

What's in your (Open) box? - 21 Jun 2022 - catch up

ISABELLA HENMAN: Good morning and welcome to our Student Hub Live broadcast this morning. Lovely sunny day where I am, although I'm inside at the moment. So this is a very exciting session for us because it's a sort of a hybrid session. So it's called "What's in your Open Box? And we're going to be talking about open study. As the Open University, we're also part of Staff Development Conference. So it's actually quite exciting that we have a lot of students with us today. But we've also got members of staff and colleagues who are joining us.

Now, HJ is our chat supremo, along with Sarah and Mary. So HJ, I understand we've already having some lovely conversations in the chat to start us off.

HJ: Yeah, absolutely. I'm really pleased that everyone's getting the sun. It's very sunny here in South Wales. And I know it's very sunny in Leeds as well Valerie tells us. I'm liking the fact that Barbara is doubling up on things and being very productive. She's ironing as well as watching Student Hub Live.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, no, no, no. Don't do ironing.

HJ: And Paula, which is really exciting because lots of people are doing the same, but Paula has just submitted an EMA for B100. And she's also got one more TMA and then the exam, and then she's done for the academic year. Looking forward to what's coming up next. But it's great having everyone introduce yourselves.

I'll be putting your thoughts, comments, and questions to our fantastic guests. So do introduce yourself. Let us know where you're studying, what you're from, and what you're thinking about what we're talking about as well because our guests would absolutely love to hear it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Thank you. So I went straight in there because I understand we've got lots of repeat people. I know we've got some new people. Everybody is always incredibly welcome. Student Hub Live is our community. It's cross modular, so we talk about different skills. We do online workshops to do with skills, and we're also doing these kind of sessions which is part of the Open Programme. And I've got a number of guests with me today.

Before I introduce them, just a couple of things about how the sessions work for those of you who are new or who may not remember. So you can interact in the chat. And there was a number of people there helping you in the chat. So there's HJ, Sarah, and Mary. And you should be able to see who they are because they've got SHL in front of them. And you should be able to see their faces, their nice smiley faces there as well at the moment. You've already seen HJ's smiley face.

And then there's some of us here that are guests who will be talking today. And I have got Cath with me, I have got Martin with me, and I have got Sally with me. And we will be talking about different things, exciting journeys. Aw, brilliant. Thanks Cath, for the wave. And Martin for the wave. Come on Sally, you want to wave. You know you do. Yeah, fabulous. Excellent. Thank you. I suppose I should wave too. Anyway, oh, it is a two handed one.

So with the sessions, you can engage in the chat. Often, we talk about all sorts of things, including chocolate, because chocolate tends to be one of the most important overriding factors of Student Hub Live in my experience. But do remember that don't share personally identifying information in the chat because this is going out live at the moment. And then the recording will be available later.

So we do have a number of things that we're going to be talking today in conjunction with this idea of what's in your open box. So we've got a first question for you to get you thinking I said about the Open

degree, and this is, have you ever considered doing an Open degree? Some of you maybe, some of you may be thinking about that. So what we're going to be talking about now is I'm going to be coming to Sally first. And this idea of what's in your Open box. And Sally's got a number of different ideas. And she's been involved in the Open degree. And it's open different doors for her.

And what she's going to do is she's going to bring out some props, which we love props other than chocolate. I don't think anybody's got chocolate props. But hey, you never know. Maybe we'll get some of those. So Sally, how would you tell us, what's the first thing that's in your Open box that you can tell us about?

SALLY: OK. Now, here is the first thing in my Open box. I'm not quite sure if you can see it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I can indeed.

SALLY: I can't imagine why I don't have chocolate, because clearly that would be one of my top recommendations for Open University study. So at the top of my props, there's an open door. So the Open University has always had an open door. And in the new advertisement that's on the telly just now and on the billboards and everything, it's an open door. So the door has always been open for me. So this little LEGO figurine that you can see on the step was me as a student a long while ago.

And I started as an Open degree student. I was completely convinced I wanted to be a physicist. And so I had all the modules mapped out. And it actually turned out that I really wasn't very good at physics at all. And so it was good that there was a broad base of interdisciplinary study. And I started the mathematics. And it just took off from there.

So at the time, my children were little. I was the first in my family to go to University. And I was teaching, dancing, I was singing, I was doing all kinds of creative stuff.

But the opportunity that the Open University gave me to gain an Open honours degree was incredible. So here was me there. And I was going up. And I could go into this open door at any time I Wanted but fast forwarding to now-- and I'll go back a little bit in time-- but do you see the Student Hub Live? That looks like the Student Hub Live couch down there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, indeed.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ISABELLA HENMAN: I thought you were the person balanced over on the side. I liked the idea that you were another person going woo.

SALLY: This is me now. This is me now. It is me. It is me now. So I'm going to tell you the middle bit of my journey, but just to finish off the first bit of the journey, my graduation ceremony, it was such an emotional, wonderful day. And my little boy, who was 8 at the time, said to me afterwards, you know, Grandad nearly clapped his hands off. And it's emotional for me now.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Aw.

SALLY: It was emotional for you then. This is a journey for everybody. So here's me now way out in a different faculty. So I was really all about mathematics. And I'll show you something else, another thing in my props later on.

But now, I'm doing practise research in a different kind of thing. It's nothing about mathematics whatsoever. It's about community and growth of collegiality and working with my wonderful tutors on that one. So I might dare-- Oops. and I've just pulled it off.

[LAUGHTER]

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, no.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SALLY: But it's OK because that's what you do in a research degree. You keep falling down. And believe me, I've had so many U-turns in my research. But it's OK, because you can kind find the door. And this will be me behind the door before too long. And Isabella, you must stop me when I say too much because I can talk about the Open University all day. This is Dougie. This is another prop.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Dougie's impressive. I just-- I just want to go back to the LEGO before-- we've had some comments about how good your LEGO model is, much better than any I've ever tried. And I was also-- what was it I just thought. I was thinking something to do with that. I was slightly worried that you had your back to the door initially. I think probably because you wanted to wave from the door, and you'd come out of it. But I thought it might be nice of you sometimes not thinking about having your back to the door but going through it.

