

Studying with Neurodiversity – 22 March 2023

[MUSIC PLAYING]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good morning, and welcome. It's so exciting to be here today. This session has been such a long time in the making. And I'm so honestly so excited to be doing this today. So this is our Student Hub Live special broadcast about studying with neurodiversity, and we're going to be talking about all sorts of facets about that.

We're going to be talking about some of the challenging areas, some of the wonderful areas. We're going to be talking about the terminology-- all sorts of things. So my name is Isabella Henman. I'm one of the presenters on Student Hub Live, and I'm going to be your host today.

I've got Suki and Yasmin are my wonderful guests who are we going to be talking to later, and I've also got Heidi, who is on camera coming from the chat room, so you will see her there. And I've also got George and Mark, who are helping out in the chat.

So just a couple of things to help you because it may be your first time at a Student Hub Live broadcast. So we are broadcasting live. I'm talking live here now, trying to make sure I have my teeth in and say the right things. So we're talking about a number of different aspects. So from your perspective listening at home, you can listen to us, you can watch what we're talking about, you can interact in the chat.

So you see that you've got a chat option there. If you find the chat moves too quickly, there is a pin option, and the people that are there helping out are designated. They usually have SHL at the start so you know what they are there, and they can answer questions, and they can point you to different places. We don't have all the answers. We never have all the answers. But what we try to do is we try to build community in Student Hub Live. So we exist. We're not connected to any module. We're not connected to any faculty. We're across university, across level, within the Open University to build community.

So we're going to be talking about-- we have a number of different workshops in these live sessions talking about different aspects of studying. And this is one that I've been very passionate about wanting to do for quite a while because we have students who say, we really want you to do a session about this. It's something-- neurodiversity is something that is mentioned in different places, always hidden in different places, and we want to talk about it.

We had Neurodiversity Celebration Week last week, so we're talking about this. So Heidi, I mentioned, is our on-camera chat person. I know Heidi has been looking at seeing what people have been saying so far. So Heidi, what kind of things are people looking forward to today?

HEIDI: Hi. Good morning. Well, it's so busy in the chat this morning, which is really, really great to see. We've got so many people in the chat. So I want to say some hellos. Before I kick off with the hellos, I just want to say a number of our guests have referenced that they're used to using Adobe Connect. So it's a slightly different format to what we used to hear when we're streaming live for Student Hub Live. So it is slightly different.

If you have any issues at all, if you need any technical support, just let us in the chat, and one of us will come to you and will help you with that. So some hellos this morning. We've got Alistair from Bolton.

We've got Molly joining us from Frankfurt. Helen is with us from North Wales, and then Denise is joining us from South Wales.

We've got Heidi from Plymouth, and Jane is joining from Brussels this morning. Erin is with us from the Scottish borders. Lovely to have you with us, Erin. I think we've spoken before. Rebecca is from Nottingham, Gemma from Sheffield, we've got Clinton from Somerset, and we've got Karen joining us from sunny Orkney.

And I just want to say Aurora has put such a beautiful message in the chat already. Student Hub Live is quite literally one thing that keeps me balanced emotionally. I'm not joking. My mood has already improved. It's so lovely to have you with us, and thanks for joining us.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, that's lovely. That's so good to hear so far. Because we know that, as I said, Student Hub Live is about community, and some of the issues to do with community can be challenging. And we aren't going to shy away from talking about those later. But we really do want to encourage you through this. We want to help you thinking about things.

So a number of you may actually be studying with neurodiversity. Some of you may want to find out more. Some of you may know what the term means. Some of you may not even like the term. And again, we're going to come to that all later.

So my first guest today is Suki Haider. And Suki is involved in a project which is getting students in a variety of different areas to let the university know what works for them. So Suki, you've got a fantastic job title, which when you told me about it, I was like, OK, I don't really know what that means. So can you tell us a little bit more about it?

SUKI HAIDER: Yeah, I'm a senior supervisor for the Inclusive Curriculum Student Consultant Project at the OU. So it's a brand new project. It's a pilot project. So my role is managing the students who are employed to work as consultants at the OU, and their job is to help module teams understand how to make the curriculum more inclusive and more accessible.

So these students were recruited by the OU. It's a paid role. They work 10 hours a week. Specifically because they have diverse lived experience and because they are from marginalised backgrounds. So how fantastic is that? A paid job to share your perspectives as a student on how to improve the curriculum.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ISABELLA HENMAN: And that's brilliant, isn't it? So this is one of the things we want to say. OK, I can't take any credit for that. All the credit is to you. But the university does listen. It's one of the things that we want to-- we're going to talk about some of the things, but we're also talking about, how does the university listen? How does the university want everybody's study experience to be as positive as it can? Again, we mentioned there are some things. There are pitfalls in study. We all come across them, and some of the things that we talk about in these workshops is how to maximise success-- how to try and avoid the pitfalls, but not ignoring they happen. So Suki, can you tell us a little bit more. What kind of things have been explored by the students that are part of your project so far?

SUKI HAIDER: So it's really directed by them. So it's a student partnership project, and that bit's really important. So we are partners. Staff and students are partners, and the partners-- partnership means we're equal. So the student consultants draw on their lived experiences. So if I explained about that first all, then I can answer your question, I think.

