

# Wellbeing for students - January 18th, 2024

ISABELLA HENMAN: We're here talking about wellbeing this morning, a subject very close to my heart, and something I love talking about and encouraging students about. So you are students. You are wonderful students with the University and you're managing your wellbeing. Or you know what? Some of you may feel that you're not managing your wellbeing too much.

So what we're going to be doing today is we're going to be chatting through some ideas, and I've got some wonderful guests with me today who will be talking through some of their strategies, things they have found have helped them for their wellbeing I've also got some lovely people in the chat with me. I've got Laura and Rachel, and I've got Heidi, and they will be answering your questions. So if you have any questions at any point, just feel free to ask as many as you like in the chat.

Student Hub Live is very much about community, particularly this event, which is about wellbeing, so ask as many questions as you like. Share what you've done. Share what you've had for breakfast. Share if you're one of those slightly mad people that's gone out for a run this morning or anything like that.

So I probably should have introduced myself. I probably haven't done that yet. My name is Isabella Henman. So I've been working with Student Hub Live for a number of years. And I love helping students and supporting students with different study skills and aspects of their life, and their management of their study.

So I mentioned I've got the wonderful Heidi with me. So Heidi has been looking at the chat so far. So what kind of things have been coming up so far, Heidi?

HEIDI: It's been busy already in the chat this morning. Hi to everyone. If you haven't met me before, my name is Heidi, as Isabella said. So I studied with the Open University for six years. I did my undergraduate studies with the OU in literature, and I'm now Alumni Engagement Manager at the OU. So I've been here for a number of years. So you're hearing from me now while you're studying, and you will also hear from me in a few years, once it's all done and completed and you graduated.

So as Isabella said, hopefully you're all nice and warm. I've got my blanket here. I've got my pot of tea here. And just behind me, I've got my dog Martha. She's a-- she can be a bit distracting. She tends to just kind of zonk out and then suddenly she'll wake up, and just kind of walk round in circles. So hopefully she's not too distracting in the background.

So some conversations going on in the chat at the moment, then. So some of you are looking forward to the snow. We were talking there about how cold it is. So Lindsay and Holly, they are both looking forward to the snow. Holly says that she's really eager to build a snowman and has the toboggan in the conservatory already. So Holly is fully prepared for the snow to hit. But Declan and Gemma aren't quite so enthusiastic about the potential forthcoming snow.

So to say some hellos, as well. So Marisol is joining us from Oxford this morning. We've got Rebecca in Lancashire. And we've got Gemma in cold Liverpool. Lisa is in Scotland. And we've got Ruth in Kilmarnock, in Scotland.

We've got Tony on the sunny Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire border. Welcome to you and Amita in Leicester. We've got Zara and Anne. They're both joining us in Wales this morning, which is great. And we've got Holly in Essex.

And a really nice little message from Lisa who says, I'm looking forward to this session. Self-care is something I put on the back burner a lot, so I'm hoping this inspires me to remember my own needs, too. Amen. I love that, Lisa. That's brilliant.

If you find the chats moving quite quickly, you can pin it. In the top right hand side, there's a little pin there. That will slow down the chat for you. There's lots of people here at the moment, so it will just help you with keeping track of that. But equally, if you find the chat a little bit distracting, and you just want to focus on what we're talking about, that's absolutely fine too. Thanks for joining us

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thanks, Heidi. So Heidi was mentioning lots of different places people are. You'll see there's a map that you can pop a little pin on to say where you are. And when that's ready, hopefully we'll be able to show it. We've also had a word cloud running, which is saying what you've been studying. And I understand, apparently, we can have a look at that now to see what people have been studying.

OK, so, oh-- lots and lots of people with psychology. Counselling. More psychology. Questions in science, accounting, studies, music, statistics, science, literature, English, social science, international-- lies. Oh, that's an interest-- Oh, lies, damn lies. That's somebody's being naughty, aren't they? Because that's lies, damn lies, and statistics. That's somebody who's heard me say things before. I talk about that kind of thing.

I'm amazed nobody said they were studying chocolate. Neill will be very cross with me if I start talking about chocolate already. He always tells me off about liking chocolate and cake.

So I didn't mention the guests I have yet, but I have the lovely Bryn, the lovely Leah, and the lovely Neill, who'll all be joining me at different points tonight. Not tonight, what am I talking about? We're still in the morning. Crumbs. I don't know where we're going with that one.

So I'm going to come to Bryn first. So Bryn has been a student with the University before, and has had a number of challenges, works for the University now. Bryn, can you tell us a little bit about the kind of things that wellbeing, or the kind of role that wellbeing had in your study journey?

BRYN JEFFERY: Yeah Hi, everyone. I started studying with the OU back in 2008, and I was really ill at the time. So I'd been diagnosed with fibromyalgia and I'd had to leave my job. And I was just very ill. Basically, I couldn't really do anything much.

And studying that module-- it was just one module at that point with the OU-- just really helped me feel less hopeless I got a lot of support with equipment and stuff, so that I could study in bed. And it was something to do that made me remember that there was more to the world than just being exhausted, and feeling in pain, and not really knowing what the future could hold, that could be good in that sense. So it was really-- study was a really important part of helping me to keep on going at that point.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So you say it helped you going. You mentioned that you were bed bound at one point. So I know some students, we may have some people here that are bed bound, and others who might be thinking, how on earth could you study when you're bed bound? Now, you might want to go into some of the practicalities. But also, with the wellbeing ideas, how did you get yourself to be able to study when, as you're saying, you're going, I'm in bed. That's what the world is. You mentioned that it got a bit better. How?

BRYN JEFFERY: I think, well-- so I was studying arts. So just the introduction to the arts course, which is really about how humans self-express and create. And it was a great reminder that I was also human, in that sense, that I had that same desire. And I think, when you're in bed and you're in a lot of pain, and you've got no career prospects-- I had no family around me-- your world really shrinks.

