

**Becoming an OU Tutor in STEM   Being an OU Tutor in STEM: Computing and Communications**

**Part 7 Conclusion**

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Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

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## 7.1 Overview

By [Victoria Nicholas](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/olinkremote.php?website=Becoming%20an%20OU%20Tutor%20in%20STEM&targetdoc=Victoria%20Nicholas)

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We hope that this badged open course (BOC), Being an OU Tutor in STEM, has been an interesting experience for you and that it has inspired you to apply for a tutoring role with The Open University.

It is one of the most rewarding jobs in the University and here is a reminder of some of the quotes from OU tutors that you have read during the course.

Start of Box

"OU teaching is so different from what I do by day, it is almost addictive. The thrill you have when a student has grasped what you have said in a tutorial, and you see it come back to you in an assignment - you know you really have imparted more than just the text, but a real understanding which can be applied to everyday life."

End of Box

Start of Box

“Being an AL brings flexibility to my life.  There are times when I am busy and must concentrate on the matters at hand, but there are plenty of others where I can be free and mobile if I wish. I don't have to work from home all the time, with a laptop and the right setup I can be free as a bird.  Organisation is up to me, the motivations come from within, teaching is good and there are plenty of examples where I can see that I have made a genuine difference to people's lives.

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"It is a marvellous job for someone who is disabled. The OU is very open access to ALs as well as students. At first, when I was trying to build up my private tuition from home, the OU work I had was my anchor, it gave me stability. Also, the OU gets quite a lot of disabled students, and I think it must be good for them to see a disabled tutor."

End of Box

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"I really like the teaching. OU students - as opposed to younger undergraduates - have worked very hard to get to where they are, so they really appreciate the fact that they are able to study. They are so keen. You could not ask for anything better."

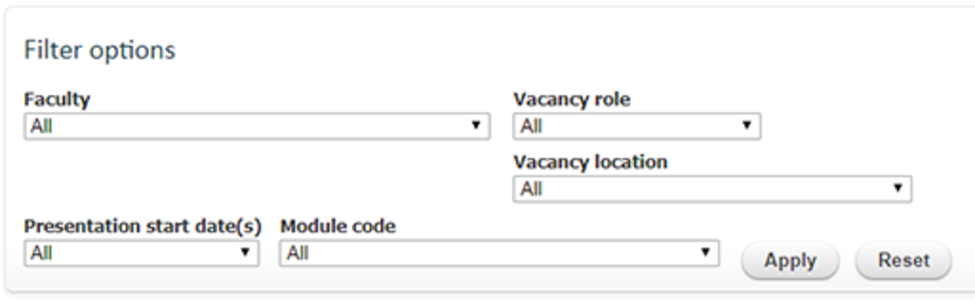
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Now let's look at the practical steps on how to apply to become an OU tutor.

## 7.2 Practical steps to help you – vacancies and how to apply

Tutoring vacancies at The Open University are advertised both internally and externally. [Our external vacancy page](http://www.open.ac.uk/jobs/tutors/vacancies) offers you the opportunity to filter on the faculty and the type of role. For Computing and Communications vacancies please select “Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology” and click on the Apply button.

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As part of our union-agreed recruitment processes, vacancies are usually advertised internally first and then externally if necessary. There are four advertising rounds in advance of each module start and modules may be advertised in some or all of these rounds. This means that the vacancy site is updated on a regular basis.

Start of Box

**Recruitment windows**

For modules starting in October 2021, the recruitment closing dates are:

* 29 April 2021
* 27 May 2021
* 24 June 2021
* 22 July 2021
* 26 August 2021

End of Box

If there is more than one module that you are interested in applying for, please do apply for more than one. Different modules have different average weekly hours and different salary bands, and you can see module-specific information for each vacancy before deciding on applying.

This will change in the future as The Open University is in the process of implementing a new AL contract, where tutors will be offered a permanent fractional contract of employment rather than being employed on one specific module.

## 7.3 Submitting an application

If you decide to submit an application form, it is important that your application demonstrates how you fully meet the generic person specification and the module person specification for the vacancy that you are applying for. Ensure that you are as full as possible in your application as the selection panel will only consider information on the application and they will shortlist based on your fit to the generic and module person specification.

The digital badge, Statement of Participation, and the learning outcomes from this course can be included to support your application. Read the [further guidance](http://www.open.ac.uk/jobs/tutors/how-apply/guidance-completing-application-form) on completing the application form, as well as the [Generic Person Specification](http://www.open.ac.uk/jobs/tutors/teaching-roles/generic-person-specification). The Module Person Specification can be found in the module details link attached to each vacancy advert. Once completed, your application should be sent to [al-applications@open.ac.uk](mailto:al-applications@open.ac.uk).

Once an application form has been submitted, receipt of the form is acknowledged by an automated email. As soon as possible after the closing date, applications are considered by the interview panel and a shortlist is drawn up. Shortlisted candidates are then contacted and invited for interview. Applicants who are not shortlisted are not contacted.

If you are invited to an interview this is usually conducted by two members of the OU staff and afterwards you are informed of the outcome of the interview. If you are notified that you are not appointable your application will be terminated. If you are appointable, and there are sufficient student numbers, a contract is sent to you about a month before the start of the module.

If there are not sufficient student numbers, you are still considered to be appointable for up to 36 months and you could be offered a contract for the next presentation of the module.

## 7.4 Equal opportunities

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The OU is an equal opportunities employer and welcomes applications from all backgrounds and nationalities. However, the OU is only able to accept applications from candidates who are resident in the UK, Guernsey, Jersey, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland. Applications can be submitted in Welsh and a copy of the application form in Welsh can be downloaded from the [How to Apply](http://www.open.ac.uk/jobs/tutors/how-apply) web page.

We aim to support our tutors so that they can fulfil the requirements of the role, so if you are disabled or have a medical condition and are short-listed for an interview you should discuss any adjustments required to enable you to attend the interview with us. Information about who to contact will be provided in your interview letter.

Resources are also available to enable tutors to provide support and guidance in meeting the needs of disabled students.

## 7.5 Summary

We very much hope that you now have all the information and enthusiasm you need to apply for a tutoring vacancy with The Open University. Now is a suitable time to review and reflect on what you have learned from this course.

Now you have completed this course you are able to:

* Identify the core aspects of the OU tutor role
* Summarise the OU’s teaching methods and technologies
* Demonstrate an understanding of the Computing and Communications curriculum
* Describe the tutor’s role in correspondence tuition
* Explain the role of CPD in supporting the development of pedagogic practice with novice tutors.

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**Digital badge and Statement of Participation**

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The final step towards your digital badge and Statement of Participation is to complete the end-of-course knowledge assessment in step 7.7.

End of Box

## 7.6 Further video resources

The full unedited footage of the video interviews with the OU tutors featured in this course is available here. These videos may prove interesting to watch if you would like to understand a little more about a particular aspect of being an OU tutor. The vidoes are listed under each subject heading.

**Challenges in supporting students**

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**Helping to develop student skills**

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**How did you feel when you first started as an OU tutor and how do you feel now?**

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How to help students engage with their learning

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**Mentor and mentee roles**

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**The role of a tutor**

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**Student support**

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**When to contact students**

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## 7.7 End-of-course knowledge assessment

This knowledge assessment contains 12 questions. The pass mark is 60% and you have unlimited attempts at the assessment.

This assessment counts towards your digital badge and Statement of Participation which can be used to support your application for a tutor role at the OU.

Go to the [End-of-course knowledge assessment](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/olinkremote.php?website=Becoming%20an%20OU%20Tutor%20in%20STEM&targetdoc=End-of-course%20knowledge%20assessment) now and gain your digital badge.

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# Uncaptioned Figure

## Description

A man sitting at a desk working on a computer with multiple screens.

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# Uncaptioned Figure

## Description

A screenshot of the filter options on the OU's external vacancy website. The key filters are on faculty, vacancy role, vacancy location, start date and module.

[Back to - Uncaptioned Figure](" \l "Session2_Figure1)

# Uncaptioned Figure

## Description

Three workers, male and female, studying a piece of ITC equipment.

[Back to - Uncaptioned Figure](" \l "Session4_Figure1)

# Uncaptioned Figure

## Description

A digital badge inscribed with being an OU tutor, STEM and C&C.

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## Transcript

CHRIS

OK, so it's on to a question about what is challenging about supporting students.

TAMMY BROWN

One of the fun parts of this job is the challenge of supporting students because they are all individuals, and there is no one cap fits all. So I think it's important to develop the relationship and the expectations early on so that you can individualise your support. I think that's probably the most challenging part. The rest of it comes with experience.

Oh, and interpreting what it is they really want. Often, students, they'll come to you. They're having a problem, say, with an assignment question. And it's kind of unravelling what it is they think their problem is to actually get to the core of it to know where to signpost them to.

PRINCE BOATENG

So like what Tammy has said, balancing the different needs of our students sometimes can be a bit challenging. Because, as she said, there is no one size fits all. And trying to individualise the support for each individual student sometimes, yeh, a bit challenging, and especially in terms of time constraints.

But sometimes you realise that you have a TMA deadline. And then on the last day or just the day before, somebody comes to you and wants to request for an extension. And the story they are telling you, you don't think is-- they just want to buy a bit of time.

And trying to really read through the whole thing and try and help them-- you want to help them as much as possible, but also trying to ascertain as to whether what they are telling you is true or not and so on and so forth sometimes can be challenging. I always give people the benefit of the doubt anyway. But sometimes, it can be stressful. And in fact, in terms of that as well, knowing how much time, for instance, to give them sometimes can be challenging.

