

Freshers - Being a great OU learner - 20 September 2023

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good morning, and welcome to the second of our freshers broadcast from the Open University Student Hub Live.

My name is Isabella Henman, and I'm, as ever, your slightly hyperactive host today, welcoming you. Very exciting to be back for another year. Again, another year for me. Many of you are brand new. Some of you might have been here yesterday for our first in our freshers workshops welcoming you to the OU. This one is Being a Great OU Learner, getting you started, giving you lots and lots of tips. And I've got some lovely guests with me today. I have got Zoe. I have got Tom. I have got Mark. And I have got Becki. And I am very pleased to see those with me. I'll be talking to each of those later. And I've also got some people in the chat with me. I've got Heidi. I have got Matt. I've got Humera and I've got Sean. And you will have seen that you've got Heidi in the chat, and she's there waving at me already.

So Heidi, what kind of things have people been talking about as we've been getting ready?

HEIDI: Hello. Good morning, everyone. Lovely to be here.

Yeah. So the chat is really, really busy again this morning. I'm not sure if you were able to join us yesterday for our first freshers event. If you were and you're joining us today as well, welcome back. You have to excuse my rather bizarre dog in the background. Goodness knows what she's doing. So hopefully she's not too distracting. She's my study buddy. So I thought I'd bring her along. I did bring my other one in as well. But she's a rescue from Cyprus, and she's terrified of everything. And every time I wheel my chair the slightest bit, she darts out of the room. So I don't want her darting back and forward. So hopefully you've got your study buddies in the background and there a little quieter than Martha is going to be.

So time to say some hellos this morning. I don't know if you've had a chance to familiarise yourself with the system on Student Hub Live. First of all, with the chat, you might find that it's moving quite fast. Our freshers events are really busy. There's loads of people chatting, which is wonderful.

But if you need to slow the chat down, top right hand side, there's a little pin. Click on that one. And it just gives you a bit greater control over the chat. And it's one that I certainly use as I'm going through and gathering all of your comments.

We've got some widgets. So please do just spend a couple of moments just playing around with those. Let us know where you're joining us from. If you're in the UK, you can actually pinpoint exactly where on the map you're joining us from.

And we've got information there on what people are studying. So if you put your details in, you'll see what everybody else is studying. So we've got lots of people studying psychology with us today. So you can see that in the widget. So do spend some time familiarising yourself with that.

Alternatively, if you're a bit nervous and you just want to sit back and not get involved in any of the technical stuff, just relax. It's absolutely fine. You don't have to.

So some hellos this morning. We've got loads of international students joining us this morning, Isabella. So we've got Heba, who is totally new to the OU. So welcome, Heba. Studying global challenges, social science in action, and is based in Morocco. So good morning to you.

We've got Amparo, from Argentina, based in Berlin, Germany. And we've also got Ursula in Germany. And she's studying arts and humanities. I tried to be a bit cleverer today and group people by their disciplines. So I'm going to try and do my best with that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Excellent.

HEIDI: Set myself a challenge.

So Henrietta, I'm about to study history and politics. And Henrietta is from Warwickshire. Welcome to you. And Tracy, I'm studying forensic psychology from Yorkshire/Lincolnshire.

Atiyah- hopefully I've pronounced that properly- from Cambridgeshire, currently studying psychology and counselling. And we've got Alexandra studying psychology and counselling, and also Kaylee who's studying psychology and counselling. So yeah, we've got lots of psychology students.

Elena, I'm studying art history and arts and humanities in the Welsh Valleys. Shelly and Helen are also studying humanities. Helen is actually doing English literature and creative writing. I did English literature. I started my studies with the OU in 2009, graduated in 2015. Absolutely loved doing English literature. So you're going to really enjoy that one.

And then welcome to Kitty, from Chelmsford, in Essex, who's studying music, with the hope of becoming a music teacher. And we've got David, in Bath, who is also studying music. His is a diploma in music. And hi to Aidan, studying sports fitness and coaching, from Devon. And finally, Candice and Lou, they're both studying the Science, Technology, and Maths Access Module. They're both being a little bit apprehensive. So hopefully, by the end of this session, you'll all be relaxed and reassured that everything's going to be fine.

So welcome to everyone.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I'm just- is it Martha in the background? There's just legs in the air. It's just fantastic. I think anybody who's been-

HEIDI: She's got no shame.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Nobody's paying any attention to you, Heidi. Sorry. We were just watching Martha go "woo" in the background.

[LAUGHTER]

Which is just so funny. And actually, I was thinking that the forensic psychology- or was it forensic psychology of Yorkshire- I was thinking I thought you meant it's "of Yorkshire." I was like, oh, OK. And then, I went, no, no, no. They're based there. But that's lovely.

And Morocco- chickpeas. I love chickpeas. Anyway, we'll start talking about food, then, and then I'll get all distracted. But I know we've got some study buddies and people- and we will talk about study buddies a little bit later, but do share your ideas and share your experiences with your study buddies, whether they're helpful or not helpful. I think we've got a Bandit and we've got a Twirl that we've been told about so far.

So my first guest this morning is Zoe. And what I am going to do with Zoe is we've set ourselves a task to try and give you some quick-fire information about tutorials. Because we know there is lots and lots of people who want to know about tutorials. So just before I say that- now, many of you won't have your allocated tutor yet, particularly if you're Access Level 1. Those allocations are happening later this week- probably Level 1 or next week, if you're Access- but you will have access to be able to book your tutorials, and you probably want to know about them.

So Zoe, are you ready? Have you taken a deep breath? Yeah.

ZOE: I think I'm good. Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: You're calming yourself.

ZOE: I'm ready.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Right. Because Zoe and I work together with tutorials and we want to give you lots of information, bang on. So we're going to set that challenge. So starting, what are tutorials from the OU perspective, Zoe?

ZOE: So they're basically a chance for you to meet with other tutors and students online. They're a chance for you to explore your subject, work through some tricky problems, and just maybe gain a better understanding of the module material that you have gone through.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you. So how do students find their tutorials? Where do they need to look?

ZOE: So tutorials are mainly going to be from your StudentHome. So we do have some screenshots to show you. So here's the first one you're looking at. So that's StudentHome. That's where you'll find all the information you need for your subject area. That will include things like looking at your profile, links to your module websites, and how you can book tutorials.

Firstly, I'll just say something about the difference between StudentHome and the links to your module website. So those links- in this example, it's B870- that will take you to our next screenshot, which shows you the module websites. And this is important. It's slightly different from StudentHome, which is like the centre for all of your study.

Your module website is where you will find all of the study material you need for your module. That's where you'll have your study planner, where you'll have links to your reading material and activities and assessment and tutorials and so forth.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. So that's one of our key things that we want everybody to know. There's a difference between StudentHome, which we talk about, and your module website. So that StudentHome bit is where you first log in. And then, down the middle, that's where you get into your module website. And as you've seen, we've helpfully got a link of that, Book your Tutorials. And that's, once you click your Book your Tutorials or you see your module website, which is what you're looking at at the moment. So then, if you've clicked on Book your Tutorials, this is what you will see. So tell us about this bit then, Zoe, please.

ZOE: So this is your tutorial booking system. And this is where all the modules that you are studying, you will have a little button to click on that. So in this case, there's only one module. So you would select that. And then you will see all of the dates and times available for every tutorial that you can book on.

Don't be scared. There might be quite a few for you to choose from. And the reason for that is because we like to give you choice. We know that you're fitting your study in around many other things. So try and find dates and times that suit you.

When you book on those, then they will display in the same page, and you can see all of your booked tutorials. So remember we said about the difference between StudentHome and module websites. The links for your booked tutorials, they'll say Online, and it's a link to your module website. And that's where you will then see where your tutorials are.

Which I believe we might have them- yes.

ISABELLA HENMAN: We do, indeed. We have- as if by magic, we have another picture for you.

[LAUGHTER]

ZOE: It's as if we prepared this.

[LAUGHTER]

So on your module website, you will have a Tutorials page. And on that Tutorials page- I can't stress how important this is for you- this is where you will be able to get a link back to your booking system, where you can manage your bookings. But it's importantly where everything you have booked on will be displayed, and every event that you have booked on will have a link to it. And that link is under the Venue column. And that will take you to the right room and group intended for that event.

So we do a lot of the hard work for you, and it all sits there.

On the same page, there's a Visible recordings link. So any recordings that are available will be listed there. So that's really the main ways that you get to your tutorials.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. And then we've got a fifth image as well which we want to show you. Which was something Zoe taught me last week. Now, I thought I knew lots of things. So Zoe, tell me about what we've got circled in pink here, which I was very excited when I found out about that last week.

ZOE: Yeah. So when you book on your tutorials, not only do they display on the Tutorials page, they also get pulled into the Study Planner, which is on the Home page of your module website. And that will give you a link back to the Tutorials page, where your links are and everything else.