And studying really opened that up for me, again, because I could look at things people had created and things that people had thought about and talked about. And I could engage in that as well. I could talk back and I could write things. And even though I wasn't creating anything myself at that point, I could still engage with that. And I think that's such an important part of being human, is that ability to connect with other people, whether that's through art that maybe a few hundred years old, or whether that's your live tutor and students. So that just really helped to expand my world mentally, at a point where my body couldn't do very much at all.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. Thank you. That's-- Lisa said, thank you for that beautiful, heartfelt story. So she found that was a really helpful thing. And I love the way you talk about expanding the world. Because I know, we can often feel we are in this little bit, aren't we?

I'm in my front room. And I'm often-- it's just me in front of my computer. And you talked about connection. Student Hub Live is about connection. It's about community. That's why people who haven't been before may see the chat and go, wow, it's just going really, really quickly. It's because people are connecting with each other and you mentioned that.

So you mentioned about being able to connect through art. Now, can you remember, was that the art connected to your module or was that something else? Any ideas about that?

BRYN JEFFERY: It was the art connected to the module, but I think the great thing about studying is that it expands your horizons. So didn't just learn about the stuff in the module. I also got the tools to appreciate various types of artistic expression, then, wherever I saw it. So then, I could look at a picture and go, oh, I like that, because of this or whatever.

And it just-- I think it also removed a barrier where you sometimes feel, or I sometimes felt like you have to be really knowledgeable to enjoy art or literature. There can be a lot of felt snobbery about it, which is silly, because that's not what it's made for. It's made for that connection. And I think just studying that one module just made me feel like I have-- I do know enough, and what I feel when I connect with this kind of thing is important and it's valid.

And again, that helped my own sense of self-worth and my own sense of being human, that because I am human, this stuff is for me. So it just it really-- yeah, it gave me a lot more confidence.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That what-- I was trying to pick up some of the words but then there were so many valid points. And I was like—

BRYN JEFFERY: Sorry.

ISABELLA HENMAN: No, it was like, oh, I can't remember them all. But it's the getting a sense of you, and I love that idea. And that's what I always feel studying is about. And when you were talking about being knowledgeable, it reminds me of a friend of mine who I always tell her how completely thick I am

because I'm so totally unculturally educated. She says, oh, no, you're not. And I was like, yeah, but I just feel completely unable.

So I know what you mean because sometimes you go, oh, yeah, that can't possibly be for me because I'm not knowledgeable enough. So it's lovely that you said, actually, you know what? It is. Me, I am enough. And in fact, this is going to remind me. I've got these quotes-- I've got them on a post-it here-- which some people may want to hear these. I am valuable as I am, and I am worth it even without my achievements.

And I think those are both really valuable because they resonate with what you're talking to us about today, Bryn, is that you said you were doing just the first module to see whether things were happening. And you were finding, yeah, actually, you, Bryn was enough. You are enough.

I sound a little bit like a certain pink film that came out last year. And there's a song about that, which I'm not going to break into. But yeah, I am. Anyway, I'm sure plenty of you know what it is. I better not say that because we don't do brand names in here, but yes. But it's interesting.

And you'll see-- sorry, I'm going to get the giggles now. Stop. Calm down. You see, this is what I love about these things, because you can have fun. And even though Bryn's shared with us what's actually quite a heartbreaking story in many ways, about being bed bound and not being-- it's actually showing there's a smile, there's a happy, and there's a-- actually there's something.

And you mentioned that you had no career prospects at the time, but you work for the University now, don't you? You built a career from what you were doing. Just before I carry on with that a little, you're note-- everybody at home will have noticed we had a ticker question, which was related to when Bryn was talking about creative, and how do you express your creative side? We'd really like to know that.

And when I've carried on talking a bit longer, I'll go to Heidi, and we'll get some ideas about the creative side. So Bryn, could you tell us a little bit more about how you then built up your study journey after that first module? How did you feel, then, that you were able to continue to get this brighter, expanding world?

**BRYN JEFFERY:** So I was lucky on the health front and my health improved. And I eventually-- well, fairly soon after that, I went to study at the University of Manchester and I did a degree there in theology. But think what enabled or encouraged me to continue that journey was the sense that studying is also a creative act, in that sense.

Because when you're learning you're, and you have to write essays and do assignments and things like that, that's creative as well. You're not just, obviously, making it all up. You're having to pull together other people's views and stuff like that. But the way that you understand those other writers, and the way that you put it together, that's your-- you are creating something. It might not be unique. You might not think of anything that anyone hasn't said before, but it's still you. You're still contributing. And so that was a really big boost for me to continue with education at that point.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Yeah. And I love that idea that, even if it's not unique, you're still creating. You're bringing things together. Because a lot of students, when we do sessions on academic conduct, and writing, and so on, people go but how do I write myself? Well, you are still being creative. You're coming up with ideas from yourself.

So I know we've had lots and lots of comments that have been coming in on the chat, so I'm going to go to Heidi now to see some of those things, some of the things that people have been sharing and some of these creative ideas. So Heidi, what's been going on?

HEIDI: Yeah, really busy in the chat. So it's really nice to see lots of solidarity in the chat there. So that's a really powerful story that you shared, Bryn. So Gita says, I totally understand. I have fibromyalgia too and the OU has been very understanding and helpful. It's been a great distraction to study and has helped me boost my confidence again.

Daniel says that, my mum has fibromyalgia, so I can understand how hard it must be. And Toni says, it lets me lose myself in my study. I also have fibromyalgia, ME, and angina, but diving into studies lifts me out of that bubble. So it seems like lots of people are kind of experiencing similar things to what Brynn was sharing there.

So I'll get to how people express their creative side. I just wanted to touch on some comments that had come through as well, about how studying has helped some of our students with their wellbeing. So Mackenzie says, having a goal, or something to work towards, I think is great for anyone's wellbeing. It gives you a real sense of purpose and achievement.

Melissa says, it helps because it takes my mind off medical stuff as I have epilepsy. Gemma says, for me, I love to learn. And with my mental health, I seem to thrive when learning.

