

# Freshers Welcome - 19th Sept. 2023

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good morning, and welcome to this Freshers event. It's so exciting to be another year-- well, another year for me, a brand new year for all of you. And I know that you've all been chatting away before we started. My name is Isabella Henman I'm the presenter of Student Hub Live here, and so excited to welcome everybody today. It's such a brilliant journey that you've got on, and I'm all giddy already.

So I've got some lovely guests with me today. I've got John, I've got Christine, I've got Tracey, I've got Matt, and I've got Jessica, who will all be our lovely guests on camera a little bit later, along with Heidi, who is in the chat and on camera as well. And I've also got Mark, Sinéad and Jess on chat, who have no doubt been asking and answering all sorts of questions for you so far today.

So it's great to see you today. This is the first of our workshops that we've got in our Student Hub Live Freshers, welcoming you to the Open University. And as I said, I've got Heidi, who has been collating some of the information that people have been chatting about so far. So, Heidi, where are people? What are people talking about?

HEIDI: Hello. And it's so lovely to be here, and to be back at Student Hub Live after the summer break. So welcome to everybody. This is a Freshers event, so it's super, super busy. And before we begin, I just want to reassure everybody. So I am a former OU student. I started in 2009, and I studied with the OU for six years. I did English Literature, absolutely loved it. And it's great to see so many people that are doing English Literature and Creative Writing in the chat.

So I understand how apprehensive you're probably feeling right now. It is quite a scary process. But we're here to reassure all of you it's going to be absolutely fine. And this is genuinely the best adventure that you could possibly embark on.

So there's a few things to go through. So if you're brand new to this system, if this is your first time that you've come to join us for Student Hub Live, you'll see that the chat is moving very, very quickly. So there's a little pin on the top right hand side. If you click on that, it means that it will slow down the chat so that you can keep on top of that, and it's not going quite so fast. So you can just test out using that. I certainly use that because it is so busy in the chat at the moment.

We've also got some widgets. So you can see there we've got a map there. We're asking people what they're studying and where they're joining us from. Have a little play around with those widgets. Put your information in there, and then you can see what other people are saying as well. We've got the map up. So pop exactly on the map if you're joining us from the UK, where you're joining us from.

And it's time for me to say some hellos. So, as I said, there is so much going on in the chat, so I'm going to say Hello to as many of you as possible. Philippa, first question, "Anyone else juggling looking after young children while studying?" Philippa, I started, my son was nine months old when I started studying with the OU. I know it's very, very daunting, but it's totally doable.

Sarah Jane has said, "It's real now, isn't it?" I think being in this session has made Sarah Jane realise, yup, it's started. There's no going back now. You're going to love it, Sarah Jane. Kelsey, "Just turned 19. Finished A-levels in the summer, and is now working towards a BA in history." Welcome, Kelsey. That's fantastic.

Dennis from Deepest Dorset, studying a BA Honours in History and is petrified. You'll be fine, Dennis. Don't worry. Vincent, "First I'm studying in 17 years." And Chloe, "This is my first time studying after I dropped out of a brick uni eight years ago. Nervous, but really excited to get started." And Janine, get well soon. "Five days post major surgery. So this is going to be more challenging than ever, but can't wait to get started." So I do hope that you're doing well, Janine. And well done for joining us today. Goodness me.

Tony from Hertfordshire, "Returning after an eight year deferment to continue my integrated Master of Environmental Science." Welcome back. Lisa, joining from Gravesend. Lane is from Port Talbot. We've got Katrina in Porthcawl. Loads of other people joining us-- like I said, I wish I could go through and say hello to every single one of you. But I am saying hello in the chat. Do let us know where you're joining us from in the widget, and enjoy the show.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. And, apparently, I'm supposed to say, people of Aberdeen, where are you? There's a song in my head that's running around and I can't work out what it is. And I'm not going to try and sing it, because that's probably not going to be a good idea. Apparently, we've got a little bit of a tech issue with one of the widgets about what are you studying. So some of the things might have dropped off. So if you can't see what you're studying on there, do have another go.

And I think you need to put something different in each one. Be careful if, for instance, you're putting health and something. If you put the word "and" in, it looks like you're studying "and." So just be aware of that. So lots of people here-- it's great to be here. And, actually, it's probably worth mentioning I started my OU journey as a student, as well. So the person who's doing a master's, I started off with a master's, as well.

And I remember we didn't have this kind of thing when I started, so I was just all paper and just reading things and going, where is everybody. So it's lovely that we've got this, and that you've got other people. And that's probably one of the really big messages. There's lots some other people out there.

So my first guest is the very wonderful John Butcher, who has got a fantastic title, which I'm going to wait until it comes up on the screen so that I get the full title of it. Because I can never remember your title, John. But it's really, really smart, and they're not showing it for me. So I'm just going to read it. It's Professor of Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education. That sounds wonderful, John. Why did you particularly want to be here today and welcome our students to this Freshers event?

JOHN BUTCHER: Thank you, Isabella. I'm absolutely delighted to be here. It's always a pleasure to welcome new students to the Open University. I too did a master's and a doctorate in education part time with the OU. So I'm absolutely with all the new students on this one.

A rather bizarre sub-story to my title is that I didn't realise until I got my chair that you get to choose your own title. So I actually invented that title, Professor of Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education. It's essentially, I think-- and I'm very proud of it because it represents, I think to some extent, my journey through doing very poorly at A-levels, and going to work, and then getting a degree from a polytechnic, and working as a teacher in further education and comprehensives, and eventually getting into teacher training.

And I think my driving passion was that there are lots of people out there in society who could thrive in higher education but often don't get a chance. And I think it's very much up to the education institution to offer support, and to teach in a way that recognises those students as individuals. So that's my title.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. Thank you, John. And there's apparently lots of people at the moment, much like you, and myself, and Heidi as well, are mature students. And that's a particularly interesting part about the university, isn't it, having mature students?

JOHN BUTCHER: It's really significant, and it differs the Open University considerably from the majority of other higher education institutions in the sector. I think I came to OU study in my late thirties. I was teaching in a sixth form. I used to study in a conservatory, because I had six children and there wasn't a lot of space anywhere else. So you kind find your own spaces, really, and you do find a way to thrive. And I think one of my messages is going to be that engaging with higher education as an adult is a really exciting thing to do. It opens up so many opportunities. And I wonder if students, while they're watching this, could think about if there was anyone who inspired them to become an OU student. Because often that connection with other people is incredibly important.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Thank you, John. I was actually just going to ask that. So people might have seen that we had that ticker question running across the bottom of the screen earlier, "Who inspired you to be an OU student?" And we'll go to Heidi a little bit later to hear some of those stories. Actually, that's a point. Who inspired you, John? I don't think I know the answer to that one.

JOHN BUTCHER: I think that's a-- well, that's a great question, and I'm not sure I've given it sufficient thought, really. I think when I was at school, I was one of those schools where the assumption would go to university. And I didn't really want to go to university. My parents were actually against me going to university. They wanted me to go out and get a job, because they were very worried about supporting myself.

And, certainly, I think the classic thing is you have to follow your passions. So I did a degree in English and History, and then I made myself almost unemployable by taking a master's degree in Victorian Studies. But, funny enough, that's how I got into being an OU tutor. So it's amazing how some things turn out.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. Yeah, and that's the thing, isn't it? We've got all sorts of different people. We've got mature students. And we've said John and my journey was a mature student. But we've got lots of-- apparently, we've got some immature students here, as well, John. That's how they're describing themselves. But we've got young students, as well.

And that's one of the good things about the Open University is the fact that we're open. And that's something I know that you wanted to particularly talk about, isn't it? So what does it mean for us to be open and welcoming students at the moment?

JOHN BUTCHER: It's really important. Because the Open University is so, I think, established certainly in the UK, and arguably around the world, actually, that it's easy to take that word open for granted. And I

think, for me, there's something about the university's social justice mission, to be open to all. And I think going back to those differences from conventional brick universities, we are also uniquely open access. And what that means, I think, is quite significant. So we've heard from some students who've already started at some brick universities. And they will have been selected or had to meet certain A-level criteria or other criteria to get in. The Open University will take anyone, and not only in terms of any-- regardless of any prior qualifications, but also important in regards of how long you've been out of education. And, you know, it is for everybody, so I'm delighted we've got some 19-year-olds with us. I also recall a lovely chap who used to attend our committees as an OU student rep who was in his early 80s, and who's always wanted to study in higher education but just hadn't had the opportunity. He retired, and that was then the time for some me time for him, as it were.

