

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Good morning and welcome, everybody, to our latest *Student Hub Live* broadcast. My name is Isabella Henman. Some of you may know me from the online workshops and previously been allowed out to play here in the studio.

So today we have got a very exciting broadcast for you thinking about different ways of considering your study and looking at things from maybe a different perspective than you may have done in terms of it's your degree, your choice, and what can we make of that?

So hopefully you've been engaging in the chat already. I know that there's been lots of discussion about the weather, apparently. It is raining outside the studio at the moment here today. And in that chat, you're very welcome to ask questions, share comments. Please don't share any personally-identifying information.

If you can't use the chat or it's too distracting, that's absolutely fine. Just focus on what myself and the guests are saying. You can also email us on our email address, which should be coming up on the screen at the moment. And we'll be looking out for those. And we're very happy to answer questions that way.

So I've got a number of really special guests with me today. So I've got Payam Rezaie, who is the Postgraduate Open Qualification Director. And I have got George Curry, who is the Open Director? I can't remember. Sorry, George. I've just probably forgotten your title. And I've got Jay-- Jay Rixon, who's, similar to Jay, Open qualification thing.

I'm really sorry. There's lots of people that have got very similar names. And then I've got Claire Corkram, who's in employability, fantastic employability consultant. So I can get that one. And I've also got HJ, who is our hot desk supremo. So he'll be looking after the chat. We'll be going to him regularly and talking about a number of different things.

So in fact, to get you started on that one, we've got our first question for you to be thinking about in the chat. And that will be coming up on the screen now. And it's thinking about the why did you actually decide to study? Why did you choose to study with The Open University in the first place? I've told you we're going to be talking about Open degrees and different qualifications.

So what was your aim? So to start us off, I'm going to be talking to-- let me just check. I'm going to be talking to Payam first. So Payam, you are, as I said, you're our Postgraduate Qualification Director. Would you like to tell me a little bit about what makes your job special and what you can help our students to do and gain from these qualifications?

**PAYAM REZAIE:** It's lovely to be here, Isabella. It's a great, great offer that we have at The Open University. I mean, the Open qualifications, you can create a bespoke course of study across a broad range of academic disciplines. If you go on to the Masters, which is my area, you can also combine those with professional development. And you can tailor it to support your career.

And it's flexible. It's distinctive from any other Master's programme you might come across elsewhere. The key thing is that it's self-designed. So you are in charge of the programme of study. It's part time. So if you're working or have other commitments, you can still study. And many of our students are in this position. They can fit study around their commitments.

And you personalise your education to fit your interests and career goals. So the benefits are unique to every student. Most students have an idea already where they want their degree to take them. Now, one of the key things to consider now in today's society is just having a degree is not enough. Employers, we're going to be talking about this a bit later on, value students who have subject-specific skills, knowledge, understanding.

But they're looking to employ and develop leaders as well in their organisations. So these skills that you learn, such as communication, team working, key professional skills, attributes, critical thinking, problem solving, resilience, adaptability, self-management, these are developed through studying an OU qualification by distance learning and help you stand out from the crowd.

If you're looking for a qualification that offers skills and depth of knowledge in a variety of specialised areas, you've come to the right place. This type of study helps you look at and understand topics from different viewpoints. It helps you relate different fields, make connections across disciplines.

And it provides you with a broader, more well-rounded education that will support your career and your interests and help you stand out, again, from the crowd, which is a theme of this session. So in all these respects, we're here to support you in achieving your goals. I hope that was-- was it good enough?

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

That's such a fantastic start, Payam. I mean, you've just covered-- you've just encapsulated everything. And I was thinking while you were talking. And I mentioned to you briefly when I spoke to you, my first experience of The Open University was a Master's. It was a specific Master's, so it was the science Master's.

But all of these skills that you're mentioning, this idea of key skills and adaptability and applying, it's so good, isn't it? Can you tell us a little bit more about that one? So you mentioned about standing out from the crowd. So what kind of things does our Master's programme offer that helps people stand out from the crowd? Payam, sorry.

**PAYAM REZAIE:** It gives you-- sorry, I'll take that. It gives you several distinctive qualities. You can mix your specialised, advanced knowledge at the Masters we're talking about with professional skills in various areas. So in that respect, it's quite distinctive.

So team working, autonomy, time management, organisation, we're going to talk about this later, I'm sure-- reflective thinking, communication, personal development planning, these are all part and parcel of studying with The Open University.

And above and beyond that, the Master's provides specialised knowledge and understanding that crosses disciplines-- so this ability to make connections, to apply this to real world situations, an opportunity to gain further professional skills in areas like leadership, management, strategy, innovation, these are the things that are developed in graduates from this programme.

**ISABELLA**

Our employability consultant, Claire. I'm sure she's going to bring some of those up later. So I've just remembered I've been reminded that I mentioned HJ in the chat. But I completely forgot about our other two lovely guests in the chat. So I'm just going to quickly introduce them now. And I do apologise.

**HENMAN:**

So Sarah McKernan, who's one of my colleagues in the Access and Open Qualification there, she'll be there answering your questions. And we've also got Julie Emery, who is another Employability and got lots of information there. So do ask them questions. If there's specific questions you want to ask them, they'll be very happy to answer. So I'm just going to move onto Jay now.

So Payam's been talking to us a bit about some of these skills, the way of standing out from the crowd, but the adaptability in all those skills. We may have some students here who are thinking, oh, I'm not up to Master's level yet. I'm still undergraduate. So Jay, what can you tell us about our undergraduate programme and the Open programme there?

**JAY RIXON:**

I think Payam has put it brilliantly, that we talk about standing out from the crowd. But I think at the same point, what's lovely about the undergrad and postgrad option is that students are in the driving seat of their studies. They're the ones who get to select the modules. They're the ones who get to choose what they're going to do on a modular level.

And that's really empowering. And I think that's really inspiring for many students to be able to do that. And I think also if we think about maybe being in employment, or looking for a job, or gaining a promotion, how exciting is it for an employer to be able to hear someone talk about their career, talk about their employability skills, talk about their education in such a passionate way? And as Payam says, that really does make them stand out from the crowd.