Holly says, studying helps to build my confidence and my self-belief. I'm part of the world, not just passively observing from the window, whilst sleep deprived from raising children. I think you just-- the way that you worded that, Holly, is beautiful. And I can relate. I started my studies when my son was a newborn and I remember very well what it's like with that scrambled egg brain and then trying to do all of the studies.

And then Helen, I definitely agree with the guest. Study helps me have something to distract myself from what's happening in my head, due my mental health problems, and because I don't have to leave the house to study on days when I'm exhausted and not well enough to go out. I also feel that I can connect with people because as a widow I don't get much contact with the outside world, and my studies keep my brain going.

And then just a couple of ideas about how people express their creative side. So Jackie-- I've never been particularly creative but I can doodle for ages. And then Mackenzie says, I express my creative side through music. I sing and play guitar, so that's a great outlet.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great, thanks. Thanks, Heidi. Now Lisa has said, I really struggle to express creativity at all. I feel I should be working or studying. Guilt always stops me. And that's a really, really-- it's a very interesting and actually quite a sad comment to her, and I think I can probably identify with that, as well. Because I know what you mean in terms of, you always feel you should be doing something. I should be studying. I should be working. I should be constructive. I should be achieving something. I can't possibly relax. And I think, from my perspective, I know what you mean. I completely identify. I don't have any definite answers. Maybe some of my guests might have.

But what I would say from how I would deal with that myself is, I'd say, occasionally allow yourself. Give yourself permission. So for example, on Tuesday, I just felt really, really tired in the afternoon. It doesn't

happen to me often, and I knew I had work. But I went, you know what? I'm just going to lie on the settee and just listen to the radio for half an hour.

And I knew, and I felt really guilty, because I knew I had all these things to do. And I knew, and I knew, and I knew. I should be achieving. I should be achieving. But I went, I have to lie on the settee because I'm tired. I'm not going to achieve anything.

So that kind of idea about allowing yourself-- so whether that's allowing yourself to care for yourself or allowing yourself to express your creative side, it doesn't have to be massively creative. And I'm going to go back to Bryn. Because you were saying, Bryn, about this idea of uniqueness when you're writing and it not necessarily being new. So I know you expressed it before, but could you say a little bit more about that, in terms of how maybe it wasn't obviously creative, but it was, if that makes sense?

BRYN JEFFERY: Yeah. I think, when you're doing something, when you're making something, you are being creative. It doesn't have to be good to be valuable for you as a person. I just think creativity is such a core part of being human.

And so I mean, for example, I've been writing fiction for years. And a lot of what I wrote 10, 20 years ago was rubbish. I mean, it's terrible I read it back and I go, wow, let's bin that. And I've got better.

But there's two things about that. The first is that, yeah, it's rubbish. But when I was writing it, I was happy. I was enjoying it because I was imagining these scenarios in my head and then I was putting them on paper. So I was making something and it was concrete. It was tangible.

And the other thing is that I'm a better writer now. And I wouldn't have become a better writer if I hadn't written really badly at the start, Because. You can only start where you are. And at the end of the day, you're doing it for you. So if it makes you happy, who cares whether it's good? You being happy is a worthwhile pursuit and an achievement.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I think it's that one of the reasons we wanted to do this session about wellbeing-- and the sun's just come out and it's shining my eyes. Let's talk about the fact I've got a weird shadow on me. But it's actually really nice that the sun's actually out. But this idea of, even if it's for you. It doesn't have to be for somebody else. And I want to keep going back to Lisa's comment about allowing yourself.

It doesn't have to be big. And as Bryn was saying, it doesn't have to be brilliant. It doesn't have to be for somebody else. Just a little thing. And it doesn't have to be you suddenly created a symphony or anything like that.

And actually Lindsay said, I feel guilty about not doing mummy work, life, and everything, but she's not going to anymore. No more. Lovely. Good. I'm glad to hear that, Lindsay. Because I think there's too much guilt in the world, really. I think we can all beat ourselves up about things. We beat ourselves up that we haven't done something well enough, and we haven't achieved enough today.

Starting-- Now, you said something interesting, Bryn. You said you have to start somewhere. Was that the wording you used? Or something like that? You start where you are?

BRYN JEFFERY: You can only start where you are.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah.

BRYN JEFFERY: Where else can you start?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Yeah, exactly. So just because some-- and I think just because somebody else can do something or is doing something, or even myself as a tutor, Bryn is a curriculum manager, we know certain things about the university. We don't know everything, but we are at a different level. Just because you're not at that level, big, fat hairy, deal, for want of a bit of a better word. So when we were talking about some of the things we might like to discuss, we had a chat about balance. And actually, I think this fits in quite nicely with what we're talking about, is this having a balance between the different things you can do in your life. So as you carried on in your study with your creative, and this probably links in with what some people were saying about whether they're allowed to do different things, is how did you start managing that balance?

BRYN JEFFERY: I think it's-- I mean, I find it quite difficult. And I think if you're already feel constrained by your health, because it's not-- if you already feel like there are limits set on you that you can't do anything about, it can be quite hard to find balance, because you have fewer options. And I think what worked for me was recognising what I could control and managing that and recognising often it's a trade off. So a few years ago now, I was put on some medication that was meant to help the fibromyalgia, help the pain, and help me sleep better. And what it essentially did was turn me into a zombie 24/7. And it was-- I mean, most of the medication associated with fibromyalgia and those conditions does it to an extent. But this was really bad. And I just, after a couple of weeks, I just went no. I can't do this, you know? And so I had to make a decision to say, no, this doesn't work well enough. This trade off is not worth it. And I think that applies to study as well. And it's difficult when you're trying to juggle your study, your family life, your job, and your wellbeing and things. And I think it's learning to figure out what's the most important thing right then and, I think, making sure that you don't leave your wellbeing out of that discussion. Because I would tend to do that. I would almost be treating myself as a thing that does stuff, you know? So if I was evaluating what I should do, it would all be tasks that I am doing to fulfil roles in my life. But actually being you and looking after yourself is really important as well. So it's making sure that you give it the weight that it deserves when you're trying to balance stuff out. Recognising that looking after your kids and all of that is also really, really important.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I think we've got an image that we selected about balance, which, hopefully, we can show you on the screen at the moment. And there were quite a few different ones. And what I liked about this one is, OK, some of you might go, ooh, it's perfect. It's perfectly balanced. But you'll notice it's different things on it. And actually, it's balanced on a whole load of different rocks. And you could look at that and you could go, I want to poke that rock. I want to get rid of that rock there. But I think this is sort of your ideal world, isn't it? This is the everything is in balance. The reality is things aren't always in balance. And there's different things. We could have had other ones where one side is way down and others. And you'll see that there's a widget that you can fill in about balance for you and what you-- how you feel it's working for you. And I think it fits in with what some of

