

# Welcome to the OU: Navigating your learning journey - 7th February, 2024

ROB MOORE: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Student Hub Live. You're here with me Rob Moore, coming to you from the Study Shack in a reasonably mild, museum today. So really good to see you all. Today, we're going to be looking at our welcome to you to your OU studies. So hopefully you've been engaging already with our helpers in the chat. We've got Nicola and Sean, who are looking after you. And you'll notice messages from them because they'll have "SHL" in front of their names. And my link to you is Heidi. And Heidi is going to be taking your questions and letting me know what you're talking about.  
[AUDIO OUT]

HEIDI: Sorry, Rob. I lost you then. I think we've got a little bit of an issue possibly with the sound that's going on. So I heard a little bit of a click and then something fell out. So I think I've got a little bit of an issue with sound.

But I think you were asking me what people are saying in the chat. So I'm just going to go ahead and say hello to everybody.

So my name is Heidi. And as Rob said, I'm going to be supporting him with the chat as we go along. So you can put any of your comments and questions into the chat box, and I will put them to our panel. Now, you might find, if this is your first time using Student Hub Live, this system looks quite different to what you're used to. So if the chat is going really fast, there's a little pin button- I always have to get it the right way around- that side of your screen. If you click on that, it will just slow down the chat and it makes it easier for you to see what's going on. And I use that all the time. That's a real godsend for me.

So I'm going to say some hellos this morning. Last night, we did a welcome session for freshers. And we had loads of international students joining us yesterday. We had guests from Luxembourg, Namibia, Germany, Guyana, and Greece.

And so today, we've got Stephanie who's joining us from Belgium. So welcome to you, Stephanie. We've got Pauline, who's joining us from Roslin. And we've got another Pauline, who's joining us from West Yorkshire. And I've just been having a little bit of a chat with Pauline in the chat because Pauline previously was at a BRIC University and has come across to the OU to start Level 2, studying business management.

We've got Theresa, from Nuneaton. Hello to you. We've got Jenks, from Cheshire. Natasha is with us, and she's studying psychology. We've got Emily, from mid-Wales, studying health and social care; Melanie, from Swansea; Rachel, from Liverpool; Matilda, from Luton; Gabriella, from Hartlepool; and we've got Taiwo- I do hope that I've pronounced that correctly- Taiwo, from Newark, who's studying computing and IT.

So you'll notice also on your screen that you've got some little widgets. So there's some little interactive bits that you can get involved with there. So we'd love to know where you're joining us from and how long

it's been since you previously studied. And then, we'll be looking at the widgets as we go through today's session.

We do just recommend that, within the chat, you avoid any personal comments or anything that can identify you too much within the chat. So we just recommend that you're just mindful of that.

And if you want to get in touch with us and send us more information and not share it in the chat, one of my colleagues will pop our email address in there. It's [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), and you can contact us that way as well.

So it's great to have you with us, and I really hope that you enjoyed today's session.

ROB MOORE: And hopefully the microphone gremlins won't keep coming back. We were joking just before the session that sometimes Heidi has to step in when I tread on my microphone. I didn't do it then. So fingers crossed it holds on.

So today, we've got some real experts with us. So we've got Mark, who's joining us, who's information security coordinator, with some tips on how to stay safe online.

We've got Zoe Gibson, who's the senior production development manager at our Learning Design Services. And Zoe knows all of our websites and web pages inside out.

And we've got who's Hossam who's joining us from the library, to tell you about some of the services that we offer to students and how to access them. So great to see you all, guys.

And as we go through the session, we're going to be talking to Mark, Zoe, and Hossam. But after we have the break, there'll be an opportunity for you to ask some questions. So Mark and Zoe will be coming back again later. So if you have any questions for them specifically, you can pop them in the chat. And then Heidi will ask them for you later.

So let's get cracking. We're going to start by talking to Mark. So Mark, welcome. Thank you for joining us.

MARK HUGHES: My pleasure.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, excellent. So what is information security, and how does it impact on students? What is your job? What do you do?

MARK HUGHES: Yes. So welcome, everybody. So if you're joining us as a first-time returning student, no matter how long it's been, the world of cyber security or, as our team name is, Information Security, is forever changing. So what our job is and what we like to do is come along to these sessions to give you a little bit of a taste of how to go about your studies safely and securely.

So our day-to-day job is ensuring that our systems are as secure as possible to make sure that you can study with peace of mind that your data is secure and our systems won't be failing and they won't be hijacked by any potential nefarious infiltrator. So that's what we do in a nutshell.

So I, in my job day to day, produce a lot of guidance materials for our colleagues. And what we want to do more of is engage with you, our students. So starting today, this is going to be probably the first taster of what we want to provide for you. And then, long term, we want to engage with students at other events throughout the year as well.

And of course, if you have any concerns regarding cyber security, we will also give you our contact details. We do have a central inbox. So by default, you would contact the OU Computing Help Desk. And there'll be more on that and you'll find out more later on as you go throughout your studies on where to go there. And then, from there, the OU Computing Help Desk, where necessary, can triage to our inbox, which is [information-security@open.ac.uk](mailto:information-security@open.ac.uk).

ROB MOORE: So Mark, I'm thinking about this both from my role as a tutor and as a student. Let's say, for example, my email has been compromised or I think I've had a problem and somebody has managed to hack into my computer. I'm going to be a bit embarrassed and a bit worried that it might have had an impact.

So what are you going to do to me when I phone up and admit that my system has been hacked?

MARK HUGHES: Fundamentally, we have a zero blame culture. So the first thing we want to do is- well, first of all, make sure that you're secure and reassure you that we are aware of what the issue is, if you've been compromised- so we can reassure you and give you that peace of mind, from a perspective of your security- but also that there is a zero blame culture because we want to encourage and foster that culture of reporting.

We don't want there to be an issue where someone won't report something to us, whether it be they feel their password has been breached, they feel their files have been accessed by someone that it shouldn't be. So that could be an ETMA. It could be something you're doing for part of your studies. It could be an assignment. Anything at all, the key is don't worry. We will be on hand to support you.

All we care about is knowing about the situation. And then we'll get in contact with you. So a member of my team, the Information Security team, will be in touch with you. And we want to, first of all, reassure, and then make sure we contain any potential issue, if it's there. But very much, it is highly confidential. So no one else will be made aware of this issue. Only the teams that need to be aware of this problem- if there even is indeed a problem.

But if you have a suspicion, please get in touch with us. We're a happy, friendly team. There's 20 other individuals in my team like me. And our job is really to support you, whether it be from a technical side or from my side, the advice and guidance. It's to really just create that culture where you can come to us. We are approachable. We don't blame you.

ROB MOORE: So if we've got a suspicion, you'd much rather we came to you even if we weren't sure- if we just had a suspicion-

MARK HUGHES: Yes.

ROB MOORE: -rather than wait till we were completely sure.

So what sort of things have happened in the past? Just what sort of examples have we got of where things have been compromised? Have we had any at the OU?

MARK HUGHES: Yes. And sadly, it is increasingly happening. Well, we see the threats are increasing as well. So thankfully, we do have a very security-savvy culture within the OU. Our students, thankfully, do come to us when need be. They'll go via whether it be their Student Support teams, whether it be going through to their tutor, first and foremost, or coming to us directly.

We do have students that come to us. And then we have seen issues, varying from they feel they've engaged with an email. So this is actually the most common form of security breach- would be caused by, for instance, you engage with an email from someone who's pretending to be your tutor.

So they might be masquerading as someone who you see as legitimate. You think they're an OU member of staff. And you think, oh, great, they're safe to deal with. I'll reply to the email. Or I'll click on the link that they've sent me. And that's when we see your data harvested, for instance.

So that's why we'll summarise in a moment some of the things that you can look out for to look for those particularly nefarious emails that could provide that threat. But that's where we see it's the biggest open

door to our systems, where we see probably the most breaches, is where someone's data has been harvested and their account has been compromised as a result.

ROB MOORE: I see. So you've got some tips, then, for students, things to watch out for, things to take care of, to try and avoid these?

