

# FASS Freshers Event 2022 - 27 Sep 2022 - Student Voices in FASS

ISABELLA HENMAN: Welcome back, everybody, to our fourth and final session probably, actually, the most important one because it's all about students. So it's people just like you. So I've got Bev with me. I've got Sue with me. And I've got Claire with me. All of who have studied are studying at the moment and have got some really useful things.

So you've just watched a video about mentoring, and I'm going to come to Sue and Claire in a little while because they both experience of this, but Bev, I wanted to come to you first. So you've been studying quite a while, not making any aspersions, but you've had quite a chequered journey. So can you tell us a little bit about what made it a chequered journey, and what really helped you as a student?

BEV SMIT: Yeah, I think I started my first degree, I think, in 2011, something like that. I've got no commitments, nothing at all. And then I think within about six weeks I was a carer for four people.

ISABELLA HENMAN: OK.

BEV SMIT: And I've also got a cousin who'd had a major accident, so we're rushing to the hospital to see him as well. So everything went a little bit pear-shaped. So student support was really good. Letting your tutors know what was good. What was happening, I mean. And also, just taking a little bit of time out for yourself to do that study, and to say, now, this is my time.

And I've had to defer, and I have found a module. So I know what that's like. But it's not the end of your journey. It's just a little step back. And then you take five steps forward, and then you graduate like me, and then you sign up for another degree.

ISABELLA HENMAN: [LAUGHS]

BEV SMIT: So doing this, it's your own journey. Don't be influenced by others, just take your time and just contact student support.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think that's a really useful thing. So several of the things you've said there are quite resonant with things that we mentioned earlier. So we had Njabulo from Student Support earlier saying, talk. Richard was very blunt about saying, if poop happens, let people know, communicate. And Blaithin, as a tutor, was saying make sure you chat to a tutor. And that's really quite an important thing of making sure that you communicate with your tutor.

So things happen. Everybody has a study journey. It wiggles around all over the place. I like that idea that if one step back, five steps forward. I nearly said it the wrong way around. That wouldn't be so positive, would it? So that's actually really useful.

So Damon, I wanted to come to you. We didn't mention you in the last session. I know that you were beavering away answering questions. What kind of things have we had coming in from our students, our viewers whilst we've been looking at other things?

DAMON: Oh, a whole stack of things. There's a big discussion about food for a start. There's a big discussion about the return of face-to-face study this year, and so people are looking forward to that. Some people obviously prefer the online tutorials because travel and other issues possibly because they're caring or family commitments.

Some people started studying with the pandemic, so that's made a big difference. There is a question, probably for a little bit later on, about mentoring and how to apply. And who gets to be a mentor or mentee. So, yeah, there's a whole stack of things coming through, but people being very, very positive at the moment.

ISABELLA HENMAN: And I like the fact that you're talking about food. I managed to keep getting that food conversation going on. [LAUGHS] So I'll come back to you, Bev, in a little bit, but actually, because we had the question about mentoring, Sue, I know that you head-up our mentoring scheme. I don't know whether that's the right way of saying it. So could you tell us a little bit about what that actually means in terms of the mentoring scheme?

SUE WATKINS: Yes, that's fine. I'm involved in the mentoring scheme. And it's been growing over the past three years. We've now got four modules that we cover. So that's A111 Discovering the Arts and Humanities, DD102 Introducing the Social Sciences, DD105 Introduction to Criminology, and DE100 Investigating Psychology One.

We get the message out to students by sending them emails initially. They'll get a link on there, which they can just click on, and then they just need to follow the steps. It's very easy. I'm going to say that, aren't I? And the message is also shown in various other places on Student Home, on the Bulletin Board, so the notices that they get on the right-hand side of their Student Home on the module websites.

