

Well-being – 18 January 2023

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good morning, and welcome to our latest Student Hub Live well-being broadcast. My name is Isabella Henman. And I'm your slightly giggly already host for today because we're thinking about well-being, and I've just been chatting about my favourite band which always makes me happy. We'll come back to ideas about things making you happy and making you feel good a little bit later.

So if you are new, you are very, very welcome. It's lovely to have you here. It's also lovely to have you here if you've been to one of our sessions before. If you are actually starting one of your modules in February, hello, welcome. Great to see you. It's great to see you engaging in things already.

So this is Student Hub Live, which is the community aspect of the University. And we exist to discuss study skills, aspects that help students overall. We're non-modular. We have workshops, and we have these live broadcasts. I've been privileged to have been involved for quite a few years now, and I absolutely love it. I love hearing what students have to say and giving ideas to help people.

So the way you can engage is through the Chat. And you can share your ideas. You'll see we've got a number of people in there helping you. We've got Heidi who is my person on camera. And I'll go to Heidi in a little bit to see what people have been talking about.

I've also got Amy and Mark, who are also answering questions. And I have a feeling we've probably got Cat and Rafael in there as well because they always like to be engaged.

So if you find the chat moves too quickly for you, you can always pin it so that you can keep an eye on the messages and then release the pin as you're going along. And if you're ever not sure, one of the people will be able to help you. And I have also got a number of guests with me today.

I've got Neill, and I've got Renu. And I've got Yasmin. And I'll be coming to each of them in a little bit. And they will be sharing some of their ideas. And it's lovely to see people waving at me. I can just see that on the bottom of my screen, so it's great.

But as I promised, I said I was going to come to Heidi first to see what people have been chatting about while we've been getting ready. So Heidi, what's been going on today so far?

HEIDI: Lots of introductions so far. Really busy in the chat, which is great to see. So I've set myself a bit of a challenge for 2023. So when I introduce people, I'm going to make my way - I'm going to try and do it geographically, so I'm going to try and be clever. So we're going to start off at the very, very north. And we've got Peter in the Shetland Islands. So, hello, Peter.

We've got Danielle and Kirsty joining us from West Scotland. It's apparently 4 degrees there and some snow, so a bit on the chilly side. Michelle joining from Glasgow and Erin from the Scottish borders, we've got Leanne from Whitby. Lisa and David are both in Lincolnshire. We've got Michelle from Leicester, Amanda from Cardiff, Kieran in Bristol, Chloe in Essex, Aaron in London, and John in Cornwall.

So lots of introductions at the moment, lots of welcomes going on. Kieran did raise a little query around navigating his way around the OU Study website. So people have been sharing some tips and ideas in there. And I've also shared the link to an OpenLearn course, which is really helpful for students wanting to navigate their way around. So do engage within the chat. We'd love to hear from you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. Thank you, Heidi. And I was mentally placing where you were going to go when you were saying about the place. I was like, oh, you've gone over to that side. My geography is not that good, but I could basically - I could follow things on. That was quite good.

So you're just seeing that there our email address has come up on the screen, so it's studenthub@open.ac.uk. And if you don't want to engage with the chat, if you want to send us an email too, then that will get through to us. And people will feed things to me so that I can engage with those and to see what people are saying.

So this session is about well-being. So often, people are thinking about well-being, particularly at this time of the year where, to be honest, we often find it's a bit miserable. It's cold. I have to de-ice the car on the way to the studio this morning, which was quite an achievement for me because I actually managed to do it. And I didn't manage to kill myself, which I normally do.

But Neill, I'm going to come to you first. So we said, we're talking about well-being. What even do we mean? Can you tell us what we mean by well-being? Or what do you mean by well-being?

NEILL BODDINGTON: Hi there, and welcome to everyone. That's a really hard question to ask just to start off with. But I like to think of it as - there's lots of medical models and lots of boring answers that I could give you. But I think, the way I like to often sort of phrase it is to be thinking about how you feel at a particular point on any given day. So it's very much focusing around feelings rather than taking a more sort of medicalized or diagnostic sort of approach to things.

And there's lots of different things that can be an impact within our well-being, things like your happiness, how much meaning you have in your life, connection with other people, sense of achievement. And they're all key aspects that can really play a part in terms of how someone feels and whether you feel that things are - there's a level of satisfaction in your life around those areas.

And they're always the key areas, when people talk about it, I'll always be saying, well, that's something to think about, think about those areas, think about what brings you happiness, what makes you feel connected to people, what gives you a sense of achievement, et cetera. And then pick out what they are and then reflect on are they're meeting what you like? Are they meeting what you need in your life?

Because essentially, it's all individual. We are all individuals. And what brings happiness to you, just like your band, probably might be something that I absolutely hate. I kind of interested to know what it is now. I'm sure we all are interested to know what that favourite band is.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, Shinedown. And my lovely cameraman here and me happen to be - we didn't know we were at the same gig in Wembley in December, although I've been asking him about various things, and he doesn't remember them. So I'm going to gently slap him after the recording and tell him that he really should have remembered these things. But it's a rock band, an American rock band, absolutely lovely.

But they, actually, interestingly, they talk quite a lot about well-being and mental health, and they're very, very passionate about it. In fact, quite a few of the bands I listen to that, just completely by coincidence, they are very keen on expressing that, actually, you know what? We're not always all right. It's OK not to be all right. But how about doing something to make yourself feel better? So like you were saying Neill, find out what makes you feel happy.

Now, you mentioned a sense of achievement. So I wanted to actually say to everybody at home, one, you're here. That's a fantastic sense of achievement. You're watching here, whether you're watching us live at the moment or you're watching on the recording, you're an Open University student.

That is absolutely fantastic. We love our Open University students. I started out as an Open University student before I started working at the University. Actually, I've never asked you Neill, have you studied with the OU, or not?