MARK HUGHES: Indeed. So there's so many tips to cover beyond studying remotely; equally, what to look out for while you're on your laptop or tablet or whatever device you're using for your studies. But to summarise them really quickly, I would say, when you're opening up your email- so when you're in Outlook and you're looking through your emails, it could be you're looking for something related to an assignment, wherever it could be- only respond to an email if it's related to the OU, if you've got an open.ac.uk domain at the end of the address. That denotes it's a member, or it should be, a member of our staff.

Of course, there are some cases where you will still need to verify that it is that member of staff. Because one of the biggest issues we face is spoofing, where an address is copied and- but what I would check is that, if you've had correspondence, say, if it's with your tutor, just to double check. If there's any doubt in your mind that it is legitimate, just double check with them.

So go for a legitimate contact base. So it could be replying to a previous email that you may have had from your tutor. Going back on that email just to check, did you send this email? Because it says it comes from your address, but it doesn't seem right to me.

So if something doesn't settle right, where the way they're speaking to you is different, the language they're using is slightly different, the formatting of the email is different, whether they're asking you to divulge personal information- that's a big red flag. If they're asking you to click on links, attachments, while- other red flags are being addressed as well- so it could be their email signature is different as well. That's a common trait.

But if there's any doubt at all, just check with a legitimate contact. So if you've got a legitimate address that you've used before, use that one. Double check with them. Because it's always better to be safe than sorry in that regard.

Beyond email, if you do receive emails pertaining to be from OU colleagues that aren't using open.ac.uk addresses, don't engage with them. So if you get an email that's pretending to be from an OU colleague- it could be your tutor or anyone else- that isn't from that domain, please don't engage with it.

And even if you do believe it could be your tutor, please ensure you only reply to @open.ac.uk email addresses. And then-

ROB MOORE: Absolutely.

MARK HUGHES: -beyond that- and indeed, Rob, that's absolutely key. That's one of the messages we want to try and drum into people as they come in. So there is a massive danger if you do accidentally- again, accidents happen- but if you do engage with someone that's not from an open.ac.uk email address, the threat to your data, and the OU's data more widely, is under serious threat.

So what we want to do then beyond that is we want to cover off other elements of potential red flags that can come up while you're studying. So another one is where you're studying. So device security.

So when you're out and about- you could be using your laptop, you could be using your tablet, phone- whatever is convenient for you- make sure that if you're leaving it for a period of time, make sure it's locked and that you have a PIN in place or, even better, a biometric. So it could be your fingerprint, for

instance. So that it means that only you can unlock that device from that. So make sure you've got that extra layer of protection in place, especially when you're in a public place.

And that links onto Wi-Fi. So when you're connecting to Wi-Fi to complete your studies, never connect to Wi-Fi's that don't require a password to be input. So if you see, when you're looking for a Wi-Fi network- you're in a coffee shop, you could be out and about in the library, you could be anywhere- if you're looking for that Wi-Fi to connect to, make sure you have to input a password first. Because then that gives that extra layer of protection as well.

If you can automatically connect to the Wi-Fi, theoretically, anyone could look at what you're doing within that network. And then when we're talking about protection-

ROB MOORE: We've actually got a question, Mark. I'm sorry to interrupt.

MARK HUGHES: Oh, yes. Sorry.

ROB MOORE: We had a question about, should we be using a VPN if we've got one? Is that something you would recommend?

MARK HUGHES: Absolutely, yes. If you have a VPN, of course- I know it's not accessible for everybody, but if you can use a VPN, please do. Because that obviously adds another extra layer of security to your network. And that brings me on to another step you can take beyond VPN. And that's two-factor, or multi-factor, authentication. So they're often referred to in either of those terminologies.

That essentially means, if you've got 2FA or MFA in place, it's an extra layer of protection beyond a password. So if you're logging into systems or your account, make sure that MFA or 2FA is in place in some way on whatever you're using to keep your device secure. That essentially means you've got to prove you are who you are using something only you have.

So that could be, for instance a code that's sent to your phone via text. It could be you're engaging with an app. So it could be a 2FA or MFA app or something else that you have, like a biometric, for instance.

ROB MOORE: So we're getting some questions about TLAs, three-letter acronyms. So we've got a few coming out. So a VPN is a virtual private network, which hides your network address.

MFA is multi-factor authentication, which means it's more than just one way of logging in. You have to log in in different ways. And 2FA is two-factor authentication, which means you use two methods. I think that's right.

MARK HUGHES: Yes. That's spot on, then.

ROB MOORE: You have to use all these terms as we go through.

MARK HUGHES: We have, yes. That is another thing, yeah. We have a lot of acronyms, yes, here at the SO. And of course, if we need to ask anything, explain away. We'll do that for you via our team.

And then, to summarise, because of course I appreciate this is a lot to take in, in one moment, I would like to signpost you to the OU's Safe Computing Help page, which you will find on Student Home. So this is a page that we're regularly updating. And this will have all the essential guidance that will summarise probably far better than what I'm talking about today to keep you secure.

But if I could leave you with a couple of other pieces of quick tips to use, it's around passwords. So of course, we all sometimes find it difficult to remember our passwords, if we've got many across different accounts. And so, therefore, we recommend that you use a passphrase. So rather than a conventional password, where it might be 8, 9, 10 characters, and you're combining quite a common word that's easy to remember with maybe some characters, think of a phrase.

So think of three or four random words, combine them together, and that is far more secure than a smaller, more complex password that you probably use across all of your accounts, and inherently means that if you are compromised with one of your accounts, all of your accounts will be compromised.

So try and make your passwords as long as possible, but equally as memorable as possible. So it could be, for instance, four words like "coffee instead of tea." And then that's a simple phrase you can remember- or whatever it may be to suit your needs. And then you can easily remember that password. But the longer it is, the more complex it is, and therefore, the harder it's going to be for those infiltrators to get hold of your data.

And beyond that, software. So we're going to be working with a lot of software probably when you're studying, you're on your modules. You're asked to download a bit of software. The key thing with software is make sure you're downloading it from a reputable source. Make sure you look in the search engine to see that is the actual vendor- the legitimate vendor. Because we do see a lot of scams where you're sent to or you're directed to a fake website. And that's another scenario where your data could be exfiltrated by an attacker.

And then, beyond that as well, when you finish using a piece of software, make sure it's removed as well. So we've got some guidance that we're going to be uploading to that Safe Computing Help guide, which will take you through everything you need to do to remove and update software because patching is crucial. So making sure software has the latest security updates is another crucial element to keeping the software you're using while you're studying completely secure.

But of course, beyond all that and the guide, if you have any queries at all, our mailbox is open. So I'll repeat that address again. It's [information-security@open.ac.uk](mailto:information-security@open.ac.uk), and we'll answer any queries if you ever want to come to us directly.

ROB MOORE: Thank you, Mark.

And if you've got any questions for Mark, he'll be coming back again in the next session to answer your questions at the end. So I just want to say thanks. Some really great tips there.

And we are having a full session, looking at cyber security, later in the year. So we'll have a whole Student Hub Live session focusing on cyber security.

So before we move on to Zoe, Heidi, I know people have been filling the widgets out, talking about where they've been studying. So do you want to give us a quick run-through on that? And then we're going to move on to Zoe.

HEIDI: Yeah, absolutely. That's given me real food for thought, that session with Mark there. I had no idea that if you just go into a coffee shop and you're just using a Wi-Fi without a password that you don't have any security at all. And I do that all the time. So I'm definitely going to be much more mindful of that. So thank you for that tip, Mark.

Luckily, I only look at things about the International Space Station or anything to do with NASA. So yeah, if anyone wanted to see what I was looking at, then that's what it is.

But in terms of widgets, yeah. So just a reminder, the widgets are up on the screen. So there's these little interactive boxes on the screen there. So we're asking people whether they're new to the OU. So at the moment, 33% of you in the chat are new to the OU. So welcome to you if you're brand new.