When we think about the job market and how quickly it's moving and how fast-paced it is, actually a lot of times, employers are looking for that one thing that makes you special, that makes you shine a little bit. And I think sometimes that comes down to the way that students talk about their studies. And as Payam said, there's some fantastic skills that Open students learn.

And that is communication, transferable skills, being able to make connection across subjects as well, that I think is fantastic. And if I think about my background, I did an Arts degree. But actually it was probably very similar in many ways. I learned how to make connections across subjects.

And I work in a university. And I think, how did I get here? But actually what's fantastic is it's taught me how to make connections across subjects, the importance of teamwork, the importance of communication.

And also I think Payam mentioned the word autonomy. And I might use the word agile as well. I think students who learn at The Open University are brilliant because I think there's a lot of self-discipline. I think there's a lot of skills that students need. You're often working on your own. But then sometimes you work with peers. And if you think about how a lot of us work online, those are skills that are more required than ever to both work in isolation but also work as part of a team.

And I think that being an Open University student-- let me get it right, and also an Open Qualification student absolutely teaches you that skill set.

**ISABELLA**

Yeah, it's so interesting, isn't it, because you talk about all these skills. And I'm a tutor as well. And sometimes my students, they don't realise that they're developing the skills. So all of these things you're mentioning, the teamwork, sometimes it's like, oh, do I have to do that? It's going to count. It's going to be great. When Claire talks to us about employability later, I'm sure she's going to be mentioning how important some of those things are.

**HENMAN:**

And as Jay, you said, employers really recognise it, don't they? They're looking for those skills. So are there any other skills that you can think of, Jay, that we exemplify at The Open University as an Open student? Or have you done the whole list by now?

**JAY RIXON:**

Oh, I'm sure my colleagues could help me think of more. But yeah, I think it is about having transferable skills, I think being able to be a team player but at the same time learn a bit about yourself. You mentioned about reflection. I think that's such a vital thing, reflection, to think about what you're doing now, how you can make it better, how you can improve-- communication.

And also thinking about the way that you are assessed-- I think when you're an Open Degree student or an Open Qualification student, you work across different modules. You work across different subject areas. And actually, that skill set is really amazing because you're able to go into different areas and learn different techniques in different places, which you can then apply and mix up. And I think that is something that is vital.

And again, as Payam says, always a phrase we use a lot, it really does make you stand out from the crowd.

**ISABELLA**

**HENMAN:**

Yeah, I mean, and this applying things and moving things. I'm so passionate about this skills development. I do the online workshops, which are all skills-based. And I know, Jay, you've helped me with some of them before. And what we're trying to get at is that you can apply them. If you get certain skills, you can apply them.

And what we're talking about today, we're talking in the context of your degree, your choice, and the Open programme. But to a certain extent, it doesn't matter. I came from science originally. I do all sorts of other things now. Jay said she did an Arts degree. She does all sorts of different things now. And that's the thing. It's about these skills.

So we asked you the question earlier, what made you decide to study with The Open University. HJ, what kind of answers have we had coming in?

**HJ:**

Well, we've got lots of fantastic and great answers that I'm sure we can all relate to, especially myself as well, as an OU graduate, I know some of these decisions came into play when I was studying as well. So Sarah says, I chose to study with the OU because of flexibility, when to study. That's definitely a massive benefit.

Natasha said because of the student stories and because of all the digital tech and film awards. And Natasha actually got into it by doing the Time to Think OpenLearn course as well, which if you haven't been on OpenLearn, it's absolutely fantastic. But be warned, it is addictive and will probably get you some more.

Penelope joined the OU having decided after 30 years that she did not want to be a nurse anymore, so a change of career there. And Bliss said, I chose to study with The Open University because having young children and living on an island means I don't have the option to go away to a brick uni. It's flexible and fits around my home life.

And Chet said, I chose to study in The Open University because I couldn't study abroad due to COVID. And I'm just having a check -- There you go. Layla said, I chose Open University due to the flexibility and the experience. And I'd like to be able to change my career. Layla started off doing the Access course and enjoyed it so much, which is why she's doing the Open Degree where you can choose your own modules.

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

Fabulous. We do like this. We could almost get these as a little bit of a promo thing. Get all these quotes on a poster and say, this is what we're about. So flexibility, that came up so much. Now Claire, I've been building you up quite a lot about employability, no pressure.

But when we were talking before, you said that there's lots of really important skills that our students exemplify and the employers are looking for. Do you want to tell us a little bit more about that from the employability perspective?

**CLAIRE  
CORKRAM:**

Yes, sure. Thank you. Nice to be here today. I work for the Careers and Employability Service at the OU as a Careers and Employability Consultant. So I think the one thing the pandemic has done with careers, it's completely changed the landscape. And us and employers are now having to adapt. And we are having to find new ways of working, new ways of being agile.

Our new word in careers is agility-- and just learn to problem solve and find solutions to what's been thrown at us from this external market. So completely-- Payam and Jay have mentioned what we would perhaps recognise as competencies within job descriptions, So teamwork, problem solving, communication.

But what employers are looking for really now that we have to stand out from the crowd is what makes you unique. So you can answer these questions that you're a team worker. But show me. So demonstrate it to me.

Now, when you're studying at the OU and you're doing interdisciplinary study, I think from my time working with the OU with this particular subject, is it makes you really versatile and multi-functional, if you want to look at it like that. So you might be able to bring to me as an employer an example of team working from your work. But what you might be able to do is say, do you know what? I started to study this subject, which is completely new to me. I knew nothing about it.

But I've learned these methodologies. I've learned to work with people in all different countries. I can now bring this skill set to you. And rather than just you tell me what to do, I can come to you and problem solve. So I can come to you as an employee and solve problems. I don't need you to dictate to me my job every day. And that's what employers are looking for because they're having to manage the market like we are.

So from a careers point of view, to stand out from the crowd, you need to be thinking, what makes me unique? Why should they recruit me? Now, it doesn't have to be that you've created the atom or anything like that. It could be that within your subject, you came into it knowing nothing. But actually from that, you produced something that was then used within your workplace, a new method of working that they haven't tried before.

