

- ISABELLA HENMAN:** Good morning and welcome, everybody. Welcome to our well session, which is one of the faculties within the university, Building Resilience for Student Success. So hopefully this session will be a really useful one for you to be thinking about what helps you become more resilient.
- So when we talk about resilience, we'll give you lots of ideas about that later. But it's how you manage things-- how you manage your day-to-day life, how you manage if anything goes wrong, how you manage to make sure you are the best student on your study journey that you can be.
- So I know that many of you have already been interacting in the chat and have been saying where you are and how you're getting on. We have got Ximena, we've got Heidi, and we have got Sandy in the chat today, and you'll be able to see them and, well, you can see their photos at the moment, but you can see their names. And we've also got a number of guests, who I'll introduce in a little while.
- At the moment, in the chat, you can see that to the left of the chat, there are some widgets. So you can see there's a little map, and we use those along the way. And we've got Heidi, who is on camera. So Heidi, what have we been talking about so far while we've been waiting?
- HEIDI SHL:** Well, we've got lots of people in the chat already, which is fantastic. This is a subject that's really close to my own heart. I've been studying for many, many years. I studied for six years with the OU, so I'm really, really looking forward to today's session. So thanks to everyone that's been putting their comments in the chat. Lovely to have you with us. So Emma-- she was one of the first ones here from Middlesex, so welcome.
- We've got Stacey from Oxford, Deborah in Northamptonshire. We've got Jodie in Hastings. And then we've also got a couple of students joining us from Wales, which is fantastic. So we've got Darren and we've got Tassie in Wales this morning, and we've also got Alexander in Germany. So please do continue to pop the details in the chat of where you're joining us from so we can say hello to you.
- ISABELLA HENMAN:** I gather we've actually got lots of people in Germany, and nine people in Europe, so as well as Alexander, we've got other people who just-- they just haven't admitted where they are yet, apart from on the map. But it's lovely. We are an international university. Yes, we're based in the UK, but we have people from all sorts of places. So if you are somewhere exotic, even if it's the Costa Del Bournemouth, let us know where you're from because it's always nice to know.
- So just one thing-- when we're going along, the chat might start to move quickly once we've got lots of people there. If it does, you'll see there's a little pin icon at the start-- at the top, and you can use that pin, and it will make sure that you can see things before they move, and then you press the pin again and it moves, if that makes sense. My grammar doesn't seem to be working this morning, but that's OK. We'll talk about resilience, not how to speak properly.
- So when we're starting off, I've got Lynne with me and I've got Stephen with me, who I'm going to be talking to, and then later on, I'm going to be talking to a couple of students as well, Marianne and Joe, and you can see all of those on the screen at the moment. So that's great.

We will come to Marianne and Joe later when they're giving us some really excellent ideas from them as students. But first of all, I've got a couple of academic people with me, so I've got Lynne and I've got Stephen. So Stephen, I know that you've done various pieces of research, and as I said, you are an academic within the university. So what does the term resilience mean to you as an academic?

**STEPHEN
LEVERETT:**

Good morning. Good morning, everybody. It's a very useful concept, resilience, and as well as using it as part of my research, I'm a lecturer in the School of Health and Social Care within Wales, and resilience is an important concept that we use when we're focusing on how people in adversity somehow managed to survive or bounce back or continue with their lives.

And I think it's a concept that increasingly, and in the research that I've done, we've considered it. It can be used to look at how students themselves manage to succeed in their courses. So being resilient is sometimes a term that we use, but actually, the ongoing research into resilience has focused not only on the person but also the relational aspects around that person as well. And the research that I've done into some of our students in distance learning courses at the OU has found resilience to be a key factor for students succeeding.

**ISABELLA
HENMAN:**

Excellent. That sounds really useful. So just for our students at home, you'll see we've got a Wordle, which is what the term-- what does resilience mean to you? So you need to enter three words there. If you can't think of three, then you can put a dot. But you need to enter three things for them to go through, and we'll come back a little bit later.

So Stephen, you've mentioned this idea about bouncing back, about managing things. So you mentioned you've done some research. So can you summarise that? Who did you do the research on, and why did you think it would be a useful idea to do research?

**STEPHEN
LEVERETT:**

The focus of the research was students who had been successful-- i.e., they had graduated from our health and social care degree. And we were interested in talking to successful students because we've noticed that some students weren't successful, and with other people that I work with have done research that's particularly targeting students perhaps who've dropped out or who haven't necessarily achieved the grades that they were expecting.

But what we were interested in-- myself and two colleagues-- was what about the students that do succeed? What can they tell us about their experiences? So we chose 51 students. We tried to select as closely as possible a group of students that represented the population of the module that we're interested in.

And we interviewed them, and we got back some very rich and interesting data that told us of many of the strategies and attitudes and relationships that those students had developed during their study time with us and they themselves put them down as key factors in why they succeeded.

**ISABELLA
HENMAN:**

Excellent. So I think what's really interesting about that is you're talking about students that succeed. I think often, with resilience, we can tend to be negative, can't we? We can think about, oh, oh, we have to be resilient because things aren't very good. But actually, what we're doing is these are people that have said, you know what, I've made it through. So we can get some really good ideas.

Now, you've mentioned relationships. And I think relationships, I'm guessing, is probably quite a key one to help people succeed. What kind of things did you find out about that?

**STEPHEN
LEVERETT:**

The students that we spoke to talked about different kinds of relationships. And I think it's important to bear in mind that students come to the Open University from different contexts. Some of our students are in families. Some of our students work. Many of our students work in health and social care occupations, which are quite stressful and challenging. And some of our students don't have those sorts of relationships.

So we're interested, through talking to them, to find out a bit more about what kind of relationships matter to them. And I think the key relationship for most of these students were the relationships that they formed with their tutors. And I can't underestimate the significance of tutorial support for these students that succeeded.

It contrasts with something that we already knew, which is when we look at students who drop out, particularly quite early in modules, often they're students that haven't had very much contact with their tutors. And it was interesting that most of these students talked in quite glowing terms about the relationships they had formed with their tutors over the course, but particularly at times when they were struggling or facing challenging moments in their studies.