And then, looking at the levels that people are studying at, an overwhelming majority are studying at Level 1. And we've got 65% of you studying at level 1.

And then we've got 18% of you studying Access Courses. Level 2, we've got 10%. Level 3 at 4%. And also postgraduate and beyond at 4%.

And then it's really interesting to see how long it's been since people last studied. So between 0 to 2 years, about a third of you. But I'm really particularly interested in those. So between 11 and 20 years, and more than 21 years. So that's almost half of you. So that's really, really interesting to see. And welcome back to those of you that are coming back to study after taking a little bit of a break. It does take real courage. So welcome to you.

And I just want to touch on a couple of comments in the chat. So we're talking about what people are looking forward to with their studies. Molly says, as part of her course, she's most looking forward to just learning new things about how the mind works and learning more about behaviour patterns.

And then Tracy says, I'm looking forward to getting back to the workforce after an accident left me unable to carry on in my last career. So I'm really sorry to hear that, Tracy, but wonderful that you're studying with the OU.

And Barbara, you asked a question. You said, you can't stay for the whole session. Will the session be repeated? Yes, Barbara, this will all be available to watch again on playback. So you'll be able to see this whole session again. So if you do need to disappear, don't worry. You can watch it all back later.

ROB MOORE: Thank you, Heidi. That's great.

So if we could bring Zoe in. Welcome, Zoe.

ZOE GIBSON: Hi.

ROB MOORE: An expert on our learning system. So we're going to treat this a bit like a live Frequently Asked Question session. I've got some questions to point at you, Zoe. So let's get cracking.

So tutorials, what do we mean by tutorials from the perspective of the OU?

ZOE GIBSON: So the tutorials, a majority of them are going to be online. They are a chance for you to really explore the subjects that you're studying. They are a really great opportunity for you to get online and have those conversations and discuss tricky problems with not just your tutors, but also with fellow students.

That's really what they're about. They're about bringing your module to life. They are key touch points to bring a module to life.

ROB MOORE: And you get to meet people like me in your tutorials.

ZOE GIBSON: Yes.

ROB MOORE: Whether that encourages you or not, I'll leave you to make your mind up.

I know we've got a screenshot for this next one. So how do students go about booking their tutorials?

How do they know when they are, and how do they get registered for them?

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah, it's a really good question. So the screenshot that you should be seeing is Screenshot 1. And that is around the Student Home. So Student Home, that's the main place that you will go that really collates all of your studies together. It's where you'll find your Profile, everything to do with the qualification you're on, and access to all of the modules that you are studying at the same time.

So some of you may be studying one module. Some of you may study several, a couple, in parallel. So you can access all of them from there. You've got your links to your module websites. But importantly, for your tutorials, you'll see there's a Book Your Tutorials link that we highlight in this one.

So that's when- if we were to go to Screenshot 2- so this is the tutorial booking system. When you click on that, it takes you through to your tutorial booking system. If you are studying more than one module, or

just even one module, what you'll see is that top highlighted area. It tells you the little module boxes that you're studying.

So you select the module that you want. And when you select that module, it will then show you all of the tutorials that are available for you to book. You can book and cancel from this area at any point. I think that's the main thing to say about this one. So that's the Student Home, and that's where you will go for everything about your study.

You'll get links from these booked tutorials to your module website. Because your module website, which I believe is probably- yeah, this screenshot- so you'll come through to this page with your booked tutorials. And this is where your module website is.

Now, a really top tip is- your Student Home is super important for everything around your studies- but top tip is bookmark your module website because that is where you're going to be going for all of your study material. That's where your Study Planner and all of the content is.

And importantly, this is where your tutorials will take place. So when you've booked your tutorials, as I've said, you'll come through here. And then, at the top there, you'll see there's the Home page, Assessment, and then there's a Tutorials one here. And I believe Screenshot 4 takes you through to the Tutorials page. So when you click on that and you go to the Tutorials, you will then see all of the tutorials that you have booked on. Now, remember, this is your module website, where all of your study material is and all of your tutorials take place.

If at any point you need to cancel or book another tutorial, you can go back to Student Home. OK? And that is on the Tutorials page. If you can still see that screenshot of the Tutorials page on the Module website, there's a Manage bookings block at the top. So if you were to select that, it would take you back to Student Home, where you can cancel or book other events.

And when you do that, again, you'll be able to come back to the Tutorials page at any time. And when it is time for your event, you'll see there's a Booked events table. And in there, importantly, all of your booked events are pulled into here. So you can go here, see the dates, the times, who's going to be running your event. And the important thing is, under the Venue column, you will get a link to the right room and the group that you are a part of. So we do all of that work for you.

ROB MOORE: So you can't accidentally go to the wrong room. If you follow the link, it's going to take you to the right room.

ZOE GIBSON: Absolutely.

ROB MOORE: I know that it can look a bit intimidating when we first see all these screens. But from my experience, it takes students about two months to be completely familiar. A bit rabbit in the headlights for about two months. And then, for the next five or six years, it's just business as usual because we like to keep things consistent and the modules are designed in a similar way. So once you get used to it, there's a lot of help there.

Now, a lot of what you're talking about, Zoe, we can also find that in the Help Centre, can't we?

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah. Yeah, we can. So if you go to the Help Centre, which we don't have a screenshot of, but on the Help Centre, there's lots of information about your studies, lots of information around keeping yourself safe on the computer, which links to what- Mark's useful information he gave is there for you.

There's also stuff around tutorials, as well. So if you click through to Tutorials, it tells you about online tutorials. And it will tell you how you can book on them, how you can find them. There's also information around how tutorials can be accessible to you.

And I think a really important thing to say, actually, is about you having reminders. So we do have a final screenshot, I think, don't we, of the Study Planner?

ROB MOORE: I think so. Yeah, when you're on the Study Planner- yeah, we got a picture of the Study Planner. I can't remember if we've got a screenshot.

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: But on the Study Planner, that's effectively a calendar for your entire module. And I like the Study Planner. It's got two views, hasn't it? It's got the Current view, which is this week, last week, and next week- unless you haven't started yet. If you haven't started your module yet, it might just have next week. But it's got three weeks to look at. Or you've got the entire module that you're studying at. You can see however many weeks- 32 is quite a common number of weeks for study. And yeah, all of the links are there in one place.

So you've got Student Home, which is where all your personal information is, your passwords, and a list of all the courses you are studying or have studied. And then you've got the Module website with the Study Planner, which really gives you the detail for the actual module that you're on.

So I'm just thinking about the tutorials. Now, do we have compulsory tutorials at the OU, Zoe?

ZOE GIBSON: There are a few occasions where there are. So for example, if you're on an apprenticeship, particularly nursing, there might be some mandatory tutorials that you need to attend. But for the most part, your tutorials are going to be an optional thing.

So you can book on the ones that are right for you. You'll get a variety of dates and times. So try and pick one that's most convenient for you. But the main thing to say is that they're there to support your study.

So if you can attend, there's evidence that shows that it really can help you with your studies and help you to reinforce some of those tricky learning points that you may think you've got, but sometimes listening to other students can make a big difference so you can really understand something in more depth.

So where possible, try and book if you can. If you can't attend, that's OK. We usually make at least one tutorial non-recorded and one tutorial recorded so that if you could not attend, you can catch up by watching a recording.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. And I think that's quite important because sometimes students don't want to go to a live one because they don't want to be recorded. If you're going to have your microphone or your camera on- we love to hear from you by the way- microphones are fantastic- but if you go to a session and it says it's not recorded, then you don't have to worry. But there will always be at least one version of each tutorial that you'll be able to watch afterwards.

I've got a question here about, can you book on more than one tutorial for the same tutorial? In other words, can you hedge your bets?

ZOE GIBSON: It's a really good question. The answer is yes, you can. So it's possible that we may have several offerings of the same event. And that's because we have different tutors running them in the same group. They might be pitched slightly differently in terms of tutor style of delivery, obviously. But they may be all covering the same point. So it might be they're leading up to TMA-01.

