Different Perspectives: Exploring the big questions from different points of view — 24 May 2021

KAREN FOLEY: Good morning, everybody. And welcome to Student Hub Live. I'm really looking forward to this very special event today, "Different Perspectives: Exploring Big Questions from Different Points of View." My name is Karen Foley. And I'm a lecturer at the Open University. And I'm the presenter also today at Student Hub Live, the OU's online platform for academic community. And a big welcome to everybody out there. I know you're all taking your seats in the chat and getting to know each other, filling in our map to let us know where you are, what you're doing, et cetera.

I'm in West Wales at the moment. It is pouring with rain. My dogs are under the table, behaving for now, as they may be. But who knows what could happen in the next phase of the time that we have today together?

I'm joined by a really fabulous panel today in our virtual studio. And we also have some lovely people who are on the hot desk, who are going to collate all of your feedback and bring them to us as we have a big discussion around four really important hot topics. So on our panel today, I'm joined by Martin Weller, John Baxter, George Curry, and Rehana Awan. And I'm going to ask each of them to say hello and let a little bit about some of the lenses that they're going to approach today's conversation because one thing that we have decided is that the last year has taught us so many different things. And even now, it is so much more important that we bring these different interdisciplinary aspects to solving some of these big complex questions that we're going to start to get to grips with today.

So first, if I could come to you, Martin, how are you? And what can you tell our audience today about what you're bringing to our discussion?

MARTIN WELLER: Hi. I'm good. Hi, Karen. Hi, everyone. It's good to be here. I'm in Cardiff. So I'm just east of Karen. So I expect I'll be getting your rain quite soon. I'm a professor of education technology at the Open University. I've been at the OU for 26 years, so still a newbie in OU terms. So my main interest is in educational technology. I'm also the chair of the Open Programme.

And it's been interesting over the past year, and the pandemic in my field because suddenly, education technology was front and centre. So all these other universities had to go online. I've been doing lots of talks about, what can we learn from the Open University about doing online education? So that's been a really interesting thing from the pandemic. And so what I'll be talking about today will be around technology and that. So it's good to be here.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you. We're very delighted that you could join us. John, would you like to say hello?

JOHN BAXTER: Hi. I'm happy to be here. I'm sitting on the edge of the Peak District in Glossop. It's sunny here. So we haven't got any rain yet. I started life as a chemist. But for many years, I've been involved in interdisciplinary studies. I'm currently the qualification director for the Open degree. Recently I've been thinking about what's popularly called wicked problems, which are interdisciplinary problems which are difficult to solve. And the difficulties that some educational institutions sometimes have in teaching interdisciplinarity and bringing together disparate subjects. So today's talk is right up my street.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you very much, John. George, would you like to say hello next?

GEORGE CURRY: I certainly would. Yes, hello. I'm George Curry. I'm in Hertfordshire today. And it's, I'm going to say sunny, but I don't think it's going to last, to be honest, because there's some dark clouds out there. I too have worked for the OU for 26 years, so newbie as well, Martin. I've done my undergraduate degree and my masters as an OU student. So I understand it from that perspective as well.
And currently I manage the OU's access provision. But I'm also co-chair of one of the modules in the Open Programme called 'Making Your Learning Count', which lets students not only choose to use credit that they've used - courses that they've done elsewhere towards credit in a qualification, but it lets students think about mixing a variety of different subjects together to really hone in on what interests them. And outside of work, I'm a musician and an actress. And so I will be coming to today's talk with an interest in the arts.
KAREN FOLEY: And if George doesn't mention Hamilton, I'll eat my hat.

That's guaranteed. And last but by no means least, we have Rehana. Rehana, would you like to say hello?
REHANA AWAN: Hello. So I'm Rehana Awan. And I'm in Reigate in Surrey. And at the moment, actually, the weather seems to be holding off. But hopefully the big rain cloud isn't going to open any minute now. And you won't hear lots of pitter-patter on the roof.
So I'm staff tutor for the Open Programme, which means that I look after the associate lecturers that work across the Programme, but also look after the student experience as well. And I come to it today as an interdisciplinarian myself. So my background - my first degree was in social sciences. So I did a combined honours degree. So I have history and politics. But I also did psychology and sociology.
And I think it just gives you that breadth and understanding. The breadth and understanding that you get gives you a broader understanding of some of these big questions that we're going to be looking at today. And I also am an OU student. So I really enjoy the idea of being on both sides of the fence. So really pleased to be here today. So thank you for having me.
KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, everyone. Gosh, if that's not a lot that we bring to the table to discuss, then I don't know what is. But we have lots of people talking on the hot desk. And we have Linda, Mary, and Jay, who are moderating the chat. Mary, can I come to you very briefly and see what people are talking about at home? And would you like to say hello? You've been very involved in organising this event, Mary. So what's happening down with you?
MARY KEYS: Hi, everyone. It's really nice to be here. This is my first Student Hub Live event. So I'm quite excited about it. So I look after the Open Programme, which includes also qualification manager for the Open degree. So this is really exciting to be able to see of all the discussions that are going on. And there's some great chat going on. People are engaging with the widgets. And they're getting to know each other. And there's some great people who are meeting up as well, who have realised that they're on the same courses, which is really good because it's great to be able to create that community for people. And people can interact and get to meet each other.
KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, Mary. And Linda and Jay, I'll invite you to say hello when we bring your discussions and contributions. But we must crack on because we've got an awful lot to cover today. So please fill in the widgets and the map. We've got these word clouds there, which need three things. Otherwise the computer says no. So if you can only think of one or two things, that's absolutely fine. But you need to then put a full stop or a cross or something in that box.

