

Returning to your studies with confidence.

– 25th May @ 12pm

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good afternoon. And welcome, everybody. My name is Isabella Henman. And this is our Student Hub Live Broadcast, which is mostly aimed at encouraging students to come back to study. So I know there's a lot of you that have already been telling us your stories about where you might have had a break and things. And I will come to some of those in a little while.

So just so some of the basics about how things work today, it's a slightly different format than some of them that you might be used to. So you might be thinking that it looks a little bit different. If the chat is moving too quickly for you, you can pin it. So there should be a little pin icon. And if you aren't able to use the chat but you want to get something to us, then you can use our email address, which is studenthub@open.ac.uk. And we'll remind you of that one later.

And what we'll be doing is, we'll be going through a number of different things, encouraging you, giving you different ideas. I've got a number of different guests with me. And I know already that some people have said they're nervous. And I'll let you into a little secret. I have had butterflies something chronic all morning.

So I've been doing these for quite a long time. But this is my first one presenting from home. I've got all this exciting setup. But I feel really strange because I've got nobody around me. So I know exactly, the people that are saying that they're nervous and even being on this live stream, hey, I know what you're talking about. I absolutely know. I'm with you on that one. But we're going to get it through together, or rather, we're going to get through it together, if I put my teeth in, which I never do in these sessions.

So in the chat, we have got our fabulous HJ, who is always there managing the chat. And we've also got Ticos, Anthony, Jo, and Heleena. I'm sorry about that, Heleena. And they will be answering different questions for you. So you'll know that they're part of the team, because they'll have SHL at the start of their name.

Now I know, I said already that we've had a number of stories coming in. So I know that Mary said that she's had a break and she's coming on to a new course. So welcome back, Mary. And Steve, who says he's 65 and hasn't studied since he was 15. Wow, Steve, that's amazing. I hope you're going to have a really, really good time. We're looking forward to seeing how you do. And Jason's had a couple of years break due to that wonderful thing that is COVID and family issues. But he's back doing business studies. Adam's also had to take a year out due to the arrival of a baby. Oh yes, that's going to involve some time management and space management, Adam, but hopefully that's going to be well. And Mims is due to return at the end of next year after a four-year break at a brick university, now coming to the place that enabled the first child of immigrants to get a valid education, finish what they started. That's fantastic. That's what we like to hear. We at the Open University, we're here for everybody. And we're an Open University. And we meet all sorts of different people.

And what we're going to do today is we're going to talk about a number of different stories. We're going to give you some scenarios. I've got with me Linda, who is going to be telling us a little bit about her experiences as a student, and also her experiences doing some research with students.

I've also got Nicole with me here, who's part of the Student Support team. And she's going to be giving us-- thanks for the wave there. Oh thanks, Linda. Sorry I didn't ask you for the wave earlier.

I said, Nicole will be giving some practical advice. And we've got a wonderful student Kat here, as well, who's got all sorts of stories to tell us about how she did. And she knows that she's got to the other end. So she knows how it all works.

So first of all, we've got a question for you, which I know many of you have been answering already. But are you thinking of returning to study after a short or long break? So you see, that's the question that you might want to answer in the chat pod. Sorry, in the chat pod, I don't know. I think it's still a pod. I'm so used to doing the online workshops where we call them pods. But if you want to answer that, if you've got any other questions, then absolutely do ask them along the way.

So my first guest I'm going to be coming to is Linda. So I've already promo-ed you a bit, Linda. I've already mentioned this. So you had a bit of a study break. And then you've also come back to your study and you've also looked at things. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah, so I'm a student on the doctorate in education. And during COVID, like everyone else, life got turned upside down. And so I had to take a break from my studies. And I found it quite difficult to take the break because I just wanted to get on with studying. And so I did take out six months. And I was home schooling and working during that time.

So I did, although it was in some ways very difficult to make the decision, as soon as I'd made a decision to take a break, actually it was a huge load that was lifted off my shoulders. And I could get on with life, because life happens.

I took the break. But what I did find was also that the break was quite useful, in a way, because I was still thinking about my studies whilst I was on my break. So when I returned, I had still made a little bit of progress, even though I hadn't been actively studying during that time.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. So that's the thing, isn't it? The 'Life Happens', that's definitely the slogan on the mug, the slogan on the poster in the background. So what we're trying to encourage everybody about is, life does happen. Things change.

So Linda's mentioned this. I just want to mention, Catherine said she dropped out of a brick university in her 20s. She's now in her 40s, and she really regrets not doing that. So Linda, you said you'd had a break but you came back to your studies, and that's a good thing. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Did you have any regrets? Or did you decide that it was the best thing all around?

LINDA ROBSON: I'd say it's a bit mixed, really. Part of me now, I'm feeling, oh, I wish I'd just carried on. I wish I was further down the road.

But equally, there was so much going on, it just wasn't sensible to try and do that as well. Something had to give.

And when you're working and you've got a family, you need to sometimes give something that isn't going to mean you can't pay the mortgage and you can't look after the kids. So you have to be pragmatic about it.

I think, yeah, on reflection, it was the right thing to do, even though it was quite difficult. Somewhat ironically, my research, what I'm studying is into students who have taken a break from study. So it was also actually useful for me to have the experience of what it's actually like, because then I can understand my students' stories much better.

And what I'm finding is that people don't take the decision lightly to take a break. But when they take it, they always say, yeah actually, it was the right thing to do, gave me a bit of space to breathe and to sort other things out, and then come back to it refreshed and ready to keep going.

I think there's quite a few people on the call who have taken a longer break. I'm talking mostly about taking breaks within a programme of study, but I know there's lots of people in the chat who have been saying that you've been out of formal education for a long time and you're just starting with the OU. And that's a really exciting time. And I hope you're excited as well as nervous about it.