But really importantly, at the bottom of the Study Planner- and of course, at the beginning of your studies, you might need to scroll a little bit down- there's an Export key dates. And that means that you can export all of your key dates onto a calendar of your choice. There are two options.

There's a straightforward export, but there's also a subscribe option. I'd personally recommend the subscribe option because that means that anything that you cancel, you book onto later, or any other dates change on the Study Planner, then they're there and they will actively update on your personal calendar. So then you'll have your own reminders. So there's a top tip for you there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. And that was why I was excited because I hadn't come across that before. So that I have because I'm restarting my master's study with a module this year. So I've now got that subscribed into my calendar. And I thought that's great. So we've given you some information. So hopefully you've got the idea- there's a difference between StudentHome in the module website, the tutor groups, the tutorials. So there's so many different words that start with "tutor." This is the demonstration. We all get muddled up with our words. It happens to everybody.

So you can book on tutorials. You can do that now. You can export them to your own calendars, pop them on to your calendars, write them on to your physical calendar or something.

Now, we mentioned very briefly what tutorials are at the start. Could you tell us a bit more about that, Zoe? So how do tutorials fit into module content overall?

ZOE: Yeah. So you're mostly going to be working on your own online at any time of the day. So the idea of a tutorial is that they're not really meant to be a lecture. So the module material that you read is effectively like a standard lecture. So your tutorials are a chance for you to really dig into some of those areas that you may be struggling with. There might be key points that the tutorials assert in order to consolidate your learning and work through some tricky problems.

It's really nice for you to get a variety of tutorials, if you can, so you're able to book on not only your own tutor's tutorials, but also the other tutors within the group- the bigger group that you might be in. So a lot of students benefit from different tutor perspectives and also listening to other students. Because often,

you may think you've understood a point, but it's not until you hear other people having a conversation that something clicks and you go, oh, that's what it means.

So super important to help lift that module content and really bring things together for you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, Zoe. That's really useful.

So I'll come back to you for a couple more questions in a minute. But I know we've got lots of questions that have been coming in from those people at home.

So Heidi, I'd like to come to you now to give you a chance- what kind of questions have been coming in from people at home?

HEIDI: Lots and lots of questions. Yeah. So I'm just going to kick off with one, but quite a few people have asked this question. So when do Level 2 get to see their tutorials? When are those dates going to be published? Quite a few people have asked that question.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK. Now, before you say something, Zoe, I'm just going to jump in because I'm a Level 2 tutor as well. We have mostly scheduled them. So as tutors, we know when they are. But with Level 2, we only got the groups- sort of they're happening at the moment. I know one of mine appeared today. So it may be you might not see your tutorials for a little while.

Zoe, have you got anything that you can add from your perspective there?

ZOE: Yeah. So it's similar to what you've just said. So I was actually given the dates yesterday. I believe that from next week, dates will start to be what we effectively call published. So I think it will be during next week that we should start to see dates available to students to book on. But please don't panic. It doesn't mean you're behind at all. There's plenty of opportunity to book on. So it will come.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. Great. That's really helpful, yes. Because one of the things we reminded people about yesterday is I know everybody's so enthusiastic. I am for my own module as well. But the modules don't start until the end of September, beginning of October. So 30th of September, 7th of October. So some things are not available until the module websites start.

And you haven't done anything wrong. If you can't see it, don't worry. You will have plenty of time. If you've got an early tutorial- so some Level 1 modules will have early workshops. Sometimes there might be face-to-face ones. You will be told about them ahead of time. Sometimes that might be in the module news. Sometimes it might be on your Study Home, which is something slightly different. Which I'm not going to go into now because that gets even more confusing with different words.

But look out for emails as well. Sometimes your faculty- the people that run the module- might send out emails about that. And actually, that reminds me. We asked you a word cloud earlier. We asked you to fill in a word cloud, what kind of subjects you are studying. And I know this has been brilliantly. So we'd like to show that now about what subjects people are doing.

So it looks like lots of people doing psychology, counselling, creative writing, arts, humanities, arts and humanities. Some people are doing postgraduate. Lots of different ones there. I like it. Psychology is right in the middle there. So that's brilliant to see lots of different people and what they're studying.

So if I can just- actually, before I do- Heidi, you said there was that one question. Have you got any other questions that people want to have answered now?

HEIDI: Yeah, a couple more. Just to say, hopefully- Eleanor and Chris, hopefully that answer just reassured you. Because they were saying that their tutorials hadn't been added to their pages yet. So hopefully they're suitably reassured.

So Becky has asked, how often do we have tutorials? And Jane has said, what times of day are the tutorials held?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Lovely. So Zoe, could I come to you to answer those for us, please?

ZOE: Yeah, those are really, really, really good questions. So how often? So usually they're at key points in a module. I would suggest normally, depending on how long a block of study is, it could be every six to eight weeks or so. It could be every couple of months that you have a tutorial. It really depends on the module. But normally, there's a two-week window for that key date, that key point in the module, where you can book.

And the times of day, again, they will depend very much on the tutors and the students and what's happened in the past on modules and what they think is best for that particular topic of study. But you can expect to see tutorials in the evenings because that's when many may be available. So they usually will range from anything from 5:00-6:00 PM- more likely 7:00 PM- in the evening, anything up to 9:00 PM. You'll get Saturday ones. So there will be Saturday tutorials, as well as Sunday tutorials. And sometimes they'll have them in the morning, which might be before people starting work or doing the school runs. There might be early ones. And there might be lunchtime ones as well so that you can fit it in around your day of work.

But, again, I can't stress enough, this will depend very much on your module. But they do try really hard to give a variety of dates and times.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, thank you, Zoe.

And one of the things in terms of we wanted to talk a little bit about accessibility and recording. Could you explain a little bit about the University's policy about recording, first of all, and then maybe go on to accessibility?

ZOE: Yeah, sure. So we try to record as many tutorials as possible. To ensure that we give choice, we do make sure that when we advertise the tutorials- when you book on them- you will see that they are either recorded or not recorded. So that will be advertised and displayed in the title of the event.

If they're recorded, then what that means is you will enter the room and there will normally be a time at the beginning where there's no recording and you can have a little bit of a chitchat before. The main part will be recorded. Sometimes it might be that the recordings are paused so that there can be further conversation. But I think what I want to stress about recorded tutorials is don't panic and don't feel like you can't be yourself and relax in them. So we make sure that tutorials are safe and secure for everybody. So all recordings are anonymized.

That means that if you speak or you type in the text chat that your names are anonymized as User 1 and User 2 and so on and so forth. So no one can see who has said what.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Can I just clarify that a little bit, Zoe? That's on the end recording, isn't it? As you're there live, you don't just go in as User 1 when you're there live. You go in as your name there.

ZOE: That's absolutely right. Because that's what I was just going to go on and say. So in the actual event, the live event, your names are displayed so that you can have that social interaction in a safe space. And also, if you feel like you- sometimes there are activities that may be anonymous so that you can interact within the live event and nobody knows who's doing what, such as draw tools and polls. But recordings are there for people to catch up or for people who, you may have intended to go, you're busy, and you just haven't had time. Recordings are also really good for you catching up as well. Even if you've attended the live event, you might want to have a recap.

On the flip of that, we do have some tutorials that are not recorded. And that's for those that really do feel a little bit self-conscious about being recorded. And so we offer that choice, and it is there.

But I can't stress enough, if you do attend the recorded tutorials, everything is safe and secure and it really shouldn't put you off attending.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you. And in terms of that, we're talking about the word "room," aren't we? It's an online room which is accessible to the people that can access it. So if it's a tutor group, it's just the 15 to 20 students within that tutor group. If it's a cluster group, it's the multiple group. If it's a module, then it's the people in the module. It's not that anybody can just suddenly come along into that room or watch the recording, is it, Zoe?

ZOE: No, that's absolutely right. The reason why we have our online rooms, our online spaces, on the module website is so that we can control all of the permissions and the roles around who can access those rooms and the recordings to ensure that we keep the spaces safe and secure. Because it's all about you, the students, going into your tutorials and having a very open conversation not only with the tutors, but with other students, and feeling as relaxed and safe as you can do.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Lovely. Now, we've had a couple of specific questions come in, one of them from Katerina- I think you already answered, which was, are there any during the day? They all look like they're evening and weekends. So I think that depends on the module and the tutor, doesn't it, that one?

ZOE: Yes.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Are tutorial spaces limited? Should you book early? That's another question that we've had.

ZOE: Oh, that's a really good question. Sometimes the tutorials in the booking system are limited. So they'll be capped at say 20 or 50 or 70. And if it has reached that limit, you go on to a waiting list, and then there may be other events that are put on. That said, don't be put off if you go on to a waiting list and you feel like you can't get on. There are other ways that you can attend.

