**Being an OU Student – OpenLearn Badged Open Course**

**Diane Butler, Cath Brown and Isabella Henman**

Hello everybody my name's Diane Butler and I'm a Senior Lecturer in the STEM Faculty. I'm here today to talk to you a little bit about tutorials and what they bring to the Open University experience for students and with me I've got Cath Brown who's a very experienced and very successful student of many years standing.

Hi everyone.

And also, Isabella Henman who is an Associate Lecturer who tutors in the STEM Faculty.

Hi.

So welcome to you both. So, first thing that I'd like to ask you is why do you think tutorials are such an important part of the whole OU experience for students? I'll start with you Isabella.

I think because it's your opportunity to talk live to your tutor and other students because it can be incredibly isolating when you work with the Open University because we're distance University and you're doing your work at home you're carrying on and you might connect with people somewhere along the line but if you go to a tutorial you can connect with other students. You can talk about that and then you can ask questions and you can feel genuinely, you go "Okay, you just said that can I just check my understanding of that?" And that's the best part of it because you can be reading through things and you might be able to understand and you can always ask your tutor by email or phone or whatever, but the live experience in the tutorial is definitely the best bit because you get more out of it and your tutor will be helping you to understand how to access the material, how to get more out of it, how to use your skills to build. Tutorials are often about the skills, not just the factual content. So, what do you think Cath?

I think those are very good points indeed Isabella. I think I would add to that as well that you can often get a completely different perspective on the material from your tutor at a tutorial compared to the one from just reading the materials. Also, as you say connecting to other students, connecting to your tutor. Because we all know it's much easier to ask for help if you feel a personal connection to the other people, isn't it? You feel much more relaxed about it. And even if you think, well I know all that material, you usually end up learning something, you gain something from it. The fact that actually you're carving out some time which is just dedicated to your studies, where you haven't got the kids calling for you or the housework looking like it needs doing, all those many other things that you have distracting you. So, I think it's an incredibly useful way of dedicating time to your studies, you gain loads out of it and you can really focus.

And you think those considerations apply equally to online tutorials as well as face-to-face tutorials?

Definitely, and I think the best bit about online tutorials is that you don't have to travel somewhere and you can go "right, my tutorial starts at 7:00" you rock up at ten to 7:00 or five to 7:00. Try not to get there dead on the time because if you've got any connection problems. And you don't have to worry what you're wearing. You don't have to make sure you're nice and respectable. You can just rock up in your pyjamas and I have plenty of students who say "Oh in my pyjamas, I'm eating my dinner at the same time"

You've forgotten the wine!

Oh yes, definitely. You can have your glass of wine!

You can have your refreshments at the same time. You don't have to bring your own.

And I think online tutorials definitely offer so many benefits.

That flexibility.

Yes, face-to-face lovely because you can put the real face, the actual here you go face, but online just it's even better in my view.

I think both of them have got the great advantages. The fact that you don't actually have to go out of your house, the fact that for some people who can't go to the house, they're accessible. Obviously, you can't go to the pub afterwards in the same way as you might with a face-to-face one with other students. But online can be brilliant if they're done well, they can be absolutely amazing and you can get all that sense of community and engagement from them as well.

Okay, what do you think the students themselves can do to get the most out of the tutorial experience that's offered?

I think look at what the tutorial is going to cover. Ideally speaking you will have covered most of the content in your study there, but sometimes they're timed towards the start of a particular block or bit of study, sometimes towards the end. Have an idea. Come with questions, come prepared to learn, prepared to get this idea of interacting. Don't just sit there go "someone's going to talk at me for an hour". You're not going to get a lot out of it if you just take it somebody is talking at you for an hour. Be prepared to engage, not in a scary way. You don't have to go "Oh, I really don't understand this" and feel silly, but you can genuinely ask say "actually I'm not quite sure on that bit" or "I've had this really good experience about this and I understand it this way, am I ok?"

I think that being prepared to actively participate was top of my list as well. But I think another thing to remember for a lot of students, is some people come to the OU you in a kind of school mentality, as if there were naughty year 9 hiding behind the bike sheds and the tutor's a scary deputy head and you need to move away from that one. Remember the tutor is another adult and they want you to succeed just as much as you want to succeed. So, come with the idea that you're having this fantastic opportunity to spend dedicated time with someone who is best equipped to help you succeed.

Absolutely, the tutor's got all the experience of supporting students, hundreds of students through that particular module and their advice is so golden. Yeah what they have to offer.

So just finally, what are your best tutorial experiences as a tutor to start with Isabella, very briefly?

I've had some really quite large-scale ones recently. The small ones are lovely as well, but some of them where everybody's engaged and the chat box is moving and going on and on and on, because everybody's engaging and it's fine. I know some people that distracting, that's fine. You don't have to look at it, but it's great when you're getting people who are asking questions, who are answering questions, who are adding their own bits in it, and you know that actually even though I'm talking to a computer, there's somebody on the other end of it. There's all these somebody's on the other end of it and they're responding and that's definitely the best experiences for me.

Okay, and you Cath?

Can I cheat and have two?

Very quickly

So one of them is a face-to-face one, and we were at day school and we were doing the workshop on how to tackle spectroscopy questions, and so that's the problem-solving sort of thing, and the tutor got us up and involved and really affected how I saw that whole topic and it turned me from being one of the things I was a bit scared about to one of the things I've absolutely loved the most. And the other one was an online one. And again, it was a real conversion experience I started off feeling that this module, was meant to be a chemistry module, it felt more like biology to me, and I'm not so keen on biology. Sorry, Diane! But the tutor managed to show me how this particular topic actually, she brought the chemistry out in it. And it really transformed my understanding of it. It turned that module into one a moment my favourite ever. And those tutorials were so much fun as well because the other students were in there, they were interacting we used to have a bit of banter before it started. We used to carry on and have a chat afterwards, everyone was asking questions and involved so that really stands out as a fantastic experience for me.

It's great. It's excellent experiences.

It just goes to show that attending tutorials and really participating in them can make a huge difference to your study experience. So, when you sign up for your modules look for your tutorials and make sure you do go, make sure you participate and take the opportunities that are offered, you won't regret it.