

(re)Freshers Orientation | Being a confident learner - 29th September 2021

KAREN FOLEY: Good morning, everybody! Welcome to Student Hub Live. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Karen Foley. I'm a lecturer here at The Open University, although I'm broadcasting from my home in, today, sunny Pembrokeshire in west Wales. And I've got heaps of people to meet you today. And I see that you've all been logging on early, and making connections with other people, and telling us what you're studying and where you are. So I'm hoping that some of you have come along to our previous events. But if not, let me just briefly explain how the show works.

So Student Hub Live is The Open University's online platform. We do loads of events, like this. And we also do study skills workshops in Adobe Connect on all sorts of things, like time management, and essay planning and writing, exams, et cetera, and all sorts of things that can support you in your study. And you can find out more about those on our website and book your ticket to the events that are going to suit you. But today's show is all about creating a space. And we've got a big topic to cover. It's one of, I think, the most important topics, which is about becoming a confident learner. And I hear that some of you haven't studied for, what, 50 years in some cases and others slightly less. But we're all feeling very excited and somewhat anxious, perhaps, about this new venture.

Because it is new, there's stuff that you're going to want to ask questions about and things that you're going to know. So we're going to put those questions to my guests today on our topic. And I'm also joined by some lovely people in the chat who can answer your questions.

First, though, let me introduce you to Jamie Ireland, who is a student and is also working in our student support team. And he is here today to represent your voice at home, and to pose your questions to the panel, and try and answer as many as he possibly can. Jamie, how are you today?

JAMIE IRELAND: I'm not too bad. I'm in less sunny Manchester at the minute, hiding out in a loft. Luckily, I've got lights to keep my place looking bright. But yeah, I've been looking at the chat, and it's looking pretty good at the minute. A lot of nervousness in there, but a lot of excitement to go with it, so it's looking good.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, excellent. Now, this chat is an opportunity for you to meet other people. Please don't share your personal details though. There are lots of groups, and I can see Tala's in the chat today as well. And I'm sure she'll share some of the groups.

But there are lots of spaces on Facebook and Discord groups where students can connect, so no personal details here. But you may like to use this opportunity to talk to other people, ask questions. And we also have the lovely Natasha and Heather who are in our chat today. Natasha is a staff tutor. So she knows lots of academic things.

And Heather is from our student support team like Jamie. So she'll know lots of things as well about ways to support you in your studies. So do make sure that you get those questions answered by them.

But if there's something we haven't covered, you can always email us. The email is studenthub@open.ac.uk. And we'll get back to you on those questions and triage them to the right person. So this is all about you.

Enjoy the space. You can use the pin button if the chat is moving very quickly, and there's something that you want to look back on. That's at the top right-hand side of the chat. Or you might like to just ignore the chat, and look at my lovely guests, and have a nice cup of tea.

This is recorded. So you can watch the video stream on catch-up later if you would like to. And we've also got a YouTube channel with loads of other stuff. So do chill out and enjoy this opportunity in a way that feels right for you.

So let me introduce you to my panel. I have Ola who is a staff tutor and works at our sport and fitness team, Rachel who is director of teaching and works in psychology, and Jackie who is in our careers and employment services. And she knows heaps and heaps of stuff and is also involved with our Carers Network as well.

So they're here today to talk to me about this big topic, about feeling confident. And some of you guys have already been talking a little bit about this. And I'd be very interested in some of your feelings around this notion of confidence. And I guess it's really about how we know that we're doing a good job.

So do fill in our word clouds that are there. I know you've been filling them in about what you're studying. But just let me very briefly explain that those word clouds that have three options require you to add three things. If you can only think of one or two things, that's fine. But you need a full stop or a cross or something in those other boxes before your results will submit.

So then when you've done that, you can then see what everyone else at home says also. And you can fill in our map and let us know where you are. In fact, Jamie, have you identified this other continent that we've been very intrigued by?

JAMIE IRELAND: I haven't asked for fear of feeling a bit rude. But we've got the UK and Ireland. We've got all the continents, and then we've got other. So I'm wondering if it's maybe Antarctica, the International Space Station.

I am very intrigued. So if anyone wants to shout up and say if they're somewhere that's not been listed, we would be interested to know.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, excellent, indeed. And we'll try and show that map a bit later because it's populating very well. So if you haven't filled it in, do click on the map, tell us where you are, and then you can also fill in the other interactive widgets as well for us.

So let's start by thinking about this notion of confidence, OK? It's something that I hear many students talking about. Jackie, let's start with your experience. Is this something that you hear very regularly? And what do you think this whole notion of confidence is all about really?

JACKIE PICKLES: Yeah, I mean, I speak to a lot of students who have just started their studying or coming through their study and feeling that, if they've been out of study for a long time, that they don't feel confident about what they're doing. But I think it's really important to reflect on all the other things that you've done in your life and think about the skills and the strengths and the things that you're good at in all the other areas of your life as well.

So we do that quite a lot in the careers team and talk to people, working through, well, if you've been out of study for a while, you might have been raising a family. You might have been working. You might have been doing all kinds of other things. And there's lots of strengths and things that we can help you identify from that.

But also, in terms of confidence, I think the key thing is we're not either confident or not confident. It might be that we're kind of confident in some situations but not in others. So it can be really good to reflect on where we do feel good and try and bring that through to study and other parts.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Because I think it's one of the things that I often hear you and your colleagues talking about is that OU students develop so many skills, like being able to juggle all of these family commitments and do assignment and keep up to speed with their reading. So their time management skills are excellent, prioritisation, being able to articulate things. All of these things that we often don't give ourselves credit for are really important.

But while we can feel very confident maybe sorting out the family lunches or organising certain things, sometimes applying those things to other areas can feel hard because they're so new. So we don't often think that we can do them maybe.