So there are lots of places to go. If there is anything that they can't find, then they can always come to us at [fass-peermentoring@open.ac.uk](mailto:fass-peermentoring@open.ac.uk). But basically, they're there to join up with what, in a face-to-face university, would be their buddy. So we're calling the mentors mentoring buddies. And the mentees are the opposite side. So the ones starting the level one modules. And the mentoring buddies are the people who have passed one of those four modules in the last presentation.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great, it's almost like the expert but non-expert voice. The yes, I've been through this, so you know what? This is what would be really useful. This is what would be-- yeah.

SUE WATKINS: Exactly we like to.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So they're not a tutor. They're not taking the place of a teacher.

SUE WATKINS: No, absolutely not, no, they're not there to ask anything about the module, anything about the TMAs or EMAs or anything like that. They are there just to act as a buddy. If you've got any, what you might term, silly question, then these are the people to go and ask. They've been there. They've done it. They've got the t-shirt. So they know how you might be feeling and can help you through that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Brilliant, thank you.

SUE WATKINS: It's support is what we're offering.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, that sounds great. So Claire, I know that you have been, as Sue said, on the other end. So you have been a mentee. Have I got that the right way around? You have been a mentee.

CLAIRE: I've been a mentor.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Mentor. [LAUGHS]

CLAIRE STURGE: So I had previously done the module DD105, and then I saw the link on Student Home that you could go in and say that you would be a mentor for the following year. And I'm really pleased I did. And it's really just there to help students. Like you say, you're not a tutor, but it's offering reassurance and especially being new to the Open University, distance learning no one really gets it until you start doing it if you haven't done it before.

So as a mentor, we're just giving them the reassurance that what they're doing is correct. Where to go, where to look on the systems because they might think, oh, I don't want to pester my tutor with this. Where do I go? And I was just like, well, no, you look on your Student Home and the resources that are available. So it's building their confidence, and they're then able to do it by asking their tutors having that extra confidence knowing that they can come to me as well.

ISABELLA HENMAN: That sounds really useful. So we've got a ticker question for people. So when I say ticker question, it's one that goes out. So just basically, do you think you'd be interested in a mentoring scheme? So Sue mentioned the modules that actually have mentoring, so it's not that they're all there. But we thought it would be a useful thing to ask because we know that some people have said they're not that interested. They don't want to, but we just thought we'd be interested to know how many people are interested. So Bev, I don't know when you were studying was there a mentoring scheme at all when you were studying? Or was that something that came after your time?

BEV SMIT: No.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Do you think it sounds like something that might have been quite useful?

BEV SMIT: Yeah, probably, probably for me. It wasn't around when I was studying.

ISABELLA HENMAN: So I know--

BEV SMIT: I think it's useful for a lot of students, especially younger students, I think.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, so I know you mentioned earlier about the fact that you've been a carer and things like that. So I know the OU has a Carers Network, but that's a relatively new thing as well. So I guess it's the sharing experiences because Simon says you're a legend. He's very impressed that you were very honest about your experiences.

So if you were to say to somebody, sort of encapsulate, what would you like people to know from your experience to help them?

BEV SMIT: That it's possible. Yeah, it is difficult sometimes. Sometimes, you do want to throw your laptop and scream, but there is help out there. And just enjoy your journey. It's for you. Every step you take, every TMA that you submit is an achievement. So just enjoy your journey and be proud of what you're doing, yeah.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely, thank you, thank you, Bev. And Sue, I know that there's been some quite positive feedback from the mentoring scheme. So what kind of feedback have you had from people that have been involved that have said how it's benefited them and then their journey?

SUE WATKINS: Well one of the phrases that comes to mind is that people, when they first start, feel out of their depth. And as a student myself, just started A802, which isn't on the mentoring scheme, but I wish it was because when I looked at everything I needed to read, I felt quite overwhelmed. And I would have liked to have had someone to talk to. So that's a personal experience there.

So those people who were mentees last time felt like that and are now able to offer the support that they were looking for when they were new to the modules. So they want to return that support. And the mentees are looking forward to having someone that they can chat to and ask for directions and just go to if they've got something that's on their mind that, as Claire was saying, they don't want to bother their tutors about.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Great, so can you just remind people, because we've got quite a lot of students have actually said yes, they would be interested, can you remind people how they'd know if the mentoring scheme is actually on their module? You said about an email. That they'll get a direct email.