And the key thing there, I think, is to think about how you're going to approach your studies, think about how you're going to fit it in, and come up with a plan. And your tutors will help you with that when you actually make a start.

But in this period before you start, think about how you're going to make it work. And I guess importantly, tell lots of people around you that this is what you're doing, because then you'll get lots of support from those people. They will be asking you, how's it going, how can I help, what are you doing. And that is really, really important.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. And that support, I mean, part of what we do in Student Hub Live, we're about the community and we're about building support in that way, because this idea about being nervous and not really knowing. And sometimes you can feel really, really isolated, and you're the only person there.

But as Linda was saying, tell people about your study, get them excited. You can even be accountable to other people. Say, you know what? I said I wanted to do this. Could you ask me how I'm getting on in a little while? But be prepared for me to tell you, because I'm going to tell you all the stuff that I've learned. So I just want to come back, Linda. You mentioned about doing some research as well, so that you found things-- so what kind of things did you find out from your research?

LINDA ROBSON: So I think, most of the OU students would take about six or seven years to get through their degree qualification. And of course, a lot of life things happen during that period. It's unusual that someone can go through that amount of time without a bereavement, a change of job, a baby, some kind of relationship change. All these things happen, and moving house, and you know.

And so you do need to sometimes look realistically at your life and say, can I fit all this in, and at the same time do my studies justice. I've had quite a few of the students that I've been talking to in my research who've said they took a break, because although they could have carried on, they felt that they wouldn't have been able to do their studies as well as they really wanted to.

So it's about thinking about it, working out what you can fit in, and deciding whether or not life is interrupting it, and balancing that against, obviously you want to carry on, you want to complete your qualification. So it will be different for every individual about making that right decision for you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you. And that's really useful, Linda. I think we've had a number of other people telling us they're coming back. Chloe says that she's looking forward to coming back after a break, but not looking forward to the TMA stresses.

Yes, I know that. I'm technically a lapsed student, myself actually, because I had to take a break because I don't have time to study at the moment. But I really, really want to get back to studying. But it's just a case of, as Linda was saying, sometimes it's the shoehorning every possible thing into the day. And I quite like sleeping and I quite like eating and I quite like doing other things as well occasionally.

But yeah, and Allison says she's coming back to study after a bit of a break. And Andrea didn't have the opportunity to go to university. And now she's getting back to her love of learning.

So we mentioned that we've got Kat with us here. And Kat has been a student. And she is still a student, just not with the Open University anymore. So it's lovely to have you here, Kat. Can you tell us a little bit about your planned break and how that came about? Or the unplanned break, even.

KAT EDWARDS: Unplanned, yeah. So I actually took two breaks during my degree with the Open University. And the second was an unplanned break due to illness. Unfortunately, something came up and I just could not continue my studies anymore.

But luckily for me, I was in a situation where my tutor was really, really supportive. And I was able to speak to my tutor about it. We discussed the workload. We discussed what I had done, what was coming up, and we made the decision together that it was going to be best for me to defer a module. So that's what I ended up doing. It was a level three module as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Girl, yes, it's a level three towards the end of it. But you deferred.

KAT EDWARDS: Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And you got through. Because as the lovely strap line said, recent graduate. Hey, you got through. That's fantastic. That's lovely. So is there anything that you think of that-- you said that it was unplanned because of illness and things?

KAT EDWARDS: Yes.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Not trying to put you on the spot, but did you feel-- we were talking about the support from other people. You mentioned your tutor's support. Did you have support from other people with your study to help you along the way then as well?

KAT EDWARDS: Yeah, definitely. I mean, other than my family and friends who were really supportive, I would honestly say that the Open Uni was a huge support in that, because I didn't really know what to do at that point. I really wanted to continue. And like I said, I was very close to graduating anyway. And so I really wanted to push through.

But after having a good conversation, and also with Student Support, they were really advising me on what I could do and what my options were. And so I felt very comfortable in being able to defer, and knowing that I could come back. And one of the main things was that I could actually bank my assessment scores. And that was a huge incentive, actually, for me to take that break quite comfortably.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So you mentioned assessment banking. I know it's one of the many terms that we have at the Open University. And it basically means that you're allowed to keep the scores when you move forward, isn't it?

KAT EDWARDS: Yes, it is. Yeah, that was a decision that was made between me and my tutor, because the workload that I'd done, we were very close to the end. And I was very happy with my scores. So the OU actually allowed me to maintain those scores to keep them. So the next time around I did the module, those scores would be available, and I wouldn't have to repeat the work. So that was a huge weight off.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great, lovely. So just for people, so for everybody listening, assessment banking isn't available on every single module. It is available on many. So if you are thinking about taking a break, and actually, you're almost at the other end rather than coming back, it's always worth having a discussion with your Student Support Team. And when I have a chat with Nicole later, we'll be talking about some of the practicalities like that.

So we asked you a question. Oh, my cat's just come to say hi, which is lovely. This happens. That's the benefit of being at home. Thank you, baby.

Anyway, so we had a lot of people telling us their stories. HJ, I understand there's something called adventure study. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

HJ: We're talking about this area, about people studying in all these odd places like on boats and some people just in their backyards, which maybe seem a bit more mundane, but it depends on what your background is like. But on boats, I think that is definitely one of the most adventurous ones. So if you're in the chat and you studied somewhere like a bit out there or you think is noteworthy, let us know, because I'd love to hear these crazy places where you've been studying.

We've been talking about breaks a bit more in the chat. I know we picked up on some of the comments. And it's great to hear lots of people thinking about returning after breaks. I'm myself on a break, so I know exactly what it's like due to work, oh, that thing that comes up. Unfortunately, I have to eat. I can't just study and get away with it.

But Tyler's hoping to be returning to study soon. Christine's returning to the OU after a two-year break. And she wishes everyone good luck as well. And don't we all? That's the great thing about our community, is that we're so supportive of each other.