So I think that kind of openness is crucial. And what it really means in terms of how we teach is I think the OU can be much more flexible than many other universities. So the fact that the majority of our students work whilst studying, the majority of our students have obvious caring responsibilities-- whether for children or older relatives or people with ill health and things like that. So we recognise, I think, that OU students are not just studying. They're doing other things, as well, and we have to work with them to support them, to make sure that they can wear those different identity hats in a comfortable way.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I remember that when I used to do an introductory day school for one of the modules that I tutor. And we used to talk about that. We used to say, you you're not going off to university in the same way that people at a brick university do. You're still studying alongside everything else. And that's what's really quite interesting.

Now, I know we've got lots of stories coming in about inspiring. So Catherine said her drama teacher inspired her. She knew brick university wasn't for her, so she introduced her to the university, and she's very excited to start. Sarah Jane said, "My brain didn't feel right until now. I think I inspired myself, to be honest, as I've come so far in the last few months. I have to practise what I preach to my foster sons." That's fantastic, isn't it?

Maisy says, "I was inspired by listening to podcasts where academics were talking about subjects I was interested in. I realised I wanted to be like them." Yeah. I've got into podcasts in the last couple of years, I have to say. And I'm like, oh, I need to find out that. I was actually listening to something about AI yesterday, and that was very interesting. And Kaley says, "My daughter's DDT therapist inspired me. Always had an interest in psychology. She helped me believe in myself that I could follow my dream." I know Heidi-- when we come to Heidi in a little bit later, there will be a few more then. But I wanted to pick up this idea about flexibility-- not "flexibizity"-- flexibility with you, John. So can you tell us a bit more about that for our new students, and how that works out in practise as they're studying?

JOHN BUTCHER: Yeah. Well, let's just reflect back on what that map of the nation told us. So essentially with the Open University you can study from wherever you are. And many of our students can be in quite remote areas or areas that aren't well-served by other higher education institutions. And, crucially, I think it means you avoid the necessity either to travel to a brick university or indeed to live on campus, as it were, with all the costs that can be incurred there.

So I think it's very flexible in terms of you don't have to move to literally go to university. You can be at university from your own kitchen table or whatever. So that's, I think, an important thing. And I think the

second thing is flexibility around pace. So students, as we can imagine, with all their responsibilities can be very busy.

Some people will want and indeed do succeed in studying at a great intensity in getting their degrees, if they're aiming for a degree in three or four years. Others will take six years studying part-time. Others will defer and do different things and come back to the university and finish off perhaps 10, 12, 14 years later. So that flexibility, I think, is really, really important.

And just the third thing, just in case there are any students out there who come in with credit transfer, we also have students who perhaps have started off some studies elsewhere. Perhaps it didn't quite work out for them or there weren't the opportunities to continue. And the Open University, I think, is very flexible in acknowledging the learning they bring with them. And then students can pick up perhaps at stage II or stage III and get their undergraduate degree. So I think that's where the flexibility comes in.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. And it's interesting where you talk about deferring and coming back. Because I'm coming back myself after having had a four-year break within my study. And I'm very excited to be starting studying again. I haven't been able to for various reasons. And it's like, oh, I'm coming back and it's lovely.

So you were talking about the map and where people are. So we showed the map a little bit earlier. But I've got some additional information that I've been told, that we've got 39 students who are watching in Europe, three in North America, one South America, one Africa and Middle East. And we've got people as far as Shetland in the UK. This is so wonderful, isn't it, John, that we reach people in so many different areas?

JOHN BUTCHER: And one of the things I will say is one of the absolute delights of working for the Open University is the opportunity to attend a degree ceremony. Now, we're getting ahead of ourselves now. But I happened to be at a conference once in Vienna, as you are, and the Open University had a presence in Vienna. And I was able to attend a kind of Central European OU degree ceremony.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Wow.

JOHN BUTCHER: And that was absolutely fascinating, because not all countries have Open Universities. So that's worth thinking about, as well. We're very lucky.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. So that's wonderful. So we're meeting all sorts of people now. We've got people from all over the UK. We've got people in different continents. We've got people with different ages, doing different subjects, and so on. I'm going to come to Heidi now just to get some more of those inspiring stories before I go back to carry on talking to John. So what other inspiring stories have we got, Heidi, that people have been inspired by other people to study with the OU?

HEIDI: Yeah, so many to choose from. So Danielle says, "My wife inspired me," which is lovely. Vincent, "My children. I want to be able to provide them with everything that I never had." Freya was also inspired by her son. I was so inspired by my son, too. Lisa was inspired by a friend. And Jade says that Alison Weir has inspired her because she wants to also be a historian.

Charlene, "My four-year-old autistic son is my inspiration to study psychology and eventually specialise in behavioural psychology." And Paula says, "One of my closest friends was in banking for 17 years, and then had her children in her thirties. She decided to completely retrain when her kids were tiny, and did an OU geography course. She became a teaching assistant and is now head of department in a secondary school, and she is amazing." So Paula has got a very inspiring friend there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely.

HEIDI: And Maria says that her boyfriend inspired her. So there's so many lovely stories in the chat, and it's so nice to see people sharing. I do just want to say a quick hello. You mentioned there we've got people joining us from North America. I want to say hello to William in Connecticut. William is an expat and says that he misses Scotland. So I just wanted to get that in there and say hello, William, and thanks for joining us.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. It's so great to know we have people from all sorts of places. It's the thing that always gives me such a buzz. And we've been talking about people who have been inspired by their children, people who've got young children, who are caring, and so on.

So, John, I know something you were particularly keen to talk about is your-- well, your advice, your experiences. You said about studying in the conservatory around your children or maybe be away from your children. What kind of advice have you got for people that are trying to manage getting that study space, getting that ideal place to get themselves the best start?

JOHN BUTCHER: I think there are two elements to this, really, and first one is obviously a physical space. And I think what students have told me over the years is, even if it's kind of lurking under the staircase or in the shed or whatever, what you need is a little space where your laptop or your materials or your notepads or whatever are not going to be disturbed and having to be moved all the time. So, in other words, a space that is a little bit special for you, and you know you can go back to it, and your books will be out, or your material will be out if you need it.

And that's not easy for everybody. Because we know some students have to study in libraries and internet cafes and that kind of thing. But if you can do that in the spaces you have around where you live, that's great. The second thing is slightly different, but I think it's about space, as well, and it's finding a bit of head space.

So when you're a busy parent or a carer, you're working-- we know quite a lot of our students work a number of part-time jobs. So that presents its challenges as well as working full-time, of course. And often it's very difficult to find that space in your head and your brain to think about your Open University studies. And so I think there is something about compartmentalising your time if you possibly can.

And what our more experienced students tell us is that, eventually, you learn how to grab those moments. So, for example, I've had conversations with students perhaps who've been taxi drivers, and they take their OU material with them. And when they're waiting for a fare, they're stealing that time, as it were, to do a little bit of studying. So I think the physical space is very helpful, but particularly getting that space in your brain when you're not just caring and working and stuff.

And what I would say is to be very open about that with folk around you. So I think being clear that sometimes, as a mum or a dad or whatever, you may need to sit at the table for an hour and engage with your teaching materials. And I think I've heard some lovely stories, and there have been mentioned in the inspirational things already, really, where students have sat down with their children while they're doing their homework at the kitchen table. And it becomes a kind of shared learning activity. And I think that's a lovely picture, really, of how to do it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Yeah. And we've got a special session for our Freshers and Access students on Thursday. But I know that many students who study with Access, it's so that they can actually help their children with their homework. And it's a lovely thing. And I was marking some work recently from students who had just completed. And that was somebody-- that was something that somebody said at the end. I've achieved what I want to achieve from this module because I can sit down and I can help my children with their homework, which is great.

And, actually, there's been some resilience that's already been shown today, John, which you might be interested in. So Gita has been trying to log in for half an hour, and is demonstrating the resilience of an OU student because she's managed to reach us today. So well done that she's got in there. Sally apparently wants to know what I'm studying. I'm carrying on studying Mental Health Science. So the people that were talking about that earlier, yes, I want to know a little bit more about that. Now, John was talking about people space, getting by, and finding places.

Now, one of the other things-- and it sort of links in with that, John, doesn't it-- is that at the university we teach. We help students to learn factual information, but we also spend a lot of time on study skills. Don't we? Can explain a little bit about what that means for people that might not be very familiar, and what particularly we do at the OU to help students there?

JOHN BUTCHER: I think this is a really important point. Because I think what new OU students should be very open to is the fact that their learning experience will be very unlike the kind of learning they might have experienced from school, however recently or however long ago they were at school. So we do not expect students to be vessels that we have to fill with facts.

