

KAREN FOLEY: Yay, we're back. Welcome back to Student Hub Live. Megan and I just think it's all the cat's fault. They're just awful things, these cats, aren't they Megan. HJ, how's everybody back at home? I'm so sorry we went off air. We had a problem with our server.

HJ: I know. We were really worried, because we thought it might've been the wet cat. But of course, we know cats can't do anything wrong. So - or maybe the servers were pumped up with -

KAREN FOLEY: I think we disagree, don't we Megan.

ALL: [LAUGHING]

HJ: But everyone is coming back, and they're excited to be back, which is fantastic. A lot of people were looking forward to our OUSA session, so the Students Association and our Stay Well, Study Well. But the good news is, is that we're having those a bit later today, so from ten past four, we've moved those sessions so you can enjoy them in full. And all of our sessions will be on Catch-up, as well. So if you can't make those later times, don't worry. It'll be on YouTube.

But yeah, we've got - all the wet cats are out of the room. All the talk of cakes has been - we've given the servers just some extra capacity to deal with that. So go right ahead and get back to the cakes.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, that's wonderful. Thank you. And well done, everybody, getting back. And you can go out and chase those nasty cats. Yeah, so we redid the programme a little bit because we had some really, really interesting sessions. So we're going to come and hear about the OU Students Association towards the end of the day, and then also our Stay Well, Study Well session.

To be honest, I was in the green room with those guys, and they're so super calm and collected. The best time to have a technical mishap is with the psychology department, so do stay tuned for us later. But, I'm really glad you're all back, because this session is a really, really important one. We're talking about assessments and developing your learning.

I have Klaus-Dieter Rossade with me, who's the director of the Assessment Programme and the associate dean of curriculum in Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies. And Klaus-Dieter oversees the developmental thinking around the policy and the design and the delivery, so that the assessment at The Open University is fit for purpose as a world leader in distance education.

And Sophie Stansfield is the senior marketing manager in the PVC, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) offices, and she managed the Assessment Programme. And she works with Klaus-Dieter in making the assessment practice and the OU assessments experience transparent and consistent. So it's wonderful to have you both here. Klaus-Dieter, can you tell me, then, why you became so interested in assessments?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: A story that will illustrate that, a year ago, a friend of mine, retired doctor, he started doing a masters in global health. And when it came to his first exam, proper traditional exam, he completely fell apart. The pressure was just too much. He did it, but he felt awful about it. And this is somebody who has done loads of exams, all through his

training. And when I saw that, I thought, really, well, does it have to be that way? Can we not design an assessment that is really important, that, however, means students can learn from it, and it doesn't have to be scary, something that's an opportunity to shine, and not something to shirk away. And that's really what I like to achieve.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And Sophie, you've also been at The Open University in other roles, but now you're interested in assessment. Why is that?

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: That's right. For me, it's really assessment as part of the overall student experience, what we do to support and prepare students, but also how students can ensure that they get the most out of the process as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. So we've got lots of widgets for you to fill in at home. One of them is, what one word would you associate with assessment? So do make sure that you're filling in our widgets as we go through, and we'll bring those results in when they are all ready. But before we do that, can we think about what assessment is not? Because often, we think about what assessment is, and we'll see about that. But Sophie, what is assessment absolutely not?

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: Assessment is not there to cut you out. Assessment is not a trick. It's not there to try and find out what you don't know and expose all the gaps in your knowledge and your skills. It really is there to try and help you focus.

KAREN FOLEY: Klaus-Dieter, so what else is it not?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: Well, it's not a judgement on you as a person. It never is, although I can easily see it feels like that, and especially when you didn't do so well. I come clear clean here. I failed my driving test twice, and I had time off from school to do the test. I had to come back into that classroom. Everybody was looking at me, and it felt like such a personal failure, and I took it personal then. With hindsight, I shouldn't have, because what it helped me to - in the long run, it helped me to become a good driver. And just when we discussed it, Sophie also has an interesting one about not taking it personal.

KAREN FOLEY: Go on then, Sophie.

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: So, I have a puppy, so we've been going to puppy training classes. I work pretty hard with her during the week, and we're given tasks and homework, as it were. And it's really difficult not to take the feedback from the classes really personally or be disappointed if things maybe haven't progressed as quickly or gone as well as I would hope. But actually, that feedback is really useful. It lets me know what I need to work on for the week ahead, and it gives us a focus for the next week.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, absolutely. I remember puppy training classes. It was always very difficult. The puppy trainer always used to say, he'd always say, are you really important? Because it was the people who would just have this massive frustration that things weren't going their way, because it's often easy to control the things we are in control of. But sometimes when things are out of our control, like a puppy, it can feel really hard.