And also, for instance, our tutorials, I try and facilitate-- I mean, for instance, if you've got disabled students and how to really make the room or make the facility work for them sometimes can be challenging. Because sometimes, people come with wheelchairs and you want to make them comfortable. And it may require you negotiating with the other students, for instance, to make room and so on and so forth.

Sometimes, they can be challenging. Of course, they are interesting. I mean, I am happy doing that. But I'm saying that sometimes, it can throw up a few challenges, but nothing insurmountable. We always get around things like that

and sometimes also students some students just don't have the motivation. They sign up the course for whatever reason, but they just don't come up with the motivation. So sometimes, you're trying very hard to help them, but they're just not meeting you at that level where you're trying to support them. And sometimes, that can be very challenging. But all in all, we try and get on top of these things.

JOAN JACKSON

I think what's challenging about supporting postgraduate students is really just the same as for Tammy and Prince. I think the main challenge is making the contact-- yeah, making the contact personal and relevant for the individual student.

I guess with postgraduate students, they can have a range of development issues. And it's like being a detective, really. You've got to identify what those issues are and tailor your feedback and support to address those. I mean, for some of them, it will be postgraduate skills. But for some of them, it will be the academic module material. So you do have to identify what the problem is and provide the appropriate support.

But for me, I mean, isn't that why I like being a postgraduate tutor? Because that's what makes it really interesting. It's what makes it really rewarding. When you get that light bulb moment where you can see that a student has really got to grips with what postgraduate study really means, then that's a great experience for you as a tutor.

CHRIS

Thank you, Joan.

CHARLY LOWNDES

I suppose the difference between a project module and whatever has come before that is that the project is defined by the student, not by me or by the university. The student goes and finds something that interests them, with a bit of luck, which ties in with their earlier studies and works on that.

So there's a lot of interpretation of what it is that they ought to be doing. So that's straightforward factual teaching, if you like. But there's also the underlying emotional and intellectual confidence to set about doing something where the pathway is not as clear as it might have been in earlier modules.

And I think empathy with students is one of the things that I try most to get going. And a great experience I had was being a student myself of the saxophone. And I tried to learn this thing. I'm not particularly musical. It was a struggle. I failed grade four.

And the experience of trying to do something that I found hard and didn't actually succeed at any particularly high level put me into a deep understanding, I think, of what it must be like for somebody who is feeling out of their depth. And the support and care and empathy I got from my saxophone teacher is something that I try to reinterpret in the rather more technical context where I'm more confident to pass on to my students.

CHRIS

Thank you, Charly.

COLIN EVERISS

What's challenging about supporting project students, project students find themselves in a variety of different situations, possibly by the nature of them working in different working environments and with different managers and different types of managers. Because you're working with both the students and the managers, now that, in itself, is quite challenging.

The other thing is that the students themselves are given time off from work to actually carry out their studying. And the variety of situations students find themselves in is that some students may find that they're studying on a day per week. Other students may find that they're studying for one or two hours per day. And that can vary. A lot of that comes down to the student's preference, but a lot of it also comes down to the employer as well making the time available.

And what I've found challenging is that the different study styles may not necessarily satisfy that particular type of person, that type of student. And often, I find myself negotiating with managers to find the most appropriate study method or the study time made available to the students themselves.

And the other challenging thing is that because students are finding themselves in work situations, they are under different deadlines and pressures, maybe. But quite often, the employers may find that there are different priorities for the student in any one particular week. So it's challenging to be or to find the flexibility for both the employer and the student.

The other thing that's quite challenging is that it's challenging for students themselves to find the right balance between study and work. And quite often, you're talking to students, often becoming a problem-solver. You're trying to encourage them to find different approaches to their study as well.

Being extremely flexible and compassionate to the way that they work in that situation is very, very important indeed, and it's also important to be a good listener. Quite often, it's easy to take the lead role. But unless you listen to students, you don't necessarily find out what the underlining issues are for them.

CHRIS

Thank you, Colin.

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## Transcript

CHRIS DOUCE

In your capacity as a tutor, how do you help to develop the skills of your students?

PRINCE BOATENG

So primarily, I try and help develop their skills through the comments that I put on my TMA script when I mark their TMA scripts. So if they've made mistakes or errors in language-- for instance, grammar or punctuation or sentence construction and so on and so forth-- I try and, in a much more supportive way, point out those things to them.

And also, for instance, we teach programming as well. So programming skills as well, if they've made errors, I try and give them the right solution and also make them aware of where they've gone wrong and why I think they've gone wrong and so on and so forth.

And also, good academic practise, trying to help them also to adhere to instructions because it will have a downstream effect. If they are not adhering to TMA instructions, it may be that when they go out to work and they are given instructions at work, they may not have developed the discipline to adhere to instructions.

So even as simple as adhering to word count and so on and so forth, I try and point these things out to them that it is very important that they incorporate these skills in their life. So by giving them all these comments on their TMA scripts and their PT3 form as well, hopefully a lot of them would have picked up some of these skills.

And also, I try and give them transferable skills. I've mentioned language skills and so on so forth-- so skills not just for the course per se, but skills that will help them going forward in their lives, in their jobs, and, further down, other OU courses.

So yes, that's how I try and-- and of course, when I speak to them on the phone as well, sometimes they have further questions which I may not have put on their scripts or PT3 form, but we can talk about them. We can discuss them. And hopefully, they would incorporate them in their lives as they go forward.

TAMMY BROWN

In a variety of ways, I try and develop the skills. The relationship that you have with the individual student is absolutely crucial because the way you develop them has to be tailored for their particular needs. As we've said before, that the "one cap fits all" just doesn't work. So you have to get to know your students.

And you tailor the feedback in the assignments-- for example, the correspondence tuition-- putting in place strategies, finding other resources, signposting them to other activities where they can actually do things to develop their skills. That's probably paramount-- that's across the board for all students. That's probably the most common means of helping them develop.

Those that do come to tutorials obviously have even more support and guidance. And I try to make my sessions as interactive as possible. I don't like the lecture. People tend to go to sleep. So I try to always make sure that there's some kind of activity interjected into that that focuses on particular skills to-- as Prince was saying with the programming, if you can develop some programming strategies in real time with them and give them a sense of achievement, it helps develop their confidence.

So the interactivity, I think, is great to encourage that achievement and sense of belonging. And that ownership that they then have actually develops their skills just that little bit better. Does that make sense? It just takes them on that level.

COLIN EVERISS

As a practise tutor, you actually monitor the student's progress throughout their retainment. So it's probably relatively easier, let's say, to pick up on student skills throughout a whole period of not only their academic work, but their working relationships as well. One way of helping them is obviously to probably record. We do this through the quarterly review meetings that we hold. We record what they do.

We are able to easily pick up these skills which they develop through the workplace, identifying and relating not only the academic work to the work that they're doing, but perhaps the behavioural skills as well, looking at things as to how they work with different people in a team, working under pressure, for example, working to deadlines, for example, which may not necessarily be picked up on an academic piece of work.

So we demonstrate that through-- or they demonstrate that through giving examples. So we record that through the review meetings themselves. Picking up on that, we can identify any possible weaknesses or areas for improvement, and we can actually set targets for them for next time. So this is something which they would carry out or they would attempt to carry out, and then we would come back and look at that again in three months' time, again looking for examples and, again, looking to record those examples as well.

CHARLY LOWNDES

I think there's so many different skills to think about. There's obviously the pragmatic, technical stuff, the content of the module that they're studying. But in order to get to grips with that, they have to be able to absorb material. Then they've got to communicate it back out again. So it's reading and it's writing.

But also, in the middle of that, there's the reflection skill, which is a difficult one to get used to, particularly important in the project module I tutor on because a large part of the assessment of that is how the student has reflected on what went well, what was frustrating, what got in the way. And that's a really interesting higher-order thinking skill, if you like.

Tied in with that is planning and managing a complicated sequence of things that need to be done. So all of those come in. I try to distill some of these things down into short slogans and things that I can make a one-minute hints-and-tips type video about.

For example-- I don't really claim any originality whatsoever. I'm sure all tutors have used this thought. But I call it Charly's law for easy memory. Charly's law is read the question and then answer it-- subtext, not the question you'd like to have been asked or the one you happen to know the answer to. And my claim is that Charly's law works with every level of assessment on any topic. So read the question and then answer it.

Other slogans would include, have a go. Try it. You might like it. It helps to study the material before you try to write an essay or answer a question or whatever. It always interests me how sometimes students think, well, I'll just answer this. And you think, well, have you not actually read this chapter, or have you not tried that practical activity? I think you really would find it helps.

So it comes down to some pretty basic study skills. Have a go. Read the stuff. Think about it. Reflect on it, all those things. When it works, it's great. And I get more pleasure out of a student who's been struggling who didn't come easily to those studies skills and manages to pass something than I do out of somebody who's obviously very able, possibly already a graduate of some other university who's doing an Open University degree for some interesting reason. They consistently get distinction-level scores.

Well, of course they're going to do well, and it would be hard for me to stop them. It's the ones I've helped flex their intellectual muscles and get the job done. That's where the reward comes, I think.

CHRIS DOUCE

And Charly's law, and your law for us all to take away and apply. What do you say to your students, Joan?

JOAN JACKSON

Well, obviously for me, I'm attempting to develop some of these higher-order skills beyond the module, academic material. So what I'm really looking to do is to get the students to think for themselves. So I have various ways to try and encourage them to do that-- by asking questions in my feedback as opposed to giving them answers.

So I'm asking questions. I'm looking at things like giving them references which they might like to explore, other academic material, and generally really encouraging them to search for additional material themselves. So that's the sort of thing I'm doing.