Most tutorial rooms you can access without necessarily booking onto the tutorial. We do have caps on some tutorials. And the reason for that is- and there is a really genuine reason- is that sometimes the tutorial has been designed as a small event to allow people to have very small- a closer discussion. Other events have been designed to be bigger, so you know there's going to be more information giving going on in them. But generally speaking, try and book on as early as you can. Don't be fazed if you go on to a waiting list because those rooms are always open for you to get into. And the rooms sit on the Tutorials page of your module websites.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, Zoe. Because that's always something that I remind students about. And we have it in Student Hub Live sometimes, when we're booked out because lots of people have booked. Being completely honest, not everybody that books a tutorial will actually come. So pop it in your calendar. Make sure you remember that it's on. Go to your Tutorial section of your module website. Go to the relevant rooms. If it's a tutor group one, go to the tutor group room, if it's a cluster, whichever, you can still go to that room.

Obviously, the room- there needs to be- technical here- the host needs to be there to open the room. So the tutor needs to be there. It's not that you can wander in and out. Think of it. Like, if it's a physical space, almost like in a school. You couldn't just wander in. When you were in school, you couldn't just wander into the classroom when another lesson was on. You had to wait until it was your time. So it's a little bit like that.

Now, we've had another question from Emma, who says she's doing two modules. Are the tutorial times likely to overlap? What can you say about that, Zoe, please?

ZOE: Oh, the honest answer is that some of those tutorial times may sometimes overlap. However, remember what I said earlier about they'll give you choice. So there's normally a nice little window for you to book on dates and times. So I suppose my advice to you would be, try and make a note of the ones that you think you can do on one module, and then go and have a look at the other one and just see what they have to offer, and make sure that they don't clash. So that would be my best advice.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, Zoe.

Yes. Because I know, as a tutor myself, sometimes we're trying to schedule things- because if you've got TMAs at a particular point, you need to count back for tutorials, and there are certain times when you can do them. And I know there's some modules where students commonly study them alongside each other. We do our best, but we can't guarantee everything because we don't have an infinite amount of time, really.

So that's really helpful. Thank you, Zoe. We may have some other questions for you later. But I'm going to go back to Heidi now to see if there's anything- any other chat that's been happening, any other things that people have been wondering about or sharing in the chat.

HEIDI: Yeah. Well, there's some love from Kitty for your gloves, Isabel. She said that she really loves your gloves. So there we go. Just sharing that compliment with you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yay!

HEIDI: We've got some amazing multi-taskers in the chatroom today. So Sophie has just mentioned that today's perk of studying with the Open University, you can answer the phone to the doctor when you're in the middle of something, and I like that very much. And Henrietta is currently cooking lunch and also listening to this conversation, which is very impressive.

So lots of multitasking going on. Which I'm not great at, ironically, as there so much multitasking that goes on in this job. Which is why my brain's always- ohh-- by the end of it. And there's quite a few people that are wanting to connect in the chat.

So Sean, my colleague has just said that if you want to connect with anybody within this event, please don't post any personal information here. But you can drop in on the OUSA Community Forums. And Sean has shared the link to that in the chat. So if you are wanting to connect with other people here, don't share your email address or your phone number or anything like that. Head across to the OUSA Community Forums and you'll find the link in the chat.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you, Heidi.

And I know that the Open University Students Association, OUSA, have got their own Freshers Week things that are coming up. I think most of those start towards the end of this week or next week. But they will be on your StudentHome News. So that's when you first log in on the right hand side, StudentHome. So my next guest is Tom, who is a tutor that I've worked alongside on one of the modules. And it's lovely to have you here today, Tom. So as a tutor- we've been giving information about tutorials- what kind of things would you like to say to students starting out, from your perspective as a tutor?

TOM: Well, firstly, hello. It's lovely to be here.

I think the key message is I'm here to help and please use me. Because a really frustrating thing- I remember it from when I was a student myself- is the suffering in silence, spending days and days stuck on something, when you just needed a little nudge in the right direction. It is great to work things out by

yourself and you can really explore ideas, but it's rather like me trying to put in my shower for the bathroom I've ruined next door here and knowing nothing about plumbing. Just occasionally I could have done with someone saying, no, that's not quite the right idea. You're going to spend a whole day on that. So yeah, don't suffer in silence, and we're here to help. And please use us. And we'll certainly tell you if you need to work something out for yourself. Just ask.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, Tom. That was a nice welcome there. So you started off as an OU student. And we've got a question for the students at home in terms of what skills that you think you bring from everyday life to your study. So you'll see that question is going across, and I'll come to Heidi in a little while for that. So, as I said, you came as an OU student initially before you started tutoring with the OU, Thomas. What did you think that you brought either to your initial studying or from being a student to then being a tutor?

TOM: It's a lot easier to- partly because of the time that's passed- answer with respect to what I brought from being a student to being a tutor in terms of approachability and understanding some of the unique challenges that face distance learners at the Open University. That said, everyone- it's often said- there's no typical OU student. Everyone's different. Everyone's got their own challenges. And as tutors, we know that. We don't know what those challenges are, but we are very open minded and flexible in trying to find solutions to problems.

The modules present a way of doing things and suggestions for things like collaboration, et cetera. But often people need some adjustments. So if you're struggling with something, let us know. And there's often a way we can find of adjusting things to help with that. So having experience as a student from that end, I mean, it comes back to my original point- was just we're here to help. Because I was very hesitant about getting in touch with my tutor and I wish I hadn't been.

In terms of what I brought from my everyday life when I was a student, it's really hard to know until you actually get down to it and you realise all the things you actually are bringing. And that's an area where the collaboration really comes into it. Because in fact, all the courses I teach have very deliberate collaborative elements, where you work together with the other students. And you'd be amazed with the things that- because I see these chats in the forums where the students are working together- the little bits of information, the insights, the approaches brought by a variety of students.

Because people come from all sorts of different backgrounds. I mean, I was an audio engineer and then I was a soldier. And it was after that that I started studying in earnest, but people have all sorts of colourful and interesting backgrounds or just personalities. So yeah, you've probably got something, whoever you are.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's a key thing. I know you almost said that as a throwaway- you've got something, whoever you are. I know we often, as tutors, we talk to students, or in Student Hub Live when we're talking, students say, oh, I'm nothing special. I haven't got anything. I'm not bringing this.

And I think sometimes there's this worry that you have to be this suddenly perfect student. There's this image of this wonderful student who gets everything, who manages everything and does everything and has got all the things ready, and all the knowledge immediately goes in and you know everything. And that's not really very realistic, is it, Tom?

TOM: I've never experienced that, for sure, myself. No. I was chatting with one of my students the other day, and they said they'd got the assignment done three weeks ahead of the schedule. I went, brilliant,

but I've certainly never experienced it myself. No. And everyone finds different things difficult at different times. Also, it's a general life thing, I suppose, but there's a temptation to make comparisons between the model study plan and/or perhaps your fellow students and your own progress.

And I wouldn't worry about that too much because you could end up beating yourself up for nothing.

You're you, and you're the one who's having to learn it with whatever way works for you. And I loved that about OU learning. Because it gave me the flexibility that I'm not sure I would have got in a slightly more traditional setting just sitting through lectures, et cetera.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And what's interesting is I can see some of the comments that have been coming through about what people bring. And Sarah-Jane says, the ability to juggle things, being confident to ask for help- so that's great; you'd like that one- without judgement, and there's an open and honest approach.

Susan says, I bring the ability to juggle.

Michelle says, mine is my thirst for knowledge. I just want to soak up as much information as possible.

Charlene says, I seem to learn better on my own compared to struggling in school. I found a new love for learning through the OU.

Elle said, time management, ability to get work done anywhere. I like the idea of that one.

Lisa, I bring touch typing, the experience of studying in the past, legal skills from study and work, and some psychology skills.

So there's all sorts of things. Some people might use it, and you might not realise those things. And I just want to talk to you a little bit more about this idea of collaborating and learning from others. It's something we mentioned in our first Freshers Session yesterday where we said we know we do have some students who come to the University because they don't want to be with others, they want to learn from a distance. But there are opportunities to learn from other people.

So either from your own experience as a student or as a tutor, what kind of advice would you give students about collaborating, Tom?

TOM: I would say give it a go. I mean, it's a fundamental part of a number of courses that's not optional, as such. Although, that said, if there's a really extreme or genuine reason, there's often adjustments we can make. But other people will be equally as nervous as you. And I've found that, on the forum chats, once the ice is broken, once people have made those uncomfortable tentative first steps- uncomfortable for some people- that they really start rolling.

And it's great seeing the discussions. And even when I can see perhaps they've gone slightly down the wrong route, it's great because they'll find their way back to- oh, that didn't quite work, did it? And through working together themselves, they've found their way to the answer. Which is brilliant.