I liked the way you were going in and out of the door, but making sure it's not sort of your back to it overall.

SALLY: I think for the door I just-- the door is always open, and I just have lots of different routes into it. And the thing about community, it's really good to the Open University community, including the Student Hub Live sofa here. And thinking about the wider societal issues, it's just so important for individuals to have those connections, because after all, that's all there is.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And I think that's it so before you go on to-- sorry, I know you keep wanting to get on to Dougie. And I'm sure he's going to do well. But you've mentioned this idea of societal challenges. Because that's part of our theme today, isn't it, and something that we're going to keep coming on about. And actually, I think you've sort of touched on that a bit, the you changed from physics to math and research. So far, you found that being open, it really helps you with your societal challenges and thinking about big questions?

SALLY: Definitely. I think certainly one example is-- and so this-- my journey was about my journey, but really the way to tackle societal questions is for everybody to think about their journey. And certainly in the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw how everybody played their part and how unimaginable solutions were forged by people doing-- the epidemiologists doing much cool stuff, mathematical modellers doing cool stuff, but people in the communities thinking, well, I can go shopping for people, and how the communities grew and massive societal problems were tackled in a local way.

I love the quotation by Margaret Mead, which I'll just read in case I get it wrong. And Margaret Mead is a wonderful ethnographer. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has," which I believe is still true, and everybody's got their own part to play.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. Thank you. So I keep interrupting you. Let's hear about Dougie then. So how does Dougie help you for your open study?

SALLY: So Dougie was given to me. And I hope I don't burst into tears again. Dougie was given to me by my son when I was studying my undergraduate degree. And he was saying, you know, it's hard, but here's a friend of yours. And at the time, we didn't have a Labrador. And we do now, but it was our family dream to have a Labrador. And every time with my research now, there's often moments that I just have no idea what to write. And it sometimes feels like it's getting on top of me.

But Dougie sits on my desk. And he's sat on my desk all the time. And it's a reminder-- and this links to sustainability and well-being as well. So well-being is a sustainable issue too. It's one of the big societal

issues. And remembering when you're studying that you have to remember why it is you're studying, what matters to you. And make sure that you do something other than studying as well. So Dougie reminds me that if I'm so stuck that I don't know what to write, which is practically all of the time, then he reminds me that there's other things as well.

Isabella, I don't know if I've talked too much. I've got another prop.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Let's hear very quickly, because I know you've got a maths book which was relevant wasn't it? Let's hear about that quickly before we come to HJ to see what people have been saying at home.

SALLY: OK. So with my open degree with the Open University, I did various things with other universities, and worked-- taught at schools and everything. And then my dream was to become an associate lecturer, which I did. So I came back. And then I got a full-time job with the Open University, which I still think is just one of the most wonderful jobs in the Open University. And I got the opportunity to be involved in this amazing module. And it's called MU123. I don't know if any of the students in the chat box have studied it. But U means that it's a Universal module. And people study MU123 because they have different intentions for maths. They might want a little bit because they're nursing or business or economics, as well as more maths as well. And I had the chance to be involved in the team writing and presenting MU123. And talking about societal changes, it's life-changing for students because they tell us. And I think we've given an MU123 award to around about-- I should know the number, shouldn't I, a mathematician, but I think we've given it to around 40,000 students, Isabella--

ISABELLA HENMAN: Wow that's loads.

SALLY: --which is totally amazing. And this morning, we had a meeting to award passes to another few thousand.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely.

SALLY: It's an immense privilege. And the Open University makes it all possible. And interdisciplinary study makes it all possible.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's a key thing. I've studied some interdisciplinary modules. And I'm involved in others myself as a tutor. And I love the bringing things together and thinking about things and the societal challenges and all the things. And you can look at them from all sorts of different ways. So thank you, Sally. That's been really helpful. HJ, we asked people about the Open degree earlier, but I'm sure that people have got tangential in the chat box. What kind of things have you been talking about?

HJ: Oh, as always I think everyone agrees with Rihanna when we say we love Dougie. What a great study buddy to have. I think Dougie is unlike other study buddies, where Dougie probably doesn't sit on your keyboard and interrupt your study.

But Rihanna says, "I love the idea of combining different subjects I'm interested in. I'm interested in doing the Open degree, thinking about children's literature, some child development, and sociology," which sounds like really complementary subjects.

Sarah's started an open degree as well, "looking at things like social work, social care, and psychology," which again sounds like a fantastic pairing. And this is the great thing about the Open degree, isn't it? We can be flexible and choose subjects that work for what we want to do. Alan and Mary who's helping us in the chat have completed MU123. And we completed it successfully. I completed MU123 as well.

SALLY: Yay!

HJ: It's a great module and it helped me brush up on my math skills.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Squeals from Sally.

HJ: And a few of us in the chat are doing access modules as well. So we're not quite sure where we want to go yet, but we're building a great foundation to help guide our choices in the future.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely. Thank you, HJ. Access is a passion of mine. I'm involved in Y033 and the fast track version, which is the STEM version of access. But yeah, very interdisciplinary, leads onto all sorts of things. And it's really good, and about building the skills and thinking. Some of my students are actually now thinking about a debate and how you actually use science and use factual information to consider different things, and don't get involved with different facts along the way. Yes. All sorts of exciting things there.

So we've got another question for you. So far, Sally's brought out some of her props-- her wonderful LEGO house, Dougie, and the book that represent her study, represent her Open journey. We're going to be coming on to talk to Cath and Martin about their objects. What kind of objects represent your study? So all of you that are listening and watching, have you got a specific object, other than mine clearly being chocolate, chocolate, and chocolate as my three objects. And I'm very sad that nobody actually had that as their item today.

But there you go. Anyway, right, I'll stop talking about chocolate. Now, Martin, let me come to you. So I know you've got a number of different items. And you want to share some ideas with us about how things have helped you in your Open journey.