NEILL BODDINGTON: I am actually currently studying with the OU, yes. I have obviously, the opportunity to access it as a member of staff. Seemed too good to be true. But yeah, and it's a fantastic it's a fantastic insight into what students see, what they do, their communications. And that can help in my role across a lot of different aspects. So yeah, I am currently studying. I'm on both sides of the fence.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. That's great. So we were talking about - you were giving us some tips. So you were talking about sense of achievement, so studying in the first place. And obviously, these sessions are talking about study skills, helping you be an effective student. So we're going to be talking about that in a bit, but we're also drilling down into this well-being. And you mentioned connection. Can you tell me a little bit about that, please, Neill.

NEILL BODDINGTON: So connection, we tend to think of it more about our relationships with people. And there's so much wealth of research and information around the benefits of being connected to people and the various social support that we can gain from people. And I think we'd all know.

We'd all just think back to the pandemic and how horrible that was for a lot of reasons, but even just the ability to not engage with people, to not have that connection with people, to not be able to meet up with the various family and friends that you've got and the networks and the clubs and societies and groups and everything that you have.

So connection is really important, especially for your own sense of who you are and personality. Because you're often going to be around people that reflect that, that either share something that you're interested in or share something about your personality, whether it's sexuality or ethnicity or whatever else. That sense of who I am can come through those connections with people.

So that can be really important as well as just the very everyday aspect of just being happy talking about your favourite band or a gig or something. Those things helped to bring back happiness and positive emotion. And the more things that you can do that bring positive emotion, then the better it is. And often, we need to fall upon those people around us to help with that and to make that more and more meaningful.

We are social animals, as people. Generally, that's how we roll. We kind of didn't evolve completely to be just on our own walking around individually.

ISABELLA HENMAN: It's an interesting point though. I'm just going to pick up something from that, Neill, because I know I've sometimes spoken to some students who actually really struggle with other people and they feel that actually one of the reasons they study with the University is because they don't have to meet people face to face, they don't have to go into a lecture theatre.

And if they're feeling a little bit iffy, they can just be by themselves. So what would you say for that kind of student in terms of helping their well-being if they find the actual social aspect, tongue twister, a little bit challenging?

NEILL BODDINGTON: Yeah, that's a really good point. And it comes back to - that's what I said at the beginning. It's the sense that it means something to different things to different people. So some people would love to be surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people, and others might only have one or two of friends and connections. And it's what works for you. It's really about how that fits for yourself.

And if you find that, actually, I really enjoy being able to engage in a forum and hear other people and learn things from other people, whether that might be from the protection, safety, and comfort of your own home, then that's fantastic. But likewise, if you don't find it helpful, don't find it beneficial, then maybe that's not a problem. You kind of pull back from that and don't get so engaged in it.

I think it's really important to have a reflection for yourself. Am I getting something from it? The minute it becomes less happiness-giving, is to identify that that might be something that I'm not gaining from. I need to then reflect and find another option.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So the important thing that I'm hearing from you is, it's an individual thing. Work out what works for you.

In fact, we've got a question for everybody at home. What helps your well-being? What have you found that helps boost your well-being? Other than bands, I have to say chocolate. And those of you who've ever listened to me before know that I will always talk about dark chocolate because it really makes me feel great.

But I understand that we've actually had some people at home have been asking some questions. So Heidi, before I come back to Neill, I'm just going to come to you. So Heidi, what kind of questions of people have been asking so far?

HEIDI: What's really nice is that people have actually been sharing. They've been responding to that question that we asked them around, what helps their well-being. And they've been sharing some of the tips. And one of the key themes is actually music. So people have been sharing some of their favourite go-to songs, so those tracks that just lift us when we're having a particularly difficult day.

So Chloe, for example, has said that her go-to is Linkin Park and 4 Non Blondes. And then Vicky listens to ABBA. Who's not going to be cheered up by ABBA? Erin has said that mindfulness is the key, and Michelle prefers yoga.

Keris likes to craft and write letters to people. That's something that I love to do. I love writing letters. It's a bit of a lost art, isn't it? I really try and make time to write letters to people. I love receiving them as well. Aaron likes French knitting when feeling low. And Chloe has six cats and a puppy which keeps her very busy and goes for a dog walk when feeling low. And again, that's something that I can really, really relate to. So lots of idea-sharing at the moment in the chat about what people do to help boost their well-being.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you, Heidi. That sounds like lots of creative things. I understand we also had a question, when Neill and I were talking about connections, about how we can connect with other students now. We do have the Open University Students Association. And you should be able to link that from your programme of study I believe is a way is - there's Connect, and I think there's information, or just google Open University Students Association.

Often, in your module, there will be people saying, we want to have a meetup, or we might have a social media group, or something. My only thing I'd say is sometimes, be quite careful about social media groups because some people find them very helpful. But in the same way Neill was talking about earlier, some people find them a little bit overwhelming. In fact, I know I didn't pre-prepare this with you Neill, but social media is something that some people do find useful, but some people struggle with.

NEILL BODDINGTON: Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Do you have any advice to students about their use of that to help them with their well-being?

NEILL BODDINGTON: Yeah. Again, I think it's being able to reflect and think, what are the emotions I'm getting from what I'm looking at? And it's - social media is not a perception of reality. It's just a photo or a comment that's given of one moment in someone's life. And often, with a projection of something maybe more unrealistic to what it actually really was.

So I think it's the ability to go, how am I feeling? And it's whether it's just almost having that - think about it as an emoji. What's my emoji at the moment? As I'm reading this, am I feeling envious, jealous, frustrated, annoyed, bored, or happy, motivated, engaged? And think about that kind of emoji and that emotion that you're getting from it.

And if it's inspiring and bringing you happiness and connection, let's not dismiss social media for the negatives that it can bring. It can bring a fantastic sense of connection to people. Then great, keep doing it. But the minute you start to feel it's a negative emotion, put it down, hide it, get rid of it. And come back to it maybe another time.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I think that's very useful. I think that's the same with a lot of things. And going back to my chocolate, I know when we were pre-discussing this, Neill, you were telling me, stop eating so much chocolate. I do. I am quite measured and I eat very dark chocolate, so I don't eat too much. That's always my excuse. Neill was telling me off. I have to tell you, everybody at home, Neill was telling me off and saying, you need to do something about that. You can't just eat cake. And I was, like, well, I like it. And he said, yes, but there's some positive emotions, and there's some negative. So Neill's been very helpful for me as well. I think I have the little Neill voice in my head when I'm eating stuff.