And subsequently, productivity went up or something like that. So it's a very volatile market at the moment. We just don't know how things are all going to pan out. We're all having to learn new ways of working. But we need to look over and above what we would call career standard competencies. We would want you to come with those.

But what is unique? And that's where I think interdisciplinary study comes into its own because you're putting yourself in this position of having to learn things and choose things that you haven't really perhaps done before. And it might be-- if I use the word foreign, as in, it's really unusual. And it's a bit scary for you.

So my degree is within HR. But I work for Open in STEM. So learning all about the science is new but scary because I'm not a scientist. But that's something unique that you can bring. And that's what we're looking for.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** That's great. So you'll notice that we've had this question running across the bottom of the screen, which fits in really nicely with what Claire's been saying about what made you choose your qualification. So Claire's been mentioning a number of things about this idea of being able to actually identify things. So one of the things she said was employers are looking for what makes you unique.

So you can almost use this as a test. So when I come to HJ in a bit-- well, we're not going to give the brownie bonus for the best answer. But almost think about that. You're showcasing, what made you choose your qualification? You're showcasing to Claire, as an employability consultant, about how you're doing those skills. So if you were giving somebody some advice about that, about how to showcase, then Claire, what kind of things would you say-- how else to stand out from the crowd?

**CLAIRE CORKRAM:** Yeah, you need to give evidence. That's what you need to do. You can tell me you're a team player. So can 60 or 90 other people who apply to me. So give me the evidence. And I think what comes across quite a lot of the students we work with is because a lot of them are changing careers, they don't feel they have the evidence. So they're-- I haven't done this in the workplace. I don't know what examples to use.

And that's where really the study comes in because you're probably doing things within your study that you've never done before. So that's worth considering. And really, when you've done your study, just think, what skills have I learned? What things are new to me? How can I put this into the workplace? I'll just bring this in now. We were going to talk about it later.

But on the Careers website, there is a Career Work Planning Book. And it is a PDF that you can print off. And there is this area in there that you can list your skills, like a sort of development programme, really. And every time you do something new, write it down. And write down what the evidence was. So whenever you approach an employer, you can say, yeah, I had to approach this new team working.

You had a lady there who said that she works on an island. So she's a bit restricted for mobility with people. So how did she reach out and work as a team? And now that's critical because we're all having to work that way. So it's those kind of examples. Bring me real evidence. Don't worry if it isn't from the workplace. Think about what you're doing in your study that is giving you these kind of insights into these new competencies.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** That sounds such good advice. I love the evidence. We definitely like evidence. Coming from science, we like evidence, don't we, Payam? Evidence is key, isn't it?

**PAYAM REZAI:** Science is not scary at all. Science is lovely, as are all the other disciplines.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Ding, ding, we like science. But we like all our different topics. So let's come to HJ. Let's see how people are being able to evidence this idea about their Open. Why did they choose their qualification, whether it's Open or something else? What have we got, HJ?

**HJ:** So we've got lots of great answers. So Natasha said, because I like learning about research and evaluating the use of digital technology for all sorts of educational purposes. Chet says, I chose my qualification because I wanted to improve my business skills and believe that it will help me prepare for business work life. I will have to work two years while studying Open University. So this will give me plenty more opportunities to study more.

And Thomas said, I chose Open Uni and the Open Degree route because I was able to transfer credit from my previous studies. So that's fantastic, putting other experience into your OU journey as well because that's what interdisciplinary study is all about, is bringing together things and getting the strengths out of all those things, whether it's putting it into future work, our learning, our knowledge. So that's fantastic to hear.

And we've also been talking about the career planning guide. Julie's put that in the chat for us as well. And I have to say, it's a really useful tool. I've used it myself. And if you're wondering, what will I do next or how do I market the skills I've gained from my qualifications to employers? It's a great guide to help you think and help you prepare for the job market.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** That sounds excellent. Yes, that sounded like such a good idea because I know when I do things like appraisals, I go, well, I've forgotten what I've done. And this idea of evidence-- and we're going to go back to evidence again, and ticking things off and putting things down when you do them so that they're there. So you don't have this sudden worrying, oh well, I don't know. I've got to put it all down there.

So Claire, I'm going to come back to you now sort of within our second idea, about this idea of, you're hired. You're great. So what is it that employers are looking for? You've talked about a number of different things. Is there anything else you can share about the employment market that would help our students?

**CLAIRE CORKRAM:** Definitely. I think now, as I said and we've said in the conversation so far, it's volatile. It's changing. And we don't really know. Careers of longevity, we don't know if they're still going to be there. The jobs of the future, we don't really know what they're going to look like, how they're going to shape. Are we also are going to be working from home? Are we going to do hybrid?

So you've got to show this agility. That's what we're looking for-- we, employers, I'm speaking for employers. They want you to be agile. That's the new word on the street. And I think you've got to just really be able to ebb and flow. If you want to go into a job and just have a job description and this is what you do, there are those jobs. But if you're studying, it's probably because you want a bit more from your career.

So really value what you get from your degree and the study that you're doing because being able to take something you've read and produce a piece of work that can be evidenced and researched and then produce something that then is passed is really good. And not a lot of people can do that. And those skills that you've learned from researching, putting it all together, producing a professional document, that's kind of what they're looking for in the workplace.

So importantly, you've got to be willing to change and adapt and keep learning. Employers are upskilling and reskilling their workforce all the time at the moment. It's costing them a lot of money to work in this new environment. So go to them and say, look, I can do this. I'm doing this through my Open study. I've put myself in that position already. So I'm willing to keep learning. That's who I am.

**ISABELLA**

That's great. So we've got another question which links in really, really well with what you've been talking about, this-- and our next question, to everybody at home, is this, what do you think the value is of studying in an interdisciplinary fashion? I'm glad that HJ said it first because I always stumble over the word. I mean, Claire's already given you lots of good thoughts. And you may want to crib some of hers.

**HENMAN:**

But for those of you that are studying at the moment or thinking about studying Open, think about some of the things that we mentioned. I'll come back to Claire briefly. So this idea, you mentioned agility. You mentioned flexibility. You mentioned the need of upskilling. So we talk about interdisciplinary study at The Open University, Claire.