I think one of the best ways that I found to encourage skills beyond the module is really to use a forum. And I tend to seed topics for discussion in the forum which might be contentious, which might surface some supporting and opposing points of views on a topic and actually get the students themselves to discuss and uncover all sorts of interesting references, experiences, link theory and practise, all those sorts of good things. So that's how I develop student skills.

CHRIS DOUCE

Well, thank you, Joan.

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## Transcript

DIANE BUTLER

Hello, everybody. I've got four associate lecturers here, all from the School of Computing and Communications, all very experienced associate lecturers. I've got Gill, and Terry, and Sarah, and Ellen. Very warm welcome. We're going to talk today about what it was like when you were new, and what you did then, what you do now, and how that might have changed over time. So how did you feel as a novice tutor doing things for the first time?

GILL WINDALL

I remember being extremely nervous about tutorials-- online tutorials. It just felt very daunting, just the thought of it all happening in real time, and I'm being recorded, and things that were completely out of your control. And so being on top of the technology and the thought of trying to manage that, as well as interacting with students, and presenting material, and interacting with a colleague that I was co-presenting with just felt-- I was really quite scared, I have to say, at the thought of it.

TERRY O'REGAN

Yeah, I was concerned about fitting the OU stuff around my full-time job. Would I have the time to fit all this in? I really wanted to do it, so I had to make the time. So I felt that pressure. Also, I was worried about marking assignments. Would I get the marking right? Would there be complaints or challenges? You're so worried about this minefield of marking students' work and making some kind of statement about their performance.

In terms of tutorials and guidance, I felt all right about that because of my previous experience. But there were times when I felt I had the imposter syndrome. I used to think, am I really good enough to do this? We had that concern at times.

DIANE BUTLER

Yeah. Sarah, did you want to comment on that one?

SARAH SLATER

OK. So it was really daunting for me at the time, because this was a new module in a subject just outside my normal teaching area. I had to pick up the new systems. I was seeing these emails come through telling me I had to learn new systems. I had to travel to venues which I found intimidating at times, in fairness.

So I was leaning on my staff tutor an awful lot, which was Hillary, and later Marina. And they were really helpful during a difficult time. I only had one module then, and that was a lot. There was no forums at that time, so that was unhelpful. And there is now, so that's fantastic. So it was really my staff tutor helping me the most during that time.

ELLEN CADDICK

Well, my experience was only in training peers or members of staff. So I used to work on a one-to-one basis or with very small groups of two or three. So standing in front of a classroom of 20 adults, all very keen to learn something from my tutorial, was really nerve-wracking. So I really-- my first tutorial was super duper prepared. And I was like, what are they going to ask me? What am I going to tell them? I really need to know my stuff. So it was really daunting to do that, having not stood in front of a classroom before.

The marking was the same. But my biggest worry was, am I going to be fair? Am I going to be telling them, in all fairness, what they did wrong, and also tell them how they can do it better next time and improve their scores? And are their scores really going to be fair? Am I going to be too strict, or am I going to be too lenient? How am I going to find that middle range?

DIANE BUTLER

How does it feel when you were new, and you were called on to teach on something that you just felt you'd got your fingertips into yourself?

ELLEN CADDICK

I don't have a background in computing, so it was daunting to suddenly teach students in computing. I had a good understanding of the module material, so I could follow what the module materials were teaching. But it was literally also pushing me to the point of where I said, this is borderline of where I actually feel, as a computer-interested person, teaching somebody to use.

At the same time, it's level one, so a lot of it was literally getting students to get used to being in a university environment, and focusing a lot on writing assignments, and understanding referencing, and understanding those areas that I really understood very well.

GILL WINDALL

Yes, I think I find it-- I found it, and, in fact, do still sometimes find it-- slightly alarming to be expected to be an expert on quite a wide field, or to feel that I'm expected to be an expert. But I have to say that is also one of the things that I've liked. I've liked learning new stuff, actually.

Yes, learning it may be only just before the students. But it's an opportunity to really expand your own knowledge. And one is extremely motivated to do that if you know that you're going to have to teach a tutorial or mark an assignment. So yeah, it's got that two sides to it - scary, but also enjoyable and motivating.

DIANE BUTLER

Yeah, I think that's something about the the Open University and the methods that we use to teach. The module materials have got everything in. The associate lecturer is there - is to support student learning of that material. So you don't have to be the expert in everything you do. You're not delivering lectures. You can be that guide on the side, and that facilitator to help them

TERRY O'REGAN

Yeah, I was going to say that one of the things that's changed for me over time is the fact that you feel that you have to be an expert in all the content or the module that you're teaching. And over time, I've realised that that's not really possible, and that, amongst your colleagues in your immediate study area - usually the study centre - you find that there are people with strengths in, say, computing, and others who are better with the technology and the maths.

And in the end, we have an understanding. OK, if it's programming, then so-and-so will do that. And I'll pick up-- I'll do the maths. I'll do the technology, or writing notes-- that kind of thing. So now, I think we know each other's strengths.

SARAH SLATER

You can see the things that they're going to struggle with most. And I think as long as you get those in tutorials, and students start talking about them in the tutorials, that that helps as much as anything else. And that's why I'm saying that the forums are a good place for students to be pushed to to have those discussions, to drop that surface learning down into a much deeper level. But then I think it helps me, as an associate lecturer, when they do that, because then they come with more interesting questions to tutorials, then.

DIANE BUTLER

I think it's a really interesting part of the role, this not being necessarily an expert, but still having a huge amount to offer across the range of skills an associate lecturer needs. Is there anything that makes you cringe? Is there anything you think, oh, I wish I hadn't have done it like that?

TERRY O'REGAN

Exactly.

DIANE BUTLER

And why did I do it like that?

SARAH SLATER

Yeah, in the early days of teaching, and even up to a few years ago prior to doing a PGCert, I was very driven by PowerPoint, and trying to feel like I was putting a lot of information on PowerPoint, and doing things like PGCert. And reflecting on my own teaching over the years, I really feel that PowerPoint has always been a tool for me, not for the students, to remind me what to talk about.

So when I feel cringey, it used to be looking back at some of those heavy PowerPoint slides, where I'm trying to feed loads of facts to people. And, of course, it stops engagement with the student by slide after slide after slide. So when I look back now at how I used to teach with tonnes of PowerPoint slides, with tonnes of facts, I realise that I was actually preventing the students from engaging in the interactive element of a tutorial. And it became almost a lecture.

So these days, I back off PowerPoint, and use their resources and their materials the same as what they would have, and start discussions. The first thing I do is, can you please put your mics on and start talking to me? And that's the approach now.

GILL WINDALL

That's why I think the feedback that I used to give-- and I believe it is important to give lots of feedback, but I used to give tonnes. It was as if I felt anything that the student had got a tiny bit wrong, I had to write feedback on and say, no, no. You could have said this. You could have said that.

And I've come to realise that it's better to focus on core issues and maybe less is more. A few issues that actually are core skills that, hopefully, the student can improve on and they're going to see them-- stand them in good stead for future assignments is more important than, oh, well, actually, there was this point you could have made in response to this question, and, oh, yes. Well, you could have got one more mark if you'd said this. And I think that's-- well, it's not the style that I use now.

ELLEN CADDICK

At the beginning, I wasn't quite sure how to connect or how to help students with different abilities. So I literally just looked at the profiles that we have and just adjusted my presentation to what I thought they might need. And I think, on occasions, that was just not good enough. I could see, in their faces, that they just couldn't understand what I was doing, or couldn't just take it in because of their different abilities.

So I think the moment that that changed was when I started to actually talk to them before tutorials and ask them, how do you need me to adjust so that you get something out of the sessions that I'm doing? And that has now become completely a norm with me, that I actually talk to them first and try to understand how I need to adjust what I'm presenting.

And it's so fantastic to see them when the penny drops. You stand there, and you wait, and you wait, and you wait. And then, suddenly, you can see when they say, oh! That's fantastic to just watch that happen during a tutorial or after you return an assignment. It's what keeps me going every time.

DIANE BUTLER

It is incredibly rewarding, isn't it? Those light bulb moments and those feelings that students finally got it. All their hard work has paid off, and you've helped along that way to the light bulb moment. It's great. So yeah, it's really interesting to hear how you've changed. Do you feel that your confidence has grown now? I think it's clear that it has. But what do you think was the main bringer of that confidence?

GILL WINDALL

It's that feeling that you can relax into it and that you don't have to deliver the perfect tutorial, or maybe even give the perfect feedback. The students can be very forgiving and encouraging as well, actually. As long as they can see that you're trying to help, you're trying to get at what they're finding difficult, and you're working with them on that, then it's not like they're going to be horrified if you can't give them exactly the perfect nugget of information.

ELLEN CADDICK

You can actually be yourself. You can play to your strengths. You don't have to play to your weaknesses. There's always somebody where you know, OK, maybe this hasn't quite answered the question. So then let me refer the student to somebody else, or ask somebody else, OK, how can I explain this in a different way so that the student then understands it?

So I think in the beginning, when you start, and you see all these guidances, and the marking guide, and the presentations for the tutorials and everything, you think that you have to adjust to something that's there. And I think it's only there as a support. And you can then have your own style, and bring in your own style, and just literally almost interpret what's been given into your own abilities, into your own strengths. And I think that has just-- the same has made me relax and just literally just do it.

SARAH SLATER

Yeah, I've mentioned it before, but my staff tutors-- I've got a few, and I've had a lot. But I have to say, when I decided to detach the idea as a staff tutor as my manager and more to be more like a mentor to me-- I appreciate they're my manager, but I think of them more as mentors.

