

Access: Making a great start - 7th October 2021

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Good morning, and welcome to Student Hub Live. Well, this is an event for our wonderful Access students. It's all about making a great start. And my name's Karen Foley. I'm involved in Access actually. I'm one of the team here, but I also present Student Hub Live, and it's a real delight to be here with you guys today.

So some of you may have come to some of our induction events. If you haven't, you can catch up on those on our website. We've got lots and lots of these live, online, interactive events to support Open University students. Because one of the things we know at the OU is that we've got lots and lots of students, and often, those students give such great support and advice to each other. And it's really wonderful to be able to come together, focus on particular skills, meet other members of staff and, of course, students.

So in this hour, I've got a range of wonderful guests I'm going to introduce you to in just a moment. But this is your space, so you'll see on your interface that you've got a different option to lay the screen out. For example, some people think, great. I'm going to chat to everyone, and I'm going to make the most of this hour with real life students here. Other people may just want to focus on the screen and listen to what my guests are saying. So it's really up to you in terms of how you want to interact, but this is your time and space.

There are no rights or wrongs, but you can make the most of being here in real time and asking any questions, which I bet there are loads of, to my guests here today. And HJ is going to be in the chat seeing what everyone's doing and also raising your questions and making sure that we can answer those. We've also got Gareth, as well, who's also one of the module team. He knows lots and lots of stuff, and other colleagues in the chat can also answer your questions here today.

So there's a picture of Gareth that you can see. He's in the chat room, and he will be answering any questions about any of the modules. And if we can't answer them, then do email us-- studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we'll make sure that we get the answer to your question and get back to you as well.

So, HJ, it's really wet and windy here in West Wales where I am right now. How are you, and how is everyone at home?

HJ: We're doing really well-- wet and windy down here as well. But we're not too far away, so yeah, not much change in the weather. But we're doing really well in the chat. I know Zach was here bright and early, putting the kettle on, getting all set up. And boss had toasted Marmite at the ready, so that's definitely something that I approve of this morning. And we're just introducing ourselves, and we're finding out where everyone's from.

Yassin's from London, John's from Manchester, Caley's joining from Farnborough, Karen from Gloucester, and Tracey from Basingstoke. And if you're new, certainly introduce yourself. Let us know where you are, what you're studying, how you're doing. It's always great to have a good chat at these sessions, and the chat box is just for you. So use it to chat to your fellow students, put your thoughts, comments, and questions to our fantastic guests. Or you can sit back and just listen to what's going on. It's completely up to you.

I know Scott's working today, and got it on in the background so, Scott's being very productive. And Natasha's got a call from her tutor, so we'll be watching this while speaking to a tutor. So lots of productive people in the chat. But if you can't multitask like me, that's OK. But anything goes in the chat, and certainly put your thoughts, comments, and questions to our fantastic guests this morning.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And I hear people have been talking about ages as well, HJ. Have you got an oldest participant here for us today? And a youngest maybe?

HJ: I did see 75-- Veronica, if she doesn't mind me saying. And I know we've got Mave, who's 18, from Birmingham. But that's what makes these events so special, isn't it, where we have lots of people with different backgrounds, different ages, and we're all bringing our experience to the table. I know when I was at tutorials, it was great having lots of different people there, because you all have different perspectives on what you're studying and talking about. And it all makes it better, so it's fantastic. So yeah, do let us know if you're on the younger side or if you've got more experience under your belt. But yeah, it's fantastic that everyone, all sorts of ages, are joining us today.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. No, no, it is really exciting. And whilst it's fine to share your age in the chat, just remember not to put personal information in that chat. So I know some of you are thinking about maybe organising meetups, et cetera. Within your modules, you've got some really lovely spaces where you may do those in structured ways, within the Open University, using some of our forums and systems. And I know many students also set up separate WhatsApp and Facebook groups as well. But it's lovely having all of our modules here today. So with this in mind, let me introduce you to some of our guests. And bear in mind, you guys have all been talking about ages. Let's introduce them in chronological order of longest time at the Open University. Actually, this was a lot harder than one might think. So who is our oldest guest today? I'm joined by Carlton Wood, George Curry, John Butcher, and Anna Brooks. Who's going to own up to having the most experience in terms of years at the Open University?

CARLTON WOOD: Well, I guess the oldest guest-- that's a different question, isn't it, Karen?

JOHN BUTCHER: Oh-ho-ho, that's moi.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, absolutely.

CARLTON WOOD: Oldest involvement at the university.

KAREN FOLEY: We decided that that wouldn't be a good idea.

CARLTON WOOD: In terms of involvement of the Open University, it's probably me. I started in 1988 when I started tutoring at residential school. My mum was an OU student at the time.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Brilliant. And, Carlton, you're an associate lecturer here, and you've got other roles at the Open University as well.

CARLTON WOOD: Yeah, I am. So I'm a tutor on the Access module, so I tutor some level one science module. And I also work for the Open University full-time as an associate dean in the science, technology engineering, and maths faculty. Sounds very grand, but it just means I make sure that we have the best student experience we can in that faculty. So yeah, I've got quite a lot of experience around the Open University.

But I just love tutoring for the Open University, and I've carried that on since I first started, which was back in the early '90s, as a tutor. I've been involved in the Access programme since it started really back in 2000. So I get a lot of enjoyment from it, and the students are fantastic, really good.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Absolutely. So Carlton-- a man who knows lots of things, knows lots of people and places, and also knows about juggling lots of things. Who might our next guest be in terms of length of service at the Open University?

JOHN BUTCHER: It might be me, Karen. Hi, everyone. My name's John Butcher. I'm a professor at the Open University, and I'm director of the Access programme. When Carlton was starting off his experience on that side of the fence, I was actually I think teaching, and I was an OU student doing I think some sort of master's programme or something like that. And I became a tutor in 1992, and I joined the Open University full-time as a staff tutor in 1997.

I had a period off for good behaviour when I worked at a few other universities, but I have been back here since 2012. I'm delighted to welcome everybody to this Access event. This time in October, we always look forward to this with the new students starting with us-- and particularly looking out on rather a pleasant autumn morning in Bedford, where it's not raining-- it being National Poetry Day.