But again, it's that kind of thing, isn't it, Neill? It's reflecting and being aware of our feelings. And I know we're saying this quite a lot. But well-being is often from how we're feeling and being aware of how we're feeling. So have you got any tips to help people know what they're feeling. And I know that sounds a little bit odd. But for some people, they might go, well, I don't I don't know quite what I'm feeling in this part.

NEILL BODDINGTON: Fine, you're asking a man to start talking about feelings, so that's probably the wrong person to come to. But for some people, it will often be journaling. And there's lots of different things, things like the OU Well-being app is really good for being able to log how you're feeling and being able to reflect on things in a very sort of simple way. I think it just uses emojis, so it's quite simple and quite easy to do. So that's something students might be interested in. All on the Help Centre, you can find out about the app.

But sometimes it can be asking other people can be helpful. When do I seem to be at my happiest? When do I seem to be most engaged? When am I not? Are there certain things - so sometimes asking other people can be really useful if we struggle to do that a little bit.

And there are quite a good few tools that you can utilise. Often at the end of the day, just to think about, what have I achieved today? When did I feel most connected?

You can Google these things, end-of-day reflective journaling or just kind of come up with it yourself. You don't need to do that. You can just think, well, what do I want to know? What do I want to think about reflect on? And you can then just create your own script and be able to then just have that moment to reflect on it at the end of the day.

One other thing that can be quite useful is, actually, if you can't do it for other people, it can be helpful for yourself. So if you were there to say, oh, I'm going to say - I'm going to reflect on of a partner or a friend

or family member or something, someone like that, and be able to talk to them about, oh, you seem really connected at this moment, or you seem really happy when you do that.

That, in itself, can either elicit conversation to and fro that is helpful, or it can actually help us to be more in tune with our emotions and our feelings because we're acknowledging them in other people. So we can learn that way as well sometimes.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you, Neill. So you've given us lots of tips. You mentioned the OU Well-being app, and you also mentioned the Help Centre. I think we've got the link there. It's probably been popped in the chat already. Brilliant, thank you. Yes, so the mental health and well-being - there's so much useful information on there. Well-being isn't just mental health.

And I'll come back to Neill later on in the session, and we'll talk a little bit about mental health as well. But we're talking about well-being mostly. And you can see there's all sorts of things in there. It's really useful. My student groups - I give them all these links. Every time I find something more. I happened to be at a training session with Neill and others yesterday. I was, oh - found some more useful things, I'll pop that one in.

The resources are there. Again, we were talking about your individual journey. We were talking about what helps you. Try and think about what helps you. But we recognise things aren't always great.

Sometimes they aren't. And we'll come on to some of those ideas later. But I just wanted to come back to Heidi. What else have we had coming on in the chat, Heidi? Is there anything we need to share? Is there anything people have been asking about?

HEIDI: Yeah, so Danielle really bravely opened up and shared her own experience. So Danielle has been mostly studying online for years because of bullying in school causing anxiety and feeling like it was difficult to settle in with like-minded people.

And that's something that Danielle is working on now. But learning to delete the social media apps from the phone when I realise it's doing more bad than good, and that's been really helpful. And then, similarly, Erin shared that Erin's on a Facebook ban at the moment.

But what was really nice is Deborah said, feeling a sense of connection and belonging just by being part of the OU family is great. So it's trying to find that balance, isn't it, all the time between that comfortable amount of connection that you have. And I definitely have to take my social media in doses because I can only digest so much before it tips over and then starts taking over life. So it's always trying to find that balance.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, thank you Heidi. That was useful. I have to say, the main reason I use social media - I don't post on it, but I use it to find out what strongmen are doing. Because strong men make - well, I don't do strongmen, clearly, but I like watching strongmen. And I like - because who doesn't like watching a man pull a bus or picking up a fridge or something like that?

Obviously, it's quite a niche like, but I really like it. I like watching it. I like going to them because it's just an interesting thing. But again, it's finding out what you like, finding out what works for you. So my next guest is Renu. And Renu and I have known each other for a number of different things.

But Renu's got some really interesting ideas. And she's - I think, the first thing I want to come to you and ask you about, Renu, is - Neill's been giving us some ideas about well-being. And you've also got me some definitions, haven't you? Because sometimes, again, like Neill was saying, sometimes we're not a bit sure - not always sure, but you've got some more information about well-being, haven't you?

RENU BHANDARI: Absolutely, Isabella. It's a great morning to start off with, I think, positive sense of being here and the very fact that we are celebrating all your students and their remarkable choices of being on a module, learning while juggling so many things.

So if you get into the research and you start thinking - OK, what is well-being all about? What are the key features of well-being? I think Neill's picked them up in a big way. But I just wanted to highlight there are five big dimensions experts talk about in well-being.

The first one is positive emotions. And most of the time, we say positive emotions are just because it's happiness, but positive emotions like self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of belonging. All of these are positive sense of emotions along with happiness which is the biggest one in well-being. The other is engagement - engaging with others, engaging with the environment, being able to cope, feeling a sense of connection with people.

And the other one is relationships. How am I developing relationships with a distance-learning environment? Are you in touch with your student group? Are you connecting with a tutor? Are you making a connection with the student support team if you need help, if you need assistance? If you are a student with, let's say, certain special educational needs, have you got in touch with the disability support to help you?

So just forming those relevant relationships that give a better meaning to life and better understanding to what we're trying to achieve. And the last one here is achievement. So what am I achieving by being here, by talking to people on the forum, by speaking to my tutor? Am I making sense of my TMA? And if you look at the biggest definition that has come from Department of Health, in very simplistic terms, it says, it's a positive state of mind and body.