We expect students to engage with the learning experience and really to come to their own conclusions based on what they're reading, what they're engaging with, and how they're discussing with their tutors as well. So I think it's a much more active way of learning, and most mature students really welcome that. It's a real transformative experience for them. And I think, secondly, is a recognition often that particularly with them mature students, there's a concern if they've been out of education for quite a while-- oh, I've got I've got nothing to bring to this experience.

And, actually, if you have a conversation with your tutor, the skills you've got as a parent or juggling three part-time jobs or whatever, are incredibly helpful in terms of life experience, so that you can prioritise your studies and that kind of thing. So I think the crucial thing is talk about that sort of thing with your tutor. And also develop, if you possibly can, whether it's a study buddy or simply someone around you, one of your peers, who's just a little bit interested in what you're doing. Because sometimes just having a chat over a coffee can be incredibly helpful in terms of resilience and persistence, actually, in keeping going.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, and recognising other people are excited, the way I was very excited at the start. Because I'm starting my new module. Everybody watching is starting their new modules. But it's lovely to get other people's buy-in. And you can teach them things. You can say, you know what? I just learned this. Can I tell you about this? Or, do you know what-- I've just learned how to take notes. I didn't realise that.

And I do that to people all the time. And they're like, oh, you're doing it again, are you, Isabella. Yes. Thank you. You've learned this. Do we need to know? But, actually, most of the time they secretly go, actually, that's really exciting. So that's really great. It's been lovely to hear from you today. Yeah, go ahead, John.

JOHN BUTCHER: OK. Can I just throw one other thing? Because I think you mentioned the skills development, and I think for OU students this is very important. Because I think what we try to do-- and this goes back to my title, really-- is to help people learn how to learn. And I think schools are not as good at that as they might be.

I don't think I learned how to learn probably until I was doing my doctorate, which is a bit shameful, as I was in my 40s by then. But there we go. But I think that idea of learning strategically, and knowing what's really important, is an incredibly helpful skill to get. And we'll help you do that. Thank you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. Absolutely, John. Sorry, I wasn't trying to cut you off. I was just saying thank you for all the useful things you've said. But I think that's such a good point to make. And I know I remember when it was another one of these things which I kept telling people about. I probably haven't told you about this yet, John.

But when I used to be of what we called the acquisition model of learning, and it was all in here, and it was great. And I knew because I'd learned it. And then somebody explained what we call the participatory model and learning from other people. And I was like, no, no. And then it suddenly clicked. And I was like-- [GASPS] I was like, but John, John, I've learned from you. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I've learned from doing-- and, you know what? It's so exciting.

I get giddy talking about it, because genuinely it's so nice when you can learn with other people. I know we've got people that don't want to do that, and that's absolutely fine. We're not forcing you to do anything. But sharing with the people that are around you, sharing with other people, sharing with your module-- you know what? I've learned this, and I'm really happy about that. And that's great.

So it's been great to talk to you today, John. And you mentioned about having tutors. And my next guest is the very lovely Christine, who has been on a number of different modules with me at different points. She's never been my tutor, but I've worked alongside her. And I've had the privilege of learning from her. She's much calmer than me, aren't you, Christine? You're not quite as giddy.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, yes, much calmer.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So, Christine, you're a tutor. You've been a tutor for quite a long time with the university. But many people might be going, I don't know what that word tutor means. So what does the term tutor from the Open University mean? Can you explain to those students that are new?



CHRISTINE HEADING: Yes. Well, hello, everybody. It's interesting. Because, technically speaking, I have been a tutor off and on for more decades than I want to remember. But I've been a tutor of all sorts of different types. But since joining OU, I've been a tutor attached to one or more modules at any particular time.

And our duty really, our role, is to support students with their journey through the university, particularly with regard to their academic work. When it comes to non-academic things, often our role is to just signpost them to the relevant people, some of whom you'll be hearing about later this morning. But my role, and that of other tutors, is basically to support students with their academic work.

And what that means is helping them to understand and use their module material, helping them through tutorials to be able to express themselves, and ask questions, and learn new things, marking their assignments, answering their questions, however trivial they think they are or however profound. From my point of view, there's no such thing as a stupid question.

I don't mind if it's just a trivial question they want to ask, like what line spacing should they use for their assignments, or whether it's what I actually think about the origins of DNA or some such thing. Whatever, it doesn't matter, just ask. And sometimes, if I can't answer it, I could just point them in the right direction. And they can find the answers themselves or talk to somebody else.

So I'm their support person focusing on their academic work, and I give them lots and lots of feedback regarding their assignments. Because it's worth saying that, that when students are asked to do assignments and they send them in to us, we don't just look at them and say, oh, yes. Tick, good, could be better, or anything like that. No. We write masses, and masses, and masses, in terms of feedback. And the students who've produced high quality work get just as much feedback as those who've struggled a bit with their work. So feedback is part of the learning process. And we deliver teaching in that way.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And that's probably one of the things-- one of those study skills that John was talking earlier, and the learning things. Actually, it's how you deal with feedback. Now, one thing I wanted to say to everybody watching at the moment, because I'm sure lots of people are asking, don't worry if you haven't got your allocated tutor yet.

There are a couple of modules that might have had an allocation yesterday, so some postgraduate, some level 2 and level 3. But the majority of new students who are Access level 1 won't have your tutor allocated until the end of this week, or Access is probably next week. It's because we've got lots and lots of things-- well, I say we-- the Royal we, it's not me that have got quite a few things to deal with behind the scenes of making sure people are in the right groups and so on.

So don't worry if you don't have your allocated tutor. And I know people will be asking that, because everybody always does. You will do soon enough. You will do by the time your module starts. Because, remember, this is Freshers week before the modules even started. Most people's modules either start on the 30th of September or the 7th of October.

So I think what I'd like to ask you next, Christine, is from the tutor perspective, what kind of things would you say to students to start doing now? What would you like the students to be getting on with before they would hear from you as your tutor-- as their tutor? Sorry.

CHRISTINE HEADING: Right. Because it could be a little while before they hear from me, but they will. Don't worry. If you have access to your module website, which you probably do, there is probably

introductory information there available to you, suggesting that you do this, have a look at that, do the other, and so on and so forth. And it really is worth taking that very seriously and really doing it systematically.

If you do it systematic-- if you go through what you're asked to do and go through things systematically, you're going to find your feet much quicker. You're going to find your way around. Now, a lot of the things that it'll suggest you do is why not click on this and see what it says, and what it offers, and so on. And that's your-- you have a sort of guided exploration, should we say. It's a bit like going up a mountain with a mountain guide rather than do it doing it yourself. And if you're a beginner, it's kind of better to do it with a guide.

So I would urge you to start working through what they suggest you do. Take your time, but follow it yourself. Don't just flick around randomly. Because although you'll find interesting things, you'll lose your way and not understand how it relates to B, and B to C. So be guided and follow the path. And look at it as having a mountain guide with you. That's my best.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I like the idea of that, the mountain guide bit. Because it was making me thinking of when you're trying to build a piece of furniture or you're trying to make something and there's instructions. I was trying to make a work bench that I got for my birthday in the summer. I have to say, the instructions were really bad. They were just a single bit of pictures.

And I went-- but the bits don't look like that. How am I supposed to make it? And then I had to go off to YouTube or try and find a video, kept pausing it going, but the bits you've got don't look the same. But we're not like that, are we, Christine? We're not bad instructions. We give useful instructions, don't we?

CHRISTINE HEADING: Yes. Yeah. So that's definitely the thing.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And so the students-- so people that are waiting at the moment. In fact, Rachel says, "Please tell me you don't put big red crosses across the work if it's wrong."

CHRISTINE HEADING: Oh, no.

ISABELLA HENMAN: When you were talking about marking.

CHRISTINE HEADING: No, no. I can assure you I never put a big red cross. I might put a tiny little cross, but it'll only be because I then explain that two and two don't make five, they make four. And I will put a little cross, perhaps, and then explain why two and two make five. Four. [LAUGHS]

ISABELLA HENMAN: I was trying to think-- [LAUGHS]

CHRISTINE HEADING: Yes. Two and two make four.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I don't know what they make.

CHRISTINE HEADING: That's what I mean. So you never just put a big red line through and say, like, rubbish or no or nonsense or anything remotely like that. Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So we asked people earlier. What do you think a tutor does. And I'm going to come to Heidi next before I come back to you, Christine. Because we asked everybody at home a question. So what do they say? So, Heidi, what kind of things have people said that they think tutors do or what kind of questions have people have been asking?