those comments were that were coming in earlier about people feeling guilty and saying, oh, well, I can't do this.

And I can't manage the different things. And I've got to manage mummy time. I've got to manage study time. I've got to manage work time. And I think we are all constantly trying to balance. We are all somewhere along that.

That was a very perfect image, which you might think, oh, well, that's unlikely. But where does your balance fit in? So I think I'm going to go to Heidi now to see what kind of things have been coming in in the chat. Because I think there's probably been lots of different things. So Heidi, what are the kind of things have we had?

HEIDI: Loads. And it's just absolutely brilliant that the chat is absolutely buzzing. So we've got students that are sharing their experiences of feeling that guilt. And I think even for me, it's just so nice to be reading this and thinking I'm not alone. Yes. So Maria says it's so hard to just chill out. I get the guilt, too. Now, with Maria, she says, I even feel guilty exercising, so I use my exercise bike or treadmill and study simultaneously. That's incredible, Maria. Lara says, I understand the guilt. I feel a continual state of worry that I need to keep up with the work, even though I'm way ahead. So well done on that, Lara. You're obviously super, super organised.

It makes no logical sense, but I can't seem to stop doing it. Yeah. It makes absolute sense. Tony. I have a scheduled 30 minute nano-nap each afternoon. It boosts my body, brain, and soul. And we've got a great response to that. Lots of people loving the idea of a nano-nap.

And then I do just want to pick up on this comment. So Declan shared, I'm a workaholic, so forcing myself to relax is hard, which is what made getting ill so frustrating as I can only push myself so far before my body forces me to stop. And I just-- we had a lovely response then from Holly who says, Declan, I'm sending you good vibes.

We can't be 100% all of the time. Don't be hard on yourself. I have baby dribble in my hair right now. So if you're clean, I would consider that a successful day. And I just love that. So thanks for sharing that, Holly.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. So balance means balance, and managing means whatever it means. Absolutely. Now I understand that you've been filling in the balance widget, even though I can't talk, and we should be able to show it now. Oh. OK. Right. So there are some people that feel very balanced, and there's-- but actually, we're slightly more towards the not balanced stage.

OK. So that's quite interesting. Thank you, everybody, for being very honest there. It's always worth considering these things.

So I'm going to go to Leighah next, because we've been talking about balance. And Leighah, you've got a number of different things. You are an active student as well as working at the moment. So what kind of things do you do to try and achieve balance in your life?

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: OK. So in 2019, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. And I had to relook at balance in a whole new way. And I was-- obviously, I had to come out at work for a few months. I still did a little bit of work behind the scenes, but-- so I identify what people are saying about workaholic. But I started cordoning off my mornings when I went back to work and saying, OK, I'm not going to see clients and patients or students in the morning.



I'm going to cordon off that time for me. So cordoning off time and putting a routine or ritual in that time. So for me, you can see ballet's really important to me and to my wellbeing. So doing my ballet practise just in my own home in the morning, going and having coffee in the garden with the birds and the big tree, and take one of my pet rats in my dressing gown, because that's the part of my balance, having animals. And it made all the difference to actually time block in that sort of way. And obviously, clients knew I'd been off sick. So I did say, OK, going forward, coming back, appointments are on certain days from, say, 12:00 noon or 1:00 PM until a certain time. So doing that made a lot of difference to me. Do I feel guilty sometimes? Yes, especially when a client is like, oh, I can't do afternoon. So they have to miss sessions. But then that's not all my responsibility, you know?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, and that—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: I sometimes take too much responsibility. But when I take a step back-- and for me, that's part of balance-- and think, hang on a minute. Where's the boundary here? What is actually my responsibility as a person, as a family member, as a friend, as a therapist, a teacher? I have certain responsibilities to things, but I'm not responsible for right certain things. The only things I'm responsible for are me and any dependents. Now, I have no tiny children at the moment. Animals are dependents. But aside from that, I'm not responsible for other people. But I am responsible for myself and my wellbeing and making sure I do everything I can to not get a breast cancer recurrence.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. Absolutely.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: So cordoning off time. Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. So I think there's a number of valuable things that you've brought up there. And in terms of the balance and the boundaries and—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Boundaries.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And what's your responsibility to what's others. And I know we've got what we call the four square grid-- I know you've got another name for it-- which is about priorities, which we can show on the screen at the moment. And it should be available to download from the event links as well. It's in the time management section of the StudentHome Help Centre. And what this has is it has important and unimportant and urgent and not urgent things. And that helps, I think, with this boundary setting as well as the balance, because I think you were talking about the responsibility, whether you have the responsibility for other people and things. And I think that fits in with the urgent. And it's not saying that other people aren't important. But sometimes when you're prioritising, you're prioritising your study, and you're considering things. How, other than the time blocking, how else do you deal with boundaries, Leighah, so that you actually have time to study as well as looking after yourself?