And their guidance has helped me a lot-- that breaking down of the ice between them on the wall so that I feel they're approachable always, whether it's email, or call, or dropping in on me periodically, which they do, and just seeing how I'm getting on. And that just makes you feel relaxed, because else you feel isolated sitting in a room doing an online tutorial, wondering if you're doing everything right. Maybe you're getting things wrong. We all get things wrong sometimes. And it's good to have that feedback or that help in doing it.

I also liked the staff development courses that the OU offer. I've done loads of those. I didn't really very comfortable with using the rooms when they first started, when we moved to Adobe Connect, I signed up for all those, worked through those, did a couple more of those. And working through those courses has really helped. Doing the PGCert really helped.

DIANE BUTLER

That's great. That's really good to hear, and I think it is a real strength of our model. And as our communications technologies improve with forums and with various online platforms, we've got better and better at having that distributed group of staff working together and for the benefit of the students.

One thing that I'll reflect on what you're saying is that, perhaps, as you've gone on your journey from a novice tutor to an experienced one, you may have moved from this tutor-centred approach to doing the job to a more student-centred approach to doing your job. Would that be a fair way of reflecting the journey that you've gone on? Terry, do you want to -

TERRY O'REGAN

I was going to say, at one time, I was concerned about, will they turn up to the tutorial? Will I do a good lesson? But over the years, you think, what's important here is getting the students through. So you start looking more at, what can facilitate that?

So it's about giving effective feedback and support in assignments-- marking fairly. It's about supporting students when they first start, and also supporting them when they're finishing off. So really, my focus now is more on getting students through, maximising the number of successful students without bending the rules-- doing it in the proper way.

DIANE BUTLER

Of course, yeah.

TERRY O'REGAN

And that's what's changed for me.

SARAH SLATER

You get to meet them virtually a lot of the time. Sometimes they talk to you. With icebreakers in the forums, you get to know a little bit about them. These become people that you connect to. And once you start connecting to them, and you start supporting them, and you start marking their work-- and I always email students right at the beginning of the course, talk to them. But then I always email them all the way through, telling them there's assessment due shortly, how are they getting on before every assessment.

And I like that link, that I feel like I want you to do this, and I want you to progress. So I feel like I'm nurturing them rather than teaching them. And sometimes they just need that support. And I think that's one of the things that is different about OU ALs to maybe a brick university, where with the OU, you can appreciate that they're in a room like you trying to learn this. You've just learned it maybe a month ago, and you can appreciate that you're trying to nurture them through it as best they can.

And each student's individual. You can't teach them all the same way. We know that. Some have got different needs. Some need more time. So I like that-- when you get to the end, and a student says to you, thanks for your help. I would never have got through without you. That's nice to see that.

And then if you do the follow-on module, and you see the students have passed, that's great to see, too, because they say hi, or I had you last time. I'm glad I got you again. And that's really nice to see. So you always feel like you connected. I like the connected idea. So I feel connected to students.

DIANE BUTLER

That's the whole "making a difference" thing, isn't it?

SARAH SLATER

Yeah.

DIANE BUTLER

It's really nice to work for an organisation where you can really point at something and say, I made a difference to them. Yeah, it's fabulous.

GILL WINDALL

Oh, I echo what Sarah said. And I think having taught in a traditional bricks-and-mortar university, I think I do feel more connected with more of the students-- a greater proportion of the students-- with the OU than I did in that situation, partly because you've got a smaller group. And distance learning, strangely, seems to bring you closer, in some sort of way.

ELLEN CADDICK

I would really miss it, because it is giving students that maybe don't have had in their life a chance to study at university that come into studying and think, oh, God. How am I going to do this? The confidence that, actually, they can. And actually, they have the skills to study, and to learn, and to do it in a formal environment, in a formal way. And then you hand them over to the next course. And you see how they have developed, how they feel much more comfortable with the whole setting, with reading, with applying the readings, even with numbers.

So building up that confidence in them and just helping them find that confidence that, actually, they can do it. They have the skills to do it. They have the skills to progress, and to learn, and to get higher grades, and to improve their learning, and to show it, and to talk to me, who is in academia. At first, they all treat me like a teacher. And I always say, no, I'm not a teacher. I'm literally just helping you here with your journey through your studies.

DIANE BUTLER

That's really interesting, that it's that personal approach, that looking after the students' learning personally and supporting them. That comes out really strongly in your answer.

TERRY O'REGAN

Yes, I was going to say, I've been working with the OU for 30 years. I've retired from everything else, and this is the thing I probably enjoyed more than anything else. And that's really strange. I agree with Sarah on that. I really enjoy working with the OU. I've also enjoyed going to staff development events. It was always great to meet up with colleagues and have catch-up with each other. It's like meeting a group of friends for a day out. So we enjoyed the day. We enjoyed the learning aspects. But it was also great to get together and catch up with each other.

DIANE BUTLER

You found your team. You found your AL group of friends, your--

TERRY O'REGAN

Yes, yeah.

DIANE BUTLER

--AL team. And you've gone through this as a shared experience. That's really

TERRY O'REGAN

Very much so.

DIANE BUTLER

If you had somebody in front of you who'd never taught before, or only done a very small amount of teaching or, perhaps, coaching in a workplace setting, and they fancied dipping their toe into OU tutoring, what would you say to them?

TERRY O'REGAN

Do it, because all the support--

ELLEN CADDICK

Go for it.

TERRY O'REGAN

- is there. You can learn while you're doing it. As long as you've got the appropriate background-- academic background-- you can learn how to teach while you're doing it. And you've got all the support and the systems around you to draw on, and help from colleagues. So it's a great environment to do it.

SARAH SLATER

I would try to encourage somebody who is interested from the viewpoint that, not only do you get paid to do this, but you get paid to do this from home. You can learn a new subject in more depth than you had before. You can help somebody. When you are a tutor, and you feel like you're helping another student-- maybe they phone you up, and they've got something serious going on, and you're the person who's been able to help them or give them an extension, or you've just been able to guide them, because they're about to give up.

And when you get those points, those moments-- which happen on a module-- it becomes something that, for a few hours a week, it's a best five or six hours of a paid employment that I probably would feel that I could have it at a period of time. And you're always reflecting with teaching, I think. I think teaching's a journey. You're always reflecting on your teaching. So I would encourage them to not just try it, but to move into that area, and build themselves in both their knowledge and their communication skills, and helping other people.

ELLEN CADDICK

I think even the fact that they're considering it makes me think that they're good for it. So I would always say just go for it. Take the challenge and help other people evolve, and develop, and grow. I think it's very rewarding.

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# Uncaptioned interactive content

## Transcript

CHRIS

The next question is, how do you help the students engage with their learning?

PRINCE BOATENG

All right. I'm a firm believer that at this level, we need to adopt a student-centric learning. So I try and put a student at the centre of their own learning. So when we have tutorials-- and I say this for all my colleagues. We all do that. We will try and engage the students.

I don't just rattle on and just keep going. We try and cooperate. For instance, at the beginning of a tutorial, I'll try and introduce some icebreakers, for instance, just to get students engaged, just to get students talking to each other, for instance, and engaging with each other.

And also, we'll try and incorporate activities into the lessons-- so activities, for instance, pairing up people and asking them to do certain things and then feed back to their group. So you're trying to make the whole lesson interesting, but also trying to get the students to be engaged so that their minds are not wandering all over the place, but they are focused on the lesson and hopefully get something out of it.

I'll also try and use question and answer sessions. I'm always encouraging students to ask questions as the lesson progresses, or maybe wait till the end of the lesson and ask questions. But I always incorporate Q&A sessions in my lessons, and all my colleagues do that. I see them do that as well.

Also, I try and engage them through, as I've mentioned, teamworking. But for instance, in programming workshops, we take it to the next level. We'll try and put students into groups and get them to come up with your opinions on software. One of our colleagues or one of us would develop a seed software, and then we'll give it to the students to try and extend it in teams.

And it's so interesting seeing them being engaged when you introduce activities like that and try and pit one team against the other, force that kind of competition as part of all that. So that gets the students excited and it gets them engaged.

So at the end of it all, it's very, very satisfying and gratifying that students come to a lesson or a tutorial and they are so much engaged because of the various techniques that we employ. And mixing the techniques like that really get them to engage.

TAMMY BROWN

A variety of different ways. Some have already been discussed. Trying to make things as interactive and relevant to not just their studies, but to them. And sometimes, that can involve re-educating them as to what is relevant with a view to development beyond the module.

So linking in with-- I think it helps, when you start to get to know the student early on, to know what their ultimate goals are for why they're studying, why they're doing their degree or their diploma, and keeping that in mind so that you can then try and relate what they're studying in the module or what they're studying in the tutorial to what they're actually personally getting. Because I think it's important that it needs to be personally relevant.

And that is a challenge if you've got a student who doesn't want to open up to you, for whatever reason-- personal reasons. Maybe some mental health issues that inhibit them a little bit. So it's kind of unravelling and getting in there.

Yeah, and the reward. Did I mention the reward? So it's not just saying, yes, you've done fantastic. Brilliant. Excellent. You've got your 85%. You've got your distinction. Where can you lead it on to? They've always got to have something to be able to go on, and that then encourages them to dig that little bit deeper and to stretch themselves.

Even a distinction-level student can improve. You might not be able to give them any more marks, but you can certainly give them more skills that they can then take on and develop. It's about making things relevant, I think is my main point.

CHARLY LOWNDES

It's a tricky one because all the obvious things. What are they trying to get out of their studies? Do they enjoy it? I think having fun with learning is the bottom line. So I make a point of my standard email sign-off to any message is, "Have fun." Sometimes students-- I can hear them groaning as they open up. Oh, Charly's trying to be cheerful again and I still haven't got my head around question three.

