

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to Student Hub Live. Well, this is our virtual FASS Freshers' Week, and we've been having a really, really wonderful time. I hope you've enjoyed that first session. There's certainly been lots of chat and questions. So let's hop over to Damon and see how everybody is at home and what's going on.

DAMON MILLER: Yeah, everyone is really excited, chomping at the bit to get in. There's quite a few people who are doubling up this year. So they're studying maybe A111 and A112 together. We've also got some people who are coming in at Level 2 and Level 3, and they're a bit concerned about the stuff that they might have missed. So, is there anything that they need to know and how they go about that rather than sort of hitting the ground and not being able to run as it were.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. No, those are really, really good questions. The OU has a really nice little BOC - a Badged Open Course. We have all these sort of acronyms, which people get the hang of in no time at all but can be a bit confusing at the start. So I think my advice would be for those students who are transferring, the key things to really learn to navigate are the institution itself. How do we submit things? How do you work with your tutor?

We've got some workshops on Saturday the third of October, the day of module start, that you may want to come along to and which will take you through the virtual learning environment, and show you around, and show you tips and tricks that you might like to use, and talk about how to make the most of your tutor, et cetera. But the one thing I would say is that your tutor is the key source of support. And I'm sure, Damon, you'd agree with that as a tutor yourself.

Very often, there's no such thing as a stupid question. If you don't know something - and why should you - it's always best to ask because there's a very simple way around that. And not only that, but there's the Student Support Team, isn't there, Damon?

DAMON MILLER: Yeah, absolutely. As you say, your main relationship will be with your tutor, who is your main contact, and they'll be marking your work. But the Student Support Team are there at the end of the phone and at the end of the email. And if you've got any questions, any problems, contact them.

Well, contact your tutor if it's to do with your studies. Anything else, contact the Student Support Team, and they will do their very best to help you out. The worst thing that you can do is not talk to the university and try and deal with things yourself. Things can go wrong quite quickly, and we are here to help. We are here to see you through your studies and see you graduate.

KAREN FOLEY: There are thousands of students who study and have studied successfully with The Open University. And trust me, we've heard all sorts of things going on. And one thing that is so amazing - and one thing that actually employers really, really value is the motivation that students have in terms of juggling many, many work commitments, et cetera, whilst also completing a qualification.

So as Damon says, the Student Support Team, they'll help you with things like time management. If, for example, something temporarily goes wrong, you need an extension, et

cetera, they're really, really supportive. And they can often work around the best solution for you.

We've also got a wonderful library team, a careers team. There's the OU computing help desk. So there's so much support and information there that you can access. But today, we're really, really focusing on FASS. But on the twenty-eighth of September, we have a generic event. So, if you're a new student, please come along to that, because, again, we'll be showing you all of the things that you need to know and to be introducing you to some of those central sources of support.

So let's go to Billy now and see what it's really like being a student. Welcome, Billy. We've all had that brief video introduction. But I wonder if you could tell us what you're studying and, also, how it's all going.

**BILLY DOCHERTY:** At present, I'm on my last module. I'm doing DE300. I start on the third day of October. And that's my second Level 3 in psychology. So hopefully, I should graduate next year. Fingers crossed, if all goes well, I'll actually graduate next year.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And where are you, Billy, in the UK right now?

**BILLY DOCHERTY:** I'm just outside Edinburgh in a place called Bathgate in Scotland.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. We've been asking everybody at home where they are as well. And our map looks so wonderful. I wonder if we might just take a little look and see. We've got lots of people in Europe, and Africa, the Middle East, and other, in Australasia, but a lot in the UK as well. So it's wonderful to see so many students there, and in particular, so many international students.

We have a wonderful international student community. And of course, the best thing about the OU is being able to hook up online and meet people from all over the globe. It's just important to get your timings right. So Billy, I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about FASS then in terms of your relationship.

Often, you're studying something in a faculty because you're interested in a subject. But you've had quite a complex and multiple relationship with the faculty. So what does the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences mean to you? And how have you been involved?

**BILLY DOCHERTY:** Yeah, I'm a psychology student. But when I started, I originally was doing social sciences and got totally hooked on psychology. During that time, I got involved with the Student Association, and two years ago, I had been elected faculty rep. So that gave me a chance to work with a wider scope of the faculty.

But, for me, the faculty is absolutely amazing. I love FASS. Anybody who knows me, I always promote FASS because the students in FASS are really keen. They get involved in things.

As faculty rep, I had over sixty students on campus over my two years, because the faculty gives the students the chance to get their voice out there. And the staff are always keen to hear from students.

So for example, we have what's called faculty assembly, which meant I could bring five visitors plus my three reps to faculty assemblies, so they met the staff. They were involved, and not so much the decision-making part of that, but they knew exactly what was happening within the faculty and how the faculty was working to support students.

I've also been involved in student consultations. They do these regularly online. So you can actually sign up to be part of the consultation groups. And when we go back to face-to-face, they have yearly consultations, which happens all across the nations, where students can actually come and meet reps, and meet staff at the OU, and discuss some of the big issues that's happening round about at the time.

**KAREN FOLEY:** There's also other ways that students can get involved with things that may be a slightly lighter touch, like forums, and filling in surveys and things, aren't there? What are some of the other ways that you've been involved in? And what benefit did it give you as a student in terms of contributing your opinions?

**BILLY DOCHERTY:** I think one of the big issues for students is because we're all distance students, we're not actually on campus, we do wonder how much the university actually takes onboard what we're saying. I've led, and I've been part of these forums that appear regular within the faculties. You do see that your voice is actually listened to and what your concerns are, are actually addressed.