Let's see, Angela, how the widgets are doing. Are we getting any responses from people? I'm not sure if the widgets have crashed with our server or what. But we've also asked about

some of the results in terms of what people think assessment is, and it would be really interesting to see people at home, how they're responding to that. HJ, how's everyone feeling? Is assessment making us feel super calm, or how's everyone at home?

HJ: I think we're a bit worried about the assessments. We had, how do you feel or what comes to mind when you think of assessment, so, panic at the University, stress, fear, pressure, grades, anxiety. Well, hopefully, we can alleviate some of these things. And like I said, and a lot of people said in the chat earlier, that if you're worried about something, it's a normal response. You care about doing well. So no need to worry about worry. Some worry is normal, isn't it?

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, HJ. So panic there coming up as one of the key things. So Klaus-Dieter, what do we think about this? I mean, what's assessment like in an OU context? Many students here are brand new to the University, but there are some here who've been through assessment before, and they might like to fill in the others, in terms of what happens. But Klaus-Dieter, how does that work?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: Well, first of all, whenever you hear 'assessment', don't automatically think of exam. Think more like a puppy class. It's just the point where you get some feedback, and you get better at what you're doing. We tend to do more assessment at The Open University than at another university, and that's because assessment is part of our learning and teaching approach.

So we want to get those snapshot moments when you can show what you can do, and then you get feedback from your tutor. That is really important. We call it Assessment for Learning. And yes, also have a couple of scores that you will get, and we tend to put too much emphasis on the numbers. And it's actually when you write your assessment and then you get feedback from your tutor, that's when the learning happens. But Sophie's going to talk a little bit through some of the items that we have.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That would be great, Sophie. But Matthew wants to know what a formative exam is. And we have a lot of these words like formative and summative. He says, is it like a practise exam? Can we clarify what 'formative' means?

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: Yeah, so generally, we distinguish our assessment as either formative or summative. Simply put, summative assessment means that it counts towards your final module grade, whereas formative assignments, they don't. They may be compulsory, and you will need to complete them for learning purposes, but they don't count towards your final mark. And it's actually these types of assignments that are really important and useful opportunities to use as getting and using feedback.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, Sophie. I hope that answers the question. But other questions, do please let us know. So Sophie, you were going to tell us about some of the different types of assessment. We've got lots of different ones. Some we've met today as various acronyms we've been going through, like TMA's, the Tutor Marked Assignments. Can you talk us through some of the different options that students may meet in their studies?

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: Yeah. So there are many different types of assessment. They're all designed to help in different ways. So the TMA, the Tutor Marked Assignment, this can be anything from an essay, a creative piece of work, a report, or it could be something a little bit

more practical. For example, if you're doing computer programming, maybe an activity in our nursing programme or a spoken task in a languages course. And it can be something that you might work on by yourself, but you might also work with other students on this.

We also have, then, the iCMA, and this is the interactive Computer-Marked Assignment. Some of these, you can do over and over again until you get the right result, but others will be linked to a score that does go towards your final mark.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That's wonderful. Klaus-Dieter?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: Yeah, and just at the end of the module - so as I said, they don't all have exams. Most of them have some form of end-of-module assessment. And we have a name for that, EMA, of course. So it's a piece of work that you do in your own time. You submit it, and then you will be assessed.

And they're often, then, synoptic. That means they will pick up on several parts that you've learned in your module. They might build on TMAs that you've worked on. They're also progressive. They can be a little bit harder, understandably, than when you start your module, and they also get a little bit more complex as you go through OU's study Level 1, Level 2, and then the final level, Level 3.

But in a sense, every assessment, no matter what it's called, it should be a bit of a challenge for you so you have a real opportunity to show where you are with your skills and your knowledge, and then get your tutor to help you focus on what you have to do as the next step.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. The other important thing, I think, that sometimes students forget is that the way that the courses are designed at The Open University is that things start in a very structured way. They get progressively, as you say, more challenging and complex throughout the module. So our students at Level 1 are going to have some quite nice, tight assignments to focus their learning on, and then those develop. Can you tell us a little bit about how that works, Klaus-Dieter?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: So in terms of - when somebody starts with Open University, we are open, so anybody can start with us, provided that they are kind of ready to start at Level 1. We also have Access courses. So what we want to make sure with our assessment is that we teach all those skills that everybody needs to have to successfully move on to Level 2 and then Level 3.

