

FASS Freshers Event 2022 - 27 Sep 2022 - A tour of the Nations

ISABELLA HENMAN HENMAN: Welcome back, everybody. So I hope you found that useful. I got a bit fixated on looking at the jelly-like brain. I'm not quite sure what it was about because I wasn't paying enough attention, but hopefully you found it useful.

So this session, we are now going to be doing a tour of our nations, which is very exciting. So we've got Hayley from Scotland. We have got Philip from Ireland. We've got Anthony from Wales, and we've got Katy from England.

And we've still got Damon, Damon from everywhere in the global omnipresent or omnipotent. I don't know. One of those "omni" words. I'm not sure which one it is.

So you'll see that we've got another widget for you, which you'll see in the session three tab next to the chat, which is what nation are you studying in. And like we had a bit of a mini competition between the schools earlier, we'll have a little mini competition about which nation later. I'll see whether or not this gets-- we'll see whether it gets a bit sensitive about which one it comes into, but anyway.

So, Haley, you are representing our Scotland nation today. What can our students in Scotland look forward to in their studies?

HAYLEY NESS: Hi. Thanks, Isabella, and it's great to be here. Hi, everyone. If you're joining Scotland, I just want to say you're joining a fabulous team.

In the recent National Student Survey, the OU and Scotland was voted joint first for student satisfaction. So students can look forward to joining a fabulous student support and teaching team.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. That sounds really good. So we're starting off with the competitions already of Scotland, where we go.

HAYLEY NESS: Yep. We Set the bar high. Scotland's winning.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Definitely set the bar high. Sounds good. So some of our students might be thinking, well, yes, OK. But I'm of the Open University.

But we do have people are very proudly part of Scotland, the same as very proudly part of Ireland, and the Republic, and Wales. So our school students in Scotland, how do they have this kind of unique special experience being based in Scotland?

HAYLEY NESS: OK. You're right, Isabella. We do try really hard to be consistent across all four nations, but each nation is a separate country. We're quite distinct.

And most of that distinctiveness for the OU comes from our different funding regimes. So in Scotland, we receive money from the Scottish government. And that allows us to do particular things.

So I'm in psychology. So for psychology-- and actually for all students we can do slightly different, tailored, specific, distinct things. So in Scotland, we have slightly different levels of support for mental health. And we can also pilot schemes that we can then roll out across the country.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That sounds really useful. So we were talking about mental health earlier. And we had a student from India who was wanting to know about the support. So that's really nice to know that Our Scottish nation is putting mental health support at the forefront.

I think is that a good way of saying it?

HAYLEY NESS: Yeah. Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Do you think?

HAYLEY NESS: Definitely. I mean, the whole OU does, but yeah. In Scotland as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. Great. That's lovely. So apparently it wasn't just me that looked at the video and thought about jelly, that brain thing. So sorry.

I know you're in psychology, and I know the brain isn't jelly, although we always talk about it like that. But yeah. That's fine.

So that's right. So Scotland is-- so best bit so far is top of student support and really good at piloting things. Now, Scotland-- I have to say I always get very confused when I get the geography. But Scotland actually is a very, very big nation in things.

So I know I've had students before that have been based in Skye. They've been based in Lewis. They've based in Shetlands.

HAYLEY NESS: Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So how do we actually in the Scottish region bring together our students who might be geographically distant? Do we have anything special to help them?

HAYLEY NESS: Yeah. Thanks for asking that, Isabella. I mean, that's some of the things that we're piloting. We're working really hard to build community in Scotland because, as you say, you know, Scotland's hundreds of miles, you know. And we've got such vast different geography.

We've got the Highlands and islands. So two of the things that we've been starting in psychology but that aren't psychology-specific that will be rolled out are-- one of the schemes is called a community student hub. And the other one is a student group.

So for the student community hubs, that we've been doing is in at the moment it's been Aberdeen as well as Edinburgh and Glasgow. We've been running small non-module-related events for students. So you come along get some tea, cake, coffee, hear about a great talk, meet other students, and just really get connected and start to build community. And we've made a real effort to do that in local community centres as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great.

HAYLEY NESS: So the other thing that we've been piloting is a student psychology group. We've called it a psychology committee, but the students ran a competition for a new name for it. So it's called Scottish Psychology Talk.

So they have a Facebook group. So the aim of that is it's a student-run, student-led group. So the students make all the decisions.

The key aim for them is to build community in local areas. So we have students in Inverness, in the Highlands, we've got them in the borders, we've got the central bay-- all over Scotland. As I said, they've got the Facebook group at the moment. They're encouraging meet-ups with other students, so do look out for that.

And we are going to roll this out across Northern Ireland, Wales, and England over the coming months. So do please look out for adverts. We'll be looking for volunteers to take part to help run the groups as well as participate in them.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That sounds great. Now, so I was just having-- I hope you couldn't hear me laughing in the background. The widget is ready to show.