MARTIN: Yeah, I have. So I'm the chair of the Open degree. So good to be here today. So I've got a number of items. I've even got a nice wooden box because I'm posh.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Ooh, very nice.

MARTIN: I won't pretend that I made it myself. Should I drop my first item?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Please. Yes, please. I'm very excited to see what it's going to be.

MARTIN: So the first item-- well, it's not as exciting as a LEGO house-- but it's a pack of cards. But I want you to think that it's really a game. So for copyright reasons, I couldn't bring out what I wanted to bring out, was a kind of particularly really good computer game. So my daughter, for instance, was really into playing Red Dead Redemption. I've just played that. So it's a kind of very realistic game set in the set in the Wild West.

And I think what those things demonstrate is that we really live in an interdisciplinary world. So if you think about designing something like that game, it's going to need historians who really can help them design it to make it look realistic, it's going to need computer programmers obviously, but people involved in marketing, people involved in psychology about how you kind of make that game give sufficient rewards. So I think we often think of interdisciplinary study in terms of the complex problems, like climate change or the pandemic.

And it is very important. You just see it everywhere. We live in an interdisciplinary society really. So things like computer games really can't exist without these people, these big groups that all have different disciplines, different skills talking to each other. But also it needs someone working in those teams who can get those people to talk to each other and understand their different perspectives. That's where the interdisciplinarian comes in. So the interdisciplinarian-- for want of a better phrase--

ISABELLA HENMAN: That sounds a bit scary.

MARTIN: It's as much a skill as a kind of very specialist skill. So I think we need to kind of really appreciate that. And particularly, I think in a digital society, we really break down a lot of the kind of boundaries between disciplines. So it needs people who can help bridge those gaps. So my first object is a game of cards, but really pretend it's a very complex, nice computer game.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, OK. But playing games I think is a nice way of thinking about study, because I think when you said interdisciplinarian, I just focused on the disciplinarian bit, which is why I said it's quite scary.

MARTIN: That's something else.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I'm just probably making it-- oh, that there-- that's different. But actually the interdisciplinary thing, that's the nice thing. And games are interdisciplinary. And actually having fun in study I think is really important whenever I'm doing things. I don't want to be serious.

And I think sometimes we can think, oh, study's got to be serious. And oh, it's interdisciplinary, which means, oh no, I'm getting the worst bits of all. No, no, not at all. You're getting the best bits of all of the study. And you can pick and choose. And I'm sure as you said, because you're the chair of the Open study, you actually get to see people-- the Open Programme. Sorry-- picking and choosing all these exciting things and going, wow.

And you do what you want to do, and what helps you in your study.

MARTIN: Yeah. When I first became the chair, I thought there'd be like one or two big pathways that students took. But actually, students combine all manner of modules into the pathways they want that suit their needs. And I think that's fantastic to see. It's often a kind of an aspect of flexibility and personalization that we don't often talk about. It's really exciting.

I think Sally talks about that, and HJ was saying some of the sort of combinations people come up in the chat. We think that's great. And if we don't need to say to you, these are the subjects you need to combine, people can go I need to combine these for my purposes. And that's really fabulous to see.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So just before you move on, just before you move on to that, we've had Anne-Marie said that, how do you actually register for an Open degree? So she's studying level 1 at the moment, but she doesn't know what to go on to do. So how? Can you give us a little bit of help there before you move on to your next item?

MARTIN: Yeah, yeah. So if you go to the OU website, the Open Programme is listed there. But you need to be named on a qualification. So you can just say I want to have my degree to be the Open degree. And that means that's what you're counting it towards.

You can study-- there's over 250 modules which are eligible for the Open Programme. So you can choose more or less what you want. But some of them do have prerequisites. So if you think you want to get to a-- take science example-- a third level physics course, that might well have some kind of maths requirements, so you would need to make sure you get those.

But yeah, there's plenty of advice. Speak to study advisors, go to the Open Programme on the website if you look at the qualifications pages. And Mary in the chat as well, so Mary can probably put some links in as well I think.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you for answering that.

MARTIN: Sorry to dump that on you Mary. I'm sure you can do that.

[LAUGHTER]



ISABELLA HENMAN: Keep her working. Keep her working away. So what have you got? What's your second item out of your exciting, posh wooden box then, Martin?

MARTIN: You want to see the posh wooden box again?

ISABELLA HENMAN: I do want to see the posh wooden box. I like wooden boxes. They're great.

MARTIN: So the next one-- a slight vanity choice-- but again, copyright considerations. So it's a book that I wrote called 25 Years of Ed Tech.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh, very good.

MARTIN: And what I wanted to think about was how we teach interdisciplinary studies as well. So this book is about education technology. And education technology itself is a very interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary subject. And I wrote a book which is kind of about the history of it. And my thing I did, it was openly-licensed, so it's free to download. You can just download it.

But that also means that people can take it and use it for other things. So someone got in touch with me and said, I want to create an audiobook version of your book. And I'm going to get different people to read each chapter.

And they can do that because it wasn't copyrighted. And then someone else said, what I'm going to do is run a podcast after each audiobook chapter has been released where we're going to get other people in this global community to discuss that chapter. And actually I think the podcast and the audiobook are more interesting than the book. The books are kind of basic. But I think what that shows-- and in those podcasts, people came in with different perspectives and different disciplines and different takes on my chapters.

Sometimes, they really sort of showed what I had missed and stuff. And that was great. But it really created a dialog around the book. And I think that's a really good example of what happens when you open up textbooks. So in the US and Canada in particular, there's been this movement around open textbooks. So they're openly-licensed textbooks you use, you can take and adapt, which is kind of interesting itself. But I think what's really interesting is when people get students to adapt those textbooks. And so you might have a book that's about a particular topic, but you ask students from another discipline or from their own experiences to come in and say add to this book. What is it missing? Why is it not talking about people who are similar to you? Often, we talk about people who are excluded from stories and stuff, so bring in your perspective. And so that sounds like quite a simple thing, but I think by opening up the textbook and allowing other people to contribute to it, particularly learners, I think it changes the nature of the relationship with knowledge.