Monica is returning after a break. Cassie really only has a break over the summer. So like most of us, she'll plan her module, so she starts in October and then finishes for the summer. But she uses that break to take a nice refresh and then get back into study mode for October.

Natasha took a break and then came to the OU because of a bad experience at university. But Natasha's got a lot of determination to make her study a success since she's returned. Roger's been doing a lot of OpenLearn courses as well, in his studying. Absolutely. There's a really great OpenLearn courses. We were talking about how the maths ones are really good. I mean, I needed to brush up on my maths. And I found them useful, and so did a lot of other people in the chat.

Jess deferred, of course, in January, and then is starting back in October. And Sandra deferred for a couple of years due to family, and is now looking to return. And she's changing the focus of study as well when she returns. So lots of different situations and reasons. But it's all great to hear that everyone's thinking about their plans and deciding what they're going to do to move forward.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. And I think that's quite an important one, that one of the people said about the natural break, the break in the study in the summer, sorry, or if you're doing a different time, whenever it is. And it's actually a very real thing, isn't it? Because actually for some students, there's almost a three-month break. Because HJ, I know you know about this because you've had it so long.

But you almost sort of go, oh, that's fine. And you switch off and then it's a case of, oh my goodness me, I've got to do it again, haven't I?

So yeah. So there may be some of you who are thinking that. So we're not trying to worry any of you that think, oh my goodness me, I'm going to switch off over the summer. It's not that at all. And we've got various events over the summer. So hey, you can keep going. And there's all sorts of things to watch from the past as well.

So HJ mentioned some practicalities there. And I know there's a number of people that have been affected by things like COVID and illness and stuff. So Nicole, you're in our Student Support Team. And you're one of the lovely people that's on the end of the phone or on the end of the email to help people when it comes to the question.

So HJ's mentioned a number of scenarios then. So if you had somebody that basically contacted you and said, I don't know whether I can manage at the moment, I think I need a break, what kind of things would you say to them?

NICOLE LEACOCK: So I think it's really important to remember that if students-- there's a number of reasons why students would need to take a break at times. And no one can see into the future. And so the most important thing, really, is to assess the circumstances that are leading up to the student needing a break. And we then obviously take a look in to see whether or not the module does account for assessment banking, and what this would mean for when the student is able to return.

I think it's really, really important though, as well as obviously having a conversation with your Student Support Team. It's also important to speak to your tutor about the proposed break, just to see what their idea is. As Kat said, her tutor gave her a lot of support in terms of what she could and couldn't do. So yeah, no, that's definitely important.

We'd also talk about possible study hours. And we can also discuss things such as special circumstances, which are also things that we can take into account as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So you mentioned special circumstances. I know that's something that I often, as a tutor, tell my students about. And basically, it means this life happens thing that Linda was talking about earlier, and where Kat was saying she was ill. And sometimes, with the best will in the world, we can't study, or something might affect the way we could normally study. And that's what special circumstances is about, isn't it?

NICOLE LEACOCK: Yes, absolutely. So special circumstances are there to inform the Module Results Panel of any circumstances which have impacted your studies throughout a module, whether that's towards a particular TMA, whether it's throughout the whole module or even down to things like on your submission date, whether or not there was IT issues.

So basically, that information is collated, and it gets sent to the Module Results Panel, who can then be made aware of the circumstances and see how that would have impacted your work or your progress towards the module.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great, thank you. And there's also-- and everybody at home will be knowing that we've got a question talking about returning to study. So we're sort of talking about both, because Nicole in the Student Support Team is the person that would help you if you're wanting to defer, but also the person that is wanting to come back.

So what made you decide to come back to study? So if you've got somebody-- so we're moving on a little bit now, Nicole. If you've seen somebody saying they want to return, sometimes things change, don't they? We had the illustrations of people that are saying that they went to brick university originally and now they're with us, or they haven't studied for 30 years. There's lots of things that might have changed. So what kind of things would you tell people about, that could potentially have changed since the last time they studied?

NICOLE LEACOCK: So there is loads that can change. The most important thing to be aware of is your qualification structure, so what could have potentially changed throughout the qualification that you're working towards. And so if you're a previous OU student, have taken a break, and are returning, you may find that one of the modules that you were previously studying or had planned to study is no longer available. It could have been replaced with a new update. So it's just being aware of those key changes to your qualification pathway so that you are aware of your starting point when you do return.

And another thing to be really sort of keyed up on as well is the support that is available. At the OU, we are very involved in supporting our students. We are consistently making changes to the way in which we can support students and provide the most or the best practise. So it's just being keyed up and aware of the changes and types of support that are available so that you are accessing those. You're being supported throughout.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Because I know sometimes people think, oh, I can't ask. And if things are going wrong, either if you're trying to have a pause from your study or when you're coming back, you're thinking, well, I don't know who the person is to ask, or I don't know what's available for me. So it's really nice that you're saying there's lots of different support available.

I just want to go to HJ a minute. Because apparently, HJ, you've got all sorts of things that are going on in the chat pod that you want to tell us about.

HJ: Yes. As always, we're very busy in the chat, which is amazing. Because it's always great hearing other people like us having the same experience and we're not alone. Because sometimes when you're studying on your own, even if you're like Roger, dangling your legs out of the loft studying, you can think, are other people experiencing the same things as me? Or is it just me? Am I the crazy one?

But it's great to hear that there's lots of other people thinking about returning and considering coming back. So Alex says, I'm currently switching from 12 years in retail, going into my dream role as a journalist, writer, reporter. To achieve that, I'm studying English literature and creative writing at the OU and taking journalism courses with the NCTJ.

And so he says, I have one module left to completing my degree. She's considering starting the module in February, after a two-year break. She says, however, life's unpredictable, illness and care responsibilities. So she's not quite sure yet. So we've got lots of people helping us in the chat and our guests giving us lots of great advice as well. So hopefully after today's session, it should help you decide what's best for you. Because that's the great thing about the OU, we can be flexible, and we can do things in a way that best suit us and help us be the most successful.