So I would say I absolutely sympathise that it's not second nature to some people, and different people play different roles in groups. But do stick with it. Just get through that initial discomfort, and you may find that- you generally find just a whole group of really friendly people, who are equally thirsty for knowledge as yourself and want to learn. So go for it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Because at the end of the day, the majority of students studying with the Open University are adults, and they've made the decision. It's not like at school. It's not compulsory education. Everybody here watching, you're streaming- and Student Hub Live- for those people who are new, who didn't hear this yesterday in the first session- Student Hub Live is completely across the University.

As it happens, I've tutored on the same module, as Tom said before. But that happened to be a science module. But there's people here from all sorts of different modules, all sorts of different walks of life, different areas. And Student Hub Live is about building community and thinking about those skills that underlie study. So bringing people together and recognising that we've all got different skills, and it's about what we bring.

That's why we asked you about what kind of things do people bring. And in fact, I can see John says, it's only at 39 I feel ready for higher education. But now I'm very excited and can't wait to get started. So that is really lovely. I wonder if that's the same John as we had in as a guest- one of my speakers yesterday, who went on to become a professor.

Candice also says, I'm an expert at winging it and living life in a wobbly balance. Oh, yeah, yeah, wobbly balance. That's something I like.

And Tony says, I'm able to treat every day as a fresh new day, regardless of what happened yesterday. That's a lovely thing to think about. I know, realistically, some people might not be in that position. And one of my guests later, Becki, will be talking about students with disabilities and some of the support that can be offered there.

Because some people will go, yeah, in the best will in the world, I'd love to treat every day and be all fresh. It doesn't always work. But we'll come back to that. Because I don't want to be negative, but we'd just like to be realistic.

Now, I just want to bring Tom back to a couple of things in terms of some of the practicalities. Zoe is explaining the difference between StudentHome and the module website and tutorials and so on. Students that are just starting out now, who maybe have got access to their module website and starting to have a look around, what would you say to them to do? Where would be some of the key places to look at from their module website?

TOM: I'm probably not going to suggest specific key places, but more the website itself is a really vast and fantastic resource. But don't expect to be able to gain a familiarity with it just like that. There's too much there.

So I would say actually set yourself some time aside specifically to explore the website and what it's got to offer for you, finding out which functions work for you. Because there's lots of guidance in the Help Centre on the website itself. So yeah, I would invest some time- really set some time aside to take some time looking around the website and getting familiar with it. Because it will repay you over the longer run, for sure.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think it's something that I always used to say to students when I started. I often forget now- this idea of having a little bit of proactive time rather than being reactive.

We mentioned module websites are open, but the modules don't actually start for another couple of weeks. These points, before you actually have to be starting, have a look around. We said yesterday you can just randomly click around, but it helps if you do things in a slightly more systematic way so then you know where you've found things. But have a really good explore. Find out what you think.

You'll find things like with the Subscribe option to find all the dates in your calendar. I didn't know about that. That's fantastic. And there's things- like, if we have a look at the image now of a module website- if we just show you- it might not be the module you're doing, but if you can have a look, you'll see across the top all modules have that same strip. So there's the module Home.

Assessment- if you click on to Assessment, it will give information. Bear in mind, it probably won't have everything in there at the moment because the modules haven't started.

Tutorials, we talked about those with Zoe earlier. There's information there.

Forums you may find a welcome forum open. Once you get a tutor allocation, you'll be able to see your tutor group forum if you've got one.

Resources is a great one because there's loads of resources. You can get downloadable resources. You can get information about ebooks, other accessibility.

And the module news, which also shows on the right hand side- but that's a place to look.

You can scroll through the different weeks. So you can have current weeks and all weeks and see what's available. Once your tutor is allocated, there'll be information there. But there's loads and loads that you can start looking at.

Most modules, even if you have a printed version, you'll be able to click on and you'll be able to see through- click through the module and start reading things, work out what you need to do, find some key dates. Get yourself a calendar. I've got a calendar up on my wall in front of me here at the moment, and that has key dates on it. And I have module calendars that are printed out. So I'm just looking at them.

They're all behind me there. And that's really useful. Because then I see things that are coming up.

So Thomas, how do you recommend to students in terms of that initial planning and making sure that they know what dates are? Do you have any particular advice about that for students?

TOM: Yeah. I mean, just being proactive about it. Again, I think what you suggested is exactly the route I go down. Actually, I like printing things out and jotting them down so I can actually see them. But you can get a bit more control- a feeling that you're slightly more in control of your life by being able to see what's where and when.

But also bear in mind that there's probably going to be some flexibility and adjustment as things go along. There'll be unexpected things in your life. And some things might take you longer or less time than you had imagined.

I would resist the temptation to jump to assessments, which I know people occasionally do, without working through the materials. Because to do the assessment properly, you'll end up working through the materials eventually. Oh, I need this bit. Oh, I need- oh, now I understand what that means. So please, do resist that temptation. Do things in order. But yeah, be flexible.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Thank you. And that's one of the things- I mean, we mentioned assessment. We know we've got a lot of new students, and they're very nervous. So it's been great to talk to you, Thomas.

I'm going to go to Heidi now. But before I go to Heidi, I just want to say a little bit about nerves to people. Everybody gets nervous. I get nervous. I get nervous before I do these things. Am I going to actually say the right things? As you've demonstrated, I don't always say the right things. I stumble over my words all the time.

But you know what. It doesn't matter. Thomas was saying, we're all different. We have our own experiences. We have our own life skills. We do these things. You are you. You are not anybody else. You are on your own study journey. Just because somebody else does something else, great, lovely, that's great for you. You are you. You do what is going to work for you.

So I just wanted to make sure everybody knows because I feel quite strongly about this idea sometimes. So Heidi, what kind of things have been coming in in the chat? Have there been any other life skills that people have mentioned that they want to bring to their study?

HEIDI: Yeah. Yeah, lots of comments in the chat. I just want to pick up on what you were saying there, Isabella. So I know exactly how everybody's feeling because, as I mentioned in the introduction, I studied with the OU. I started in 2009. My baby boy was nine months old. He's now a teenager. And I remember getting those first books through, and I was so excited.

And I was thinking in my head, how on Earth am I going to do this over six years with raising- I'm a single mum- I was raising my boy on my own. I was just working on the weekends just when I could fit it in, and then just studying in between his naps. And I was getting up super early in the morning.

And initially, when you first start, you think, this is too much. This is six years. This is too much. But it's just about taking everything a day at a time, and trying to find that enjoyment and remember why you're doing this. I did it because I'm so passionate about English. And I hated school and I did terribly at school, and I struggled so much with that very didactic approach that they took in my school, where you just sit there and you listen.

And then when I joined the OU, I was like, this is what learning is. This is what it's all about. It's about being able to follow your passion and your joy. And it's a true blessing. Even during those difficult times, as I always say, it's the greatest adventure that you'll embark on.

So just having a look at some of the comments. I've got a quick question for Tom, as well, actually, if we can pop that in at the end. I'm not sure if that's possible if we can go back to Tom. So Jade said, being a mum helps me to multitask and makes me want to succeed.

And Katie, who is literally superwoman, has said, currently halfway through studying her module and is starting criminology and law in October. I'm very excited, but also worried about juggling everything with six children. And then she's put "Eek!" So Katie, you are absolutely amazing. You are inspiring everybody within the chat. So thank you so much for joining us. And you're going to do amazingly.

Think about that standard that you're setting for your children, showing them what a go-getter you are. It's absolutely amazing.

And Suzanne says, I didn't have the opportunity to study when I was younger. My husband is diagnosed autistic and has Asperger's and has an MSC. I am studying to add credibility to our combined research into predicting human behaviour based on an intelligent mathematical blueprint. I can't even say it, Suzanne. But isn't that amazing. What a power couple, both studying together.

So yeah, loads of comments. Keep popping them in the chat there. We love to hear them and share them with everybody else.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you. And I just wanted to add another little thing from my perspective there. If you're looking and you're saying, but I don't have six children. I'm not studying multiple modules, and how am I going to manage that? Everybody has their own challenges. Some people thrive on having lots and lots of things. Don't feel, just because you're not working alongside, just because you've not got children, just because of these things doesn't mean that you don't have to manage your study alongside your life.

We all have different things. Honestly, please hear that if you're nervous. Please don't compare yourself to other people and say, oh, I can't possibly be OK because, oh, I can't ask the question because I don't have things. So it's a little bit like what Tom was saying earlier about that he wished he'd talked to his

tutors about things. If you've got a question, ask us. We might say, here's where the information is or this is where it was covered or we will point you to it. But please ask us. Don't feel, oh, my question isn't as important as anybody else.

Now, I've got a lovely student here with me, Suzy, who I wasn't able to introduce earlier because there were a few technical issues. Now I know Suzy, it's lovely to have you here today. I know you've managed all sorts of things alongside study, haven't you? So can you tell us a little bit about your study journey and why you particularly wanted to be here today?

SUZY: Well, I mean, I've raised my girls, and it was time to take charge of my own life. They're older now, so they're off doing their own thing. And I wanted to do it. You have to excuse my dog. He's photobombing.