We've got a number of different modules. And I'll come to some of the other people in a moment. So how would you match up that terminology, interdisciplinary, with those skills, the agility that you were mentioning?

**CLAIRE**

**CORKRAM:**

Yeah, in a work context, that's about being multi-functional-- so being able to move from one project to another, one piece of work to another, being able to work within different teams, being able to work with perhaps the board of directors and then different colleagues. So that's being able to work across all different types of work, different people, different areas within an organisation.

So when you're studying interdisciplinary, you are doing that, aren't you? You're learning this subject, and then that subject, and then this subject. And some, you might feel more confident at than others. But those skills that you're having to learn to get through that particular area that you've chosen, and you might have chosen it because it feels comfortable, or you might have chosen it because it feels scary. And that's going to be the same in the workplace.

Coming on here today is quite scary for me. I've not done anything like this. But you've got to learn. And you've got-- this is what the future of work is. And that's where I think-- I can't say it myself now. Interdisciplinary study comes into its own because you can say to the employer, actually, I chose this subject because I knew nothing about it.

But I know it's really needed in the career that I want to do. And although I was a bit scared, this is what I learnt and this is what I can bring to you. So it's aligning that study with what the employer wants.

And they're not completely sure how the market is going to go either. So they're not sure what they want either. So if you can come with something that's really interesting, they're going to grab hold of that.

**ISABELLA**

**HENMAN:**

Yeah, I think that's the idea, the being interesting. And while you were talking, I was thinking of a pineapple and the fact that a pineapple, it's got lots of spikes on the top. And it's this scary-- scary-- Payam is laughing at, what on Earth is a-- it makes sense. It will make sense in a minute. Trust me. So if you don't know what a pineapple is, you look at it and you think it's spiky. It's got these bits.

And if you ever do the mistake like I do of touching at the top, you spike your hands. And you think, this isn't a nice thing. This doesn't look actually-- it's got all knobbly bits in it. But once you get inside, it's lovely and sweet. But there's different parts to it. So it's almost like this metaphor for interdisciplinary study. It's got different things in it. And it's got bits that might look scary. But once you get into it, it's going to be great.



So there you go. That's our promo for interdisciplinary study and studying something you don't know. It might look scary and spiky to begin with. But it's really nice. So in fact, now as if another, almost seamlessly, George, you are our co-chair on a module that-- you're looking at me going, where is this going? So you see, you've got to get these weird, little metaphors in.

So I actually tutor on the module that you are the co-chair on, which is our Level 1 Interdisciplinary module, which is why you'd think I could say that word considering how much I've tried it, but I don't. So how about you tell our students a little bit more about how that module can help them, linking into these different things we've been talking about so far?

**GEORGE  
CURRY:**

A pineapple, there we go. That's an excellent mental image for us all. Yes, so my module is called Making Your Learning Count. And it's a 30-credit level 1 module. And it's like a mini version of the Open Degree writ large because what you can do as a learner is curate your own pathway through the module in the same way that you can curate your way through your Open Degree as an Open Degree student. And I think that that confidence that comes with being able to make those choices is an incredible and very important employability skill.

And being able to think about what your study goals are, what your learning goals are, what your employability and career goals are, what your life goals are, and then design a suite of learning that's unique to you that takes into consideration your passions and your interests, and then working through that plan toward your goal is something that is very unique to interdisciplinary students at The Open University, whether it's on Making Your Learning Count, the module that I co-chair, or whether it's on the qualification, either at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

And I think we've had a lot of students saying to HJ and in the chat that they enjoy OU study because it fits around their lives. But it's not the study that's fitting around their lives. It's those individual students making the study fit around their lives, organising their lives in such a way that they can fulfil all of the commitments that they've got and study a university qualification at the same time.

So I think when you're describing how that study fits, don't say the OU study fits around my life. Say, I make it fit around my life. And that's a key employability skill as well, isn't it? Organising what it is you want to study, when you want to study, and looking at the portfolio of things that you're responsible for and making sure that all of those plates keep spinning in the air.

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

I might even expand that a bit, George, and say, it's not around your life. It's part of your life.

**GEORGE  
CURRY:**

Part of your life, yes.

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

Yeah, because I think sometimes when we do time management, one of the time management resources that we use has, this is the amount of time I've got. And study is at the bottom. And I always say whenever I showcase that one, I don't like this one because study isn't at the end. Study is part of it, the fact we're so passionate about the skills.

Claire's been talking about this agility, this flexibility, the information, what the employers want. And we're trying to showcase to everybody listening and watching that these skills are really important, aren't they? And they're really relevant.

And I almost want to go-- when the pandemic hit, I almost wanted to go, at The Open University, we've been doing this for ages. We're ideally placed, aren't we? So George, with our course, maybe you could tell people a little bit more when you say about curating your own learning. Maybe some people are going, I don't quite know what that means. Can you explain a little bit more what that does mean?

**GEORGE  
CURRY:**

Absolutely. So if you are an Open undergraduate degree student, then you will choose what modules you want to do. And that is you, like a museum curator, or at an art gallery who's deciding what pictures to put on the wall or what to show in their exhibition. You are choosing what courses you are going to do. So that's you curating your qualification.

You are in the position of making those choices. Someone, some academic from a faculty hasn't done it for you. You are doing it. And that is a unique skill that you're developing there. On making your learning count, the students choose much smaller pieces of learning to put together to curate a pathway that makes sense to them. And that might be courses from OpenLearn.

I know we're going to talk about OpenLearn a little bit later on. It might be courses that they've done in their workplace that they want to be able to make count and count towards their qualification, or there might be other courses or qualifications or pieces of learning that they've done in other community settings.

So it's adding all of those bits together, thinking about what you're passionate about, what really interests you because study is hard. And I think it's-- never underestimate how much passion for the subject will get you through, will help you stick with it. So inhabit that passion. Be enthusiastic. And if your interests are apparently subjects that don't go together very well, own that. Own that.