It's not just something you're getting and receiving, it's something you're contributing to. And your own experience is valid. And you can bring different perspectives to it. So I think the idea of opening up how we teach things, I think is really important in interdisciplinary study.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And I think that also links in with our theme about the answering questions, because you were talking about students are to the same, but that's actually the differences and thinking about the big questions. And there's all sorts of big questions about differences of people and issues about where are people excluded. So I think that sounds like people could come in for that and saying actually, you've written this from this perspective, or these students from this perspective, but you know what, I'm actually different, but I'm not excluded because for me, it works in this way. Did you get anything like that?

MARTIN: Yeah, yeah. So you see people do that. And I think particularly depends on what you're teaching though. So a colleague of mine was teaching North American literature. And of course, lots of people are not included in those representations of literature. So as students went off and found a really good resource to say, well there's this story over here, but here's a version over here which gives a different account of those kind of things.

So I think bringing in different perspectives. But also I quite like to watch YouTube clips where experts talk about Hollywood movies. They say, look, this would never happen. So I love kind of having those experts come in and it's like-- even if it's like a fantasy like Lord of the Rings. I mean, this is not a valid army formation that would happen. So when you're having those kind of expertise brought in is actually kind of really-- and adds value to those things. That's what works.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely. Yeah, I think that's quite an interesting one. Yeah. I sometimes watch that kind of thing. And we're watching things and going, OK, I'm not a physicist. And like, Sally, I didn't even start off with physics, let alone carry on with physics. But I would look at some of those and go, my understanding of physics goes no, no, sorry. That doesn't work. No, you cannot drive a car in space. No. It doesn't work.

But yeah. It's like that kind of the study-- well, because you see, absolutely, because I do that for-- my study has told me that big societal challenge that the Hollywood blockbusters that are driving a car in space. No, sorry. My study answers that question quite effectively. Absolutely. So what's your third item then, Martin?

MARTIN: Third item I don't think is quite as cute as the Labrador. My third item is a GOGN penguin. So I ran a project called GOGN, which is a global community of PhD researchers in open educational resources that research in different aspects for open education. And what we do is try to create the community. It's often the only people who are researching that in their University. And so we bring them together once a year. And they get to meet other people who are like-minded and stuff.

And for some reason, we gave them stress penguins because doing a PhD can be quite stressful. And since then, the penguin has become the logo of our community. So all of our things have designed penguins on it. We did a conference recently, and the penguin was the logo. And people had penguin t-shirts on. So anyway, it's quite a cute penguin. But I think what that's about is really about trying to create community. I think sometimes that can be difficult for interdisciplinary students.

So you touched upon this earlier. And I think if you're studying psychology, then you're in a community of psychology students. But if you're studying different things, then I think that can be quite difficult to form that sense of community and cohort. And I think there's ways we can start to help people with that, whether it's giving people tools like owning their own domain, having their own blog space so they can start putting together the connections between the different disciplines and seeing how other people are doing it.

Or we provide courses like YXM130 that allow people to make those connections. But I think trying to help people think who are studying Open degrees to think of themselves as interdisciplinarians rather than just, I'm just gathering together lots of different things over here. I think that's kind of a really helpful thing too. And we can do more of that. So yeah, the penguin represents community. And having fun.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So I'm wondering-- a penguin. Why didn't you have a giraffe? I think the giraffe with a nice, fuzzy face and the-- what are they? Horns? Thing on the top. I thought that would have been fab. But, I guess a penguin is good.



MARTIN: It was-- we were buying the merchandise and the penguin was the cheapest option. So it's very pragmatic. But since then, who doesn't love a penguin?

ISABELLA HENMAN: No. This is true. Absolutely, yes. Yes. So trying to be slightly more sensible there. I think very good point. And I know what you mean about the community. We will come on. All three guests will be talking a bit more about community. And Student Hub Live is part of that community because any University-- brick universities, students go to the coffee shop, they go to the Student Union, they go to it. And they're there physically. And we do have tutorials obviously at the Open University. But I know what you mean about this.

Sometimes you think, I've got nothing. And it's not I've got nothing in common, but my study is not the same as these other people. So I'm not part of it. But within Student Hub Live, we're trying very much to build that community and say, it doesn't matter what you're studying, you're studying.

We're on learning journeys. We're doing all sorts of things. And that's really, I think, the key. And I think even with an Open, as you say, yes, OK, one person could be studying French, one person could be studying textiles in Ghana, one person American literature.

But you're studying. What are you learning? YXM130, I'm a tutor on that module. I know, it's brilliant for that because you're actually learning about learning at the same time as learning. But yes, absolutely. Thank you, Martin. That's been really interesting. We'll come back to you in a bit. But I understand, HJ, you've got lots of people who've got their items that represents their study. So come on. Other than chocolate, what kind of items represent study?

HJ: Well, some people definitely got chocolate in there, so that's kind of a given. I think Valerie said, "it's a great reward while studying, so we can't disagree with that whatsoever." But, yeah, we had some great contributions. So Jane says a banana. Now, me and Sarah did ask what this is about. But she says, we'll have to study U101 to find out. So that just makes it even more tempting. Dominique says, "I have a crow figurine for focus and about five different egg timers for sprints and breaks," which I think sounds like a good idea.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Sprints?

HJ: Michelle says from-- Sprints Yeah, maybe--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

HJ: Michelle says, "I was writing on boyhood and children's and young adults fiction, like in gender, culture, childhood studies mainly. I still have a set of cardboard cutouts from boy band One Direction from that time. And that about sums it up. It's great fun."

And I like what Linda said, as well. I think this is really fantastic. She said, "Knitting represents my study journey. I have various goals and knit bits together to come out with something that may be close to the original goal, or something completely different," which I think is a great representation.

Christine said, "I studied biological psychology module many, many moons ago. And in those days, we had--

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yay, that was my first module

[LAUGHTER]

HJ: Oh excellent. Christie says, "in those days, we had a model called Brian the Brain, and it still sits on Christine's desk." And where's another great. I'm just having a look because there's so many.