So there's six student consultants all together, and they have intersecting identities. So three are neurodivergent, three are racially minoritized. LGBTQ+ is represented. One is profoundly deaf, one is

sight impaired, and one has mobility problems and experiences pain. So they are looking at the module materials through their experiences. So the issues that are coming up are the issues that they face. So for example, the neurodivergent students talk about where they lose focus, where they can be distracted, where they can be confused. Is this helping? Is this the kind of information that would help the audience?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Sounds fantastic. That's really useful for me to know, and also the fact that, as you said, there's so much lived experience. Obviously, today's session is about studying with neurodiversity, being neurodivergent. We'll talk a bit more about labelling and the words there and what we mean by that. But yes, it's really useful to know that particularly, if anybody was trying to tot up, you would say, there were six students, but actually, you mentioned quite a few different things. And that's something that's quite common, isn't it, that actually students often have a number of different lived experiences, which some people would refer to as challenging?

SUKI HAIDER: Yeah. Yeah, and these are all issues that affect their study. And also, what's really clear is how one student's experiences and neurodivergences is different to another. So when we're giving our advice to module teams, the message that we keep making is the changes that you make for one student, that's not it. So what works for one student doesn't work for everyone.

This is a process. This is a journey. You have to talk to students. Everybody needs to be at the table. And I think that's the value of having a group of students. And this group that I line manage is just one group. There are many groups in the faculty. So if we add up all the students who are giving their perspectives at the moment to the university, there's probably about 50.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So I mean, we've got lots of different students. And some people might be going, well, 50's not many. But you know what? We like receiving feedback. Student Hub Live, we love receiving feedback. We've been dealing with lots of different things, and I was chatting with a couple of the central team yesterday about how we deal with feedback, how we let you know we're doing things.

And in fact, that's one of the questions we want to ask everybody at home at the moment. If you could give feedback-- you'll see the ticker question will come on the screen now, in case I mess up the wording-- but if you could give feedback to your module teams, what would you say?

So if you're neurodivergent, if you're studying with neurodiversity, if you're disabled in any way, if you're studying with disabilities. If you're studying with any kind of challenges, or even not, what kind of things would you say? So it's not about the subject. It's about, how can the university make it more accessible for you?

So we'll come back a little bit later to get some of those answers. But I wanted to pick up with something that you said there, Suki, about what works for one person doesn't necessarily work for another. Could you say a little bit more about what you mean by that?

SUKI HAIDER: Well, I think it's because this is a new area for universities, and this is not just a new area for the OU. If you look across universities in the UK, they are all on this journey of wanting to understand the barriers that students experience. And they know that the barrier is in the institution, but they're not quite sure what is the barrier, what are the barriers, and what do they need to do to change?

So this is where the student perspective is so important, and this is why we need multiple perspectives. So it's like we know there's a problem, but we need help with finding the solution. And so I think what's really important is the familiarity with the fact that some things, like print, are preferred by some students.

So definitely in the team that I manage, some neurodivergent consultants will say, I like print. I will print off materials because I'm less distracted.

But then there's other members of my team that go, no, no, no. I want to study online because I prefer when I've got videos and when I've got audio because then I'm more engaged. And so I think that's a really good example of how module teams, in creating their courses, have to cater for both sets of students.

So we can't just say, oh, we spoke to one neurodivergent student, and therefore, we know how to meet the needs of neurodivergent students. So what I'm saying is, we understand we need lots and lots of feedback from students, and ongoing feedback as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think the reason I quite like being on camera is I like waving my hands, because it's this-- it's not just this. There's not just one answer, is there? There's all sorts of different answers. And realistically speaking, this actually is something-- sometimes the weighing up of different things. So the fact that for some people, studying on print is the way that works for them. From other people, nope. Studying online is the way it works for them. And we can't, as a university, know what works for you. There is something what we call-- which is called reasonable adjustments. So the university can make reasonable adjustments for students who've got a declared disability. But the thing with that is, in the nicest possible way, they're reasonable adjustments. We can't change everything.

So in the same way as Suki was saying, for some people, print works. For some models, we can't use print. So if you think about what we're doing at the moment, I'm not scripted. Suki's not scripted. The other guests are not scripted. We're talking on camera. We're talking about things. We're trying to cover quite a few different things.

And in fact, I was asked yesterday if we've got slides for this. And I said no, because we've got an idea about what we want to cover, but it's a live session. So sometimes with modules, have a little think like that. So yes, OK, it would be lovely if it was in print, but it's a video. You can have a transcript of the video, but do you get that? If it's a graph, you actually get the full experience.

So is there anything like that you've come across, Suki, where that resonates or rings any bells with what some of the people have said to you?

SUKI HAIDER: Yeah, because I think it's across the module. What we're aiming for is that the student feels included across the module. So what I mean by that [INAUDIBLE] so they feel welcome at the university. They feel like they belong in this module. They feel fit. And so I think the things that we can do that we know of a problem. So long sections of text are a problem, particularly online because of the distraction.

And so we can almost give a checklist. So avoid long sections of text. Use short paragraphs, use short sentences. Think about the clarity of the language. Think about the clarity of the instruction. So if all of that is happening and you haven't got your first preference-- you know, you haven't got print then-- it's OK, I think. That's what the students are telling me. But a really strong message has been, use different formats.

So let's say we've got this text, and there's some complex information in this text. Can we have a diagram as well that represents the information in this text? And best of all, can we have an animation? So the students that I work with absolutely love animations when they've found them in the module materials because it's another way of representing information. And because it's visual and it's audio as well, they enjoy that. The information is coming in in layers.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you, Suki. That's really, really helpful. I think the animations things-- we were actually talking about it in the production team before we started, about animations and how good they are, and it always reminds me of mind map. And those of you that have seen me in workshops before say, I always say, yeah, I know some of you might like mind maps. I'm rubbish at mind maps. That's fine. I accept it. They just don't work for me. I'm great with bullet points. I'm great with lists. But there's different things. There's different experiences.