And indeed, so you might have a task that that's very bound, very tight, very clear instructions, do this, do that, and see how it goes. And as you then progress, they might become more complex. And certainly when you move from Level 1 to Level 2, we would expect more analysis, basically more of yourself, the way you interpret the sources that you'll be looking at, the way you do your task in a way that's appropriate to the level.

The thing I think - the most important thing is to start with Level 1. Don't worry about Level 2 and Level 3. Just focus on the task at hand. And when I studied, or always when I study, I always look at the final assessment, just to see where it's going. But I also usually realise, well, actually, I couldn't do this yet.

And then I could just go back and say, okay, what do I need to do now? What's my assignment? I'll do this as best as I can. And then if you trust the process, your tutors will help you to guide you with the assessment, guide you all the way to the end of the module and, hopefully, to the end of a qualification.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And if you keep answering these questions that are set for you in terms of the assignment and use your tutor for support, it's very unlikely that you won't be able to pass. If you, however, answer a completely different question, then you do up the odds of failing. But let's take a look and see what people said at home. We asked, how likely you were to do formative exams.

And the answer here is, a lot of people are very likely to do formative exams. So this is something that our audience right now are looking at. So we also asked about preparation. And this is going to be the next subject that we're going to come up to.

So we've got a word cloud here about how students can effectively prepare. Let's see what they said. They said: study, revise, plan, practise, stay calm. Those are the key things. And read the question, super.

I'm going to let you have a look at this, Klaus-Dieter and Sophie, because I'd like you to pick up on some of the things that really resonate with you. Oh, dear, lie down, roll and cry. That's not so good. But there are lots of very useful things here. And HJ, you're chatty. How's everyone feeling? Are we making people feel a little bit more comfortable at home now?

HJ: I think we are, but I think we're still a bit nervous about doing assignments and assessment and how it all works. But I think Klaus' advice, just to focus on what's in front of us now, especially when we're on Level 1 and starting out. Because our tutors are there to guide us through, and the module materials are really good at prepping us and starting us out.

We do have some great questions that I'd like to ask, as well. One of the ones that has come up in the chat from Claire and Toran, they said they're a bit terrified of group work. Because all these kinds of things can happen where some people might dominate the group work, other people may not pull their weight, or you don't know how to have a voice in the group work. What would your advice be for those that are worried about those types of things?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: So I think a certain amount of worry is entirely appropriate. You go into to a group, and you don't know the people. And you will have been in other groups where, exactly like you said, not everybody is pulling their weight. And then having that as maybe even an assessed task, that might make it even more stressful.

Maybe I can focus a little bit - and these are really justified worries. But if you focus a little bit on the outcome, actually on - working in a group is incredibly important. I mean, how many jobs are out there where you don't work in teams and groups? It's more and more important, and actually now even more so when a lot of work is happening online, as well.

So when you're out there in the world of work, you will have to deal with these teams. And here you'll have a guided approach to help you do an assessment or actually do a practise, work in groups to come up with the result. We'll always make sure that the assessment scores that you get will be fair, and you won't be pulled down or up in a way that's not really appropriate.

But the key is, it's scary, but actually, it is so essential as a preparation for pretty much wherever you go these days. And if you see it as an opportunity to learn something where otherwise - that's an opportunity to learn that you cannot have from doing the activities on the website, doing the reading, doing the writing. It is really this interaction with people. It's fantastic. It can be hard, but if you get through it, you will have really mastered something.

KAREN FOLEY: That's wonderful advice. So if we can go back then, to our word cloud that we saw before and pick up on some of your experience, because you two have been sort of overseeing a lot of students' experiences of assessment, what are some of the successful, then, strategies that students may pick up on here in terms of assessment? What would your top two be, Sophie?

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: So I think right there in the middle of the word cloud is that word 'plan'. And this is something that always helps me. Plan. Give yourself time to ensure that when you approach each assignment, you know that you're doing so at your best and giving it your best shot.

But I think what's also really important within that planning is that you don't let that dominate your study. Don't let that take away from other elements of your learning. Don't let it distract you. But there are also some great resources that can help you plan and plenty on Student Hub Live, actually, that you can find out what works best for you. So plan, but don't let it be your single focus.

And I think secondly, is to just remember that assessment really is only one aspect of your whole study and learning experience. It is an opportunity that's there to support your learning, to receive the feedback, and you really will only gain from that process.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That's wonderful. Klaus-Dieter, what's your advice to students about effective assessment?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: I like all the emotional stuff in there, staying calm, because really, you can't do a good job if you're really, really nervous. There was one, 'read the question carefully'. That's the biggest rookie mistake that people do. You get so excited with what you think the question is, and then you get off onto the wrong course.