HEIDI: Sure, yeah. So I've got quite a few comments. And I've got a question for Christine, as well, if that's OK. So Pauline says, "Tutors help to gain a valuable experience on students to support and give feedback on their TMAs." Sally says, "Having an approachable tutor really helps." In my experience, when I was studying with the OU, every single tutor I had was beyond amazing. And it was the same at postgraduate level, as well. So OU tutors are absolutely phenomenal.

Michelle says she's excited to have a tutor assigned. "I think it will feel more real by then." A couple of quick tips as well that have come in from some of our student guests-- so Daniel says, "My advice is spend some time going over your student home page. It's daunting at first. But as soon as you get used to it, your course and your university work is much, much easier." I totally agree with that.

When you first look at it, you think, oh, my goodness. How am I going to navigate my way around this? And then, after no time at all, it becomes second nature. And it's such a useful resource. Sally says, "My tip to start now, plan, plan, and plan some more. Look at when you can study. Block out those times in your calendar now. Look at the TMAs. Print them off or download the information. And set up files on your computer." So some really good advice there from Sally.

And a question for Christine-- so Natalie says, "How do we tackle having a tutor that perhaps isn't quite as responsive in terms of feedback? What if they don't give very good feedback?"

CHRISTINE HEADING: Hmm. That's a tricky one. That's a very tricky one. There are roots of action in this respect. I think if it's really getting to you, I think it might be a good idea to contact the student support team. The student support team, if they think that's appropriate, can then get in touch with the line manager-- they used to be called staff tutors, who's responsible for that tutor-- and have a chat and see what's going on, basically.

Worst case scenario, you can ask to have a different tutor assigned to you. Sometimes it's just a communication problem that can be sorted out. But, probably, if it's-- give it a little bit of time to make sure that that's really happened, that your feelings are quite justified and it's not just a one-off situation. But then contact student support, I would say. I think we've got somebody else was thinking of jumping in there. But I think that's probably the best approach in the first instance.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think I'd probably agree with you as well, Christine. Yeah. Because in the nicest possible way, we're all people and we're all individual people. Sometimes, for whatever reason, personalities don't quite match up. I know that I've had students transferred into my groups. I've had students transferred out of my groups for whatever reason before. And it happens.

If you're in that situation, contact somebody in student support. See what can happen. It might just be that there's a bit of miscommunication. And, in fact, that's something I wanted to talk to you, Christine, about.

In terms of what as tutors-- so I'm a tutor, as well. And what kind of information do we actually see about students? Because I think students might be quite interested to know sometimes what we do and we don't see about them.

CHRISTINE HEADING: Right. Well, when we get our allocation of students-- which as we have explained will be in the next week or so, or week or two-- what happens is every tutor can then see what's described as the student profile for each of the students in their tutor group. Now, that has only information that students have provided for the university at this moment. There's no secret information in there.

So that'll be things like contact details, date of, birth a little bit about their own academic history if they've provided it, what modules they're studying, what qualifications they're aiming for, and any disability information that the student has disclosed to the university. The term disability has to be considered very, very widely as a very loose definition of disability in this sense. It includes long-term health conditions, medium-term health conditions, and all sorts of things that the student thinks may have an impact on their study.

So those are the sorts of things we see initially. And then, I think tutors on all levels-- but I can't vouch for that-- but, certainly, tutors on the level 1 modules all then try to have an individual phone call face-to-face-- sorry, not face-to-face, an individual one-to-one phone call with each of the students. And that enables us to flesh out what's on this student's profile.

And we're not probing into anything that the student doesn't want to talk about. But it lets the student explain any concerns they have. Just as we were hearing earlier, for example, mature students who've been out of study for several decades can be terribly frightened that they-- that they're out of touch, they don't know how to learn. And then, just as was explained earlier, conversation can show that, yes, you do. Because you've done this, you've done that, you've done the other. In fact, you've got a whole range of skills.

Likewise, new students-- I think we've mentioned we've got one who's straight from school. Students of that sort sometimes find it quite a culture shock to move from learning in a classroom to learning, apparently, on their own. They're not really on their own, but it feels as if they're on their own. So those sort of things we can talk about.

For disabilities, let's take an extreme example. Suppose we find somebody who's got severe deafness, profound deafness. Is an introductory phone call really going to work? Maybe yes, because maybe they will have provided information about that and how they like to manage it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely.

CHRISTINE HEADING: Does that answer the question?

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think that's a key thing. Yeah. I don't know. When I see my student allocation, we see some things. But we'll always say to students, please let us know what you want us to know. We can see some things, we can't see everything. Now, I know we've got lots of questions that are coming in for you, Christine. So I know there was one-- how many students are allocated to each tutor? I think that depends, doesn't it? Depends on the module.

CHRISTINE HEADING: It will depend on the module. But the higher project modules, I think, sometimes have smaller groups. But most of the level 1's to 3's, excluding any project ones, I think we'll have about 20 students in each tutor group, approximately. That's the allocation.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah.

CHRISTINE HEADING: And so that's quite manageable, quite manageable. And many tutors are tutoring several tutor groups, perhaps more than one in a particular module or maybe a couple of-- two or three levels. So a particular tutor may have anything between 20 and 60, let's say, on average, which is important for communication.

When students send an email and say, "Hello, this is Allie. What's the answer-- how do I tackle question 3B," and you don't know which module it is-- I probably have half a dozen students who might have shortened their name to Allie, and we don't know which assignment it is. So it's useful for students to remember that tutors actually may have a lot of students to look after. So information is really valuable.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think that's key, because I know I tutor on a number of different modules myself. So I always say to people, please put your module code in. It's a good thing. For instance, I've got my calendars on the wall behind me here. So I can remember what they are. Because, often, people can't remember what their module codes are initially.

Apparently, the wind is causing havoc. It might have been the reason why I froze and Christine froze a little while. But Sally's had a tree brought down in her back garden. So, hopefully, nobody's getting any damage. I've heard various gusts outside, but I'm not going to look out the window at the moment.

But what I'm going to do-- thank you. You've given us some really useful information, Christine. I'm just going to go to Heidi next to see whether there are any other specific questions for Christine or for tutors. Heidi, is there anything else that people wanted to know?

HEIDI: Yeah. I've got a couple of quick questions. I just wanted to draw attention to a comment that Freya made, which I think just sums everything up beautifully from what you and Christine were just discussing. So Freya said, "I struggled with my tutors at first, and then just sent emails being really upfront and saying, I need help and this is what my issue is, and then got amazing responses." Freya says, "They aren't mind readers. And if you don't get in touch and tell them your needs, then they'll assume that you're doing all right." So I thought that was just a fantastic point, and really summed everything up really well. So a couple of questions-- so one quick question for you, Christine. Natalie would like to know what modules that you teach on. And then a slightly meatier question from Andy, who says, "What about industrial action interfering with the delivery of tutorials?"

CHRISTINE HEADING: Right. Well, that's two interesting questions. I currently teach on SDK-100, which is a Health Science level 1 module. It's really the entry-level module for health a whole variety of courses related to health, basically, as opposed to nursing and health, and social care and health.

So that's the module I teach on. I've taught on all sorts of other modules, say, at level 2, and 3, and master's in the past. But it's all in the Science faculty. And I have all sorts of students who are some wanting to do Health Sciences, some going into Psychology, some going into Psychology and

Counselling, some doing degrees for being an ambulance paramedic, some switching who want to become physicians associates, and they're doing this course to learn some biology to then go on-- and also health biology, to then go on and train as a master's degree for physician associate, these sorts of things.

So I've got lots of those sorts of people and then, yeah, all sorts and people doing open degrees, as well. So the other question was industrial action. That is sort of a little bit outside my realms for comment. But having said that, I've never known it to be a problem. I've been with the OU for 23 years, I think, now.

There has been some difficulty with the sort of marking and assessment areas that may be moving towards a resolution. I don't like to comment on that. But as for the teaching, there has been no interference that I've been conscious of. And we usually manage to get around things, if I'm honest with you. We usually manage to find solutions.

Tutorials and things like that sometimes have to be cancelled for other reasons, as well. And then they can always be rescheduled. But, yeah, that's something I would worry less about at the moment, I think.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think I would add to that, as well. Definitely, Christine, I think there is industrial action. There has been industrial action. But the university overall does its best to minimise the impact on students. And there are other people that can be brought in to cover, that can be marked. So please don't feel that that's going to have an adverse impact on you.

Now, it's been great to talk to you, Christine. And I'm going to switch things up a little bit, and I'm going to come to Matt next. Because we've had a number of questions that would be really good to talk to Mat about. So Mat is a wonderful person in the student support team. And I've got quite a specific question for you first here, Matt, From David.

MATT FIDDLER: Excellent.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So David says—

MATT FIDDLER: Hi, David.