Now, we did ask everybody at home earlier, or wherever you are, whether you are at home or somewhere else, what kind of feedback that you would give if you could? So, Heidi, what kind of things have people been saying? I'm really interested to know what's been coming up.

HEIDI: Yes, so busy in the chat. It's just so great to hear from everybody. So what Suki was just saying there around the text being very wordy very often within modules-- Amy says that's one of the issues that she faces in terms of so much a bit being very, very wordy. And Laura says, my current bugbear is the huge number of broken links to resources and further reading within her module. And then Laura finds that it stops her from being able to carry on studying, as she has to deal with so many unexpected demands and having to work around that.

So many people feeding back in. I do just want to pick up on some of the discussions that people are having as well around some of the terminology. It's really interesting to see people's perspectives on this, and I just want to share some of those. So there's a discussion going on in the chat around the term "superpower." Now, Gemma says that she likes this because it leans towards trying to shed a positive light on our differences, but Louise and Vicki really dislike the term.

And Karen also agrees-- really dislikes the use of the term "superpower." Karen shares with us, "As someone with autism, I have yet to find my superpower, and I feel it puts a lot of pressure on us to be exceptional in something." And then just to finish up Kate, has advised, can we address that it's studying with neurodivergence? Neurodiversity is a descriptor of a diverse group.

So please do keep sharing your thoughts. It's really great to discuss them in the chat and really great to share them with others.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Right. Thank you, Heidi. And in fact, what I'm going to do is I'm going to move on to talking to Yasmin now, because that sounds like it's a very useful linker. I'll come back and talk to Suki again later because, Yasmin, you're one of our students who-- you have neurodiversity. You're neurodivergent, and one of the things I wanted to talk to you about is about this labelling, about the terminology. So how do you describe yourself?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, so I mean, my personal preference is that I am a student with autism, in terms of one where we're talking about autism, ASD, all of those kind of terms. There is so many terms that are out there. It has developed in my lifetime, let alone before my lifetime. And I think it's completely OK to use whatever terminology that you feel kind of fits. For me, it is I'm a student with autism, whereas for others may prefer ASD. Some people may prefer neurodivergent, neurodivergency. So yeah, that's kind of my terminology that I prefer to use.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And that's a really useful one. And in fact, that's our next question, which you'll see coming up on the screen now. It fits in with what Heidi was saying is being discussed anyway. But how do you prefer to describe yourself if you are neurodivergent, if you've got neurodivergency, if you've got autism. Do you refer to yourself as an autistic student, or are you a student with neurodivergency? Are you a student with autism? There are so many terminologies.

And in fact, I've got a document here, which Heidi mentioned to me. And this is some official terminology that the university has. And it's about the different terminology. And one of the things I personally found really interesting is it actually says, avoid using the terms autistic spectrum disorder.

Now, I know personally, when I have students with a disability marker, and just so that you clarify, this isn't a derogatory term. Disability is a legal term that the university has. So if you have what we call a D-mark or a disability mark, it means you've declared something that is classified as a protected characteristic. Now, it actually comes up as autistic spectrum disorder, and I don't know whether you've seen this as well, Yasmin, on your record, that you've seen this? Yeah. It's really interesting isn't it?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, so it's--

ISABELLA HENMAN: Sorry. Carry on, please.

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, it's something that I personally don't like the use of autism spectrum disorder. I feel that it has a lot more people saying, well, everyone is a little bit autistic and stuff like that. Whereas for that, I don't feel is the case. I much prefer to be extremely clear and use the terminology that I like to use. So that it kind of clears up, especially with tutors and things like that, what terminology I would want to be used. But yeah, I think everyone has their opinions on ASD as a term, which everyone's opinion is valid.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [INAUDIBLE] When I wrote the description, because I did write it, because it's a session that I've been wanting to do. And I was very careful with the language, but I'm also aware that, as has already been shown, there are some people that have different opinions about the language I was aware with that. We know we've had people contact us ahead of time.

And I know that there will be people in the chat-- in the nicest possible way, there will be people that will disagree with other people. That is fine. Please do it in a respectful manner. It's fine to say, this is my term. So exactly how Yasmin just said, and when we were talking about it ahead of time, she said it's her personal opinion, which is fine. I've done some additional study and I've looked at terminology.

I know there will be some of you that are watching, either live or on the recording, that will say, I have Asperger syndrome. I have Asperger's syndrome, or I have high-functioning autism. Technically speaking, from the diagnostic criteria, they are no longer things that are referred to by the people who would be diagnosed. The actual term is autistic spectrum disorder, but again, some people don't like that. So some people may have been diagnosed earlier and will have been told, you have Asperger's, or you are autistic, or you are high functioning. And some of it, people go, you know what? I like it. And I know I've had workshops before where people have used terminology, and I've had to say, I don't actually know what you mean. Can you let me know?

So are there any other terms that you, Yasmin, have come across that you might want to bring out now so people are aware that we know about

YASMIN REEVE: I mean, there's lots of terms that get used in the field. I mean, you will find that a lot of people who stick with Asperger's may call themselves an "Aspie." That's another quite common one that is about. And yet, I think that the problem is that the definition and the actual name has changed so much. And I also think it will probably change again in another couple of years' time. So it is just purely choice, really.