So it's not just our mind, but being physically fit, well, and feeling good about ourselves, that combination, being able to feel safe, coping with life, and making a sense of connection with people, not just people but communities and environment altogether. So a big, very holistic definition giving us a big perspective that well-being is not just happiness but a combination of things, including emotions, engagement, meaning-making, and achievement.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So you've mentioned one of the words that I love hearing about, environment. Now, I know some of our students were talking about physical activity earlier and things like. Now, we have got something which we hopefully we're going to show on screen now, which is something that comes from the Student Well-being Handbook, and it's Physical Activity Bingo.

And I have to say, it's a little bit challenging to read in places with the pink background. But there's one of them that, in fact, I've got a copy, so I just need to check it. I can't read it on the screen. So they're taking a lunchtime walk. And that's something I make sure I do every day unless it's the summer and I'm already outside.

And there's, oh, go for one lunchtime run or jog. No, no, we do the lunchtime walk. We don't do the lunchtime jog. I'm not very good at that. But this is quite an interesting one.

So you might like to look at something like that because, actually, sometimes like Neill was saying, reflecting earlier, and Renu saying this idea of working out, what's making you feel positive? It's not just positive emotions. And we do have to recognise when we have negative emotions, but things that make us feel better.

So in fact, I said that Renu and I had known each other for a number of different things. And one of the things that we knew each other through first was a photo gallery that Renu would put up. And it was

actually for tutors, but I engage with it because I've got an allotment, and I like being outside. And I shared lots of pictures of my vegetables or interesting ice when we had the cold patch in December. And I think the environment is quite an important thing for many people, isn't it Renu? The being outside in the fresh air, engaging with the physical world really.

RENU BHANDARI: Absolutely. And I totally agree. Well-being is for everyone. It's not just for students. It's for associate lecturers, the whole faculty, and everybody. Like Neill said, we are people who want to be connected with people. And physical activity, there is a great range of research saying the fact that, yes, physical activity improves our well-being, our sense of worth, our self-esteem as well.

So engaging in activities that you really enjoy - somebody, a few minutes ago, Heidi was sharing how they love crochet, they love maybe gardening, they love maybe doing a lunchtime walk. So it is a whole range of activities that you can pick up and create those little pockets of just stopping and taking notice. I think that is a very must for well-being for all of us where you need gaps in between your busy routine. You need gaps in between your TMA deadlines where you have sent the TMA in and waiting for the mark to come back. To have those little activities which you really enjoy, being with the environment - yes, if you are a very outgoing and an outdoors person, activities like gardening, take a walk, take your dog for a walk, just chatting with your neighbours maybe if they are friendly and they want to be sort of on the same note and talking.

Or maybe just picking up the phone and talking to a friend if they have time, and building those little pockets where well-being can be encouraged, and creating that positive feeling that, yes, I am now standing back from the hustle of life, and I am doing this for myself, just so that I can take notice of the present moment. And I think this is what people miss in our well-being talks. We know lots of things. But are we able to create that well-being space for ourselves, those little pockets where we can just take notice and enjoy the moment and do activities that we really like - so music, walking, gardening, taking pictures. I am not a great photographer in my family, but I do attempt. And suddenly, if I see something really, really nice and creative, I do take a picture.

And my Hues portal was just to encourage all the associate lecturers to come on that portal and engage in activities that were nonacademic. So we get bogged down by marking and doing all sorts of academic research and so on. So that was a little pocket I created where everybody else could recognise other talents we have besides teaching and marking.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely, thank you. So one of the things I wanted to pick up - I've mentioned this Well-being Handbook, which is where the Physical Activity Bingo comes from. I'm going to come back to you in a moment with some more ideas, Renu. But I just wanted to let people know where they can find the handbook. So there's a couple of main places.

So it's in our "Being an OU Student" course, which is on OpenLearn, and it's in Section 4, Mental Health. So it's called the Student Well-being Handbook, and the Physical Activity Bingo is in there. The other place you can find it is on your programme of study site. So if you go to your programme of study site, click on the Connect tab, and then, on the right-hand side, you should see a nice picture that says Student Wellbeing Handbook, and that's where the Physical Activity Bingo is.

We can't give you direct links, unfortunately, other than the Being an OU Student one because, for each of you, you are in a different programme of study. I was trying to get them all yesterday, and I realised, there were so many of them, I couldn't keep them all.

But I wanted to come back to you now, Renu, for some ideas. Because I know that you've done some research. And you've asked students before about what's made them feel helpful.

You've actually also talked to some of our neurodiverse students. And it's a passion of mine, helping students with disabilities, and particularly neurodiversity to recognise how to be effective and learners. Can you tell us a little bit about what you found about those students and what helped their well-being?

RENU BHANDARI: Well, many students we interviewed in our neurodiversity project, they were students who came into the Open University with the first experience of distance learning. And as you are aware and many of our students may be aware as well, that neurodiverse students, they have to do - they require a lot of support, not just academically, but around them so that they can have an effective learning experience in any institute.

So when we started interviewing these neurodiverse students, what came across was that many students had built their own strategies of coping and own strategies of being well and feeling assured about what they were doing. Many of them would get in touch with a tutor. One student particularly shared his favourite pet that, a pet dog was the right next to study every time when the TMA was getting done or when the module chapter was being read.

Another student shared how she would have a whole range of mark-up pens and a whole range of teddy bears lined up just to feel a bit more confident in what she was writing and what she was trying to achieve in the module. So we explored what particular strategies worked well. And what we found out was, everybody had made their own route.

And they made the plan themselves. And they kept on experimenting to say, this works for me, this doesn't work for me. And I think that's the advice we took forward in terms of implications as well to say, for each student, the kind of well-being strategy that will work will be very different. Every person is unique. And what you have to do is continue to experiment with what is working and what is not working. And I think that's the beauty of creating a well-being strategy for yourself, rather than having a big institutional policy. We have institution policies. But what may work for me may be very different from Isabella because she likes chocolates, and I don't like chocolates that much. I like ice creams more. So I'm more of an ice cream person and less of a chocolate person.

But I would say, think about what works for you and the strategies, like I said, for neurodiverse students. And students all across the spectrum would be very, very different from each other. Pick up the best ones. And when we say connect, connection also makes you learn from other people. So when I'm talking about my Hues portal where all the lecturers were sharing their interests and ideas, many other lecturers said, oh, I've done the same thing. I should try that.