ISABELLA HENMAN: --"I'm not great at reading but I have no issues listening. What kind of advice have you got about ways around that?" Can you give any advice to David for that?

MATT FIDDLER: Yeah. So if you go into your module website now, David, which should be open, there is a tab, which says Resources. If you're on a desktop such as a Windows or a Mac, and you click on to Resources, top right hand side you'll see a big purple button that says Downloads. If you click onto that and go into it, you will see EPUB formats and also word formats of the module materials which have been formatted for screen readers.

I don't know if a lot of people know this, but you can take those EPUBs and pop them into iBooks or Google Books and use the built in narration software to have your module materials read to you completely free of charge. So a little study hack for you there. If you want to listen to your module materials. Also great, as well, switch the radio off if you're driving to work in the morning. Half an hour of study.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That was fantastic. That was such a brilliant, detailed answer there, Matt, given the fact I gave you no warning whatsoever I was going to come to you then.

[LAUGHTER]

So that was really good. So, I mean, people might not know what the student support team means. We mentioned it earlier in terms of if potentially due to difficulties, which we really hope doesn't happen. Can you just give students a little bit more of an insight about what the student support team does, so that our brand new students get a bit of an idea?

MATT FIDDLER: Yeah, absolutely. So we are here to support you on your study journey starting out, or if you're returning back to study with us. We offer information, advice, and guidance on your study. We're here to help you solve any barriers to study that you might be experiencing. If you're not sure about what to do next on your study journey, if you finish your module, we can help you as well.

If you've got a particular career goal in mind, for example, have you checked your qualification to make sure that it's the right qualification for your career goals? So we can start to explore that with you. If you need to go a bit more in depth, as well, we would refer you on to our careers service. But, mainly, we deal with situations where students have hit a bump in the road on their study.

Because six years, it's a long time. Life is going to get in the way. Something is going to come up. No study journey is perfect. I myself started studying with the OU in 2016, and it's been a roller coaster up and down. And I'm starting out again on a new qualification this year, studying law, which is well outside of my comfort zone.

Really excited, slightly nervous, because Science TMAs are great because there's an answer, and you can work it out, and you can check it. There's not an answer for something like law or business. It's your argument. So we'll see how that goes. [LAUGHS]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And that's the thing, isn't it? There's so much information out there. There's lots of people that are available to support. So John was the introduction about welcoming in the first place, talked about study skills, talked about open access. I had Christine talking about what a tutor can do, and the tutor was the first line. I will talk to Jessica later, who is part of the Careers and Employability Service. And she'll give all sorts of ideas about how they can help.

But the student support team are sort of-- it's a little bit sad sometimes, isn't it, Matt, that often you only get to talk to people when things have gone wrong. But you don't only want to talk to people when things have gone wrong, do you?

MATT FIDDLER: No. I mean, I had someone-- we've got a number of different ways you can contact us. So if you hit your student support team, you'll get a link of all the different ways you can get in touch with us. You can email us if you don't want to talk on the phone and tell us that in your email if you don't want us to call you. Email only, please. We'll do that for you.

There's web chat, or there's the good old fashioned contact numbers, as well. A great story I had was a student on a maths module had got in touch with me, just sort of one day before the exam. And they were saying, I can't do this. I don't feel prepared for my examination. I'm really struggling. I want to cancel my module.

And had a look, and they'd done really well in their assignments. So we had a little bit of a chat about it, about how they were feeling. I encouraged them to go and take the exam. And I told them, I said, please come back once you get your result for your examination and tell me how you got on. You can send an email in for attention of Matt, and it'll find its way to me and. This student did, and she got an 87. She achieved a distinction on her examination—

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic.

MATT FIDDLER: --which was a fantastic outcome for that student.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good.

MATT FIDDLER: But She was this close to packing up and going home because of her nerves. So we're not always here when there's a problem. Sometimes if you just need a bit of a boost, if something's impacting you, if you're not feeling great about your studies or something else, come and talk to us. We will help you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you, Matt. That's really helpful. Now, my next guest, I'm going to talk to Tracey next, who is a student, was actually one of my students last year. And, actually, some of the things Matt was just talking about reminded me of you, Tracey. Because I remember you emailing me saying, oh, things are going wrong. I don't like this. I don't know things.

But I want to take it back. Now, I'm not doing this in a negative way. Tracey got through well. It was fantastic. And she's carrying on in her study. But lots of people are saying, what do we do at this stage, and they're really, really worried. As somebody who's a continuing student, who's gone through and had these sort of beginning nerves, what would you say to other students to do at this point, Tracey?

TRACEY YOUNG: I think like Christina said really, Isabella, to find your feet, get confident with that home page, click around, see where things are, and check out your dates. Dates are quite important, I think, when you can see what's coming up before Christmas. I think to take small little chunks of time is quite useful, not to be distracted by what's going to come up in summer. Because that can be quite daunting. So, yeah, small chunks is quite handy.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Right. That's really helpful, because I think that's something often. We sort of touched on it earlier about you think you need to know everything immediately, don't you. But it isn't. You've taken things-- and this idea of working through systematically, and the idea of the instructions and actually reading through things-- so I on some of the modules you've done, Tracey, there were things like primers, weren't there? How did you find those? How did they help you?

TRACEY YOUNG: The primers are quite useful, daunting perhaps to start with. But I think to have bookmarked it, to know that it's there, and also that might back up your dummy TMA, which I think are very useful. I've not done them on every course. But to do it with yourself last year was perfect. Because everything that we needed to do in that time, whether it was to upload a picture, to use an Excel



document and create a graph, it was all just really good practise. Any problems ironed out from the beginning. So definitely hit those.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. So that's the sort of-- the. Making use of the information just so everybody knows, I will come back to Matt for any of the specific questions a bit later. But I really wanted to bring Tracey in because it was sort of people are worried. And, Tracey, you're a student face. You are real, aren't you? You are a real student.

TRACEY YOUNG: [LAUGHS] Yes. Yeah, I've been here since 2019, did an Access course. And I did initially want to go to a red brick, as well. I wanted to be a speech therapist. I really didn't think that was going to work three years away from home. So Open Uni seemed the ideal place to come, and been doing the Health Sciences ever since.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. And I know some of the things when you were one of my allocated students, we talked a bit about planning, didn't we, getting yourself a space. So John was talking about carving out your place. And I know some students at home were talking about planning. What do you do particularly that helps yourself in terms of planning or preparing yourself?

TRACEY YOUNG: I do like those dates, to have dates up on the wall so you can see what's coming, to get your stationery and organised, whether you're going to use books, whether it's going to be your online files. I'm a bit old school. I do like my A4 binders, which takes me back to my college days. I know where things are. If there's no internet, I can go back to my notes. And your stationery highlighters are useful. I know Isabella's a fan of the Post-It note. Plenty of Post-It notes are handy, too.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [LAUGHS] Yeah. And everybody at home, you'll see we're asking this question. How are you planning to take notes for study? Is it in a book? Is it online, using an app, using Post-Its? Tracey mentioned she has binders. So what do you do? Do you have a different binder for each module or do you have a different binder for different topics? How do you organise yourself, Tracey?

TRACEY YOUNG: Yeah. Last year, doing the two, I did Mental Health and the Biology with Yourself-- two very different subjects, very different binders, different areas. It looks different when you log back on. To keep those really separate was helpful, especially when it came to the revision for the Biology. You knew where your stuff was.

And I think, like John said, to have that study area as a constant. I've recently just changed around my room and it's a bit of a nightmare all crumbs where has it gone then last year everything was so much easier. You really can't waste time going to find stuff. That being constant is really helpful.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I'm probably not a good example of that. Because I'm in my front room, which is where I work in the winter or when it's not so nice. But I take my laptop around in the garden in the summer. So it's fine. Again, we're flexible.

Nobody's going to tell you you have to sit at a desk from 9:00 till 5:00 or from 8:00 PM till 10:00 PM. It's about finding your own way. So, actually on that point, when did you find you studied the best, Tracey? Were you able to iron out a time that worked for you?

TRACEY YOUNG: Yeah. I think ironing out that space-- I think people have said before, if you're open with your studying-- I do voluntary work. And last year, the Health Sciences sort of crossed over into my voluntary work. We were studying eyesight, and someone at the cafe where I volunteer had an eye problem. So you felt like it was a bit more real. And, coincidentally, those things sort of did crop up. Oh, guess what I was studying at the weekend.