And having that relationship in place, for many of these students, was a key element of why at that point they didn't drop out but they continued. Maybe they adapted their approach, but they used the relationship with the tutor. In addition to that, we found students were talking about the importance of having good relationships with the people they lived with or worked with.

Now, that could be family members, so that when a student was perhaps in the run-up to a TMA, the people they were living with would accommodate that in terms of what was going on in the household, who had access to the PC, and just putting up with general moodiness and stress that somebody who's working towards a TMA.

**ISABELLA
HENMAN:**

And feeding them chocolate-- making sure that they have--

**STEPHEN
LEVERETT:**

Certainly chocolate, or any other traits that motivate people. Yes.

**ISABELLA
HENMAN:**

Yeah, I think that people-space thing is quite an important one, isn't it? And I think many of our students who are just starting out may actually be still feeling their way through that, because we know we've probably got quite a lot of students that are watching who only started in this October start. So they've been studying for about four weeks, and they may still be possibly negotiating a few of those spaces, and they might be coming up to their first TMA and going, oh, how am I going to manage that?

Now, before I carry on with you, Stephen, the word cloud is ready to show, so we asked everybody at home what they thought was-- what resilience meant to them, and now we should be able to show you the answer, and I think there's some really lovely ones. So determination and strength. Don't give up. Be adaptable. Try, try again. Self-care-- that's quite an interesting one, isn't it? And I know I'm going to be talking to Lynne a little bit about that later.

How to cope, have self worth, and this bouncing back that you were mentioning, Stephen. Setting up right-- oh, I like that idea. That's the people space as well, isn't it? I could read all sorts of ones up here. There's some lovely ones. Overcoming, moving forward, and persevering, and handling set backs-- Chuck Norris. Yes, that could be resilience there.

Yeah, I think we've got some great ideas there. So some of the people who are new might be thinking what? So if I'm going to summarise, so the relationship with the tutor and tutorials. Now, I know that before we were live, we were having a video going, and Marianne, one of our guests, we suddenly went, oh look, Marianne, you're there on the screen because she was in the video. You'll see it again at the end, which is about tutorials, and how beneficial tutorials are.

But that tutor relationship-- so I think maybe we could say to people watching, if you haven't really spoken to your tutor yet, if you haven't emailed them, get in touch. Get in touch with your tutor and say hi. Sorry, I haven't been in touch yet. Things have been getting a little bit to me, but you know what? That relationship. It's going to be quite important, isn't it?

So Lynne, I wanted to come to you as well now, because you've also been looking at things, and you've looked into this idea of relationships as well. So what can you tell us about what you found out about relationships and how they help students with resilience?

LYNNE

WATSON:

Good morning, everyone. I think relationships are key to success. You're not born with either with resilience or no resilience. We have resilience all through our lives in different situations. And it's important to remember that so that when your studies become-- and it was interesting to see determination there because you can be very determined but still find things really overwhelming.

So it's those relationships that can really help you at all times-- when things are going well, and when things are going not so well. So it's not just the relationship with your tutor. That's very important, as Stephen has said-- making sure you contact them. But your family and your friends around you-- that's really important too.

So making sure that they're aware, A, that you're studying, and that you're doing this piece of work. Making them aware of when your deadlines are and when perhaps you need some extra support, talking to them when things get a bit tough, and saying, I really just need a walk in the park or a bar of chocolate and a cup of coffee-- someone to walk that journey with you.

And of course, you've also got your peers around you. The modules have forums where you can form friendships with other students. And so it's all those relationships that can help. Sometimes relationships can be less than helpful, so we've all been in those forums where someone who knows I've done my essay three weeks ago and the cutoff isn't for another four weeks-- we all have met those sort of people. and sometimes you might need to avoid some of those people.

But they are also students are there to help you-- no, I haven't done my TMA either. Goodness me, you know, but I'm a last-minute dot com person-- recognising your own strengths, but using the people that are helpful around you, so family, friends, and especially your tutor. And then, of course, we've got the student support team, who are also there-- a wider network.

And beyond them, it's like the ripples in a pond. You throw a stone in, saying, I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed, and those ripples go out and touch a lot of people who are there to help you too. So there's a lot of support there. Yeah, and you'll see we've got you a question for everybody at home. What do you think would help you develop resilience? And I'll come to Heidi in a little while to see some of those answers.

I just wanted to pick up one thing you said, Lynne. This idea-- because every student is on their own study journey, and in fact, some people may be a long way ahead for whatever reason. And I think sometimes it's quite a difficult one to manage that, isn't it, because some people will say, oh, I've already got my TMA in.

And yes, some people might be boasting, but some people might actually be looking for a little bit of-- I can't think what the word is-- gratification, or a little bit of thinking, you know what, OK, you've done it. And that person might have always been that last-minute dot com, and they might actually be really proud that this is the first time they've managed to get a deadline. So just bear in mind, we're not saying to you, Lynne, but I think I have to remember this myself as well-- sometimes if somebody looks like they're much ahead of you, they may have reasons.

For instance, I know some of my students when they contact me, they've said, oh, I'm going to be having a baby, so that's it. Or I'm getting married, or I know I'm doing this, or I had a student memorably once who said, I sail in the summer. And I'm sorry, Isabella, but I'm not going to be doing any work, then, so I've got to do everything early.

So it wasn't that he was being big-headed when he posted early in the forum, but he basically knew that was it. He wasn't going to get anything else done because there was other pressures on life. And I think-- I like to think of people having a study journey. Some people might have heard me say about it before because it's one of my favourite topics.

And we've got some images about study journeys. Now, some of them may resonate differently for different people. So the image that we've got at the moment is an image of a river. And some people might like this idea. I like this one because I find it quite restful because it's outside-- it's like a walk in the park. And we've also got one of literally a walk in the park.