So we're going to show the widget of where people are. And I'm really sorry, Philip, about this. Apparently, we've got nobody here from Ireland yet.

HAYLEY NESS: Aw.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Aw.

[LAUGHTER]

ANTHONY HOWELL: Have we been blocked? No? No?

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah maybe you have been. so--

[LAUGHTER]

Anyway. But yeah. So actually it's really nice we've got lots of people outside the UK as well. So we will ignore the fact that Katy is winning on the nation competition at the moment. But we're not having a competition. But we just have a little whoo in the background.

So, Anthony-- and you are from our Welsh region. So what is exciting about studying in the Welsh nation? I some of the things you were telling me about, which made me feel really excited.

So could you convey some of that excitement for us, please?

Antony Howell: Absolutely. I mean, it already feels quite competitive. Being in Wales is, first of all-- first and foremost, for me, it's a beautiful country. I know the other nations will say this, but it really is. And you can be part of the community in Wales wherever you are and still have access to world-class arts and social sciences modules. So that's fantastic.

I live in Swansea. I work in Cardiff, and I've been a student with the OU. So I get to sample the different aspects of Welsh cultural life and geography and study and teach on the go, actually. And like Scotland, we've got a wonderful team of dedicated student support advisors.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I need to interrupt you Anthony.

ANTHONY: Yep.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Does the Welsh cultural life involve Welsh toffee?

ANTHONY HOWELL: It can do. It also involves cockles--

ISABELLA HENMAN: It has to. Oh, but--

ANTHONY HOWELL: --if that's your thing.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. [LAUGHS]

ANTHONY HOWELL: And Welsh cakes, Welsh cakes, if you're partial to Welsh cakes.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, oh, very partial to Welsh cakes. Oh my gosh, oh, I'm just going to have a little moment.

ANTHONY HOWELL: They are available in Swansea market and Cardiff market, of course.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [LAUGHS] Oh anyway, sorry, I need to go back to you, because I'm just having Welsh cake fantasies now. [LAUGHS]

ANTHONY HOWELL: Absolutely, and there's laverbread, if you're a bit more adventurous, which I quite like.

ISABELLA HENMAN: It's not my-- yeah, OK, but the Welsh cakes have just got me now. It's like the jelly earlier. The Welsh cakes have got me. Sorry, Anthony, you were being really sensible. And I just completely ruined it for you. I'm so sorry. [LAUGHS] So please tell us--

ANTHONY HOWELL: No, no, I think it's way more important, the food.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: It usually is, isn't it? So I know it was very exciting. You were talking about cultural aspects. And particularly, Welsh-- Wales is often known for the music and the festival. So how does the OU in Wales get involved there?

ANTHONY HOWELL: Well, two things I'll say about the culture. First of all, there's the language itself. And if you're a Welsh speaker, you can receive the student support and detailed knowledge about Ffss modules through the medium of Welsh. So that's wonderful.

We also-- we've had a presence in the past at famous festivals, like the Hay Festival, where we've sponsored talks on all manner of things. And you can experience and witness us everywhere really, in the community and at various sort of cultural events around the country, as well as having a portal. You mentioned in the other session, I noted, OpenLearn. We have OpenLearn Wales and the Welsh language version of that, OpenLearn summary, where you can learn about things like Welsh hymns, Welsh art history. So it feels like we've really got our finger on the pulse of Welsh culture and civic life based here in Cardiff.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That sounds fantastic. Now I'm going to bring the tone down a little bit here. We've got another widget for everybody at home to fill in, which is after my own heart. So it's about food. Which is your favourite food from the Welsh nice and stuff. We've obviously mentioned Welsh cakes. [LAUGHS] I'll be really, really happy if Welsh cakes comes up there.

But I know there's Scottish tablet, which I have to have banned from me, because I just eat it all and then go into a sugar rush. And I know that a soda bread is just-- that's this bit on the pole with Welsh cakes. And I don't know. I don't know, Katy, what exciting things from England.

But anyway, there's a widget for you, for everybody to fill in. And we'll have another little mini competition about what was your favourite food from the nations. [LAUGHS] Me being in the tape, everybody tried to be really sensible. I just keep bringing the tone down. Never mind. [LAUGHS]

So Dipti, going back to knowing that we've got students elsewhere when we were talking so and where Haley, you were talking about meetups with Scotland. So Dipti, was really eager to hear about if there's any groups around Europe as well. So if you're in the chat, if you are one of the European students somewhere else, then please do share. Oh, apparently there's lots of love for Tati scones. Is that-- are they the potatoes, or have I got something-- OK, what are tati scones?