When you fill those word clouds in, you can then see what other people say. And we'd really like to use those as a way to generate some thought about some of the topics that we're going to discuss today. They're all very self-explanatory questions. So you can have a go filling those in, the map should be the most simple to do. And I hear that's populating very nicely. So we'll show you that in just a moment.
But let's go to our first big question of the day. And I'm hoping that you will join in the chat with us. So one of the things that we've been thinking about is around these whole ideas of the environment. And so I'm going to come to Rehana first. Sorry, I've just lost my actual big question. Let's see what the big question is that we've got. So we'd like to know from you at home, what are the three words that come to mind for environment? And then our question to frame the discussion is what impact has the pandemic had on the environment?
And we're looking at that in both positive and negative terms. So we're all going to offer our different lenses and contribute aspects to that. But Rehana, if I could ask you to lead on this particular one, what are your thoughts on the impacts on environment of what's been going on?
REHANA AWAN: Thank you. So I think the environment has - with the pandemic, we've seen huge changes. There are about three billion people across the world that all went into lockdown at the same time. So there had to be some impact on what was happening around us. And we started to see things - so we had restrictions in movement. So that meant that activities stopped, so shopping and driving. And this all had a huge positive impact on things like air pollution. So there was a reduction in air pollution. There's been a reduction in some waste that we've been emitting from our homes. There's been a reduced pressure on tourist destinations. So we saw images of London, where there just weren't people. And of course, if people aren't flying, that's a reduction in air pollution. And we also saw water pollution as well reduced significantly. People started to shop locally. So people's buying and consuming habits changed.
But one of the things to think about is how sustainable is that? How long term is that impact? And also things like the impact on climate change - so in China, there was something like 50% reduction in greenhouse gases, which is absolutely incredible, if you think about that. But thinking about coming at it from different subject areas, we can start to unpick some of these items. So we can think about it in terms of geography, the way that people move. We can think about it in terms of are we going to impact on laws? Are things going to change politically because of the positive impact on the environment?
Having said that, there have been some negatives as well. And one of the things we've seen - I don't know about you - is our Amazon shopping went up probably about five-fold. But sometimes that would mean that we'd have maybe three drivers in one day coming to our house. So how can that be a better thing for the environment? Also the amount of packaging - my children would order some pens that would come in a huge box about this big with all of this polystyrene packaging, as well as the cardboard that went with it. So household waste suddenly increased.
And actually recycling started to decrease. So we can start to think about this from a sociological point of view, as well as the impact on society of the pandemic and of waste. So the increase in online shopping has really had a bit of a negative impact as well. So the other thing is thinking about PPE, the whole protective equipment that people have started to buy and the plastic masks and how we dispose of those. So there are lots of positives. But I think there are also some negatives. And really thinking about how has the pandemic affected how we think and feel about the environment, and how sustainable are those changes going to be, and how quickly are we just going to revert back? And one of the things that I think

you can really see a difference in since the easing of lockdown is the traffic. Again, very quickly, people are like, I'm going to walk everywhere. I'm just going to walk. And then suddenly, we were in a traffic here yesterday, which we haven't been in one for about a year. So are people just going to slip back into their old habits?

KAREN FOLEY: Interesting. So a lot there going on, Rehana. You've mentioned so many different things. And as Peter said, people have thought a lot more about locality. And some of the aspects that you're talking about are things that are very visible to us, like packaging, et cetera. But yet, it always depends on what we count and how we're counting it, doesn't it? Because one could argue that while there's been an increase in deliveries because we aren't able to go out shopping, equally by collating some of those from a better source of organisational perspective, means that we can be more economic in those sorts of terms. So is going out to the car or having one person bringing 20 packages - as sometimes happens in my household - is that more environmentally friendly?

But a lot of the things that you're talking about here are very visible and obvious. There are also some hidden aspects to the environment. And I think that streaming services are one thing that we were talking about the other day that personally, I've never even considered an environmental factor. George, you've been watching a lot of Netflix. What do you think?

GEORGE CURRY: I certainly have. And I'm not alone in that, have I? We know that Netflix consumption nearly doubled in 2019. And it's only gone on to increase more during the pandemic because as people didn't have a lot else to do. But did you know that watching one film on Netflix uses the same amount of energy as making 60 cups of tea and watching a half hour Programme on Netflix is the equivalent of driving 4 miles in terms of the energy used? So that's, as you say, a invisible cost. Do you think - you feel like you're not doing anything wrong just sitting on your sofa watching telly. But actually there are these massive servers, these massive buildings with banks and banks and banks of computing equipment, generating and using lots of energy allowing us to do that. So yeah, certainly a hidden environmental cost there.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And people are talking about the silence as well that we've had. I know Martin was talking about going to Cardiff. And I've seen some pictures lately about things resuming back to normal. But I remember seeing all those pictures of ghost towns. Let's take a look and see what everybody said at home when we asked about some of the questions around environment. And then perhaps somebody else would like to pick up on what our viewers think.

So here's our word cloud that we can see. So there's lots of things here, climate change being the most common, but there are also things about sustainability, nature, less commuting - so I wonder if anyone would like to pick up on some of those things, plastic, responsibility - so various outputs, and also as Rehana mentioned earlier, various behavioural changes. Martin, what do you think?

MARTIN WELLER: I think the point Rehana makes is about how much this will carry on post pandemic is really interesting. So lots of us were forced into being homeworkers, for instance, which reduces commuting. And I've seen some companies are putting pressure on people to come back to businesses, to come back to offices. And obviously offices themselves use lots of energy. But I think equally, we're going to see lots of people saying, oh, I actually quite like this homeworking thing. I don't want to go back to doing that commute.