But, yeah, weekend study-- initially, when I started, I was childminding as well. So working during the week wasn't going to be an option. And my children at home-- well, my own children got used to it. I was away upstairs studying. And I think, like John said earlier, you become that motivational person not just for yourself, but for your children. So my daughter was studying at the same time, as well. But, yeah, you do have to be quite strict, put your phone out of the room, turn off any distractions to really crack on.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think that's a good thing. And I know for myself I have to remember that. And I have to mute my phone and close the case so I don't feel tempted to go off and look at what the strong men are doing or anything like that, or look up nice pictures of cats or chocolate or things. But it's fine. You have your little breaks, have your little treats. Because it's good to reward yourself, isn't it, Tracey? What was your favourite reward when you were studying?

TRACEY YOUNG: Probably cheese.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [LAUGHS] Oh, fantastic. A good piece of strong-- oh, strong goat's cheese. Oh, that would be nice.

TRACEY YOUNG: Mm-hmm. I know you're a fan of the dark chocolate, but was cheese. Just, all right, get this done, then you can go and play your-- I like Wordle-- go and do your word game—

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah?

TRACEY YOUNG: --zone out for 10 minutes, have a coffee, and go back to it. Yeah, definitely treats.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. So I know we've got lots of best tips, so we're going to come to Heidi now. So what kind of tips-- how are people doing notes then, Heidi, and what kind of tips are being shared in the chat?

HEIDI: You've just caught me out. Because you were talking about having a snack then, and I just had a quick bite of my snack. So I do apologise for everyone. That was really unexpected. Yeah, people talk about their note taking. So Sally says, "I'm old fashioned. I have a fountain pen and paper, as writing things helps me learn and remember." And Henrietta says, "In a book or a diary, so old school here."

And then Sophie is feeling a bit apprehensive in the chat, so lots of people offering lots of reassurance for Sophie. I really like this comment from Emma. It says, "Level 1 is about getting through uncomfortable. Your actual grade doesn't count towards your final grade. You just need to get over the 40% hurdle, so not as frightening while you get used to study." And I thought that was a really nice way of framing it, just saying that first year is about really acclimatising yourself. Don't put tonnes of pressure on yourself. Everything's going to be fine.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think that's an important thing, isn't it. Again, it's going back to this, do you need to know everything at the start. And I think people come in and they go, what do I need to do? Have I done everything? Well, actually, you don't have to do everything immediately. And I think if I come back to Tracey now, because when we were talking about this, when we talked about it in tutorials, when you were studying alongside me and things, what would you say would be the best tip about either not worrying yourself or making sure you start out well, if that makes sense? Two-part question there.

TRACEY YOUNG: I certainly don't want to be overwhelmed, not to be too daunted. And I think that Heidi just said, remember what you need to do to pass. And I'll be quite honest. When I'd see what was in the TMA, to really focus on not just those answers but around that topic, so you can bulk out, say, an essay. But if I knew a topic was an essay topic, like we wrote about fat last year in the diet, my notes were extra, extra neat and tidy, and maybe did some work on the side as I went along. So just ease that little pressure. But, no, you can't remember everything.

ISABELLA HENMAN: John mentioned about strategic learning, about something that the university does. It's not just about memorising everything. Is it? It's about actually doing things-- actually, I can see Christine's got something she really wants to add now. So, Christine, what would you like to add from your experiences as a tutor?

CHRISTINE HEADING: So just by way of explanation, the OU is like most organisations, full of three letter acronyms. And Tracey just introduced us to one, the TMA. TMA is a Tutor Marked Assessment or Assignment, I forget which-- Tutor Marked Assessment. And these are continuous assessments that students have to do during the presentation. So there may be, say, five of those a year or something like that, but that's what she's talking about.

But there are a splendid number of three letter acronyms, or TLAs, if you like to call them that. So there you go. And while I'm here, can I just say one other clarification relevant to what has been said earlier? There are two websites that brand new students need to be familiar with at this stage, or should I say they really want to get familiar with. One of them is Student Home, which is the one that gives an overview of all their study.

The other is their module website. And they do need to make sure they've found both. Probably, the Student Home page, after the first week or two, they will be using much less and just as a reference source from time to time. But at this stage they need to look at two. Because I have had students who have only found one and not the other.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. That is actually a very good point. Thank you, Christine. You're pulling me up on my job because I'm forgetting to do these things. And it's the really lovely thing about being part of the OU, actually, and it makes you feel part of a happy little club because we have all this terminology. And all of you that are watching and are thinking I'm not going to get used to it, it becomes second nature. You get all this terminology and you get used to it, isn't it. Isn't it-- that was awful grammar. I do apologise. [LAUGHS] But you get used to the terminology. But, yeah, TMA-- you'll find those. Student Home, Module Home-- so the Student Home is when you first log in, then your module website, which is in the middle. There's the Student Home Health Centre, which when I come back to Matt will talk a little bit about, and there's different things now.

I just wanted to finish up with Tracey before I go back to Matt. And, Tracey, I know when we were talking when we were preparing for this, you were talking about confidence and whether or not you felt you did or didn't. Now, what did you want to say to people that are starting out about confidence overall?

TRACEY YOUNG: Yeah. Yeah, it's very difficult to have that sort of confidence in yourself. But looking at how far I've come, when I went to think back to the beginning, I sort of wished I'd relaxed a little bit more now, sort of enjoyed it a little bit more now.

You can do that piece of work, send it in. That's progress in itself. And then you've got that chance to improve. But, yeah, and that's where your tutor group, I think, can come in. If you're all doing the same work at the same time, if you've engaged with those forums, that can be quite helpful.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I think it's something that some people might not be used to, talking in a forum in a tutor group. And, again, this is different terminology, isn't it? So it depends on your module. You may have some kind of a module wide forum, which is for everybody doing the module. You may have topic ones. You may have a cluster forum, which is a number of different tutor groups together. And you may have a tutor group forum.

So I know, particularly in Human Biology, which is the module that you studied alongside me, Tracey, there was a tutor group forum for that, wasn't it. And there was some quite supportive discussions at different points in there, wasn't there?

TRACEY YOUNG: Yeah. Yeah. Those evenings were lovely, especially sort of over the winter, to connect with people. You'd recognise people's names, see yourself and the other tutors, sort of bring out my notes, have a little refresh, and then you can engage with what the tutors want to put out there, especially if it's topics that you might have struggled with.

I had a lot of light bulb moments especially with different things. And would sort of email the tutor that had run that evening. So that really helped me. Some of the terminology might have not been in the content, but you've picked it up sort of more face-to-face. And, yeah, that really did help with my essays.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. As I said before, some students study with the university because they like a distance university and they're not so happy studying with others. But other people, there are people out there. Student Hub Live overall, we're the community. I didn't explain at the start. It's in our advertising, but we're completely across university, and we are there for building community and building study skills, those important study skills that John mentioned at the start. We have a lot of different workshops.

So this is part of our Freshers session, so we have online workshops and broadcasts. So this is Freshers. There's another Freshers session tomorrow, Being a Great OU Student. Then we've got our Access special one on Thursday. And then we've got a social on Friday evening. We've also got the Making the Most of your Tutor and Tutorials, another dedicated live broadcast next week. And we have a number of different online workshops on different things-- essay planning, academic writing, note taking. Resilience, I did last week. We have sessions for carers. We have sessions for the neurodiverse community. We have all sorts of things there. So thank you. It's been lovely talking to you, Tracey, today. So I'm going to come to Heidi next, who Heidi is going to give us some of the questions that have been coming in for Matt, so that we can prepare Matt a little bit more for some of the questions. So what kind of questions have been coming in, Heidi?

HEIDI: Yeah. So we've got a couple of questions that haven't been answered so far, so one from Debbie. "Will there be subtitles or closed captions available during tutorials," because Debbie has hearing loss. And Sally has asked, "Is it student support that offer the personal learning advisors?" Sally says that she's got one and he has really helped her. So it might be great if we could provide a bit more info on those advisors for our students.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK. I can answer the ones about captions first, because I think I possibly know a little bit more about that than Matt. So our online tutorials are all run through Adobe Connect, which is a software the university uses. Closed captions are now available in those rooms automatically. So it's a bit of an envisage this at the moment, but there is a computing guide. So there's a little button that says CC at the top, and you can click on that. And there are live closed captions that will come, and they'll just show for you. Obviously, they're live and they're the system doing it, so it's not 100% perfect. It's a little bit like Teletext used to be, once upon a time, if you have subtitles on computer. But, actually, is there anything else you can add to that, Matt, about support for students with hearing challenges?

