

PRESENTER: Welcome back to Student Hub Live.

Well, we end today's introduced introduction to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with a look at study intensity. Now, nearly half of you are doing two modules at the same time. And it's important to bear in mind that there are lots of different choices. So to talk about this, I'm joined by Rachel Penny, who is a psychologist and the director of teaching for psychology and counselling.

Now, Rachel, one of the things we know is that many students are increasingly wanting to study at what we call full time intensity-- so maybe doing two modules of 60 credits each at the same time. So we're seeing an increase in these trends, particularly within this area. So I wonder if you can sort of start by explaining briefly what we mean by flexible study intensity?

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah. So as you said, lots of people are doing more than one module at a time. And sometimes, people want to do one of the levels studying more than one module, and other levels only studying one module. So when we talk about flexible study intensity, we're really talking about the fact that with The Open University you can speed up your study intensity, but you can also slow down your study intensity as your time and your personal circumstances allow.

So it's that flexibility to move between part time and full time intensity study that is such a benefit. Because it means that as and when you have more time or less time, you can make the decision about the year study ahead that suits you, that's the right decision for you.

PRESENTER: Now Rachel, in terms of that year ahead type thing-- so we're looking at sort of one year at a time-- what are the implications for students? Can they sort of start a module and then say, actually, this feels too much, or this is not hard enough and I want another one? How does it work in terms of the time scales?

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah. So students should aim to make their best choice at the start of the academic year, and make the decision. If they are studying two 60 credit modules that start at the same time-- say, in October-- and they very quickly realise that actually, the reality of studying both those modules is more than they have time for, then they would often be able to defer one of the modules to the next year. If they're studying at level one, sometimes they can defer it just to the February because we have two presentations per academic year on most of our level one modules. But at level two and level three, normally they are only presented once per academic year, and that's because of student numbers on modules. And so then they might defer it and so end up studying, say, level two over two years as a part time student.

But there are those windows where they can sort of defer relatively early on. And the student support team will always have the most up to date information for what's possible for you, depending on where you are in your modules. So I would always suggest if you start studying two modules and you're worried it is more than you have time for at this moment, then get in touch with them early so that you can just talk through what are those key dates? Because they do differ according to your funding arrangements and according to how far into the module you are.

If you're starting with one module and you want to speed up, you would normally only be able to do that when the next presentation starts. You usually can't pick one up once the modules have got going. So it's about making the best guess at the study intensity you want to study for the year ahead. But as I said, at level one, knowing that there are two presentations a year does give you even more flexibility at level one. Which is great, because that's when you're learning about how much time it involves and everything. So it's great to have that additional flexibility at level one.

PRESENTER: It is indeed. And we have different presentations. So you mentioned that they sort of start typically twice a year, and we call these the "J". Which is because, I think October is the month, like A,B,C,D,E,F,G-- and "B", which is easier to do, which is February. A,B for February. So we have different presentations that students can look at.

And some students, as you say Rachel, may do two together, and that's very common for the October start. But some may then pick up one in February, so they might sort of have a period of time where the two modules overlap. So let's talk a little bit about maybe students doing two modules at the same time. This is common. What are some of the things that you can tell students who may be in that position that they might want to bear in mind? In addition to obviously finding out the key dates, as you've suggested, where they may have to make decisions about in fact whether that is the right choice for them.

RACHEL
PENNY:

Yeah. So if you're doing two modules that start at the same time and finish at the same time, we call that concurrent study. And for those, when you're studying modules together in that way, probably the key things to be thinking about are how you're going to manage your studying of each module each week. Are you going to have a few days for one module, then a few days for another? Are you going to do it week about and do extra study two weeks worth of study for one module, and then the next week focus entirely on the other module? So have a think, have a try about what works for you in terms of managing studying the two different content.

It's also good to look ahead and map out when the assignment deadlines are for the two modules, because obviously those are going to be times when the time requirement on you is going to be extra important. And so if you've got modules where the assignments might be very close or even sometimes clashing, it can be really helpful to kind of look earlier and make decisions about, well, maybe I'll get that module's assignment done a couple of weeks ahead of schedule so that then I have the time to do the other one.

So really it's about almost mapping out your year with the deadlines and the assignment deadlines, and then thinking about how you're going to manage the content. And I know that students who study more than one modules often talk about how helpful it is to have different colour notebooks or different-- using stationery in a way to make it easier to know which notes belong to one module and which notes belong to another. So that's a really useful tip is how are you going to distinguish between your notes and things for the different modules so that it makes it easier for you to find them when you then need to refer back to them.

PRESENTER: And that really matters, Rachel, because sometimes we can sort of conflate things or bring stuff together. It may be that one module you think, oh, that's really interesting. I might bring that into this essay. But no, because of course you're assessed on the module that you're writing the assessment for and on that particular module material. So it's really important, I guess, to have those distinctions as you suggest so that you can get as many marks as you want.

And with that in mind, I wonder if you might sort of fill us in on the whole issue of, I guess, understanding the qualification as a whole. Because for example, on some of the level two modules I teach on some students will have something really important, or they might have an exam at the end. Or something which may mean that they might need to pay a little bit more attention to one module and cover everything, even if not in great detail, than another which may be able to have more localised focus on.

So can you tell us about understanding the modules within the whole qualification, and also perhaps the weightings of the assignment? Just a sort of broad thing about understanding how much each thing matters.