And Adelaide said, I had to put my studies on hold when COVID began, as we had one laptop between the three of us. And Adelaide's hoping to restart in October.

I mean, when we all started working from home, suddenly we needed all this computer equipment.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Exactly.

HJ: Often from our offices as well, it didn't quite work, did it? So I can understand a few people taking a break over COVID.

But Ticos, who's joining us in the chat, said actually, the OU may be able to help with purchasing a new device for studies. And if we search for study related costs on the Help Centre, we can have a look at what we might be eligible for and how the OU can help as well. So if you're unsure about something, I think the key takeaway from that is definitely ask, because when returning to your study, there may be something that you need, extra support, equipment, things like that.

There's lots available through the OU and other organisations as well. And just getting in touch and have a chat and saying, I'm thinking about returning, or there's something else I might need, and you'll speak to someone friendly on the phone who wants to help you get set up and build a good foundation for your study.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Now, you mentioned things like study related costs. I was slightly worried about the dangling of the legs out of the loft. But I gather that actually, Roger now does have a

desk, which is fantastic news. So he doesn't have to dangle his legs out the loft. I'm not quite sure how he managed to study doing that, but hey. [LAUGHS] With all sorts of things.

So we've just been talking about changing plans there. So Kat, I know you said you had a number of differences and things. Did you actually change your study plans at any stage along the way, Kat?

KAT EDWARDS: Yes, I did. I did the first time, actually. I was studying my undergraduate in psychology first. And I got through all of my level 2 modules and then decided, actually, this isn't the right pathway for me. So I ended up taking another break and then going back and changing my pathway altogether.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK. So what decided you on the new pathway? Did you get some particular support? We're talking about support there. Who did you ask?

KAT EDWARDS: It was more a case of, I was studying psychology originally. And then I realised that there were aspects within that degree that weren't particularly interesting to me and what I wanted to do in the long term.

And so I actually decided to just take a break from it, because I was getting overwhelmed by it. And then I actually spoke to, I think it was Student Services or Student Support about wanting to come back, but not sure what I wanted to do. And they asked me questions about what it was that I wanted, what did I want to do in the future, that kind of thing. And then we agreed on the psychology with counselling pathway. And that turned out to be brilliant. And then I graduated with that degree.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Right, that's fantastic because there are differences. And I think often, I know Kirsty said that she originally started and did a particular degree. And then she's thinking, I didn't want to do that. And sometimes we do that. We start.

I actually myself, I originally started off doing medicine. And it was only when I was two years in that I said, I don't want to do medicine anymore. And they were going, hang on a minute, medicine's really important. You have to carry on. I said, but I don't want to do it. But you can't not do it. I was like, but I don't want to be a doctor. I'm enjoying the science.

So I'm actually another example like you, Kat, and changing, and quite a bit for me to go, OK, I've been intending to do this. For the last eight years, everything has gone towards doing this. But I came out with a neuroscience degree, and I changed and I did things.

So actually, I hadn't even thought about that until you said just now. But yeah, we all have changes along the way. We change our pathways. And sometimes, it's a case, isn't it, of stopping, having a bit of a reset, and going, OK, what interests me?

Because yes, there may be some things. And I'm sure you can say, Kat, there's some things you had to study that you're going, oh, I don't want to study. This is a bit boring.

When you do get-- you do get the choice, and there is flexibility. And that's one of the things about the Open University, is there flexibility and you can do different things. Certain of the pathways are a bit more strict. But you said you changed from psychology to psychology and counselling. And that's the degree you got. And that's fantastic, isn't it? That's what you came out with.

KAT EDWARDS: Yeah, yeah, it's been good, honestly. No, it was brilliant. And I was really grateful for the support to actually-- they went through all the modules with me. And so I was able to understand what it that was required. And yeah, it was really good. And I wouldn't be doing what I was doing now if I hadn't changed. So yeah, I'm really happy with it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Exactly. And that's the thing, isn't it? Sometimes we can have this really linear idea and go, this is what I want to do, and I know I want to do it. And it's only when you start that you go, oh. That's not really what I want to do, is it?

And sometimes actually, it's quite hard, isn't it? Because you have to say to somebody, I don't want to do this anymore. I want to do something different. And sometimes, and especially, we were talking about nerves earlier and being worried and getting support. And sometimes some people might go, but you want that.

I have to say, my mum wanted me to be a doctor. She loved that idea. And I always felt guilty that I wasn't able to give that to her. I wasn't able to give her me being a doctor.

But I felt like saying, OK. I love what I do now. I wouldn't be here now unless I'd done the path that I did. And sometimes it's a case of going, right. We have breaks. We set back. I remember when I was temping and I was working in an office going, am I ever going to be able to do anything else again? And then I was like, yeah. And we can. And you can carry on.

So it's lovely to know that. And I know we've had Sandra, no, Sasha said she had a break. But she's now raring to go again, which is lovely. And it's just great. Kersey said she decided to stop regret and start doing. That's lovely, another one of those slogans, isn't it?

So we've been talking about study plans. So Linda also, you've done some research and you changed your study plans, I think, along the way. What do you want to share with us about that now?

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah, so I'm also a changing direction person as well, because I started doing computing when I started my undergrad degree, and then ended up doing mainly business and law. So on the Open Degree, there's all sorts of ways that you can meander through different topics. And talking about regret and guilt and stuff, that's something that's come up in my research. The students that I'm talking to, I think all of them had quite a large break between leaving formal education and then coming back to the OU. And they talk quite often about, I regret I hadn't carried on, or I felt guilty I'd let my parents down. So that's quite a common one there.

I have one student in particular I'm going to tell you about who's quite an interesting story. So she was studying empire from the history area. And she was struggling with it. And then she needed to relocate because her husband's job changed.