And you can see a bridge, and there's trees, and people might be in different places. So some people might be on that bridge. Some people might be clinging to the side. Some people might be halfway up the tree. Some people might be somewhere else. Some people might be-- I think there's water to the right. Some people might be going "help" in the water.

And then we've got a very literal idea of a journey and of a path. And some of these might help some of you if you like to visualise things. To think, right, I'm on my study journey. Where am I on that study journey at the moment? Is that something that you've ever thought of, Lynne? Do you like to visualise yourself on a study journey?

LYNNE

Oh, I absolutely do. And I've had a number of occasions in my life where things have been very overwhelming.

WATSON:

And I think the one thing that I always hang on to is that no matter where I am in this current moment in time, tomorrow I won't be in this same moment in time. I will have moved on in some way.

So my life is-- our lives are a journey. So no matter how bad it is now, on tomorrow's a different day. It could be worse, but I don't tend to think like that. Tomorrow's a different day. I don't know what tomorrow's going to hold. I don't know what the next hour is going to hold. But it will be a different place to where I am now, and time will have moved me on. And I can move on in a positive way and use all the resources around me to move on in that positive way. And I think it's really important to hold on to that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. Yeah, that's a lovely thought. And I know before we were on air, you were telling me, Lynne, you used it-- was it "stepping out"? Was that the phrase you used with me? Can you tell us a little bit what you meant by that?

LYNNE WATSON: I've been a nurse for 44 years, and so I've seen some really, really challenging things in my career. And nurses have an ability sometimes to step outside of themselves to deal with what's going on around them. So you almost put your emotions to one side to deal with the here and now. And that happened to me recently with a family member, where something traumatic happened, and I went into nurse mode rather than sort of into family mode.

I went into a nurse mode-- stepped outside of that and dealt with what was happening in front of me. You then have to go and meet those emotions somewhere and look at those, and there are strategies for doing that, but that allows you sometimes to just almost put all that to one side and just deal with what's in front of you, and that's a really-- that can be a really useful strategy.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I think it's almost like when I'm talking about writing essays or writing things on potentially contentious subjects, I say to students-- I don't use the term "step out," but I might do now. I might steal that idea. But it's the stepping back, taking your self out, taking your personal things out. Yes, OK, we can all get very wound up with that and pent up, but sometimes we do need to step back, looking at things academically.

So literally academically, or looking at things from a distance. And I think that's a nice-- well, it's not nice, but it's a way of thinking about it to help you cope with resilience and cope with different ideas. So I know we asked people at home about the idea of what helps you develop resilience? So Heidi, I'm going to come to you now to see what kind of answers we've got. Have we got some brilliant gems coming up, or have we got lots of questions?

HEIDI SHL: We've got lots of gems coming up, actually. So Louisa has been putting a weekly schedule on the fridge for her family so they know when she'll be unavailable, which I think is such a great idea. It's so frustrating just as you get your head into something, a TMA, and you hear that knock on the door and you just think, oh, no, just as you're about to get started. So that's a really, really great idea.

Laura finds preparing herself, making sure she knows what she's doing and when. She's a planner. I'm exactly the same. I have to plan everything. I drive my family absolutely crazy with all of my planning, but it has to be done when you've got to fit all of the study in.

Rachel says her ADHD means that she's normally quite rubbish with organisation. Luckily, study seems to be the hyper focus at the moment, so Rachel's doing really well and is ahead, but her house, on the other hand, has fallen apart-- swings and roundabouts. I really do admire your honesty on that one, Rachel, and I can totally relate to that one.

And then Seth credits their partner's unwavering ability to sit there and "hold the hope" whilst grappling with the TMA. I absolutely loved that one-- just shows how important our partners and families are in this process that we go through-- our study journeys.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I think "holding the hope"-- I think that's a great idea. I think holding the chocolate as well-- actually, no, I don't want somebody else to hold my chocolate for me. No, no, no. I'm going to hold my chocolate. But yes, that's my theme. That's my resilience-building theme, is chocolate. It is going out for walks as well, but it's chocolate too. I find it helps. It helps me.

So I'm going to come back now. I'm going to come back to Stephen to something we were talking about earlier. You started off the idea of talking about resilience and relationships. But there's also some flexibility. So Lynne was mentioning this, and we touched on it earlier. So can you tell us a little bit about how flexibility and these ideas might help some students to develop resilience?

**STEPHEN
LEVERETT:**

Yeah, OK. With the students that we interviewed-- these are the students, if you remember, who had succeeded-- two of the biggest themes that we found from talking to them were, firstly, the support, and secondly, this concept of flexibility. Now, flexibility can mean different things in different contexts.

But in relation to the student journey that many of these students were on and bearing in mind they got to the end of that journey, they talked about moments when perhaps things weren't going too well. So it might be you've missed the dead-- or you're going to miss a deadline for a TMA, or you've got behind with some of the module content.

And what they appreciated from the way we deliver the Open University courses is that if you went to your tutor, you could discuss some possible solutions to that. So having a conversation-- again, with your tutor-- could tee up for you options that are there as flexible options within the processes we already have at the Open University.

But also, they appreciated the way that they could study at their own pace. So we had one student, a memorable student, who was fascinating, who was a sheep farmer in Scotland, I think. And he talked about why he chose the Open University because the only time he could study was when he was lambing at 3:00 in the morning and there was a long wait for the next lamb to come along. So he'd spend 3/4 of an hour reading some OU material.

So for him, the flexibility was about being able to study at a pace or at a time that suited you. And you'll find as a student with the Open University, that is built in, but you need to work it in a way that suits your individual needs.

**ISABELLA
HENMAN:**

And that's-- I'm going to use that example. Because when I talk about time management, I say to students, we have all the hours in the day, and some people-- and I can now say, oh, we had a sheep farmer who said that 3:00 in the morning is his slot that he can do things. So I think that's a great idea, and I think it's this idea of recognising for you going-- back to the idea of the study journey-- but everybody's different.

We can-- you've done some research. We've got things that students who are successful have said, this has worked. So that's the key thing one of the things we're trying to help people at home think about at the moment. Because often people want to go, I want some answers. So you're giving us some answers, aren't you?