So I think learning from each other, maybe swapping a skill - you can be a very good painter. You could be a very good photographer. But maybe for a day, say, let me try cooking today and see where we get to. And I think that is what you need in the well-being strategy.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think that's the thing. So Neill said it as well. And you said it, this idea that we're all individuals. Apparently - I've just heard that Yvonne is talking about her allotment in the chat. And I'm so happy because I have allotments. I love my vegetables. I'm not so keen on the mice and the pigeons and the squirrels and everything else that eat stuff on my allotment. But yeah, my allotment is what makes me happy.

And some of you might just go, oh, why would I want to go and dig? Why would you want to be doing that? Again, I've worked out what makes me feel happy. I know I'm not saying I'm perfect. I know plenty of things that don't. But just picking up on what Renu was saying is this idea of, don't be afraid to try things. We can give you all sorts of suggestions in any Student Hub Live workshop or session. We'll give you lots of ideas. Have a go at them. You may already know some things might not work for you. You may already know, as I do, that running is not really my forte. I don't run.

But there's other people who do. I have massive amounts of respect for anybody who can do that. I can't, but that's fine. I've learned to live with that. And you have to develop. And it's part of your study journey.

The same way as you're working out some of the study skills, also some of the things about helping your well-being and working out those are something that you might need to work on and have a go at.

Now, before I come to our student guest - we've got the wonderful Yasmin with us. I'm just going to go back to Heidi. So my tongue is just not working today. I would go to Heidi - sorry, Heidi, over to you.

HEIDI: I just want to pick up a little bit more on Yvonne. Yvonne has been sharing such fantastic advice and ideas about what Yvonne does to help with boosting well-being. Obviously, you touched on there about going to the allotment, and that's something that Yvonne does as well. But Yvonne also sits in the garden or, if it's raining outside, inside the greenhouse. I love the idea.

This year, she decided to do things for herself like getting her hair done, going for a coffee. And then, in lockdown, because Yvonne has difficulty with walking, she drove to a loch a mile away and just sat with a flask of tea and a book.

And then some really practical advice as well around TMAs and studying is Yvonne said that she doesn't discuss her marks with anybody else because then she starts thinking about people who are getting 80's or 90%. She just focuses on her own work, trying to enjoy the module, and giving herself plenty of time to complete the TMA.

Lots of other discussions in the chat, people talking about how swimming really helps them, lots of people talking about that. But as Peter pointed out, with the weather that's not always easy. And Peter actually says, this time of year outside for him is problematic. You may have remembered that, at the beginning, I introduced Peter, and he's joining us from the Shetland Isles. So he said cold and windy most of the winter, and outside this time of year is a no-go.

And I know lots of people affected by weather as well. And then others sharing experiences, very personal experiences around bullying and how that's affected them and their well-being. So loads and loads going on in the chat. It's really, really fascinating.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you. And I'm really sorry to hear that some people have been sharing negative - not sorry that you've shared it, but I'm really sorry to hear that people have had negative experiences. Unfortunately, that's the reality of life. We try to be as positive as we can. And in Student Hub Live, one of our remits is to try and be as positive, to encourage people. But we do recognise that there are challenges. Everybody has challenges, myself included.

So sometimes it's a case of, we like to think ourselves a little bit of an oasis of positivity. We try to focus on those kind of things. So I said, we had Yasmin next. And Yasmin is absolutely wonderful. She stepped in at the last minute.

But I heard her talking yesterday, and I thought, I need to talk to Yasmin. She impressed me so much. So Yasmin, you're a student. You've had all sorts of things happen in your experiences as well. Well, what can you tell us about well-being for you as a student?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, so I think, for me, well-being comes from many parts of what I do. So I always make sure that I am working on my student/personal life balance and making sure that I've got an equal mixture of the two. So I'll spend a bit of time studying, and then I'll do something just for me.

Or I will specifically book something to go meet up with friends or to have a conversation with them. So I've kind of got that crossover between the fact that, ultimately, I am a full-time student, but I also need to have my own time. So that's one of the things that I do.

I'm a sports fitness and coaching student. So we've talked a little bit about being active and going out for walks and things like that. That is something that I really enjoy. I've got a dog, and there is nothing I like more than, before I sit down to do a study session, taking him out for a walk, kind of refreshing that brain, and not necessarily focusing on exactly what it is that I'm about to do, just focusing on the environment around me, hearing the noises of the birds, even the cars going past.

And then, also, I really encourage the kind of use of speaking to tutors. I have been one of the first people to reach out to my tutor and explain that I'm struggling or what it is that I'm struggling with. Before I even start a module, I will send my tutor an email. I'm a student that's studying with physical disabilities, autism and dyslexia.

So I'd like to get in touch with my tutor pretty quickly just to explain a bit about my needs, which I feel has a really big impact on my well-being as a student. Because, from the offset the conversations between me and my tutor feel a little bit tailored more to my needs. And so I feel like I can go to them.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [AUDIO OUT] - the fact the conversations are tailored to your needs - my emphasis on your needs. But this is the whole idea. You're a student. You're a wonderful student and individual. You're here representing the student body at the moment because you're the student. But you recognise you're an individual with specific needs.

Now, you've mentioned that - you've shared that you're studying with disabilities. Now, I've had some students before, we talk - this overall session is about well-being, and they've said, but I'm disabled, so my well-being is just fundamentally impacted. I can't feel well. What would you say to that, Yasmin?

YASMIN REEVE: Well-being isn't necessarily linked to whether or not you have a physical disability or mental difficulty, anything like that. Well-being is about you, as an individual. And I think, for me personally, just because I have limitations - for example, I can't walk. I'm a full-time wheelchair user. Does that mean that I can't have a positive well-being? No.

It's the things that I do that kind of surround that. So thinking about the things that I have achieved since becoming disabled and things like that - yeah, I think, just because you're disabled, it definitely doesn't mean that you can't have a positive sense of well-being. It is very much individual, as we've said, kind of throughout the whole of today.