But I just wanted to do something for me that I'd always wanted to do.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you. I don't know whether you could see earlier, but Martha was wiggling her legs about in the background of Heidi earlier. So dogs photobombing is definitely a thing. And in fact, that's something we want to ask everybody at home. We mentioned this idea of study buddies earlier. So some people might not have actually heard of study buddies.

So study buddies, they're often animal related. So, oh, look the other way now. You're not talking about them anymore. they've just looked off now. Oh, no, they're looking back at the camera again.

So if you've got a study buddy, do share who your study buddy is. Often study buddies are animal related, but they don't have to be. Some people that come along to our online Student Hub Live workshops have flowers. They might have a particular place that is their study buddy. Anything- anything-- and it could be a person that helps you.

So can you tell us a little bit- I know you've got some particular study buddies- we're not going to necessarily show you the other ones- but how have your study buddies helped you, Suzy?

SUZY: Well, with the dogs, I can groom- and as I'm grooming them and drying them and brushing them, I can focus the work that I've done, and it helps my brain make sense of it. It sort of chills my brain and distracts it, which helps it work.

Now, the exotic animals are less noisy. So they don't distract quite the same. So I do work from the snake room, which is very quiet because reptiles are pretty quiet. And I don't know. It's a calm environment because they're calm animals, despite people's perceptions.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And now I know when I was chatting to you about this ahead of time, you had a very specific example. And now, hopefully you'll be willing to share this- about your daughter and how these snakes particularly helped her. Because I know we have a number of students within the neurodiverse community.

SUZY: OK.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And we just wanted you to share a little bit about that. Could you tell us a little bit more?

SUZY: Yeah, she's got autism and attention deficit disorder. And she really struggles. She gets selective mutism and she struggles with the world. And the snakes are brilliant for her because- it's magical, really, to see her interacting with them. They seem to calm her considerably. And she's very good at taming them. And they help her in the world.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I thought that was a really interesting example. So I know you're the student, but I know that your daughter is also studying. But it's this idea- we're not saying to everybody, go out and get yourself a snake.

SUZY: No, no, no. Don't go and get a snake.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: But sometimes there are ways of- yeah, they're things that help. So often people automatically think of common pets. And again, we're not saying you have to go out and get a pet. But sometimes there are ways of managing your situation and helping yourself, aren't there?

SUZY: Well, you can even visit a pet store or an aquarium, watch the fish, interact with animals. It certainly helps, especially with neurodevelopmental problems. I've found that. Horses are brilliant. Just visit a field and say hi over a fence. You don't have to own them. Just say hi.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely. Or even just being out in nature. Sometimes breathing the fresh air. Sometimes looking at the- I have lovely chats with plants. This is a slight aside. I was walking the other day, and a very strange little yellow spider popped up on the top of my laptop. And I just sat there staring at this little spider that was on there. And he looked like this little alien. I was trying to take photos of him to send to people. What are you doing? I was like- oh-- why have you sent me this? Well, he was sat on top of my laptop. And it just distracted me. So it's really good.

So that's study buddies. And we'll come to Heidi in a little while because I know lots of people have been sharing about your study buddies. But just a little bit more about your study journey then. Because I know the reason Suzy is somebody that comes along to our online workshops- and I got to know Suzy because she was talking about her study buddies a lot, and I thought, oh, she might be good. She might like to come on here.

I know there's other things. Other than animals, you've got other things that help you. You've got a little bit of thing about stationery, haven't you, Suzy?

SUZY: Well, yes, my stationery has been my godsend in my studies. I mean-

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yay! Post-its!

SUZY: It's everywhere. My youngest daughter is always stealing. But I find writing down- and Post-it notes, especially the transparent ones, they have been brilliant through my studies.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I was going to say I've got little ones like this, which are the little tab ones. I know they're not those translucent ones, but I've got different ones. I don't know where they are at the moment. I probably used them. I've got little ones that I found that had little animals and stuff. Yeah. Yeah, that's great.

Again, we're not saying to people, you have to go- you've got loads of different ones. We're not saying-

SUZY: It works for me.

ISABELLA HENMAN: -you have to go out. Yeah. Well, exactly. And I think sometimes-

SUZY: You've just got to find out what works.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Exactly. That is what I was going to say. Find out what works for you. If having Post-its stuck up works for you, try it. If it doesn't, don't worry. But there's lots and lots of different things that works. And I know we've talked to other people in different places who say they have different notebooks. And I've got them next to me here. I have different notebooks like this for different purposes.

SUZY: I like them.

ISABELLA HENMAN: They happened to be- that one happens to be a Student Hub Live one. That one happens to be an OU one that I managed to get. And I find they're useful. Because with online study, often, students, particularly when you're starting out, you think, OK, I don't know- do I have to do everything online? Can I do things in paper?

How did you manage that difference between the online study and the doing things on paper, Suzy?

SUZY: Well, I mix it. I do print off the work so that- I can do online, but I also have the hard copy, where I can go through and do highlighting, annotating, sticking my Post-it notes, and I have the A4 files.

Because I'm old school, and that's how it worked then. And it still works now for me. But I have tried all the methods that they recommend trying. And writing works. I've just worked out different ways.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely.

SUZY: Printing it often helps. Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And some people might not be in a position to be able to print off. And sometimes, if you're on an online module- you have registered for an online module-

SUZY: Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: -sometimes it's the case of trying it. Because I know I've spoken to a number of students, who initially said, oh, I don't want to do online. And then they say, actually, it works great for me. You can still write your notes, but everything- reading it online, you can read it on a phone, you can read it from different places, and so on.

SUZY: A little bit.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, you do that as well, which is good. I'm just going to add another- for everybody watching at home, we asked you to tell us about your study buddies. But in the same kind of way that Suzy said how study buddies help her, if you could tell us how your study buddy helps you, if you've got one. And then I'll come to Heidi in a little bit so we can get some ideas about that one.

But apparently, Leilani, says, stationery shopping is therapy. There you go, Suzy. That's a good one.

SUZY: It is. It is. It's brilliant. I'm terrible.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And apparently the idea of transparent Post-its has sent Sara-Jane into a complete frenzy, and she's gone off looking at-

SUZY: It's brilliant.

ISABELLA HENMAN: -searching- well done- online.

SUZY: It's a life changer. It changed my life. What can I say?

ISABELLA HENMAN: I mean, it's funny, isn't it? Some people might go, oh, dear. But actually, there's some of these things- there's little, simple things. And it's one of the things that we particularly like to do in Student Hub Live. Some people call them study hacks, life hacks, if you want to use that terminology. But it's sharing things that have helped you.

The same way as had Tracy as a genuine student- she did the little pinch test yesterday to show she was real, Suzy is a genuine student. She's not just somebody that I've conjured up. She's a genuine OU student.

SUZY: I'm real.

ISABELLA HENMAN: She is- sharing you're real. Yeah, excellent. And the dog has just disappeared. So clearly, you're not real in a way that provides food, which means you're deficient there.

But again, as a student, hearing from other people- like when Tom was saying earlier about collaboration- learning from other students- actually, that's just a little aside, Suzy. What have you learned from other

students as you've been starting off your study? Because you're part of the way through your degree course now.

SUZY: That we're all individual and we're all on the same journey. We all stick together and have fun. You've got to make it fun as well as learning. Embrace it. But the other students, I found them really friendly and welcoming.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely.

SUZY: Yeah, it's been brilliant.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Because I think this is the thing- I mean, sometimes people say, oh, everybody isn't the same as you. No, it doesn't matter because you are you. You are unique. But you're studying the same module. You may be studying the module for different purposes. But we're all studying. You've made that choice to study as an adult learner to better yourself, to get that thirst for knowledge, to get that- whether it's to get a new job, whether it's to find out more, to help your family- there's all sorts of reasons people are learning.

So learning from other people is quite an interesting one. So you can learn skills from other people sometimes chatting about- strategies can be useful. I can just see, erasable highlighters and something called FriXion pens. Oh, I haven't come across FriXion pens. I might have to look them up. And Rebecca says-

SUZY: My daughter used them.

ISABELLA HENMAN: You've used them, have you?

SUZY: My daughter uses them, the FriXion pens. You can erase the ink.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh. Oh, I remember it. Erasable pens- that was when I was little. Gosh, they've been around for ages then. OK, I'm being told they're penjernih rubber.

And Rebecca says, I may or may not have my new modules- that's an excuse to buy a bunch more stationery. Yeah, so there's lots and lots of stationery love. So that's great. So there have been some really useful tips from you, Suzy. So these things that you, an individual, use your space.

You talked a little bit about working in a particular space. And Tom was talking about getting people set up earlier. But how do you find managing your space to study? Is there any particular advice you'd like to share to people starting out there?