So certainly my favourite poem I think would be Keats's ode To Autumn. I won't give you the full three stanzas, but if anyone wants to put up in the chat box their favourite poem, I'd be very happy to respond to that knowledge. But enjoy your studies, everybody.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, John, and lovely to have you here today. So Vanessa says, "Is it just me, or the older you get, you forget how old you actually are?" She's been telling everyone--

JOHN BUTCHER: Denial.

KAREN FOLEY: --that's she 31, but she's actually-- well, it is. I actually have to work mine out often by using something like Facebook or a calculator. So yes. And in fact, this task has been very interesting. This leaves us with Anna and George. Who out of the two of you has the most service at the OU?

GEORGE CURRY: Well, I'm going to go next. I might be wrong, Anna, because I know we've both been--

ANNA BROOKS: Nope.

GEORGE CURRY: --around a while, haven't we?

ANNA BROOKS: - No, it's just you, George.

GEORGE CURRY: I started in 1996, when I was a mere toddler. But yes, so I've been at the OU for a long time. I've been in various positions, but I've been working on the Access provision and the openings modules that preceded them since 2001. So I know Access very well. It has a very, very big place in my heart, and I believe it's a brilliant thing for the OU to be offering. And I'm really excited to be spending some time with students today, which is fab.

I did my undergraduate degree as an OU student in music, which is the greatest of all subjects. I think we can all agree. And I've not long ago completed my master's also with the OU as a student. So not only a member of staff all this time, but I also understand the stresses and joys of being an OU student and studying at a distance whilst juggling family and all the other things that go on in our lives.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Excellent, George. Thank you. Well, I think a few people are disagreeing with you in the chat. There's a lot of poetry conversation going on, John, with some alternatives. Ode to a Nightingale being mentioned-- Charge of the Light Brigade. And Ellsy says the only Shakespeare she's read is The Seven Ages of Man, which is in Y032, which has virtually no poetry in it whatsoever. But many of the students studying Y031 may be enthused by this topic as well.

So, Anna, would you like to introduce yourself to us as our newest in terms of experience to the Open University?

ANNA BROOKS: Yeah. I'm barely a baby. Yes. So I joined the OU 16 years ago in 2005 as an educational advisor, and I've been working in Student Support since then. I also have a dual role now where I support our students in prison. We actually have quite a large community of students studying Open University courses in prison, which is a wonderful privilege to be able to see those students transform their lives through education.

And I've also experienced OU study from a family perspective. My mum-- extremely proud moment for me. She graduated with her Open degree a couple of years ago. After she retired, she decided she wanted to pursue her love of literature again. She's a big poetry fan, and she did her Open degree in English literature and English language. So that was an extremely proud moment for me as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, Anna.

ANNA BROOKS: Thanks.

KAREN FOLEY: And there's one guest we haven't actually introduced in terms of ages, and this is a topic on everyone's mind. Carlton, how old is the penguin?

CARLTON WOOD: The Penguin's, oh, 21 knocking on 22. The predecessor version of Access was called Openings, and they had a penguin, and it was a mascot. The idea was a student was dipping their toe into the water. So yeah, so we've had these old penguins around since the very start. Unfortunately, when Access came around, the penguin got the chop temporarily, but this penguin is still hanging on in there.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm glad it's been able to come along today. That's wonderful. Lovely. Now, our first topic of conversation is around community, and this is something I think that's really happening really nicely in the chat and as part of today's event. But one of the things that we know is that studying at a distance can feel very isolating. Sometimes, you're there in the middle of the night with your books, feeling like you're the only one maybe who's falling behind or who's not understanding something. And we actually know that many people are feeling similar things.

So my question to our panel-- and you can just jump in here with some of your thoughts around this-- is how can Access students feel part of a community? And what sorts of spaces-- other than, of course, this lovely space-- can they use to connect with other people? Might we start talking a little bit about tutors, because, well, one of our participants is having a conversation with their tutor right now. Carlton, do you want to fill us in a little bit on how that looks? I know it's a topic we're going to cover later-- but in terms of community and people, in that context.

CARLTON WOOD: Yeah, the tutors are your invaluable link to the Open University, because they've almost certainly been around for quite a while. They know the modules inside out. They will have seen pretty much every problem that you're likely to encounter and more importantly know what to do about it and also who to put you in contact with in order to get some extra help. So what I would say is, if you're a bit worried about being isolated, don't be. Make sure you establish contact with your tutor and stay in contact with them.

But also, there's things like the tutor group forums, as well, that each tutor has, and you can go on there and post messages up. Each tutor looks after about 17 students in total so you and 16 others. And you'll be able to introduce yourself to other students on that forum, so take advantage of that. You can access that off the module website, and that's a really good way of getting in contact with people.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Excellent. Oh, and of course-- sorry. I forgot to introduce my dog. This one is Megan. I actually have two, but I've separated them today, because they've been fighting a bit earlier. Megan's my older and slightly more calm dog, and she's having a nice sleep here on the sofa. And

Megan is 6. But Coco, my puppy, is just one-year-old, and so she's a bit more feisty. So she's otherwise engaged right now, as well, so you might see her on other shows.

CARLTON WOOD: I thought you were upping the ante in terms of cute factor, so I come with a penguin, and you have to come in with a dog.

KAREN FOLEY: Well you know Carlton, no I didn't. I didn't. Not at all. OK, so Carlton's a really nice example of one of the tutors. I'm hoping that you guys at home are already starting to connect with your tutors, whether during this programme or, in fact, at some other time. They'll often have sent you an email, so it'll be good to perhaps say some things about maybe how you might like to work with your tutor. So you might have some ideas about that already.

The other people who are really friendly-- and Anna's a great example of this-- are our Student Support team. So, Anna, can tell us a bit about what you guys offer in terms of community to our students?

ANNA BROOKS: OK. So I think, obviously, Carlton's explained a bit about the support that tutors can offer. But Student Support teams-- we're really here for anything, so there's no right or wrong in terms of approaching us. If you're unsure about anything, finding your way around, if it's about wanting to know what your options are in terms of how you plan your studies, the Student Support team are here to guide you. And we're also really good at signposting you elsewhere to other resources on the Student Help Centre and other resources.

