

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to Student Hub Live. Well, we've got a packed afternoon. I hope you've managed to get some lunch. There's been lots of chat going on, and the lovely Jason joined us in the chat box to talk about IT security. HJ - how's everyone at home? Has everyone eaten? Is everyone refreshed and ready for our afternoon?

HJ: [LAUGHS] I think so. We've had baked potatoes, and we're talking about fast food, and we're satisfying everything that we need to. I know I've eaten some of the cakes behind me, so I'm very happy with that. And, unfortunately, Ruth's cat has been struck trying to steal her plant-based lunch. So, actually, when she finds out what it is, she might not be too happy about that [INAUDIBLE].

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHS]

HJ: I want to bring up a great comment from Dave, he said, while we were on break. He said, I've already contacted the career service. I thought that I was asking quite an obscure and difficult question. However, the chap that responded - and he responded amazingly quickly - was fantastic. His advice was clear and innovative. It wasn't the usual careers type experience. It was really great, and I advise all to give them a shout.

So I think it shows a lot of people have found their experiences with The Open University, that if you just ask, you'll get the answers that you're looking for and you'll find plenty of support. And that's why we're looking forward to hearing from our fabulous tutors as well, because we all know how great they are.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, and I've got some wonderful people - Oh, cat and dog off - wonderful people for you to meet now. Because we were talking earlier today about when you're going to get some contact from your tutors. And I'm joined by the lovely Rehana Awan and Anactoria Clarke. Welcome. Where are you both in the UK right now. Anac?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: I'm in Manchester.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And you're in the office, aren't you?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: I am - I'm actually in the office.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. We get very jealous of Anac. She can get into the OU office in Manchester - one of our regional offices - which is wonderful. Which doesn't have a dog with her, which is a bit of a downside. Rehana, where are you?

REHANA AWAN: I'm down in Surrey. And I've got my three cats in the room as well - who may try and make an appearance, but hopefully they'll stay asleep for now.

KAREN FOLEY: Ahh, brilliant, excellent. We've had lots of cats on today's shows. More cats than dogs, it seems. How can students make the most from their tutors? What are your experiences about how students can use your skills and expertise to the most effect? Some students haven't got a tutor yet, and we know that some are still being allocated. Modules haven't started yet, so there's no panic. But when they do get allocated, how could they make the most of this relationship? Anac?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: Making early contact with your tutor is a good thing. So if your tutor sends an email and offers to give you a call, if that's okay for you, take them up on it. But reply to them anyway, let them know a bit about you, and just kind of keep in touch through the module. And if there's any problems that you're experiencing, just let them know about it. Because you'd be surprised at what we can help with. There's very rarely something we can't sort if we know about it.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. What about in your opinion, Rehana? How do you think people can make the most of their tutor?

REHANA AWAN: I think using the feedback that they give to you on assignments is really important. That's one of the really key parts of being an OU student, is learning from the feedback that your tutor gives you. I think Anactoria's hit the spot with saying the idea of keeping in touch with them throughout the module.

If you are struggling, if something changes in your life that has an impact on your studies, or you're just not sure about something in the materials, speak to your tutor. That's what they're there for. They're there to help you, and are willing, and able, and looking forward, and want to hear from their students as well. So it's really lovely to develop that relationship.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, many students may not know that tutors love teaching with The Open University. And they often do so in addition to many other roles that they've got. So many will work for other universities - or, indeed, The Open University - or have other jobs elsewhere. And they often like to apply that experience to their teaching.

But it does mean that they're not available full-time, as such, for The Open University. So sometimes you can have a delay, of maybe a day or two, when they respond to you. Because they pick up their studies, like we do as OU students, flexibly. So that's really, really important to remember.

Very early on, though, they'll often send you an email. What sorts of information, Anac, is useful to know from a student?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: It's really useful to know that if there's something that you need us to do, to help you make the most of your studies, it's really useful to know that. So if you need your feedback presented in a particular way, if you need us to communicate with you in a particular way - in a particular format - then that's good to know. Because we actually want you to get the most out of our communication. So we want to give it to you in a way that's best for you and easily digestible.

KAREN FOLEY: Because you once had a student who was deaf. And because she told you about this and told you about the ways that she was hoping to work with The Open University, you were able to cater for her needs. Tell us about that.

ANACTORIA CLARKE: Yeah. So this is a great example. She's a lovely student, on classical studies. I'm seeing her on a forum for another module now as well. But she turned up to the tutorials and we were able to organise the room so that she could lip-read for everybody who was going to speak, so she didn't have anybody's back to her. And online tutorials were a little bit more of a challenge. And she was a bit worried about these, because she wore the hearing aids, and she was worried that she wouldn't be able to follow what was

going on. But because I knew she could lip-read, I could have my video on and make sure that my face was illuminated a bit better than it is now, so she could read my lips.