ISABELLA HENMAN: It is. And it's also quite an interesting thing. Now, some of the modules that I personally tutor do relate to brain issues. And we do cover what I think we've just referred to as autism

within SK 298, which is one of the modules that I tutor. And we do talk about some of the underlying brain biology, but we also say that it isn't necessarily with everybody.

So I know some people will say, you have to refer to neurodivergent as the people that have got the fundamental brain differences. But we can't have a specific marker. We can't look at one person's brain and say, you've definitely got this. You definitely haven't. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. And I know that's something that is always really challenging for some people because they would like to know, am I? Am I not? But it's a constellation of features.

And apparently, we've got somebody who says neuro-spicy, which I think is wonderful, particularly as I have quite a liking for strongmen, and Tom Stoltman, who is twice World's Strongest Man, is autistic. That's how he refers to himself and he refers to his challenge. He's been quite open about his challenges and how he's progressed, and the Stoltman brothers' strap line is about being spicy. So I don't know whether the person that said they were neuro-spicy is actually a Stoltman fan or whether that's complete news.

So in terms of-- I just want to come back to the labelling and how People-- So as a student, you said you refer to yourself as a student with autism. I believe that was your words, Yasmin. How have you found that has impacted on your study experience or not?

YASMIN REEVE: Do you know what? I think it has really, really helped being very, very clear from the start about the terminology that I like to use with tutors. Tutors have been extremely respectful of my choice of terminology. Equally, tutors have been really respectful of the way that I'm communicating and the way that I deal with tutorials and all of those kind of things.

I guess having the uni aware of it has been really beneficial to me. It's a big thing that I say is, where we were talking about reasonable adjustments earlier, we can't expect somebody to give us reasonable adjustments if they're not aware that we require it. So yeah, I think it's really helped me. And also, it's helped me come to terms with me accepting who I am. I am somebody that got a late diagnosis well into adulthood, and I really embrace it now.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That's absolutely wonderful. And I know that you've been quite open about it and you've written a number of blog articles. Now, one of the things-- I'm just going to do a little bit of terminology here. Now, when I planned and I asked that we could do this session, other than we'd had lots of students who'd said, can you do a session about neurodiversity, which is why I use the terminology and so on.

And I did it as encompassing as possible. So we've talked about autistic spectrum disorder so far-- autism. But is also attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. And I we have a number of students who I know come along to our online workshops, the Adobe Connect workshops, who mention they have ADHD. And some of the things really help them. Some of the things don't. So hopefully, if you are, let us know and see if there's anything about that.

There's also dyslexia, dyspraxia, and dyscalculia. And there was another one which somebody told me yesterday, which was sometimes included. But there's a difference between some people may feel if they've got mental health challenges, including bipolar, that might be classified as neurodivergence. But I think from the medical terminology point of view, if I'm going to pin it down slightly, we're mostly talking about ASD, as Yasmin abbreviated to ADHD, dyscalculia, dyslexia, and dyspraxia.

And I just wanted to pick up the dyslexia thing because I don't want to forget about that. And in fact, Yasmin, that was one of the first times I actually got to know you, wasn't it? Because you were saying

about your experiences as student with dyslexia. And it totally blew my mind when you told me about screen readers. So can you tell me a little bit more about that so everybody knows?

YASMIN REEVE: Yes. So I mean, in order for me to even be able to study, I utilise a screen reader and voice dictation software. And a lot of people don't realise some of the challenges that can be faced with screen reader software-- the amount of times that I have received PowerPoints which haven't been accessibility checked and my screen reader is reading things that I can't even see on the page, which can be really challenging equally.

I think, being a student that uses a screen reader, it takes an awful lot more time to complete study. And I wasn't open with university until probably this year-- so this school year-- about my struggles with using a screen reader and dictation software. And I've written a blog post, which hopefully you guys can have the link to. There we go. It should be on screen. Which goes into some of the challenges that I face as a student studying with dyslexia and whilst using software.

I specifically made the point-- I'm very aware that it is an extremely long blog post. There is links there so that you can listen to it as audio where you haven't got the challenge of screen readers involved trying to read kind of other items on the page. But yeah, it can be challenging. It takes a lot of extra time, a lot of extra effort, and unfortunately, using dictation software can also lead to issues which you may not quite realise. The wrong spelling of something that happens quite often.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [INAUDIBLE] correctly for me ever. Yes.

YASMIN REEVE: So yeah, it is challenging, but it is doable. It's not something that holds me back. It takes extra time for definite. I mean, some of the things that I have learned with Open Uni and where they like you to read a whole book or a whole chapter within a book is the if I'm taking my dog for a walk, I will have that book playing in the background whilst I am on the walk so that I'm kind of listening, paying attention, but equally getting on with things to then make it a bit quicker later on when I need to find specific points because I can relate it to where I was on the walk and think, whilst I was here, the book was talking about this, and then time it with my walk because I know how long it takes me to get to each point on the walk that we do.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I love that example. That's fantastic. If I'm going to use technical terming, it's related to cognitive mapping. And it isn't something we talked about when planning, but it is something that's really useful to think about with students, particularly-- well, I was going to say particularly neurodivergent, but not actually-- any student to be aware of it.

And it's something I'm aware of-- often when you're studying online, when you're looking at a book, you can go, OK, it's roughly here on a page. But using other kind of markers, like what did I think about? What was I doing when I listened to that bit? Or where was I on the walk? Or where was I on my run? Or where was I on my commute? Where was I if I'm listening to that in the cooking dinner? While I was chopping onions, so it's towards the part.