So she took a study break. And she wasn't sure if she was going to come back or not. But her relocation took her to the Caribbean.

And suddenly, the topic of the module became really, really relevant to her. And so she did come back. She completed that module. And then the following year, she decided to do a module that looked at volcanoes because, of course, the Caribbean is volcanic.

So she very much drew on her situation and that was motivating her to find out more about where she lived in order to then go on and complete her degree. So there's all sorts of options out there and ways to tap into motivation to get through if you're struggling a little bit.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, and you mentioned our Open Degree. We have got another session coming up next month in June, which is going to be talking about our Open Degree. And I know, Linda, we're both involved in one of the very open type of modules, which is where you get to choose all your own study. But it's lovely, isn't it, that you can change your study plans. In our Open Degree, you can. The idea you said about meandering, I think that's a really nice way of thinking about it. But it's meandering with a

purpose. You know you've got an end. You're still getting the degree. But what works for you, what do you enjoy, you're changing your study plans and that kind of thing, isn't it?

So is there anything else you wanted-- is there any other illustrations from your research that you wanted to share, Linda?

LINDA ROBSON: Just firstly about the Open Degree, you do need to be slightly careful because some modules have prerequisites. So although you can meander and it's within the rules to pick and mix anything, you do need to think, will I be prepared to take this third level module, based on what I've done at second level. So it's just a little bit of caution there.

In terms of the students that I'm talking to, I mean, there's a whole range of different stories in there. And people do find that taking a break does give them a little bit of time to reflect on what they're doing.

And indeed, some people say that they come back with a real renewed purpose for it, because they've had to stop doing it for whatever reason. And then suddenly, they've got the chance to come back. And they say they're really highly motivated, much more motivated because they're returning. So it can be quite a powerful thing there to make that active decision to continue rather than just to continue with the flow, so to speak.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes, great. Thank you. And thank you for that added detail. It's always useful to know, because sometimes we know certain things, but we don't know everything.

One thing I did want to mention is something we call milestone qualifications. And I know personally, I didn't know that's what they were called. But I've made use of those during my study with the Open University. So it may be that when your study plans change, you may have initially thought, well, I want to get a degree, but things are changing. And you're like, I've got a certain way, but I don't really know how to get further.

So our milestone qualification is that you can gain a certificate. You can then potentially move on to a diploma. And then you can move on to a degree. And that can be really nice. And it's sort similar to the meander idea, but it's also, you're actually gaining something along the way.

And that can be really nice. That's the motivating thing, Linda, you were talking about, isn't it? Because you're going, great. You know what? I've actually got something. Here's the piece of paper. Here's the badge. Here's the qualification. It's different from what I initially intended, but I've got something. Have you come across anything like that, Linda?

LINDA ROBSON: So yeah. I mean, it's really nice to get a certificate along the way because it is hard work as you go through. It's worth it, but it is hard work as well. And those certificates and diplomas, they can be useful because they go on your CV as well, as you're going along. So employers will see those. And it would actually highlight as well, to anyone that as you're going through, you don't have to wait for a qualification to put it on your CV. Employers will be impressed by the fact that you're studying with the OU right from the start. So don't wait to start telling people about what you're doing. It is valuable along the way as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely.

LINDA ROBSON: And yeah, people will collect their certificates and diplomas as they go through. You might end up with them in different subjects as well, which can be useful to show the breadth of your qualification. So yeah, I think it's a really useful thing. Do collect them as you go. And it does mean that if you do get interrupted for some reason, you've got that in the bank and you're ready to come back later on.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, lovely. I think there used to be a really good one on student home that said, based on what you've already done, this is what you can get. And I went, oh, I remember working on, I got a certificate in business studies once, which was amazing, because I didn't think I knew anything about that. But I was like, oh, if I did this, I could-- and I got all sorts of exciting things. As I said, I didn't know they were called milestone qualifications then. But it was lovely, because as you say, you bank them.

So HJ, we asked people about their study plans and changing and things. I gather you've got lots of stories to tell us about now.

HJ: Oh, yeah. I think it's part and parcel of it, isn't it? We're going through, life happens or it's the case where a subject isn't what we expected it to be, which is what happened to me. I started on one subject. I won't name it for anyone that's actually doing it. And I decided, whoa, this is not for me. It's not what I expected. I moved on to something else.

So Samuel said, I changed from maths and physics to a STEM degree to avoid a whole year of statistics. I can understand that Sam. If statistics isn't for you, going by your strengths and having the flexibility to study what you're interested in, that's always fantastic.

Tyler has had a massive journey of different subjects to find out what interests her and what she wants to pursue. So Tyler said, before I studied with the OU, and when I was deciding what I was going to study at uni, I started with petroleum engineering, then decided I want to do medicine, then decided biomedical sciences. And then Tyler settled on health sciences. And I know Tyler's looking to resume her study. And I know she'll be very successful.

Ticos, who's helping us in the chat, said, I started psychology with the OU. And after a study break, Ticos says, thinking of changing to economics.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, that's very different.

HJ: Just a bit different. So I wonder what brought that change as well. But they do say a lot of economics is psychology. So maybe that's what bridged the gap there.

Andrea said, I started in arts and humanities but want to change to art history. I'm not sure how to do this. And Chett said, can I change to history? Because I'm studying business management and I'm not sure if the modules will be a bit of a step or a bit too different.

Now, Ticos gave us some great advice that if we're ever unsure, our Student Support Teams are a great place to go, because they can give us an idea of what the modules will be like for us, maybe some advice of what modules to start on, whether it's 30 credits or 60 credits, maybe give us an idea of some of the course content, or maybe give us some tips on some OpenLearn courses to do, just to gear us up and get us in that mindset.

So definitely chat with your Student Support Teams, because there's loads of great advice that they can give you. And there's no question that they haven't heard or don't want to answer. And I'm sure they'll find it very exciting if you ask them a question that they haven't heard before, because it means that they get to look it up and it's a new challenge for them.

