

INTERVIEWER: Welcome back to Student Hub Live. Well, it wouldn't be Freshers week without talking about our study buddies. Lynne, I hear that everybody at home is comparing animals.

And my lovely dog here has been so good all morning, just sitting here all day, in fact, lolling around and snoring and not doing any work at all. But I hear that we've got some pretty challenging animals on the cards that our students are going to have to deal with while they're juggling their studies. Tell us more.

LYNNE: Yeah. Absolutely right. I think my dog is the same as your dog. She's just sleeping all day.

But we've got Melanie, who has got 33 Guinea pigs, two rabbits, a budgie, a hamster, snake, and two dogs, with about 14 fish in a pond. Georgia has got chickens. They're called Becky, Dotty, Hattie, Nancy, Doris, Ethel, and lots more names, as well.

And Jan has pet rats. So one escaped during cleaning cages recently. It was two girly rats, so she may be very busy coming up in the next few weeks.

[LAUGHING]

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's wonderful.

LYNNE: Amazing.

INTERVIEWER: One of the things that we do in our online sessions, Lynne, is we share pictures of our study buddies and also our tummy buddies, which are our cakes that we make. So we always start the day with looking at some of our pets. And it's nice to see everybody's pets and cakes, et cetera, there as well.

So thank you for the sterling work you're doing on the chat. Keep talking. Keep sharing. We're now going to tell you some more about some of the amazing work the faculty does.

So [INAUDIBLE] came on this morning and started telling us about how this was not just a faculty involved in education, but actually changing lives throughout the world. And so that is the focus of this session. I'm joined by Matthew Foster and Martha Tengesha to talk about the work that the International Development Office are doing. Matt, can you give us a brief overview of what the International Development Office does and why the OU have one?

MATTHEW FOSTER (Director – International Development Office): OK. So we're quite a small team, about 20 people. And we work with academics across the university, but especially those in the faculty of WELS.

And we design open distance learning specifically for educators, health workers, humanitarian workers around the world so that they can change lives. So we're working with those people so they can deliver improved health care, better education, more effective humanitarian relief in some of the most disadvantaged places in the world. And why does the university have-- yeah?

INTERVIEWER: Go for it. No, I was just going to ask you about why this is so important.

MATTHEW FOSTER: Why? OK. Well, we think it's really important because, obviously, these are big challenges. Access to good education, health care are all massive challenges around the world. And they're challenges that the university has a really big role to play in trying to solve. Because we can use open distance learning, it can reach lots of people and help provide really good quality training to loads of people around the world.

The reason the Open University is doing this work in particular is because it's a key part of our vision. So the Open University's vision is all about providing more opportunities through education, supporting more students through lifelong learning. And what our team's doing is taking that beyond the UK and reaching and expanding that out to many places around the world.

It also means we're a very distinctive university. And academics not only do teaching and research, like they would do in any other university, but they're also getting involved in these very practical projects that help them solve big challenges around the world.

So for example, in Sierra Leone, they might be working to think about, how do we create opportunities for more female primary school teachers where there's a massive shortage of female teachers in that country. And we know that that makes a big difference to girls education and then completing schooling and having more opportunities. So it's a really important aspect of the Open University's work. And it makes it quite different from other universities.

INTERVIEWER: And can you give us a little bit of an indication of the scope of this? How many countries are you involved with? And how many projects are going on?

MATTHEW FOSTER: Yeah. We're currently working in about 10 different countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and about 17 projects at the moment.

INTERVIEWER: That's wonderful. And we're not just doing this because we're a wonderful organisation and want to help people. There's a process here in terms of how we're working collaboratively and together with people. It's not just a case of disseminating information. isn't that right, Matt?

MATTHEW FOSTER: Absolutely right. So this is all about designing open distance learning for a particular group of people. So if it's like I mentioned before, teachers in Sierra Leone, it's about working with other partners in that country to help design open distance learning that's particularly suited to that situation. So we'll often work with a lot of partner organisations that you might know of, people like Save the Children, but also with governments.