So we're saying-- we're talking about having a good relationship with a tutor, good relationship with the peers, making sure that you make use of flexibility. That doesn't mean putting everything off to the last minute and being lastminute.com because that doesn't always help mental resilience, I find.

But also, there was another term that Lynne was mentioning to us earlier. And I'm just going to come back to you, Lynne, about that now, and you've referred to something called glimmers, and I thought this was a lovely term. It's not something that was out of the research, but something that you-- is it a word that you came across or one that you heard? Tell us about what do you mean by glimmers?

**LYNNE
WATSON:**

Yeah it's a term I came across in the resilience toolkit that was sent to me, and it's almost like the opposite of triggers. So if you think something triggers something-- your TMA is due in, and it triggers an anxiety and a feeling of being overwhelmed by what you have to do.

And glimmers is almost the opposite of that. Glimmers relates to almost like cues of safety. What makes you feel good? What makes you feel better? So it could be something like a piece of music that just makes you calm down and relax. It may be something that will evoke a memory.

It could be a scented candle. It could be lying in the bath with your scented candles on. It could be, as I say, music, or it could be a photo. And we build our lives. So resilience isn't something that, as I say, we're either born with or we're not and once you've got it, that's what you've got. And if you haven't got it, you're never going to get it.

But resilience is something that we can build and develop and grow and encourage and top up and fill us up with, and we do that all the time in our lives. We have photos around us. We have ornaments, knickknacks. These are all things that remind us of good times for something you may have bought from a holiday, a photo of your family, or of your dog or your cat or whatever pet you've got.

These are all the things-- these glimmers are all the things that give us hope and bring us into a place of almost peace and harmony and relaxation, and they're really important, and they can just be-- it can just be minutes. So like Stephen was saying about the sheep farmer studying at that time in the morning, the OU materials are often-- they will give you a cue about how long something will take. Five minutes, 10 minutes, you know, this activity will take you that long.

And so you can use those glimmers in between times to just try and get back to a pace. If you're feeling overwhelmed, you can just step out, like I said earlier on-- put things to one side, and just step out and use those glimmers to take you down, to calm you down, to build your resilience up again so when you go back-- in many ways, a coffee break is that as well-- coffee break and a biscuit-- can do that too.

It's those glimmers of safety, of I'm OK. I can get through this time, and time will take me on my journey, or take me on. And these are the things that help build resilience because it's important to remember that whatever you're facing, resilience isn't either there or not. It can be developed, and everything else alongside it.

ISABELLA

I think I just need to say that Darren has said, love the other idea of glimmers, but they make her procrastinate.

HENMAN:

And Daren said, Ella Fitzgerald-- that be my glimmer. Oh yeah. I used to have-- I never knew the term glimmer, but it was Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue," a particular recording by Skye, an instrumental crossover group that were around I think, I don't know, '70s, '80s, '90s, whenever.

And I used to listen to those before every exam. And I'd just have them as loud as I could possibly go on my headphones before an exam, and it would just get me. Interestingly, it didn't used to bring me down. It didn't used to calm me, but it used to get me going because it that was my trigger to pay attention, get into the exam mode. So I think that's quite an interesting--

LYNNE

WATSON:

It's a good point about the procrastination as well, because we can all procrastinate. But a glimmer isn't about procrastination. It is about something which is sort of, I suppose, in a way, maybe not time limited, but is just there as a glimmer-- as a glimmer of hope, a glimmer of peace, a glimmer of relaxation. So it's not something that I'll go and do the hoovering instead of doing my TMA. It's not that, if you like hoovering. It's a glimmer of something, not a procrastination.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I remember washing my windows when I was supposed to be revising for an exam once. I've never watched the windows before. I was out there doing that and I was like, OK, seriously, I need to focus on doing some revision now. Don't come up with every possible other thing.

So yeah, yeah, I think when you were talking about glimmers, I think, actually, for some people it might almost be an image of that graduation-- that little glimmer. This is what I'm working towards.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

LYNNE WATSON: Sorry, I just wanted to say about that graduation was, yes, that is so important, and graduation is what gives-- that I love in my job. The graduations are the absolute highlight of my job, and are sort of in a way my glimmer when work is getting a bit overwhelming. I think that on the stage, watching the students walk across it-- that's a real glimmer for me, yes. Sorry I just wanted to add that in.

ISABELLA HENMAN: No, that's fine. I mean, and that's a really helpful thing. I was going to say, we've heard from Claire-- says Claire's a new OU student. "I feel like I'm overthinking the TMAs. I actually need to have more faith in myself." So I think maybe for Claire, that the glimmer of what you're aiming for-- have that little-- here you're going. Think about what you want. But maybe don't think however many years in advance, but maybe what's your reward? What's going to be the thing at the end of your module that you're going to do?

I like rewards. I'm definitely much more carrot than a stick person. But I know that when you were talking about building things, and it doesn't just start-- it reminded me of our colleague, Gina, who was helping us in our welcome session in our freshers week. And she was saying that some students sort of-- they almost think that as soon as they click that registration button, oh, there you go. I'm going to suddenly be a brilliant student. It's going to work. And she said, you need to build this.

Now, Joe, I know that when we were talking, when we were planning things in this one, you talked to me about building a resilience muscle, and I thought that was such a great thing. So I know this is slightly out of order from what we planned, but I think that links really well with this idea. So Joe, tell me what you mean when you say building a resilient muscle. What do you mean there?

JOE HOGAN: Well, I think it's-- I think building resilience muscle is talking about different techniques and factors and ways of studying or ways of breaking down work, techniques to do with things like aspects of life that fit into things to do with studying.

So sleep, sleep patterns, rest, relaxation, how you approach study, possibly working in short bursts, and maybe compartmentalising those things into strengths that you can then appropriate into developing a resilience muscle, so to speak-- just kind of ways and techniques that you can actually develop that can help you and can lead to-- can lead to the stage whereby you might have a setback. You might fall back for a period of time, but then you're able to put those-- to use develop that resilience muscle to then get back on the track and be able to focus and achieve things.