So it might be that you decide to book yourself onto a couple of those because, actually, for you hearing different perspectives is what you need right now. You need to understand that and get that deeper learning. So there is nothing to stop you from booking on several if that's what you need.

But also remember you can book on the key one that you want to go to and you can watch recordings as well.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. We don't normally encourage you to attend more than one because there's not a great deal of value I know some students like to attend one and watch one on the recording. If you do book more than one, though- because I know some students, they're not quite sure, they like to book everything at the start of the year- so they might book all the tutorials, but give themselves some options. As a tutor, I don't mind that because you're keeping your options open. But what I do ask students to do is, if you decide you're not going to one, de-register. Because then that gives us as the tutor an idea of how many people are going to turn up. Because if we've got an activity planned on 30 people turning up and we only get 10, then it throws out our planning.

So if you do book some contingency tutorials to give yourself some options, unbook the ones that you're not going to use. That's really helpful.

So we talked about accessibility. So our tutorials normally go in Adobe Connect, don't they, Zoe? We've got our platform with Adobe Connect. Do you want to talk about some of the ways that we use Adobe Connect and make it more accessible?

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah. So within Adobe Connect, it's accessible from all devices. That's the first thing to say. And any device, whether it's a laptop or whether it's using the Adobe Connect app or whether you're using a browser or one of your mobile devices, there are lots of accessibility settings on your devices that you can change.

So for example, you could have a dark mode plugin in the Chrome browser. You could have coatings on your mobile device. And those will also come over into your tutorials. So if you need to change the way it looks, there are options.

So again, a top tip is maybe have a little play. Have a little play around and see what works, whether the app is better for you or whether just going in straight from the browser is going to be better for you.

In terms of the actual software, we have automated closed captions in all of our tutorials. And those automated closed captions are there and personal to you. So if you click to show them to yourself, nobody else- they're not going to turn on for anyone else unless they choose to turn them on.

So you can have the captions for yourself. They can be dragged around the room so that it doesn't block anything that's being shown in your tutorial. And you can change the size of the text and the colour of those closed captions, too.

Those closed captions will also display as an option over a recorded tutorial. So again, the same principles apply- that you can move them around and you can change the colour and the size if you want to.

If you do require anything more accurate- because obviously these are automated closed captions- then you can contact the Disability Support Team. And those details are on the Help Centre and they're also in the Adobe Connect Accessibility Guide, which is linked to from every Join page for a tutorial.

And you can have a conversation with them if you think you need something more accurate or something more supportive. But over every tutorial, every recording, there are closed captions for you.

We also have the option for recordings now. Because one point to just mention about recordings is your interactions in a tutorial are all anonymized when they're recorded. So you don't need to be put off by putting your microphone on or typing in the text chat because your name does not appear against those interactions in a recording. And those recordings can also be downloaded onto your computer if you need to work offline and refer back to a recording.

And again, another top tip for you-

ROB MOORE: Or listen to one while you're walking the dog. Absolutely.

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: You can come on your phone and listen to it while you're walking the dog.

ZOE GIBSON: Absolutely.

ROB MOORE: Thank you for that, Zoe. That's a quick run-through.

I'd like to point out that the session that Heidi did with Margaret last night, we also gave some more screenshots of things to move- the ways to move through the system and how the system works. So the two sessions are meant to complement each other. So I very much recommend you having a look at the recording from last night.

We did have one question from Theresa about, where do you find the bookmarks? So when Zoe talks about bookmarking your page, what she means is you go to the browser that you're using and you add your own bookmark. So there'll be an option to bookmark this page. And that's what we recommend you do.

Personally, I bookmark the Study page for the module and Student Home. They're the two that are my key go-tos.

Thank you for that, Zoe. That's great. And of course, Zoe is going to be around to answer your questions later on.

And we're going to move on now to Hossam. So Hossam, thank you for joining us.

HOSSAM KASSEM: Thank you for having me.

ROB MOORE: Thank you for coming along and coming and talking to us about one of the things that I think is really understated in the OU. And that's a lot of students don't even know we have a library. So can you tell us a little bit about the OU Library, what it's there for, how students can access it, et cetera?

HOSSAM KASSEM: OK. So we have a library at the Open University like any other university. There is a physical building with librarians in, although, since the pandemic, have been working hybrid. But there's always the building is open. And like any other academic library, there's study spaces, there is books to borrow, although our main collection is in electronic format because our students are spread around the country. So they can access our resources online. We have access to e-books and e-journals in all the topics that we teach at the Open University.

And also, there is a Help Desk. The Library Help Desk is open, literally, 24/7 as a chat. You can go to any of the Library web pages, and then you can access the Help Desk on the right-hand side of the pages.

And you can either send an email, call us, or if you want 24/7, then you use the Chat function.

We do find that some of our students would like to access a physical library. So the Open University is part of what we call the SCONUL scheme. And this is an agreement across many universities around the United Kingdom, where students from each of these universities can visit the libraries of the other university.

So our students- let's say someone is studying in Manchester- if the Manchester University is part of the scheme, they can visit it and study in that space. Sometimes they might be able to browse their printed materials and read them there or they can also access the Wi-Fi and just have a quiet place to study. All they need to do is come to the library website and, under Student Services, you can register for the SCONUL scheme.

Now, the SCONUL scheme does- there isn't many universities in Northern Ireland that use the scheme. I believe there is one. So our brilliant staff in the OU Northern Ireland had an agreement with Libraries Northern Ireland. There's about 96 of them, where our students are entitled to go register with them and use these libraries for their own study, access computers, Wi-Fi, and even the book collections there, and the staff support as well. And I believe also they have out-of-hours access to these libraries

ROB MOORE: That's brilliant, Hossam. I've got my SCONUL card, where I came in and I requested it. You need the card to take advantage of this. And it gets sent through to you, doesn't it?

HOSSAM KASSEM: It's no longer a card. There's an email now. You just get an email, and that's that. And you need to register for each module. Because our students register on a module basis, after each module ends, you need to register again to use the system. But now it's an email-based system.

ROB MOORE: Oh, goodness me. I'm getting old. I like my library card. But we're going all digital now. [LAUGHTER]

Another thing I wanted to ask you about, Hossam. There are training sessions that are run at the library. And I know we've got a screenshot of a page of the training sessions. What sort of training sessions does the Library run?

HOSSAM KASSEM: OK. So to start with, we use the same system as Zoe has mentioned. Which we use Adobe Connect for our library sessions. We have two types of training. We have what we call targeted sessions. And these are associated with certain modules.

So let's say you are studying a psychology module that needed a library training session. So you will have to register in the same way Zoe had mentioned. And you access this session via your module website. But we have also something called generic training sessions. And these are the usual offerings we run regularly through our Library. So there are sessions about referencing, sessions about introduction to library services, how to use library search. We have a session on how to use databases. This is for more advanced, for Level 2 and 3 and master's students. And basically, we introduce you to how to use the library in various ways.

And especially I know that lots of students might have concerns about plagiarism and referencing. There's nothing to worry about. We have a dedicated page- and I believe we have a screenshot referencing the plagiarism page, where we have simplified guidance and also links to the Cite and Write system which we use in the University. And it's a simple thing. You don't need to memorise anything because all the guidance is there for you to use.

I think we've lost Rob.

ROB MOORE: Goodness me. It's the microphone gremlins.

What I was saying before Heidi was about to leap in and rescue me- I was saying that the guidance that you give on referencing and plagiarism is fantastic. My students come to me and say, can you give me some advice on referencing? Can you show me how to do it properly? I just give them the link to your training because it's far better than anything I would do as a tutor. And it goes into just the depth and just the level that is needed.

So anybody that's worried about referencing, find that- I don't know if the guys in the chat can find that link, or perhaps you can pop it in later- but that recording on how to reference and cite work correctly is absolutely fantastic. And it's my go-to as a tutor.