So I think what we see over the next year or two, the outwash of the pandemic, if you like, will have a big impact. And it's not just so there will be a big environmental impact. But those things will be decided by

lots of other factors about how the new economy works out, what people's preferences are, where they want to work, and those kinds of things.
KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Linda, let's come to you because you're on our hot desk. And you haven't said hello yet. So could you just give us a nice hello and let us know what everyone at home is talking about?
LINDA ROBSON: Hi. Good morning, everyone. So I'm Linda Robson. I'm from the School of Engineering and Innovation. And I've been managing the chat this morning, along with Mary. And so one of the things that I particularly noticed was people talking about working from home improves the environment and potentially improves quality of life. But obviously, that's a two-edged sword. Some people have really enjoyed working from home. And others have found it really challenging. So that's a really interesting point to think about.
KAREN FOLEY: And one of the things we're going to be talking about a little bit later on is around mental health. And I think that's been one of the things that's been quite challenging to look at. So some of these things are quite easy but others, not so much. Rehana mentioned the issue of sustainability. And John, as we transcend into our next discussion, which is going to be around food security and sustainability, I wonder if you might just want to briefly touch on environment and sustainability, to neatly segue us into that next section?
JOHN BAXTER: Sustainability is usually defined as the ability to meet our needs in the present without affecting the needs of generations in the future. And it strikes me that a lot of these - you were talking earlier about invisible impacts. And a lot of these are what are called boundary problems. People talk about zero impact electric cars. But there's no such thing as a zero emission electric car.
But whenever I see that on the news, my fists clench and I bang the arms of the chair because it's not true. Because in building a car, in generating the electricity, somewhere there are some emissions. If you draw the boundary around the car itself as it's driving around, then perhaps you could argue there are no emissions. Although even that is debatable. But if you look at the way the car is made, the way the car is disposed of, where the electricity is produced, if you have a wider boundary in your focus, then actually you begin to see that actually there are emissions. There is no such thing as zero impact.
KAREN FOLEY: So it's where the impact is. And I think as Rehana was bringing up quite a different lens to your very scientific notion of what's emitted, how we count the various things, we can say, there's no right or wrong. Where we take, something has to give. So there's always this difference in priorities. How might that link - you mentioned some of these sort of wicked problems that you're trying to solve, John. How might that notion of those wicked problems relate to this idea of where our values lie? And I guess those values are going to change depending on policy and context. So they're probably not fixed either.
JOHN BAXTER: I think you're right. I think one of the issues for me is when I hear about homeworking and so on, is the question of what choices do people have? Haven't we become aware in this country during the crisis of our reliance on refuse disposal workers? They can't work from home. Or on emergency services in terms of medical practitioners, many of them can't work from home. So there are people in society that don't have the opportunity to work from home.
And so in a sense, stepping away from my scientific technological bias, perhaps, what about the issue of class? Social understanding, how society works, is part of the wicked problem. We can't solve the problem of the environment unless we understand that people are living different lives according to where they are situated in the world and where they're situated in our social structures.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And it's interesting you say that, John, because I would have expected from that very scientific notion, that you'd be more concerned with the various aspects that we had. And yet, you're talking on very different levels, which I think relates very much to the topic I wanted to start off with you, which is on food sustainability and this idea that despite having effectively enough food to fill the world's population, yet we have all of these underlying issues that mean that hunger and unsatisfaction are very common in particular areas.

So our question is about food sustainability here. And has the pandemic changed the way that we eat? And we've asked everybody at home if they could vote on our widgets - not vote, but fill those in - about three things that come to mind about the word food security and sustainability. John, can you give us a brief definition of what we mean by food security?

JOHN BAXTER: I'm going to read it out because it's an accepted definition, which has been produced by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. So it's quite a long definition. And it includes quite a lot of stuff. But it's basically saying food security is when everybody in the world can access the food they need to live a healthy, active life.

And it's a problem that has many complex parts because it's not just about producing enough food. The focus for food security many decades ago was about producing more and more food. Now we have to think about - we're more likely to think about how the food is produced and how the food is used. Is it nutritious? Is it is it accessible to people? So it's a complex, knotty, wicked problem, if you like. But food security is about people being able to access enough food to meet their needs.

KAREN FOLEY: And there are particular challenges in certain areas. Rather ironically, food security can be more of a challenge to those in rural areas, who are often farmers. That doesn't necessarily mean that there's a correlation, and that the farmers can't eat. But nonetheless, we see some of these trends happening. What do we make of those, John?

JOHN BAXTER: I think being able to access enough food is a global problem. I would take a global lens on it. The issue of obesity is a form of malnutrition. It's a feature of the Western world, where people tend to access too much inappropriate food. But it's also increasingly a problem in places which have a reputation for the other types of malnutrition, for not having enough food. So in places like Ethiopia and Somalia, actually, there are increasing numbers of people who are accessing - who are struggling with the problem of obesity. So it's a worldwide problem.

And the problem of having too much food can sit side-by-side with people having not enough. So even in the Western world, in this country, we have food banks because there are many people that for poverty cannot access enough food, side-by-side with issues of people accessing too much food and the wrong kind of food. And how we solve that problem isn't just about - I might be drawn to technological solutions, producing new types of food that give people access to true nutrition in a different way. But actually it's also a cultural question. And you can never solve these problems simply by technological quick fixes.

KAREN FOLEY: And again a lot of value systems in there, in terms of how we farm and what we farm. So despite the fact that we have a calorie limit, I suppose, of 1800 calories a day, which is the threshold of having enough, what you're saying, John, is that according to this definition, it's about safe, nutritious food. And for various different reasons - sometimes it's our value, sometimes it's our access to resources - means that those can't be obtainable for certain people. And yet, then this also stems into, I guess, what