Paul has one I think we can all agree with. "I think what represents my study is about a million pieces of paper all around me, especially at TMA and EMA time." Oh, I know what that's like.

And Ruth, I like Ruth's one. She said, "In programming, there's a concept of rubber-ducking, explaining your code to a rubber duck." And she reckons we could do that with penguins as well, and maybe even giraffes, Isabella.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. You'd have to say quite loudly to the giraffe. But anyway, I can probably take that metaphor a little bit too far, so maybe we won't go on now. Brilliant. Thank you, HJ. And it's lovely. I think this idea of representing your study journey that I've been talking about with objects. Can be quite a good one, because sometimes the idea of pinning it down helps you to reflect-- those of you who are doing access often do reflection. So my students in access, they ask to reflect where you're coming from, what you're trying to do, and so on.

Now, I've mentioned this theme that's running through about big problems. So that's the next question also to be thinking about, is that how does Open study or how does it help you think about those big problems? Does interdisciplinary study help you with that kind of thing?

It's probably phrased in a slightly easier way. And it will come up on the screen. I've just sort of talked around it a little bit. And I'm going to come to Cath. It's great to talk to you, Cath, about things. I know that you've had all sorts of journeys. And you've been going through things.

And I know rubber ducks are probably something that you're quite familiar with in terms of the programming. So you've been a student. You've been involved in the Students Association. You were an associate lecturer. And you're doing all sorts of things. So you've got your open box, your representation. So how about you tell us-- what's your first object, and how does it help you represent your study?

CATH: So I have an actual box, but it's not a posh one like Martin's I'm afraid. Sorry. This is a student identity here. We don't get posh things, do we? So I've chosen objects to represent three of the specific modules in my Open degree that I finished a while ago now. So here is the first one.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Ooh.

CATH: And this is--

ISABELLA HENMAN: That looks like Grumpy Cat.

CATH: Yep. But he is grumpy, you see, because he's Schrodinger's cat. And so he's a bit fed up with being half dead and half alive. And he represents quantum mechanics. That was one of the modules I studied in my Open degree. And it probably sounds like "quantum mechanics-- oh, that's just physics." Sorry, Sally.

But in fact, it's in itself, quite within science, quite interdisciplinary in the sense that it is actually the foundation of modern chemistry. There was quite a lot of work going on now in quantum biology. And obviously maths is fundamental to it.

So in itself, it's actually fundamental to a lot of modern science. It's fundamental to a lot of modern technology. So that, I think, illustrates quite nicely why we don't see the sciences in isolation and how much of what we do today and what we rely on depends on things like quantum mechanics.

Shall I go for my next one?

ISABELLA HENMAN: --relies on chocolate for me rather than quantum mechanics. Sorry, I'm just going to.

CATH: Can we have quantum chocolate? Can we have quantum chocolate?

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK, OK. Yeah. We can have quantum chocolate. Yeah, I'll give you that one.

That's fine. OK. But I mean, the cat thing. I think even if you hadn't have said quantum mechanics, I'd have gone, yeah, a lot of study relies on damn cats and dogs. We were talking about them earlier. Sally's

got her dog that was-- I think has been quiet in the background. Hasn't actually-- well, Sally got a model dog. She's got an actual dog behind her, which I think has been quite quiet, which is quite-- but I think you're probably quite pleased about that, Sally.

But we have all study buddies. We have all animal friends. And for many people, they really do help us through study. So that's fine. Sorry. That was another little tangent, Cath. Right. What's your next object? It's not quantum mechanics again, is it? Is it something I can understand?

CATH: It's a robot.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Now, can I understand robots?

CATH: Oh, I'm sure you can. He's a very cute robot, isn't he? You just have to turn the key, and then he walks. So he's very nice. And that comes from a lovely little course module I did called Robotics and the Meaning of Life. And I just studied it because I loved the title. And it was an amazing mixture, because we had actual ideas about programming robots. And I actually acquired some LEGO MINDSTORMS, because I kind of wanted to, and I wanted to play with robots and have an excuse to play with robots. But it was also talking about the idea of what's going on with artificial intelligence. One of the things we were sent was Isaac Asimov's I, Robot novel about various robots and the laws of robotics. And in our final assessment, we were comparing fictional AIs with what's actually going on in the real life as well. So it was coming in some quite profound ideas about what do we even mean about artificial intelligence and some practical things about how the ideas behind robotics and AI can actually help us in our everyday life.

Now, I did this quite some time ago, so it's a bit out of date compared to what we actually see now, where we see lots of robotic things, automated cars, and those sorts of things that are becoming far more every day. And I thought one of the things I liked about that was the fact that it brought together these two strands about the thinking about the general principles as well as the actual playing with actual robots.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. It actually reminds me-- the second module I studied as a student way back in time was called Damaged Brains and Neural Networks. And we got to try-- and it was probably a lot more simplistic than the robots-- but we had to Programme very, very basic things to show how learning would happen. So I think it was the forerunner to AI, because we're going back the best part of 20 years now. But I remember finding that absolutely fascinating, because it was like, well, if this bit gets damaged, the learning-- and it was a computer-based learning-- but this is what happens.

But it didn't always happen in the same way. And I think it was very interesting. And thinking about the big challenges-- and what was the second half of your title? Robotics and--

CATH: The Meaning of Life.

ISABELLA HENMAN: The Meaning of Life. So that kind of idea. My one was Damaged Brains and Neural Networks. It was essentially neuropsychology and science. But yes, it was very much the thinking about the AI thing, and where does this go? What does it mean? You could take that quite a long way. I'm sure you could have really interesting discussions about that in the well, here's it from a scientific perspective, narrow perspective, but opening it up. Wow. All sorts of things. Yes, very interesting. So what's your third item, then, Cath?

CATH: My third one's quite big. I'm just going to have to lean across to get it. It wouldn't quite fit in the little little box. It's London.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Ooh lovely.