ISABELLA

HENMAN:

That sounds lovely, and I think you just summed so many things up for us there. That was great. So this idea of having strategies. Now I know, your study journey has been a bit of a chequered one. At some points-- when we had that illustration-- you did feel a little bit like you were clinging to the underside of the bridge. Other times, you were striding forward. So tell us a little bit-- what do you think made your study journey so chequered at times?

JOE HOGAN:

I think-- I mean, I started in 2018, and I've completed a few modules, but obviously, I had some issues. And it was primarily ones to do with health. I was-- I had some health issues and things like that. And actually looking back on how my studies have gone. A lot of it to do with me was actually things like I happen to be taking medication for a period of time.

And that then impacted and affected my sleep, and so sometimes I would have poor or not very good sleep. And it was quite hard kind of developing that into what would maybe be seen as the normal trajectory of study or the perceived way of which is maybe achieving success. And then there's things like the pressure that comes to achieve-- the pressure from social media, advertising, and things like that.

And yeah, my journey was one in which I had to defer from modules. And also when I couldn't actually say I had engagements that I needed to perform and things, and sometimes I felt that I was maybe constantly letting people down or letting people down with things. But on the flip side of that, I think that actually communicating and being honest with people about where you're at with your study journey and possibly things like your health is really important.

I think those things are really important, because it's not when you're studying, it's not a sprint. It's about the long game, and you need to kind of, I think, develop ways of working and factors and things that will help you to develop and succeed. And so possibly, things like when you're studying, taking things in small bursts, not overstraining yourself, and being able to break things down, to not overburden yourself, to not feel overwhelmed, because I think that's a lot of what this comes into, is there is a study journey.

And it's a wheel, like Lynne was saying-- resilience isn't something you're either born with or not born with. It's more of a spectrum. And so it's how as an individual, one can then develop along that study journey and maybe develop techniques that will enable them to have resilience and to overcome adversities as they may appear.

ISABELLA

HENMAN:

Great. Yeah, because I think that's very important, this idea that adversities-- bluntly, they're going to happen, aren't they? With the best will in the world, life happens. Things happen, even-- and health is one of-- probably the most challenging one for some people.

I know we've got lots of people chatting that are watching are talking about anxiety and how they manage their anxiety, or if they get anxious about their results and then sometimes we find ourselves getting into this little, almost like a little ball, and it's this almost this snowballing on thing where you get anxious about something, which means you can't focus, which means then you get more anxious because you can't focus.

And I think it's similar to what you were saying where you couldn't sleep, and therefore if you were finding didn't have enough sleep, you couldn't focus on your study, and then you get worrying about your study. I'm one of those people. If I get worried, I'm lying there at night, and I can't sleep because I'm thinking about things. And I'm thinking, I need to sleep because I need to be able to do something.

So I think I like the idea of giving specific pinpointing ideas. So having good sleep-- it's good sleep hygiene, and sometimes making a balance between things and possibly allowing yourself maybe to have a nap in the day. Are you the kind of person that ever has a nap in the day, Joe?

JOE HOGAN: Well, you know what, I actually struggle with even being able to have a nap in the day and being able to say I hadn't had much sleep to actually be able to have a nap and say, well, I'm just going to have half an hour now and I'll catch up. So I've really struggled with that, so actually, I have to say one of the recent things I did, which has actually proven to be quite fruitful, is I completely knocked out all caffeine and am now caffeine free, and actually, my sleep has improved.

And I'm finding that, yeah, I'm able to-- I'm not sure. I just feel to have seemed to have a lot more of natural kind of rest and natural slumber, and I actually feel more alert, funnily enough, after knocking the caffeine on the head. So that's one thing that I just-- I think needs must actually, because it becomes such an issue with the sleep. I just thought, well, I'll do it, you know?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, it's very interesting, isn't it? Because some people, they rely on caffeine and they go, if I don't have the caffeine, I can't get up, I can't get alert. But yeah, again, it's like this idea of all being bundled into one sometimes. And I was told I wasn't allowed caffeine quite a long time ago. I think my only source of caffeine usually is in chocolate, and I've just decided I need the chocolate too much. There's not too much, but I know what you mean.

It can-- and I know people, and I've spoken to people. I remember years and years ago, before I even knew about it somebody, said to me, oh, she had a certain brand of caffeinated beverage. That was it. She was literally-- and it was really obvious how hyperactive she was as a result of having that. And it must have been the caffeine. This is going back a lot of years.

And Deborah says, thank you, Joe, for your honesty and your recommendations. Feeling overwhelmed definitely happens to me, and I think we've got lots of other things in the chat. But I'll come back to you in a moment, Joe. But I wanted to go to Heidi because I think you've given us lots of things, and people at home want to share. So Heidi, what kind of things-- other than this thanking to Joe-- what kind of things have been coming up?

HEIDI SHL: Just some really great ideas from our guests just sharing different techniques and different ideas and strategies that they use to help with that anxiety when they are studying. So Bellen said that the psychologist tells them that smell instantly calms somebody down. So they're now lighting a candle that makes them feel happy or using hand cream to help you connect with your senses, and it helps give you a break from those sensations of anxiety.

And then Daisy's recommended using lavender oil. I have a little lavender spray mist that I spray on my pillow at nighttime, and it's just absolutely divine and just helps me with sleeping. So I can really relate to the power of sense to calm us down.

And then Deborah and Anthony have been sharing about their anxiety around TMAs. It is a very stressful time as you're working on the TMA, and then obviously after you've submitted it as well and you're waiting for your results. But Bellen recommends for those that are struggling that yoga helps them, so yoga is another option.

So lots of different ideas coming in in the chat and lots of people very courageously sharing their experiences. Susan talks about having agoraphobia and PTSD. Stacy also has PTSD and anxiety and has been really developing her resilience, so lots of people sharing lots of personal experiences in the chat, which is really, really great to see.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I'm just-- you're saying about the hand cream. I just got my lovely rose-scented hand cream. If anyone could hear weird sounds in the background, that was me putting my hand cream on, going, oh, and it smells so lovely. It was a present that a friend gave me. It's like, you know what, I should. I've got all sorts of hand creams, around, but you know what, that does-- that just smelling that rose scent. It's just like a little bit of relaxation in there.