Create the pathway that makes sense to you. And try and find a way to describe what it is that's making you passionate and that's interesting you. And that will make you unique. That will make you stand out from the crowd because you've thought about what your interests are. And you've done something about it. So I think that's really, really key.

Another thing that's been mentioned a little bit before that I just wanted to come back to is this notion of making connections. I think that that is such a key skill for interdisciplinary study. I think it gives you opportunities to look across and between subjects and have a richer understanding of those subjects for knowing about more than one. So there can be new knowledge.

If you've learnt subject A and subject B, then actually, that can make you think about something entirely different that you wouldn't have thought about, were you're not comparing the way that those subjects operate, the methodologies that they use, the language that they use. The comparison of language across different subjects is so interesting.

And I think being able to make those connections and look at the world from various different lenses, through various different lenses from different standpoints and perspectives, makes you a more empathetic person. It makes you able to understand other people's standpoints a little bit more easily. And the world could definitely do with more empathy, couldn't it? And that's a very attractive thing to bring to a workplace, I think.

But the ability to look across and between will help us with the complexity of the modern world, whether we're thinking about climate crisis, whether we're thinking about food security, whether we're thinking about social justice. These things are incredibly complicated and won't be solved by one subject area alone. So if you can bring the insight from a few different places, a few different subject areas to the party, then that is going to put you in a really good position with any future potential employees.

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

Yeah, and I was also thinking, when you were talking about complexities and things, I was also thinking I know we've got students talking in the chat about some of the technologies that they're ending up using. I know, again, grounding it in the example you were talking about, George, we do use a couple of different technologies within Making Your Learning Count which are a little bit different. How do you think they help students to develop their skills?

**GEORGE  
CURRY:**

So this is one of my favourite things about Making Your Learning Count. I would urge you all to have a little look at it. If you haven't considered doing it as part of your Open qualification, then maybe you should. It's lots of fun. But one of the things-- because students are creating their own pathway, the subject that each student is studying is unique to them.

So I might be doing some courses on music and theatre and drama because that's where my interest lies. I might move across to English literature, a little bit into philosophy, et cetera. Someone else might be doing some physics and some chemistry and some business with a bit of French thrown in. So some of the tasks that we ask students to do is to describe and summarise their learning.

And they do that in different ways, via the creation of a poster, or a blog post, or a video. And then they can upload those artefacts, those posters and videos, to a piece of software called OpenStudio, where other students can see them.

And we've got a really, really interesting activity that allows for peer-to-peer feedback. And that is another really wonderful employability skill, to be able to give critical feedback to your peers in a sensitive way. It's something that, if you have a chance to do that on a module, that's a really, really great thing to be able to talk to an employer about.

But as well as that, it exposes all of the students on the module to lots and lots and lots of different ideas because you're looking at posters from lots of other people. So it might be Childhood and Youth Studies over here and Law over there and Latin over here and all sorts of wonderful different things, which might then spark your interest and send you in a slightly different direction, which is the agility we've been talking about so far.

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

Thank you, George. I think we're doing quite a good-- probably doing a bit too much of a promo for Making Learning Count. So maybe I'll move on from that.

**GEORGE  
CURRY:**

Not possible.

**ISABELLA  
HENMAN:**

It's a lovely course, though. So HJ, we asked people earlier what kind of questions have come up for this, about-- they saw the values of studying interdisciplinary. I'm going to make you say the word again.

**HJ:** I'm going to try and avoid it now for the rest of the session, otherwise I'll trip myself up. So Penelope said, I really like this because I think I share this perspective as well, I really enjoy the opportunity to look at the world differently. So she said, I'm doing an introductory course in sociology as part of a psychology degree. And it's challenging perceptions she had as a nurse from a previous career.

And Natasha said mental flexibility from studying all these different subjects, which has enabled me to handle different situations in international aid well. And as we kind of picked up as well, we've been talking in the chat about how we're using different technologies as students. So when people were sent to work from home or were starting new jobs that are in hot desk offices or from our home, we already know as OU students how to work in these crazy places and how to manage ourselves well and get stuff done.

So that's definitely a strength. And Natasha actually had a fantastic question in the chat, which I'd like to put to Claire, asking another interesting aspect of the Corona crisis is that it put a lot of people through the financial pressure cooker. As an example, Natasha is asking, how can people turn interesting life events into professional advantage? What do we think?

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Yeah, Claire, is there anything you can share with us now? Coming to you off the cuff, sorry. But hopefully you can give us some ideas?

**CLAIRE CORKRAM:** Yeah, I hear and I see a lot in my time within careers that I've worked in. I've done it for a number of years. People undervalue the skills they have in life. They seem to think that when they go out for a job interview or something like that, they have to talk about what they've done at work. But actually, your life skills are really important. And that's normally from an employer where you're so interesting.

For me, when I used to recruit, I used to always ask people, what are your hobbies? What are your interests? Because that told me the sort of person they were. And if someone told me they were interested in archery or they played wheelchair basketball, I'd think, great, amazing! What did you do? Why did you like it? And it lights passion.

It shows me who you are as a person. It demonstrates to me all the skills that you're not verbalising, so teamwork, being able to be competitive, being able to perhaps deal with if you lose a game, win a game, whatever. So in answer to the question, without knowing obviously all the detail, but in a summary, we're all having to learn to work differently from home.

We're all now, with the energy crisis, having to learn to manage our homes differently in different ways. And George talked about learning to be more sustainable and how we want to approach the world more from a social justice. And that's what employers want as well. So I would encourage people to value more their life experiences. And without going into-- in an interview, in a humdrum, what is it that you've done that you've had to get through these difficult situations?

And tell me about that because that interests me because that tells me who you are as opposed to what you can do filling in some administration. So I think that's really important. Can I just add, I think what might be really good here is there's an old kind of phrase, a personal development plan that people have probably heard about quite a lot and may have used.

And I think we refer to it in the Career Planning Workbook. We now call that FutureYOU at the OU. And within the study home page, on the Open sites and other sites, on the Careers Plan tab, they'll see FutureYOU. And that's our new version of personal development plans. So this all links into that. And being able to plan your career and talk about yourself, but really value you as a person and your life experiences.