SUZY: Yeah, it's away from the main body of the house. Away from the hustle and bustle, the interruptions, the door, the phone, everything. I shut my door. There's a sign that goes up, saying "Do not disturb." And it just helps because I'm out of the way. I can focus. My phone automatically goes on the Do Not Disturb setting so nobody can interrupt me. And I do it there in the room, which is quiet, away from it all.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Lovely. Thank you. So some people might say, but I haven't got a space away from it. But I know I had a student a few years ago who said, literally, they were sort of in a closet halfway down the hall. But they just put a sign up, saying, "Mum is studying," and unless you're dying, do not do not disturb me. Because you are just as important as everybody else. And you are making your own journey. And again, everybody at home, please hear me. You are brilliant. You are special. You are doing things. You may not feel that, but it's your journey.

SUZY: Yeah. You've got to think sometime- you've got to think that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And taking time for yourself, recognising that it's your thing. OK, it might be challenging. We do have carers networks. We do have the Students Association. We have all sorts of

different support networks. So do have a look. Reach out if you need additional support. And after I've been tidy, I'll be talking to Becki to give a little bit of information about some of the support for students with registered disabilities.

So I wanted to go to Heidi now to tell us a little bit about the information that have been coming in. So what have been sharing about study buddies? I still can't talk today. I don't know what's going on.

HEIDI: I love how you and Suzy caveated there, saying, we're not advocating. Don't go out and buy a snake. And I'm thinking, no fear. Goodness me. You've got no concerns about that. I don't mind snakes so much. And all the grace and respect to Suzy for liking snakes. My concern would be about having to feed them because I'm just too squeamish. That's the thing. But my son has been begging me for a snake since he was about four years old. So I think there's going to come a point where, maybe as a reward for his GCSEs, I might need to get him one, but it's going to have to be a small one. And he's doing all the feeding.

But Anthony said, I may get a snake just to see my wife's face. And then Tina said, I have snakes in the garden, and they can blink well stay there. So it's a bit of a mixed bag, I think, in the chat in terms of the love of snakes.

But then in terms of study buddies- so Theresa, my cat loves sitting on my lap as I'm trying to type. Jane, my dogs and cat are my study buddies.

Chris, I have an anti-study buddy, an overgrown Doberman, who's incredibly energetic and he never leaves me alone. Doberman, they're known for being massively overgrown lapdogs, aren't they? I seem to recall that they're the ones- they just constantly want to be on your laps, even though they weigh an absolute tonne. So Chris has probably got sort of squashed legs by this point.

Louise, my study buddy is my gorgeous dog Zuma. I love him to bits. Charlene, my three-year-old Lhasa Apso Cookie is my study buddy. I haven't heard of that dog before. I'm going to Google that. She sits under my desk as I work away.

Alicia says my cats, Dot-com and Dexter, are my study buddies. And Kitty has a hamster and a Wosh called Alfred, for my study buddies. I'm not quite sure what that means.

Carolyn, my study buddy is a rescue dog Fred. He's 4, and we've had him since December from a rescue Centre. I'm not even going to try and pronounce his breed, Carolyn. I'm really sorry. But that's just beyond my capabilities at this time in the show.

And then Christany, I have my rats as my study buddies. Hard to get frustrated with a furry potato on your shoulder. I love that. I thought that was lovely.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I've had a student who has- very, very enthusiastic about the rats and how encouraging they are and how much they give and how much they support. So thank you, Heidi. That's been great to know.

So I'm changing the order up a little bit. Because I thought it was quite a good thing to come to Becki next. Because I was talking to Suzy about some of the challenges about her daughter and the autism. So I know, Becki, you're here to tell us a little bit about how the Disability Support Team can support students and what disability support the University has overall. So can you tell us a little bit about it, please?

BECKI OVERTON: Yeah, of course. So I guess it's really hard to say, if you're a disabled student, this is the support we're going to give you because no disabled student's experience is going to be the same as the next one.

And I think the first thing I want to say is really about the word "disabled," and just acknowledge that that's a word that not everybody identifies with, but what I'm meaning by using that word. So when we talk about disability here, we're talking about anybody with a long-term health condition, a specific learning difficulty, like dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD. And it could be a long-term medical issue. It could be mental health.

That's one of the common things that people say- I don't really identify with that label of "disability." I have a mental health condition. Whether or not you identify with the label, what I'm trying to say is there is support here for you from the University. And the most important thing is to get in touch with us.

You might not know at this point what you need to be supported, but that's where we come in and have that conversation with you, to say, tell us a little bit about maybe what your experience in the world is, what your experience at school was, what your experience in the workplace is. How do you manage things at work?

It might be that you don't have any previous experience of the kind of things that you can relate to study, but that's fine. We can give you examples of the kind of support that might benefit you. So like I said, there is such a wealth of things that we can offer and support that we can put in place.

The focus of my team is that we will create a disability profile- it's what we call a kind of document that we'll collaboratively create with you as a student. That is intended to open up the conversation with your tutor about how they can best support you. So rather than you having to go kind of cold to your tutor- I mean, you're absolutely welcome to do this if you want to, but some students want support with this- and rather than having to go cold to your tutor and go, I have this condition, whatever it is, and I'm going to need some extra help, it's about having that wording already there that your tutor can see. And that will get that conversation going.

And so they might see, just as an example, OK, you told the University you've got dyslexia. So what do I need to know about how I can support you during our tutorials? It might be that there's a communication difficulty, a communication barrier, and you need your tutor to communicate with you in a different way. We can start that ball rolling of you having that conversation with the tutor by creating this profile. It helps us get to know your needs a little bit, and it can be then an ongoing conversation with the practitioners on my team to look at what support we can go.

And it might be you get six months into your study and go, do you know what? This isn't working. I need something different. You come back to us.

The other thing that my team do is we support the admin side with Disabled Students Allowance. So that's another really important step that I would encourage students- in the UK, certainly- to take. If you're overseas, there might be an equivalent to Disabled Students Allowance in your country. Obviously, we have students studying all over the world so we can't make recommendations for every single country. But if you're in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, there is Disabled Students Allowance. And I really encourage anybody with any sort of long-term condition to have a look at that. Because one of the things that many of our students don't realise, for example, is that you can get Disabled Students Allowance for mental health conditions. And that's something that a lot of people didn't realise they'd be able to get support with.

Going back to what Suzy was saying about printing stuff out. If there's a reason that printing out some of your materials is actually supportive of your disability, Disabled Students Allowance might provide you with a printer and a printing allowance. That's just one example of what DSA can give you. And we know

that disabled students, students with disabilities, who apply for DSA, statistically, the data says they're more likely to succeed if they have a DSA award in place.

It can be a bit of an overwhelming process to apply. If you're not sure, give us a call. We can talk you through it. We can literally walk you through the form. We can't submit it for you, but we'll help with everything else that we can. And then we can explain the next steps and things like that as well. And there is so much support that you can get through Disabled Students Allowance.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. So a couple of practical questions, then, for you about that. So in terms of that- so students, if they're not sure, where's the first place they need to look? If they've got a disability, if they've never mentioned it before, how would do they make the contact and how long would it take them to hear from the Disabled Students Team once they've made that contact?

BECKI OVERTON: There's so many different ways you can get in contact with us. The best way- if you want to speak to somebody on the phone, just ring the main OU front-line number and ask to be put through to Disability Support, and one of our team can have a chat with you. You can also just send an email in to the main OU number and ask for it to be passed on to Disability Support. And that's the easier way of doing it, rather than trying to give you out a specific email address now, because it does depend where you're located.

You can also go on to your- if you go on to your StudentHome, which has been talked about a bit today, and through there, go into Help Centre, there's absolutely loads of information on Help Centre about what could be on offer, what might be available. And you can start the ball rolling in terms of a conversation with my team by filling in a Disability Support Form.

If that form doesn't feel accessible or right for you and you'd prefer to do that in a conversation, that's also absolutely fine. But if you're happy and comfortable to fill in that form, that is the best way to kick start.

Once you submit that form, we will send you information about DSA as well- Disabled Students Allowance. Because we don't actually- you don't apply to the Open University for Disabled Students Allowance. It is a separate form. It is a government fund.

So that is something that we see a lot of students getting a bit mixed up on. There's the Disabled Students Allowance Form and then there's also the Disability Support Form for the Open University. And those are two different forms. But that would be the best way. So you can contact us in the way that suits you, really- sending in an email, and that will get passed over to us. Ring us, and we can have a chat with you and then let you know what information we would need to get the ball rolling on things, really. And like I say, I can't say the steps will be XYZ, because it does differ for every student.

You asked about timescales as well. The best thing you can do is get the forms in for everything or make contact with us as early as possible. So don't panic if you haven't already made contact, but just do it as soon as you can. The turnaround times for Disabled Students Allowance on the government side of it is usually about 12 weeks. But again, don't panic if you haven't already applied. Just get it in as soon as you can. And yeah, they're just, I guess, processing things as fast as they can.

And in terms of getting a response from Disability Support, as in our team ourselves, it does vary a lot. We are at our busiest time of year right now. But like I said, the best thing you can do is get in touch as early as possible. And then, depending what your query is, one of the team will reach out.