As Carlton has said, the tutor group forums are a really good place as well for a sense of community. But I'm hoping that if you pick up the phone or if you email us and you contact the Student Support team, you will feel-- again, we don't want students to feel isolated. And we're here to help, so there's no right or wrong in terms of contacting us.

CARLTON WOOD: Anna, how do students get in contact with you? Where are the contact details for you?

ANNA BROOKS: Variety of ways they can do that. They can do that via Student Home. So if they log on to Student Home, they'll see there is actually a section you click on that says, "contact your Student Support team." So that will mean that a message gets sent directly to us, and we will then email you back. But you also have your contact details on there to contact us via telephone. And we're open pretty much office hours-- at the moment, Monday to Friday. So you've got those options to contact us. We also do have web chat, so if you do want to contact us via web chat, that's an option if you prefer that method.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And you're open all sorts of hours as well, so it's not just a 9 to 5:00, Monday to Friday-type scenario. So make sure that you use the most of those. Well, it's lovely to see-- we've got students here who aren't just studying Access modules but have come along as well. And this is another really nice thing I often find about community is that it's not just about students on your module. They're, of course, going through similar sort of things in terms of content. But so often it's really nice to be able to talk to other people who may be a little bit ahead of you.

And I know that many of those students have perhaps come along today, because they find it really nice to be able to reassure students. And we all remember what it's like when we first started something and how excited but a little bit nervous we felt. And this is one of the lovely things of community is people coming together and being able to do that also.

But let's return the focus to some of the things within the module in terms of spaces. George, I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about some of the forums that students use. Many of them have been connecting there. And I'd also like to talk a little bit about the Adobe Connect tutorials, which are similar to

this but different, and the spaces that they offer to students to focus on tasks. So could you fill us in, George, on those two?

GEORGE CURRY: Absolutely. Would love to, Karen. Yes. So your module VLE-- your virtual learning environment, the module website-- is going to be your central place where you can find a lot of the module materials, and it also links you to your forums. Now, there are two forums that you'll have whilst you're an Access student. One is a forum that has everybody that's on your module studying at the same time, and that's always a really, really supportive place where people can get to know each other, find out where they live-- much like the sort of conversations that will be going on in the chat today.

And there will also be a tutor group forum, so that will be just for the people that are looked after by your tutor. And that's where some more learning and teaching goes on. So there might be some activities during the module that point you towards that forum and ask you to discuss particular things that have happened in the module materials.

So they're really, really useful spaces where you can be involved as much or as little as you want. You can just read messages if you want to. You can post messages if you want to. It's really, really there for you, but it's a lovely way to feel like you're part of a community. And as Karen says, because you're all moving through the module at the same time, you'll all be having the same experiences, and it's often lovely to share those.

Another thing that we provide on Access are our Adobe Connect sessions, and, again, you will have a chance to experience those during the module. Often, these are sessions run by members of the module team or by ALs, like Carlton, and they might be on preparation for your assignment, so there might be a session on that. Or there might be sessions on thinking about what you might want to do after Access. There's a variety of them that are available through the module.

And that's an opportunity for as many or as few people who want to get involved to come. And, again, you can get involved in the chat in those sessions, or you can just watch and listen to the presentations. But Adobe Connect is a piece of software that's used across the university for group tutorials, so it's a really good opportunity to get to know how that works. It's very cool. There's lots cool polls and questionnaires that happen live during those sessions, and they're often a lot of fun. So I'd highly recommend them if you can make them. So keep an eye out on the module website for those.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That's perfect. Thank you, George. Lovely. And I really like those sessions, too. It's really nice to be able to connect with everybody. HJ, I hear that we got a question in the chat which I'd like to pass over to Anna quickly-- from Emily Wilkinson. And I'm not sure if there are other questions also. And this is one about whether the Student Support teams specialise in particular modules. Is that past some time ago? Can you fill us in on what Emily meant?

HJ: Yeah, of course. So what Emily's wondering is does she have to contact specific Student Support team for her module, or where does she find the contact details for her module? Is it all already set up for her to find it?

ANNA BROOKS: It should be set up on Student Home. So if you click on the contact details for your Access module-- if you're studying Access-- then the contact details will be for the Access Student Support team. So we do work in subject area, so we have it based in faculty areas in Student Support teams. So Access is actually supported by the team that also support STEM-- so science, technology, engineering, and math students as well.

But as I said, it's not a problem. If for some reason you maybe accidentally contact the wrong Student Support team, we're all joined up, so your query will get to the right people anyway. But you should find that you've got the right details on Student Home.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. No, that's wonderful. And I think one of the things about this whole set up is that the Student Support team, they pretty much offer advice on anything other than the academic side of things. So things like if you have a disability, if you need help with something in particular, if you'd like some time management resources, if you'd like to find out about future modules, for example. The benefit of them working within those subject areas is that they're the best people to talk to about the specific modules.

And, of course, don't forget that, as an OU student, you have access to our wonderful Careers and Employability Service. You can set up a consultation with them and talk about your aspirations. They'll give you heaps of advice and guidance on all of that, and they've got some really good things if, for example, you're wanting to update your CV or practise for an interview. So they're also a really good source of support.

William's been a builder for 20 years, and so this is all very new to him. Well, it's all very new to everybody here, and we've all got different things that we're covering. But navigating and going through these things is a challenge when you've never done it before, and this is why today's event I think will be so useful. So we can start to think about, literally, where to start and what to do. So we do have a Start Here leaflet, which is a really important source, and I think George is going to say something briefly about this. But perhaps now is a good time, George, to briefly mention this.

GEORGE CURRY: Absolutely. So as we're starting the new modules in October, it might be a little bit overwhelming when the pack comes through the door, and you've got your access to the module website. So we just wanted to spend a couple of minutes talking through what you should do right at the start. So if you've got your pack already, fantastic. If it's still winging its way to you, it will be with you very shortly I'm sure.

But if you open the pack, one of the good things to look out for is the Start Here leaflet, and that's got some really, really simple information about what you need to do first. There's some frequently asked questions on the back, so you can have a look through. There's lots of information on there about how to contact your Student Support team, about what you can expect from your tutor, and about how to access all the module resources. So that's a really good friend at the start of the module. If you put that somewhere where you can find it easily, that will hopefully answer a lot of your questions for you.