JACKIE PICKLES: But it really is about transferring, being proud, and being really pleased about what you can do in other bits of your life, and thinking, yeah, I am really organised. I can manage the family, get to work, maybe care for an elderly parent. Perhaps, you've got an ongoing illness that you manage. Or there'll be skills that you've got from all those different things. And it really can be transferred across because if you're thinking about your study, it's about, like Karen said, about being organised, about maybe planning your time, about being able to ask for help maybe. There's different skills that you would have got from all of those different areas that you can definitely bring in to study.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm, absolutely. We'll come back to you for some more tips on that, Jackie, in just a minute. But before I do that, let's get Rachel's thoughts because Rachel, I guess, brings some psychology to the whole discussion really. Rachel, what do you have to say about confidence and, in particular, I guess, this notion that Jackie is talking about, about doing new stuff.

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah, I think it's really interesting because I totally agree with what Jackie's been saying about transferable skills and recognising when you have those transferable skills. And at the same time, I think we all know that when we're starting a new job, when we are starting a new hobby, we don't feel confident right on day one. And that's OK because there's a lot to get used to. And there's new ways of working, or there's new techniques to build things to become familiar with.

So I think when you are feeling that lack of confidence at the start, recognising that that's really normal, it's almost part of the process really, as you start to increase your familiarity with your surroundings, with the ways of doing things, with what's expected of you, as well as what you expect of the new thing you're doing. So actually, that giving yourself time and recognising that that's OK, that's normal. That's how things have always been when you've started something new. And it is true for most people most of the time.

And actually, as you start to explore the websites, as you start to read your books, as you start to interact with other students, ask questions of your tutors, the familiarity will start to build. And you'll start to feel more settled. And so that's just a really normal process for us.

So the fact that you don't feel confident right on day one, that's the norm. That's not unusual. And so take comfort in that and the fact that when you speak to other students, most of them will share that same nervousness that you're stepping up to something new. And you're getting used to something new.

And so that's normal. That's to be expected. And you won't stay in that place for the whole module. So I think also knowing that this is the first few weeks, it's the first bit, that is also reassuring as well, I think, for a lot of students.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. So let's take a look and see how you guys, just before day one, are feeling. We asked you on our word cloud how you're feeling. And these are some of the things that you said. And Ola, I'm going to ask if we can pick up on some of these things with you because some people are feeling really happy and excited and proud, which I absolutely love that word, and inspired and fun and optimistic, whereas some other students are feeling overwhelmed.

Some are feeling highly stressed. Others are saying that they've got really poor self-confidence, and apprehensive, and nervous, and intrigued. So there seems to be a real mixture here of feelings with students, which I think is, as Rachel said, is really normal. And just before module starts, it's very likely that perhaps you're on both ends of that spectrum for very different reasons.

But Ola, I wonder what you've got to say about some of this and perhaps from, I guess, a sports perspective around things like how we can often feel those nerves perhaps at the start of something. And we need to keep going with those. And also, I think you've got some advice a little bit later about how students may get some support for some of this as well.

OLA FADAJU: Yeah, thank you, thank you. Just to add to what Rachel and Jackie have mentioned, it's interesting the points they've made because it's similar to what I was saying in my talking points, that I would always say to students or to anybody starting something new that they-- and again, it's this thing-- try and be positive as much as you can be. And also, as Jackie and Rachel have said, don't allow things to be overwhelming.

So don't get overwhelmed at the fact that you are lacking confidence, that I am a bit nervous, because quite frankly, you're doing a new thing. You're supposed to feel nervous. You're supposed to feel anxious about it.

I will say, it's quite unnatural for somebody to say, I'm going into this new job. And I'm going to be the greatest thing since sliced bread because you don't know what that new job is yet. All the skills that you think might work actually may not work. So you're trying to tread carefully, walk, and then pick up stuff. But for students coming in from any kind of background, maybe, for example-- and I'll use myself an example. I went back into higher education as a mature student after about 10 years of not doing any kind of reading or any kind of academic work. But here I am today as an AL and also as a staff tutor. So there is-- the passage of where you can get to has been trodden by so many people before.

And I will say to students, there's one key thing you would love to do at the OU that you need to do is to build real and very positive relationships with your assistant - I say assistant, associate lecturer we say here, but your tutor because we are here to help you on your journey from A all the way to Z. We're not here to pass judgement on whether you have come from this background, whether you've got five GCSEs, or you haven't got any A-levels. That is irrelevant to us. We are here to help you on your way. So first, I would say, the first thing you should do is when your tutor contacts you, email them back, phone them back, text them back, start to build that relationship. And this is the key thing, as an AL, that we say to ourselves. Never be afraid to ask that so-called stupid question.

There isn't such a thing as a stupid question because, as we're saying, everybody in that particular tutorial, in your tutor group, I run a WhatsApp group, are most likely thinking of that same question. And if none of you ask that question, then none of you are aware of what you need to know to move forward. So don't be afraid to ask that question because the tutors are not going to use that and think, oh, what a stupid question. It's not.

It's a question that you needed to know because you don't have that information. If you had the information, you wouldn't ask it. Or you're seeking for clarification. So always build on that.

And one key thing I wanted to add is this point that Jackie made earlier about looking at things that you did before that were positive and how you've moved and about things. I will say, it's about being persistent or being resilient. Most of the time that you have been in your life, you have been persistent at getting something done or being resilient about overcoming barriers. And that will always be something you need to file back on.

If things are getting a bit harder, just a bit more resilience, a bit more resilient. Because you step over that hurdle, you've completed that hurdle. You move on to the next one because that is-- well, I won't say that's life. As a student, that is what will happen.

You'll have all these little hurdles. And you just need a little bit resilience to step over it. And if you don't step over it, and you fall down, you get up again. And you start again. And you keep on going, and you keep on going.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. So it's all about, I guess, being here right at the start and acknowledging some of those nerves, trying not to let them be too overwhelming, but trying to work with them. And I wonder if we can move the conversation onto thinking perhaps a little bit about how we gain confidence because it's one of the things that I see in two different camps here really. Ola's talking about some of the stuff that you need to do to seek clarity and to learn stuff about systems and processes, so things like being able to ask questions, et cetera, work with your tutor, one of those things that are going to help. The other are things like skills. And sometimes, we think, oh, I'm going to be excellent with my time management. I mean, I always think that. And actually, I'm often up to the wire with things because I think, oh, that's an hour task. That's an hour task. And I forget about the dishwasher breaking down or other things happening that then can lose an hour or two very quickly in my day.