MATT FIDDLER: So, yeah, there should be a recording of the tutorials which is made available. And those always have subtitles and captions on them, as well. But if you ever need an adjustment to something like a tutorial or an assessment because of a health condition, specific learning difficulty, or anything else that you've chosen to share with us, get in touch with either your tutor in the first instance or the student support team. And let us know what you need and how we can support you. We might not be able to do it exactly how you want it, but there is normally an option that we've got to help support you with a reasonable adjustment. To give an example, I had a student contact me one time with regards to an assessment. They were really concerned as there was an audio component of the assessment. They had to record a five minute presentation. This particular student had a stutter and a language difficulty. The learning outcome was to assess the audio assessment. So I contacted the module team, who very kindly agreed that the student could produce a written piece with a 30-second recorded summary. So they were still meeting that learning outcome. They still had to do a little bit of the recording. But they were able to access an alternative form of assessment for them. So if you find anything that pops up in

your studies that is concerning you or might be a barrier, reach out and ask the question. So we won't know what you need unless you come and tell us.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, lovely. And the other question was about the personal learning advisor service. I'm not sure I've come across it. I've attended training about it. Is that something that the student support team are the avenue for or is that somewhere else, Matt?

MATT FIDDLER: No. You'd be contacted separately about the PLA service. So they are fantastic, but if you are eligible for a PLA then you'll be contacted by the service automatically. So you don't need to worry about that. If you have a registered health condition, disability, specific learning difficulty, or any of those things, then you might be eligible for a non-medical helper through Disabled Students Allowance, as well.

That's the kind of thing in the student support team that we can signpost you to. So if you do have a condition which might impact your learning and you need some extra support in the form of a helper, you might be able to access it through the DSA service, which I believe is operated by Student Finance England. But that's a great question. You're all testing the boundaries of my knowledge today.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, that's great. Yes. Because I think from what I've heard of the PLA service, it's not something that students can specifically request. As Matt was saying, you can request certain adjustments, but it's not that everybody's automatically given a mentor.

In some subject areas, in some modules, there might be mentors. There may be study buddies. There may be supportive people. So do look out for that, because it might become obvious. And you can always ask and see about that. Now, there's a couple of other questions that have come in.

Sarah Jane's saying, "If I was to get an ADHD diagnosis during my studying, do I need to let you know? And is there any more support from the OU for that?" Matt, what would you say for Sarah Jane about that?

MATT FIDDLER: Yes, absolutely. So please do share that with us. If you go to the Help Centre on Student Home and type "disability support" into the search bar there, you'll see what support is available from the Open University. And this can be things like advanced handouts for tutorial slides and things like that, or alternative arrangements for examinations.

I'm on the team which deals with a lot of those for all modules, as well. So we can offer things such as rest breaks or additional working time, if you've got a specific condition which is going to impact your ability to sit the examination. Sometimes students get a little bit nervous. I'll phone them up to ask them about it like, oh, I don't want any special treatment.

That's the wrong way to think about it. It's about levelling the playing field. It's to make the examinations equitable for everyone. So if you've got an exam and you can't sit down for longer than an hour without being in discomfort, then that's something we need to know about. So please reach out to us in the student support team. We also have a dedicated disability support team, as well. So their contact details are on the Student Home also.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK. And there's other questions coming in with some specific things about whether things are recorded or not. So, tutorials, it will say if they are recorded. Most tutorials are, but in some modules there will be ones that aren't recorded. So it will be say some induction sessions, they are. I think lots of people, because some modules have got sort of pre-module start things at the moment, haven't they, Matt, sort of inductions and so on.

So I think probably the best advice there is have a look what it says. It will tell you whether it's been recorded. And then you can get the information. Because some students-- everybody's so enthusiastic at the moment. But the reality is, the modules don't start until the 30th of September or the 7th of October. So you're very soon already, but it's OK. You're fine. You don't have to do everything so far.

So that's been great, Matt. If there's any more questions I will come to you. But I wanted to come to the lovely Jessica. And Jessica is from our Careers and Employability Service. Now, we touched on careers earlier. And there are some people that might be going, I don't really know what the university offers. And it might be that some people are studying for career and employment purposes, and might not. So, Jessica, can you give us a little bit of an oversight about what does your department offer?

JESSICA MCKENNA: OK, yeah. No problem. So I suppose in terms of what we offer-- we offer support to all students that are registered on a qualification, and throughout your Open University studying, up to three years afterwards. And there's a different resources that can go through in a bit more detail that I'll specifically kind of point you towards.

But I suppose, just to let you know that we are here, and we're here to encourage and support you in navigating your career goals and discovering what your career needs are, because sometimes that can be quite daunting. And as well as that, even if you're not sure at all, just get in touch with us and we can see what we can explore in terms of encouraging you to engage with some of our resources.

And also we've noticed that, from data and feedback from students, that actually the students that have got in touch from the very early stages have actually had more of a motivation for actually continuing and successfully completing their qualification. So it can be really useful just to get in touch. And we can discuss how to navigate your future.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Because there's a couple of questions for people-- so you'll see we've got the ticker question, which is the one that's going across the bottom, so what are your motivations for study. And you can tell us about that in the chat. And you'll also see that we've got a widget at the moment, which is are you studying for career purposes or for interest. Because we've got people from all sorts of different places.

Now, I know you've got a number of places that people can look for information, Jessica. And I know we've got some images to try and illustrate these for us. So if you would like to talk us through what kind of things we can offer, and we'll try and show people the relevant pictures at the right points.

JESSICA MCKENNA: Yeah, no problem. So we do offer one-to-one support. So that can be by email, if you prefer, or you do have the option of phone call or video call support through our consultations. There's two different types. So we've got an information and advice appointment, which would be around 20 minutes with one of our employability advisors. And that's kind of a starting point conversation, and we

could look at some resources to get you started in terms of particular careers you're interested in or just thinking about your study goals, as well.

We have 45-minute consultations, as well, that we could refer you on to after a 20-minute appointment. Or, alternatively, there is the option to just book in a 45-minute appointment. So we're just going to show you an image of the Opportunity Hub, which is where you would look to book your appointment.

Now, at the moment as a new student, if you've not yet started your module you've got that all coming up. You won't actually be able to access Opportunity Hub until five days into the-- sorry-- until your modules start. Falling over my words there. But as soon as you do gain access, you'll be able to view that image that we've just seen there. And that does specify the different types of appointments, and you can check in terms of the availability.

But even if you can't log in at the moment to Opportunity Hub, would advise still getting in touch with us. Because, obviously, then we can look at booking in a manual appointment and still getting that conversation going prior to you starting the module if you wish to. OK? And the other resources we've got, we've got online employer panel events, employer showcases. We've got general career skills events. So if you're looking at your CV, or your interview skills, or you want to learn how to network, we've got a number of events that you can book onto, some of which can be recorded. So they can be quite useful to dip into when you feel ready. And we also have Careers Express, which is a newsletter that will be sent out that you can subscribe to. And that highlights some of the main resources and events coming up. And then we've also got our Careers page, which I think we have an image of, as well. So at the very top of your Student Home page you can access the Careers tab. And you can view the different resources that we have to offer. And this is one of our beginning resources to discover how to plan your career as an initial starting point.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. That's great. So there's lots of things. So some of it is a-- if you're just starting out, if you're not sure what you want to do, we've got lots of information there. And then another one is a bit of a reminder that everybody's really enthusiastic and wants to get going straight away. Don't worry if you can't see everything yet. Once your module starts, you'll be able to, same as with the module websites. You can't see it.

The widget should be ready to show. So let's see whether people are studying for employment or career purposes. OK. So that's very interesting if you want to show that. So lots and lots of people, career purposes. But there's also a fair number for interest. And I think it's really that sort of thing, is there's a spread, and you're called the Careers and Employability Services.

Now, I just want to talk a little bit about employability skills which, again, it's one of these terms, like Christine pulled me up earlier on using terms. When we talk about employability skills, what does that mean, Jessica? Tell the people that are new what that means.

JESSICA MCKENNA: So I suppose it's not to narrow it down to just kind of your employment history. It's also just to look at your general learning and skills that you've developed, the knowledge you've developed through your study, work, and personal experience. That can be really valuable to particular roles.

So, for example, it may be that you're looking to become a counsellor, so empathy and active listening skills will be vital. And if you've got your own personal experience of undergoing Counselling services and



seeing the benefit of it, or seeing a lack of support, then it may be something that motivates you in order to go into. So what we can do is just discuss those employability skills and help you recognise those in yourself.

We do have a really good event that's coming up, actually, called the Careers Fest. And once you get access to Opportunity Hub, do see if you can book on to any of the events that come up. So that's due to take place the 7th to the 9th of November. It's an online festival, and this year is focusing on supporting your career confidence, navigating your career pathway, and addressing any barriers or challenges that might come up when you're trying to seek different opportunities. So we're very much aware that can sometimes be a reason for people not feeling as comfortable or confident going to apply for roles. So, yeah, feel free to get in touch.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Yeah, that's lovely. Because I think that knowing what the employability skills are, what people are looking for, what you can do-- as John said earlier about this, you've got things that you bring from life, and actually recognising them in their work. So, thank you. That's been really helpful, Jessica. There will be more information. There's links on the event page.