we should be doing in terms of how much we should be eating of various food groups, how much exercise we should be doing, and how healthy we are, and I guess how that links into various other things. It's all very interrelated. I wonder, who else on our panel would like to comment on this? George?
GEORGE CURRY: Yes. I'm reminded of the quote that is attributed to many different people, which is we're only three square meals away from revolution. And I was thinking whilst you were talking that the things that we take for granted before the pandemic - getting a Tesco delivery, popping to the shops to get X, Y, and Z, that was suddenly taken away from us. And it made us feel quite vulnerable, didn't it? And it made us in some cases begin to panic and buy a lot of toilet roll where we could.
So not only are there the scientific elements around the need for food, there's a deep psychology there. It's linked, as we've been saying, to people's different social statuses. And how close you live to a shop suddenly became increasingly important. So I think the pandemic has made us feel a lot more vulnerable than we did before. We took things for granted. We took the availability of food for granted. Those of us that are lucky enough to be able to buy food without worrying too much about the money, suddenly we couldn't. And I think that has redressed - that did make a change in society. But as Rehana said earlier, who knows now that we are able to go back to going to popping to Tescos whenever we want to - other supermarkets are also available - whether our behaviours will remain changed, whether we will remember what that felt like.
KAREN FOLEY: And just reflecting on what you're saying and what people are talking about in the chat, Natasha makes a really good point. She says, not only is food poverty linked to obesity because junk food is also very cheap, it's also addictive. And there are lots of psychological aspects that then become this vicious circle. So we can see even if, for instance, we have money or access to things, that sometimes it's those choices that we're making that perhaps for different reasons aren't necessarily the right choices. And then that's challenging. Catherine makes another point about people in Somalia being obese. And getting to the bottom of the balance of nutrition is complex. And that seems to be more important than just providing enough calories, as such.
John, what do you make of those points, that our students have raised in the chat?
JOHN BAXTER: I was really pleased to hear that first point because I think that the personal experience of the pandemic, for many people, has been an increasing waistline and an increase in consumption with the wrong sort of food. And therefore I would hope that post pandemic, we might move into a world where people are more sympathetic to the psychological - to the impact upon psychology and mental health on what one eats. People in the past have often said - derided people that are overweight as just showing a lack of control. And I hope that emerging out of the COVID crisis, perhaps one thing might be a great deal of sympathy to people, to see it's not just about people being weak. It's we should all have an appreciation of how our mental health is linked to what we eat.
KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely, because I think one of the things that Natasha comments on is that junk food changes mental health. And lack of nutrients impacts low self-esteem. And so we can have this cycle going on. But interestingly, the way in which we farm has changed. For example, meat is a lot more fatty now because the animals have less room to move around. And so the animals are fatter. And therefore the meat content is more fatty than it used to be. So there are all of these things that we can have in terms of seen and unseen things.
Other people are reverting back - Graham says that he did what they used to do in the war. And he's been growing his own vegetables. And I think many people have been trying to take a little bit more

control and get some satisfaction out of nourishing their bodies and nourishing the soil around them. John?

JOHN BAXTER: Well, the issue of political vegan, vegetarianism is a big one. The supermarkets certainly have huge choice in the vegan diet because people are moving away from eating meat because they want to reduce their impact on the environment.

KAREN FOLEY: But it is challenging, I think, because we have on one hand, what food is going in, how we then feel about ourselves, how we feel about our bodies and what we're eating. And as Philippa says, lockdowns increased anxiety. And that's had a knock on exercise and food habits. So this whole notion of some people comfort eating or trying to control what they eat, there's also trying to control what we waste when we're trying to get stuff. I think we've all used our toilet rolls. But I know certainly because I haven't been able to go out shopping so much, when I do see vegetables, sometimes I was having them, and then I get so anxious about wasting some of that food. So there are lots of different anxieties coming into play.

Jay, let's take a quick trip to you on the hot desk because you haven't shown your lovely face and your super haircut, which you've now had. Would you like to say hello and fill us in on some of the other things people are talking about?

JAY RIXON: Yes. Hello, everybody. It's lovely to be here. The chat's going really well, lots of really interesting points about Rehana's point about environmental issues and some of the challenges that we face. And actually it's great to see how all of these questions are so linked. And I think that boosts that notion of coming from an interdisciplinary background, to these sorts of points as well.

So we've been talking quite a bit about food waste and how food waste did go down in the early days of the pandemic because as you said, Karen, I think we were so much more aware of what we were using and maybe what we were throwing away. But then also the question's now about the challenges of increasing waistlines and food consumption and why you eat certain foods because they make you feel good.

And then you get into a bit of a vicious cycle because you know you probably shouldn't be over consuming things, but you do. And that will probably come on quite nicely with one of Martin's question's a bit later about then what we do when we know we've eaten too much. We now need to walk it off or exercise it off as well. So actually, it's great to see how all these things are linked as well. So yeah, really dynamic chats. That's great to see.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, Jay. Let's take a look at our food word cloud. And we're going to close this section. But I'd also like to raise one of the points Janet's made, which I've struggled with as a parent myself, which is about the schools sending letters home to parents about children's weight, et cetera. And obviously because the children have had less opportunity to go outside and play, they've had less interaction with their peers, and certainly from my perspective, less exercise. And so while I might feel I can control what I eat, I see my daughter often comfort eating and doing less exercise. And I really worry about that as well. I think it's a very valid point.

So here we can see some of the things that you've said around food. And some of them are really common, like cost and poverty. But also interesting things around smart logistics. So food environmental impacts, yes, so there are lots of amazing and points that we've had, which I think leads us to our next section, which I'm going to talk to Martin about, which was on that whole relationship with wearable technology. It's been one of those things that I've been mindful of with the various step and activity

challenges. And my daughter's constant requests for more Fitbits or this, that, and the other, that can count and measure steps. How we can become very insular around our use of technology to try and measure and monitor our health.

So, Martin, I'd like to ask you our question here. And everybody at home, I'd like you to fill us our word cloud in on what comes to mind around the theme of health and technology. So Martin, is new technology, like Fitbits and things like that, are they a benefit for health? Or are they a burden? And what shifted in that respect, in terms of the pandemic?

MARTIN WELLER: I think speaking as one of those people who has had an expanding waistline during the pandemic, it follows on quite nicely from the previous topic. I think in that question, there are two bits to unpack. And first, is that what do we mean by technology? Then what do we mean by health? And so I think from the technology point of view - I label this new technology - but perhaps it's interesting to think what would it have been 20 odd years ago, if the pandemic had hit then, and what if we got now what we didn't have then? And in terms of health, I want to cover both physical and mental health, both been affected in the pandemic.