CATH: So I've got London. Well actually a few different things. Part of my module, I did was some engineering modules. And obviously, we've got some lovely large-scale engineering there. But what I really wanted to refer to was a fantastic module, sadly long gone, called Cities Technology from Babylon to Singapore. And that's the most interdisciplinary thing I have ever studied. It gave ideas from obviously that technological development, but also sociology, history, the works.

And understanding interaction between a city and the technology understanding that it's not just about technological drivers on their own, that you've got this whole reaction between environment [INAUDIBLE] that affects how technologies are implemented and used. It was fascinating. And we got at the end to do an EMA that was entirely of our own accord any city, any technology, the impact. It was well, the toughest module, but it was-- still remains my favourite.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fab. Lovely. And I think we've got a few connection problems with you, Cath. So what I'm going to do is I'm just going to go to HJ and see if we can sort out your connection problems so we can hear a little bit more about that. Because I wanted to know about how those different ones went. So HJ, we were talking about the big problems, we were talking about the items. What else have you got to share with us?

HJ: So I think Rihanna as an excellent, everyday problem that we're probably all encountering that could use an interdisciplinary approach. So Rihanna says, "Would it help our understanding in the rise of the cost of petrol?" So an understanding of economics, engineering, sociology, psychology. I reckon economics and politics could go in there. And I think it really shows the value of us doing like open degrees and being interdisciplinary and having a broad approach to solve these problems, to use all our thoughts and understanding.

But do let us in the chat-- what other problems do you think we're facing that could benefit from an interdisciplinary approach, whether it's a small problem about getting our pavements fixed outside and potholes dealt with, or a big worldwide problem. Let us know what you think. We'd love to hear it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And actually, you've just mentioned about worldwide. Now, we know at the start that we had a few people that said that they weren't in the UK. And when we do the workshops, we often do things. So on our map, you should be able to see that. Let us know where you are. And if you're somewhere other than the UK, we're talking about things-- obviously, we're an Open University. We are in all sorts of different countries. And also the community is all sorts of different places.

We mentioned the cost of petrol. And often, I think, oh, it's something that only affects the UK. But I've seen it affects a number of other countries as well. And Cath was mentioning her module from Babylon to Singapore. Let's see if we've actually got-- obviously, Babylon, I think if my geography is correct, doesn't exist anymore. But Singapore does. So Cath, is your connection OK? Can we hear you now?

CATH: I hope so. Any good?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great. Yes. Yeah. You were sort of a little bit actually a little bit robotic and a little bit crackly. So unfortunately we couldn't hear you. So just going back to the Babylon to Singapore thing, what was your takeaway on how that helped you understand the big issues in terms of open and our theme for today?

CATH: I think the big takeaway was that if you ever try to say something has one single cause or a one-dimensional solution coming from just one area, then you're wrong. It's never as simple as that. I think it really convinced me, someone who I might add before that was largely a very hardcore STEM person, it actually convinced me of the importance of the social sciences.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Oh good. There it is then. I remember when I was doing a postgraduate module in terms of education but it was quite an interdisciplinary one. And I had always, as you said-- the hardcore STEM; that was definitely me. And it was like, knowledge is mine. It's in here. And they were going, oh, no, no. Knowledge and learning is participation and I was like oh, no, no, no, no, no. We don't do that in STEM. No, no, no. Because we take it. And they were like, you learn from each other. And I had to embrace that.

And it was like, oh, you do don't you? You do actually learn from each other. And the community of learning-- I know you've been parts of all sorts of communities of learning. Often, you say that sometimes it's this, you don't want to, but actually you realise that you can. And some things aren't correct. And there was one thing you said. Was it you said that nothing was wrong, or it was definitely wrong? Which way around did you say it there?

CATH: I said, if you're just looking at it from one single perspective or thinking there is one single cause, then the chances are you're wrong.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. Yeah, that's it. And sometimes, when we're going and when we're learning as students, there may be some facts that are the correct facts. But often, it's a case of-- when you're learning, when you're doing the skills, it's how do you learn? How do you embrace these things? And interdisciplinarity is very much about that. There's lots of different ways of thinking about things.

So what we're going to do for the remainder of the session is I've got all three guests, and we're going to be talking about community and community and these interdisciplinarity things. I'm not going to say interdisciplinarian, Martin, because I still find that word scary. But these different concepts. Now, Student Hub Live is a community in the first place. And a question for everybody that's watching and listening is, how do you engage with your community?

Obviously, everybody that's here and engaging with the chat and listening at the moment is engaging with the community. Is there any other ways that you think about it? So Sally, I'm going to come to you first. So how do you think Open Study helps with this idea of community and helping us with questions, if that's not too big a question?

SALLY: And that's my dog barking outside. Sorry. I thought going back to my LEGO might help a little bit, because in terms of community-- so here I am facing the door now. I've got myself back on track, I've written loads of chapters. And then there's lots of other students at the other side saying, come on up. But what I wanted to say was-- we've got lots of nice steps. The Open University is good at giving you steps on your journey. So if it's an interdisciplinary journey, you can plan it yourself. But there's lots of steps. But sometimes when you get to this step, you can see the door-- it's open, you can see people who've gone through it, but you need just that little bit of motivation. And I'm sure that Cath could say loads and loads about this. But other students, if you can connect with other students-- and Students Hub Live is an amazing way of doing this. And I think Student Hub Live is a wonderful thing and idea and place and community. And so if you can-- and we're doing we are doing this from the perspective of module teams, working with tutors to help students to make those local connections.

Because if you're on your journey just finding the motivation to keep going, it does come from your tutor sometimes, but it's from other students saying, yeah, yeah, yeah, you can do it. Let's just keep-- and then we can swap cat and dog stories or Dougie stories. It's Dougie again. But do stop me if I have asked you a question, but I met I think somebody you know at the weekend, the lovely Dr. Steven McNair, who teaches in psychology and who teaches in statistics as well.

And going back to your idea of the interdisciplinarity and how to tackle bigger questions like that, from his perspective teaching both, you look at reflection in a different way. So if you're a mathematician, you tend not to really want to talk about reflection at all. And as Cath said, if you come in from a STEM perspective, what's this reflection all about anyway? And I've become a great devotee of the social sciences as well. But in an interdisciplinary journey, you look at really important things like reflection because that's a big issue thing as well.