But I often think, nonetheless, that I'm excellent at my time management. But there are things that you can learn. And there are techniques that you can develop to work on some of these things. And in fact, some of these we do at Student Hub Live.

But there were lots and lots of resources. I'm sure Jamie can fill you in the chat about some of those spaces that are very common for students as well to look at. But before we do, let me just take a quick trip to Jamie and see how everyone is at home. We've got some lovely comments here last night as well. Oh, Nathan got to a point last night where he cried. A few hard years ago, I was so nervous and thought why I should be proud. And he agrees that proud is the best word, which I think as well. It's awesome to be starting such an incredible journey. But Jamie, what other stuff of people sharing in the chat?

JAMIE IRELAND: We got stuck on the euros and Eurovision for a second (LAUGHING) when we were talking about locations. But some of the other things that have come up is there's a gentleman called Martin. He was asking if there's anybody under 25 in here, I think because we have got quite a lot of mature students. Tala's put a really good link on Facebook for a group for young students. So that's something to check out if you want to, obviously, branch out a little bit and network.

Laura said she was, I think, coming on with what Ola was saying, starting something new always makes her anxious. Don't know what's going to happen, but once you get the routine going, that obviously breaks some of the anxiety. And then we had Grace as well who was replying to someone, just saying, take it one week at a time.

Don't take it, don't take it all in at once. That's not how it's meant to be. That's how you can get intimidated. Break it down, and take it, like Ola was saying as well, just take it as hurdles. Do one, then move on to the next.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm, absolutely. Well, let's take a quick look, Jamie, at that map because everyone's been filling it out. So we can all see where people are. Here we go. We've got lots of people in the UK, also lots of people in Europe, and all over the shop, including the mysterious other place, which I'm hoping someone will tell us where that is.

We also had loads of under 18s with us on Monday. In fact, The Open University has seen a massive growth in young students. There's something like 180,000 students studying with The Open University. So there are heaps of people. And while we've got lots of today, there are heaps more out there. So Tala's put some of the groups in the chat that you may want to join. But yeah, do know that you're certainly not alone because of the volume of people. There are all sorts of things that we have in common. So if you do want to connect, as Jamie says, make sure that you do do that.

Let's also take a quick look at what you're studying as well. So you can see some of the things that people have been filling in. Here, you can see psychology, which Rachel will be delighted with, is one of the key words that's coming up here. But we also have lots of science students, for example.

Some of you know the modules. Some of you are interested in the career, end goal, et cetera. And if you are studying with the arts and social sciences on things like A111, A112, A113, psychology, and social sciences, then we have an event especially for you on Monday next week. So make sure you see the Student Hub Live website and come along to that also.

Right, so let's think then about how we can gain confidence because I think we've discussed this notion. We've agreed that it's really important. Jackie, what are some of the ways that you in careers work to boost confidence? What are some of the techniques that people might be able to apply or think about in terms of their own situations?

JACKIE PICKLES: I think, I mean, I think, going back to what we were talking about earlier, one of the key things is really to think about your transferable skills. And the experience that I have is when I speak to people, and if we're doing a CV, or we're talking about the different things they've done before, often, when they kind of think about all the things that they have been through and the different sort of experiences they've had, that can really build the confidence because people tend to forget. I mean, I'm sure everyone does it. You sort of forget, oh, gosh, I did do that job 10 years ago. I did manage that project.

And just going back through and thinking about that can really make people feel more confident about where they're at. We've got a tool called Future You, which I won't-- there's a link, actually, on the Student Hub page. So you can follow the link if you want to. And there's a tool there which can help you really to reflect on where you're at and where you want to get to.

And we had some really great feedback a couple of weeks ago on one of the student forums from somebody that said going through this process really helped him feel more confident moving into level 1 study. So it really does help with that. And then different things around thinking-- reframing how you're thinking about things, thinking more positively like Ola was mentioning earlier, so I was thinking about this.

If you're feeling negatively about something or having a negative thought about something, which, for an interview, it might be why would they want me? I'm going to freeze. Just trying to change that language

around a little bit to I've been invited for interview, so I've got just as good chance as anybody, immediately helps you to feel different.

So if it's around study, it might be, I've not studied for many years. And I'm going to panic to I'm going to have a go. I've got the skills I need to get started, and immediately feel a little bit better when you do that. So we can talk to people around long-term goal setting, like I said, reflecting on what you've got to offer. But also, we can help people think about those different ways to build confidence as well, in terms of language and things like that.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. I was talking to someone yesterday, and even coming on these shows-- but I've been doing this for quite some time, but I still get really nervous coming along and talking to people, as I think we all do. So it is hard, but sometimes I think that mindset is so important, and I just think let's just pretend I'm a really positive person and let's try and sort of reframe some of these things.

Because it's so important. Because Louisa said everyone in the forums on her module seem so confident and experienced, and she's finding that a bit intimidating. So she likes knowing that other people are feeling anxious as well, but I think one of the sort of difficulties with the OU is that it's very unlikely people are going to put their anxieties on a forum. It's more likely that they are really, really anxious and then finally type something up there, and everyone goes, oh yeah, she's really confident, or he knows what he's talking about.

So we don't really know, and we can sort of lead ourselves into thinking that everyone else is OK and we're not. And that's why we have these events, because it's so important to know that everyone else is winging it, and killing it, and getting there through different ways. And to help each other is really important.

So Jackie, how might people then sort of shift some of that negative language and focus? I mean, you guys do a lot of work on goal setting. And so you're sort of trying to focus on those goals. And I that sometimes it's not about that end goal necessarily. It's more about the first part of that goal, for example. And that can be a useful way for students as well break stuff down.