So there have been lots of positives. I think there's been things like the Joe Wicks classes, all these couch to 5K acts, or people taking part in virtual events and wearing Fitbits and trying to get their walking up, and those kind of things - and being much more outdoors. I live near the Taff river in Cardiff. And you see a few people along the Taff trail. At times it was busier than the centre of town. Suddenly everyone was out walking. It was great to see.

But I think there's also some negative effects, particularly people can go online a lot more. And I myself, I spend quite a lot of time on Twitter, partly through my job and everything. But anyone who spends any amount of time on social media, it's difficult to come away from there feeling positive about the world, often. So I think that that's a real impact on mental health.

And I think there have been things, particularly in my area of technology - for instance, they've been introducing exam proctoring, not necessarily at the OU, but at other places of the universities. They've just done this video exams, those kinds of things. That's really invasive technology. And that just is an example of feeling of being under surveillance all the time. When you're continually online, there's a lot more data being generated. You feel like you're just being monitored all the time. I think a lot of people find that quite oppressive. There's lots of issues around privacy and ethics and stuff.

So I think this is a good example of John's wicked problems, really, in that makes - it's very interdisciplinary. So you need not just computer scientists and health care specialists, but you need people understand psychology and ethics and philosophy and economics and sociology to understand the complex mix of these two things, of health and technology.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. It's interesting, actually, because I think while the increase in some of these devices - so some of the wearable devices have gone up massively in recent times - there's also this issue of performing our sport and fitness, of having things on social media, of liking everyone's posts, or perhaps judging you've run too far, you've done this, that, or the other. So by people's actions, and also by their lack of actions as well, there is the social thing.

And we know that so many aspects of social media are addictive. We can often scroll through things that don't have that end point often. So there's that going on as well. And also the behavioural aspect, like so many people have been talking about in the chat, about how you can get in these cycles, with an increase in scrolling through social media, that blue light then may have an impact on our sleep, our melatonin

levels, et cetera. So again that can feed into how we feel about ourselves and also how we are in ourselves.

MARTIN WELLER: Yeah, and again, those are good examples of pluses and minuses and things. So I think you're absolutely right. There's this whole performative aspect online. And people talk about FOMO, fear of missing out, and those kind of things. And then you often see - Instagram, you see people post, hey, just come back for my 10-mile run before breakfast. Now I'm off out and all I've done has had some toast and sat in my pyjamas. And they can make you feel bad about the whole day before you even start. But equally, I think that there's real positives in a lot of that. So sometimes if you join in a community and share things - and think about all the Zoom meetings people had as a family. Even though they were separated physically, they could still meet up and socialise. And that was really important for people's mental health, to able to get through a lot of that feeling of isolation.

KAREN FOLEY: So there's certainly been some positives and negatives. Let's take a look and see what you said at home. So we'll show the word cloud that people have been contributing to. And then I'd like to check in on one of our hot desk colleagues to see what people are talking about. And then we can take the discussion further.

So here is a word cloud about technology and health. We can see that monitoring, motivation, obsessiveness, communication, and mental health are coming up as the key things. But other things that are interesting here, are very value-laden things, for example, things around advancement and having sedentary lifestyle. So there's some things that we perhaps set by others' expectations or even our own, whereas other things are more robust. John might argue things like power usage and monitoring things - nutrition, setting goals, and many of those are a lot more scientific in their approach of using devices to measure and record things based on certain parameters.

Martin, what do you make of our word cloud?

MARTIN WELLER: I think it's very interesting. I actually think it really gets a lot of the tension that I was talking about. The words like competition, but also motivation, and those two things could be two sides of the same coin in a way. For some people, seeing other people going out and doing 10-mile runs is really motivating for them. They want to be in that competition. They want to do it. And for other people, that's really demotivating and a real feeling of social pressure and inadequacy or whatever. So I think that word cloud is very interesting, actually, and really captured a lot of the dynamic between both the positive and the negative.

KAREN FOLEY: And Philippa makes a really interesting point, which is this notion that if you post something online, saying, I'm going to do this or I'm doing the couch to 5K, for example, she says that's an incentive. So there's some sort of accountability. If she said she's going to do that, then other people might hold her to it. So that's an interesting notion. John, what do you make on this topic?

JOHN BAXTER: The word that leapt out at me on that was obsessiveness because I think for me, social media is often associated with an obsession, checking your phone every five minutes all day till late at night. But also obsession can impact on diet, for example. I know that people trying to lose weight can become obsessed with how many miles they've run to start - rewarding exercise with unhealthy food is something I know that I've done and my friends do. So it was just interesting, I thought, that obsessiveness leapt out at me from that word cloud.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And as someone who queued for one hour after making their daughter do 20 lengths of the swimming pool for some KFC, I'm guilty of that. Jay, let's go to you on the hot desk. And then we'll come to George.

JAY RIXON: Thanks, Karen. I was just wondering about the conversations in the chat, but also that notion of how websites are often designed to keep us quite addicted. There's almost no scrolling off point. But it keeps us feeding those desires. And the links with some of the research out there about communication and mental health and social media, and all of those sorts of things, so somebody in the chat said a bit about it's like being at a bookie's, having your phone in your pocket as well.

And interesting, on a social app that I use, you can switch the timer on now, which I think is a really good thing. And I use that time. So it tells me when I've had my 10 minutes for the day, which is actually really helpful because it allows me to think, now I'm going into extra time. I need to put it down and step away from it. And that's certainly helped me manage my use of that platform, which can be good for me, but also slightly negative in the way that colleagues and some of our student audience is saying as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And if you think about all the time we spend on these things, one thing that students often say to me is, the biggest procrastination. I have is my phone. If I could just turn that phone off for a bit, I could get so much more done. But yet we very often have to check upon things as they're happening for fear of missing out. George, what do you think?