Comparing things to learn is actually quite an interesting, holistic way of learning. I probably need to not go too much further down that line there, but I'm going to come back to some of those challenges in a minute. But I'm aware that we ask people at home about labelling, and I wanted to come to Heidi now to see what kind of things people have been talking about. So Heidi, what's been going on?

HEIDI: Lots and lots of feedback. I do just want to point out, so a few of our guests are saying that they're struggling to keep up with the chat and also be watching the video at the same time. So just a reminder to everyone that the video is going to be available again afterwards if you want to

watch this back on your own time, if you want to chunk it down, if you want to listen to bits at certain times, then it will be available online in the next couple of days.

I just want to credit Aurora. She was the one that initially used the term "neuro-spicy," which lots of people really, really liked in the chat and said that they're going to start using now. So I've got a few bits of feedback, and then we've got a question as well, Isabella. So Hannah says, I guess I see myself as having additional learning needs. That way you don't have to give too much personal information out about yourself.

Joanne says, disorder, so ASD-- disorder makes it sound like you're broken, and I am not broken. And Emma said, I don't like the term disorder. Louise refers to herself as, I'm a student who lives with ADHD. And Licia says, I'm a student first and centre, and disability comes next. Giselle prefers to say autistic but will use neurodivergent.

Natasha says, I'm neurodivergent, as I have multiple neurological quirks. Helen, dyspraxic or a neurodiverse student. And Tyler, as someone with ADHD, I find neuro-chaotic the most accurate word to describe themselves. So I found that interesting. Aurora and Avril have made a couple of comments. So Aurora said, I think it's nice to know that we can all have differing opinions and ways to explain how we feel regarding our identity. That's important.

Your own identity comes into it much more. It's about what makes each other feel comfortable. And Avril says, I think we need to understand that one size does not fit all and what term is used for one-- we're all unique in our own way. So some really interesting feedback. And then we've also got a question. Hannah said, is there a neurodiversity support group with the OU? So it would be great to find out more about that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: As if by magic-- indeed, there is, in fact, the Open University Students Association have a Neurodiversity Club, and I'm aware-- because when I've had this back-- there's very little on this page. But if you look in the bottom right-hand corner, there is a little email link, and there's a little Facebook link. Now, that Facebook link will take you to the relevant Facebook club page, and the email will go to the relevant email for the club.

I have fed back to them about that because some people want to find out a little bit more, and they're aware of that, but they say it will go through to the relevant people. But I just wanted to-- I'm aware that in the previous time when I got some feedback back from Heidi, people talking about the superpower. We are going to talk about it in later. So it's not the fact that I've ignored that one.

And again, that is a piece of terminology that is bandied around, different people refer to. So it isn't the fact that we say you have to be wonderful. If we're going to be technical about autistic spectrum disorder, here is the diagnosable disorder, then there's what we refer to as the triad of impairments, so there's the communication, there's the social, and then there's the what's referred to as repetitive or compulsive behaviour.

And for many people, if they have what they refer to as a superpower, it can come out of that. So my example, going back to the strong man example, is Tom Stoltman. He found that if he focused on lifting weights, if he focused on his strength, it became his superpower. Although actually, he doesn't refer to his strongman abilities as superpower. He actually refers to his autism as his superpower because he believes that makes him who he is, which is twice World's Strongest Man and various different other things that he does. But we'll come back to that a little bit later.

So I actually want to go-- I know I said I was going to come back to Yasmin. I will come back to Yasmin but I'm going to come back to Suki again now, because we've had some feedback from everybody that's listening here. We've talked about labelling. We've talked about how people refer to them. So in the group that you're involved with, the students are there. So what kind of things, other than you've mentioned a bit about the text, what kind of other things have people fed back that are particularly relevant to them?

SUKI HAIDER: Oh, so many things. So the way it works is the group gets module materials to review. So these are usually modules that are being written. So these are the modules that are going to come out in 2024. So the purpose of this conversation that the team are having with the academics is to say, we would like to see this or we really don't like that.

So it tends to be related to what the module team has given us. So if I talk about images then-- so images come up quite a lot. So the first thing I would say is, there needs to be a relationship between the image and the text. That's the feedback that I've had. And it's really interesting, this one, because it's about, what's the purpose of the image?

So what a student will tell me is, number one, the image can be really distracting. And then number two, if they can't work out the relationship between the images and the text, then they become anxious. So it's just not helpful having the image. And then when we go back to the module team, the module team think, oh, but we were breaking up the text there adding in the image. So we're raising awareness.

And so it's also about placement. So we do want images, but where should they be? So one of the team has said, don't put it before an activity because if you want me to focus on the activity, if you give me an image, I'll be focused on the image. So that's been so helpful.

Another thing they've given feedback about is time management, and this is something that Yasmin was talking about. I was really interested in that. So I've had feedback that study takes longer. And they do like approximate timings, but then the caveat is that approximate timing needs to include the rereading as well and the fact that screen readers take longer to use.

So timing is important, but also flexibility is important. And then flexibility leads to choice. And so we've had a lot of conversations about choice. So what the student consultants will tell me is they don't like essays, by and large. And a number of reasons-- so it can be that they find an essay is a barrier. So they want to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. And they have knowledge and understanding, but they feel like they can't show it because they're having to do it in an essay format.

So they have said that they prefer a report format. If they're going to be given a written assessment, then can we have a report rather than an essay? Because a report has that structure. But actually, they would like to do PowerPoint because they say they find it easier to put the information on PowerPoint slides and to present it.