JACKIE PICKLES: Yeah, yeah. I think it's really important to kind of-- you might have an end goal. You might sort of know about which sort of broad sector you want to get to. But actually what's really helpful is just to break it down, like Karen's just said-- to sort of think about some small action points. And we can do that, again, through-- there's all sorts of ways that we can support you with that.

We've got lots of resources that you can look at yourself. So things like there's an interactive tool called Kudos AD where you can sort of go through what you like, what you don't like, and how you're planning, and that can help you to set some small goals.

We've got webinars you can attend or watch-- recorded things. And again, there's some links on the Student Hub page to some things you can have a look at.

But we do also do kind of one-to-one sessions, so we can work with people to really break down where they're hoping to get to, how they want to use the study. But what might be useful to do right now?

So I want to make the point as well that if you do want to start to explore this, it's never too early to come in and have these conversations with us in Careers. And like Karen says, we can look at really small sort of first step action points and goals, which might be-- I don't know, it might be doing a skills audit for example.

So in the career planning guide, there's some exercises you can do that are quite straightforward but really helpful to start to think about where might I want to take my study? So that might be a way for us to sort of help you to set some small goals there.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And as Ruben says, it's really important to celebrate those mini milestones. So very often, the end goal can seem far away and really sometimes unachievable at times, but it's about putting one foot in front of the other.

In fact, I interviewed some great students on Monday, Heidi and Pierce. And if you haven't seen that, that'll be available quite soon. But Heidi-- she just started doing one thing at a time, and eventually she built up her confidence and started getting different qualifications and things.

And just by sort of-- she used to just sometimes say, oh, you know. I don't feel like studying. I'm too tired. But I'm just going to instead of do an hour, I'm just going to do half an hour. And she just sort of tried to keep going. And that putting one foot in front of the other just really worked for her.

So Rachel, I wonder if you could help with something that Laura is sort of talked about. She says having negative words echoing in the back of her mind is always a struggle, but she's allowing some of the good stuff to be a bit louder.

And I think we're all a little bit guilty of some of those things as well. How might you suggest she can kind of work with that and amplify those good thoughts?

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah, I mean, I think it's one of those really interesting things. We all know that if we get anything that we feel is negative feedback or negative comments, even if we have loads of positive comments or loads of positive feedback, which is the one that lingers? And if we're realistic, we would all own up to the fact that it's not the hugely positive overwhelming number that kind of plays on our mind. It's often the one that's less positive.

So I think recognising that for what it is-- knowing that that's what's happening sometimes is really helpful. And because I think when we acknowledge that that's what's happening, it kind of takes the power out of it. It takes the strength out of it, because we start to realise that we're probably-- we are probably making that one the big one, you know?

And actually what would be really good is if you can find some positives and put them at eye level. You know, so maybe there's a Post-it note that you can put that had your study goal on it, or a bit of positive feedback from a tutor, or even from a friend or family member saying, I think it's amazing that you're doing this, or I'm really proud of you, Mum or Dad-- or whatever it is. It can be something really small.

But I think kind of allowing yourself to be reminded of the positive feedback or the positive statements can really help kind of start to just unpick a little bit the kind of earworm that we end up with the one that's not so positive.

And I would encourage you. You'll all kind of encounter your first assignment at some point, and one of the amazing things about those assignments is the fact that you get this individual feedback from your associate lecturer that's tailored exactly to your assignment. And what that feedback will always try and do is say what you're doing well and also what areas they think you might benefit from working a bit more on.

What's really important is not to only read the ones that you need to work on, but actually to see, to absorb-- to feel confident about the ones that they've said you're doing well. Because that's what you're going to build on. So you're going to build on what you're doing well, and you're also going to be working on the things that they would say spend a little bit more time on this.

So I would always say, again, write down. Something physical often is helpful. So write down the things that have been spotted that you're doing well, and also the one or two things that might be your focus for your next assignment to kind of work on-- to improve or maybe spend a bit more time on.

Because it's about balance. It's not about saying that we're never going to have those negative thoughts or never going to have those things playing on our mind, but try and balance it. Try and make sure that you're also hearing and really listening to the positives as well.

Because when it starts to become unbalanced that it becomes unhealthy. It's not a wrong thing to hear the negative. It's less helpful for us when that's what we focus on. So it is about finding that balance.

And as I said, putting up a little Post-it on the fridge saying you've got this, or with your study goal, or something, or your career goal. What are you working towards? What's your next thing that you're trying-- that you're doing this for? That can be a reminder.

It's just like when you're maybe trying to become more fit, and you know you stick up that picture of the goal that you have in mind. So maybe it's going to be one day doing a half marathon, and in the meantime, just doing a mile is like a huge step in the right direction. And all the thoughts saying you'll never do a half marathon. You'll never do that. You can't achieve that.

But you can achieve a mile. So put a mile down as well, and kind of do those small steps.

I mean, you were talking about that, Karen-- about the interview you did the other day with the student and actually just building in those interim steps-- building your confidence slowly, knowing it's not all going to come at once, and knowing that it's always going to be about trying to find that balance between things that you do need to work on.

And that's what we're here for. We're here to support that learning journey, but also recognise the positives in what you're doing already and the positives for being here, and building on those, and having those as part of your journey as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Absolutely. So people are talking a lot about different things going on. And I'd like to talk to Ola a little bit about time management in a second. And Jamie, I'm going to come to you also as well.

Bliss says she's got this framed print on her desk that says, I can and I will. Watch me. Which I think is just awesome. I've got one on my desk that my daughter made for me saying you can do it. And she somehow believes I can, and sometimes I just have to think, oh well, let's just go with that. Pretend I can, because sometimes it does seem a little bit insurmountable.

But some of you are worried about things like academic writing, because you've been out of education for a while. Well, tomorrow's show is going to deal specifically with that, and we've got lots of support. But it's something not to worry about if you're at the very beginning of your OU study journey. It's something to worry about at level three if you still haven't got to grips with, but you're going to start slowly, and we've got lots of support there for you.