HOSSAM KASSEM: Yeah. And just to mention- that our sessions, you could attend them live. And also, there is a recording and transcript of these sessions. So you can watch them in your own time for help. And the quick guides are brilliant because they have the day-to-day referencing stuff you have to use. And our message to the students is, first of all, check your module guide, what's the guidance around referencing? But consistency is important- just be consistent with what you give- the information. If in doubt, always reference the source you are using if you're not sure.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And the last thing I want to say on referencing is, if you're just starting out with the OU, don't panic. Referencing is a skill that we're going to help you develop. We're not going to be there with a big massive stick, knocking you down on day one because you're referencing is not perfect. I see my Level 1 course as the way that I get students to do referencing correctly, develop that skill.

[AUDIO OUT]

HOSSAM KASSEM: We lost you again, Rob.

HEIDI: Rob, we've lost you again there with your sound.

I've actually got a question for Hossam. If we're having some issues with Rob's sound, can I put that question to Hossam quickly?

Are you back with us, Rob?

ROB MOORE: I'm back. But if you've got a question, we can ask it. I could hear you, but my mic is definitely playing up today.

HEIDI: Playing up today, isn't it?

Yeah, just a very quick question, Hossam. Samantha says, how do we go about applying for the card? And does it give you access to libraries in other universities?

HOSSAM KASSEM: Well, to apply for the card, if you go to the Library website- I think we have a screenshot of the Library website- and then, under Services- Services for the Library, then there is a section for services for students. And from there, you can access the SCONUL web page, where you can look about the information. And basically, it allows you access to academic libraries in your area. The only condition is that the library you want to access has to be part of this scheme. For example, Oxford and Cambridge are not part of that scheme. But there are many, many other universities that are part of it. I think there's over 100 universities that are part of this scheme. And you can just go to their library.

The minimum they will offer you is a place to study and access to the Wi-Fi. Some of them might offer book borrowing. But you need to talk about that with the relevant library because we don't have data on all of them.

ROB MOORE: Thank you, Hossam.

In this next session, we're going to focus a little more on what it's like to be a student. And I've got two special guests with me today. I've got Cat and I've got Lou.

So Cat is one of our Student Hub Live team. So if you come to some of our workshops, you may see Cat in the chat with us. And Cat is also the person that sorts out all those lovely Study Buddy pictures.

And then we've got Lou, who is the vice president of engagement at OUSA, the OU Students Association.

So we're going to have a chat with Cat and Lou and talk about what it's like to be a student and their experiences so far. So we're going to start with Cat.

CAT KIMPTON: Hi, Rob.

ROB MOORE: Hi. Great to see you. It's great to have Cat on the camera. She's normally in the background, writing messages to me, telling me to behave myself.

[LAUGHTER]

So you've come to work for the OU and now you're studying. So tell us about it. What are you studying and what's it been like?

CAT KIMPTON: So I'm studying a module called Design Essentials, which is a Level 2 module, which I found a little bit intimidating, first of all, if I'm honest, because I've never studied with the OU or with a university before. And I was able to do that through transferring credits from a previous qualification that I had taken vocationally.

ROB MOORE: OK. So we've actually got a couple of people on the chat. Heidi has been chatting with some of the students. And some others have had credit transfer. So they've taken their study elsewhere and they've used that towards it.

So how do you go about getting credit transfer? Is it easy? Is it just tick a box say, oh, I've done this, and the OU smiles nicely and says, fine, come on and jump in at Level 2? Or is it a bit more in-depth than that?

CAT KIMPTON: It's a little bit more in-depth than that. I started out by filling in the forms that were on the Credit Transfer part of the OU website. And they led me through from there. So I initially didn't have quite enough information for them to gauge exactly how many credits I was able to transfer from my previous qualifications. And I had to get a little bit more of a rundown of exactly what I had studied and exactly what marks I'd got for different sections of things.

So I had to go back to my previous establishment to get a certificate specially printed out and sent to the OU. And then the people in charge of the credit transfers analysed that carefully to see if it matched up to anything specifically and particularly, or whether or not it was towards an open degree, which is what I ended up using it towards was an open degree.

ROB MOORE: OK. So it's a little bit of matching, a bit of checking, what have you covered before? What was it like starting at Level 2? Because I teach at a range of levels, and I know that our Level 1 courses are really well designed to support students coming into the OU. But at Level 2, we assume quite a lot.

So what was it like for you when you come in at Level 2? What were the challenges?

CAT KIMPTON: It felt quite intimidating with regards how to lay out essays properly and how to reference, as that sort of thing wasn't expected at the vocational college that I was at before. It was much more hands on. And whilst there were exams, there weren't assignments and things like that. So that felt a bit intimidating.

However, there is loads of resources which they do point you towards. And of course, the tutor, which is an absolute blessing that you've got a tutor that you can email and they will reply back to you. And of course, your peers as well. So on the OU forums, you can speak to other people on your modules. When I say "speak," I mean type. So you can send them messages and see.

And a lot of them were very curious how I ended up on a Level 2 module when I hadn't been on a Level 1. So after explaining that, they were very happy to fill me in on those little soft skills, I suppose, that you're building up in Level 1 before you normally go on to a Level 2.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, absolutely. And as a tutor, when I get a student that comes to Level 2- or even level 3; I've had students coming in at Level 3, where it's their first experience of studying at a distance and studying with the OU- we have to be very careful because we do a lot of work at Level 1, helping people to settle in, helping students to get used to things.

And my top tip, I think, for me as a tutor is, if you're new to the OU and you're starting at Level 2 or Level 3, make sure your tutor knows. We have a small, little flag against your name to say if you do, but it's very easy to miss. So just make sure your tutor is aware. And as you say, we've got some fantastic resources to point you to.

My favourite one is Being an OU Student. If you've not come across it, it's on OpenLearn, which is our free platform. It's a short, free-to-study course that's supposed to take you about 20 hours, but it covers everything that you need to be an OU student. And it's called Being an OU Student. And hopefully there's a link to that in the chat box.

CAT KIMPTON: I did that one, too, actually, Rob, before I started. I got pointed by a colleague towards it, though. So I guess I was privy to a bit of inside information to do that one before I started.

ROB MOORE: We definitely point our Level 1 students to it because that's where it's most applicable. Once you've been with the OU for six months, you know it all. Everything that's in there, you will know. But if you're new to study at whatever level- let's say at Level 1 or with Access, we send you straight there- but you might miss the link if you come in with some credit transfer.

So just to wind this chat up- people are going to have loads of questions- so if you've got questions for Cat about being a student and transferring in with credit, get those questions down in the chat and Heidi will ask them later- but just for now, Cat, what would be your top tips for somebody that was studying at whatever level or particularly studying with a credit transfer? What were the things that you wish you'd been told?

CAT KIMPTON: I think definitely to reach out and ask for help if you do find yourself struggling or slipping behind. Or if any of those occasions happen that do in all of our lives that cause us to fall back a little bit, just make sure you reach out. Your tutor wants you to succeed and wants you to do well and go on to study further with the OU. So make sure you reach out and email to your tutor if you do find that you need a little bit of assistance.

Of course, checking out all of the Student Hub Live and OUSA and Library resources, they're all absolutely fantastic. So making sure you make full use of everything that we've put together is my biggest tip.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, absolutely. And the resources, there are so many resources. If anything, we've got too many resources. And as a tutor, I spend a lot of time pointing people to what we've got. I don't do an awful lot that's original, to be honest, because our resources are so good and in so much depth.

But being an OU Student is a great way to get into that introduction. The Help Centre points you to a lot of resources. And of course, your tutor. Most of us are human. "Mostly human" is on the application form when we join. So we want you to talk to us. We want you to have those conversations.

But asking the forum as well. In your tutor group forums, ask and see how other people are getting on.

My view of questions is simply, if you've got a question to ask me, it's not because you haven't necessarily understood something. It's because we haven't explained it correctly. So if there's something that's not clear to you, it's my job- or our job- to make sure it comes through in a way that you understand. So don't ever worry about asking a question. That's what we're there for.

So thank you for that, Cat. And get yourself ready for the loads of questions, which I know will be coming. So everybody who's watching today, think of those questions- any questions you've got for Mark, Zoe, Cat, or Lou. So we're going to bring Lou in now.