GEORGE CURRY: When I was looking at the word cloud just now, one of the words that jumped out to me was solo mental health. And I was reminded that during this time, during this pandemic, our individual circumstances have been incredibly different. Some people have been on their own in a house for really long periods of time. Others of us have had far too many people in very small confined spaces, like home schooling, which is also not good for your mental health. But those different circumstances will lead to different needs and different ways to try and respond to those. So I think the connections that are available via social media have become incredibly important for people that were physically removed from their social and family usual relationships.

Another way that struck out to me was balance. And I think we've all struggled to try and maintain some sort of balance. And that's been incredibly difficult whilst the world has been so topsy-turvy. And then finally, my final thought is the Joe Wicks, Couch to 5K, the mindfulness, the yoga, all of these things, linking back to things we were talking about with Rehana and environment and with John, thinking about food, is what will be maintained here? What will continue into, dare I say, normal life - if that ever returns? Will we continue to think about fitness in the same way? Or will it be something that we did during this period? So stuff that remains and stuff that we lose, I think is another theme that goes across all of our conversations today.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Peter says, he tries to have a local four to five minute walk each day. And I think getting into those habits has been something that many of us have started doing more. Natasha says there'll be an addiction group for social media addiction at some point, which I think is probably very likely. But it's interesting that we're talking about these things. Martin's question was about the positives and the negative aspects of some of these devices. And I'm just struck by the notion that while we've got these devices to both monitor and report and interact, we also have these things - like you were saying about the Joe Wicks classes - we have access to so much more as well.

There's almost, to some extent, no excuse because there are these programmes. And I can't remember who - I think Rehana, you were saying the other day that you were surprised by many of your colleagues

saying, hey, you have all these things now. People are taking advantage of them. And we didn't have to advocate these health programmes that people could go and do themselves because now people want and need those sorts of things also. So yeah, it's very interesting.
Suzanne is using a lot of podcasts and is listening to them on their way to work, which is a great use of technology. Actually we have a Student Hub Live podcast as well and lots of videos on YouTube, Suzanne. So if you're bored, then you can always grab one of those as well to listen to, as I'm sure Jay will tell you about in the chat.
Any final thoughts from our panellists before we move on to our next discussion? Rehana, we haven't heard from you for a bit. And I'm just wondering if there's anything you'd like to share?
REHANA AWAN: So thanks, Karen. I've been thinking a lot whilst other people have been speaking about the politics side of things and equitability and how some people - there are the haves and have-nots. And some people have things. And some people have access to things that others don't. So not everybody has access to wearable tech. Not everybody has time to do the Joe Wicks videos because they perhaps are key workers.
And I think one of the things the pandemic has certainly done is put a lens on inequality, actually. And I think that's something that we should remember and need to remember. Certainly we saw with Marcus Rashford, with the food side of things, looking at free school meals for children because they were children who were going without food, and I think we just need to remember that as we go forward and to think, what can we do in our own lives to try and make things more equal for other people that we know and we see?
It's that kindness gene, isn't it? What can we do to make things better? And what can we do to make the environment better? What can we do to be fitter and healthier that doesn't necessarily involve technology? And sometimes those simple things. So I think that they were really key points for me from today, about inequality, but then what can we do to make things better?
KAREN FOLEY: And I think this whole notion that, as you say, this inequality has highlighted is that often, I think the pandemic has driven this collective notion, that there are things that we could all do. If we all do shop locally, et cetera, and continue with some of those behaviours, then the world could be a better place for lots of people. So the notion that even though we can't change the whole world, and these are very wicked problems - as John says - actually having a collective driven goal, even though there may be challenges, and we may not be able to equally participate in those goals, but having that notion of the individual and the collective is something that I've been a lot more mindful of as well.
So we move on now to a final discussion of the day, which is one that George came up with. And this is around the arts and well-being. So we'd like you to fill in out word cloud here. What are the three words that come to mind when we think of arts and well-being? And George wanted to ask about whether our perception of the arts have changed throughout this pandemic. So George, would you like to kick us off?
GEORGE CURRY: I certainly would. And actually, I think hopefully as I talk, we'll continue to see some of the themes that we've been pulling out are relevant in this area as well. So I've been thinking about the arts as entertainment. I've been thinking of them as a way of maintaining mental health and well-being. And I've been thinking about the arts as a financial concern as a business. And so that's what I'm going to just talk about for a few minutes now.
So particularly during the lockdown, we saw that theatres were closed. The West End was completely silent. And people couldn't go to concerts, couldn't do all the things that they'd been doing before. But the

first instinct often of some of those particularly large theatres - I'm thinking of the National Theatre - was to push us live performances via the internet, so streaming performances that lots of people wouldn't have otherwise been able to see. I know in our house the Thursday night National Theatre new play was a real highlight to our week.
So there, we potentially could see something like the democratisation of Theatre, where you didn't have to pay to go. You didn't even have to leave the house. And you could see these amazing world-class productions. Similarly there were lots of concerts online. Similarly there are lots of different performances that celebrities are doing, maybe from their homes - actors performance. So we were able to have access to lots of different things, which is amazing. Indeed, Karen, on Disney you can now see the original cast production of Hamilton the musical.