Managing a home is very difficult with all the things you have to do. Maybe changing jobs-- the lady who's been in nursing for 30 years. Stepping away from that into something new is wow, you know? And as an employer, why did you do that? What interested you? That's incredible. It's stories. They're the stories we want to hear.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Yeah, that's great. And you've hinted on what I'm going to come onto in a short while, which is this idea about resources, because you've mentioned some employability resources. I'm going to come to Payam before that. But just before I come to you, Payam, is, we've got a question. So Claire's just mentioned some resources that Employability have. What kind of resources do you think are helpful for study?

So that's a question for you while you're thinking about it. We'll come onto some of those in a moment. But I don't want to miss out Payam. Because I know, Payam, there's some lovely information. And there's lots of lovely skills that our postgraduate students develop. And I almost want to bang the drum here.

In fact, I was in one of the postgraduate prospectuses early on because I was like, great, yeah, I'm learning these kind of things. So George mentions lots of things about our undergraduate. And you can mention if there's resources and things. What kind of other things do you want to bang the drum for our postgraduate students about?

**PAYAM REZAIE:** It's a massive drum. It's so big I can't fit it.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Yeah.

**PAYAM REZAIE:** Let's think about interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary just as another metaphor. You mentioned pineapple, Isabella. What about a fruit salad to start with. You've got these different mixtures of fruit. And this is not my take. It's-- other people in the world have come up with this already-- and a smoothie at the end.

So you're bringing in, integrating your understanding, knowledge. So going from a fruit salad to a smoothie is the journey on the Open qualifications, whether it's undergraduate or postgraduate. Claire has been really articulate in putting across these things about upskilling, reskilling, agile, being flexible. And this is really, really, really important.

I can't stress it enough, in the current job market, to secure employment. And the things you learn, you pick up as you develop your understanding and your skills, as you move through the programme-- is to think within and outside of the box, if you want to take it that way. So skills are really, really in high demand.

Now, Claire did mention this. And I just want to emphasise it. It's really important to be able to articulate your learning to employers. What are your unique skills-- excuse me, attributes? You need to make this clear to them. How do you meet their requirements? What are they looking for? You can do this by providing examples, as Claire mentioned, from your own learning experiences, your life experiences as well, that match the job description, the role or the person specification.

But it's also important that you bring a fresh perspective to the employment. You have a combination of study and skills that is unique to you and which makes you different from hundreds of others that are also applying for the same job. But one of the key things is reflecting on your learning and reflecting on your life events and being able, as Claire was talking about-- your personal development planning, to be able to do that as you journey through your qualification. So these are important.

If you allow me, there's some key advantages as well, just a couple of things I want to say. Integrating knowledge, integrating understanding, awareness across disciplines, bringing insights from these different disciplines to bear on real world situations, which George has talked about-- addressing real life problems.

Giving students an appreciation for different perspectives and approaches to solving problems, an ability to look at topics from different viewpoints, this is really fundamental-- and the importance of collaboration, the idea of coming together to create something which is greater than the sum of its parts, and appreciation and ability to work with people across disciplines and areas. This is tangible understanding related to real world approach.

And today, it's essential to the economy and success of professional organisations and global business. So the ability to communicate effectively with people, share knowledge that crosses disciplines, traditional boundaries, appreciating perspectives, values, motivations, making connections, seeing the bigger picture solving the big problems, enhancing the scope and depth of your own learning and how you improve that as you journey through an Open qualification and life in general.

We're talking about lifelong learning here, not just Open qualifications. I think these are really key.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** You've given us so many things to be thinking about there. It's such a motivational poster today, isn't it? We've got all of these things.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Great, we've got loads of things. So I mentioned some resources now. Payam's given you lots of things, some inspiration. Let's ground a few of these things. So Claire's already given us some of this idea about the employability. I'm going to come to Jay now. Jay, you look after our Open site. And it's got lots of really useful resources there. Perhaps you'd like to tell us a bit more about those and what students can find out from that.

**JAY RIXON:** Absolutely, thank you. So a lot of the qualifications will have a subject site or qualification site. And these are places that are just brilliant for students to explore and really research and dig deep into. So the Open Degree site has lots of really lovely information on that is really worth digging into.

So you get to the Home Page. And on that Home Page, you've got an image of your qualification. And you've got - brilliant, it's on screen. And you've got upcoming events and news and different bits and pieces like that, which is really fantastic.

And in all the different tabs, Claire talked about it a little bit earlier, you have got the opportunity to come across lots of different things. So we've got information on your qualification there. We've got information on *Student Hub Live*, information on the OU Students Association in the Connect tab. In the Discover tab, we've got all about your qualification.

We've got about multi-subjects study, the importance and benefits of multi-subject studies. We've also got the Open Programme blog site, sneaky plug there. But we've got that as well. So why not read about the students and the staff involved behind the scenes? And also on this page we've got a dedicated Open Programme on *Student Hub Live* section, which is brilliant.

In the Skills tab, we've got how you can boost your digital skills, how you can think about the skills you need for work and also for study. And we also have careers and employability on there as well, plus a massive section on the library, so how the library can come and support you on your study journey. In the Plan tab, we've got about your qualification. And also, that's where you'll find the FutureYOU section that Claire talked about-- again, such a brilliant resource for students who are at The Open University.

And then in the Succeed section, we've got some case studies about Open Degree students. We have got some links to postgrad study. So it's just a sneaky promotional thing around, if you do the Open Degree, you can progress onto the Open Master's. Payam and I are absolutely impartial. We're not biased at all. And then also, we've got some stuff around the alumni there as well.

And I just want to say on these qual sites, in their opening section, you've got news and events. And this is where there's some really great things that we often signpost-- so *Student Hub Live* sessions. But also, Isabella, this week is Mental Health Awareness. And it started yesterday. And it goes on to the end of the week. And that's something that, again, these are sort of key events we want to signpost to students.

So this is an NHS-sponsored. The theme of this week is about loneliness. So again, there's some lovely little information on there. There's a lovely video. But it's also about saying, we all get bit lonely. We talked about working in much more isolation and studying in isolation. So what can you do? Can you send a text to a friend? Can you meet somebody for coffee, which I do a lot. Can you go for a walk with somebody?