But definitely contact your Student Support Team. There's no question that they don't want to hear. And they're always there. They're supportive. They want to help. And we've got our friends in the chat from Student Support Team helping us as well. And you know how friendly they are.

And Tony said, as well, that if you're looking to change your courses, maybe contact the Career Service as well, which is actually a great idea, because they can give you an idea of how to move forward if you're

looking to change maybe your job or your career focus or what other things it could lead to that maybe you haven't thought of. So that's another great tip from Tony, is go into the Career Service. They have great advice on their website, or you can get in touch with them through your student home page.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Now, I was actually, I was going to mention career. So yeah, I was going to say that yes, I know we've got somebody from careers in the chat. So that's fantastic. And I know the Career Services are really good. Every time I talk to them, they're like, please, please tell students to talk to us. We so want to.

And one of the things that careers do is, they help you identify goals. And Nicole, we were thinking about this when we were preparing, weren't we? And we were thinking about how you identify goals. And as somebody in the Student Support Team, if somebody came to you and said, OK, I think I know what I want to do but I'm not quite sure, how would you help them to identify the goals to help them then know what they wanted to study?

NICOLE LEACOCK: So I think it's really good-- if I was speaking to a student who was in the middle of identifying their goals, I'd be directing them to the careers so the careers team are there to help advise on any study requirements that there may be and for a particular career goal, if they're moving on to a further qualification elsewhere, they can sometimes help with that.

Once we, in the Student Support Team, have an idea of any study requirements, we can then take a deeper look into the module breakdowns and see whether or not such a module is going to meet that study requirement.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That always reminds me. I used to be really sneaky. When I was choosing them, I used to look and go, if they had an exam at the end, I was very naughty and I went, no, I'm not going to do it if it has an exam. But I'm sure you don't encourage such naughtiness, do you, Nicole?

NICOLE LEACOCK: No, never.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I'm admitting all these bad things today. I'm so naughty. So obviously, Nicole is great, and she suggests things on our Career Service.

So if somebody says, well, we've got these goals and I've got these ideas, and you will take them through things, are there any next steps that you would recommend people do?

NICOLE LEACOCK: So then the next step would then be, if you have identified a study requirement, you know that there's a particular module that you need to study in order to meet that study requirement, it would then be the case of, looking in and identifying in any of the preparation materials. And access Student Support, we are able, we're very skilled in the module materials that we handle. And so we would be able to get those materials handed over to you.

It would then also allow you to have a feel of the module before going ahead with it, just so you can double check that it is the right fit for you. You can also then see if you would be better suited taking a step back and doing an alternative module as a preparation for the module that you need to study.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. So yeah. So sometimes, it is a case of looking within those goals, thinking about, what do you need. It might be for some people with that particular career path, they need to do something particular, or they need to be aware of specific skills that are involved in a career or so on. So for instance, if I suddenly decided I wanted to be a Teddy bear designer, there might be something really important. I'm guessing if I came to you and said, well, Nicole, my career, I want to be a Teddy bear designer, what kind of things, what courses do you have available, I'm guessing that's a question you haven't been asked before maybe?

NICOLE LEACOCK: No, definitely not, a Teddy bear designer.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Well, I think it would be a lovely idea. I'm rubbish at design. Yeah, another thing I'm admitting. But maybe, I don't know, a design course or fabrics, do we do fabrics courses? OpenLearn do. I've done different things about fabrics on OpenLearn.

But there could be all sorts of things. I'm not going to put you on the spot. I was going to ask you, what's the strangest career path that somebody asked you. But maybe you can think about that one for later if I come back to you on that one.

So HJ, we've been talking about goals and things. Is there anything else, any particular goals that have come up in the chat?

HJ: Yes, we got lots of goals for this coming academic year. I'm just reading through them. Some of them are brilliant.

I like Jason's where he says, my main goal is to challenge myself in my time management. He's self-employed, three kids, and a wife, and everything else. How am I going to successfully manage it?

And I think that's a great challenge. And I think actually, Jason's got the first step there, because just being aware of the challenges that you face is always a good step in knowing how you're going to move forward from that. And there's lots of advice from the Student Help Centre, on OpenLearn there's some time management resources, your Student Support Team may be able to give you some tips and advice. So whatever suits you, there's lots of advice and support for that. And I think as someone who's challenged with time management as well, I definitely know what that's like.

Maria says my goal for this year is to pass this end of year exam. I wish you all the best. I know everyone else does as well because I find myself, exams are so challenging for me. I'm not an exam person. But I know, Maria, that you've got that focus, you've got that goal, and you set out, this year I'm going to pass this exam. I know you're going to do it. And there's lots of support for you as well.

Chris says my main goal for this year is staying up to date with everything. I'm full of enthusiasm now, but come January and TMA4 it might be a different matter. We can understand that, coming out with Christmas, January blues, it is a challenge. But yeah, we've all been there. And we've all got through it. And the good thing to know is that you're in a fantastic student community as well. So whether you come to the student home life events or you go on Twitter or unofficial Facebook groups, things like that, you always know if you type in, I'm having a bit of trouble with this, I'm struggling, you'll get lots of unofficial advice and support. And you've also got your Student Support Teams, your Career Service, you've got this massive community behind you that wants to support you.

But yeah, lots of great goals for this coming year. And it's always good reading other people's goals as well. I find that motivation and I hope everyone else has found that in the chat as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, and this idea of motivational things, and people who've heard me talk in workshops and in live sessions, you'll know that I'm quite passionate about people-- it's to do with support but also recognising that because life happens, which is what Linda was talking about at the start.