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: OK. OK. So I mean, boundaries, managing boundaries has been like the bane of my life-- whoops, hang on-- for as long as I've known. And learning to say no, learning to say no to people, it's-- I'm 50 now. And I still struggle to say no. At 25, I hoped by 30 I'd be great at saying no. But learning to say no to people and not having to put a long explanation on it-- now, I'd like to be kind. So I like to give a little explanation. But it's like-- so everything we say no to, we're able to say yes to something else. Everything we say yes to, we say no to something else. So I had to learn to say no. And that included some self-awareness. Like, do I really want to do this? So if I'm a bit, oh. Can we have a call after you've finished your OU today? And I'm thinking, do you know what? I'm absolutely exhausted. I want some pet time. I want-- I want to stick some rubbish on Netflix, you know?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Other brands are—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: But then I'll say to my friend-- exactly. I'll say to my friend, oh, of course. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've missed you. And why? Why? They said that. I do miss her, but why didn't I say no, but how about at the weekend when I've had a bit of rest? But learning to say that, taking that risk, Isabella.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: And friendships that are worth it, if I say no, they're not going to write me off as a friend. If they—

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: If they do write me off as a friend, you know, it's OK.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I just wanted to pick up that bit you just said, the no, but how about? Because I think that fits really well into the urgent and non-urgent, important, non-urgent. In the chat, we've given a link to where people can download that. And I think that's a really important one, because it's not just no. That's it.

It's not just saying no to things. And this is-- we're talking about balance, we're talking about wellbeing, and we're talking about how you can manage study alongside other things. So it's the it might not work now, but I'm providing the opportunity. So I think that's quite a good one.

So do you ever do that with your study? Do you ever do the now-- sorry, not now, but? Does that happen at times?

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: That's really hard. That's-- I try to. I aim to. I'm going to be blatantly honest. It grates on my mind. So I have to then-- not have to. I choose to then do something like thought dumping, just make a list of why it's grating on my mind or when I can do it. Or doing a worry list and then putting it aside.

Because otherwise, I feel sometimes like I have to. And there is no have to. But I feel like I have to complete it, get that bit of the TMA done, tick it off the list. But I've learned to do it. I've adapted certain methods where I can put the study aside.

I loved what you said. And it's a quote. Did I give you that quote? I'm worthy even without my achievements. Because I say that every single morning.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I don't know. I've written it on a post-it. And I keep getting it out. And it's here next to my desk, so I don't know.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Yeah. But yeah, every single morning when I wake up, and I've done this for about six years now, I am worthy even without my achievements. I am valuable for because I am and for who I am. I'm already good enough simply as me. Now that first one for me is really important. I am worthy even without my achievements.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: And that helps me put things aside. That helps me not have a royal meltdown when my grades are not what I want them to be. So yeah. Yeah. Does that answer your question at all? Is that—

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I can-- there's various comments that are coming in to me. So I'm just going to look at them there. So Angela said boundaries are so vital, because people will transgress into other people's spaces. Holly said, yes, Elton was wrong. No is the hardest word. I love that one. And Paige says, boundaries are so needed, but you're the only person that can set them. And I think that's quite an important one, isn't it? Because you were talking about for you. And it's like where Bryn was saying earlier, for them.

What works for them? What works for you? So everybody listening to us now, you are the person that said it. OK. Some other people might be able to give you suggestions. And Leighah has given lots of different examples of what she does.

Bryn mentioned what they do. And Neill will give us some fantastic examples later, because I know he will. But you, you are the-- well, this sounds very pep talky. You are the commander of your destiny. You may not feel that you're commander of your destiny at times, but you are.

Leighah, you are the commander of your destiny, aren't you? OK. There's other things that happen at times, but how do you-- how do you, other than your motivational quotes and stuff, how do they translate through so that you know you are your commander of your destiny, if that makes sense?

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: OK. So it's not just about saying quotes or affirmations at all. I don't believe that at all. It's addressing the limiting beliefs we have in ourselves. So I'll take myself through a process, which I won't go into now, because it's not the venue, of challenging, facing up to my limiting beliefs. Now for some people, that might mean getting someone on board, like a tutor, or a coach, or a friend, to be accountable to in that.

But looking at where is there any negative self-talk, why is that there, where's that come from, what are my limiting beliefs, as we call it in coaching. Where am I limiting myself? Why am I telling myself I'm not the commander of my destiny? Or I'm not good enough for this? Where's that-- where's that coming from? Who actually has said that to me that I've swallowed it whole and it's become part of my identity? So it's not just about saying affirmations or having inspirational quotes and stuff. It's about really getting help if you need to, or working with yourself, or what do I need to work on where there's roadblocks that stop me going forward.

And for some people, there's a fear of success. Now I have a massive fear of failure, but there's also a fear of success. Some people are terrified to succeed, because then that means something else, that—

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. You might have—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: They need to put themselves out there then. And that's scary. It's scary to do well sometimes. So yeah. So it's working on stuff, self-awareness, getting help if you need it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: We've had a couple of very useful quotes that are coming in. So Holly says sometimes it's easier to wait for someone else to give you permission to say no. But it's not going to happen, because you have to give yourself permission. Now I know we said-- the ticker was going on, and some people might be going, why are you asking that question? Because I know-- We do-- we're about community.

We're about sharing ideas and getting people thinking about things. But we do like to give some practical suggestions. And I know when we were talking before the event, Leighah, you were talking about self-soothing. And it wasn't necessarily a term I was very, very familiar with.

So could you explain a little bit about that? Because you were talking about making time for yourself and allowing yourself. So how does self-soothing fit in? And can you tell us a little bit about what it actually means?

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Yeah. Of course I can. Yeah. So to self-soothe, think of-- if you've got children or babies, or you've had access to babies, if you haven't, you've probably seen babies, and what a caregiver does for a baby, hopefully, is when that baby's upset, so he, she, they are crying, that parent soothes that child to bring the activated emotion down and to meet the need. So it might be a bottle. It might be a nappy change. It might be a cuddle. It might be stimulation.