Everything is individual. And also, don't compare yourself to - potentially if you've got somebody able-bodied or another person with a disability, and you look at them and think, oh, well, everything's great for you, things like that. We don't necessarily always know that. And so it's really important to focus on that individual factor.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think it's interesting. Neill was talking about social media earlier and this perfect idea about what things are.

And I know that research into social media is - it increases anxiety for a lot of people because they see this, oh, this person always looks fantastic. Oh, I've got no filters, I think. I don't know, I'm probably using

the wrong terminology. But oh, I always look perfect. And you think, I'm sure you don't. I'm sure that's not what you look like when you get out of bed.

So this idea - we keep on saying it. It's about being an individual and working out what works for you. You have seen that we had the question that we had about you - what helps you when you're feeling anxious? And I understand that some people have said square breathing. I think it was that. I'm not quite sure what that is. Again, exercise, different types of exercise, swimming I think was something that came up.

So it's, again, working out - I know there were some people - there will be some people watching who suffer from clinical anxiety, which is a bit more serious. But we all get anxious at different points because we get worried. And I said, we would talk a bit about mental health along the way. So well-being and mental health, for some people, can be inextricably linked.

It's interesting because, Yasmin, you said that, for you, you said that physical health and well-being weren't necessarily the same. What do you think about mental health and well-being? Do you think they are more linked to the physical health and well-being?

YASMIN REEVE: Again, do you know what? I don't feel they're necessarily that linked, in my own opinion. They are two separate things. Just because you struggle with your mental health, that doesn't necessarily mean that you have to struggle with your well-being. Mental health, quite often, can impact on things that people do in their daily life, which, I guess from that side, yes, it could impact your well-being.

But I think it's making an effort to think that, within your limitations of what you can do, what is it that you can do to improve your well-being and taking those steps and doing them, no matter if that's a really, really small step. It's just that day, you got out of bed. That is a fantastic achievement.

That is a step towards having a more positive well-being in yourself. And it's looking at things from that side rather than, I think all too often in life, and I know for me personally, as a student, sometimes I really dwell on the negative things that are going on in my life, which definitely impacts my well-being.

And then, as soon as I start to look at some of the positive things and I sit down and write a list of all the positive things and whether or not I have to extend that back to the past few years of my life, soon, you start to kind of change your mindset a little bit, or at least it does for me, back to that more positive side of well-being.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes, well, I was getting a little bit distracted by some of the things you were saying and just thinking over them. But I think this idea of the individual things and working out what works for you, And actually - I was thinking a little bit about what you were saying about getting out of bed as an achievement. And actually, I have a feeling there may be some people watching that, you know what? Getting out of bed is just one step too much for me at the moment.

I struggle myself. I'm not a morning person. And particularly at the moment when it's cold and I'm cuddled underneath the duvet, and I'm, like, I just don't want to get out of bed. And if I could work from bed, then possibly I would, but I think I'd probably just feel too much like a slug, a little crustacean in my bed, just all manky and horrible. So actually, sometimes that getting up and almost putting yourself a face on for the world.

And not a fake face, not the social media one, but you know what? I'm going to do my hair today. I'm going to put a bit of makeup on. Or I'm going to put on a jumper that makes me feel good. Do you have any clothes that make you feel good? I know you've got your OU hoodie on there. But does that resonate? Do you have clothes that make you feel good, Yasmin?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, definitely. I have certain leggings that, if I am having a bad day or maybe I'm not feeling as bright as I normally would, I will specifically go for a brighter pair of leggings just to kind of balance out, I guess, the way that I'm feeling and then make it something a bit more positive. And that's something that I found really interesting when I'm out and about in public.

I personally may be feeling awful, but I wear these pair of leggings, and everyone is saying, oh, my gosh, I love your leggings. Where did you get them from? Things like that which, in turn, makes me feel a bit better. I've had a bit of an interaction with people. And I've had some compliments about something that people don't have to compliment on. So yeah, I definitely relate to that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I have to say, I'm one of those people that will go up to somebody and say, I love your leggings. My husband looks at me. He goes, what are you doing? I was, like, but her leggings are fantastic. I want to know where she got them from.

So yeah, I think, actually, it reminds me, when I was in the sixth form, I got the award for most colourful person because I always used to have really bright things. I had a pair of, seriously, canary yellow trousers that I used to wear to sixth form and all sorts of bright things. I had this really, really bright orange jacket.

And I think the first time I wore anything black because I think I'd been bought a Guns N' Roses top, actually. And it was a black Guns N' Roses thing. And they looked at me, what happened to you? You're not feeling good today. You're wearing a black one. I was, like, no, no, it's just because it's a Guns N' Roses one. It's not because I'm feeling bad. Oh, oh, are you sure you're OK, because you need colour things.

But again, it's working out. Sometimes some of you might think, oh, that's just a silly little thing. But you know what? The fact that somebody goes up to you, Yasmin, and says, I love your leggings, maybe share a little thing. If you see something, if you see somebody, and you think, you know what? I really like your jumper. Just say to somebody, I like your jumper.

They'll probably go, wow. I mean, to be honest, people are not going to turn around and say, ugh, why are you doing that? They're probably going to go, oh, well, that's really nice. And even that little tiny connection, Yasmin, it's lovely, isn't it, just that little connection with people sometimes? We've asked people -

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, definitely.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I asked you a question then I carried on. I do apologise. Was there anything else that you wanted to add after my little stream there?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah, I think making that connection, it comes into what we've previously discussed about connection. But then also, when we look at the five pillars of well-being, that - hopefully anyone who has seen the Well-being Handbook or goes on to look at the Well-being Handbook, one of the five pillars of well-being is give. And you're giving to someone else in that moment.

It may take five seconds of your day to say to somebody, oh, I really like your jumper and stuff like that. But every time I've said a compliment to somebody about something they're wearing, the smile that comes across their face - I'm giving them something, but also I've just gained so much from seeing that person smile.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [AUDIO OUT] about doing it just in a trite way, but it's a genuine. It's just a little thing, but it's a nice thing. Now, we asked everybody at home earlier, what do you do to help when you're

feeling anxious. I'm going to come to Heidi now. What kind of things have people shared about when they're feeling anxious? What makes them feel better?