And so again, this is the one size doesn't fit all, a student in the chat picked up. So some of the members of the team say that they feel better able to convey their knowledge and understanding verbally, and other students say they prefer in writing. And group work is something that comes up quite a lot. So when assessment is a group work, that can be very challenging, and so it's important to have the alternative. I think the OU is pretty good at that already. But what we need to do is definitely put more choice in assessment, and so the team that I'm involved with keep coming back to that. Give us a choice. Let us demonstrate our knowledge and understanding in a way that suits us because we don't want assessments to be stressful. An assessment shouldn't be stressful. If the purpose of education is to allow everybody to thrive, then let's not have stressful assessment.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [INAUDIBLE] And it's a bit-- in our description, we talked about potential pitfalls and maximising them. And when Suki and I were talking about this, we were talking about for most people, an assessment can be a pitfall because you're trying to work out-- it always gets stressful for everybody, exams or EMAs or whatever it is-- but actually trying to work out is, what's in here?

The brilliant things that are in here, your university student, your Open University students, who are studying with all sorts of things as well as neurodiversity and anything. So show how brilliant you are. But obviously, it's about helping you. And it was interesting were talking about the different bits, Suki, because the module I mentioned earlier, SK 298, mental health, and it's interesting. When we redesigned the module-- well I don't take credit for it.

When the module was redesigned a few years ago from the previous one, we used to have essays, and we had people struggle a lot. And in fact, one of the reasons why I do so much about essays is because I've done it for the previous module, and provided advice, and in Student Hub Live, we do lots about that. But in this version of the module, we have PowerPoints. We have writing leaflets we have explaining guidance to other people. So it's sometimes these different ways of thinking about communicating. Now we can't promise you, and this is one of the things we have to say, we can't promise you that if you give us feedback, if you give it through Suki, through your module team, that that can automatically happen. But you know what? If lots and lots of people give feedback and you say, you know what? This really helps me. Rather than just saying, this is rubbish. I don't like it. OK, why?

So like with the example of the images, this is why it doesn't help. This would help more. So try and be constructive, being positive. So actually, I think this would probably be a good point to come back to-- now, I didn't say out loud, but it was going across the screen, so learning activities that have worked for you. And Suki I know is really interested to see what people say. So Heidi, what kind of learning activities have people been saying do work with them? That kind of feedback.

HEIDI: So we've got some great feedback that's come in from Heidi. So Louisa says, is there any support with writing essays? And Heidi has recommended actually an open learn course. I wonder if one of the chat moderation team might be able to dig out the link and pop this up so that it's available for everyone. But it's how to write and format an essay, and Heidi says that that was really, really helpful for her second TMA. So that's a really great suggestion there.

Petra says that essay writing has gotten easier for me since I realised that the procrastination can be part of the process for me with ADHD. And Giselle and Rachel-- they were having a discussion around exams and TMAs and about how they are particularly challenging. And then Perry said, I find it helpful when others understand why I'm doing certain coping strategies, like externalising, time keeping, et cetera, so that they don't feel uncomfortable or confused.

Tonnes and Tonnes of conversations going on in the chat. Again, some people saying that the format of this Student Hub Live, because it's different to Adobe Connect and what they're used to, is quite challenging. So it's interesting to see that. And again, just as a reminder, the video is going to be available again afterwards.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And that's something I was actually going to bring out. And it's definitely a learning experience for us because I know when we talk in the workshops, and many people might be more familiar with me from having run the workshops since we started, though I have been doing these live ones as well for a while. But it's interesting. I know for many people, this may be a new one.

So I think probably what I want to say, and I also should have thought about this, and it is a failing on my part, and I do really, really apologise, particularly people who are dyslexic. And I'm thinking about what Yasmin's told me before about trying to follow different things. So I'm aware that some people will be trying to follow the camera, trying to follow what we're saying, but then aware that the chat is happening. Now, the chat is only live whilst we're live during the event as it is here on Wednesday the 22nd at the moment. The recording, as Heidi said, will be available and you'll be able to watch that again. So what I would probably say, and I know is this probably not really very good and as I said, I do apologise. If you want to follow the chat, then maybe focus on that and do that chat and the community aspect, and then maybe watching some of the other advice and the guidance afterwards.

But it is quite an interesting one because we want to try and be as inclusive as possible and as accessible and as accessible as possible. But we also want to hear from everybody, and the way we hear from everybody is in the chat. Obviously, there is an email address, and people can send it as well, but that's still involves you typing. Because of the format, we can't have you ringing in or live or anything like that. So I'm sorry that that is causing problems for people. I am genuinely really sorry, and when we do the event again, because I'm going to say when, because I really want us to do it again, and we'll have feedback at the end. So give us practical feedback because we really do want to learn and we want to be as effective as possible. So Suki, were there any of the points that Heidi mentioned there that do you want it to pick up anything, any of those?

SUKI HAIDER: Yeah, I think it's actually the issue that you've just apologised because you're aware of the challenge of following the screen and then following the chat. And I think this is actually a growth for us but we welcome the growth because we want to learn. And I think this is what's new now. This is what is good. This is a good time to be a student with additional needs because we are listening.

And I'd just like to talk a little bit about the evidence why I can say that. So the Open University has a teaching and learning plan. So this is what its ambition is for the coming years. So there's a couple of aims that are relevant to us today. And so the first aim is that the Open University is committed to be an anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, inclusive, and accessible institution. So that's for students and staff. And so what that's going to look like is that barriers are going to be broken. And we want everyone to feel like they belong and that everyone fits. And then the other thing, directly relevant to this that's happening today, is about student voice. So the university has committed to listening to students and to including student voice.