And we don't always do that for ourselves. But we were all babies at some point. And we still have that baby in us. So self-soothing is almost-- now, I don't want to sound cliched here, but it is going to sound cliched-- learning to parent ourselves. And so learning to be that mother, father, caregiver to ourselves. So if we're feeling really, really anxious, upset, depressed, having a panic or a meltdown about TMA deadlines-- that's a common one-- is learning to bring that heightened emotion down.

It's not ignoring it. It's not having some emotional bypass and pretending it's not there. Because it still is there, and it'll come back in a different form or worse. But it's learning to do things for ourselves. So there's some practical ways.

So that can be like typical self-care. Now, I say typical, because self-care isn't just about bubble baths and moisturisers. But those things can help some people, especially people of a sensory disposition

where sensory things help them. So treating yourself to your favourite smelling candle. Lavender is great for soothing.

ISABELLA HENMAN: No. No.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: And having a bubble bath—

ISABELLA HENMAN: No, I don't like lavender.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Taking-- you don't like lavender. OK. Bergamot is another good one.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK. You're allowed to like lavender.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: There'll be time when you're like, the smell of chamomile, anything.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. OK. Yeah, that's fine.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Taking that bath. Taking those 20 minutes. Now, I know one of the people in the chat have got a baby who's been sick in their hair. It's really hard to get that 20 minute bath. I get it. But that can be self-soothing, enveloping yourself in the water. It can be having a favourite sweater that you put on that feels comforting when you're feeling that need for a sort of self hug. So they're quite sensory ways.

But self-soothing. It can also be, like Bryn was saying, about creativity. I find creativity very soothing. It helps to bring my emotions and my thoughts into a balance and to give them an expression. Or having-- what on Earth is that?

ISABELLA HENMAN: This was something I did.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Isabella has the best clothes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ISABELLA HENMAN: It's not a toy. Thank you very much. This is Mx. Tiggy-Winkle. M-X Tiggy-Winkle was supposed to be theoretically Mrs., but I've never done needle felting before. Somebody bought me a kit.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Oh, I'm impressed.

ISABELLA HENMAN: If you actually saw the picture of what it's supposed to look like-- I broke two needles, and I did other stuff, but it's actually-- I just thought that was relevant to show there. That's what I was doing. It doesn't look anything like the picture. But yeah, it's this idea of—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: I'm dead impressed.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Making something. Everybody's always very polite.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: So what was it like for you—

ISABELLA HENMAN: Everybody's lovely and polite. It was painful, because I kept stabbing myself with a needle. So the self—

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Oh, that wasn't quite soothing. So find some sort of art form that doesn't stab you with a needle. Now, there is research evidence to show that stroking pets, as we soothe that pet, it soothes us. And that's why in, say, in care homes, they'll take animals in. I've got my pet rat snoozing next to me, one of them, here. Self-soothing is also Counselling ourselves or having a counsellor or somebody. That can soothe us to talk through. So it's mirroring how we're feeling, mirroring to ourselves, or having someone mirror to us, and then doing something internally or externally to help just lower the bar of that overwhelm. Yeah? And we don't have-- we're not taught how to do it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: No. Absolutely. We're not. But we've had some lovely [INTERPOSING VOICES], so we asked everybody at home. So Maureen says-- links into what you were just saying, self-soothes-- I listen to music I love. I cuddle one of my cats. Lisa says music, a cup, and deep breathing. So that was where you were talking about the bringing it down.

Lalika. I love this one. Neill will probably tell me off for loving this one. I self-soothe by baking and eating my creations. But it's something about process and reward afterwards. Holly. This did something in my brain. It makes it easier to accept.

Mirasol. To soothe myself, I will go for a walk in the woods and listen to music. Oh, I love the idea of going out for a walk in the woods. Absolutely. Yeah.

And Heidi, I think, has got some more self-soothing comments. So I'm just going to give you the chance to get them ready, Heidi. So what kind of other things are people doing to self-soothe?

HEIDI: Lots of great ideas shared. So Leighah talked there about sitting in the garden watching the birds. And I think she said she has her pet rats with her, which sounds lovely. So Helen says, I love feeding the birds, too. There's a robin who pops up every day, and we have a chat.

James in Brighton likes to go out on his paddleboard for his relaxation and likes to go for very cold swims in the sea. I've heard that that is great for wellbeing. I haven't done it myself. But yeah. I have heard that it's brilliant. Jackie says, I relax with jigsaws.

Paige says, I love a quiet stroll in nature. I think you said Marisol said that they like to walk in the woods. So Paige is the same. And then Lindsey says, self-soothing for me is a walk, a bath with a door locked-- I think that's crucial, isn't it? Especially when you've got little ones running around-- and a glass of wine. I'm definitely a sensory type.

And then I do just want to touch on-- we talked a little bit earlier about setting boundaries. And we had so many brilliant discussions and conversations going on. So Holly said, this is such a problem of mine. I've

had Counselling. I've been encouraged to say no, but it's a real challenge. Lisa says, boundaries are something I've got more comfortable with as I've come into my third decade on Earth.

And Paige said, I struggle with this. I feel like I spend half my life rushing around after everyone else, and at the end of the day, I'm exhausted. I love taking care of people, don't get me wrong. I love looking after the family. But it's so important to make you time, even if it's just chewing a chocolate bar in the bath or munching a share bag of crisps in front of the TV.

And then just to finish up, we talked about-- we're talking in the chat there and in this discussion with Leighah about self-doubt. Andrea says, I reckon it's just human nature to have self doubts. The fact is that most of what we think about ourselves is not true. And Andrea's put that in capital letters.

Other people see us as completely different to how we see ourselves. And I think that was just such an astute comment, so I wanted to share that one.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you. Yeah, I think that's really, really valuable. Yeah. And I wanted to go to Neill.

[INTERPOSING VOICES].

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Oh, sorry.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, Leighah, sorry.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Yeah, I just wanted to-- can I add one sentence on the boundaries front? Because I was listening to those comments. Boundaries are not just for ourselves, but for other people, to keep other people safe and help them with balance as well as ourselves. And it's having boundaries with ourselves as well as boundaries with others.