And we have different expertise in the team as well. So we'll make sure that the right person is reaching out, getting in touch. We don't tend to cold call people, as well. That's what I would just say. So if you're

anxious about- a lot of students don't like a call out of the blue, for example. If you tell us what your preferences are for us getting in touch, we will support that.

So if you say like, I'm really not comfortable to have a phone call, actually, can you just email me the information, we'll do that. If you say, can we pre-book a call at a specific time so that you know when you're expecting that phone call, we can do that. So we really want to make the whole experience as comfortable as possible.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you very much for that. And I know that in the chat there's been the link to the Disability Support Form, and also something about Dolly Parton. But I'm not entirely sure quite what relevance that short course about Dolly Parton had. But clearly, Matt thinks it's very relevant at this point. But that's great. That shows the varied options and the varied things.

So I think what I'm hearing from that is make contact through your preferred method as a student. You might not get an instant, immediate response because it is busy. And at the end of the day, you've got a team, but there's a finite number of people. And sometimes being realistic about expecting things- I know sometimes people think, well, I need to have this immediately now- the modules, yes, you've got your module websites. We'll do our best- or the Disability Support Team- they'll do their best to get everything in place. Occasionally, there might be a little bit of a wait because, just practically, you can't do everything immediately, can you, Becki?

BECKI OVERTON: Yeah, absolutely.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And it's not trying to be negative. It's just trying to be realistic. The same way as everybody listening, watching at the moment, you can't do 17,000 things at the same time. Becki can't, unfortunately, do that many. She's very good at multitasking, but she can't do everything.

So we've had a query about personal learning advisors again. I know we talked about personal learning advisors yesterday. They are a very specific thing. Are they part of the Disability Support Team or are they separate?

BECKI OVERTON: No, they are separate. So the personal learning advisors, I guess, sit alongside my team. So I know a little bit about them, but definitely can't speak on that team's behalf. But yeah, they providing coaching and mentoring support to a specific cohort of students based on our access and participation plan. So focusing on key groups. So I believe the situation is, if you're eligible for that sort of support, you will get contact from the PLA service. But that doesn't mean if you need some support, don't get in touch with the University. Obviously, you've got your tutor, your student support team.

If you go to your student support team and it's actually something that we can better help with, they will refer you straight in to us. They're not going to send you away. They'll just pass you across to us. And we're very good at cross-referring within the wider Student Support Services, which is where the personal learning advisors sit as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you. And I will be talking to Mark in a little bit, who's from our Student Support Team, and will explain some of the more wider support that we offer.

So that's been really useful, Becki. What I want to do is I want to go to Heidi now to see what people have been talking about and whether we've got any specific questions for Becki. So, Heidi, what have we got that's been coming through?

HEIDI: Yeah, some really nice positive feedback about people that have had this experience. So Lou said, I had a great experience with the Disability Support Team so far. They're lovely.

Chloe said, I really struggled with school not listening to me and having to fight for everything I needed because they wouldn't listen, but the support from the OU has been amazing.

Sally says, the OU's Disability Support have been so helpful so far.

Sharon said, I found the support from the OU for my disability is really great.

And then Suzanne says, wow, it's amazing quite how much support and help the OU offers. I'm utterly speechless. So that's a lovely comment.

There is a question for Becki from Ashley. How about funding for childcare?

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK, Becki, is that something you can answer or is that something that I might need to pass through to Mark- for the wider Student Support Team?

BECKI OVERTON: I mean, it's definitely not something that sits within my team, and I wouldn't like to say. I know there are a couple of access- there's a couple of funding routes that students can access. So my awareness of it, as an example, is if you need supporting evidence, but there's a charge from your GP, there's a fund that you can apply to that you may be able to get support with that kind of funding. But I think, probably Mark, in Student Support, is going to be much better place to answer that than me, I'm afraid.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you, Becki. Yeah, that's fine. Thank you, Becki, for doing your best there. So what I'll do is I'm going to go to Mark now. So Mark is a lovely supporter in our Student Support Team. So Mark, perhaps you could give us a little bit about that first question. Is there any information that the Student Support Team can say about childcare for our students?

MARK NEWMAN: Yeah. Hi, everyone. It's great to be here today.

So there is information on various funding via the Help Centre. Now, specifically, childcare, I know there's a fund that students can apply for, called study-related costs. I'll be completely honest. I'm not 100% sure if there is a specific childcare one actually internally at the Open University. There may potentially be something externally, depending on student circumstances. But it's always worth having a look at the study-related cost forms. Because as Becki alluded to, it can potentially pay for things like equipment or like a GP letter, and even things like laptops potentially, depending on a student's situation. So yeah, unfortunately, specifically with childcare, I'm not too sure 100%.

But just as an example as what we do at the Student Support Team, we may not always know the answer 100%, but that's certainly something- like, if someone phoned me in now and asked me that question, I'd be off researching that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. Brilliant. And I know when we had Matt yesterday, that was his thing. And as a tutor, I'll say, we might not know the answer, but ask. And I know that Tony said in the chat earlier, it's an example of ask, ask, ask. We might not be able to provide costs and support with everything. We can point you in the right directions. Because some things, it might be that it's not the University's end responsibility or role. But we can point you to places where it might be.

So sometimes that's a key thing of the Student Support Team, isn't it? So actually, if we step back a little bit, could you explain a little bit about what we mean by the Student Support Team, Mark?

MARK NEWMAN: So the Student Support Team, we do what it says on the tin, really. We are here to support and advise students at various stages of their studies, and also lots of different kind of areas. So it could be we could discuss any barriers you might have to your study. Equally, it could be more maybe slightly linked to the more career side of things, where maybe we're talking about which courses and modules you want to study, which qualification you're aiming for, that kind of thing.

But we're really a kind of almost- obviously, you have your tutor, who is there to help and support with anything specifically to do with the subject and the modules that you're studying, the academic side of things- but the Student Support Team, I'd probably say, really, anything else. And as I think Becki said earlier on, there are things we can help directly with, but equally we can refer to lots of other people, such as the Disability Support Team, Students Association, senior tutors.

My main message is, if there are any difficulties of your learning or if you've got any questions- similar to what's been mentioned before, no question is a silly question, and do get in touch with us. And if we don't know the answer straight away, we can certainly either signpost you or get back to you with a response.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, Mark.

And what we wanted to do now is, we've talked about the Help Centre and so on- and I know Sean's been putting some excellent links in the chat for information about study-related costs and the disability support, so they're in the chat at the moment- what I want to do is I wanted to actually show you what we talked about with the Help Centre. So now I'm going to try something very technical and I'm going to actually attempt to screen share to show you what it looks like. So here we go.

OK. So this is the StudentHome Help Centre, which is help.open.ac.uk. So that should be what you can see on the screen at the moment. So when you're logged in, you can see all sorts of things. So Cost of living and your studies. There's information in there that you can look. There's information- if you're a brand new student, having a look at the Induction would be a great idea. It gives you lots of different information.

We had the lovely Jessica talking about Careers and employability yesterday. There's further information there. Changes and problems while you're studying. That's probably one of the bits that relates to the Student Support Team.

And when I come back to Mark, when I've stopped screen sharing in a moment, we'll talk a little bit about that. Because sometimes people don't necessarily want to talk to somebody. They like the idea of finding the information.

So for those of you who think, yeah, I like to find the information myself, here, the StudentHome Help Centre, there's lots. So there's Disability Support in there. If something goes wrong with your computing or you need to know how to do things, find information about tutorials that Zoe was talking about, that's in Computing Help. Tutorials, there's more information there as well, and if your module has something face to face, a residential school.

Mental health, well-being, and keeping safe, that's one of the places I look at the most because there's lots of different areas that the University can signpost to. We're not first-line mental health support, so we don't take the place of GPs and actual medical help. But there's lots of places, and we've got a number of different support systems in place that you can make use for. And there's also bursaries and grants for those things. So there's lots and lots and lots there, which will hopefully give you a bit of an idea to show you the different things that are there.

So I mentioned in there, too, about that to the things- I think I've stopped screen sharing now- maybe.

Hang on. Toggle screen sharing. Yep, I finally did it. Sorry. That's the first time I've tried to do it live in a session and I press various buttons. And you know what. That bit is you're all learning. I'm learning and trying to do things myself, pressing different buttons to see if they work. Like we said earlier, just have a go. There you go. My challenge of the day was to work out how to screen share live.

So we talked about some of those things there, didn't we, Mark? So what kind of things would you like to signpost students to from either that Help Centre or more generally?

MARK NEWMAN: So I think specifically in terms of where students are now, you're just starting out in maybe your first time studying with the Open University, you're doing your first module, I think at this stage, certainly I guess reiterating what I said before, getting familiar with the module website and the StudentHome page.