So what I mean by student voice is student feedback, student comments in the design of the teaching. So this group of students that I line manage-- they are there having conversations with the people who write modules as they are planning the modules, as they are deciding the content.

So that's the evidence that I'm giving you that we are listening. And we're not just listening this week, this month. We are listening. This is a process that the university has committed to for good reasons-- that we want our students to succeed. We want all our students to succeed.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So we're going to keep coming back because it was in the description. How can you maximise it? You can give feedback. As a tutor, I always say-- whenever I give feedback, I say, and I'm working-- if you've got any discussions about it. Some of my students get back to me. I can think of a couple of my lovely students that are always giving me feedback.

I've spoken to a couple of them in the last week, and they say, well, I want to talk about the feedback. I want to talk about it. Some of them do have declared disabilities. Some of them don't. But they actually

want to talk to me. And they go, right. OK. You said this. Does this mean X, Y, and Z? Yes or no? That's great. Or they say, you said this. I didn't understand what you meant. And that's fine because we all use language. We use language. We want to be inclusive. But sometimes we don't get it right. We're trying to be as right as possible.

And I want to come back to Yasmin now because we're talking-- because we said Yasmin is a student, so we've mentioned that dyslexia, the autism or autistic spectrum disorder. And one of the things that you do, Yasmin, is you talk to your tutors, don't you? You communicate, and you let them know. So can you tell us a little bit more and almost sort of like what you would like people to take away about that?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah. Before I go on to that, I do want to say to anyone on the live that is struggling with the chat and the video, if you have a post-it note and don't want to see all of the chat, place a post-it note over the chat so that it's less distracting for you. But onto the question-- as to tutors, I have made a colour wheel of which covers kind of different aspects that a lot of people can struggle with, which should be on your screen now.

And what I like to do is kind of mark a little X or whatever it is, so tics or fidgets is a good example. I have a fidget in my hand right now. That is something quite bad for me. So I would put a little mark in the outer kind of box on the circle and make contact with my tutor and send that across to them and use that as a bit of a template to help the tutor get a better understanding of some of the things that I struggle with as a student.

Equally, I really like at pretty much the soonest point that I can-- as soon as I know who my tutor is, I will send them an email and introduce myself, explain that. I know that it's extremely early to be emailing, and point out some of the key things that they need to know about me in order to support me studying throughout the year and a bit of what they can expect from me.

And then the other thing that I think is really important in that email-- pointing out to the tutor about the disability profile. But I always check through that disability profile. At the start of each year, I go back through it. And if anything isn't quite right-- if I no longer like terminology, if there's terminology that I now prefer, if there's things that I am struggling more with now that maybe weren't so much of a struggle before, I get in touch with the student support team, and get that profile updated.

I think that's really, really important for students to do-- to check over, make sure that it's still up to date, in order for tutors to be able to better support you as a student.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That's really, really useful. And we've had some feedback that some students are saying that they're getting the impression that we're just asking for information from them. It's not. We've given-- what we're doing is we're telling you how the university has been finding out so that we can best support you. So what we're trying to say is, for instance,

Yasmin's given some examples. And Yasmin's colour wheel and some guidance notes are available to download from the event page. So from the event page for today, you should be able to see the links. The blog's there as well. And what we're trying to do is we can't give any one answer. I don't want to sound negative about that, but what we're trying to do is we're trying to say how the university is trying to be responsive. And these are some of the things we found out, so these are some of the things that we're doing.

So in terms of study tips, what Yasmin has done is-- it might have been quite small on your screen, but there were actually a number of tips there. And the idea of giving information-- obviously, it is entirely up

to the individual. If you don't like giving information about yourself, that is fine. But as a tutor, I work with the information that is provided to me.

So for instance, I know how to do certain things and discuss with Yasmin because she's told me. She's not one of my allocated students but I've been privileged to talk to her a number of times. And she's also said to me, if there's something you want to know about, let me know. So I've actually said, you know what? Does this work in terms of slides? Because I'm trying to be responsive. I'm trying to be as effective as possible with the information.

So a lot of modules are what we call resource-based. We give you the information you need to know, but what we're trying to do is how you get into them, how you get the information out, how you get it up here in the right way and then convey it. Do you think that would be an accurate description from your perspective, Yasmin?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah. Yeah, I think so. I think obviously, we can all sit here, and we can all give tips. I can suggest all of the things that I do as a student to help me through study and things like that. And it's applicable to me, and some people may find some things useful. But not necessarily everyone is going to find everything useful.

And I think no matter what you read, what is suggested, and all of those kind of things, it is thinking about it in your own situation as to whether or not it would benefit you or adapting it slightly and things like that to make it more applicable to you. But obviously, your tutor can only go so far to help if they're not aware of some of the things that you may find more challenging or that you may need extra support with.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you. Because I think that's one of the things, and what we've been trying to do is-- you know, while I've been doing this hand thing, because I use my hands all the time. Yasmin's got used to me waving my hands all the time when we've been meeting. But I do-- I mean, in some way, if it helps you to think of autistic spectrum disorder like this, you do. Yasmin, I know. Doesn't. So that's fine. But I often think about things in different ways. Now, what would work brilliantly for Yasmin may not work so well for Sebastian. What works brilliantly for Natalie might not work for Yasmin. And it's actually one of the things that is really one of the challenging things about autistic spectrum disorder, about ADHD, about-- well, possibly not quite so much with the dyslexia, but those two in particular, ASD and ADHD, is that what really works for one person doesn't for another.