So Lou, Open University Students Association. Am I right in thinking everybody who works there is a student or was a student when they joined?

LOU ROBINSON: Not quite. So we do have a staff team to support us. But our student leadership team- our president, deputy president, vice presidents, myself and a few others, and all our different representatives- are students first. To be elected and onto the student leadership team, you need to be a student. So we are very much guiding the work that the staff do, the priorities that we put forward, and how the association runs in general.

ROB MOORE: So what sort of things does OUSA cover? What sort of things do you get involved in?

LOU ROBINSON: There is an awful lot of things that OUSA cover. And I'm very glad that I found them quite early on my study journey. This is my second degree. I found them during my first degree. I was a Level 3 credit transfer on my first degree. So it was a really good way to settle in and get involved, talking to lots of students who had been there a while. So I got lots of good advice through networking through them.

We have loads of support available. We have a support section of the website that will direct you to our Shout text service, to other support mechanisms that we have in place. We also have dedicated support groups for disabled students. We have our Pride group and our BAME group as well. And lots and lots of support available in there. And again, delivered and run by elected students, all of those groups as well. So it's really nice to have that representation.

If you- and this is quite the negative part here- but if you were to have quite a serious complaint or were accused of plagiarism or were going through any difficulties on your course, then the Students Association can offer support with that because we have an individual representation service under the support as well. And they are there specifically to help students who are going through complaints and appeals. So we are there to represent students at that level as well.

But we are also about fun as well. We have a lot of fun. We have loads of clubs and societies. I'm representing the OU Space Society today, which is one of my personal favourites. But there are many, many clubs and societies, lots of great social media pages that connect those students.

And it's a great way to network with students that are into similar interests as you. So I'm in the walking group, the crafting group- nothing to do with my degree, but it's really, really nice to be able to share those interests with other students.

And we do have meetups in regional areas, as well, that are arranged. So we have regional groups. Our Birmingham meetups are really, really popular, as are our Northwest meetups. And we do have lots of volunteering opportunities as well. So if you can't get to meetups or you'd like to meet students mostly online, we've got loads of opportunities advertised throughout the year as and when they come up.

My personal favourite when I'm not in my elected role is graduation volunteering, where you can volunteer to run the stall at graduation. It's a great day because you get to experience an OU graduation. You can

even be part of the academic procession. So you get to walk down, up onto the stage, and applaud all the graduates as they cross the stage, which is an absolute honour. I can't think of any better way to spend a day volunteering.

And we do, of course, also have the shop. And the shop is taken to graduations, but it's also online. So you can treat yourself to some nice OU merchandise. It's also where you can download exam papers. So if you have a module that has an exam at the end, all the practise papers are on there.

It appears like you might have to buy them. You don't. They're free. But they're just delivered as downloads and you just have to put them in the basket of the shop, but you won't be charged for them. So that source is there as well.

And direction to the TOTUM card. So I could see a little poll coming your way about the TOTUM card. Part of the money from that actually comes back into the Student Association for running events for students. So it's a really great thing to sign up for.

ROB MOORE: Sorry to interrupt, Lou. I was just going to say. Can we get the poll up so we can actually see it on there? There we go. So how many of you have already signed up for your TOTUM card? "Yes" is quite a proportion. Just off the bottom, there we go. 50% have. 33% haven't. And 17% don't know what TOTUM is.

So here we go, Lou. What is TOTUM, and why should we have one?

LOU ROBINSON: So it used to be called the NUS Extra card, which a lot of people may be more familiar with. So it's a National Union of Students discount card that's available to all university students. But they've rebranded it to TOTUM. It does pretty much the same thing.

What I like about it is, alternative to things like UNIDAYS and Student Beans that offer you discounts, TOTUM actually gives you a physical card. You can get a free pass card, an actual official ID, with them nowadays as well. But the TOTUM discount card, you can take it out to places.

So if you go to a museum or a zoo or- I don't know- a cinema- anywhere you might go out, it acts as a form of student ID, which obviously, as OU students, we don't get provided with. So it's a really good way to have access to that and get your student tickets wherever it is you happen to be having a nice day off from your studies.

ROB MOORE: And any shops which offer student discounts, that's your proof that you're a student. So when I was a student, I've got to say it was the McFlurry- the McFlurry that you got alongside any order. That was where most of mine went. So well worth looking into the TOTUM card and getting your discounts.

So thank you for that whistle stop tour, Lou. We're going to be taking any questions on OUSA in a moment. So I'm just going to hand back to Heidi, see what's happening in the chat. And then we're going to take on some of the questions that you've been asking and hopefully get you some answers.

So Heidi, what are people saying? And then let's launch into your questions.

HEIDI: Yeah, just some conversations there around the TOTUM card. And it's something that's come up before and I think it's really important that we just acknowledge that, for our international students, the TOTUM card isn't necessarily an option. So Germaine put a question in the chat, saying, can TOTUM only be used in the UK?

And then one of our advisors came back and said, it can only be used in the UK. And I know that that's something that we've discussed before. So just to make our international students aware. Unfortunately, it's not something that's available outside of the UK.

And then we've just got other questions coming in, which I will save for our Q&A. So please do pop your questions in the chat, and then I can put those to Lou and Cat when it's time to start our Q&A.

ROB MOORE: And I think you've got a plug you want to put out before we start the Q&A.

HEIDI: Well, I do, indeed. Yes, there's a really exciting opportunity for OU students. So it's called the Brighter Futures Grant, and it's just been launched. And it runs until the end of March. The deadline is the end of March. So all Open University students are eligible to enter. And there's going to be 10 lucky OU students that are selected. And they will then get the chance to win a 1,000 pounds cash in a free draw. So it's 1,000 pounds that you can use on anything at all that you like. It can go towards rent or bills, or your shopping or childcare. It's basically anything at all that will free up space so that you can concentrate more on your studies. So like I say, 10 lucky students will be selected, and they will receive 1,000 pounds in cash each. It's available to everyone, including international students.

So we're going to put the link in the chat. And then you can have a look at that, find out more information, and then apply. And like I said, it's open till the end of March. So I really highly recommend you put your name in the hat, and yeah, be up for a chance of winning 1,000 pounds.

ROB MOORE: Thank you. So back to our lovely guests.

What questions have we got, and who's the first victim? I like this bit.

HEIDI: Yeah, who's the first victim?

[LAUGHTER]

Tanya has asked a question for Lou. So this was a great one. It's specifically around freshers. So Tanya says, I noticed that the OU in Wales has meetups in person for freshers there. Is there anything like that in England?

I know you touched there, Lou, on some of the great meetup groups. You were saying Birmingham is really popular. But I just wondered if there's anything specifically for freshers that we might be able to share.

LOU ROBINSON: Not this freshers, but the September freshers, we do run a freshers fair generally on the Milton Keynes campus, which is fantastic because they offer a tour of the Open University campus while you're there. A really great way to meet a load of students. So we do offer that.

There is also a conference coming up. Whether it will have a face-to-face element, I'm not sure. And we do have Student Voice Festival, which is coming up shortly. Emails will be dropping about student consultations, which happen across the UK. And even as a new student, there's lots you can contribute to that feedback if you were to participate in one of those.

So yeah, there are some in England. Wales is a little bit of an advantage because they have a fantastic space they can frequently use for these freshers events, which is why you might see them a little bit more. But we do run them on the Milton Keynes campus as well, just not in the January, February fresher slot.

ROB MOORE: Thank you, Lou.

So just to be clear, we have freshers twice a year. There is an October intake and there's a February intake. But the October intake is a lot bigger, which is why some of the events are scheduled around there. But there's nothing to stop you going to that one if you've come to this freshers as well, definitely. Heidi, next question, then.

HEIDI: Yeah, next one. Cheryl says, I want to study full-time, 120 credits a year. Is that a good idea?

ROB MOORE: Zoe, what would you advise?

ZOE GIBSON: Oh, good question. I think if you don't have any other big commitments, then maybe it's worth doing. Obviously, if you're not working, then you've got more time free to do that.