There you go.
KAREN FOLEY: I knew it.
GEORGE CURRY: So thank you. If you haven't seen it, you really should, shouldn't you, Jay? Yes, absolutely.
JAY RIXON: Absolutely.
GEORGE CURRY: I'm a fan. So we've had access to a lot of things that we wouldn't have had otherwise. So that's a good thing, isn't it? And actually, there has been a social study led by Dr. Daisy Fancourt, who works in the University College of London. And she tracked arts participation in 72,000 adults in the UK. And her data - and I'm just going to read this to check that I get it right - the data suggests that people who spend 30 minutes or more each day during the pandemic on arts activities, and that could be as a participant or as an audience member, they reported substantially lower rates of depression and anxiety and greater life satisfaction.
And there have been many other studies before the pandemic that link performance and spending time doing artistic endeavours being linked to well-being. But it's interesting to see that that appears to be even more true during the pandemic. So our thinking about well-being, as linked to the environment, as linked to what we eat, as linked to what we do in terms of exercise, is also a relevant theme here. So I think the long and short of it is the arts are important because they make us feel better. And what better reason is there for being involved in the arts?
But of course, we've also got a bit of a positive-negative thing going on today. And of course, whilst we've been watching all these theatrical productions, musical concerts, et cetera, for free, there is a problem with how that's financially sustainable. Now we know that there are a lot of people who are suffering financial hardship because they are involved in the arts and the entertainment industries.
There was a study led by the House of Lords, which shows that the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector shrank by over 44 per cent in the months March 2020 to June 2020. So there's a real reduction in revenue there. And although - and here we're thinking about politics - although the government has made some funding available, there's a real worry that that will go to the big, more wealthy institutions such as the National Theatre.
And I was reading an article just this morning that was making the point that after the pandemic, that Britain's arts sector will be less diverse because the smaller, community-focused, often more diverse little Theatre companies music, community events aren't getting that funding. And there will be far fewer of those, the theory goes, once we emerge out of the pandemic. So there's the democratisation of the arts

on one hand. But there is also a lack of equity with regard to how being an arts concern is financially viable in the future.
Just as a last thing, there's been a couple of arts in response to the pandemic. You might want to look up Love in 2020 by Giulia Rosa, which is two people kissing, but they've both got surgical masks on. My favourite is Panic by CB Hoyo, which is a toilet roll with "don't panic" in massive letters written on it. So I think as time goes on, we'll see some really interesting artistic responses to what's happened, alongside all the data.
KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. So George, you've given us an awful lot there. And I'd like to pick up on a couple of things. So Clive says, which I think is a really good point, is that accessing Theatre online, you don't get that community aspect. And you were talking about some of those smaller theatres. And there's something there about that collective sense of participation. But as you say, things have really shifted. And Natasha says, she's really missed going to the art galleries and museums and libraries.
However, on the other hand, it could be argued that actually because a lot of these galleries have been making videos, we've actually been able to get up and close and personal to a lot of artefacts that we wouldn't normally be able to access throughout the globe from our comfort of our armchairs. So there are those sorts of things. And I think it's interesting because it lends this whole notion of online versus face-to-face interaction. And I think it's one that we're very familiar with, working and being in the OU as well. Sometimes we view online things from a deficit perspective. We think it's not quite as good. But actually it's very interesting because sometimes it's really different.
And somebody was saying as well about the cello lessons, which I was looking at because I've had exactly the same thing. So we've had changed the way we do things. And I now have my cello lessons on Zoom, which means that my cello teacher now can look and stare at me and see what's going on with my sawing arm, for example, in a way that she wouldn't necessarily - as she calls it - she wouldn't necessarily be able to do that a face-to-face because we'd be doing different things. And she'd be playing the piano. So these affordances offer us different ways of being and different access to things.
So there's the monetisation, which you also talk about. Yet some people have very effectively been able to monetize. There's a K-pop band. And they've been able to rake in $20 million in June from a single virtual show. So whilst it's not commonplace, there have been small instances of people being able to monetize this. So it lends that question then, is this an impact of our ability to think and change and shift to use things for their advantage? Or is it something more fundamental?
GEORGE CURRY: I think it might have been difficult during this period for the arts to make a case that they were important when actually the focus has been quite rightly on people getting medical attention, getting food, getting the things that they need to get through the day. And just going back to the thing about whether it's better or worse online, I was watching A Streetcar Named Desire, with - I forgot the name of the actress. But the cameras were right up really close to her face. My experience of watching her performance was very different to how it would have been if I'd gone in the cheap seats behind a pillar, watching it like that.
So there are definite positives and negatives. I completely agree with the student that you quoted who said, actually, what's brilliant about going to a live performance is everybody being in the room for that moment, for those shared - there's an atmosphere in there that you can't in any way recreate. This event that we're doing now, ordinarily in olden days, we'd have been all set together in a room, wouldn't we?

And isn't it marvellous that we can do it this way instead? But better or worse, I'm not sure that that's a paradigm that's necessarily relevant here.
KAREN FOLEY: It's interesting because - I love this comment. Natasha says that Student Hub Live videos have been really helpful. She's struggling with change and creating a routine. And she feels a lot better with this. And Paul also talks about mental health and change and different situations, like closures of the pubs, have been difficult for people who've really relied on those for mental health access. Oh, and Robert says this is the first Student Hub Live event. It's very encouraging. We've got lots more. In fact, we've got one this afternoon as well, Robert. So you must make sure that you subscribe to our newsletter on the website. So you can check them all out.
Let's go to you, John, and see what you have to say on the matter of the arts.
JOHN BAXTER: I just wondered whether there's an issue about accessibility, particularly for disabled people. Perhaps they can't easily access arts, in participation, for example. I have a singing group that meets once a fortnight. And some of the people that come into the Zoom sing couldn't attend face-to-face because they're housebound or they have disabilities. So I just wonder if because we've had to adopt technologies that fit with the majority of people being stuck at home most of the time, whether some of that will live on in the arts because of this issue, of allowing some groups of people to access things they weren't able to before. So that might be a positive outcome.
KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And not just accessibility, but also financial access, as Natasha says, can be a real issue in terms of actually getting uses of the resources. Other things, we had a Student Hub Live show a few weeks ago. And one student had used an iPad to create this most incredible drawing. So using technologies in different ways also offers affordances, sometimes based on people who need them, but also can be taken up by other people. So there's this constant shift, I think, with what's happening. Jay, can we come to you and see what other things people are talking about back at home? And I'd also like to show our word cloud, so that we can see if there are any final things that we can pick up on. Jay?
JAY RIXON: Yeah, of course. I was just thinking as you said about drawing with an iPad, that the artist David Hockney has been doing with iPads. And they're going to show some of his work based from where he is. And actually what's great about that, is not only do you see the end result, but you also see all the different stages along the way. And as somebody from an arts background, actually what's fascinating is seeing the way that an artist creates the picture, but rubs things out, and then makes it better or makes it different. And actually that's really liberating because sometimes I think also when I was a teacher, my students would be so frustrated with what they couldn't do, and they want this sense of perfection. So it's great to see that somebody famous, somebody well known does things wrong as well.
But the chat is very much around saying how important the arts have been for mental health, how different people have used them to support their mental health, and actually how many people say after this time, we also want to remember some of these techniques because what they have given us, what they've helped us with - whether that's watching videos to help you get out of bed, help you have a bit of motivation, whether that's around knitting and nattering over Zoom with friends - those sorts of things - or having dinner parties - and as George says, sometimes that the notion of having online events help with location as well, so that we don't all have to be in the same room.
And that's liberated in my life as well. It's liberated things that I can do with friends as well. So a lot of students are saying just how important all of these features are. But at the same time, I think we were curious to see what will stay in the future and what might drop away as things open up again.