HEIDI: Lots and lots of brilliant suggestions. So Kieran plays with his puppy when he starts to feel anxious. Melissa finds talking to her mates helps. We've got another Heidi. So Heidi chats with friends, especially ones who are also studying a distance because that really helps immensely. And Heidi also lets her partner know how she's feeling so she's not suffering in silence.

Susan finds running helps a lot to ease her anxiety and is about to do a coached 5K. Erin, you touched on that briefly earlier actually about the square breathing. So my understanding is it's box breathing. And I know that the military use it. That's how I learnt about it.

And the idea is, it helps you to refocus. You breathe in for four, you hold for four, out for four. It's kind of like this box breathing, and then you repeat it. And I've used that myself in the past, as has my partner, and it's really, really great.

Angel uses Pilates to reduce anxiety. Michelle uses yoga. And Tammy, sitting under trees especially in the rain. There's something about being rooted to nature, which I find myself sometimes, on a really frantic day, nothing is better than when you take your shoes and socks off and you go and stand out on the grass. I find that helps enormously.

ISABELLA HENMAN: It actually reminds me - I think it was Yvonne was talking about going and sitting in her greenhouse. My greenhouse is called my conserver house. So I've got shells round it with plants, but I have enough space for my chair or my table.

So at certain points of the year, my computer goes out there, while I sit there, I shut the door. And people say, where are you? I'm in my conserver house.

And it's lovely because I get the little warm bits. And it's just a bit different, and sometimes people - what's in the background. It's whatever's growing in the background. And there's various different plants around, not so much at the moment. I've got some broad beans that are growing, and I was attempting to say some sweet peas. I'm not sure they've done anything yet. But yeah, it's great. Again, it's just finding these little things that help you.

Now, so what we wanted to do is - we've talked about things. We've given you some ideas. We also want you to think of some nice, practical things.

So one of the things I talked to Neill about when we were preparing is stress-busting tips. Now, we didn't talk about them earlier, but, Neill, I wanted to come back to you now. So what kind of practical suggestions for students - so we talked about anxiety, and students were just talking about managing that.

But often, students do feel really, really stressed, don't they, particularly when they've got deadlines. What kind of tips can you give students about how to manage their stress to make things a bit easier?

NEILL BODDINGTON: So I think the first thing I'd say is that we can - and we touched on some of the ideas that have been shared in the chat around considering your energy zones. So we can think about whether we have a high energy, or we're in a low-energy state, and whether that's positive or negative. So we can create a graph. It's quite hard to try and explain in words.

But often, we're - so we put something like anxiety being stressed as being like a high energy, but negative emotion. So it might be, well, what can I do that's going to counter that? And that might be a more positive, low-energy behaviour. And everyone's different, and everyone has different options, but stroking a puppy and standing outside in the garden and those kind of things would fit in there.

So sometimes it's been able to recognise how we are and then be able to think, well, what's the counter I can do to that? What's the opposite thing that I can do that's going to help and benefit with that? So the minute we start to notice that stress, anxiety, and some of those things - we often call them a stress signature, those flags that around how we're feeling.

Like for me, if I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed, I procrastinate, and don't do the right things. And that's like a cue to say, you're a bit stressed. You need to go and do one of those counter activities or behaviours. The other thing I'll give as some sort of practical sort of tips around things - and it might work around study or around fitting everything into your life - is the four Ds, which is Drop, Delay, Delegate, and Delete.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Delay, delegate, and delete. OK.

NEILL BODDINGTON: So before that, what you might do is you might do a DOD. So you might Dump, which is write everything down, and get everything down that you have that you've got going on that's on your mind, it's causing you stress, such like, so you put it all down on paper, that nice, very simple kind of approach. Then try and organise it.

So that organisation would include things where we now start to think about, what can I drop? What do I need to get rid of, doesn't matter? Maybe I feel like I should do it, but I don't really need to do it.

What can I delay and wait until I do it later? And it doesn't need to be done now. So if I set myself a deadline that's unachievable, or is it something I say that isn't so important that could be left, and I can maybe diarize that in for a later date.

What can I delegate to somebody? So that could be specific tasks. Even your day-to-day stuff - can someone else cook the dinner today so that I can get on with my studies, for example? Things like that can be really helpful.

And then finally, what's the thing that I can delete? What is on there that really doesn't need to be on there, linking back to what we talked about. Have I thought I've got to do this or go that place because I saw someone on social media doing it, for example? So what's the stuff I can just get rid of and just get off?

And then, coming back to our DOD, after we've done all of that, we then go, right, what am I going to do? What are the priorities that I need to get on and I need to do? What the key things that are most important? And what are the things that are important to me as well?

So OK, we might have stuff like a TMA deadline that's clearly relevant, and there's a specific deadline around things like that. But what else do I need to do that's important to me that I need to think about, I need to fit into my life?

ISABELLA HENMAN: And apparently students are really liking your stripy background. Not what I thought it was a jellyfish earlier because clearly, as we established, my eyesight isn't good.

NEILL BODDINGTON: I'm so pleased because getting some straight lines is quite a challenge.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, things like wallpapering, that wouldn't be my idea of a stress-busting activity. I could imagine so many domestics coming in that one.

NEILL BODDINGTON: Well, see that's achievement. I achieved something, so my well-being was improved. And people have said such positive things. So look, I'm smiling, so there we go.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Which is great.

NEILL BODDINGTON: Fits in with what Yasmin was talking about.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. So it's interesting. And I touched on it earlier. So when we were talking, when we were preparing and I was talking about cake and so on - so I know sometimes people's stress-busting tips or things that make them feel better might be like me eating cake and eating chocolate. And sometimes they're not the best thing.

So if I was going to say to you, Neill, oh, OK, I've been feeling really stressed. I've been feeling really anxious, and I want to eat cake. I know that's not necessarily the best thing to me. But I don't know what else to do to make myself feel better. What might you suggest in that situation?