So we can't-- I'm sorry, but we can't give you any one this will work. And I'm thinking about the ADHD example here because I know that we've got somebody that comes to a number of our workshops. We've got several people that come to our online workshops who've said, I've got ADHD. And I've said, oh, it might be really, really challenging for you to do everything.

And one particular person I can think of-- I won't mention them by name, but they say to me, actually the fact that it's this really, really works for me, and there's somebody I know personally who says the fact that this is it-- that really works for him, and that helps him. Whereas for other people, this, this, this-- I mean, I know I'm doing it with my hands. It's because I like demonstrating.

But the bits, the different components-- for some people with ADHD, that's brilliant, because their brain is doing that, and it's wiggling all over the place. The neuro-chaotic that we had earlier, and I love that terminology because it's that-- so some people might say, the fact that there's the chat, the fact there's a video, the fact that-- for some people, they go, that is absolutely wonderful. I absolutely love that. That works for me.

Whereas, unfortunately, for other people, it doesn't. Which is why Yasmin-- and thank you, Yasmin, for saying, put a post-it over something. If you're in an Adobe Connect tutorial, maximise just the slides. Ignore everything else. You don't have to look at it. You're not going to be disadvantaged. We give you different options. We try and do things.

So there are some tips. So the neurodiversity club shares lots of tips. Thank you for everybody that's been sharing tips in the chat. We always do welcome tips. We'll give you a feedback form at the end, and if there's some particular tip there, that's great.

So I just-- I actually want to come back to Suki here, so I'm changing this. Suki, you've mentioned a couple-- is there any other things that you can think about that the students who identified with neurodiversity told you actually helped them?

SUKI HAIDER: Yeah, so a lot of it is about clarity, so clarity of instruction. So things like if there's an activity. So what is it they're being asked to do? Why are they being asked for do it? What does this relate to? Does it relate to TMA? Is this going to relate to the exam? So that clarity is really important, and it comes up as well in the online space.

So if the information is important, then they want to see that it's prominent on the screen. They want it to be easy to find the information that's important because sometimes, there's so much information online, but it's like the wood isn't it-- the wood from the trees. What's wood? What's trees? So that's something that's come up time and time again, and that's something that I think suits everybody.

The better we explain ourselves, the more that we think about language as being a potential barrier and how to remove the language that can cause confusion. So that's been an important one, and we work a lot with that. So the students will underline words that module teams have written, and they'll say, I would have to go and look that up. That's a distraction for me. Do you want me to do that? Do you want me to spend my time going away looking at that word? Or do you want me to concentrate on this activity? And if that's the case, make that clear in the instruction.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Sometimes when I'm talking to students-- I was thinking about the calls I've had some of my access students in. Some of them are doing a particular question for an assignment that's due in next week. And I say to them, look for key terms. Of us as students actually do have to define key terms. So I would say, so certainly, isn't necessarily unique to those with neurodiversity. And actually, some of the things you were just saying there, Suki, reminds me something else that I was talking about with Yasmin, which was bionic reading.

Now, we're only-- we have only got time to touch on this lightly, and I know, Yasmin, you've done a little bit of bionic reading. Could you just try-- I know it's probably going to be really hard-- could you try and summarise just briefly what that means to you, how it helps you, Yasmin?

YASMIN REEVE: Basically, makes the start of the letters in each word as a bold font, so it keeps your eyes drawn to each single word and the start of each word. It helps me remain sort of focused and in line with what it is that I'm actually reading.

And equally, speed-wise, it does improve my reading speed and reading comprehension. So how much I'm understanding of what I have just read. Bionic reading I do love. I think at the moment, we're limited as to where it is used, which is the big shame of it. But I love to use it where and when I can.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you, and I know-- because when I somebody told me about it, and I know there are some apps available, and there's different things like that. So some of you might like to explore

that. And I was just thinking, where's your hound dog gone? Your woofer? Has he been dispensed somewhere else so he doesn't distract you today?

YASMIN REEVE: He is now asleep in his crate.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, OK. That's fine. OK. That's fine. So we're almost at the end today. So hopefully we've given you lots and lots to think about. I know this has probably been a massively busy session for many people. And I hope it's given you some ideas. Obviously, as I said, we've given you some tips. Thank you for sharing them.

We've actually got a couple of videos that we will play after the main session has finished, which is some of the feedback from a couple of students that were in Suki's team there. And they give some of the points of some of the feedback. They've said some of the things that help them, some of the things at work, and hopefully that will be useful for you.

We do have a feedback form, and we really, really genuinely do welcome feedback. I'm hoping that we'll get to do a session like this again or maybe more of them. We are planning to do online workshops as part of Student Hub Live, where we'll be exploring different components. Hopefully we'll have a little bit more time there. I know today probably has just absolutely whizzed by. It definitely has for me.

And I really hope that today has given you something to think about. It's given you the ideas that you can- - there are tips. In terms of that superpower, it isn't about you having to be wonderful. But it's actually recognising that if you've got autism or if you've got ADHD, it isn't necessarily a negative thing. Yes, there may be negative parts about it, but it's also positive.

We've all got things about us that we like, we don't like. I haven't even mentioned my liking of chocolate today. It's a bit of a negative in some ways because I can't get through the day without it, but you know what? It makes me feel good. So I hope that it's given you things-- do continue to talk to each other as long as the chat's there. Have a look at the videos if you find that helpful, and do please provide us feedback. And I hope this has been really useful for you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]