KAREN FOLEY: It will be interesting. Flora makes a good point about sometimes technology can exclude people. So while I think most of us can log on to Zoom or something like that, there have been some instances where I've seen organisers really struggle with the usage of some technologies. And that can exclude people both emotionally and also practically, if they aren't able to access those various things Philippa also says that it's all about balance. So it's about finding a balance between food, exercise, mental health, socialising, and work, et cetera and taps into so many of the things we've been discussing. Let's take a look at our word cloud and see if there are any final things we can pick up from that. So here's what everybody at home said about perceptions of the arts changing. So the key thing people are talking about here is mental health. And it seems that that relates to various things, like escapism, creativity, entertainment, fun - so lots of positive aspects here. Other things coming into play are things like doing yoga online. So some of the things that we do are shifting as well. But equally - as George mentioned about the funding, so people are saying things underfunded, et cetera, missed concerts and some of the things that we've actually had to miss out on. Anything anyone would like to pick up from any of these word clouds? Rehana?

REHANA AWAN: It's a really interesting point. I really love the fact that somebody put crafting in there. And certainly one of the things that I noticed with lots of friends and family, were they discovered new found hobbies and interests that they've never had before because they had the time and opportunity to do that. And one really good friend locally has actually created a business out of her artistic endeavours, which is taking leaves and doing screen printing with them. And then you leave them to dry in the sun. And she set up this amazing business off the back of what she found out about herself in the first lockdown. So I think there's been an opportunity for people to explore their own creativity as well, which is really good for your mental health, of course, which is fun.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Thank you, Rehana. And I love this idea. Peter's attended a sketch club. And he says that their motto is you can only improve on a blank piece of paper, which I think is amazing. Jay, incidentally, she runs a creative note-taking workshop for us, which is brilliant. And many people go away with this idea that we don't have to do things perfectly. It's all about finding our way and using our own creativity to help make sense of the world around us. So that's on the catch up that you can watch. Jay might put a link to that as well.

Suzanne's 82-year-old dad says, everything in moderation. And he is so right. Mary, can we come to you for our final thoughts today and just to round up in terms of what people have been discussing? It's certainly been a very fruitful and prolific discussion, very interconnected also, despite the fact that we've had four quite discrete areas to cover.

MARY KEYS: Yeah, the chat's been really good. And it's been great to see everybody engaging. And like you say, throughout the topics, they've all been feeding into each other really well. But I think this the last conversations that have been going on are all about finding that balance, finding that motivation, which is so important. And I think that's been quite a good thread through all the topics we've discussed this morning. And there have been some really positive feedback as well that people have really enjoyed this session, which has been great. And as I said, it's my first session. So I've really enjoyed it. So thank you so much, everyone, for really engaging in the chat.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, Mary. And thank you for organising it. It's always an interesting one when we work with the Open Programme because there is so much to cover. And it's always very mindful if somebody - I think many of us have approached things at various stages in our lives from different

perspectives. I was an art student and then ended up doing sciences, et cetera. So very often, we'll shift. But isn't it interesting how actually irrespective of what we're studying, we can all discuss something in a really fruitful way, unpicking some of the areas that perhaps hadn't been obvious to us? I know I've learned something new about Netflix today that really horrified me, actually. I'm going to think twice about my usage in future.

But it's been really wonderful today. And thank you, all of our panel, George and John and Martin and Rehana and Linda and Mary and Jay on our chat. But most of all, thank you, everybody at home, for participating. As I said, we have a subscription. You can just put your email into the Student Hub Live website. And then you can subscribe to our newsletter. We send that out once a month. We have events on throughout the whole calendar year, which are all programmed and set in place. But we only advertise those about three weeks in advance of each session. You can also follow us on Eventbrite as well. But we will send out those newsletters.

We've got quite a nice programme coming up over the summer. And we've got an event this afternoon, which is a celebration of our access students' achievements. And then we're also having various events for several of the schools and things on motivation and continuing to study. So make sure that you check those out. We have two interfaces. This is our broadcast event. But we also do study skills workshops in Adobe Connect. And if you are going to have a little break over the summer, we're going to be ramping up, getting ready for module start with some lovely skills development sessions that are suitable for all students at all levels.

Natasha says, lockdown gave her time to catch up and rethink her path, which led her to studying and writing more stories, which I think is wonderful. Oh, and she also says the note-taking session was incredibly helpful. And she watched last week's sessions. So highly recommended by Natasha there for us.

That is all we have time for today. So thank you all so much for watching. And please do join us at another event soon. You're all very welcome. It's been really lovely talking with you. I hope you really have a nice rest of the day, no matter what the weather's doing and where you are. And see you at another event very soon. Bye for now, everyone.