NEILL BODDINGTON: So I would say that maybe isn't a bad - if you're feeling like that, and you know you're going to feel better, maybe not a bad thing to eat cake. But it might be that we're going to eat cake, and we're going to then, as we're eating a cake, sit down and reflect on what else I could do, what else is going to be helpful?

So it's kind of asking yourself, what have I done before that's worked? Maybe a good trick is to use things called displacement. So you can imagine it's your friend that's coming to you with this sort of problem. And you could go, OK, what advice would I give them? So it's a helpful way of taking yourself out of this kind of reflective sort of activity and option.

Thinking back to the times when you've been really happy and positive - again, maybe look through your social media feed. Look through your photos. Think about the things that you've done that have worked. We often think it's got to be quite big and extravagant. But think about things in terms of five minutes. So what just takes that really short space of time, a five-minute activity that you can easily do in between study, that kind of thing, or just before you study, something that maybe takes a little bit longer maybe about an hour. And then we've got those things at a bit even more time, so a day, a weekend, a week, the bigger activities so that we've got a range of options. And we create a toolkit. And we can dip into our toolkit.

And we can go, well, I've only got 5 minutes, 10 minutes. So I'm going to do one of those. And we can then pick the right tool that fits with what our situation, as it stands. And it might be, I don't have the time to go for a run or go for a walk, but I could do something else. So I've got plenty of time to go for a walk, so I'm going to go and do that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Or you could do - something I sometimes find myself doing if I know I don't have time, I end up doing star jumps. I don't particularly like them. But if I'm feeling really lethargic, I think, no, I've got to stand up, and I don't know, I must look a complete idiot.

But you know what? They just they pump you up. Or if you can't do star jumps, little arm raises, little wiggles, anything just sort of - sometimes it's a little bit of getting your blood pumping, just getting yourself feeling a little bit better.

Now, we've only got a short amount of time left. And I know we asked everybody at home, what do you do. Our question was, what are you going to do to boost your well-being this year? So I wanted to come back to you Heidi for the last time. So what kind of things have people been sharing at home that they are now going to do, what they're committing to do?

HEIDI: Well, Isabella, you've inspired Erin. Erin is now saying that they're going to set up a conservator house just like you. They love that idea. Kieran is going to really start focusing on more of the positives. It's very easy to get distracted by the negatives. So that's going to become a new habit for care and to really, really focus on the positives so they balance each other out, he was saying in the chat.

And then, lots of nice conversations around herbal tea. And I think there's been some people have been inspired to take that up. Richard has honey and hot water at the end of the day to calm down and recommends that.

Susan says it has to be builder's tea for her. But there's lots of suggestions in the chat about different flavours and makes of herbal tea which lots of people are responding to. So that seems to be a bit of a common theme going forward for many of our students.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And if you're any good at growing mint, you can grow your own mint for herbal tea, which I think I finally managed to grow a mint, but I keep forgetting to use it in tea and use tea bags instead, which is a bit silly. I did try and have rosemary herbal tea, fresh rosemary. That was just a little bit weird, and I think I was just using it as an excuse to have lots of honey in the water. So it probably wasn't I read that rosemary was supposed to be good, but anyway.

So I just wanted to - before we finish, I wanted to come back to Yasmin one more time because you've given such great ideas. Is there anything else? Is there any sort of final take-home message that you want everybody at home to hear today, really, really hear today?

YASMIN REEVE: Yeah. I think a take-home message would be to work on yourself. Put yourself as a priority in every single aspect of your life. Try and spend a bit more time focusing on the positives, even if it's just that you spend a minute or two a day focusing on the positives. Try and just spend that bit more time focusing on the positives. And contact people if you need support with your well-being. Look at some of the resources that OU have - so, the Well-being Handbook and things like that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: These things are really useful because they don't have to be big things, do they? We're talking about well-being overall today. And I think the messages that I'm taking home from what people said is, we're all individual. We've all got different challenges. Sometimes those challenges do feel really, really poop to put it mildly.

And sometimes you go, you fee, you know what? Those challenges are too much for me. So that's where sometimes, finding that tiny-weeny little thing that makes you feel better, even if it's for 10 seconds, that's 10 seconds more than you were feeling better yesterday. So just build that up. So think of some of those ideas.

Wear your favourite leggings, wear your colourful top, have yourself a cuddle with your dog, with your cat. Go out, if you can, weather dependent, and smell a flower.

Actually, there's a lovely plant, mahonia, that's flowering at this time of year. And it's a bush. And there's one at the end of the road. And every time I walk past it, I stick my nose in it, much to the amusement of the person who owns the house.

But it's got a lovely smell. And that makes me feel better. So it's all about finding those little things.

Neill gave some practical tips. And because we're recorded, you can always come back and look again, the things about sometimes prioritising. What is important? What do you need to do? Focus on the positives. Try not to get held up with the negatives. I know it's really hard sometimes. And I know people often think, but it is really bad. Try and be positive.

Now, we do have a survey. All of our sessions we encourage people to complete a survey to make sure that we're doing the best job we possibly can. Because, as I said, we're about community-building. We're about skills. We do different events.

And we do these live broadcasts. We do online workshops. All of them are available. You can look at the details from our Student Hub Live website.

Hopefully, we've given you some things to think about today. Hopefully you will feel a little bit positive, whether that's a little bit positive about maybe baking a cake and either eating it or giving it somebody, whether going out for a walk, going out for a run, doing some star jumps, connecting with an OU club, connecting with your tutor group forum. If you've got a tutor group forum, why not start a thread in there saying, things that make me feel happy.

I'm sure your tutor would love it. As tutors, we often try and start those kind of things. Tutors are people too. We like to hear from our students. If things aren't going well, then obviously get in touch with them as well. But you know what? If there's something that's happened that's really good, pop it into an email and say, you know what? I was reading this in the module, and it was really great. That's lovely as well.

So hopefully, we've given you lots of things to think about today. Well-being, as Yasmin helpfully said, if you do have a disability, well-being and disability are not the same. You can rise above, literally.

Yes, OK, your disability may prevent you from walking, but you can still be well. You can still connect with others. You can still give to others. You can still feel. You can still feel happy. And hopefully we've given you some really good things to think about today.