So we're just going to try and focus on the whole confidence thing, but tomorrow we're going to give you an introduction to some academic skills and working evidence. So make sure that you come along to tomorrow's session as well.

So Ola, we've got all these people, and Chloe's border collie is upset because she's not paying attention to him, and Katherine's Lurch is in exactly the same position as well. We've got people-- I think Nathan's got a whole host of houseplants families and likes knowing that other people are in similar positions.

And we've also had some links to the single parents group in the chat that Tyler's put in. Charlotte's worried about how to give her children enough attention while working. And I, as a mother, certainly find it hard sometimes to be doing stuff like work and having the kids around, and you think, oh, you know, this is really selfish of me. How am I going to do it. So Ola, how might students work with some of these expectations around making time for study and fitting them in? What would your experience be as a mature student and also in your role as an associate lecturer?

OLA FADAJU: Interesting question. In terms of time management, I always think-- and I will say this to students. It's about how it's your time. You've decided to attend the University. You want to get a qualification, so you know what time you do have. You have a kind of fair idea of what you have. But remember that this is your journey, but you're going to be supported along that journey most likely with the closest people around you. So you also have to think slightly a bit also about their time. So again, it's looking about-- Jackie mentioned earlier about thinking, about doing something. Instead of hour of reading, I can do 30 minutes. Instead of me saying I can spend an hour, I can spend 20 minutes. But so I would say always be realistic about the time that you think you have, because it's always about what you think you have.

And there are so many scenarios. If I use myself when I was a mature student scenario, I didn't have a family. I was single, but I had a job. So when I was doing my timetables, I'd forgotten that I had a job. So I was thinking, yeah, I'm a mature student. I could go-- and then all of a sudden it's like, but actually I need to leave my college campus at a certain time to get back for my job. And I didn't-- that didn't even-- I hadn't thought about that at all.

So I spent the first two weeks getting late back to work and my boss going are you sure you're going to be able to keep your job and your degree at the same time? And I was like, yeah, because I have to. And then I had to readjust.

So I had to start to look at it. OK, I might need to leave the lecture room about 10 minutes earlier just so I can get to work on time. So it's about looking realistically about what you have and then really fitting into what realistically you can do.

So what I say about practical decisions, it's like I-- on the website, you will see about what they call good study environment, because that also helps manage your time. If you can have a place within your living room, within your kitchen-- whatever it is-- it might even be Costa. It might even be outside-- somewhere that you know for 30 minutes or 40 minutes or one hour during the week where you can sit down without any distractions. I can do my reading then. That's my time. You know that's your time. Then you stick to that time, unless something changes.

So for example, you can't say to yourself, well actually, my study time will be 1 hour before the school run. Well, how realistic would that be? You might have to start to think, well, then I need to get myself ready, get myself dressed, get myself calm. So always look at timing in terms of being realistic.

So on the Study Hub Live, there should be a link about effective time management skills, which is planning your time. And it gives you some really interactive ways of putting in timings into a what you call timetable. And then you can shift them around, and you start to see what your study time will be.

So as an associate lecturer, I will give you one key thing. They will say-- within my modules-- it's a six hour study per week. But it might be that you might be able to do three hours of only study, and that three hours is equivalent to the six hours they've asked you to do.

Somebody might have 12 hours of free time, and they can study 12 hours. But it's about what your free time is and how effectively can you use it and how effectively can you use it. Because everybody's times will be different based on what their life-- their lifestyle is.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And I mean, I know that when-- I mean, I'm often studying. But I often have to pick my time. So it might be that I'll watch a video while I'm doing the ironing. I might read a book by the pool. I might have those times when I can sort of half concentrate.

But if it's something really complex and I need to take notes, that's the time that I want to sort of reserve for-- I'm a morning person, so that's something I might do in the morning, whereas I can watch a video at night and it's not too much bother.

So I sort of work with my own times, and I think students are very different with those things as well. So it's really important to bear all those things in mind.

OLA FADAJU: So just to add to that-- just add to that, Karen, there's a point about using the technology that we now have. Now, I'm not suggesting that everybody has access to the new digital technology, but some of-- actually most of the OU materials now are that you can download.

So for example, you could be walking your dog in the morning, and you've downloaded a module recording onto your phone, and you're listening to it while you're walking the dog. So in that way you've killed, was it, two stones with one bird or one bird with-- I can't remember the proverb there. But it's about using that time smartly, and technology can help you bridge that gap as well. So that's another key point I wanted to mention.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, excellent. Jackie, what would you like to add?

JACKIE PICKLES: That I'm sure they-- and to Rachel also. I speak to people all the time who have come through their studies-- who started exactly where you will be now and are kind of wondering about how am I going to fit this all in with my family and all the other things. And we kind of see people all the way through and can see that it can work, and people do brilliantly. And it's just sort of giving that reassurance, really, that we kind of see that happen.

And the other thing that I thought when Ola was talking is how a lot of students that I talk to really-- they sort of ring fence that time and think this is for me. This is my time. And I've spoken to lots of students who've been through really difficult situations-- personal situations. And you kind of think, goodness, how do they keep going?

But it somehow helps them, and you know, it's their time to sort of work on their study, but it's also gives them something as well.

I just want-- one really quick final point. We've created a webinar resource with Neill Boddington from the Disability Team around growing your confidence. And it has a worksheet attached to it, which includes some of the exercises and things that Rachel was talking about earlier. So I just encourage you to have a look at that, which is on one of the links. But really great practical exercises, sort of very similar to what Rachel was mentioning.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, Jackie. And the links for those and the documents that Ola mentioned are below the programme on the Student Hub Live website, so check those out.

Melanie says-- and I love this-- my husband pushed me to do this. He knew this had been a dream of mine since being a girl. My three kids and him are proud of me, and their confidence in me and their support is helping me cope.