But I enjoy learning. I'm still an OU student. I am now on to I think my fifth qualification with the Open University. And that's a good thing for me because I remember regularly and currently what it's like to get not quite the mark I hoped for.

So I have to think, right, OK. What is going to get me motivated to attack TMA3 having got disappointed with TMA2? And it goes back to basics of, why did I sign up for this? What am I trying to get out of it? What has my tutor said to me? How do I react to that? So again, it's about empathy and putting myself into the position of the student.

Not all students will have that sense of fun. Some of them will have that sense of grind, that they simply want to get a pass mark and move on to the next qualification. Well, that's OK. That's a motivation, and I can work with that and encourage them.

OK, so if that's all you want to do, these are the three key things you need to do to pass. Let's not worry about the top-end grades. Let's think about passing and let's just focus on what is essential to get your head around this particular topic.

There are, quite often, the fancy bits which are going to be of interest to the distinction-level students who can get their heads around them, but the rest of us can probably just flounder about and try and do the best we can. And I'm really keen to encourage students whose goal is just engaging enough to get through and move on to the next bit in the hope that the next bit might inspire them.

JOAN JACKSON

OK, so in terms of postgraduate students and getting them to engage with their learning, I think I find, at that level, it's very much trying to get students to think about the module concepts in relation to their own experience. And I think if you can get them to think about how those module concepts are going to be practically of use in their own organisations, then students automatically do engage more effectively with the material. They understand the real worth of what they're learning.

I mean, that is sometimes quite difficult for students who are perhaps inexperienced. But my approach with that is to talk about my own experience and to link my own experience to the theory that they're learning about and how that benefited me and what changes that made within projects and organisations in which I worked. So I think that's one way.

My other little hint and tip or trick, which you can choose to use or not, is that I have this what I call the coffee-time questions in the forum. And I tend to seed these into the forum probably for about 10 days before an assignment due date. And they're just intended to be little nuggets of questions that they can think about in a coffee time.

I try and encourage the students to take part and post their thoughts and answers to the forum. And even if you only get a small number of students engaging, it's very useful for them, but it's also useful for all the lurkers. So I mean, that's the way I engage students with their learning.

COLIN EVERISS

For me, engaging students with their learning is somewhat different, possibly, to many other associate tutors because I'm not necessarily engaged with any one specific module. Therefore, I'm slightly removed from that level of teaching.

However, my approach with them is very much what I call a helicopter approach because I'm looking over all of what's happening and what they're doing. And it's very much about providing that additional voice of encouragement along the way, giving them that springboard, somebody to bounce ideas off, particularly when they're having difficulties or issues or problems.

And pretty much, it's maybe even applying some form of alternative ways that they may actually tackle particular topics or particular subjects. Particularly these days in the workplace, for example, they're often working alongside colleagues who are engaged with similar sort of activities, for example.

Let's take programming for example. I often find that's one particular area that students have difficulty in learning. Even though they have the study materials and they have the online tutorials and the support from their tutor, many students still have this barrier with a topic such as programming.

So in the workplace, what we often do is I try to encourage them to find mentors, somebody who's actually there with them, somebody that could probably go through an example with them or show how they've possibly done that before. So it's finding these alternative sources as well to keep that motivation going, but to keep that encouragement going as well.

I've even fallen back on things like YouTube videos and other tutorials, which often, if a student's tackling something, they may look for something maybe a little bit simpler or explain to them in a more simple way, a different demonstration, something that's more visual for them, something that's moving on a YouTube video rather than if they're reading it in a text. Because that sometimes gets their brain working in a different way. So often, it's looking for different approaches or different ways of learning and thinking outside the box.

CHRIS

Thank you, Colin.

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# Uncaptioned interactive content

## Transcript

DIANE BUTLER

OK. So Mary, could you tell us a little bit about your OU experience?

MARY GARVEY

OK. I've been a tutor with the OU for quite a long time, now-- probably over 21 years, actually. I currently tutor on two modules-- TT284, the web technology one that Vicky is, also, doing.

And I, also, tutor on TM351, the Data Management and Analysis module. Over the years, I've taught a variety of other modules-- mostly in the web area and databases.

DIANE BUTLER

Thank you. So I'm going to come to Vicky, now, and ask her to explain a little bit about her background and her experience with the OU.

VICKY O'KEEFE

Yes, I've been teaching TT284 for two years, now. I'm just coming to the end of my second presentation. It was my first role in any kind of teaching capacity, but I was an OU student myself.

And I studied at BSC in IT. And that ran from 2012 to 2017. And I, actually, studied TT284 as a student back in 2013, so I had a lot of experience from the student side of things.

DIANE BUTLER

So to come back to Mary to think about-- you mentioned that you've mentored quite a few different colleagues-- Open University colleagues-- over the years. And generally, you find it a positive experience. Why have you enjoyed being a mentor in these contexts?

MARY GARVEY

Yes, I found it quite rewarding to help new colleagues, such as Vicky, though Vicky herself hasn't needed as much support as some other people have.

With other previous mentees who are brand new to the Open University, I've had to sort of provide a bit more help and guidance. If you're new to the OU, it can be a bit baffling, initially, trying to navigate your way around the online systems.

Obviously, each module has its own sort of website. But there's other resources, too, like the library-- understanding the rules-- things like, how do you go about marking. The electronic TMA system can be a bit baffling the first time around, too.

And also, maybe if you've got an issue-- perhaps, with your computer-- a lot of modules need computer resources. I can't, always, maybe help with that. But I can, usually, point you in the right direction of where to go and who to contact.

And obviously, that can be quite important when you're new. There's, also, a lot of other support. So it's not an onerous role if you're a mentor. There's a lot of other people, too, who can help.

In the TT284 module that we both teach on, our Staff Tutor is very supportive. And he provides, like, sample comments to use in assessments. That can be a problem at the start-- trying to work out what to say on your marking.

And we have, also, tutor forums. And they're very valuable, too. So you can get a lot of support from other tutors. So there's a lot of support out there, not just from the mentors themselves.

DIANE BUTLER

Thanks very much. It's good to know that, you know, it's not that onerous a task, that you're sharing the responsibility for the new tutor with a wider community of people who have different parts and different roles to play-- and interesting that you mentioned the Staff Tutor, which is the Line Manager of Associate Lecturers and the part they play in the support.

So Vicky, has it been helpful during your early years as a tutor to have a mentor? And if so, in what way, particularly? And can you give an example of a query that you've directed towards your mentor?

VICKY O'KEEFE

Yes, I have found it useful having a mentor. It's good to have a named specific faculty, you know, you can get in touch with any time with queries. I've mostly used the tutor forums to discuss questions I've had.

But one example I can think of where I contacted Mary was when a student had asked me a specific question about an assignment, and I wasn't sure exactly how much information I could tell them.

And I was worried about giving them too much information. So I contacted Mary with their question and what I was proposing to respond, just to check I wasn't crossing the line and telling them too much.

DIANE BUTLER

I think, sometimes, there are some questions that you don't really want to, necessarily, go public with in a large audience that you would direct at one other person. And the mentor is perfect--

VICKY O'KEEFE

Yeah.

DIANE BUTLER

--for that part. So final question to you both-- I'll come to Mary, first of all-- you're mentor and mentee, but you've never, actually, met one another face to face--

[LAUGHTER]

--which is not atypical in Open University. Do you think that makes a difference?

MARY GARVEY

No, I think that, especially, these days, you can do a lot through email. And I think we're, now, getting used to these online conferences, so that might be something for the future.

But usually, most of the contact I've had with my previous mentees is through the email or maybe through the tutor forums. So it is quite normal. So we can be quite supportive of each other without, actually, meeting face to face.

And it sort of echoes the way we support our students, too. So you know, it's sort of good practise for that, too. If there was a serious issue, though-- I mean, in the past, some previous mentees-- if there was something, perhaps, crucial that they didn't want to do through email, it's, sometimes, quicker to pick up the phone and speak to each other.

Sometimes, they might meet staff at a face to face staff development event. But it's, from the mentoring side, it's quite normal to contact each other through email or phone, if necessary.

VICKY O'KEEFE

I don't find it difficult or unusual not meeting face to face. Most of my modules that I did throughout my degree were electronic only. So there were, sometimes, no face to face tutorials, so I had several modules where I didn't meet my tutor in person.

And I think most people, with the OU being distance learning, are used to the remoteness of it. And as Mary said, if there was something more complicated or a bit more detailed, then I would just call her and have a phone discussion.

So I know that option is, always, available, as well as Skype for business meetings, as well, if you wanted to have a video chat.

DIANE BUTLER

So it's really interesting, Vicky, that the way you describe that sort of flexibility about being able to contact your mentor as and when-- not in office hours-- at different times through emails-- that flexibility and the way in which it sort of mirrors the way in which we support our students in a distance learning institution-- that the support is there, but it's not sort of rigid about the time.

You can email. You can phone, and there's a variety of ways in which you can keep in contact and keep working. So thanks very much for sharing your experiences of being a mentor and a mentee.

There's a lot of similarities, there, between being in AL and a student and the same sort of developing relationship. And it's really good to know that having a mentor was really supportive for Vicky in her first couple of years as an Associate Lecturer.

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# Uncaptioned interactive content

## Transcript

CHRIS DOUCE

Can you tell me a little bit about the role of a tutor?

CHARLY LOWNDES

The role of a tutor, to me, I think is about being the point of contact for students who have opted to do the extraordinary thing that is called distance learning, which is what the Open University is all about. And they don't have a door that they can knock on at the end of a corridor, but they do have a telephone, an email, possibly a video conference that they can have with a friendly face and a friendly voice who is able to guide them-- not give them answers to questions, but point them where they can find the answers to questions.