And also, we know that *Student Hub Live* sessions are brilliant as well. So why not sign up to one, but invite a friend as well?

**ISABELLA**

**HENMAN:**

Yeah, thank you for mentioning that, Jay, because it's a subject that I'm very passionate about as well, this idea of promoting mental health. We've got so many resources. And it's quite an important thing. And I've been thinking about it throughout the session where people have been mentioning this idea about connections and building connections and the flexibility and the links-- and the student that was on the island. Maybe that is quite a lonely place being on an island.

But you're part of The Open University community now. You are part of the *Student Hub Live* community. So the fact that you're on an island and you don't see-- does it really matter? In some ways it matters because you can't necessarily go for coffee. But we've got this lovely idea of community. And I think that community hopefully combats the loneliness, is the theme of the Mental Health Week. So thank you for mentioning that, Jay. That's really lovely.

So I want to come to HJ next. Again, so what kind of things-- what resources have people been mentioning? Jay just showcased things. And Claire was mentioning some for employability. What other resources do students like, other than chocolate? Which I haven't mentioned so far.

**HJ:** So, I think Natasha's got a really creative one. She says, I collect stories of people who are more advanced than me and pull me forward. They show me what humans can do. And I really like that because that's like, using role models as a motivation for your study. And I think that can be really important if you're that type of person, too. I know I get really motivated to see what people have done and where they are and where they've ended up as well.

So I think that's absolutely fantastic. And Penelope, I love this one. She said, *Student Hub Live* has been key in embracing being a student for me. Well, I absolutely love that. I definitely agree. And Emma says, *Student Hub Live* and OpenLearn-- it's good to see contributors to *Student Hub Live* in OpenLearn or module videos. They support our tutors and other students on the chat with great tips and links. And it's very useful across all subjects.

And I like that as well. That's the great thing about *Student Hub* is we're putting names to faces. We are seeing the people that we write our module books and we see in the videos. And we get a chance to question them and get ideas from them and talk to them about things, which is absolutely fantastic.

And I think for me, because I like to talk about my personal one with this as well, I definitely think The Open University community is one of the biggest benefits and resources we have as students because we know from the chat, we learn so many great and fantastic things from each other-- all the things we share and I've picked up from doing these chats as well.

And we know with the community as well, it's not just the student side. It's that people who work for the OU. So we know Rafael, Sarah, Fred, and Julie who are joining us in the chat, they've studied as well. They know what it's like. So their tips and advice come from a place of knowing what it's like to be struggling with a deadline or worrying about assignment scores or the successes as well. So I definitely think that the OU community is one of our best resources as OU students.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Fantastic. Thank you, HJ. And I think about that. As I said, I started off as a student. And I think of the things that I learnt. I started off pure science and this idea that I was narrow. And I was almost the antithesis of what we're talking about today. No, I've got to do exactly this. But actually, I realised, no. It started interdisciplinary. In fact, most of my modules were interdisciplinary. And I learnt different things.

And I even went from-- if I'm going to put some pedagogy, as I call it, so teaching and learning terminology because we're giving you lots of multi syllable words today. I learnt the idea of, it's not just about me gaining the knowledge and putting it in here. But it's actually the lived experience. So that's the community. And it's the agility. It's the interdisciplinarity. How do you learn from different people? What can you pick up from different people?

And part of our Open programme is about that. It's about, you know what? We could go this path. But we could also go that path. They all have their benefits. Now, we've mentioned OpenLearn earlier. And George, maybe you could tell us a little bit more. Some people might not know what OpenLearn is. HJ mentioned a fantastic course that we have on OpenLearn. But do you want to tell us a little bit more about what we're talking about when we say OpenLearn as a resource?



**GEORGE**

**CURRY:**

I would love to. HJ said it was addictive. So be warned because I think he's absolutely right. OpenLearn is a website full of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pieces of free learning. I can't get over the fact that it exists. I'm so amazed that the OU has made this available. There are all sorts of courses on there, pretty much any subject you could think about.

And the great thing is you can have an explore, can't break anything. Have a little look. See what you find out. On the Home page, if you wanted to look for something for a particular subject, you can click on the subject page. And it shows you stuff by different subjects and disciplines. You can then use the filters down the side.

If you think I only want to do short, quick courses, some of them are one, two hours. Some of them are maybe six to eight. Some of them are a little bit longer. And they're at different academic levels as well. So some of them are similar to level 1 courses at the OU, some level 2, some level 3. And there's postgrad offerings there as well.

It's absolutely brilliant. And it is a wonderful way to try out subjects in a completely risk-free way to see whether they are of interest to you. Now, that is really, really helpful if you are working your way through an Open Degree because you might think, oh, I'm choosing between these two modules next. And I'm not quite sure which one to choose.

Well, you could go onto OpenLearn, try and find some courses that look at those different subjects, spend an hour or two exploring those. And then you might be able to make a more informed decision about what your next module choice is. It's absolutely brilliant. There are also a lot of courses on there that deal specifically with different study skills.

So if, through your self reflection and learning, you understand that you've got some areas that you'd like to improve, you can go onto OpenLearn and spend a little bit of time thinking about those study skills. Another really good employability element of OpenLearn is that there are badged courses on there.

So once you've done a badged course, you can download that badge, which says, I have completed this piece of learning. And you can attach it to your social media personas, particularly on things like LinkedIn. And you can add them to your CV.

And you can tell future potential employers that you've done them. So they're portable, little mini certificates of learning, really. So look out for those badged courses on OpenLearn as well. But do explore. It's just the most inspirational place.

**ISABELLA**

**HENMAN:**

It tends to be one of my summer things. Each summer I go, right, what can I learn about today? I think I started doing a course in, I can never even pronounce it, Telugu, which is one of the East Asian, Indian dialects. That was quite interesting because I was supposed to be saying words. And they were supposed to sound like what was coming back. But they didn't. I went, hmm, OK, probably wasn't my forte.