And I think that's just awesome, because so often we forget that actually children seeing their parent being disciplined, wanting to learn-- committed to doing their homework and schoolwork-- are actually great things to set examples for. So it is really important to sort of bear those in mind also.

I'm going to show you some of the things from our word cloud, because these are really, really brilliant. And we're going to first look at knocking your confidence back. So we've asked you what knocks your confidence back, and also what helps your confidence?

And then I'm going to come to you, Jamie, and see how everyone is at home. And then we can perhaps reflect on some of those things that are knocking confidence back.

So here we can see that the biggest thing seems to be things like fear and anxiety, self-doubt, my two-year-old, low self-esteem-- procrastination is a key one. Being told I can't do it-- and I've heard this from you guys today. You've been talking about people saying you're not clever, you're not smart. And actually, we've proved otherwise.

Other things like depression, not being supported, having closed thinking, having low marks on TMAs, work overload, burnout, lack of clarity, loneliness, lack of OU response, no job prospects, never been to University, not studied in years, dyslexia, overthinking, unhealthy comparisons. Tala wrote a brilliant blog about that, which is on the Student Hub Live website you might like to look at. I'm sure she'll put the link in the chat.

Talking silly things, being out of practise, potential maths-- maths, I think, can often feel like something really insurmountable to people. There's a great resource on Open Learn, actually, called Maths Help, which you might like to look at.

Poverty-- so lots and lots of quite substantial stuff going on here that is very real and really can have an impact on confidence. Jamie, let me come to you quickly before we look at what can help with confidence and see how everyone's feeling at home.

JAMIE IRELAND: Well, it's been a mixed bag. A lot of people have given us their personal circumstances, which is really good to see, because it shows you that everybody's situation is very different.

Couple of key points as well, and everyone has picked up on this. It's obviously not to compare with each other. You have got your own journey, and you work with that as best you can.

Couple of sort of nice things that I have been seen as well. Laura is getting two mentions there. The first one is that she's got a pin board that she's got an eye level, so she's got some encouraging words to look at when negative thoughts creep up to try and get rid of them.

She's also put-- and I wanted to put this, because I find it quite funny. She was replying to somebody that her Mum has been getting in touch with. It's like, oh, you'll just do an hour a night then, won't you? And she's like no, I'll be doing 12 to 14 hours a week for the first module. She's going to be a hermit, and she'll communicate when she can.

So it's a good approach to make sure your friends and family know what you're up against so that they understand to back off when they need to.

Other than that, Maria has said about physical exercise has helped give her a sane mind and be a bit more focused when studying, so boosting confidence. So like Ola was saying, as long as you're reasonable with your time, you can plan exercise into it. That might help.

And then my two colleagues, Heather and Natasha, have got some useful things as well they're saying about there's lots of links and useful resources for well being, especially in mental health on the Help Centre.

And Natasha's also pointed out as well having a good place to study is really good as well, so having a set place when you do have the time to sit down and obviously crack on when you can.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. No, that's excellent. And thank you, Natasha and Heather, for all the sterling work you're doing on the chat. I love this comment from Caitlin, who says comparison is the thief of joy, which I think is absolutely true.

And Laura's partner has done a really fab thing, printing out a weekly planner. It's got working hours, and she's put in time for her workout. It's great to see so many people prioritising exercise, which I think we all agree with. Because, in fact, all of us have had analogies to like marathon running with an early degree in terms of presenting this.

And so she's now put her workouts on so the whole family can see this. And her son understands she won't be going to an actual university, so he gets his mummy during the evenings and weekends as well. So a great compromise there for Laura, which is wonderful.

So stuff that we've looked at here in terms of that word cloud about stuff knocking people's confidence back. Some of it are things that we can't do a huge amount about. Others we can do things about. I just would like to invite Ola, Rachel, and Jackie, if there's anything you wanted to sort of pick up on that particularly resonated from you, Rachel, let's think about how you sort of experienced a lot of those things happening for students.

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah, and actually when you were talking just now-- so friends and family and the role that they have. So my Mum was a mature student, not with the OU. She went back to university when I was a teenager and my brothers and sisters were teenagers.

But my dad has done an OU degree as a mature student as well, and since then. So I feel like I've sort of seen it from the family perspective.

And, you know, we used to have this habit of having-- especially when my Mum was studying, obviously, because she was basically our full-time carer. She was at home all the time, and then she was taking on a degree, so maybe like a lot of people watching today with family or caring responsibilities.

And we used to have a sort of family meeting each summer and just talk about what was going to be needed. And we stepped up. You know, we took on more of the sort of household tasks. And it was really important to us that we supported her studying, because we really were so proud of what she was doing. And she was able to say what she was going to need to be able to do, so like the hours she was going to have to put in and things like that each week.

And so I would really encourage all our students to speak to your friends and your family about what you're doing-- about what's going to be needed. Because having them understand what's needed and that it's not some one hour a week thing-- it is more than that-- will allow them to better support you in your studies.

So I think especially where you've got caring responsibilities, whatever that looks like, I think speaking to those who are affected by that and actually kind of encouraging them to help you with your study. So the student whose husband's done a study plan are brilliant. I mean, anything practical that just shows how they can help you, ask them for help.

A lot of people would love to help you in your study journey, but don't know how to-- don't know what they could do. And it might be small things, like when I'm reading, maybe one of your kids could have a go at doing a simple dinner, or bring you a cup of tea, or it could be the smallest thing. But anything that

encourages you is going to actually help you with your confidence as well, because as your family and friends get around you, that's really helpful.

And often that is the thing, because those needs-- kind of looking after your children-- it's not easy to compartmentalise that like you can with working hours for a job and knowing that you're going to be in the office at these times. When you're looking after children-- when you're looking after a family, if you've got caring responsibilities-- you know, that's a little bit more fluid. You know, that's a little bit more-- it peaks and troughs, and it can be any time of the week and it can be any time of the day.