There's lots of different pieces of support that the university offers. It's often categorised as mental health support or mental health challenges, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you're doing anything wrong. So I was talking to somebody last week about it and I was thinking about the kind of support to offer students who are struggling with exams, so this idea of, I want to pass the exam. It's not a mental health challenge to want to support an exam. But sometimes, there will be resources that are available related to that, that actually could give you some ideas, so the idea of de-stressing yourself.

Time management is actually quite important. And we do, as well as the live broadcast we do online workshops, and time management is something we do time and time again. Sorry, that was not supposed to be a pun. But we do them often because it's something that we talk about, and we learn. And as HJ was saying, we have to manage our time very well as well, or not very well, as the case may be at times as we're going.

I have my lists and I tick things off. And I go, oh, my goodness me, I have to have my reminders. But it's worth-- so the community idea is quite important in thinking about the support and what's there for you. And sometimes, you may be somebody who has either chosen to study with the university because it's a distant university, or you're having struggles because of that. So think of it both ways. There are different bits of community that you can engage with.

And Kat, I know I didn't pre-warn you about this, but did you find at some points that there was a community that really helped you when you were studying? Were there any elements of that you want to share?

KAT EDWARDS: Yeah, definitely. I think, to be honest, the unofficial Facebook groups are really, really crucial. Definitely don't get advice on assessments or anything like that. But in terms of support, they are incredible because yeah, as much as I am a planner, I like my lists, I like my ticking off boxes, I'm definitely a planner, but not everything goes to plan. And as soon as you hit TMA04 then things are getting really busy. So it's really nice to just speak to people on Facebook about that.

And also, Twitter is also a really good network. But I would say probably another aspect is probably the forums on the modules as well. Because if you do need to speak to a tutor and you need it before an email response, then do you use the forums because they can be quite-- someone will be able to answer you. So whether it's another student or a different tutor, someone will be able to answer your question. So I have found the forums are really, really good. Hope everyone else as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thanks, Kat. And I'm really glad because I didn't pre-warn you.

KAT EDWARDS: No, it's fine.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That's great. And I know, so HJ, you've got something else to share? Is that based on something that Kat's been talking about?

HJ: So it is about support and community as well. And I think there's one big part of our Open University community that we may not have mentioned yet. But Mary said, my study goal is to find my own critical voice and get my head around referencing.

Now, we know our friends at the OU library always have fantastic sessions throughout the year on referencing, on research. And I've used them myself. If you're confident on referencing and just feel like you need to have a little refresher or if it's completely new to you, their sessions are absolutely fantastic. They've got loads of great guides and resources.

So if your goal is like Mary, to get your head around referencing, I know it was a challenge for me as well. The OU library's got you covered. And definitely check out their sessions.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, see, I forgot because you stole my thunder talking about careers. Are we going to talk about careers and the library? And then I forgot because you talk about-- I mean-- I love the library and I always used to make it my mission, it wasn't a naughty mission, but to see whether I could get them questions that they hadn't had before. I think I managed some of the times when I was doing things, because I used to have some really bizarre questions about my references and they were

like, OK, but they were great. They managed to answer. They managed to calm me down when I was going, oh, I don't know what I'm doing and it's not working.

But yeah, referencing, we all love referencing. It is something that we have to do as part of our study. But it's not the be all and end all.

But we've got-- I some other people have been sharing some of their goals and some of their aims. It's like staying awake whilst reading things. Yeah, that's quite an important one. Although interesting enough, I have had students before who've said that they actually record some of their material and they play it when they're going to sleep. And that actually means it goes into their heads quite well. So it's an interesting one.

So Linda, I haven't spoken to you for a little while. So I'm thinking, we talked about a number of different things. We've talked about communities. We've talked about support. Is there anything else you want to add there from either from your own experiences or from your research experiences?

LINDA ROBSON: I think a bit of advice really, in terms of if you're getting into any form of difficulty, to shout early and do talk to someone and find out what support is available. Because it's very reassuring if you know that should you run into difficulties, these are the options you've got.

So if you're struggling a little bit, talk to your tutor. There're things that they can do to help you both academically with getting to grips with the material, but also with time management issues as well. Talk to the Student Support Team, and they can help you out and let you know what your options are.

And it's always better to have a plan and possibly not have to use it than to end up having to make decisions when you're in a crisis. And a crisis is never a good time for making decisions. So look at what's coming up, look at life, what's going on, and talk to people, and you will find that the support is there to help you.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I think that's an interesting one, this idea of having a plan. And I always used to say to myself, I was very strict on my plan, and I had those early false deadlines and all sorts of things. So when I'm talking about time management, I sometimes think about that.

I think, it's easier to over plan to begin with and then you can ease off. But if sometimes when you get really relaxed to begin with and you don't plan and you don't really know where you're going, that's when the not-so-positive meandering can come in contact, because you're going, oh, well I think I probably meant to have done something. I can't really remember what it was. But yeah, so anything else, Linda, that you want to share?

LINDA ROBSON: I think also, be kind to yourself. You're doing something new for quite a lot of people. You've maybe not studied for a long time. It's going to take you a little while to get back into the flow of it. So recognise the achievements that you're making.

Don't be too hard on yourself when you have a hard day. And recognise some days, study goes really well, and everything just seems to be falling into place. Other times, you will feel like, there will be moments when you feel like you're banging your head against the wall. And it's because you've come to something tricky, and you just need a bit of time to work it out.

So be kind to yourself in those moments. Do a bit of study. If it's not clicking, then you've got options, talk to someone about it, try explaining it to a friend because sometimes explaining stuff helps it all fall together. And also, just take a break. Sometimes go out for a walk, have a day off, spend some time with some friends. You don't have to spend all your time studying. It's important that you do also enjoy other

things as well in your life. So when it gets tricky, be kind to yourself. Take a break and talk to other people.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. I mean, the idea of going out into the library, I'm inside at the moment. So going out into the library, what am I talking about? Because I was still thinking about the OU library. Going outside for a walk, I love being outside.