Obviously, there's a whole lot more to it than that-- for example, giving the student confidence that they may think, who am I to try to be an undergraduate? Well, anybody can be an undergraduate. That's what the OU has proved over 50 years.

PRINCE BOATENG

I think one of the main responsibilities of a tutor, especially at level one, is to help develop our students' study skills, which they will then need further along the line in their studies, study skills like English language skills and mathematical skills. And in the IT department, we also try to help them to develop their problem-solving skills. And hopefully, all of these skills will help them down the line as they go through their studies. It's one of the main responsibilities as well.

JOAN JACKSON

I'm a postgraduate tutor. So I think I follow on from a lot of what Charly and Prince have said in that we do all of the usual role of a tutor, which is to provide academic support and also some welfare support as well, making sure that students are happy studying the module and sorting out any problems.

We also, as Prince said, really try to develop, in our case, postgraduate skills. So we're moving students on from an undergraduate level, where they're absorbing material, to a postgraduate level, where we're asking them to be much more critical, to learn independently, and to develop some skills really which are transferable, as Prince said, through all their modules and to complete their qualification, but also transferable skills to the workplace as well. So I'm thinking about things like critical engagement and reflective practise.

COLIN EVERISS

The role of the tutor is they are very much the face of the Open University. They are the human being that they actually meet and they talk to and they discuss in addition to the textual and the other media material that they have as part of their distance learning. So you're very much engaged as a person with the student themselves, talking to them, discussing with them, verbally answering their questions in a very diverse way, much more than they are getting from a textual book or a video.

CHRIS DOUCE

Now Tammy, could you tell us a little bit about the work you do as an undergraduate tutor?

TAMMY BROWN

Very much reiterating what has been already said, supporting and helping students develop, facilitating their learning. I think an important point to pick up is that a lot of what we do is we help reduce the sense of isolation by being that friendly face, by being the face of the university. We are that point of contact, that reliable point of contact. We help reduce that sense of isolation, which helps maintain the engagement of the students.

CHRIS DOUCE

So when do you contact your students, and how do you contact them?

TAMMY BROWN

I contact my students before they start. I send an email, round-robin email, with a welcome letter with probably too much information. But I try and put it in a friendly way in context so that it leads them through those introductory few days.

I make sure that they know when they can contact me, and I try to set up a realistic sense because I think it's important. Students will study for-- I don't know-- 15 hours, say, a course in a week. But we may not be employed to teach for that 15 hours specifically, and not 24 hours a day. So I think it's quite realistic to set the goals and then stand by them.

So I say that they can contact me by telephone between specific times, and I do my best to make sure that I am available during those times. They can contact me at other times, but we would then arrange that between ourselves. But most of the contact is through forum support and email, which makes it a little bit more convenient because it's asynchronous. So we don't have to be using the same means of communication at the same time.

And I contact them at various points throughout. Because I teach on the first level, I think it's important to remind them about deadlines, but not over-remind them because they have to be independent. So I will bring to their attention the fact that there's something crucial coming up.

And I always contact them at the end to say, congratulations, you've been fantastic, and have you thought about reflecting on your practise and what you might have done differently before moving on to your next module.

PRINCE BOATENG

As similar to what Tammy has said. So I always contact my students as soon as I get my student group. I send them an intro or a welcome email, setting up the expectations when they can get in touch with me and a little bit about the OU, a little bit about myself, and then just make them feel comfortable and just let them know that they can contact me at any time. So I do that.

I also contact my students to remind them of impending tutorials. So whenever we're going to have our face to face tutorials or online tutorials, I would normally sent an email around saying, don't forget that we have a tutorial at such and such a time.

I've also been sending my students an email trying to help them do their TMAs properly because over the years, I've realised that sometimes my students don't get the marks they deserve not because they don't know what they're doing, but because they're not answering the TMAs in the appropriate ways and missing out things. So I've got a kind of a group sheet that I normally send out to them just to help them know how to answer their TMAs.

And of course, I also respond to my students when they get in touch with me. So another point of contact is responding to them when they get in touch with me either by email or on the phone regarding whatever queries they may have. So I contact my student through emails and then also on the telephone. In fact, sometimes I even prefer telephones because then we can establish a rapport and I can explain things better. And I can also get things from them a bit clearer than what one can put on an email.

And as Tammy also said, through the forum as well, I engage with my students. But what I tell them also depends on the purpose of the communication. So as I've said, if it's a tutorial reminder, then I'll tell them that we're going to have a tutorial on such and such a date at such and such a time. Of course, if I'm responding to a query that they've raised, then the content of the communication will be just that.

And then in the past, I've had a student who said they are depressed. They haven't spoken to somebody for a while. So there is a bit of pastoral work there sometimes. And I'm sure maybe it's not part of our job description, but we're there to support our students all around. So sometimes, pastoral care comes in as well. So these are the ways and the content of my engagement of my students sometimes.

CHARLY LOWNDES

I try to contact students in a number of ways. I'm a great believer that one size does not fit all. So one of the things I do is to make little videos at the start of each academic year saying, hi, I'm me. I'm trying to get across the idea that I am a friendly face.

I'll send very short emails just to establish a line of communication. Once that's going, I suppose I'm trying to do three things. One is to give them some factual information. This is what you need to do and where to find it and how to do it.

One is, if you like, just pragmatic. Have I got the right email? Reply so that I know. All you need to say is hi. If I don't get a reply, then I'm going to keep following up, possibly through another channel like the telephone.

But the third and the most important thing is the emotional rapport, a tricky thing to do with somebody you've never met, may never meet face to face. So I try to put myself across as being approachable because I want to be approached. That's what a large chunk of what a tutor is for.

So I use email. I use video I might use video conferencing later on. I've used SMS text messaging. The telephone, of course, is real time and very easy and personal. I use Twitter a bit. Not very many people seem to chime with that, but all the social media and communications tricks are there.

Probably the only one I haven't used-- I don't think ever-- is to write somebody a letter. But that's up my sleeve. I don't think I've ever written anybody a letter, but that's up my sleeve as a possible way of getting in touch. That contact is just so important.

CHRIS DOUCE

Well, thank you, Charly. That was great. And I think I did used to write some physical letters to our students around-- I don't know-- between six and eight years ago. But these days, all of my instructions are by email.

COLIN EVERISS

I actually do recall sending some of my students letters many, many years ago, but it is many years ago now. So really, I guess a lot of the-- well, the students on the apprenticeship scheme are with me for four years. So I initially make contact with them at the beginning. That's normally via an email.

And then from there on, I arrange what are known as quarterly meetings. I will meet the student four times a year. And throughout that period, I would probably be talking to them via email. Some of them, but not all of them, I will use mobile telephone calls. Quite often, students don't reply to the mobile telephone call, but they seem to reply to texts, which is pretty useful.

I also contact their managers as well via email. This is also to arrange the quarterly meetings that we hold where we come together and we go through a whole range of discussions and things to cover their learning with the Open University.

Initially, I'll be spending a lot of my time talking to them about what it means to be a student with the Open University. And a lot of my time initially is talking to them about how it's organised and how they should be organised. And as I mentioned, some of that discussion also takes place with the employers as well.

What I try to do is to organise it in such a way that we do follow a reasonable agenda which follows through the four years that they would be undertaking their apprenticeship scheme. We talk about things like the skills that take place. We talk about the modules that they're studying. We talk about the feedback that they have with their tutors, and I try to resolve any issues or problems.

We talk about organising their structure, such as we go through learning plans. But we also talk about many other things as well, which might be the remit by an associate tutor. We talk about any diversity issues or equality issues that they may have in the workplace as well.

A lot of the communications and contact does take place through face-to-face meetings, but that isn't to say that contact doesn't go on throughout the year as well. As I say, much of that is via email, and quite often through telephone calls as well.

CHRIS DOUCE

Thank you, Colin. That was great. OK, so it's on to a question about what is challenging about supporting students.

TAMMY BROWN

One of the fun parts of this job is the challenge of supporting students because they are all individuals and there is no one cap fits all. So I think it's important to develop the relationship and the expectations early on so that you can individualise your support.

I think that's probably the most challenging part. The rest of it comes with experience-- oh, and interpreting what it is they really want. Often, students, they'll come to you. They're having a problem, say, with an assignment question. And it's unravelling what it is they think their problem is to actually get to the core of it to know where to signpost them to.

PRINCE BOATENG

So like what Tammy has said, balancing the different needs of our students sometimes can be a bit challenging. Because, as she said, there is no one size fits all. And trying to individualise the support for each individual student sometimes can be a bit challenging, and especially even in terms of time constraints.

Sometimes, you realise that-- you have a TMA deadline. And then on the last day or just the day before, somebody comes to you and wants to request for an extension. And the story they are telling you, you don't think genuine. They just want to buy a bit of time.

And trying to really read through the whole thing and try and help them-- you want to help them as much as possible. But also trying to ascertain as to whether what you are telling you is true or not and so on and so forth sometimes can be challenging. I always give people the benefit of the doubt anyway. But sometimes, it can be stressful. In fact, in terms of that as well, knowing how much time, for instance, to give them sometimes can be challenging.

And also, for instance, our tutorials, I try and facilitate-- I mean, for instance, if you've got disabled students and how to really make the room or make the facility work for them sometimes can be challenging. Because sometimes, people come with wheelchairs and you want to make them comfortable. And it may require you negotiating with the other students, for instance, to make room and so on and so forth.

Sometimes, they can be challenging. Of course, they are interesting. I mean, I am happy doing that. But I'm saying that sometimes, it can throw up a few challenges, but nothing insurmountable. We always get around things like that.