So we in part - if you get an invite to attend the forums, they're always fantastic to attend. There's always really interesting topics, and you get the chance to express how you feel about certain issues. Yeah, the forum, to me, was always a good chance, a), to meet other students. Although it's online, we still get to meet other students.

Find out what other students - what their thoughts are on issues and how they address the challenges of being a distant learner. Because a distant learner is totally different from being on campus. I found it really interesting before looking at the word cloud, the students' worries, and every one of those I could - I've now been with The Open University six years.

So six years ago, I can remember sitting in the exact same spot worrying about loneliness, worrying about time, worrying about TMAs, so, the forums are a really good chance to get the student voice really deep into the faculty. So if you get the chance, then it's definitely worth doing them.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And Billy, a lot of students are talking about various other ways of supporting other students, things like WhatsApp groups and social media, et cetera. Have you been involved in those? And what was your experience? I've heard they're a bit marmite.

**BILLY DOCHERTY:** Yes. My advice to students from day one is very simple. What's on Facebook isn't always true. Because I've seen so many students get so upset over things that's on Facebook. Especially about some students are working ahead of schedule. Some students maybe like to get ahead because of life commitments, family commitments. And this causes a lot of upset to students.

Plus, I always try to say to students that the best place to ask questions is actually your forum - your module forum. Because that way, the tutors are there. And that way, you know the information you're getting is correct.

Because it's not the first time either on Facebook or into a WhatsApp group and asked a question and got twelve different answers. So I end up more confused than what I did at the start. So I always say to the students, your forum is there. It's not instant.

So the tutor wouldn't be sitting down at the computer ready to reply straight away. But usually, in my experience, within a few hours, twenty-four hours maximum, you get a reply. And then you know that reply is correct. You know the information you're getting then, can help you go forward.

For being online for things like Facebook, as a student association, we have over sixty clubs on Facebook, and we also have our societies. And we've got thousands and thousands of students involved in all these clubs and things. So for the social side of the university, it's fantastic. For the academic side, we always advise students to stick to the forum or actual tutors. That way, you're guaranteed the information you're receiving is the right information.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. So it's really important, I guess, to seek clarity on the things that are important and module-related from those sources, like your tutor. And they're often cluster forums, et cetera. And we'll be going through all of that on the twenty-eighth of September anyway if any of this is worrying or confusing anybody at home who's brand new to the OU.

But the WhatsApp groups can be a real good source of support. But everybody is different. Everybody studies in a different way at The Open University. And that's really important to bear in mind your time, your pressures, et cetera, and also to remember that this is your journey.

And you're doing it for yourself. You are competing with yourself, not necessarily everybody else. It's your degree with your aims in mind.

Billy, you were a faculty associate representative. And I know that there's a vacancy now because these are sort of positions that are valid for a certain period of time. And there's an election coming up for that. Do you want to tell us very briefly about that before you just end with some tips for the students?

BILLY DOCHERTY: Yeah, the Student Association has a central executive committee which is elected every two years. The election actually happened a few months ago, but the post for the FASS rep wasn't taken up. So yes, we have - round about the start of October, we'll be opening an election process, where any student can stand for election.

And we are looking for a FASS faculty rep to take over the job that I did. I'm looking to go for another position. So any student - if they go to the OU Students Association website, as of the first of October, they should start to find information about the election coming up.

But as faculty rep, you work with all the wonderful staff and the faculty. And you are the voice of students. So yeah, you have to work with the students to take their views forward, and then represent them across all of FASS.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Not only is it a great way to meet a lot of the team at The Open University, but it can be really, really good work experience. I know people who've used

roles like that to showcase lots and lots of different skills. So it can also be very helpful for that.

Now Billy, we sort of mentioned some things - and we've got one minute left. So I wonder if you could, in a nutshell, give us some of your top tips and things that have worked for you, particularly bearing in mind there are lots of new students here, maybe even not at Level 1. So what would your advice be?

**BILLY DOCHERTY:** My advice is time management is important. But then not to fret over time management because you always seem to get there in the end.

As you said earlier, it's your journey. We all start on the same day. We all finish on the same day. How we get from point A to B is different for every single person. So please don't judge yourself to what stage other students are at.

And ask for help. That's what your tutor is there for. The staff are there to help you. I made the big mistake on my very first Access module thinking I could do it all myself. And it turned out that, once I sat and spoke to my tutor, it took so much of the worry away.

So your tutor is there, your Student Support Team there as well. And yes, utilise that. The staff are really keen to make sure that you get the best experience and, obviously, move on through the levels. Because when I started Access, I never thought I would ever get near the end of a degree. And as I say, I've got what eight, ten months left and then, hopefully, I should get my degree. So yeah, time is everything. But again, everybody's time management will be different depending on your personal circumstances.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Absolutely. And some people need to get ahead for various reasons. Maybe they have something coming up, some commitments, et cetera, and other people don't. So again, I think that's really sound advice, Billy. It's about your own journey, and about not competing with other people, and really trying to manage your time, and seeking help if and when you need it - not only from other students, but, as you say, also from your tutor.

Well, thank you so much, Billy, for joining us and for sharing your views. And you've done a wonderful job in that role. So if you're interested in seeing more about that and seeing what the opportunities are, do check out the Open University Students Association website, as Billy says. And information will be up there shortly about that role.

We really, really do value working with students. And we're going to be talking a little bit about that in our next session. But before we do, we're going to show you another "FASS in Fifty, Part Two." And then we're going to have one of our who's who videos, "Who is Sally O'Reilly?" So grab a coffee if you haven't already. Enjoy these video breaks, and I'll see you back here very soon.

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