And, of course, one of the big advantages of open distance learning is it can work on a very big scale. So these projects are often very big. And they're working across whole countries.

INTERVIEWER: Martha, you've been involved in specific projects. I wonder if you can give us a flavour of how the Open University work on a specific project?

MARTHA TENGENESHA (Project Coordinator – International Development Office): Yeah, sure. So we're working in Zimbabwe. And we're working in partnership with World Vision and CARE International. And what we're doing is we're supporting the transitioning of girls

from primary to secondary school. And we're working directly with the Ministry of Education and teachers to build the capacity to be able to teach literacy and numeracy.

So one of the issues within Zimbabwe is that a lot of children lack the basic skills to be able to read English or do simple maths. So as a result of that, they struggle at school. So for example, how do you understand science if it's in English?

So the Open University has collaboratively developed literacy and numeracy modules which provide activities and techniques to teach literacy and numeracy. We have developed seven modules on the IGATE programme in Zimbabwe. And what we have done is partnered with teachers in approximately 300 primary and secondary schools in order to build the capacity of learners in foundational literacy and numeracy, using the IGATE modules.

So from that approach, 72,000 girls are benefiting from the programme. And the focus is for teachers to do new classroom activities with their learners. We get materials and activities into the hands of teachers, and we use school staff development sessions for teachers to talk about these activities and to try them out as well.

Additionally, we also support school heads and literacy and numeracy teachers to facilitate these modules and become champions across the school. So my staff and colleagues from the International Development Office, as well as academics from WELS, take part in school support visits. And we visit schools individually, which often are located in remote areas.

But it's a fantastic opportunity to be able to meet the learners who are directly benefiting from the programme. And it's a great opportunity to learn about how teachers are improving literacy and numeracy within their schools. As you can see from this screen, in the previous image, there was a picture of a school, which had literacy and numeracy painted all over its walls. And that particular image, that's a perfect example of how schools are embracing literacy and numeracy programmes within their schools.

And through these support visits, we're able to learn about what's going on within the schools. Were able to share what we observed with other schools. And they also inform the education programmes within the International Development Office so that we're able to upscale the good practise that we've observed. Everything we do is done in collaboration with school communities and the governments as well.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that's fantastic, Martha. It's very impressive, that scale-- 72,000 girls. So not only are you reaching broad, but also touching many, many lives and really making a difference. Matt, I wonder if you could end the session by telling us a little bit about how the current situation, COVID, has affected things? Has it had much impact on the work that you're doing?

MATTHEW FOSTER: I think it's had a very big impact. I mean, we used to travel quite a lot to do this work. I think we found it very easy to adapt, though, to collaborate online remotely. So that's not been a big change, really. It's just been something we had to get used to over a few weeks. And sometimes, we find it's actually better to collaborate through platforms like Zoom because it can involve more people in the same conversations.

The big change that we've seen is about 8 percent of the world's students have been affected by COVID because schools and universities have been closed in many countries around the

world, which means there's been a huge change from going from face to face education to open distance learning. And in some cases, that's happened overnight. So there's a big demand for the Open University to help other universities to make that transition to open distance learning, especially now it looks like it's not just a temporary fix, and it might actually be more of a longer term trend for many countries to invest more in open distance learning.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you've both given us a wonderful idea of some of the really important work going on. And also, I sort of touched on some of the benefits that we're getting from it at the Open University. So through working collaboratively with people, we're able to really deliver solutions that are practically sensible within those populations, as well as touching a lot of lives, but also learning, ourselves, about new technologies, trying new things, and seeing how we, as a university, can be flexible in many places and different ideas and working with the technologies that we have on offer, constantly adapting.

Martha and Matt, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your important work with us today. We're now going to play a short video. And then, we're going to have a spotlight on ECYS, education, childhood, youth, and sport. So join me after this quick break. Grab a cup of tea, if you haven't already, and I'll see you very soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[Text on screen: studenthublive.open.ac.uk]