And sometimes, also some students just don't have the motivation. They sign up the course for whatever reason, but they just don't come up with the motivation. So sometimes, you're trying very hard to help them, but they're just not meeting you at that level where you're trying to support them. And sometimes, that can be very challenging. But all in all, we try and get on top of these things.

JOAN JACKSON

I think what's challenging about supporting postgraduate students is really just the same as for Tommy and Prince. I think the main challenge is making the contact-- yeah, making the contact personal and relevant for the individual student.

I guess with postgraduate students, they can have a range of development issues. And it's like being a detective, really. You've got to identify what those issues are and tailor your feedback and support to address those. I mean, for some of them, it will be postgraduate skills. But for some of them, it will be the academic module material.

So you do have to identify what the problem is and provide the appropriate support. But for me, I mean, isn't that why I like being a postgraduate tutor? Because that's what makes it really interesting. It's what makes it really rewarding. When you get that light bulb moment where you can see that a student has really got to grips with what postgraduate study really means, then that's a great experience for you as a tutor.

CHRIS DOUCE

Thank you, Joan.

CHARLY LOWNDES

I suppose the difference between a project module and whatever has come before that is that the project is defined by the student, not by me or by the university. The student goes and finds something that interests them, with a bit of luck, which ties in with their earlier studies and works on that.

So there's a lot of interpretation of what it is that they ought to be doing. So that's straightforward, factual teaching, if you like. But there's also the underlying emotional and intellectual confidence to set about doing something where the pathway is not as clear as it might have been in earlier modules.

And I think empathy with students is one of the things that I try most to get going. And a great experience I had was being a student myself of the saxophone. And I tried to learn this thing. I'm not particularly musical. It was a struggle. I failed grade four.

And the experience of trying to do something that I found hard and didn't actually succeed at any particularly high level put me into a deep understanding, I think, of what it must be like for somebody who is feeling out of their depth. And the support and care and empathy I got from my saxophone teacher is something that I try to reinterpret in the rather more technical context where I'm more confident to pass on to my students.

CHRIS DOUCE

Thank you, Charly.

COLIN EVERISS

What's challenging about supporting project students, project students find themselves in a variety of situations, possibly by the nature of them working in different working environments and with different managers and different types of managers. Because you're working with both the students and the managers, now that, in itself, is quite challenging.

The other thing is that the students themselves are given time off from work to actually carry out their studying. And the variety of situations students find themselves in is that some students may find that they're studying on a day per week. Other students may find that they're studying for one or two hours per day. And that can vary. A lot of that comes down to the student's preference, but a lot of it also comes down to the employer as well making the time available.

And what I found challenging is that the different study styles may not necessarily satisfy that particular type of person, that type of student. And often, I find myself negotiating with managers to find the most appropriate study method or the study time made available to the students themselves.

And the other challenging thing is that because students are finding themselves in work situations, they are under different deadlines and pressures, maybe. But quite often, the employers may find that there are different priorities for the student in any one particular week. So it's challenging to be or to find the flexibility for both the employer and the student.

The other thing that's quite challenging is that it's challenging for students themselves to find the right balance between study and work. And quite often, you're talking to students, often becoming a problem-solver. You're trying to encourage them to find different approaches to their study as well.

Being extremely flexible and compassionate to the way that they work in that situation is very, very important indeed, and it's also important to be a good listener. Quite often, it's easy to take the lead role. But unless you listen to students, you don't necessarily find out what the underlining issues are for them

CHRIS DOUCE

Thank you, Colin.

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# Uncaptioned interactive content

## Transcript

CHRIS DOUCE

Well, what kind of additional support do some students need, and what specific support do students on your module need?

PRINCE BOATENG

For me, students need additional support in other module-specific additional support or support in other areas of the academic journey. So for instance, I've been approached by my staff tutor once regarding a student who needed a bit more in terms of programming. It was about TMA2 or something like that, and he needed extra support.

So the SST approached me and arranged extra time for me to actually call this student and take him through the various scenarios in the programme, in the programming sense, and actually help him. So at the end of it all, I was able to help him over and beyond what he got from tutorials. And because it was one on one, he understood things a bit better. So there's one area where students need additional support and that we offer additional support.

There are occasions also where students have needed not just subject-specific support, but, for instance, currently, very, very recently, I had a student who said they are very much overwhelmed with the coronavirus and with work and family issues and the rest of it. So they want to defer the course or give up the course. So what are their options?

So I had to talk to them a bit and then signpost them to the Student Support Team, the SST, so that they can lay out the various options available to them in terms of whether they can defer the course or whatever they can do. So this is not module-specific support, but extra support that these students need. So these are all additional.

And as I mentioned earlier on as well-- for instance, our tutorials. I sometimes get disabled students who need additional support when they come in-- so whether it's somebody who's hard of hearing and they want to sit at front. So I have to actually help them clear a space for them so that they can sit on the front row. Or maybe a wheelchair user needing that additional support as to where to place their wheelchair appropriately. So these are all additional support that our students do need that I've come across in course of my work with the OU.

I mean, in terms of what kind of support that they-- generally what they will need on the course are some of these things that I've mentioned. But I think I can't, from the top of my head, really come up with what the investor needs to do further, because the opinion investor is very, very good in terms of making available options for support for students.

So I don't think I can suggest any more avenues of support that we can give students. Everything is there. The OU has provided various means through which students can get support through-- forums, through cluster group forums and tutor group forums and so on and so forth. So I think we're good on that. The OU is good on that.

TAMMY BROWN

The support specifically with the level-- I specialise in the first modules that students come to. So a lot of what we do is help develop their basic fundamental skills in terms of literacy and numeracy.

One of the things that attracted me to the Open University in the first place is this word "open." We are open, and we make available this amazing academic pathway that is not available to people through other means. And it doesn't matter what you come to the table with in terms of any difficulties, disabilities, anything. It doesn't even have to be as formal as a disability.

We are open and we adapt, and we do our best to make the whole thing available, and we help develop your skills. So nothing should inhibit students, whether that be dyslexia and helping to develop the specific skills that each individual needs-- because as I said before, there's no one cap fits all. It's getting to know that student and getting to know the tools that they can employ to help them develop, and knowing where they can go-- so signposting the additional support.

And sometimes that is outside of the Open University, where a great wealth, I find as tutors, of additional support-- and we're all very keen to assist each other, which I think is really, really lovely, which again feeds into this ethos of openness. But also, there is a massive wealth of support toolkits, different departments that will help to develop student skills with this additional support they need.

We've also touched on the pastoral support. And there is pastoral support within the Open University that students can make available to them. But also us as tutors, we can do that on a personal level so long as it doesn't encroach too much on time.

I've had-- life throws spanners into the works. The best-laid plans just go absolutely haywire. The coronavirus is an example. But bereavement, illness, students travel-- we did do. Somebody becomes ill in their native home country so they've got to go back.

And they can still carry on their work, but you need to give them that additional support. You need to give them an extension. You need to know how they can maybe rethink what their ultimate goal is for that module to get them through.

One example I have is a student who was working in the Middle East, and his wife became incredibly ill. And it looked like he was going to have to hang up his studies. Being able to have the conversation with him about what his expectations were and what he could afford to come back on, grabbing some support, some counselling support for him, we were able to get him through. And in fact, he absolutely succeeded fantastically. But this is this additional support that was needed to get him through.

CHRIS DOUCE

Charly, could you tell us something about the additional support that some students do need and if there's anything in particular that does surround your project modules?

CHARLY LOWNDES The Open University is such an extraordinarily wonderful and literally open institution that every possible additional support need comes our way. Now, that might be to do with language because not all Open University students have English-speaking mums. It's not their mother tongue. So there's that.

There's the ability to crunch numbers, which is often a part of a computer or communications module. So there's those obvious things. There's every possible point on that neurodiversity spectrum of people who come to us for study because our kind of learning suits them. So in extreme cases, we've got a really well-organised and very skilled and very experienced student support team. So I know how to refer students who need specialist help to get the help that they need.

That rich mix is interesting. It varies over time. 2020-- coronavirus, lots of people working from home. I wanted to give students some advice on the ergonomics of if, all of a sudden, you're not in an office where you've got a proper chair and a proper desk and a big screen, but you're possibly working and trying to study on a kitchen table or a bedroom desk of some sort, whether a laptop, then what about repetitive strain injury and keeping your eyes from going whoa after a long night of study?

And sure enough, there was an entire Open University resource on how to set up the right angles, how to examine where your spine is on the chair-- I'm not very good at sitting up straight-- but all that sort of stuff. It might seem trivial, but if you're doing 40, 50 hours' work and study in one place, it can matter.

I'm a big believer in holistic health, and I go running. I encourage students to take some exercise of some sort. Again, coronavirus has made that topical. But I think it's a great persistent truth that if you want to stay mentally sharp, you need to be physically fit as well.

In terms of the project module, there are some specific things. Again, it's a great truth that time management is one of the big challenges for a distance learning student at any level because you haven't got a timetable set by an institution. You've got to make your own timetable.

So that's particularly true of project management because you've got a lot to do. And over the space of several months, you've got to keep on top of what's going on. So that matters.

And being clear about what the objectives are. There's a curious dichotomy of looking at the project outcome. There's the product. Often, people do a software development project. So they've got to write some code that does something. So that's, if you like, the fun bit, and a lot of students want to spend all their time doing that at the expense of reflecting on and describing and justifying what they're doing and the why as opposed to the what of their product. You could call that the process of developing the software solution or whatever it is.

And so I think that's a very important support thing. It's not a natural skill. Writing code might be what students think study is all about. But thinking about, well, OK, why that language, why that approach, why that algorithm? That is important, and I spend a lot of time with project students discussing that sort of stuff.