One thing I would always advise students is I wouldn't say necessarily don't go into your assignments in depth at this stage, but certainly have a look at the dates and where the key pinch points are throughout the year. Because obviously, a lot of guys might be balancing studying with work, family, other commitments as well. So I think identifying when maybe you've got quite a few assignments within a short space of time. And particularly, like if, say, you're doing two modules at the same time and you're trying to balance both of those together, maybe having a quick look ahead, maybe seeing when it might potentially be the busiest time.

So for example, anyone who's starting on an October module- which I presume is everyone that's here- the final end of module assessment tends to be May and June time. So that might be a time, for example, maybe you to reach out to your employer to see if you can have a couple of days off beforehand- that kind of thing. Just be familiar, I guess, when the pinch points are throughout the year.

The other couple of things. I was going to mention as well is, on our OpenLearn website, there is a really good course, called Being an OU Student. So it's not subject specific, but it will give you a really good idea of what it's like to study at the Open University and what systems are available, how do you submit things, that kind of thing. So that's available on via our OpenLearn.

And as I think you just saw on that example, Isabella doing the kind of induction as well. So we have these fantastic events that are happening this week as part of induction, but also, there are things that you can do in your own time as well just to get yourself familiar with the Open University, I guess.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. So Being an OU Student is a great one. It's something that we mentioned to students in our online workshops. And it gives you lots and lots of information about different things, about what we're talking about, the three-letter acronyms that we love that you get used to after a while in terms of the OU, and information about being a student overall. So there's lots and lots of useful information overall there.

So it might be that there might be students who are studying multiple modules. I know that there are at least some because that was something- that question came earlier when we were talking about tutorials. So if you are studying multiple modules, you might have that. And there was a question that we're going to be asking you, as a widget there- so are you studying multiple modules, and what level are you coming in at? So I'm trying to remember what things were asking you. So I'll go to Heidi in a little bit to find out what kind of answers we're getting there.

But it's that thing, thinking about sometimes- Mark, if there are students that are studying multiple modules or maybe have changed their level, is there any advice that you think you would like to give those people?

MARK NEWMAN: I think the first thing to say is I think sometimes that there is a natural, I guess, temptation or desire to finish your degree as quickly as possible, particularly if you are looking to progress to a certain career. And I think that's just natural in all of us kind of thing. And I think it has been said before, every student is different and it's all about doing a learning style and intensity that's right for you.

One thing that I would say- I guess this is just for students who are doing two modules- so one module, roughly, if you're doing 60 credits, that's between 16 to 18 hours per week, on average. Doing two modules is around up to potentially 36. Again, it will vary depending on the module and the time of year. But sometimes, I think you do as much planning as you can, but you may not necessarily know how it's going to be until you start.

So my advice would be, if after the first two weeks you're thinking, oh, actually, two modules, maybe I should stagger the starts or maybe do one this year and one next year instead- do reach out to us early on. Or actually at any point of your module- but particularly early on if you're finding the first two weeks, actually, I might want to maybe just do one module and then maybe do the next module later on kind of thing, do reach out to your Student Support Team.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you. Because I think there's some practical things to do with fee liability points- which we're not going to talk about now- but sometimes there's different points in the module that are useful there. And I've been given the details. So of the people watching, 70% are doing one module, 26% are doing two modules, and the 4% are doing three.

And in terms of the level, if we could maybe show the widget answer of what different levels people are doing. So 75% of people are doing Level 1, but a lovely 13% Level 2, 6% postgraduate, and 7% doing Access. That's lovely.

So for those people doing Access, we have got a dedicated Freshers Access event tomorrow at 11 o'clock, which is going to be very exciting. And postgraduate, I guess with people newly starting in master's and different things like that, like the master's study I'm doing myself. So thank you, Mark. That's been really, really helpful.

What I'd like to do is I'd like to go back to Heidi now, as we're coming towards the close of the show. So have there been any other questions? What kind of additional chats have been going on in there, Heidi?

HEIDI: Yeah, lots of chat. I just want to flag. So looking at this- how long it's been since you last studied- over 40%. So 10 years-plus. It takes so much courage, doesn't it, to come back to study after 10 years? And it must feel like you're starting from scratch, really. So yeah, I was really surprised by such a high number there of our students that they've had over a 10-year gaps in between their study. So welcome back, anyway. You're in very safe hands with the OU.

So in terms of the chat, people have been sharing some fantastic bonuses of being an OU student, in terms of that automatic support you get externally from just being an OU student. Before I go through those- and Rochelle, I think she just had to head off- but she pointed out a really good point. That for us international students, we can't always benefit from some of the help that's available in the UK. So some of these points that I'm going through- that's such a brilliant point, Rochelle. And thank you so much for reminding us of that, that for our international students, these may not be applicable.

If you are based in the UK- Gillian talks about the TOTUM Card. She says that I've almost saved what it cost me and the course hasn't even started yet. And Pauline said that she applied for her TOTUM Card yesterday.

Tina recommends UNiDAYS. It's another student discount that you can use. And Matt, who is my colleague in the chat- I had no idea this existed- so, Matt, you've literally just revolutionised my life- but Amazon Prime student. So have a Google for that- Amazon Prime Student, you get money off because you're an OU student. And when I just googled it, it was 50% off, which is amazing. I could have saved myself a fortune over the last few years. I wish I'd known that one was there.

And then Matt, who is a wealth of all knowledge, also said that we will give you Office 365 with your OU email address. So there's no need to buy or subscribe.

Sarah-Jane recommends Student Beans app. And then Becky said- I mean, I did know about this one, but I only found out a few months ago- Becky says you can use your OU email to get a student discount on Spotify. And she now saves 5 pounds a month on that. So another really great tip there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. So lots of really good financial tips. I have to say, one of my favourite ones is the 10% off Co-Op, which might be the 10% off Co-Op chocolate quite often. I've definitely made back the cost of my TOTUM Card on Co-Op chocolate, as I go and buy lots and lots of it. You know what. I hadn't actually mentioned chocolate yet today. That is very remiss of me. And I haven't mentioned Strongman, either. There you go. Get them both in quickly.

So what I wanted to do as we finishing up today's session is I wanted to come to each of my guests for your little snappy take-home message. So Zoe, if I could come to you first. What would be your single-sentence take-home message that you'd like our new students to know?

ZOE: Oh, am I allowed two really quickly because there's two that I've got in my mind? Sorry. I'm going to take a liberty. So the first one is your module websites- you're going to see a lot of stuff. And I agree with everything that's been said about taking time to explore it. But the module website has been designed to help you. So your Study Planner will guide you through your study. You can go at your pace, and you can tick things off as you go. So your Study Planner is your friend. That's one of my top tips for your actual module websites.

The second one is around accessibility. So sometimes we don't know what we need. I would strongly recommend having a look in the Help Centre. So I'm sorry I'm going to look this way because I was looking it up before coming back on. So under the Help Centre, under those links that Isabella showed you, there's a Computing Help one. And in there, there's an Accessibility part.

And there, it talks about all sorts of things. So some of the things that you may not think about are you can adjust the colour and contrast of not only your computer, but also the browser that you use. You can also change font size and colour. And you can use the built-in narrator to read things out, but also the text-to-speech tools.

So I cannot stress enough to have a look. Because there might be some real game changers in there for you. So there are my top tips.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you. I'm going to have to be much more strict with the remaining people for saying a sentence. Otherwise, we're going to overrun and I'm going to get in trouble. So Tom, what would be your snappy, please, one-word- one-word or one-sentence top tip?

TOM: I'm here to help. Talk to me.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you, Tom. That was wonderful.

Suzy, what about You Oh, I think you're on mute, Suzy, because we didn't hear that, unfortunately.

SUZY: Enjoy it, and be yourself.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you, Suzy.

Matt, what would be your top tip?

MATT: No questions are silly questions.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you.

And, Becki, last but not least?

BECKI OVERTON: Well, Zoe said what I was going to say. And that means I get another one. So that's brilliant. Apply for DSA. Apply for DSA, and follow all of Zoe's tips.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you. Yeah.

So my top tip is something I've been saying throughout this session- is-- you are you. You are on your own unique journey. There are people there to support you, to help you become a great OU learner. Start well. But remember, it's your journey. You are fantastic. You've made that first step. Think about it. Think about some of the things we've said today. Think about what you're going to do.

It's still that exciting phase. The modules are starting soon. There is feedback, and we do always welcome feedback from all of our sessions. There'll be that feedback link in the chat. So if you could fill that in, we'd be very grateful because it helps us do the best thing we possibly can do.

And then we are available from the main website. There's an email address, and you can send us a thing through. We've got the final session tomorrow, the Access Freshers Session, and then a social on Friday. All of the upcoming events are on our website. But it would be lovely to see you at future events, and hopefully you've learned a lot and you feel that you're going to do great- and you're making that fantastic start to being a great OU student.

So have a lovely rest of your day.

[MUSIC PLAYING]