Another thing that you will find in your pack is something called the Contents Checklist, and I think Carlton-- my glamorous assistant-- is about to hold one up. There we go. So if you find that in your pack as well, that lists absolutely everything that should be in that pack. So you can go down that and make sure you've got everything, so that's always quite reassuring.

And then, once you've done that and you've had a look at your Start Here, what I would do is open the book-- the block 1 book-- and read the introduction. We've given you a whole week to get to grips with the introduction, and it really explains why we've designed the course the way that we've designed it, how it's all going to work. And one thing that I hope you will find really useful is our module map, which, again, is something to put somewhere that you know where it is, because this takes you through the 30 weeks of the course, shows you how it all fits together. And you can plot your progress as you go along.

We call it the snail diagram at work. That's what we've started calling it, because it's reminded us of that. You can see that the first week is spent introducing yourself to the module, so you see how it can work. Then you can see that there are three main blocks. This is the module diagram for Y032: People, Work, and Society, But there are very, very similar ones for arts and languages and the STEM course as well-- Y033. So you will all have those in your model introduction.

You can also see there that there are some options weeks dotted throughout the course. They're incredibly exciting opportunities for you to try out different subjects, try out different things that excite you. Or if you need it, they're a week for you to catch up, and I know a lot of students use them for that, which is entirely fine. And then towards the end, halfway through block 3 in blue there, you can see that there's a moving on week.

So that's really an opportunity for you to think about how you've enjoyed Access, what subjects have really excited you. Was it the ones you thought were going to excite you, or have you discovered a new passion? Which is entirely possible during the study of Access. And it gives you an opportunity to talk to people like Anna, to talk to our lovely Careers and Employability team, and to really think about what your next steps will be in your learning journey. So I think if you find your Start Here leaflet, check your items against your Content Checklist, and read the module introduction, you will be absolutely fine.

You don't have to know everything at once. Breathe deeply. I think that was always good advice I gave myself when I was starting a new module. But it's all there, and your tutor will absolutely talk you through anything that doesn't make sense.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, George.

CARLTON WOOD: George, it might be worth saying that as well. There's a study planner, which is a bit like a snail diagram on a single sheet of paper, and often students find that really helpful to pin up--

GEORGE CURRY: On the fridge.

CARLTON WOOD: --to where they're working. Yeah, so it has the same information as the snail diagram. But sometimes, people find it a bit more convenient, because it's a single sheet, and you can just stick it somewhere really, really obvious.

KAREN FOLEY: And cross it off.

GEORGE CURRY: And the good thing about the study planner-- yes. And it's got the dates alongside it as well, so you can see exactly what needs to happen in each week. So that will be a really, really useful thing. It looks very similar to the module website-- the study planner. They're both organised in the same way. So if you've got the study planner in front of you, then when you move on to the website, it should look a bit familiar.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now Lorraine's asked a question about Adobe Connect. Adobe Connect is free, Lorraine. You don't need to pay for it. And you will find the links to the workshops listed on the Tutorials tab on your module website, so that's the place to go. And it's worthwhile downloading the app if you can, or you can just log on through a browser window. So, no, you don't have to pay for that.

And also, Judith, don't worry about your concerns about your lack of IT skills. Studying online is something that you'll look at in block 2 when we move to the online environment, and there's a really nice set of activities that you can work through. But basically, it's about being able to click on the right things and watch them. Attention and focus are much more challenging, in all honesty, than IT skills. But there is also a Computing Helpdesk, so if you are stuck-- much like the Student Support team, they offer a really

nice broad service, and they can help you with anything IT related. I'm sure HJ will put the details in the chat.

Now, we're going to talk about tutors. I'd like to move us on a bit. And, HJ, can we just come to you? Because some people have been talking about their tutors. What's the tone in the chat about how people have experienced this initial contact with their tutors?

HJ: Yeah, so it seems like it's all going well. We're starting to get contacted by our tutors by email and telephone calls. Christine had to chat over the phone and some emails, and she's really happy with her tutor, which is great. Chelsea is feeling a lot less confused and a lot more confident after speaking to a tutor, which is great. And Gemma's tutor is really nice and very helpful. And I'm sure everyone will find the same, because that's what your tutor's there for. They want to be there. They want to help you and support you.

What we were wondering in the chat, though-- some of us haven't heard from our tutors yet, but we can see their details. Should we give them a call or send them an email to introduce yourselves? What would we recommend?

KAREN FOLEY: Carlton, what do you think?

CARLTON WOOD: Shall I take that one? So the tutors are just getting round to contacting students at the moment. We're at the end of introductory week. So I would say, yeah, if you haven't heard from your tutor at this moment, probably best thing is just drop them an email, introduce yourselves, and the tutor will be really, really thrilled that you've taken the time and effort to get in contact. And then hopefully, from there, they'll be able to set up an introductory phone call. So yeah, if you haven't heard, drop off a friendly email, just introduce yourself, and I'm sure they'll be in contact soon.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Absolutely. So, Carlton, what do you think, then, is the most important thing that tutors can actually do for their students?

CARLTON WOOD: Ooh, that's a great question. I would say, overall, what you're trying to develop in a student is confidence, because I think most people who are studying with Open University-- whether they wish to admit it or not-- are just lacking a little bit of confidence. And the Access modules are really good at developing that confidence. And more often than not, it's the one thing that students say, either at the very start or certainly when they give us some feedback on one of their assessments about the things that they've developed as they've been going through the module, is that they've developed confidence in certain areas.

So the tutor's role really is to help develop that confidence. And so some people are reasonably confident when they start off but become more confident. But some people are lacking a lot of confidence. It may have been that they've had a bad experience at school, or they've just never really got into studying in the first place. And that's what these modules are here for, really, is to develop that confidence. So anything the Tutor can do to help that is a real bonus.

KAREN FOLEY: And sometimes, Carlton, I often think that that confidence is about going with some of those mistakes, going with some of those anxieties, and getting through them-- for me, anyway. I guess I've learnt the most when I've maybe failed the most in terms of stuff I've tried or put myself out on a limb, like being told, yeah, you're doing a great job. Sometimes, that's good, but actually, confidence is a little bit more deep-rooted than that. And I know for so many students out there this is a massive step, and people are worried about how they're doing.