JOAN JACKSON

I think in terms of additional support that postgraduate students need, I mean, that could be all the things everyone else has spoken about. The OU has this great raft of resources for things like writing skills and citations and referencing and postgraduate skills. So yeah, I mean, they've got all those skills and they've got all those resources, and we can refer to those as we need to.

We do, as well, provide additional support sessions in the form of, say, tutorials for those students who are struggling with a particular topic. And again, we will provide some additional support sessions for those with specific disabilities, and we'll do that.

And some students with difficulties would prefer teaching using the spoken word. So we will extend our tutorials by giving those students a little bit of extra support and an extra tutorial. So we would do all of that.

I think in terms of the postgraduate modules, and particularly the research modules, the project and dissertation modules, something which students maybe find most difficult is, as Charly said, the time management, but also organising yourself to study. These modules have an awful lot of reading, and you really have to be very good at organising all of your sources and organising your module material and how you're going to interact with that.

So we do find that particularly new students and students when they reach the end of the road, the capstone module, then we do sometimes have to provide additional support of things like using bibliographic management tools, and also thinking about how you use combinations of online material, EPUBs, studying on mobile devices so you can get through all the reading that you need to do.

Just one final thing, which probably is the crux, really, of postgraduate study, is most of the modules, they will have an end-of-module assessments, an EMA, or they will have some form of dissertation. And in that type of module, then you are linking your understanding of theory or of the literature on that topic with some sort of practical experience, either your own practical experience or some research content.

So in those modules, the choice of topic is up to you, and that choice of topic is really crucial. I mean, if you get that topic wrong, if you're not sufficiently interested in that topic to sustain you over what can be six months to a year, then you're not going to be as successful as you should to be.

So in terms of the additional support, the key thing is to actually speak to the student. You actually have to have a chat with them in the first couple of weeks of the module or of their project and then make contact with them again at various points in time during the module.

For someone who's completing a dissertation, then those students who keep in touch with their tutor or supervisor, say, once a fortnight, those are the students that actually do best. So that's the kind of additional support we need.

COLIN EVERISS

There's a lot that's been said here already about additional support which I won't necessarily repeat. So I'll be a little bit more specific about the student apprentices. You have to remember that this is a partnership. It's a three-way partnership between employers, the Open University, and the apprentice. And additional support can work both for the employer and for the apprentice.

A good example of that is that student apprentices undertake a whole range of modules, and probably one of the important ones there is the work-based module. And because it's a partnership, it's very important to see that there's a relationship there not only between the academic work that's been undertaken by the module, but it does relate to the actual work being undertaken by the student. So it's important to get the additional support to the employer such that they realise this so that they can identify aspects of work and components of work that match up with the module itself rather than being fragmented and separate.

And that needs planning. That doesn't just happen when the module's beginning. That needs to happen before the module so that employers recognise that, that they can prepare for that, and to identify what it is that the student can do.

And the other thing is that the student apprenticeship, which runs over between four, 4 and 1/2 years, things don't always go according to plan, just like any student with the Open University. But unlike other students who are undertaking a module independently, if, for whatever reason, they have to postpone that module-- They have to defer that module. They may even fail a particular module and have to pick that up later on.

For a student outside the workplace, that is more manageable. Within the workplace itself, that has an impact because the student is engaged with a period of work with the employer. So the additional support that takes place then is that one has to look at the overall programme, the impact of the programme. Does it extend the apprenticeship, for example? There's a whole range of issues which have to be addressed.

And so the additional support there is that we have to talk to not only the student about what's best for them, but to be able to negotiate with the employer and to look at what best fits the programme.

CHRIS DOUCE

Thank you so much, Colin. Thank you, everyone. Thanks so much for joining us. I do hope you have enjoyed this and have found it of interest.

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# Uncaptioned interactive content

## Transcript

CHRIS DOUCE

So when do you contact your students and how do you contact them?

TAMMY BROWN

I contact my students before they start. I send an email, round Robin email, with a welcome letter with probably too much information. But I try and put it in a friendly way in context so that it leads them through those introductory few days.

I make sure that they know when they can contact me. And I try to set up a realistic sense, because I think it's important. Students will study for, I don't know, 15 hours, say, a course in a week. But we may not be employed to teach for that 15 hours specifically, and not 24 hours a day. So I think it's quite realistic to set the goals and then stand by them. So I say that they can contact me by telephone between specific times and I do my best to make sure that I am available during those times. They can contact me at other times, but we would then arrange that between ourselves.

But most of the contact is through forum support and email, which makes it a little bit more convenient because it's asynchronous. So we don't have to be using the same means of communication at the same time.

And I contact them at various points throughout-- because I teach on the first level, I think it's important to remind them about deadlines, but not over remind them. Because they have to be independent. So I will bring to their attention the fact that there's something crucial coming up. And I always contact them at the end to say congratulations. You've been fantastic. And, have you thought about reflecting on your practise and what you might have done differently before moving on to your next module?

PRINCE BOATENG

Similar to what Tammy has said, so I always contact my students. As soon as I get my student group, I send them a welcome email setting up the expectations when they can get in touch with me and a little bit about myself. And then just make them feel comfortable and just let them know that they can contact me at any time. So I do that.

I also contact my students to remind them of impending tutorials. So whenever we're going to have face-to-face tutorials or online tutorials, I would normally send an email around saying, don't forget that we have a tutorial on such-and-such a time.

I've also been sending my students an email, trying to help them do the TMAs properly. Because over the years, I've realised that sometimes my students don't get as much as they deserve, not because they don't know what they're doing, but because they're not answering the TMAs in the appropriate ways and missing other things. So I've got kind of a crib sheet that I normally send out to them just to help them know how to answer their TMAs.

And of course, I also respond to my students when they get in touch with me. So another point of contact is responding to them when they get in touch with me, either by email or on the phone regarding whatever queries they may have. So I contact my student through emails and then also on the telephone. Sometimes I even prefer telephone, because then we can establish a rapport and I can explain things better. And I can also get things from them a bit clearer than one can put on an email.

So and as Tammy also said, through the forum as well I engage with my students. But what I tell them also depends on the purpose of the communication. So as I've said, if it's a tutorial reminder, then I tell them that we're going to have a tutorial on such-and-such a date at such-and-such a time. Because if I'm responding to a query that you've raised, then the content of the communication will be just that. And then sometimes, in the past, I've had a student who said they are depressed. They haven't spoken to somebody for a while. So there is a bit of pastoral work there sometimes. And I know, I'm sure maybe it's not part of our job description. But we're there to support our students all around. So sometimes pastoral care comes in as well. So these are the ways and the content, my engagement with my students sometimes.

CHARLY LOWNDES

I try to contact students in a number of ways. I'm a great believer that one size does not fit all. So one of the things I do is to make little videos at the start of each academic year saying, hi, I'm me. Trying to get across the idea that I am a friendly face. I'll send very short emails, just to establish a line of communication.

Once that's going, I suppose I'm trying to do three things. One is to give them some factual information. This is what you need to do and where to find it and how to do it. One is if you like, just pragmatic. Have I got the right email? Reply so that I know. All you need to say is, hi. If I don't get a reply, then I'm going to keep following up, possibly through another channel like the telephone.

But the third and the most important thing is the emotional rapport, a tricky thing to do with somebody you've never met, may never meet face-to-face. So I try to put myself across as being approachable because I want to be approached. That's a large chunk of what a tutor is for. So I use email. I use video I might use video conferencing later on. I've used SMS text messaging. The telephone, of course, is real time and very easy and personal. I use Twitter a bit. Not very many people seem to chime with that. But all the social media and communications tricks are there.

Probably the only one I haven't used, I don't think ever, is to write somebody a letter. But that's up my sleeve. I don't think I've ever written anybody a letter. But that's up my sleeve as a possible way of getting in touch. That contact is just so important.

CHRIS DOUCE

Well, thank you, Charly. That was great. I think I did used to write some physical letters to our students between six and eight years ago. But these days, all of my instructions are by email.

COLIN EVERISS

I actually do recall sending some of my students letters many, many years ago. But it is many years ago now. So really, I guess, a lot of the students on the apprenticeship scheme are with me for four years. So I initially make contact with them at the beginning. That's normally via an email. And then from there on, I arrange what are known as quarterly meetings. I would meet the student four times a year. And throughout that period, I would probably be talking to them via email. Some of them, but not all of them, I will use mobile telephone calls. Quite often, students don't reply to a mobile telephone call, but they seem to reply to texts, which is very useful.

I also contact their managers as well, via email. This is also to arrange the quarterly meetings that we hold where we come together and we go through a whole range of discussions and things to cover their learning with the Open University. Initially, I'll be spending a lot of my time talking to them about what it is or what it means to be a student with the Open University. And a lot of my time initially is talking to them about how it's organised and how they should be organised. And as I mentioned, some of that discussion also takes place with the employers as well.

What I try to do is to organise it in such a way that we do follow a reasonable agenda, which follows through the four years that they will be undertaking their apprenticeship scheme. We talk about things like the skills that take place. We talk about the modules that they're studying. We talk about the feedback that they have with their tutors, and I try to resolve any issues or problems. We talk about organising their structure, such as we work through learning plans.

But we also talk about many other things. Well, which one would be the remit an associate tutor. We talk about any diversity issues or equality issues that they may have in the workplace as well.

A lot of the communications contact does take place through face-to-face meetings. But that isn't to say that contact doesn't go on throughout the year as well. As I say, much of that is via email and quite often through telephone calls as well.

CHRIS DOUCE

Thank you, Colin. That was great.

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