But it's like we have boundaries with our children, it's to keep them safe. We can often feel selfish having boundaries, but it's not selfish. You're actually being helpful both to yourself and others by having healthy-

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you very much.

LEIGHAH BEADLE-DARCY: Boundaries. Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you, Leighah. That was really, really useful. So I'm going to go to Neill next. And Neill, I've been gently ribbing him during the session about comments about chocolate, because he always tells me off for eating chocolate and goes-- well, actually, he's been very good about not telling me off, but he has done in the past. But other than that.

So Neill, we've talked about balance. We've talked about boundaries. Now you work within the university, and you have lots of recommendations and ideas. What kind of things would you like to share with the students who are coming along today about how wellbeing would be useful?

NEILL BODDINGTON: Yeah. Thanks a lot for inviting us. And actually, it's been-- I've written loads of post-it notes for everything that's been said and the fantastic stories and comments that's been going on.

And I kind of-- I think I'd like to-- I'm going to pull on a little bit of your chocolate theme, for definite. So I'm not going to completely beat you up about chocolate.

But there was, for some of the more mature listeners out there, viewers out there, there was a chocolate bar that had an advert of helps you to work, rest, and play. And I think that's, when we talk about boundaries, there's that sort of sense of actually what it is. And we've got-- we've got to do a bit of our life that's going to involve work. That might be study. We've got a life that's going to involve having some time to rest and recuperate and some time that's for enjoyment and pleasure and fun and all the other things. And these are merged. I think we got to remember that there's not-- one doesn't just be the other. We can find enjoyment in the work and et cetera, et cetera. But actually remembering those. And they're not-- They don't all have to be-- I love the word balance, because I did a lot of work within employee wellbeing in a previous life.

And we talked about work-life balance, and that's the phrase that gets used. And often I say, look, let's think about being boundaries, work-life boundaries. What are the boundaries we have, both physical-- so for example, I'm in my office at home. But when I finish, I'll physically close the door, so that I'm not being reminded and seeing the computer. And there's no desire to go in, and I'll just check an email or something.

So I can create a physical boundary. But you can also create that sort of metaphorical boundary between things, which I think it is important. But they don't all have to be equal. The slide was great. It showed the stones, and everything was in perfect harmony and in balance.

But it doesn't always necessarily-- you can't-- you might only need 10 minutes of a cup of coffee in the garden to create a sense of balance in your emotions and how you feel and have then the motivation and the energy to then get back to your study, or to then cook dinner for the family, or whatever it might be, whatever it might be.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think it's about Recognising in you. So finding what works for you, isn't it, Neill? Because what works for you-- this is why I gently rib you, because Neill does mad things, like running and things like that, whereas I self-soothe with cake. But it's finding out what works for you. So have you got any, any suggestions for students about how, if they're not sure, how they could find things that work for them?

NEILL BODDINGTON: Yeah, I think so. I mean, there's a good model. And I like this one. There's lots of them out there, but I like this sort of model. PERMA model, which is positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. And it's a really good framework to think about what's going on in my life, what do I need a bit more of, what am I lacking, helping you to create some of those boundaries.

I like things like saying to yourself, I'm going to create a rule. You know, your rule might be I'm going to go for a run every Wednesday. It just might be I'm going to finish my work at this time, or I'm going to study every Wednesday. Often, by saying a rule to yourself, it helps to be, oh, am I, aren't I, it removes a sense of that.

And it fits in with what's been talked about, things like affirmations and such like. So it's all the similar kind of concept that can work together. But yeah, this PERMA model is a great way of being able to think



about your life, think about what you need, think about what's missing, and then being able to consider what you might need to do, where you need to work a little bit in certain areas.

And you can-- positive emotions isn't just being happy. It's a range of things. You pick what that positive emotions might be. You think what a sense of meaning is, what gives you meaning in your life. We would all have something different.

So what is that meaning in your life? Are you getting a sense of meaning? And then that might prompt into where I might think about, well, I might need to do a bit more of.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. So we'll see-- the StudentHome will see that we've got a widget up about that PERMA that you were talking about that people can fill in. And so some people may not be familiar with something. Can you just maybe give us a little précis of what each of the letters relate to? I know they've got words, but what that might mean, what it might look like.

NEILL BODDINGTON: So like I said, positive emotion is just a happiness to joy, whatever is for you. And it'll be different things at different times. So again, it's almost like having a list of what are the sort of positive emotions that I want and I need. And you might even think about what positive emotions do I need before I study. So if I'm feeling quite tired, quite drained, quite negative, so we can have positive emotions and negative emotions.

We can have high energy, low energy. That's kind of sits on the grid. But we can also be thinking about what do I need to have before I maybe do, commence some study, or anything else in your life. And that can help with that. I need to be in a-- that positive-- have that positive emotion and energy before I move into that. So what can I do to help me create that?

And it might just be a cup of coffee, watch a TV programme. It might be something completely different. It might be more energetic. It might be go for a run or such like. Engagement is that the things that we do, how engaged are we in them. There's that concept of flow, so it very much links to that.

So how much are we feeling engaged in these things? We do things. And quite often, we do them. It's a task list. And we get on, and we go, I've done it. But actually, sometimes we might need to stop and think about how engaged are we in that process and how, if we're really struggling to be engaged, is it worthwhile doing it.

And if we enjoy doing it and we feel like it's worthwhile, what can we do to step back to then step into it in a more engaged manner? And again, even just something like cooking dinner for the family, like I mentioned, thinking about how much they're enjoying it, how much-- what that is, what that process is. Can I have others help me out? So engagement, it doesn't always have to be just you, the process. It can be you and other people.

That then fits perfectly into relationships, which is self-explanatory. But again, the relationships we have with friends, family, colleagues, fellow students, all the rest. So what relationships work for us, what relationships give us something, and how we utilise those relationships to help us and to help others. Meaning is our own sense of meaning in life. Bryn talked fantastically and gave a real concept around how that can really work and having those goals that I think were talked about a little bit in some of the chat. And then finally, accomplishment. And accomplishment, it doesn't have to be, oh, I've finished my degree.