David says, everyone goes at a different pace, and sometimes slow and steady wins the race. And I've heard from other students saying, these people have all submitted their first assignment yet. Should I have done that? Am I missing something? So can you tell us a bit about I guess working with the student and how there's this real one-to-one relationship that we have in Access?

CARLTON WOOD: So that's a key difference, if you like, from Access relative to other parts of the university is that the relationship between the tutor and the student is a one-to-one relationship. And it sounds really hard, but you actually feel as though you get to know each other really well, even though you've only contacted each other by telephone throughout the module. And you're quite right, Karen. The key thing in this is for everyone to go at their own pace and develop in the areas that they wish to develop in. And try something. If it doesn't work, you know not to try that again.

So often, we'll spend a lot of time-- the tutors that is-- and the students in the early stages of the Access module-- trying to work out what's the best time for a student to study. Is it in the morning? Is it in an evening? Is it the weekend? And there's no single correct answer. Each student will be different, and so it's a chance of just trying studying at different times to see what works for you. Likewise around note-taking, it may be that you've always written notes on a separate piece of paper. It may be that highlighting might work better for you. It may be writing little, tiny Post-it labels and sticking them in the book in the first instance.

So it's just trying different things early on to see what works best for you. So some things won't work, and you just have to accept that. But what you're trying to do is find the thing that really does work for you. And when you do find it, you will know, and that will help you in the rest of the study.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Caley has a really good question. And I think this will be really interesting for those people who maybe haven't spoken to their tutor yet. She says, "What do the tutors ask us during the first phone call? I'm not very good at speaking on the phone." And I know that a lot of people feel like this. And she has massive social anxiety. So if we could tell her what she might expect in that first phone call.

And perhaps in the chat, if you've already had a phone call, you might like to say some of the stuff that you talked about or that worked for you so that Caley and other people, who maybe haven't been in touch with their tutor, have some ideas. But, Carlton, what do you typically ask your students when you randomly phone them up?

CARLTON WOOD: I never randomly phone them up. I normally agree a time with them via email first, so they know I'm going to ring. But normally, what I'd do is I'd go through the way in which the module is set up. So that gives the students-- a little bit like George has done-- give people an idea about what it is that they've let themselves in for. But then also, I find it quite helpful to find out a little bit about the students. Not in a real inquisitorial type of way but I just want to know a little bit about why does the student want to do the module? Why they've chosen this one and not another one? What are they hoping to develop the most? What have they found difficult in the past?

And all of that helps me work out how best to structure future tutorials for students. So it's really down to individual students, so it's almost like how much information that they want to say. Occasionally, students say, well, I'd rather not do telephone tutorials. I'd like to be supported by email rather than by telephone. That's fine. So we just take our lead off what the individual students want. We're not going to pressurise anyone to have a tutorial if they don't want one, in a medium that they don't want.

But yes, it should be quite a relaxed chat, and it's just the tutor finding out a little bit about you. But it's just information that you're happy to supply. The stuff you don't want to answer, don't go there. That's absolutely fine. But the tutor is there to help you out, so all the information you can give them will help them structure future tutorials for you.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Vanessa says she's got a speech problem. So the tutor has said that she can email the questions before the phone call so that if she's struggling, then that's something that we can pick up on. Sorry, Anna, did you want to add to that?

ANNA BROOKS: Yeah, I was just literally-- it's interesting you just said that, because I was just going to say, the most important thing is if you envisage that you might find it difficult on the call because of social anxiety or because you've got a particular disability and you need an adjustment, just let your tutor know. You can let them know via email, and you can just work out what works for you. We've got quite a few different ways and quite creative ways of connecting with students. So the most important thing is don't be shy about saying, I'm going to find this difficult. And your tutor will find the best way to work with you.

CARLTON WOOD: It's a good call on that as well, Anna, because often what you sometimes find is if the tutors can see a sort of disability profile from a student, if they've already got one-- and so if that's the case, your tutor may well be asking you some questions about what would work best for you. So say-- I don't know. Say you have dyslexia diagnosed. They will be asking you questions about the way in which you might like stuff presented to give you the best chance of succeeding. So, again, it's entirely down to you what information you supply, but what they're trying to do is to try and work out what's the best way of allowing you to have success on the module.

KAREN FOLEY: Charlene, who's clearly a poet, says, "Speaking with your tutor is like holding a candle, and someone turns on the light so that you can see the whole room," which I think is a really--

CARLTON WOOD: Whoa.

ANNA BROOKS: That's lovely.

KAREN FOLEY: --lovely phrase.

CARLTON WOOD: We'll need that one for next time.

KAREN FOLEY: Ask Charlene first. Chelsea says she feels so much supported already in the first few days than she ever did in secondary school. Everything is explained really well. But a lot of you in the chat are talking about various disabilities or challenges that you have and some of the worries that you have around that. So I'd like to ask Anna about some of this other support. Because while the tutor will work with you certainly early days and having those conversations about your aspirations and your needs-- and later, you'll use your tutor to bounce off your ideas around perhaps what you're going to put in your assignments. Or when you get feedback, you'll be talking to them about clarifying that feedback, and checking you understand it, and seeing if you can maybe do it a bit differently next time.

But the other important thing is that we know that so many students in particular study with the Open University, because they can't necessarily study elsewhere, and they like the flexibility that it offers. So many, many of our students have some sort of disability, and we always want them to tell us about it so that we can be as flexible as possible and work with students on that. But people are a bit worried.

HJ, I wonder if you can tell us a few of the themes that are coming up in the chat. And then maybe, Anna, you can fill us in on how, practically, the Student Support team can actually help with some of those. HJ, let's see what people at home have to say.

HJ: Yeah, so I know in the chat there is some concern about how we approach disabilities and what type of things we should be telling our tutors. And we're not too sure actually, sometimes in the chat, what support is available. So we've got health conditions. We know we may need some adjustments or support, but where do we go after that? Is it just our tutor we speak to, or is there somewhere else we need to go?

KAREN FOLEY: Anna.