Certainly, I would look at the key dates. So it depends how much you're studying and alongside. So remember we talked earlier about your Student Home. Student Home is set up to show you all of the modules that you're on. So it's certainly there so you can see and see what's going on.

In terms of the module Study Planners, it might be wise just to see what the key dates are and when their assessments are because you could have quite a lot at the same time. So that's probably my main thing I would probably advise.

But in terms of the learning systems, they definitely hold your hand all the way through. So the Study Planner will tell you what you need to be studying each week, where you need to be at. So I think that could help you manage your time effectively. I hope that helps a little bit.

ROB MOORE: Definitely. And I think your point there, manage your time, is important. And it's being realistic

We expect most- well, most of the modules I work on- so I work in the Business School- most of my modules expect you to be putting 14 to 18 hours a week in to get a good outcome. So if you're putting 14 to 18 weeks of studying on a module, then you're on track to get a good result and you'll cover everything we want you to cover.

If you're doing two modules simultaneously, you're actually doubling that up to 28 to 36 hours. If you can't commit that amount of time and you want to do 120 credits, something is going to have to be compromised. And you need to think about where that compromise is going to come from.

But I would say, if you're choosing full-time study as an alternative to going to a campus-based university and you can quite happily put 30 hours a week of studying in, no reason at all why you can't successfully do 120 credits.

It's the students who try and do 120 credits on top of a full-time job where we have all those conversations about, oh, I'm behind, I'm losing. What can I skip? And we don't like those conversations as tutors. We like you to be able to enjoy and take your time. So make sure you've got the time to do it.

OK, Heidi, next question. I'm enjoying the question-and-answer session. Let's see if we get one for Mark.

HEIDI: So Rachel said, is it normal to feel like it's absolute information overload before you even start studying? I feel like there's so much to find out about before I even get going.

ROB MOORE: Yes, absolutely. And it is. And it's information overload for the first couple of months. And then, once you get to month three or four, you think, what was the problem? There's just so much at the beginning.

And I think that, Zoe, you said, just keep asking questions. I think Cat said it as well. Ask questions. Don't try and mumble along on your own. If you've got a question, ask us, because we know there's an awful lot at the start.

As I say, when you get to your next module- when you get to your second module- you won't even think about all of the information that you're struggling to get under your belt now because it will be natural. It's like learning a new language. You will be fluent in your OU by about month four. And once you're fluent in OU, everything else just fits in.

But yes, it is completely normal to feel a little overwhelmed. But don't feel you're not supported. Just ask the questions. I definitely felt like that when I started. My first module was definitely too much to take in.

So if anybody wants to add to that, obviously feel free to jump in, or we can move on to the next question, Heidi.

HEIDI: Yeah, next question. So I think this one is for Mark. This is from Gregor. I hope I pronounced your name correctly. So I'm not quite sure on the terminology here, but I think this is one that Mark will be able to pick up. So Gregor says, how can I find self-computing material on the OU website? Is that something that you can help with, Mark?

MARK HUGHES: Yes, we can help with that. So if you take a jot down of our contact email address, I'll come back with a comprehensive reply for you after the session. So our email address is information-security@open.ac.uk, and then we'll support you in that regard.

ROB MOORE: There we go, personal service. We don't normally get personal service on Student Hub Live. Thank you for that, Mark. I'm glad you took that. I didn't understand the question, so I couldn't have answered it.

ZOE GIBSON: Can I also add in? On the Help Centre, there's guidance on computing- on how to stay safe on your computer, what type of computer you might want to choose. So the Help Centre, from your Search at Student Home, also has information for students on various aspects of staying safe. And as I said, what type of browser should I choose, what type of device I should choose.

So that might be a good place to start, as well as obviously taking up Mark's kind offer of a personal service.

[LAUGHTER]

ROB MOORE: OK, Heidi, next one.

HEIDI: On to the next. I think this one is for Zoe. Perhaps you can help with this one. So Tanya says, can I ask what the time frame is from submitting the TMA to receiving feedback from the tutor?

ZOE GIBSON: Oh, that's a really good question. I think Rob's probably best placed here, as a tutor, to answer this one. I think the guidance is two weeks. But Rob might be able to come in and save me and give a better answer as a tutor.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. Well, the official line is 10 working days, which in most cases is two weeks. But the reason they say 10 working days is because that allows a little extra if there's a bank holiday or something that's in there. So it's 10 working days, which for most of the year is 14 days, two-weeks turnaround.

That doesn't mean it will take 14 days, as in that it will always take that. I think most tutors work in a similar way to me, which is they do them in batches. So I tend to mark eight to 10 assignments at a time, then I send them back. And I try and do it in the order they're received.

So a student that sends the assignment in first will be in the first batch returned. That's how I tend to do it. Though that's not actually a strict rule, I think a lot of tutors use that approach.

Then we get into the murky world of extensions and the impact that this has. So if you have an extension on your assignment, it's most likely going to push it past that return date from the cutoff. But if you haven't heard back from your tutor within 14 days of the cutoff of the assignment, you might want to check.

I've definitely had assignments go astray. And I've definitely had things that I've returned that didn't show up in the system. It's very rare, but it occasionally can happen. So if you haven't heard back in the 14-day period, just drop your tutor a note and just check that everything's right, that it's been marked.

The other thing while we're on TMAs, actually, if you're brand new to the OU, the first time you come to send in a TMA- another TLA, three-letter acronym- tutor-marked assignment, the first time you do it, you'll have an option to send in a TMA-00. It's a dummy TMA.

So this is just so you can practise with the system. So you can just send a file to your tutor with a pretty picture or something that says, Hi, this is me. And it gives your tutor a chance to reply. And then you get to see how the system works. So look out for that TMA-00. And if you've never sent one before, it's a great way just to be comfortable with using the system.

But yeah, my advice would be- and it's because nothing is infallible- I mean, I mark literally hundreds of TMAs a year, and I have issues with perhaps four or five. So this isn't a common problem- but sometimes things do fall through the cracks. So if you haven't heard back in a fortnight, give your tutor a nudge. They won't mind.

And sometimes, as a tutor, we sometimes fall ill as well. So I know, on a couple of occasions, I've stepped in and done some marking for one of my colleagues who's been poorly. And that can sometimes extend the period. But you will know about that in advance. So you'll know that the return has been delayed because they've had to ask somebody to step in and mark it.

Hopefully, that answers the question.

OK. So Heidi, what else have we got?

HEIDI: This isn't actually a question, but this is something that I think Lou can pick up on for us. So Tracy says she had no idea that we sold OU merchandise. Now, we touched on there earlier- Lou, you were talking about the OUSA shop, which I love. And this is where my OU hoodie comes from. And then I've also got an OU mug as well.

And the OUSA shop, there's so many nice things in there. We were discussing it actually yesterday on last night's show. And there's some really unusual things in there. And many of our students were having a look on there and going, oh, look, you can buy this and you can buy that.

So Lou, could you maybe just give us a bit more of an understanding about some of the OU merchandise that our students can go and get for themselves?

LOU ROBINSON: Yeah, sure. I'm a bit of a collector as well. I don't have anything to hand at the moment, but we do some fantastic hoodies. I also have that hoodie. I'm not wearing it today, but I'd highly recommend. It's very cosy. Lots of different hoodies and polo shirts, t-shirts. The clothing tends to be everybody's favourite thing. Everybody loves a snuggly hoodie to do their studying in.

And then there's cups and- a popular one for graduations is we do little graduation bears and little owls, which was the first mascot for our University Challenge team. So they're very popular as well.

I can't think of other- I wouldn't say anything is really unusual. There are things like champagne flutes and whiskey tumblers, but, again, aimed at people who are graduating and celebrating. And we sell lots of those at graduations. But definitely worth a treat to yourself as well, I would say.

ROB MOORE: Definitely. I love my OU jacket. I've got one of the jackets that I like, mainly because it makes you stand out when you go to tutorials. People don't have to look around. So if they've not met you before, they can track you down by your jacket. So fantastic.