Because if you want to know which way forward to go, then clearly embracing where you've been is a really important thing to do.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Absolutely.

SALLY: And profoundly important thing to do. And if you have different ways of looking at that-- so for example, Steven was thinking about his psychology students, how they approach reflection, and statisticians, how they had a different approach to reflection. So if you're a student studying across different faculties and you come upon similar ideas, but you look at them in slightly different ways. And then that helps you to determine your own worldview. And it's taken me a long time to figure out my worldview.

But within the Open University, there is a way for you to do that however you choose to. And it's your degree, your choice in an interdisciplinary approach.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And I think that's quite interesting. And I like the idea of the social sciences. And often, I know what you mean. People go, oh, we don't want to necessarily think about social sciences. But we all-- because we are all social beings, whether we want to be sociable, we are social beings because we're humans, because we have cognition, we talk, and we have verbal. So I think this idea of the reflection within it and how you do it-- I think, again, going back to this idea of the hardcore STEM idea.

Often, we're very much fact. Here we go, do, do, do. And the maths works like that way. How do we know? Because we've got the numbers that back it up. How do we know the physics? Because we've got the experiments. We these kind of things. But looking for reflection and thinking, well, where have I come from? As you say, you know where you're going from where you've come from. And thinking about it. And it's an interesting one.

So Martin, because you probably get quite a holistic view of this, being the chair of the Open, what do you see in terms of the community of the Open project? And do you see that the Open degree has this community or is it something else that leads to it?

MARTIN: A bit of both. I think some students on the Open Programme, even though they're studying the Open Programme see themselves as predominantly within one discipline or within one sort of area of study particularly mainly STEM, say, or perhaps it may be a couple of other subjects elsewhere. And other students really do see themselves as kind of fully interdisciplinary. And I think there's been a number of things that kind of helped with that fostering that community. And I think Student Hub Live is definitely one of those.

So we ran a session last year on tackling complex problems or wicked problems that they're called through this kind of approach. But also, I think you see a lot of it on social media. And there's lots of bad things about social media that I won't go into now, but it does kind of help blur some of those boundaries. So you see people making connections whether it's via Facebook, Twitter, wherever. So people aren't kind of constrained within their boundaries.



I think for those of you who did summer school, it reminds me a bit of summer school sometimes. I remember I'd used to be there and there would be like completely different courses going on at the same time. There'd be like social sciences and programming or whatever. And they'd all be in the bar of the cafe at the end of the day kind of thing. And it was always an easy mix. I think we have to admit that sometimes. People come with very strong discipline views.

You'd get to learn to see each other as people and sometimes understand different perspectives I think. And sometimes, that kind of informal mixing was really beneficial. So I think finding ways that we can facilitate that online is going to be really useful. So I often think of people like computer programmers. A lot of my friends are developers. But I think increasingly they've become aware-- and it's become more apparent-- that they need to have an understanding of issues such as ethics and social science.

You don't just-- computer programmes aren't neutral. They have an impact in society. You need to kind of understand that in the development stage. And similarly, I think social scientists can could benefit from understanding how developers operate and what software can do and how networks operate. So I think creating forums or situations where those two people can bring their own perspectives to bear on the other one is going to be really useful for our students and I think for them as individuals going forward. So I think carry on doing what we're doing with Student Hub Live. And I think finding other ways to get those to mix. And I think through social media is a really good platform.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. It's interesting-- I used to be involved in the apprenticeship Programme. And I was part of the English functional skills. And we used to set a discussion. So people had to do a vocal discussion like this. And once the pandemic happened, it was all through online. And one of the questions one of my colleagues used to pose was, "is social media a force for good or force for evil?" And it was very interesting because people came at it from different perspective. And there was always a number of different students.

And some people come saying, oh, it's really bad because you just have trolls. And then somebody else would say, but I actually have made some really good friends and I can keep in touch with my family in Australia who I haven't spoken to for ages. So I think anything you can look at, there can be negatives, there can be positives. But bringing them together, and like you said, the meeting in the bar in the evening, some of it might be a bit stilted and a bit challenging. But sometimes, it's the learning from other people.

And I know Cath, you probably saw that quite a lot. I know it was your previous role when you were the Open University Students Association president. But I know because you did the Open Programme and now you're tutoring on a number of different modules, you, I guess, see things from lots of different perspectives or people from lots of different perspectives.

CATH: Definitely. And for me, it's quite an interesting one deciding which hat I'm actually wearing in some cases like that. I mean, I really relate to the comments that have been made so far. I mean, I think what Martin says about the meeting in the bar is really important. And ironically, the first time I met Sally was actually at residential school. when she was actually looking at things like how to get students to kind of connect and enjoy these sorts of things.

But I think doing it online is a challenge, but we spent quite a lot of time in the Student Association working on that in 2020 when the lockdown first hit and trying lots of different things out. And we were all forced to experiment then, weren't we? Because routinely, the Student Association ran lots and lots of face-to-face meet ups. And incidentally, they were never subject-specific. I made friends in our

Birmingham meetup with people studying arts and humanities, business, and law, all sorts of different things.

But trying to replicate that online is the next big challenge. How do we create those informal spaces? How do we do the equivalent of the chatting in the bar or over a coffee?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, absolutely. And I think it's interesting, because we're talking about online. Obviously, we're online at the moment. We're doing this from a distance perspective. Sometimes in Student Hub if you see back to the Student Hub Live things a couple of years ago, we used to be in the studio and we were all able to see each other and we were physically there. But the world has changed. We mentioned the pandemic earlier. And things have changed. And I'm not saying-- we're not saying that the online is the be-all and end-all.

But the reality is a lot of us do things online. We are doing things from different perspectives. I haven't forewarned you, but Sally, what would you say if you were trying to encapsulate it? What would you say was your biggest challenge about doing things online and the biggest benefit? And I'll come to you Martin and Cath. So the biggest challenge about doing things online and the biggest benefit in terms of what we're talking about overall? Sally, what do you think?