We had the chat box in the Adobe Connect tutorial, so she could read that. But I also made sure I could pick up any spoken comments from the students, so that she didn't miss anything. And it worked really well.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And I think a lot of the time it's not about having those sort of categorical things we deal with, it's working with the individual and thinking, like you're saying about how she may respond best to that particular instance, which is why it's more than just saying, I have this. It's about saying, this is how I can - I work most effectively. And actually, having those dialogues can really then result in, often, some very innovative ways of doing things.

We've asked people at home what they're most worried about. So let's take a look. And then, Rehana, I wonder if you can feedback on some of these worries because I think some of them may be, being able to be discussed by tutors. So let's see what you're most worried about right now.

So it's things like, time management, falling behind, exams, TMAs, using the computer, dropping out, not understanding things. There's lots and lots of different words. Not studied for ten years. Yes, many people are saying I might be a bit rusty coming back to study because I haven't done it for a very long period of time. Things like essay writing. Oh, worried about their tutor. Oh, that's not so good.

Rehana, there are lots and lots of things that are coming up on that word cloud. Anything you'd like to pick up on?

REHANA AWAN: So a couple of things, actually. So the time management one is a concern for all students and tutors, as well, because, you know, you've got busy lives. You're trying to fit in your study alongside other things that you've got. You've maybe got family responsibilities or work commitments, all of those sorts of things.

But one of the really key things to do with time management is to look at your week, and to look at what your commitments are that you can't move, and to schedule them in, and actually put them into a study diary. And then work out what study gaps you've got. And then fill that time.

So maybe it's an hour here or half an hour there. Doesn't have to be big chunks of time. Little and often is a really good way of studying with the OU. And you can do that on your phone, mostly. You can do it on your computer. Or you might even have a module book that you can take with you when you go somewhere.

So that's the first thing. The thing about not having studied for a long time is to remember that tutors are there to help you. The materials are designed for people who haven't studied for a while, as well.

So within the module materials that you'll have, are embedded skills. So I know somebody else said that they were worried about essay writing. So, tutors are used to supporting

students that haven't studied for a long time. The materials are there, as well, to help you to walk through step-by-step. So it's like building a house.

So we're not going to expect you to write an essay straightaway. So you'll maybe have to describe a bit of text first, as the first kind of bit of foundations to your essay. And then you'll maybe look about how you research information to build up the next layer.

So it's all about taking you step-by-step through the skills that you need, and just to kind of take each day as it comes, really. Stick to your study calendar that you've got, your usual study diary and your study timetable. And then they'll all kind of all fit together for you at some point, as well. It all does come together.

But don't be scared of your tutors. We're all really lovely, like, really lovely. And we all love being a tutor for the OU. And people do it because they're passionate about the OU and what it stands for. And watching students grow and develop, is part of the really nice bit of being a tutor. So please don't be worried about your tutor.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. One of the most rewarding things is students gaining confidence and feeling so much more settled, I guess, in terms of their studies and their ability to learn, which you're not expected to do everything perfectly the first time, because that's why you are learning. and that's why you are with us at The Open University.

Now we found out a little bit about tutorials beforehand. And I wonder if you can tell us about some of the things that people might expect from their tutors at tutorials, Anac.

ANACTORIA CLARKE: Yes. So it depends what kind of tutorial it is. So you can have some tutorials with your own tutor group. There will be things called cluster tutorials where it might not be with your tutor, and it might be more students than just the ones in your tutor group.

Obviously, we have, before coronavirus, had face-to-face tutorials. So we've got some of those planned in, hopefully, if we're allowed to go ahead with them. But we've also got lots of forums as well, some of which are going on now that are module wide.

But in terms of your tutorials, you're going to have a tutor there. They're going to be talking to you about some of the module material. They're going to want to know how you feel about it, what your thoughts are. And they're also going to be helping you to decode what's needed for that next TMA, as well.

KAREN FOLEY: And one of the important things is that you don't need to be up to speed, necessarily, on everything. You're not going to be quizzed at a tutorial. It's your chance to go and consolidate some of your learnings. So don't feel that you have to be bang up-to-date in terms of where you're at on the study calendar to be able to make the most of that. Very often, if you're a little bit behind, it's those tutorials that can really help frame things when you do go to read them.

HJ, how is everybody back at home?

HJ: We're doing really well. A lot of us are looking forward to speaking to our tutors. Anthony has a great question, though. And I'm sure a lot of us - and I know I felt this way as

well. Anthony says, I tend not to ask for help with anything. How will I know if I'm pestering, annoying, asking too many questions, or if I'm being dim when contacting and using a tutor? Also, how many students does each tutor have? I think that's a fantastic question that we'd love to know about.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely brilliant. Rehana, would you like to take that?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: That is, that is a great question. So tutors can have anything between fifteen to twenty-two, twenty-five students in a group. The average is about fifteen for a Level 1. And for Access, it's about seventeen.

So, quite small groups, quite intimate. And it's quite a nice opportunity to get to know a smaller group of students. But you'll also get to know a large group of students in your cluster as well, if you're clustered, which means, like, a collection of tutors and students.