For me, it helps me so much. I know some people don't, but this idea of taking a break, and when I first started at university, my dad said to me, oh, don't study seven days a week. Don't study all these hours. You need to have a day off. And I said, how can I possibly have a day off? How can I possibly? I've got so much things to do.

And then I remember, I made the decision, I think it was in my third year of university, to actually not work on a Sunday and to have the Sunday off. I mean, sometimes I used to work until about 3:00 AM Saturday night to Sunday morning. But it wasn't Sunday because I hadn't gone to bed yet.

But actually having made that decision and knowing that I had that break and that I had that, that made it so much easier for me. And you could say, oh, well you've lost 24 hours in the week to study. But you haven't lost 24 hours. You've actually got a nice focus time when you can be thinking, you can be de-stressing, and you can be doing other things, and then you don't have to worry about it.

And you just got-- it's that little bit of a break, isn't it, Linda, where your brain's just going, oh, I can do something else.

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah, yeah, very much. Sorry, I was going to say, study time is about having quality study time. It's not completely about the number of hours that you put in. It's the number of good hours you put in that really matters.

So if you're tired and struggling to concentrate, then taking a break, coming back refreshed is much more effective than ploughing on through and doing it badly.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. And Kat, did you have any-- we can see you've got guitars in the background. Was that your favourite de-stressing, playing your guitars? Or was it something else you did?

KAT EDWARDS: Yeah. To be honest, I'm quite similar to you in that I like to go out. Like, I really do like to just take a break and I take my dog for a walk. And that's my de-stress.

And I also am really adamant that I take at least one day off because I think there's so much pressure on students, especially at the moment to be productive and productivity and all of that. And to be honest, you can't be productive if you're burnt out. So really do take the time, make sure that you're getting enough sleep, hydrate yourself, like really basic things. But they honestly really, really help.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And it's so funny, isn't it, the fact you have to say, oh when did I last have a drink? Oh, I don't know. But maybe that's I've been trying here, I felt my watch buzz that I haven't moved because I'm here at the moment.

KAT EDWARDS: Yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: It's this modern technology we have, that little buzz, the little thing of actually having a little break, doing things. Some people find studying in a library helps. Some people don't like the idea of the quietness. But libraries can be great, even, well, the online library is great, but the physical library.

But the getting out, doing something. And again, going back to mental health, the actually getting out in the fresh air, going for a walk, it's known to have benefits. So it's a really good thing.

And Nicole, what about you? Is there something if you had a student that says, oh, I'm getting really stressed. I don't know how to handle things. What kind of things do you recommend to them?

NICOLE LEACOCK: I think what everyone else has said is really good. But I also would recommend drawing on previous experiences, so figuring out what works well for you and what doesn't, but then also don't get caught up in comparing yourself to students who are also studying the same. Everyone studies completely differently. What works for them doesn't necessarily mean it's going to work for you. And so you just have to draw ideas of what worked well previously, and move forward from there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Thank you, thank you, Nicole. That's actually-- I think that's a lovely one, actually. It is. It's, and remember what we've achieved. Remember, we've achieved things and go on. So HJ, you were talking, you've managed your degree, you've moved on. What kind of things would you sum up that you would like to tell people about as well?

HJ: I think I'd go off something that we started with about being nervous. I think for me, it's something that worried me. It would escalate, it would spiral.

But actually, I learned probably about halfway through my degree that nervousness is something, actually it's good. It shows that we care, and we can embrace that nervousness and it goes, I am nervous. It's because I want to do well. I want to develop and move forward. And I think that's something that I take as a takeaway as well.

But there's also lots of great tips shared in the chat as well, and people wondering, where can we find all these things? Well, good thing is we've got a session page. And you can find it on our website, studenthublive.open.ac.uk. So anything we've talked about today, we'll link on the website. And then you can find all the great things from the library sessions to the Career Service to the Student Support Teams as well.

But yeah, definitely being nervous, it just shows you care. It's all part of the process.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely. And you can always-- if there's something and you can't remember and you think you saw something, you can always email us as well. And then we can get back to you to give you some more information.

So what we've done today, we've been talking about this idea of taking a break from your study, coming back from your study, thinking about things, the people that haven't studied for a long time who are starting new, or people have had to have a break for various different reasons.

We've had different people sharing their ideas about what's different with us, about this idea of nervousness. As HJ said, it's fine to be nervous. Just think about those goals. Think about those small steps with the goals.

Nicole was giving us ideas about the goals. And the Career Service can help you. Your Student Support Team can help you. The library can give you information.

But remember, think of the little, small steps. What do you want to achieve? Some people really like that future idea and have that picture of what they're aiming for. Some people, and I have to say, I'm one of them, I go for little steps. I like little steps. I can't really think a long time in the future. I just go, OK, what am I going to do? Now let's make it. Great, I've ticked that bit off. Let's move on to the next one. Let's move on to the next one.

That works for me. What we share, we share all sorts of ideas. We're all different. We're all on a study journey. And that's one of the best things. We're on a study journey. We're a community Student Hub Live. We're a community in the Open University.

We've got lots of different ideas. Hopefully, we've given you some ideas. Hopefully, we've enthused you to want to continue to study.

We've got other sessions coming up. Do have a look at our website for those coming up. We have both online workshops related to study skills, and we have these live sessions about a number of different things.

I hope you've enjoyed today. I hope you've learned something. I know I always learn from these. I've got to remind myself about the small steps. I've got to remind myself that I wouldn't be a very good Teddy bear designer. And if I phoned up Nicole and asked her for help, she would tell me to go away. But she wouldn't do that, because she would be lovely and she would do her utmost to help along the way, and hopefully did.

Thank you for Linda, thank you for Kat, and thank you for Nicole today. And thank you for everybody that's been in the chat. I hope you found it useful and that maybe you'll join us again in the future.

[UPBEAT MUSIC]