ANNA BROOKS: OK. Thanks, HJ. So certainly any support that you are likely to need because of a disability-- and when we talk about disabilities, we don't just mean physical disabilities so any specific learning difficulty. We've already mentioned about dyslexia or dyspraxia. Or it might be that you have autism, and you need some adjustments-- but also, mental health conditions as well. A lot of our students-- we've also heard somebody mentioned about social anxiety. And we can make adjustments for those as well.

In terms of letting us know about those disabilities, obviously you can talk to your tutor. But what we encourage you to do is to formally disclose by completing our disability support form-- now, that is available via your Student Home page on your profile section. But if you're unsure at all, you can just contact the Student Support team, and we'll talk you through what steps you need to do to disclose. And we have a very specialist Disability Support team who will be able to provide specialist advice. For some students, it's enough just to tell us what support you need. You might just need some adjustments in your communication with your tutor and how we communicate with you. But for some students, you might need some specialist support, and there is something called Disabled Students Allowance which you may be entitled to apply for. And, again, we can provide further advice on that as well.

So obviously, everybody's needs are different, so it's not one size fits all. And I encourage you to get in contact with the Student Support team if you haven't already told us that you have any specialist needs or you've got any questions about how to access support.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. I think Gareth and HJ can answer some of the questions in the chat about links to audio books and also about the systems that we use at the university. We don't use Zoom, but we do have lots of other things, like this and like Adobe Connect, that we've been telling you about that offer various different platforms to you. And as an OU student, you can also use Office 365 for free, which is absolutely brilliant-- a whole suite of programmes there for you to make the most of.

The one thing I just like to talk about before we move on to looking at assessment is Lisa's point. Lisa says she suffers from brain damage and has memory issues and has worried about missing something important here. John, might you say something about the notion of what we're trying to do in terms of Access for people who may be worried that they can't remember Erikson's theory when they've closed the book, for example?

JOHN BUTCHER: Yeah. Thank you, Karen. I think that's a very reasonable thing to raise at this stage. I think the Access modules are designed to prepare students for subsequent undergraduate study. So not only are they a kind of voluntary additional stage, but, as Carlton's penguin reminds us, they offer that tentative first step into higher education. So they are paced accordingly.

And just to respond to some of the other things that came up earlier-- all our students tell us that the relationship with their tutor is the most important part of their development of greater confidence-- and being clear about how they're learning and how they're doing in the module. Some students tell us they

really-- I suppose you'd call it wobbled. They were worried they weren't keeping up, or they weren't understanding what was going on. And almost always, they say it's their tutor who didn't so much drag them through but supported them to get to the end.

And I think often, we bant about the word tutor without perhaps thinking that for a student new to HE, they might not have had a tutor before. So there's something about building up trust with someone. And as Carlton said, it's a one-to-one relationship, but it's a very powerful and supportive one. So I think that getting to know your tutor and being honest with your tutor, as well, is that first step there.

GEORGE CURRY: I think, Karen, I will say--

KAREN FOLEY: Now, Rebecca has a worry-- I'm sorry. Go for it, George.

GEORGE CURRY: Sorry. I was just going to say, in response to what you were saying about the student worried about remembering things, that Access isn't a stream of facts--

JOHN BUTCHER: No, it's not.

GEORGE CURRY: --that you'll be tested on at some point. It's designed to give you different ways to think about the world and to give you some tools and some ways of finding out evidence to support ways that you think. So it's never going to be about remembering facts. It's always going to be about changing the way that you think about the world, and see the world, and can talk about the world. And I think note-taking is really important, finding a way that works for you. But I really wouldn't worry about needing to cram facts, because that's not what it's about at all.

ANNA BROOKS: I'd just like to comment as well and say-- oh, sorry, John. I was just going to say, the key thing with Access is there is no exam.

JOHN BUTCHER: Exactly.

ANNA BROOKS: There's going to be no memory test. What I would say is that, if future modules that you study, there's likely to be exams, then, again, we come back to making sure that you're aware of what support might be available in terms of if you have any memory issues. It's important that you speak to us, because it might be that you need some additional support, maybe extra time in place for an exam and special arrangements. So I would encourage you to contact the Student Support team, so we can plan ahead for any future study. But for Access, I think it's about working with your tutor and finding what works for you, definitely.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, Rebecca's got a question. And I'd like to move on to talk about assessment here, because she says, "I know it's only been a week, but I already feel like I'm going to fail. What if I've made the wrong decision?" And even though it's just Rebecca saying that-- I'm not sure if it is just Rebecca saying that actually. But I know so many people really, really worry about failing. And of course, this is often linked to the assessments, because many students haven't been assessed for quite some time. And it can feel really scary and feel really hard for a lot of people.

So, John, I wonder if you might tell us a bit about, I guess, what the point of these assessments are, and perhaps frame them in some sort of context about how students might best engage with them.

JOHN BUTCHER: I will. And I'm really sorry that the student feels that way, and it's completely natural. I think if you talk to any of us, if you talk to any University student, the initial feeling about assessment is fear actually-- and frankly, it's fear of failure. And I think, Karen, you're quite right. It's often carrying with people a rather negative experience sometimes of education from school in which assessment has been a bit punitive. You get told off if you get things wrong.

And I really want to emphasise to all our students today that a University assessment-- certainly on the Access programme-- is not like that at all. I think the way to rethink assessment, as you embark on this, is that we very much embed assessment as part of a learning journey. So it's not separate to the teaching you're receiving. It's absolutely embedded as part of that.

And I think an illustration of that is, when you think about it, if we're reading something or we're reading some educational material, we're often assessing our own understanding as we read, so we're quite adept at self-assessment. And I think the problems come with people being quite afraid of what we would call more high-stakes University assessment, but I think the Access programme is not like that at all. It's designed in a way as a gentle trajectory, and I think the key really is that you are assessed on a course like this to help your tutor understand how you are progressing with your learning.

And your tutor is the only one who will read your assessment tasks. Your tutor will give you feedback. We work very closely, as Carlton knows, with our tutors to think about the quality of the feedback and the approach we take in the feedback. And I also know that it's absolutely natural that students look initially at the grade they've been awarded, and we can't pretend that doesn't happen.