I'd like to - just two quick things. One - I'm not sure whether it was on the cloud - people can be a little bit perfectionist and they say, well, I'm not quite ready yet to submit, and then they'd rather not submit rather than anything that's incomplete. If we think of assessment as a process, I'd always advise you, before you don't submit anything, submit what you have. Because for all you know, it might be enough to get a pass.

But also, you get the tutor feedback. A tutor cannot comment on something that is only in your head. It's got to be out there. And the other - I couldn't read whether - did it say anywhere the word 'celebrate'? I really think we should do that more and more. We always focus on what's ahead and what we haven't done. If you have submitted your task, whatever it was, that's a reason to celebrate. If you get a result, and even if it's not the one that you wanted, it's better than having no result. So celebrate it.

And all along the way, if you found out something new that you didn't know before, find a way to celebrate. Reward yourself. And there is research, of course, the more we are aware of the things that we're doing well, the better, actually, our whole attitude towards learning.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Now, you've touched on peer support and the importance of your colleagues. But one of the things that did come up, in terms of anxieties, earlier today, is failure. And I wonder if we could sort of talk about this. Many people worry about failing their assessment. So what can we say about that?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: Well, to start with, failing is always difficult. Nobody likes to fail. I mentioned the driving test. But actually, failing is part of life, and failing is necessary to grow. And you may have come across the phrase, 'fail hard, fail fast, fail often'. And that's how you develop.

Now, in an OU term, don't fail too often. That wouldn't be a good idea. But if it happens, take stock. What's the damage here? If it is a formative assessment, and you didn't do well, you might have failed, it may not matter at all. If you study at Level 1, it doesn't count towards your final classification. So yes, you'll be annoyed, but the damage isn't big.

And if you think you've failed and you might be close to a pass/fail mark overall in the module, talk to your tutor. And please just submit any assignment whenever you can, because you never know. It might give you an opportunity to do a resit or resubmission which you might not have if you don't submit.

And I think my final - I'm coming back to celebrating. You can celebrate failing, as well. Failing and then picking yourself up, is a sign of resilience. Resilience, we know, is something that employers always look forward to. And resilience is what keeps people going. And if you are coming out, if you're pulling yourself, or with the help of peers, if you're pulling yourself out of a slump, and you live to tell the tale, that is something to celebrate. So put it behind, and move on.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Well, Luca says, 'failure is only failure if you don't learn anything from it'. And Charlie says, 'this is great advice, very positive'. Naomi says, 'I love this advice. It's absolutely wonderful'. Klaus-Dieter, have you ever failed anything, apart from your driving test?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: Oh, I did. I failed an exam, and a really important one, a stage exam in my undergrad studies. So I had to retake it, and I prepared like half a year for it. It was annoying. And at the time, of course, I hated it. I did better the second time round, but I also learned something about how I am when I fail and what are the things that I need to watch out for; not giving up, pursuing it.

I don't think any journey in life is straightforward. There are always going to be points when you fail, when you drop off. Come back on the train again. It's worked for me. And actually, I'm not the greatest exam writer at all, but even I got somewhere.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, well, absolutely. And thank you for sharing that. Because so often, it's that one thing that we really fail, and then when it happens, we realise the world doesn't collapse, and we can get on with things. And as you say, we can learn something from this.

So many of us have failed many things over time. And as you say, it's about that resilience. Sophie, what are your final words for our audience at home?

SOPHIE STANSFIELD: I think it's really just to remember that assessment is a reflection of where you are now. And so, it's really just an opportunity for you to focus on where you want to be at the end of your studies.

KAREN FOLEY: And Klaus-Dieter, what can you sign off with to inspire people, which you are so clearly doing?

KLAUS-DIETER ROSSADE: Very short, assessment is about testing something new. It is not testing you.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Very easy to take those as very personal things when we put our heart and soul into it. But as you say, it's on the task, and it's really important to bear that in mind. Sophie and Klaus-Dieter, thank you so much. What a wonderful, friendly discussion about assessment. I hope you've enjoyed that at home.

I hope we're back on the straight and narrow with our technology now. We're going to meet Isabella in our next session. Isabella does a lot of our online workshops, so now's the chance to meet her with video. And we're going to be back after this short break. We're going to do another of our campus tour videos. This one's in the library, actually. It's a language panel. So we'll be back live for this next session after this video. See you then.