So in terms of pestering, I don't think you can pester your tutor. And your tutor will have boundaries, if they - you know. But actually, the more contact, the more you get to know your tutor, the better it is for you, but also for your tutor, because they get to know you and can support you as an individual, and they can find out about what your needs are and what help you might need.

And also, you have the forums as well. So you can ask questions in the student forum. And other students can answer the question as well. So if you did think, oh, actually, instead of asking my tutor this one, I'm going to see what other students think. Use our OU forums to ask those questions. And then if nobody can answer it, you can then ask your tutor.

But you'll work it out as you go through. But I would definitely say the more contact you can have with your tutor, the better really, because it's a really positive relationship to develop over the course of the module.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And some students have loads and loads of questions. And that's absolutely brilliant.

Say, for example, your tutor does have boundaries where they may reply every couple of days, et cetera. You might want to save lots of those questions on an email, because very often, what I've found, is that students will think of a question, then a day later they'll have found the answer to it. So sometimes it can be nice to save those up, and then ask them in one go so that you're, I guess, giving yourself time to perhaps find the answers yourselves, or if not, really make the most of getting that email off with all those questions that you've got.

Now, the other thing that tutors do, in addition to tutorials and being the single point of contact for most academic aspects of your module, is that they give you individual personalised feedback on each of your TMAs - your Tutor Marked Assignments. Anac, I wonder if you can sort of talk us through that feedback process. We have a session on assessment a little later in today's programme. So we'll talk about this more in detail. But as a tutor, how do you individually work with that student's piece of work to really develop their learning throughout the module?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: That's a really good question. I mean, I love marking. I'm a marking geek. So.

But what I really like about working with students individually is that you can kind of see where their thought patterns are going. But you also get the opportunity to help them on their piece of work. So you can give them feedback about what they've done. You can help them with maybe the structure of it. You can help them rephrase bits, by actually taking what they've written, rather than just giving them a kind of bland example from something else. And you can kind of really get a good dialogue with that student.

What I love about student's work is that they're always going to see something from a different perspective to me. So I always learn something, both about the subject or the way it can be interpreted, and about that student from their work. And it's fantastic to see that.

KAREN FOLEY: And when students submit their assignments, Rehana, I wonder if you can just sort of give us the basics, because every assignment will have a due by date. How does it work with the tutors then picking up that work? And when should students expect it back?

REHANA AWAN: That's also a really good question, because there's lots of anxiety around when you submit your assignment, especially when it's your first assignment. And tutors do know that and recognise that.

But as we've identified, they've got other students in their group and other things going on there, so they might be doing other jobs and things. But - so from the date of submission, from the day after, tutors have ten working days to mark and return that TMA to you. So you might - some students might get it within a few hours or a day or so. But I always say ten working days.

And it could be that very last day that you get it back as well. And you just have to be really patient and know that the tutor knows that you want that feedback, and they want to do the best job that they can in giving you the most accurate and detailed feedback that they can as well.

And so some tutors may take longer. Some tutors may be quicker. But really, it is about that ten working day turnaround.

Now, during the COVID crisis it was fifteen working days. But we think it's gone back to ten now. So, just bear that in mind, depending on what happens as we go forward with what's going on in the country at the moment or in the world, in fact.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Now Anac, I wonder if you can tell us about what students should do if things go wrong. So things may not always go according to plan with OU studies. We've seen that flexibility is one of the key reasons why people choose The Open University. Who do they talk to? And what happens if things, maybe, don't go according to plan?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: That's a really good point, Karen, because obviously, we've had a very strange year in twenty-twenty, and lots of people have found that they're doing things differently than they were accustomed to.

Talk to your tutor, first of all, I would say. So let them know what's happening. Let them know how it's affecting you and your studies, what you think you can do, what you think you can't do.

If you're completely stuck, just let them know because they'll be able to ask you questions and tease out the information they need, to advise you. If they can't help, there's the Student Support Team. And there's all sorts of options that we can offer to you, if things aren't going right.

But really just letting us know straight away and let us help you figure out what's going to happen and how we can work it out.

KAREN FOLEY: And if people don't know the right answers, tutors will always be able to point you in the right direction. So do feel free to ask them because there are a range of support aspects at The Open University that's all worked together to give you a really, really super learning experience.

Well, thank you so much, Rehana and Anac. I'm sorry that's all we've got time for. But you've shown us that tutors are really, really friendly, really love working with students. And obviously, getting that relationship going right at the beginning of the module, will only but help you to get the most out of that relationship with your tutor. So thank you both very much.

And I hope you at home have seen that tutors really are wonderful people. That's all we've got time for in this session. But, our next session will introduce you to another aspect of support - a very important aspect - with our Student Support Team.

So we're going to show you another of our campus tours. This time, it's the Jennie Lee building. And then we'll be back to talk to our Student Support Team. Stay with us.

[MUSIC PLAYING]