And Deborah says, I got off to a bad start with my module because of having COVID makes me feel like giving up and starting again next year. Deborah, no-- well, you can, if you really feel you need to, but you can catch up. And I think Joe-- Joe I know has got some great ideas here. So Joe, I want to come back to you. What else? What would you say to Deborah?

JOE HOGAN: Well, I think it's interesting the things that we're talking about. Sorry, I missed that last point particularly just with regard to Deborah-- sorry.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ISABELLA HENMAN: No, she was saying she feels like giving up.

JOE HOGAN: Oh, well, I mean, I was-- I mean, it's obviously-- it's a personal journey, and I wouldn't really know what to say unless I was kind of a friend or knew more of the individual circumstances. But I was just going to say I think that it's talking about the study journey and with the OU and studying and resilience muscles and things like that, I think it's also very pertinent, maybe, in today's society in the world we live today, with the stresses and factors and things, the impact on life today, things like social media, widespread technology, constantly being, obviously, the prevalence of being online and constant kind of information and things like that.

So I think it's actually kind of-- talking about the study journey with the OU and developing techniques and things that glimmers and things that provide comfort and things like that, it's actually, I think it's, in a way, that kind of looking at the study journey with the OU and how you study and adapt and things like that, is a slight kind of microcosm maybe of the way things are in larger society with the pressures and challenges that people face, you know, particularly with the world of social media and technology in which we live and the kind of go, go, go society, maybe.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I think that's a really important-- I think this go, go, go, and this idea that there's this impression you have to go, and it goes back to what Lynne was saying and when we were talking about the person that's ahead and the person that's behind, and Tassie's saying, almost two weeks behind the study planner and that's really, really affecting anxiety-- found the Pomodoro study technique to be helpful. That's the do a little chunk on, a little chunk off. I think-- I'm never very good at describing it. Lynne, can you explain this a little better? Lynne, you're waving at me. Please, please, let me know.

LYNNE I don't want to explain about that particular thing, but it comes back to what Stephen was talking about way back at the beginning-- it's about the relationships. So if you're two weeks behind or if-- was it Deborah who was saying that she feels like giving up and starting again next year? Don't make that decision on your own. Talk to somebody. Speak to your tutor, speak to somebody from the student support team.

WATSON:

That is a huge, monumental decision to say, right, I'm going to give up now, and I'm going to start again next year. It might be the right decision to take. It might be totally the wrong decision to take. But it's a decision that you can actually share it with somebody else. That relationship of talking it through because that helps with our resilience. Because if you just go, oh, well, I'm so far behind. Now I'm going to give up and start again next year.

That sense can be quite debilitating in itself, whereas if you talk to somebody and you talk it through and you look at everything and you come to that decision, although it's still-- you're still giving up and starting again next year, but you've done it in the light of discussion and with a relationship and an informed decision rather than just doing a bit of a knee-jerk reaction.

And if you're two weeks behind, yes, you can catch up catch up. There are strategies, and your tutor is a person to help you look at what can you skim read? What do you need to focus on? Where do you need to put your energies? So don't do it on your own. You're not on this journey on your own. That's the important thing with the OU. Absolutely. Thank you for that.

LYNNE I'm getting off my hobbyhorse now.

WATSON:

ISABELLA No, that's really, really useful. Thank you. And I gather that Tassie, who's much better about the Pomodoro technique, could put the information in the chat. So you don't have to rely on my rubbish description of it. And there's lots of love pouring in for Deborah. Yes, excellent. So I can see it coming through and not just saying about the keep going and talk.

HENMAN:

Now Marianne, I know you've been patiently waiting, and I know that you're now in, if I might be thinking, are you in your third year or you're level three? I'll get the right one. You're level three, aren't you?

MARIANNE Yes, I'm studying level three. Now it's actually my fifth year, I think.

SHARLOTTE:

ISABELLA Excellent.

HENMAN:

MARIANNE Yes, I've done four years so far. So I just set off--

SHARLOTTE:

ISABELLA So it sounds like--

HENMAN:

MARIANNE Originally, I just set out to study the diploma in language studies, and once I got to the end of that, I just decided to keep going and do one more module in each to get to the degree.

SHARLOTTE:

ISABELLA HENMAN: So that's an interesting study journey. That's a not necessarily thinking way over there, but actually a little step by step one, and building-- and I guess maybe you built your resilience along the way, because if you manage a module by OK, if I can manage that, then I can move on. Did you maybe think of it that way or was there any external influences saying, yes, you need to study.

MARIANNE SHARLOTTE: They weren't really external. Well, there were external influences. They were my family because once I got to the end of the diploma and I was talking to them about it, they were saying, well, why not just carry on? Just carry on and do the next two modules and finish the degree. So they were quite an influence on me.

But when I first started the diploma, I decided myself that I was going to try and get it done in three years. I don't know why I put myself under that pressure, but I did. And the first two years, I was doing 90 credits, and then the third year-- fortuitously, as it turned out-- I was only doing 60 credits to finish the diploma, but that coincided with lockdown, so it was very lucky, really, that I was on less of a study commitment, really, with just doing 60 credits when that happened.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. So I guess that gave you the opportunity also to think what we were saying earlier-- life happens. We can have the best plans in the world, but life is going to change things. I don't think anybody, if we went back three years, and nobody was foreseeing a pandemic impacting things. But I think--

MARIANNE SHARLOTTE: No.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I guess you have to build up strategies. You had to build your resilience. Because if you've got a family, you're going to have to build you're going to have to manage everything along the way, as well as your study.

MARIANNE SHARLOTTE: Well, yeah. Well, what I tend to do when I start the academic year is I have to plan things because I don't work very well doing things at the last minute. I get too stressed, and then it's not very productive.