HAYLEY NESS: Potato scones, oh, they're great.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, yes, see that's--

HAYLEY NESS: Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, that's-- see that's--

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Potato bread in Ireland, yeah, potato bread in Ireland, yeah, and soda bread.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I have that. Oh, see, now we're going to have a competition, is it the Irish or is it the Scottish one? I don't know.

[LAUGHTER]

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Irish whiskey or Scottish whisky? Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, OK, you're going to get-- you're going to get people in trouble--

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: --if we go down the alcohol route. I stay on the sugar and the calories route. Anyway, so thank you, Anthony. Anthony's being really, really sensible, which is brilliant. So Phillip, I know we've just introduced you in terms of the potatoes. So you're representing the Irish nation here. So what can you tell us? What's exciting about studying in Ireland, even though we haven't got anybody that's declared they're studying in Ireland so far that's watching today?

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: OK, well, I'm going to try and top Hayley and say that we're actually top of the student satisfaction survey for the last 13 years. So we're doing well. We actually have two offices, because of course, we are Four Nations University, Northern Ireland part of the UK. So we've an office in Belfast, which has a student hub actually, which we probably stole the name from you-- but a nice relaxing space on the ground floor where you can go and get a cup of tea and coffee and browse iPads. You used to have the hard copies of all the books. Now they're all sort of online. And we have an office in Dublin as well, which is sort of an information office where students can go in and talk to advisors and people too as well.

So yeah, we're students across the island of Ireland. But the OU is run from Belfast and Belfast office. And that's the main hub for our activities in Northern Ireland at least, yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. I know I've personally as a student I've had letters come from the Belfast office. So I've always found that quite exciting. I was like, oh, I'm not based in Ireland but I'm getting letters, mail from Belfast office. That's really lovely. So I think they're some of the teams are based there as well, as well as the locals.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Yeah, some of the teams that service other parts of the university across the four nations are based there as well, yeah. But we also have local dedicated, as Anthony said, and the same in Scotland. We have local student support teams.

So if you're a student based in Northern Ireland and you have a query or a question when you phone through, it's magically-- I don't know how they do it-- but it's magically rediverted through so you get an advisor in the Belfast office who will answer your specific query, because again, like Hayley, the funding is different and things like that as well. But they're the experts. And they know the local questions in terms of fees and things like that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, that's fantastic. So yeah, there is a certain amount of subtleties in terms of funding. We're not going to go into any of that now, because that's just way too complicated. We know most people have started. But it's the kind of thing-- we had Njabulo from the student support team on earlier. If you're not sure about that kind of thing, it's go through to your student support team in your local office really, isn't it? That's the message, isn't it, Phillip?

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Absolutely. But if you're a student in Ireland, you've got a study issue or any kind of general study issue, absolutely, you will be diverted through to a support person in the Belfast office in Northern Ireland, yeah.

Great, fantastic. So I'm now going to bring the tone down-- well, hopefully not bring the tone down. So the widget, the widget about the foods is ready to show now. [LAUGHS] So let's see what people have said. And they say, Oh, there you go Lavabred. [LAUGHS]

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Wow.

[LAUGHS]

HAYLEY NESS: Haggis there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I had vegetarian haggis last week.

ISABELLA HENMAN: There are so many-- Tayto crisps, oh yeah.

HAYLEY NESS: Full English fry up.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: I haven't had my breakfast yet. This is really cruel.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Chocolate, yes, chocolate. [LAUGHS]

ANTHONY HOWELL: Does that mean Lavabread's winning?

ISABELLA HENMAN: It does.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: I'm surprised, wow.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Deep fried Bounty bar, oh come on. Whoever said that?

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: That's so wrong.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: I think that's a wind up. Somebody is winding Hayley up.

HAYLEY NESS: Fifteens are on there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: They were.

HAYLEY NESS: Fifteen's are good.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So whatever dulse is, dulse and cawl, I'm not quite sure what those are.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Dulse-- seaweed, is it?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Iron Brew, I know what that is.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Dulse-- seaweed?

ISABELLA HENMAN: It's--

ISABELLA HENMAN: Chocolate, yeah--

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: I think dulse is seaweed.

ISABELLA HENMAN: See, I haven't mentioned chocolate, but chocolate is great. Yes anyway, [LAUGHS] so thank you for indulging me, now thinking about chocolate. I'm really sorry about that, Philip. If you haven't had your breakfast, that's going to make you feel bad.

But Katy, you're representing the English region. As we've seen, we've got most of the-- we've got the majority of the students that are watching today from the English region. So what's different about studying in the English region then?

KATY SMITH: Oh, [LAUGHS] thank you, Isabella. I'm not surprised that number's so high of English students, because one of the most amazing things about being an English student at the Open University is that you're part of this community of-- and I checked the numbers yesterday. Going into this year, our faculty has around 37,000 English students. So there's so much opportunity for you to be part of a community of like-minded students, whether that's for the subject that you're studying-- so if it's a subject- like mine psychology, lots of opportunity to meet other psychologists.