It could just be I've set myself an hour to do some study today and I've done it. So we don't have to think of these things as being massive. It might just be five minutes of happiness in my day is great. And that's a positive emotion. So the simple, smaller things are the best ways of trying to tick some of these off and to try and to work our way through what can be beneficial for us.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. So as you've been describing, I know we've had the widget going, and I was just waiting. I know the widget was ready, but I was seeing whether it changed as you were explaining the different bits, because we spent quite a lot of time talking about positive emotion. So now, that's actually-- So positive emotion is the biggest one. So we can show the results of the widget now.

So I think that's quite interesting, because I think possibly as you explain things, maybe some people change their views a little bit. So positive emotion, yes. But then meaning, having that sense of meaning, is quite important. And then that's quite interesting. Engagement and relationships are not necessarily the most important for people.

I know it is a you to choose one, which is sometimes difficult for people. But we make you make these choices every now and again. So we haven't got a massive amount of time left. So I just wanted to give you the chance just to mention a few of the resources to do with wellbeing that the Open University has. So could you tell us a little bit about some of those, please, Neill?

NEILL BODDINGTON: Yeah. I think the two key ones that sort of fit in with what's been talked about and will be useful for a lot of students is we have a wellbeing app. So this is accessible through usual app stores. Just go in there and search for OU Wellbeing app, or you can use the QR code just on screen. And there's so much stuff in there, a range of resources, range of things.

But one thing I would say-- to help with study as well as just general wellbeing-- but what I would say is that there's some real good elements in there that can help you to set your own boundaries, balance, rules, affirmations, whatever works for you. There's processes and resources in there to help you to do that, which can help a lot, and podcasts that you could listen to help with maybe some of those self-limiting beliefs and self-help guides for a lot of emotions.

There's also TalkCampus, which are a great opportunity, great, great resource to be able to then engage with students across the world. Social media-esque kind of concept to it, but also the opportunity for engagement with, again, some self-help resources that they have on there in a wellness Centre. And again, something like TalkCampus might be able to help you utilise things like relationships and a sense of engagement with other people, as well as some of those sort of practical tools that it does offer there for you as well. And again, TalkCampus is available for all of the app centres downloads. Just need your OU password.

Sorry, your OU email address and all of that is-- If you're unsure on that, help Centre pages for TalkCampus and OU Wellbeing app will guide you through that. But all straightforward. Free.

Anonymous. We don't know who's going in. We don't know what you're doing in it. It's totally free, totally anonymous.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you very much, Neill. And I think for everybody at home, we've been popping-- well, I say the royal we. The royal we has been popping the links into the chat, so you'll be able

to look at those there. And I think what I'd like to do, because we've only got a few minutes left, I want to go to Heidi again.

So have there been any more questions? Are there anything that's been raised in the chat that people might want to know about or anything that people want to share, Heidi?

HEIDI: There's some good tips and advice. So Lanika has put some information in the chat. I find the book *Mind Over Mood* by Dennis Greenberger is so useful in sorting out your feelings and intentions with helpful activities and techniques. So it's basically an at-home therapy book that you can use when you feel like you need it. So perhaps one of the team could pop a link in to the book for us.

Andrea says, I feel that if I'm happy and feeling positive, then this exudes from me to others, and then other people's negativity just doesn't affect me. I can empathise with them, but I don't need to take on their burdens. And Chloe says, my cats give me purpose in life. They're both so needy and always need care. And one of them unfortunately has been ill recently and needed a lot of care. So Chloe's accomplishments have been making sure that she has been getting her cat well.

So I really do wish your cat well and hope it gets better soon. And just some lovely final comments, just really positive feedback on the session, people saying they find it-- they found this session really useful. Holly says it's been brilliant. Already hyped up to get going with the day now, which is lovely.

Millie said, hearing everyone talk so openly makes me so happy. I used to be a dancer, but I got injured 11 months ago, which I'm still going through now. It reminds me that things do get better. And then Helen said, I've been to a lot of Student Hub Live sessions, but honestly, this is the best one so far. So thank you for those lovely comments.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Great. Lovely. Thank you about that. And I understand that we asked you-- that we had a balance widget earlier. And apparently, it's changed. So perhaps, producers, could we show that one on the screen now to see the balance now? That's quite interesting is it's changed a little bit. So there seems to be more of a clump there into the middle.

Now, I wonder whether that is people who are now saying, I've got something to do, and I've got a target to do. So we heard fantastic ideas from Bryn. What did Bryn do when they were struggling in bed? What creativity brought them out of the illness? Well, not out of the illness, but brought them through the illness and allowed them to be, to be a human, to be creative, to be able.

And then Leighah was telling us about how she was able to put in boundaries, set aside the mornings for herself, allow herself to do things, allow herself to say no. It's not easy, but then it's-- these things never are. But that kind of thing. And then Neill was giving some practical ideas about thinking what are our priorities-- we gave you the four square grid-- what kind of things help us overall, and giving us some practical advice about resources that the university provide.

We're not a frontline mental health support, but we do have lots of resources. So part of doing these sessions is to get you thinking, to build community, to get you to get ideas from each other, get people within the university. With all of our sessions, we do really, really enjoy getting feedback. We welcome the feedback to be as good as we possibly can and do what you want to do. Now, it's been lovely to hear that people have said that they've really enjoyed this session.

So I was thinking about how I was going to summarise it later. And this-- I haven't mentioned Strongman at all today. Strongman is one of my passions. I love watching Strongman. But what I wanted to say is, to people, is to go out and be great. That is actually the phrase of one particular Strongman. And not my favourite, but it is-- but work out what is being great for you. Find that one out, and get yourself set. And work out your great and go out and be your great. That's what we would love you to do so. Thank you very much for being here today, and have a wonderful rest of your day.

[MUSIC PLAYING]