SUE WATKINS: Yes, all students on those four modules will be getting an email from us, which will be next week. So the link will be on there. They just need to click on that, and they can start their journey that way. If they don't get an email, then it will be on the module site, and it will be on their Student Home. So just look around. If you haven't been contacted, then you can look at that, or as I say, contact us if all else fails on the team mailbox, which is [fass-peermentoring@open.ac.uk](mailto:fass-peermentoring@open.ac.uk).

ISABELLA HENMAN: Right, thank you very much. And Claire, I wanted to come back to you and your experiences. I know that you're now in your fourth year. So you've been a mentor and things. Now, do you feel that you are relatively sorted as a student now? Do you think how to go about everything, or are you still learning?

CLAIRE STURGE: Oh, I think you're still learning even when you get to the last module of your degree. It's just you learn something new every module that you do. And I say every TMA you do because there'll always be something comes up that you're not going to know. But I would say the main thing is making sure you know to reach out because a lot of people just don't realise that you have to reach out and ask for that support. No one's going to know that you need it until you do ask.

So in my previous module, I got to that point where I kept saying, no, no, I'll be OK, and I fell behind. And I should have just contacted my tutor straight away because they would have helped me, but it got to I was three-weeks behind, and your mind builds up with worry.

But I had a conversation with the Student Support team. I then spoke to my tutor, and it was actually resolved. They were able to help me put a plan in place to get back on track. I passed the module. And a bit like Beth said earlier on, you're going to have your fails and your wins. And I didn't get the best score for that TMA, but I improved for the next one. So I learnt how to go on.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Lovely, yeah, I think that's probably the key thing is it's about feedback. It's about that study journey. It's about developing along the way. Sometimes, things are wrong. As Bev said, she had a chequered history. Things didn't always work out going backwards and forwards, but actually it's progressing.

So we're almost out of time today. So I wanted to come over to Damon, one last time, to hear what kind of things have been going on in the chat since the last time I came to you.

DAMON: Yeah, there's a lot of interest in the mentoring. So people, obviously, wanting to get involved. Some people saying it's a shame that they didn't go through it last year. There's a question about whether it's available or whether it'll be available for masters. Obviously, it's not as yet. Obviously, it's a rolling-out scheme at level 1 at the moment.

There's also some discussion about the size of the forums and how having lots of people in the forums can be a bit intimidating. So having someone to mentor people through or chat with them to help them through is quite a help. So yeah, generally people looking forward to studying wanting a bit of help and a hand held if they need it.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, and I think that's the key thing because most people, I think it was about 74% wasn't it, were brand-new students just starting out. And my study buddy has just decided he wants to come and say hello. He thinks I've been talking to long. Oh, he's wet. Baby, you're damp. You've been out in the rain. [LAUGHS] So I'll just leave him standing over there.

So yeah, so those of you who are just starting out, yes, often the welcome forms can be a little bit busy, but once you get into your tutor group forum, it's probably about 15, 20 people. I guess the message about the mentoring if it isn't available on your module at the moment, get in touch and say, you know

what? I think this would be really useful. If lots and lots of people get in touch, it may well be rolled out. We can't necessarily guarantee that. I can't say that, but it could be.

Now, you'll see that there's a feedback form in the chat pod at the moment. We always try to gather feedback from our sessions to make sure we're doing the best possible thing we can possibly do, so do please feel that in for us, and hopefully, you've got lots and lots of ideas. It feels like we've covered so many things today.

It's great that we've had Bev and Sue and Claire at the end to give you some of that student idea. And I know lots of people are now very interested in the mentoring, so I think you're going to have lots of people emailing going please, please, please. But hopefully, that's been a really good session for you. And you're feeling now that you're ready and prepared to do carry on with your study in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. And we hope to see you another session again soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]