So I plan ahead at the beginning of the academic year, and I make a list of when the TMAs are, and I look ahead to see where the busy times are going to be in my OU schedule and have a look at where the busy times are then going to be with the family and everything else that's going on, and then try and plan my time so that I can keep time clear in the run-up to a TMA and not commit to things, for instance, in the week or two before the TMA to make sure that I've got enough time there to get that work done without getting too stressed.

But of course, like you say, life happens, and fortunately with the pandemic, the OU put lots in place to help students get through those modules when that all happened with lockdown. But if you sort of plan ahead-- I find if I planned ahead, then when things do happen and curveballs do happen, you've got a bit of wriggle room there to help cope, really, and manage your time.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think that's-- I mean, I often talk about time management, and we'll talk about the sheep farmer at 3:00 AM, but it's this planning, and often we can get quite narrow in our thoughts and just focus-- so some people need the little steps, but other people, yes, you do need to have to look at, OK, the module spans 34 weeks-- however many weeks-- right. OK, what might impact it?

And I know as a tutor, when I say to students at the start if I talk to them, I say, is there anything that could potentially impact your study journey? And then most people say oh, no, and then you're getting into it, and that might be oh, well I'm on holiday for three weeks then, or oh, my children have got exams then, and it's like, sometimes it's actually thinking realistically what might-- because going back to this idea, when you start as a student you don't suddenly have all these wonderful things and they work.

It's the building the muscle. It's building the resilience muscle that Joe was talking about, looking for the glimmers, finding the strategy, thinking, right, OK, talking to other people, working out what could potentially impact your study. Now, we did actually ask people-- we were talking about relationships and things, but most modules have module forums, and we've had a widget going, and I know we can show the results of that now, which is about whether you've engaged with the module forums.

And if you can see the results, we can see that about 75% of people have engaged with the module forums, but about quarter of people haven't. Marianne did you engage much, or do you engage much, with your module forums, and what do you find with those?

MARIANNE Well, yes, I do, actually. I do use the module forums. I think it's important, as has already been said, to get in contact with your tutor at the start of the course and make contact with them and build that relationship. And then, of course, you've got the tutor group forum, where you can build your relationship with the tutor and with the other students in your tutor group.

There's also the tutorial forum, where it's worth looking in there for tutorials that are coming up because there might be hints and tips from the tutors around the tutorial that they're going to run soon. And then the student group forum, where the student-- that's free there for the students to be in touch with each other and to help each other keep going because whatever you're worrying about, probably there will be lots of other students worrying about exactly the same things, and just sharing your ideas and your worries really does help.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think that was interesting. I was-- if you hadn't said it, I was going to say that because different modules have different forums. So sometimes, some people don't have tutor group forums, but most people do-- or cluster forums or online or topic forums. There's different ones, but it's the chance to talk to other people.

And I know we've had lots of discussion about anxiety, and I know some people say, oh, I'm too anxious to post in the forum, but you just said, Marianne, if you're thinking it, somebody else is thinking as well. And often, just one person-- and sometimes I say to students, do feel free to say, because actually it's quite nice if one person says, oh, you know what, I'm a little bit worried about that.

How are others feeling? It's like, oh, wow. You mean I'm not the only person? And that idea of not being the only person is-- you might think it sounds really basic, but actually it's quite important, isn't it, Marianne?

MARIANNE SHARLOTTE: Yeah, I think so, because you're there to support each other as well. You can support each other because you're going through-- you're on your own study journey, which is unique to you. But you're going through the same course and dealing with the same materials and the same deadlines, et cetera, so yeah, you can. But the beautiful thing about the forums is you can just look at them. You don't have to post.

And so you can read what other people are posting there, and the module buddies are really helpful too in the run-up to TMAs with hints and tips and things like that about how to approach the work. And so it's a really useful resource, yeah.

ISABELLA

Yeah, I mean, again, some modules have specific study buddy forums. It depends. I know some of mine have.

HENMAN:

Louisa says that module forms are awesome, but Juliet says, I engage with my module and tutor group and common forums, but apart from my tutor, no one replies. Oh, I'm really sorry about that, Juliet. I know that as a tutor, I'm always replying to things, and I'm always doing things.

And Louisa says, the module I have now has a café forum, and it's super busy. Oh, that's nice. But I know that sometimes people get a little bit worried about that because if they see a forum is really super busy, it can be a little bit overwhelming, and that can actually induce anxiety in some people. I don't know. Going back to Stephen, did we-- was anything to do with forums-- did that come up in resilience in your studies at all, in your research? I forget the right word.

STEPHEN

LEVERETT:

In the original research, yes, but interestingly, in the last three months, the module that I chair, we've done some research specifically on students, attitudes towards our module forum, and I think one of the things that it confirms is that forums can be a place for students to have social contact.

But also, it's a place where they can test out their skills and their knowledge. So the skill of being able to communicate ideas from the module before you're actually put into the scenario of having to write them down can be a really good motivator for some of the students. They can actually test out their knowledge in a relatively safe space.

But I think the other thing that has come out of that research is that students find different kinds of forums useful for different kinds of things. And their interpretation of forums is a lot broader than just the module forums and also includes social media and other places where they meet. But I think it's important to find something that suits you.

Smaller forums suit some people. Bigger forums where you're a bit more anonymous suit other people. So I think certainly within the modules I teach on, we try to offer a range of different forum experiences, and that should be a consideration.

ISABELLA

HENMAN:

Yeah, I think that's important. So I know we've got [INAUDIBLE] what's a café forum? I think it's different modules have different kinds of forums, so sometimes they're referred to as a student forum or overall module forum or something.

Or sometimes the chat forum or study buddies-- there's different forums that exist for people just to engage, and I think it's going back to this idea of the relationships we're talking about. So relationships with tutor, but relationships with other students because they're going through the same thing, aren't they, Stephen?

STEPHEN

LEVERETT:

Yeah, of course. And when you go into a forum, as somebody said earlier, you might have a question, but actually, the chances are, if you've got that question, there's 10 or 11 other people out there with the same question. So feel brave enough to get involved and use forums for whatever purpose you feel they can be there.