But what I'd really urge you to do is look at the written feedback you receive on your first assignment which will help you understand what you've done right, where you might improve things. And the idea then, as part of this learning journey, is you learn from that first piece of assessment, and you take that forward into hopefully doing better on your second piece of assessment.

And when we think about assessment, it's also thinking about the skills you acquire by doing an assessed piece of work. So you're demonstrating, both to yourself and your tutor, that you can understand the material you've been given to read, you can analyse that and produce a piece of written work, perhaps some analysis of what you've been reading, you can produce an argument and a conclusion based on what you've read, and you can sift evidence.

And these are actually skills incredibly useful in life outside University. I won't even start thinking about how we might assess what our politicians have been saying to us in recent crises, but it's very important we do that.

And the final thing for me, I think we need to recognise that we ourselves have to learn what assessment tasks are asking. Sometimes, universities can frame questions in a rather odd, technical way, and so you have to make sure you've understood what you're being asked to do. So becoming more assessment literate, which you will do through the Access module, is the way forward really. And it helps, then, students who go on to progress to their undergraduate studies, and actually do much better as a result of learning about assessment on their Access modules. So please, please, please, don't worry.

KAREN FOLEY: Lots and lots of questions we've got here. I'm hoping that Gareth and HJ will answer a lot of those about your tutor throughout the module, and do use this opportunity to try and get all of those questions answered. But some of them are really pertinent to this discussion. And, George, Julianna has asked us about, "Can you tell us what you look for, what you expect from students in order to pass the Access modules?" And Gemma's worried about not passing. She says, "If you don't pass Access, can you still go on to do a degree?"-- so there's some sense of clarity.

Now, there are two important things here in terms of, I guess, those expectations. One is the number, the grade in terms of what to pass and what matters. And the second point I think Julianna's really making is about what goes in. So what sort of stuff are tutors looking for? George, I wonder if you might talk firstly

about numbers, and perhaps Carlton might add a little bit from a tutor perspective in terms of then how these things are marked and assessed.

So, George, just in terms of what's included, what are the assessments, can you fill us in? And I think we've got a little video to play here also.

GEORGE CURRY: Absolutely. A little video just to tempt you with some excitement of things to come. Yes, following on from John, the most important thing to think about is that the assessments aren't set up to trap you, or trick you, or kind of win in some way. They are worded in ways that will hopefully make sense to you. And once you've looked through the Start Here leaflet, and the Contents Checklist, and the study planner that we were talking about earlier, the next thing to do is make yourself a cup of tea or whatever you fancy and have a read of the assessment guide. Because that is packed full of guidance and information that explain exactly what it is you need to do in order to pass the module.

So in very bold terms, there are four tutor marked assignments. And we refer to those as TMAs, so you'll hear us talking about TMAs a lot. And as John and Carlton have said, that's questions that you answer that gets sent to your tutor. Your tutor will mark them, give you really, really, really helpful, detailed, and personalised feedback. And you will receive that, and that will be part of your learning. And that cycle will happen through those four assignments.

The first one-- as you will see from your assessment guide, the bulk of that assignment is asking you questions about yourself. So you're already an expert in that, so it's another way of finding out what it is that motivates you. And another thing it gets you to think about is that you aren't coming to this learning experience as a blank sheet.

There are already so many things that you can do, that you're an expert at, that will be completely relevant to you as a student. So you will already be able to organise things. You will already understand time management. There are so many things that you can do that are relevant here, and this first assessment just gets you to think about that. So hopefully, that will be a really positive experience for you.

Alongside those tutor marked assignments, there are interactive computer marked assignments, which is a fancy way of saying an online quiz. So there are five of those during the course. And again, how you use them-- what you need to do is explained in great detail in the assessment guide. They're nothing to worry about at all, and actually, they're quite fun when you get to those. But it can be a little overwhelming to try and understand what you absolutely need to do to pass, so we have made you a little video that is called How to Pass Your Access Module. And I think we're going to show a little bit of that now if that's OK.

Hello, I'm George Curry, and I'm here today to talk to you about what you need to do to pass your Access module. The first thing you need to do is take a look at your assessment guide if you haven't already. Everything I'm about to say is in there, so you can always refer back to your assessment guide if you need to.

OK. So what do you need to do to pass? To pass the whole module, you need to complete nine different pieces of assessment. There are four tutor marked assignments, which we call TMAs. They each contribute different percentages of the overall mark-- and five interactive computer marked assignments, which we call ICMA's, which contribute much smaller percentages. So let's start at the beginning.

Your first assessment is tutor marked assignment 1-- or TMA01. And it can contribute up to 10%. TMA02 contributes up to 15%. TMA03-- up to 25%. And TMA04 makes 40%. Each of the computer marked

assignments, or ICMA's, contribute 2%, and there are five of them, so that makes up 10% of the overall mark.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant.

GEORGE CURRY: [INAUDIBLE]

KAREN FOLEY: So that's a really nice, helpful video, George. Thank you for showing that. And students will be able to go and watch the whole thing on their model website.

GEORGE CURRY: Absolutely. And I realised I'm wearing the same top, so that was well done, wasn't it?

KAREN FOLEY: I thought it was excellent costume design. I thought that was deliberate.

GEORGE CURRY: Well, you know-- consummate professional.

KAREN FOLEY: I do that as well. I've got a favourite dress. In fact, I'm not often in yellow, because I think it's such a happy colour. But then I do see things. I'm like, I'm wearing the same top again. So OK, that's really good. So that's really helpful. Now, one of the things that we've talked about then is understanding the components of the assignments. But, Carlton, very briefly, because we're nearly out of time here today, what sorts of things are tutors looking for? And can you talk about the importance in your answer of the student notes, the notes that accompany the assessment question, and how tutors are marking?

CARLTON WOOD: Yes. So often, there's really good guidance associated with the TMA questions, and they will help you along the process of putting your assignment questions together. And the tutors mark according to the information that's in those notes really. So if you follow what it says in the notes, you'll do very well. And the key thing is when you get your feedback back, as well, is to make sure that you read all of the comments really carefully, because the tutor will be telling you things that you've done really well and to carry on doing, as well as things that you might not have done quite so well and that you need to adapt for next time.