So kind of encouraging them to work with you, I think, is really good. There'll be nobody prouder on your graduation day than your friends and family. I can say that as somebody whose parents have been mature students and honestly the biggest cheers coming from those around you.

So encourage them to be part of your journey, because they can be really helpful just freeing you up and helping you with that time and that space. Talk to them about your learning. There's nothing that helps build confidence in what you're doing more than actually chatting to them about what you're learning, especially all you psychology students. People are really interested in what you're learning, so chat to them about what you're learning.

If you're studying history, talk to them about it, because actually it helps you learn it. And that builds your confidence as well. So it's a win-win.

So anyway those are a few things, but I was really keen to get in the fact that I've seen it from the being the child perspective, and such a positive experience it really was.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And I think that point about talking about your studies-- people often say, but I don't know anything about this. And that is the perfect person to explain some of these things to, because if you can say, well hey, I was reading about this, and isn't this interesting? And then all of a sudden you'll go, actually I can't remember what that was. And then you can go back and check. So it helps you just check your own understanding of what it is that you've read, and being able to articulate something that you've read or listened to is a really important skill in terms of writing in your own words and stuff like that as well.

Jackie, I wonder if we can pick up on some of these other things that the students were talking about in terms of disabilities. So one of the things that the OU does want to know about-- and I'm sure that Jamie and Heather have put this in the chat-- is we'd really like you to tell us if you have a disability, if you're a carer, and if things are going to impact on your study so that we can work with you to support you in your learning. So Jamie will sort of be talking a little bit about that.

But Jackie, we have a lot of students who come, as we can see today, from very, very diverse backgrounds. And it's important to celebrate that we are all unique and diverse, but some students have mentioned some of their challenges, like having learning difficulties, for example, that are there. Could you give us some guidance, I guess, on celebrating some of those differences and working with our unique strengths and weaknesses that we all have?

JACKIE PICKLES: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think it's really important to kind of talk about this and reflect on it, because like you say, there might be lots of people who are feeling that they might learn differently, they might think differently, or might have another sort of challenge or physical disability. And I guess what I would try and help people to do is, although acknowledging that there are barriers and there are challenges, there may well be strengths that you've gained from some of the things that you've faced.

So it might be that if you've got a health condition or a long-term health condition-- excuse me-- it might be that you've really developed that sort of resilience that all of us talking about earlier on or that sort of problem solving or time planning-- if you have to think about planning an outing or something. So you may well have gained some strength from that.

Or if you kind of identify as neurodiverse, it might be that you've had to kind of, again, got different strengths from that, which may be-- I'm not saying everyone, of course. It's just some suggestions. It may be that you're particularly creative, or, again, particularly good at problem solving, or thinking on your feet, or managing many different projects. We've got lots of resources and support within the Careers team, where we can talk to students about helping to identify what those strengths might be and really celebrate the kind of strengths and the positive things that you've got to bring.

And again, Karen mentioned being a carer. Similar sort of thing-- you know, I'm a carer, and I have to sort of think about different things all the time in terms of making appointments, getting to appointments, juggling work, thinking about my daughters-- all the different things. So I think that does give you different strengths in terms of, again, sort of in terms of resilience and planning.

So trying to think about that is really key to sort of think, yeah, I've got-- I've got all of these things to offer. And just really remembering that there's no one type of intelligence, you know? We're all intelligent in different ways and can learn differently and think differently.

And just, yeah-- I'd encourage you to declare if you do need any support or declare a disability or different status that you might have, like a carer status. Because then what we can do at the OU is we can really help to look at if there's any ways that we can support with your study. So the Disability Support team will look at a range of adjustments that there might be.

And there's so many examples of very small adjustments that might really help and make a difference to how confident you feel about doing your study. So yeah, I'd say kind of really believe in what you've got to offer, but also, do ask for some practical help that I'm sure there'll be things available.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And while a lot of these things are labels, and that's the long and short of it, they do often give us different strengths. You know, I often wish I was a lot more linear in my thinking. I wish I had more common sense.

But I can be really creative at times, and you just can't have it all. So I think it's about working with some of those things, being able to identify them, and know that if someone like me-- you have no common sense, then it's really important to plan some of the practical things and maybe I'll talk to your friend about helping me make some of those plans, otherwise I sort of lose the odd hour here, there, or everywhere.

So yeah, it's just important, I think, to sort of work with those, but knowing that we all have them.

So Tala's put some links in for the Disabled Students Group and the Carers Group as well, which is really important. And Shelley Louise says the OU been great, and she's autistic and disabled, so she's had really good experiences.

Cassie-- this is very common-- has anxiety, depression, ADHD, autism, and physical disabilities. She says it's like Pokemon, but a catch them all. But she says the Student Support team have been amazing talking through what she might need and how they can support her.

So Jamie, let me just come to you, because in your other role other than Student Hub Live chat hot desk host with the most, you work on the Student Support team. What would you like to say to students about some of this stuff?

JAMIE IRELAND: What I was going to start with, a thank you to Cassie, because she's also said about she thought the Student Support team have been amazing talking through what she needs and how to support. And that is basically what we do at the Student Support team.

We are effectively a borderline between a guide and a signpost in other ways. So there's a lot of stuff that you can find for yourself on the Help Centre. I think Heather and Natasha have been really instrumental in getting that message to people.

When you log into Student Home, top right-hand corner, there's a button for Help Centre-- tonnes of stuff in there, not just about disabilities and careers. There's-- I'm trying to think through my head now-- lots of stuff about your exams that are coming up. If anyone's nervous about them later down the line, lots of little things to help with that-- about how to submit your TMAs, tonnes of stuff.

But if you go in there, that's where we would probably direct you to sort of get an idea first. There's an online form to fill in to make sure you're getting support for any kind of disabilities-- physical, mental, or learning-- specific learning disabilities.

We do try to cater to everyone. We treat people as people. You're an individual. You're not a number, just because you have a condition. That doesn't define you. You are going to be, obviously, different in your own way. We like to try and tailor to that.