RACHEL
PENNY:

Yeah. And again, all that information is included on each of your module websites. So often under the Assessment tab at the top of your module website screen you'll find something that talks about how much different assignments weight in terms of your overall mark. So it's really-- and it's useful to kind of look at that, because there will be assignments that count more towards your final mark.

And depending on the qualification you're doing, some of the assignments help you prepare for assignments later on, or potentially that final module with the project or thesis-- I'm sorry, dissertation type assignment or something, depending on what your qualification is. So again, the subject site, which you can find if you press on the link to study on student home, and that takes you to your subject site.

And again, they would often have qualification narratives. And so you'll get a sense of how the qualification builds overall, where you have choices of modules, and where some of the modules are core and very discipline specific, very focused in terms of the qualification you've chosen. So getting that sense of how each module fits into that bigger picture.

And then within the module, how assignments feed into your modules picture is really helpful, because it just gives you that sense of the journey ahead and each step on that journey. Because actually, sometimes it can feel a bit overwhelming-- you're starting at level one, you're going to be going all the way to the end. But then if you start to understand that each assignment is a step on that journey and you're ticking them off as you go, then actually you're always making progress and you're always working towards that final qualification. Which can be really reassuring, especially in those early stages of the qualification. You will get there, it just takes time and ticking off each step as it goes.

PRESENTER:

And I know many students are really mindful of that qualification. And I've met some of my own students who've said, you know, I want to do this. I really need an amazing degree. I need to get a first. So they're very stressed out from day one. And of course, the interesting thing that is important to know at The Open University is that the level one grades don't count towards that end of qualification grade. But the level three ones, they certainly account for most of it, and level two likewise as well. And that structure is something you can speak to your student support team about and get a notion from your overall qualification.

But level one is about learning lots and lots of new things about applying skills and getting a solid foundation.

So I guess, Rachel, one of the things is that many students might sort of say, it's OK to, I guess, wing it at level one, to do two modules at the same time. But at level three where the stakes are a little bit higher, those may be things that require a little bit more consideration. Would that be a fair comment?

RACHEL

Yes. I definitely would agree with that. I mean, at level one you're learning lots of new skills. I would always encourage all students to make all your mistakes at level one, because you'll get feedback from your tutors on your assignments. So if you're not sure about something, give it your best shot, because the marks don't ultimately count towards your final degree and you'll get feedback that means that you'll be able to progress with that skill.

PENNY:

At level three, as Karen, you've said, each mark does contribute more to your final degree classification. And depending on what your goals are and how you're going to use your degree, that really could matter. So I would always very much encourage students to engage with the career service-- we have a great career service at The Open University. And they'll be able to help give you guidance about there might be a particular classification you need to aim for for the postgraduate studies you want to do or particular careers you might want to do. And if classification is something that's going to really matter, then by the time you're getting close to level three have a really clear think about whether you can achieve that degree classification studying the two final modules together, or whether that might be the point to slow down.

Four year degrees in Scotland are really common, so you might want to full time intensity for your first two years, for your first two levels, and then do part time over level three. But there will be students who study full time intensity at level three and who do very well. I think you just need to have a really clear understanding of your own time availability, and how you're working, and what's going to be the right decision for you and what will benefit you for your career and study goals beyond your first qualification that you're doing at the moment.

PRESENTER:

And we've asked people at home about some of their tips for time management. Simon's got a really good idea. He says there's lots of YouTube videos on how to balance life and studying. Terry's got a massive wall chart with different colour pens. Zoe says, it helps that I don't have a social life at all. So lots of exciting things there.

But about just over a quarter of our viewers today are thinking about increasing their study intensity. And I guess the key thing is to get an idea about how things are going for you, reflecting on how you individually learn, and speaking to your student support team about some of your options there as well.

So let's take a look at some of those tips. We're not going to have time to discuss them, unfortunately, but there are lots here as well. And then HJ, I'm just going to come and end with some final thoughts from you.

So here we can see things like using the module website effectively is a great idea. Lots and lots of pens getting organised. A weekly reflection-- that's a great idea. Starting early, preplanning. Using war planners. Splitting weeks up-- that's a good idea. Not over-committing. Using your assignment dates. Trying to keep ahead. Making time to study, et cetera, is all really good. And don't panic, I think, is the key thing.

HJ, how's everyone feeling?

HJ:

We're doing really well at home. And it's great to see all these study tip, as well-- we absolutely love them. And it's always helpful to see how other people manage their study. But yeah, it's been great to see everyone sharing and chatting today as well. And I'm really pleased that one of the things that came out is the most important thing is knowing when to ask for help, as well. Because sometimes there's things that we don't know about that could help, or there's times when we just need support from someone else. So a big top tip from today's chat is definitely asking for help.

PRESENTER: Brilliant.

Well, Rachel, thank you so much for filling us in. HJ, and of course we've had Tracy and Damon on the chat as well answering your questions. Thank you so much for all your help. And thank you, everyone, for watching at home. I hope you found today inspiring. I hope you thought it was lovely to meet so many friendly module chairs, and to find out that there really is so much support here for you at The Open University. It's exciting times. So all the best with your modules.

We at Student Hub Live do lots of events throughout the year to support you in your studies, from things like time management to essay planning and writing. We've got a whole range of things, so check the website out. Subscribe to our monthly newsletter, because we only promote events shortly before they are released so that you can get your tickets to those, because spaces are limited. They're all free events for OU students, so you can find something there that hopefully will support you in your learning and give you a different opportunity to connect with other people also.

So that's all we've got time for, but thank you for watching. And I hope you can join us again at another event soon. Bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]