So don't be put off by the amount of typing you might get back on your answers, because it'll be probably more than you're used to. But all of that is meant to be constructive and helpful and to give you the best chance of improving on a subsequent occasion.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, in the olden days, we used to handwrite many of these assignments and go post them through our tutor's door very late at night. But now we have an electronic system. George, can you very briefly explain to students how this electronic TMA, tutor marked assignment system works? Just show us a couple of examples from that.

GEORGE CURRY: Yes. So the ETMA-- so that's electronic tutor marked assignment system-- is, again, accessed either from the module website or from your Student Home, and you can click on that. If you want to, you can submit the first TMA via post-- good old-fashioned envelopes and paper. But you will need to use the online TMA service. But you can see that there on the screen. You just click on that, and it's really, really simple. It's just like attaching a file to an email essentially and clicking Send.

So it's something that, again, there's lots of guidance as you do it. You'll get a little receipt back that says it's been received, which is always quite reassuring. And you can always drop your tutor a line and say, I've just submitted my assignment. I hope you've got it all right. But it's really very much just like sending an attachment for an email.

And then when you've got it back, you'll receive a message that the teachers marked it and sent it back. And you can see there-- you just click on where it says Collect, and you will receive the assignment back with all of your tutor's feedback. So hopefully, it's all quite straightforward. It's quite intuitive. But if at any

point you're not sure, of course your teacher is there, of course the Student Support team is there, and of course the Computing Helpdesk is there.

But once you've done it once, you'll be well away, and it will become second nature. And then you just sit and wait for your tutor to send it back. I know what that feels like.

KAREN FOLEY: And when does that happen, Carlton?

CARLTON WOOD: So the tutors have got up to a maximum of 10 working days to return it. So some tutors work and can get them back to you quicker than that, but some of them may be marking on other modules, and therefore they may make use of the full 10 days. So if you haven't had it back in six days but you can see other people in the forum talking about they've had their assignment back really quickly, don't panic about it. Your tutor will be getting around to it. But it's maximum of 10 working days from the tutor's point of view.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And those are working days, which are not technically weekends, so that's important. So you then get your feedback. You can learn and reflect on it, and that's a great topic of conversation for your next one to one with your tutor on the phone, or via email, or however you're going to have it there as well.

John, you mentioned before that many students talk about not feeling confident and feeling more confident towards the end of the Access course. I wonder if we might end today's show thinking about, in addition to the opportunity to submit assignments and learn some stuff, what else do our Access students get as a result of this course?

JOHN BUTCHER: So much, Karen. We've already talked about confidence, and I think that confidence is a definite thing. I think the Access modules prepare students to go on into their undergraduate studies and succeed, and we've seen data going across the bottom of the screen, talking about that. I think Access students learn about their subject they enjoy but also learn what we would call in an interdisciplinary way. So they're looking at different subjects while they're doing their Access modules. Most importantly, I think it demonstrates to an individual that I can do it. All the research tells us that many adult learners are worried about whether they're, in quote marks, "good enough to manage in higher education." The Access modules really demonstrate to people in almost all cases that they can. Finally-- and this is important I think-- it enables students to really focus on the subject they want to study if they are going to progress. So it's much better to think-- I'll just choose an example at random-- think, I really want to study law. You do some law on Y032. You discover law wasn't quite what you thought it was, but you really enjoy studies of health education. And therefore, you've made the right choice, and you go on to study in health education.

So all of those things and more. And you talk to people in Tesco, and you find out that they've done an OU course as well. And you've got a conversation with them there. So enjoy your studies, everybody.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you, John. And what a lovely note to end on there today. I know there have been lots and lots of questions. HJ, have you and Gareth pretty much answered them all? And how is everyone feeling right now as a result of coming along today?

HJ: I think we've been doing our best with the questions, and hopefully, we've given some good answers there. But I know a lot of people has found it really helpful, including Karen and Sheryl. And Joe has found the session very reassuring and friendly, which is great. And Yassin said the session is very warm and helpful. So I know our fantastic guests have done a lot to reassure us and give us a boost of confidence as we start our studies.

But as always, there's so much amazing stuff going on in the chat-- advice and questions. If we missed anything, do email us-- studenthub@open.ac.uk-- because we'd love to get back to you. And your Student Support team is there as well, either through email, or they have a web chat option, or by calling them up. There's always someone at the end of the phone that wants to support you.

So if there's something that you need to help you succeed at your studies-- a query, a question-- do contact them, because there will be someone supportive at the end of the phone. But I'm looking forward to chatting to everyone at our next session, and I do hope to see everyone again soon.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And thank you so much, you and Gareth, for moderating that. If there's something we haven't answered or perhaps there was an answer to a question you didn't quite mean, email studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we'll forward it to the right person and make sure that we get an answer for you.

I'd like to end by something that Catherine has said, which I think is really lovely. "When I think I'm not good enough, I think, remember all you've been through before this point, and that helps me a lot." And I think that's just an awesome thing to think, Catherine. And we've all been through so many different things.

Remember that when you're worried about putting something on the forum or you're feeling worried about talking to your tutor, everyone else has got different stuff going on. And we get through by putting one foot in front of the other, by working on things, developing things. You're not going to be experts right now, because you're right at the beginning of a really exciting journey. And there's plenty of opportunity to develop with such a lovely lot of people around you.

So that unfortunately is all we've got time for. I leave you to go and contact your tutors, speak to your Student Support teams, make the most of the Careers and Employability Service, and also contact each other in the various spaces that you have available. Thank you all so much for coming. I hope you can join us at another event. We run these Student Hub Live events for all students at the university, and we make sure that they cater a lot for our Access students.

So we do things on, for example, time management, essay planning and writing, academic skills, working with other people's theories and ideas, critical thinking, all sorts of things. And you can find out about those on our website. You can subscribe to our monthly mailing list, because, while we have everything planned, we only release the tickets, because the spaces are limited and free incidentally, about a month before the events are on.

So make sure that you check that out, and come along if you'd like to. But for now, bye and have a lovely rest of the day. And we hope to see you at another event and certainly at your tutorials very soon. Have a good day.

[MUSIC PLAYING]