SALLY: OK. And I think having the facilitator do online things is great because it means that everybody has a chance to participate. And I think I'm going to answer this question in a slightly different one from how you expect, but a challenge with that is that I do worry-- and this goes back to sustainability and well-being-- that people need to see each other sometimes. And we can have online, but I think it needs to be punctuated with bits of opportunities to meet face-to-face as well.

And during the pandemic maybe some of us-- I work from home most of the time, we've got used to working from home. But I just worry if on an ongoing basis for building sustainable academic communities, do we need to make the provision for face-to-face as well? But always online is going to be there. We're getting better and better at knowing how to do it. And I need to give a big shout out actually to one of the organisers of this event today, because we had an event in Scotland at the weekend where tutors came together face-to-face if they felt comfortable to.

And if they didn't, there was online participation as well. And the feedback from people who were invited to this event was that the opportunity for face-to-face was very, very important with the hybrid and the online crucial too. But just in terms of thinking going forwards about how we want to emerge from the pandemic, you know, we don't want to travel lots of distances, but neither do we want to be wholly online. And there's a whole-- I mean, I think we've only started discussions on there.

Because in terms of helping to build communities, to build connections to different communities within the Open University, to move forwards to achieve all of our goals, it is about nurturing collegiality, building trust, and how we do that. So it's an open question. Sorry, I don't think I answered your question there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: You sort of have. I think it fits in. I know I'm just sort of I'm pin-pointing it on online as part of it, but it fits in with interdisciplinarity. And I know I said I was going to come to you Marty and Cath. Hopefully, I will.

We've actually had quite a few comments come in with questions from students. So Julia said, "The best experience she had was at a residential school. And she's attended some great conferences." And Paula, you'll be pleased with this one for your previous role, Cath, Paula has just registered with the Students Association. She's going to look more into that.

Ruth said, "It would be great to have an interdisciplinary space with channels for different interdisciplinary things of interest." Yeah, absolutely. Because we're talking about these things, and we're saying that. And sometimes, it's a case of, where do we go? Where do we go? We've got this. We're all doing these different things. How do we meet up with different people? Angela was saying, "As a disabled student, studying online is the only option I have. But it has enabled me to make contact with other people I couldn't have done otherwise."

And absolutely. And that's the thing. I mean, we're talking about it from the pandemic. But for many people, online was something they did all the time anyway. You read books, and there's characters in it. And they study with the Open University because they can't leave their home. I think it's not a negative thing. It's actually a really positive thing. And yes, we're still talking about the interdisciplinarity because it's part of this holistic way of doing things.

There's also another question. Justin's asking, he's bouncing the idea of doing the Open degree as a discipline instead of specialising. Is there a decision-- is it something we have to do-- Martin, you're probably the best person to answer that one, if the question made sense.

MARTIN: You need to be registered on a qualification, but you can switch qualifications. So if you say you want to go for the main degree, for the Open degree, that doesn't mean you're precluded from going for anything else. But of course, if you want to do a named degree, then there will be a definite pathway and definite modules you need to include. So you need to think. If you're weighing up between the Open degree and a specific named degree, you might want to think about what options would it involve you taking further down the line? So you wouldn't want to kind of preclude anything. But do the Open degree it's fantastic.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yes. Go Open. We want Open. Yeah. So we're almost out of time. So HJ, I just want to come to you, not that you're last but not least. But you had lots of ideas of people meeting up and how they've been building their own communities.

HJ: Yeah. We've been talking about how we engage and build a community within the OU. So Jane had a great one. "I sometimes try to engage with my community through art, which is fascinating as meanings change-- meanings change."

Alan says, "On DD102 102, the use of the form is baked into the TMA." So I'm sure Alan is a dab hand at these forums. Linda's got a great one. I love this. "I spot people wearing OU hoodies on the school run and stop then for a chat." Isn't that brilliant that you can-- it's someone you may not know, but you've got this connection just through the OU. And instantly you click.

You know what doing the TMA is like. And Karen says, "I'm in a Zoom group of students on my last module. And as we're following different paths, it's great for getting different perspectives on your subject." So lots of great contributions there. And I just want to thank everyone for joining us in the chat because we've had some amazing contributions.

And it's been fantastic chatting to you all here in your study journeys. For everyone starting out, we've all been there. We know it's nervous just signing up, waiting to start. But we know you'll do amazing.

And I can't wait to see you all again soon at our next Student Hub Live sessions. We've got lots more to come, so do check out the website. And I'll chat to everyone again soon.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Thank you, HJ. You've almost said all the things I was going to say. So I always finish with this. And this is one sentence, so a one-sentence summary if you can of this idea of today. So this is a one-sentence summary of why interdisciplinarity answers the questions. Cath, go.

CATH: Interdisciplinarity enables you to consider multiple perspectives, which is what we need to solve complex problems.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you, Cath. Martin.

MARTIN: In a digital network society, nearly everything is interdisciplinary. And as the advert says, the future is Open.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. Sally.

SALLY: Interdisciplinarity gives you the choice, the control for your degree, your choice, your perspectives.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant. Thank you. HJ. I know you'd almost finished, but you don't get away with that. The one-sentence?

HJ: I don't know if I can make it one sentence, but I always think interdisciplinary study is a great way of building community and working together.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Fantastic. Thank you, HJ. So we've given you lots of things to think about today, even if we still struggle with actually saying the word interdisciplinarity because it's one of the ones that I say it so much and I still mess it up. So we do need lots of different ideas of representing study with items. So maybe you think about your items. Think about the community that you want to build, part of the Student Hub live community.

And as HJ says, look at our website. We've got various different events still coming up. And then also thinking about how being open, being interdisciplinary allows you to think about big questions. So hopefully, we've given you lots to think about. And not last but not least, obviously, chocolate is the thing that underpins a study very successfully, as long as it's dark chocolate.

But thank you very much for attending today and watching. And I hope we've given you lots of really good ideas. And see you at another session soon.