It might just be having contact, but interestingly, there were a couple of students in our original research who didn't like any kind of social engagement, and just have to respect that some people are like that. So there is a temptation to say, oh, you should be in a forum. But I think we need to guide people to what is available and then give people the space to recognise what they can get for it without forcing them too much into it.

ISABELLA

HENMAN:

Yeah, and I know there's a really, really good OpenLearn course, and the link has gone into the chat, which is excellent. I was going to ask about it. But thankfully, it's gone in, and it's Building Confidence in Online Forums that some colleagues in the university wrote I think a couple of years ago. And it explains some of the benefits, but as you say, Stephen, actually some people get a bit worried and they don't want to do things in forums.

I think it's a do what you want to do. It's your own study journey. Again, it's these different things. Now, I'm going to come back to Heidi now because I know we've been having lots and lots and lots in the chat. Tell us more, Heidi. Are there any more questions for anybody, or is it still just chatting?

HEIDI SHL:

Lots of chatting, and it's interesting to see. This isn't something that I have found in any of my groups, but this does seem to be quite prevalent, that lots of groups are using WhatsApp, so students are communicating with each other via WhatsApp. It's a bit of a mixed bag on this one, so some of our guests are saying that they find this useful, but it does sound like with WhatsApp, particularly, well, as we know just generally in life, if you are just added to a WhatsApp group, then it can get a bit overwhelming.

So I left a WhatsApp group because it had 102 people in there. And Juliet finds WhatsApp quite overwhelming. Paula's group is using WhatsApp, and Tassie also has WhatsApp but then is muting it so that Tassie can just kind of hop in and out as and when. So it's trying to find that balance, isn't it, between that kind of peer-to-peer support, which is absolutely vital, but then also not having this constant barrage of information coming in.

And I think there's that tendency, I know with me personally-- you feel that sense of guilt a little bit. If you're doing other bits and pieces, then you've got people kind of firing all this information your way about what they're thinking or what they're studying. So I can imagine with 102 people in a group, that would be a very, very busy, busy forum to be in.

ISABELLA

HENMAN:

Yes, and I know from students that have spoken to me about WhatsApp, some have found it really helpful. And actually, it reminds me of you, Lynne, because I've had a number of nurses previously, and some of the nurses find their WhatsApp groups are really helpful, but others find that, again, it's that pressure, and then there might be the person that's saying, oh, I've already submitted another paper going, but I haven't even looked at the questions.

But then you're getting people asking for answers, and sometimes that's also can be a bit challenging, and I've had some I've had some negatives, so I'm always a little bit wary about recommending WhatsApp to students. I say, great, if you want to engage, but just be careful. I'd say the module forums are probably slightly safer because there's somebody moderating them. I always get the words muddled up. And Deborah said you can add them to your dashboard and you can get the little envelopes, so there's lots of useful things are out there.

But we're coming towards our summing up bit now because we've only got a few minutes left. So I'm going to come to each of my guests in turn to get a little bit of a take-home message. So I'm going to come to you first, Lynne. What would be your main take-home message you'd like our viewers at home to-- about how they can build their resilience?

LYNNE

WATSON:

I think I would say, remember that you are an individual. It's about you, but you're not on this journey alone. So make those relationships, speak to your tutor, speak to your student support team, but you're not alone.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you, Lynne. That's really helpful. So Stephen, what about you? What would be your take-home message?

STEPHEN LEVERETT: I think the focus has been about relationships, but I think it's also about recognising that relationships can help build individual skills, so skills of problem solving, time management-- those are some of the things that have been discussed today.

But also, and I think this came from something that Joe said that I made a note of-- I think there's also an element of resilience, which is building on what you've already done. So if you've overcome one challenge, it doesn't matter what it is. It might be related to the module or not. It's good preparation for your next challenge-- it can be motivational, but it can also give you the skills and confidence to move forward to the next step.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you. Yeah, I think that's the idea of building anything that you've got from anywhere can be useful. Yes. So Joe, I know we've always stealing your ideas because you've had such great ideas but what would be your main take-home message that you'd like people to know?

JOE HOGAN: Yeah, my main take-home message would be the yeah, when studying is a journey, and in terms of resilience and things like that, I think it's just studying, maybe developing competencies, life competencies, to develop on that journey, and also not to-- to be aware that it is a journey, and to feel just-- sometimes feel positive and not feel overwhelmed and try not to put too much pressure on yourself.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you, Joe. So Marianne, what about you? What will be your main take-home message?

MARIANNE SHARLOTTE: I would say plan ahead as much as you can, but obviously, stay flexible so when things unexpected things happen, you can modify your plans and keep going. And reach out to your tutor and the wider community because there's a wide OU community there and there are lots of people and lots of avenues of support that are there to help if you need that and you're happy, obviously, to access that. Like you say, you're not on your own. It's a marathon, not a sprint. And just find ways that help you keep going.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you very much. So we've got some great things. So Heidi, quickly, what would be your main take-home message?

HEIDI SHL: I just want to say a very quick hello to Paul. So Paul was awarded a Disabled Veterans' Scholarship to study with the OU. He's a single parent, and he's about to do his HGV practical next month. There's been loads of support for Paul. Paul, best of luck with everything. Thanks for sharing your experiences.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That's brilliant. Yeah, that's a great take-home message. You can overcome lots of adversities. So you'll see in the chat, we've got a feedback form because we always like to get feedback-- so about how well we've met the needs, if you've got further questions for us.

And I want to take such a great thank you to everybody that's been involved today. We've had some great conversations in the chat, and thank you to Lynne, thank you to Stephen, thank you to Joe, and thank you to Marianne, and thank you to Heidi.

So we've got all sorts of things. So remember that this idea-- you're on a study journey. It is a marathon, not a sprint. It's about building the resilience. It doesn't just stop, but talk to other people. Build relationships, and then hopefully, you'll have a fantastic successful study year.

[MUSIC PLAYING]