And that's exactly what we're here for. We're here to bounce ideas off as well. So if you look at those forms and you find them a little bit over-facing, that's when we start. That's what our roles are stepped off from just signposting to being a bit more advisory and saying how does it affect your study? We start asking questions and just basically getting you to think it through yourself. You already have the answers. We just need to find them.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Excellent. Thank you, Jamie.

Well, let's end the show with our positive word cloud, which is all about what can help with students' confidence. And I'm going to invite Ola and Rachel and Jackie to pick up on something that resonates with them here.

But there are heaps and heaps of words that you can see-- support, time, experience, feedback, and positive feedback. There-- getting started and taking that first step is absolutely awesome as well.

But there are other things-- familiarity, meeting other people, getting good grades, using library skills, asking questions, being told I can, self-compassion, meeting my tutor, community, time management, attending tutorials, Facebook groups, attending Student Hub Live, support with my maths, and little wins. So there's lots and lots of wonderful content here.

Rachel, what would you like to pick up on that our students have mentioned in terms of confidence? And I'm hoping at home that you can pick up some things here.

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah, I do know the thing that strikes me is that a lot of those are about understanding yourself. And when I was preparing for this morning's session, I kind of was writing some notes. And I wrote down whatever you're learning about, you're also learning about yourself. And that's what stays with me-- that you're learning so much about yourself as you study. And the things in there-- the positive feedback the support and everything-- it all goes back to as you're learning about-- as you're learning through your studies, you're also learning about yourself. And your confidence will grow as you understand yourself as a student better.

OLA FADAJU: Yes. It's really a point, because Rachel's made a point regarding support from your home and family and friends. Jackie talked about the support in terms of the physical disabilities, and Jamie's talked about support from Student Support. And I want to just to add it from a AL perspective.

And just go back to the point that Jamie just made, if you don't speak-- if you don't tell us what the problems are, we cannot help you. And that then starts to knock your confidence even more. So I always-- I would implore anybody today who is either saying they're suffering from anxiety or depression or mental health thing-- to seek that support, either from their support systems at home, or-- as it stands now, the other support system you have is the OU.

So the Student Support team, they are absolutely great. I can say that from an AL perspective. And also, as an AL, we are a great support mechanism as well for students. So please speak to us. Tell us what's going on so if we can't help you, we can signpost you to the team who can help you. And in that way, your confidence starts to get better.

The only thing that does knock confidence back is the fact that you feel you're in the wilderness and there is no support. That's when you do start to get in trouble. So please seek support. Don't be overwhelmed if things are going wrong. Speak to your AL, which is your tutor. Email them, phone them-- tell them what's going on.

And they are the first point of contact to say, OK, I can't support you there, but I do know where that support mechanism is within OU. I'm going to not pass you on. I'm going to refer you. They'll keep you in contact, and they'll be updated. So that's what I say about the support student system being really great, because I've had students who have had issues in the past, and I have referred them on.

But the Student Support team have kept me in contact and updated me on what's going on with the student. I have then gone back to the student to say, how are things going? And there's oh yeah, I'm getting better, or this has been happening. This has helped, and that's not helped. And then the confidence starts to build back again, because you're in that system.

But if you don't say anything, and you're in silence, that's where the isolation gets even worse, because things then get worse and worse. So please, please, please contact your AL. Contact the Student Support Team. Use the support mechanisms around you. That's the greatest thing-- that is the greatest ally you actually do have as a student.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. No, thank you. And sorry. I fell off the internet very briefly, so thank you for holding the fort for me. Yeah, it just goes to show working online has a few hazards, but it's all good now. Laura says, thanks for a great session, everyone, and your kind words. We've got this. And Cassie says, just knowing that people have the same worries makes me feel so much better. So yeah, we do like coming together and sharing some of our worries, and it can be so reassuring to know that we're not alone with this.

But it's one foot in front of the other. Everyone goes at different paces, but it's about getting to the end that matters. How you do it is going to be different for everybody, and it's so important to really enjoy and celebrate that session.

Jamie, let's just end with you and the students at home. How's everyone? Are we feeling a little bit better?

JAMIE IRELAND: That's the overall sense that I'm getting. Everyone seems a lot more positive towards the end. It seems like we've sort of kept the excitement but sort of dropped the nervousness, so hopefully we can keep that going for the full year.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Excellent. Ruben says, everybody, it's been a great hour. I've not been to uni for 21 years. Just love to say it's great to be back with so many wonderful people. I'm glad you've enjoyed, Ruben.

Katherine says this was awesome. Proud of everyone here. We've got this. Thank you all. And Charlotte said, you've boosted my mood so much this morning, everyone.

So thank you for coming along and being a part of this today. I hope you're feeling good. We've got a session tomorrow at 11:00. That's going to be taking our first step into thinking about academic skills, and that session is going to be really, really fun. So please do come along to that.

We've also got a social plan for Friday night, which is going to be really fun. We've got our famous Wheel of Ologies quiz, and we'll be doing some dancing, and we're also going to talk to some colleagues in the Sports Science Department about food, which is one of my favourite topics-- sport and food, brilliant. So it's going to be really, really good. So get your ticket for that.

But in the meantime, I'd just like to thank Rachel and Ola and Jackie for coming along today, and of course, Jamie and Heather and Natasha on the chat. It's been absolutely wonderful having you here today, and everybody I think would like to express their appreciation and gratitude. So thank you.

JACKIE PICKLES: Thanks.

KAREN FOLEY: Right, everyone. So that's all we've got time for today, but back tomorrow. Check out the Student Hub Live website. You can always email us with any thoughts or questions--
studenthub@open.ac.uk.

We also have a newsletter, so you can give us your email and subscribe to that-- comes out monthly. And we have a whole host of activities planned for the academic year. But we only release them shortly before they're on so that you can get your tickets to them. So the newsletter is a great way of sort of knowing what's coming up, and you can then select things that you'd like to come along to also.

So thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day, and I hope that you can join us again tomorrow. Bye for now.