OK, Heidi, have we got anything else? Any other questions?

HEIDI: Yeah. We've got a couple more questions. So one from Tanya. Can you swap tutors if you're struggling with the one that you've had assigned to you?

ROB MOORE: Well, I'll probably take that one. The answer is yes. It's not common. But if you do have a problem, first of all, obviously, you talk to the tutor and explain. But the way to make any sort of adjustments like that is to work through the Student Support Team.

And occasionally you will get a- and very occasionally- twice it's happened to me in 20 years, where, for whatever reason, I didn't get on with the student, they didn't get on with me, and they asked to go to somebody else.

And it wasn't necessarily a- we didn't have any arguments, any fallouts. They just wanted a different approach. And we arranged that. So it can happen because we're all human. You won't get on with everybody that you meet. But it's very rare. And I would say, in the vast majority of cases, talk through things with the tutor. Have a chat about what the issues are. I mean, we're there to support you.

But yeah, if you have a real problem, then the Student Support Team can help you and talk you through it. But like I say, in the thousands of students that I've had, this happened twice, where a student wanted to have a different tutor. I didn't take it personally. And they got on very well. So it can be done. It can be done.

But yeah, we normally suggest building up that relationship. The message that hopefully you've picked up from today is that communication thing. I always say to students, the only question I can't help you with is the one you haven't asked me. If you haven't asked me a question, I haven't got a prayer of being able to- we're not mind readers.

And the other thing that we don't do- this is adult education, we're at university- we don't stand behind you, chasing you all the way through your studies. If you don't tell us there's a problem, we don't go looking to see exactly what you're up to.

The only time it really flags up is if something is missing. If you're not taking part in things, we might come and ask. But I'm not there every five minutes saying, are you OK? I'm waiting for students to come to me and say, look, I've got a bit of an issue with this, I've got this challenge, I've got this problem. Those are the questions to come and ask us about.

So hopefully that's answered the question. But I wouldn't go looking to swap a tutor just because you don't like the marks that you've got or- it should be a real last-resort thing if you do decide you have to do that. But it's definitely possible.

HEIDI: Great. That leads us on nicely to this next question that we've had from Richard there. So you were talking about students needing to reach out, and you're not a mind reader and they need to update you on things. So Richard has a question.

What happens when you haven't managed to submit your TMA on time? So if somebody has reached the stage where they've missed the deadline, they haven't notified their tutor, what's the process and what advice can you give them in the lead-up to that, Rob, if it looks like they're going to miss that?

ROB MOORE: So I don't know if Zoe has got the official answer, but the thing is talk to your tutor as soon as possible. Ideally, if you've missed the deadline, talk to us in advance. Sorry- talk to us before you miss it. Don't hide it under the carpet. If you've got problems, come and talk to us. We're very sympathetic.

Another Rob-ism is, life happens. When you're studying, things will go wrong. Things will come up. Try and get into good study habits so you're not leaving things to the last minute so you don't get caught out. But if things do go a bit pear shaped, talk to your tutor early.

If you've missed the deadline and it's a TMA, you might get- and this is where Zoe might want to correct me- I have never refused to retrospectively give an extension if somebody missed a deadline for an assignment.

Zoe, am I right in thinking the official line is that you must ask for it in advance?

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah, I would agree with what Rob has said, to be fair. It's just really difficult because life does get in the way sometimes and there's always going to be emergencies. And I think at the heart of the OU- which is why I've been here for so long- is that we are so supportive and we are open, and we really will try our best to make it work for you.

So if possible, and you see things are not looking great, try and flag straight away. Ask for an extension. Make sure you're doing everything you can in advance. But things will happen, and you might miss a date.

My understanding is that there is a discretion for tutors, where they can, under the right circumstances and if there's sound reasons, that they can allow that. But there are occasions where that might not happen- if there hasn't been that communication and it's a complete surprise and there's no real- "evidence" is a hard word, but something to back it up or to make it- you understand.

But usually, if I'm honest, my experience has been that tutors are great. They're there to support you. And I think, as long as you just are open and have a conversation, there's usually a way.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. We want you to pass.

ZOE GIBSON: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: So I think, for assignments, take it that it's not guaranteed, but we will be sympathetic. However, bear in mind, there are end of module assessments, which happen at the end of your courses. There is absolutely no discretion on those.

We do run a session on end of module assessments and submitting them. On the day of your- and I'm going to do this very briefly- on the day of your end of module assessment, or your end of module TMA, we will accept up to midnight on that day without any penalties.

If it comes in the next day, it will come in, but there will be a penalty applied. And I don't know if the penalty is the same across the board so I won't give you any figures. But if you submit it a day late, then there are penalties applied. More than a day late, absolutely nothing can be done. You will have failed that assignment.

So TMAs, with your tutor-marked assignments, we've got some discretion. There's absolutely nothing we can do with those end of module assessments. So make sure, for those- I often get students coming to me and saying, Rob, can I have a week's extension on my EMA? No, I can't do it. There's no possibility of extending it.

But a really good question. Thank you for that. But again, the same message coming through- talk. The sooner you talk, the more you talk to us- when I say talk, emails are absolutely fine. We can do that.

So I think we've got time for one question, then we're going to have to wind it up, Heidi. So one very quick one.

HEIDI: Yeah, final question from Natasha. She says, when is this going to finish? When is this thing going to finish?

[LAUGHTER]

ROB MOORE: In about two minutes' time. So we will take that as the last question, then.

[LAUGHTER]

Thank you, Natasha. That's brilliant.

So I'd just like to say thank you to the guests today. Thank you, Mark, Zoe, Cat, and Lou. Cat, you got away without any extra questions there.

CAT KIMPTON: I know.

[LAUGHTER]

ROB MOORE: Thanks to Hossam for earlier from the Library.

Heidi, you've been a star as always. And remember, everyone, we've got those links to that funding, which are in the chat. So if you're interested in that, go and check it out.

Before I finish, I'd like to flag up our feedback form. So the feedback form is available for you to fill in. And I know you get nagged about feedback forms, but we take these very seriously.

We have regular meetings as a group, where we look at what students are saying they like, what they don't like, what they want more of, what they want less of. So if there's something about Student Hub Live and this session in particular that you liked, let us know. We'll make sure we do more of it.

If there's something about this you thought, oh, I could have done without that, tell us. We're open to all feedback. Or if there's something that was missing that you would have liked us to cover, tell us. We change timings, we change dates, we change subjects all on the basis of your feedback forms. So please make sure you fill those in, and that'll help us do what we do next.

A little bit of advertising for what's coming up. Tomorrow night, we've got our social. So it's the end of the freshers week. So if you'd like to come and join me and Heidi and my guest Orc to have some fun and games- and we've got another member of the team, Rafa, who is coming in to have some fun as well. We're just going to have some fun and games and a bit of chat. And if you come along, we're going to have some time for you to tell us your stories. Tell us about what you're up to.

And I'm assuming- hopefully, the team have put this in- there's a link to the Student Hub Live Home page, where you'll see all of our future sessions. So we've got some workshops coming up. We've got some live events. And sign up to them.

We've got some specialist events, as well. So Isabella is running some sessions for those with neurodiversity and disabilities. And I've got a specialised session I'm running for those who are studying whilst having significant caring duties.

So if you fall into some of those particular areas, watch out for those sessions. They're very much designed to help people with different challenges whilst studying.

So thank you, everyone. It's been a lovely day. And I've really enjoyed spending today with you. And hopefully, you'll come back tomorrow. We'll have a bright, red shiny waistcoat on, and you'll be able to play Pictionary with the Orc.

So we'll see you tomorrow night. And I think it's at 6:30 tomorrow night- I think we're down for. It's at 6:30 or 7 o'clock. Probably 7:0. I've got 6:30. Thank you. People have to keep me under control- even more so tomorrow night.

But I'd just like say thank you, everyone who's joined us today. Thank you for all your questions. And we look forward to seeing you in the next session. So enjoy your studies. And bye-bye.

[MUSIC PLAYING]