But we also-- in England, we offer regional events. So you can find people who geographically live near to you in England, so very exciting. One of the other really-- sorry.

ISABELLA HENMAN: No, no, what's exci-- you were telling us about something exciting. I'm far more interested in that.

KATY SMITH: One of the really exciting things about England-- as our first first chancellor said, we have to put a toe on the Earth, even though we're a university of the year. We have a wonderful university campus. So if you're around Milton Keynes, to be visiting Milton Keynes, pop along and have a look at our enormous university campus, proper university. And maybe go into the university library, have a look around-- wonderful building.

ISABELLA HENMAN: The library building is wonderful. I absolutely love that.

KATY SMITH: Absolutely, go and have a look at the library building. And we also have our student support team based there for English students.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So I think-- and we were talking a bit about the geography of Scotland being quite-- I mean, the geography of England is quite wide. So we're not saying to people, you have to drive to Milton Keynes. But if you do happen to be anywhere near, it would be quite nice if-- yeah, most people-- if people that don't the Open University, if they think about Milton Keynes, they think about the concrete cows. It would be really good if people said "Milton Keynes" they don't say "roundabout and concrete cows." They'd say, oh, Open University campus. We'd really like that.

KATY SMITH: The university, yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, so George is asking where can we find out about regional events. Katie, could you tell us a little bit about that if you can answer?

KATY SMITH: Yeah, so on your modules, you'll have your tutorial timetable. And we will be holding regional events. If your module has face-to-face events-- not all modules do-- but if your module has face-to-face events coming up, you'll be able to find them through your tutorial timetable.

One of the other benefits that we have as a four nation university is that we're allowed-- we're able to learn from each other. So some of the things that Hayley mentioned earlier, we can learn from the experience of delivering in a nation. And we can bring things into the different nations.

So for example, in England we've been able to trial something called qualifications day school. So we'll keep trying these piloting different events. And we'll advertise and publicise these things to students as we design them and they go live.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great, yeah, because Francis is saying, are we going to have some face-to-faces? I think it's some modules. I know one of my modules I'm going to get to do a face-to-face. Not all of mine have, but yes-- but when your module website's fully open-- so some modules that will be Saturday the first, some it will be Saturday the eighth-- that's when you'll get to find out what tutorial's available.

So have a look at the Tutorials tab on your module website. And if there's a face-to-face, it will tell you where it is. And I'm very excited to be doing the first face-to-face I've done for-- I can't remember what it's like to be face-to-face with students. I haven't done it for such a long time. But yeah, it's going to be very, very excited. And Simon says he's already booked himself into two. That's fantastic.

KATY SMITH: That's great news.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, that is great, isn't it? Yeah, really nice to hear. So we're almost out of time for this section. But it's been really helpful getting this idea.

And what I wanted to say is that this idea, we did the tour around the nations, because we're very proud of having different nations. But we are one university, aren't we? So Hayley, what would you say is the key message from your perspective about being this one university?

HAYLEY NESS: The key message? Um, oh, that's a difficult question. [LAUGHS]

ISABELLA HENMAN: I'm going to see if anybody else looks intent. Anthony, I'm going to come to you while Hayley's thinking.

[LAUGHTER]

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Well--

ANTHONY HOWELL: As well, I think--

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: I might jump in.

ANTHONY HOWELL: I'll let Philip. I'll let Philip come up with a witty catch-all.

PHILIP OSULLIVAN: Oh, don't expect it to be witty. But no, I think you've got the benefit of, as Kate says, the centre University at Milton Keynes. It's the same university across the four nations. But you've also got the added bonus of extra of having a local presence on the ground, whether it's in Cardiff or in Edinburgh or in Belfast or in Dublin as well. So it's the both, it's the local and the scale, you know? So that's great. And as Katie said, loads of regional events in England as well. So we get the best of both worlds, I think. We get of the nation's difference-- there's different cultures, different things like that-- but then we get all the benefits of being part of the bigger university. So I think that's-- yeah, I think that works.

ANTHONY HOWELL: I was going to say something similar, actually, to Philip there. It feels big and small at the same time, which is wonderful. You've got the resources of the biggest UK university, the biggest faculty. And you do feel like you're part of the nation as well, yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant, that's really helpful. So thank you, Hayley. Thank you, Philip, thank you, Anthony, and thank you, Katy.

We've got another video coming up for you, which is mentoring. So there's a video about mentoring. And when we come back, I'll have Bev, Claire, and Sue with us. And we'll be talking about the student experience as well as mentoring. So enjoy that video now. It's the one about mentoring.