So we've only got a few minutes left. What I wanted to do is I want to come back to you, Claire, for a little bit. So we've mentioned a number of different things. Is there anything else that you would like to add, to say about employability? Anything else, sort of any other buzzwords or promotional bits for our students about what makes our students so great and why they should think about it?

**CLAIRE**

**CORKRAM:**

Yeah, they are great. And I think studying is hard. Studying, if you're sitting on your own at home and whatever else you've got going on in your life, is of massive value. So think about all of that. I just, if I may, Isabella, point the students to our Careers and Employability web page that we have.

So I would say it's an underused resource. And please, please encourage students to use it. And share with friends, as Jay has said. So on here, this is up to date all the time. There's constant information. You can get help with CV advice, interview advice, all the typical careers service you might want.

There's a couple of pages I think are really relevant for today. There's careers with your OU subject. That would be a really good page I'd like to highlight to students. And have a look through at their subjects and perhaps others. And we talk about the types of jobs and different companies that you might be able to work for.

And of course, if you're doing an Open Degree or Open Master's, you've got many careers that you can look at. Some you do have to have certain qualifications for, teaching, or medicine, or something like that. But others, it's not necessarily about your degree subject. It's what you've learned and the skills you've got from doing it. And the other one on there is the forum and webinar pages. So we do a lot of forum webinars.

We have a lot of external speakers come in. We have professional companies. We have professional bodies, peer-to-peer support. So if the students today haven't done those, I'd encourage them to come on those. We've done them from Open. On the Study home page for Open, we actually did a forum. And there's a webinar on there for 2019-- still very relevant, though.

And it talks about how to present your Open Degree effectively, how to explain your Open Degree in interview, and then where to look for additional resources. So I think really, it's just about sitting back and thinking, what route do I want to go? What do I need? And all the resources are there. And also, they can come to Careers for a One-to-One consultation.

So we do do confidential careers consultations for students. You book an appointment. You can book it via that web page. You'll come to a professional, qualified person. We're not going to tell you what to do. It's your career. But we can help guide, support, signpost, challenge-- sometimes we do that. But we're there for you. And you can come as many times as you need.

And sometimes it's just about thinking, am I really going down the right route? Is there something else that we can look at? So I'd encourage students to have a look at that.

**ISABELLA**

**HENMAN:**

Right, thank you, Claire. So all of these resources that we've been mentioning, I'm sure people have been busy scribbling things down. And in the chat, there have been the links. They are all available from the event page on the website. So you can follow them up afterwards. And I do encourage you to look at OpenLearn, to look at our Open Programme, to look at our undergraduate Programme, our postgraduate Programme, to look at the Careers information.

And just as we sum up, HJ, I wanted to come back to you for just the last time. Is there anything new that's come up in the chat? Are there any more fantastic motivational quotes that we can think about today?

**HJ:** Well, I like what Penelope said earlier. And I did want to mention it. Penelope said, I'm certain the fact that I'm studying with the OU was a positive in a recent interview. It's the only thing the interviewers asked me about on my application form. And I agree too. In my experience being interviewed, talking about The Open University, the skills I gained, it's definitely been a positive.

And if you go on to the Career Planning Workbook, it gives you lots of strategies and ways that you can use your Open University study when looking at our employment as well. And I just wanted to add, Luisa said, my final assessment is due next Thursday. All the best.

Good luck. There's loads of people doing EMAs and preparing for exams at the moment. And we all know that you'll do really well. You've done a fantastic job coming this far. And yeah, good luck to everyone that's on that last leg of your modules.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Absolutely, thank you, HJ. So what I wanted to do is, each of my guests today, and that includes you, HJ, is I asked you to think about a one sentence summary take home message to our students. So Payam, what would you say to our students as your take home summary?

**PAYAM REZAIE:** Well., remember your Open qualification will be bespoke to you. So think carefully about your degree and your choices. And go for it. Good luck! We'll support you.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Lovely, thank you. Jay, what about you?

**JAY RIXON:** I had one written down. But actually, I'm going to change it. I loved that a student said that their studies helped them look at the world differently. And actually, I think that's so exciting because I think that's about preparing for where you want to go. That's about thinking about where you are now. And that's about the excitement and the inspiration that could come when you take subjects and you smash them together. So I'm going to go with the challenge of looking at the world differently.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Fantastic. What about you, George?

**GEORGE CURRY:** Mine's linked to that. And mine is that subjects or disciplines are just something that humans have invented as a way to try and make sense of the world. They're not real things. They're just lenses to look at the world. So pick up as many lenses as you want to. Try a couple on together. And see how the world looks.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Fantastic. HJ, what about you?

**HJ:** I think for me, I'll just reiterate that just being part of the OU community as a student is definitely a strength. You're surrounded by people that support you, want you to do well, and know exactly how it feels.

**ISABELLA HENMAN:** Lovely, thank you. And finally, Claire, what about you?

**CLAIRE CORKRAM:** Yeah, I would say invest in yourself and invest in looking at your career. And if you've got a plan, just be prepared to go off route with it. But make an investment in yourself because you're the expert in you.

**ISABELLA**

Fantastic. So hopefully we've given you lots of different things to think about. Hopefully we've given quite a good promo job on some of our lovely Open qualifications. Maybe you're thinking, you know what? Yes, I like certain subjects. But I'd like to do some different things.

**HENMAN:**

And I want to embrace this idea of interdisciplinarity, the mental flexibility, the going for it, the getting the ideas, or even if you're not going to do that as the formal qualification, doing the badged Open courses in OpenLearn. I've now done a number of those. So I hope you found that really useful. We've obviously given you lots of different ideas. Remember that all those resources are available on the event page. And if you've got any further questions, you can always email them through to us.

We've actually got another event coming up next month, which is sort of attached to this because it's also about interdisciplinary learning-- so what's in your Open Box. And some of you who are thinking maybe a little bit, you know what? I don't have a single path. I want to move around. Maybe you'd like to think about that one. But I've given you lots of different things to think about. So hopefully your brains will be buzzing. But don't forget if you've got an EMA to focus on that one as well. So thank you today.

[MUSIC PLAYING]