And just to remind people, if they want to find information about the Careers Employability Service, it's at the top in the Student Home Help Centre and they start typing Careers. Is that the best place, you would say?

JESSICA MCKENNA: You can do that, or at the very top there should be a Careers tab, as well, that you can click onto. So, yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Lovely. Thank you very much. So I'm going to come to Heidi now, because I know we've got lots of different questions that are coming in in all sorts of things. So, Heidi, what have people have been asking about? What have people been sharing?

HEIDI: So much. So many people sharing about the motivation behind starting their studies, so I might just pick up on a couple of those. And then I've got a question, as well. So Ian, "My motivation for study is to expand my mind and learn about the universe." I love that. Jane, "I want to show my additional needs children that you can get a degree without needing to go away from home, and you can learn at any age." Sarah Jane, "I've always been interested in the brain and how it works," she's a psychology student, "And it has also cemented this since my foster boys moved in. It motivates me to also help other children like them in the future with a change of career." Olivia says, "Getting a better job and fulfilling my dream of getting a higher education," which is brilliant.

Henrietta, "I'm studying politics because I'm obsessed with it. But I'm a musician, too, so it's a balance of interest and career." And then Henrietta's comment kicked off a really interesting conversation in the chat, lots of people saying, oh, I play an instrument, and I do this, and I'm a singer, which is great. Andy says, "My motivation is to prove to myself that I'm making progress in my recovery after my stroke." And in terms of the question, so Ashley says, "Do you offer any work experience placements?"

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. So I think there's quite a few questions for Jessica here. So that's the first one. So if you do that one, Jessica, do you have any advice for people or information about work experience?

JESSICA MCKENNA: Yeah. So we wouldn't, say, go out and look for the work experience for you. But we can certainly point you towards resources to find those work experience opportunities, especially if it's related to specific subject areas. And sometimes it can be really hard and overwhelming to actually get all that information together. So we can at least give you a starting point.

And we also have one I've mentioned, the Opportunity Hub. Our employer engagement and also employability advisors upload work experience, internships, paid experience, all sorts of things, basically, that you can have a look at. And we update it weekly. So if there's not something up there at the moment that's suitable, then have a look the next week and you may find that there are opportunities there. Again, with work experience, sometimes it can be quite difficult to even approach that. So, again, that's a conversation we can have about thinking about techniques of how to approach work experience and looking for those.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And volunteering-- does Opportunity Hub include information about volunteering?

JESSICA MCKENNA: Yes, it does, and also, Just Do It-- that's another big website. But, again, if you're from a particular nation, there may be more suitable options. So, again, if that's not going to give you the local opportunities that you're looking for, get in touch.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK. And orally wanted to know about freelance opportunities. Is there any information on how to get into particular freelance work or get experience for that?

JESSICA MCKENNA: Yeah. So what we'd probably say in those situations is to definitely have a consultation just because there's so many different types of freelancing roles. At least then we can discuss what specific role you would like to freelance in and, I suppose, explore then what's going to suit your lifestyle and what you're looking for.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. And I think Matt's got something that he can add there, as well. The super supportive Matt, waving at me.

MATT FIDDLER: Yes. Sorry, just piggybacking on the back of this. I know it's mainly a careers thing. But I just wanted to make all the students who are on a degree. registered for a qualification with us at the moment-- throughout your studies you can claim a certificate of higher education, once you complete stage 1, and a diploma of higher education when you complete stage 2.

And now, these are a couple of tiers above A-levels in terms of where they sit in the qualification structure in the UK. So if you're looking to change your career, and you're studying for career purposes, and you need an entry into maybe an entry level in the field that you're looking to move into, these can be some early access opportunities for you.

And you just contact us in the student support team once you've finished each stage and we'll send you the certificate. And it's a full qualification, and there's no charge for it, so a little motivation, as well. Put it on your wall in your study area that we discussed earlier.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Yeah. That's a really good thing to mention again, isn't it, because part of that employability-- and I'll come back to Jessica. I've got another question for you, as well. But it's useful to know that we call them-- I've forgotten what they call them. There the stages. What do you call them, Matt, the something or other.

MATT FIDDLER: Milestone qualifications.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Milestones. That's it. Just as you came on, I got the word. Yeah. Milestone. But it's actually really useful because, again, it's mapping those. In Jessica's team they can help you work out how you demonstrate the employability skills, and so on. And we've got another question about FutureLearn for you, Jessica.

Is it part of the OU career service? And how do you actually use it? So Ellie said, "It has been a link on previous modules. But it just shows a cycle map, but no information on how to use it." Could you give us a little bit of information about that?

JESSICA MCKENNA: So FutureLearn is slightly separate and not really within my-- So

ISABELLA HENMAN: FutureYou. FutureYou, not FutureLearn.

JESSICA MCKENNA: Oh, sorry.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That's OK.

JESSICA MCKENNA: FutureYou, yes. So certain modules, we do have FutureYou. Sorry about that. Yes. [LAUGHS] So on your student Home Page-- I think it's through your subject website, actually, that you can access FutureYou. It's usually something that is prompted for you to have a look at the later stages of your module. And it's a place where you can reflect on your study, and the skills, and employability skills that you've developed. And that can be a really good log, especially if you're trying to develop your own personal portfolio.

What I would recommend, though, is to also have a copy yourself, just in case once you've finished your study and if you don't have access anymore to that FutureYou, that you do have a copy of it, just so that if you do want to use it for evidence that you have that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely.

JESSICA MCKENNA: But, no, it might be that it becomes more relevant later on in your study.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think because I've known-- when I've looked at FutureYou-- sorry, and I do apologise if I said FutureLearn. That's a completely different—

JESSICA MCKENNA: That's all right.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: FutureYou-- I think it's themed to different modules. So sometimes it depends on the module quite how much of it you can see. Now, we're almost out of time. So what I wanted to do is get all of my guests-- I'm going to give you a bit of a warning-- your little bit of your snappy take home message for everybody. So I'm going to come to you first, Heidi. So what's your take home message for everybody at home that you'd like them to know about starting off?

HEIDI: That this is an amazing adventure, and I know that it's scary. But the reward that come with OU study will surpass your wildest expectations. And, trust me, I've been there, I've done it. And the development that you will find in you as an individual is astounding. So you're brave, you're courageous, and we're all in this together.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you, Heidi. That's great. So what about you, John? What would you like to give your take home message to everybody at home?

JOHN BUTCHER: I think allow yourselves to be excited about the studies you're about to embark on. And be open to being transformed. That's the most amazing thing that you can do. By engaging with higher education, you'll be a different person when you've finished it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Christine, what would you want to say?

CHRISTINE HEADING: I think I would like to echo that, actually. I think to be open minded, I think, is really important. Everybody brings some preconceived ideas, and interests, and priorities, and so on. And that's understandable. But come with an open mind, and be prepared to hear other perspectives, learn about other things, and wash away all the biases you may have.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. And, Tracey, what would be your take home message?

TRACEY YOUNG: Mine is about continuing the motivation, what people are probably feeling right now. So when it gets into the winter, when things might get slightly trickier, you might doubt yourself, just remind yourself of why you're here, what's brought you here today, what's going to keep you here until May, and just remember that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Matt, what would be your take home message?

MATT FIDDLER: It's my golden rule for OU study, and it's keep in touch. Tell us what you need, what's going wrong, what's going well. We want to hear the great stories as well as the not so great, as well. Come and talk to us. We're here to help you succeed.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. And, Jessica, what would be your final take home message?

JESSICA MCKENNA: Very similar to Matt, I would be saying please do get in touch with our career support service. We're here to support and empower you to realise your true potential, and so that you can navigate your future goals. So please get in touch.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, everybody. So it's been great to talk to everybody today. Thank you, everybody, for your input. And thank you, everybody at home, for all of your chat. I know you've kept Heidi with so much to do, and I've been trying to keep on top of all the things that have been coming through to you. So, hopefully, we've given you a bit of inspiration, we've been able to answer some of your questions, we've given you some things.

We're back tomorrow for Being a Great OU Student, and then the Access Freshers thing on Thursday. We do have feedback. We always like feedback on our sessions, so we've got that and in the chat at the moment. Then there should be a feedback form. But it's been lovely to see everybody today, and hopefully see you again all tomorrow. So bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]