

OpenLearn Podcast:

Home Education Voices Podcast – Follow up episode

Dr Chelle Oldham, Millie and Elizabeth:

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Chelle Oldham, and I'm here with two home-educated young people, who have been studying with us at the Open University. And I want to catch up with both of them and see how their year has gone.

So Millie, let's come to you first and then Elizabeth afterwards. How have you found your year? What have you done for the year? What have you been involved with? What have you enjoyed?

MILLIE: I've absolutely loved my first year. It's been amazing. The whole community of my tutor group that I was in is so supportive. I've been doing lots of tutorials and I've found them very, very engaging.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Yeah. I've really enjoyed my first module. The structure of it, I really enjoy it at OU. I think for a home-educated student, the semi-structure of OU modules is really good because it has just enough structure with the deadlines and the timings of the assessments that you can meet those deadlines and you can work towards those deadlines, but you can still work at your own pace.

You can still do extra reading. There's not so much information in the module that it's too information heavy to not do other study, which I find home educators did in quite good. I only do the one module. And for me, doing other studies and doing other things, clubs, hobbies outside of the EU as well is really important.

So that semi-structure is really good, and I really enjoy that. And I enjoy the option of live tutorials and also the fact that they're recorded. So I go to all of the ones that are live, but then the recorded ones are really helpful as well. So yeah, no, I really, really enjoyed it.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Excellent. Really comprehensive answers, both of you. What do you think you might do next year? Are you going to stay with us at the OU? Or what are your plans after these modules that you've just completed?

MILLIE: I think my next plan is to continue with OU until I've finished my degree, and then wait a few years and see what other courses and degrees I can achieve then.

ELIZABETH: For me, I'm going to continue on and do more modules to the end of my degree. What I like about OU is that you don't have to pick a specific pathway. So as my interests develop, I can pick modules that align with my interests.

And so that's what I will be doing. So I'll be continuing to look at psychology and criminology modules. And also might be looking at different law modules and continuing on with them, which I'm really excited for.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Have either of you managed to meet up with other home-educated young people who are studying with us at the OU?

MILLIE: I haven't actually met any other young people studying at the OU at the minute, but I am searching for them.

ELIZABETH: I'm definitely open to it at this point. However, what I found is it's not super easy. There's no forum, or there's no specific area or way of finding home-educated young people at

the OU. I think that's a bit of a gap perhaps. So I would say I'm open to it, but I haven't been able to.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: That's really interesting. That's great feedback for us. There's a few of the academics at the OU who work in home education, and that's where our research area is. And so that's definitely something that we can take back and hopefully improve that over the next year or two so that we can connect you as home-educated young people. I think that would be really worthwhile.

And thinking about the year that you are about to finish, because we're going into the summer now, if you had a room full of home-educated people in front of you today, what top tips would you give them either for them to prepare for their modules in October, or just top tips for studying with the OU?

MILLIE: I think I'd definitely warn them that the first couple of months, at least when they start at the OU, they're stressing and trying to get everything in. My book for the first few chapters, every single thing is highlighted.

So I'd definitely tell them not to worry, that they can always come back to the notebooks, while it is really important to highlight things so that they can remember them and make sure that they can look back on them. Not to worry, because they've always got time to look back, especially if they're part time.

ELIZABETH: And for me, what I didn't do as much on the run-up is I didn't go on to the VLE very much, and I would definitely recommend that to a student that's starting. I would like, oh, I start on this day and I'll have a look maybe a week before.

I would say go on as early as possible, get used to the VLE, get used to all the different pathways and routes to getting where you need to go way before you start. Otherwise, you're stressing about, are you getting all the information? Are you missing anything? Are you meeting your deadlines? On top of, I don't know how this system works, which is not helpful.

So I would say get used to the systems. And just when you have a spare minute, read through chapters of the book, just skim read them, just get used to the terminology, get used to how they're written, get used to the layout of the information. So you can go, I don't know what this means, and then go look at it before you're stressing out about deadlines and assignments.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Awesome. I'm sure that all of that from both of you will help potential students who are home educated and are coming to the OU in the autumn. Have both of you been able to still do a lot of the activities outside of studying that you were talking about before? So in the first podcast, when I first met you, there were lots of different things and lots of examples of different activities and things that you were doing outside of your studies. Have you been able to juggle both? Or how's that been for both of you?

MILLIE: Well, now that I've started with the OU and I've completed my first year, I've realized that I can actually do more, if that makes sense. Yes, I have 16 hours a week taken, but I can make that fit into a way that I can do the things I love while not being overtired from my work. And I've definitely managed to juggle them both.

ELIZABETH: Yeah. I was just going to say that 100% you can do the things that you want to do around. I think definitely I agree with Millie, those first couple of months especially, you're like, oh, OU is my life now. This is it. This is just studying now.

But then as you're coming down to the end, you realize, OK, I know how to manage my time now. I know how much is expected of me. And doing those other things are completely, 100% doable. It is about managing your time. It's about prioritising.

It's about maybe spending more time studying on the run-up to a deadline, and maybe more time doing hobbies just after deadline so you can have that recovery period after some heavy

study. But 100%, I'm able to do the things that I want to do around OU, and that's what I love about OU.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: OK. Last question. So thinking about what students who come into the OU from a home background might try and fit in or try and have a go at before they start their modules teaching in October, how have you found academic integrity and referencing and turn it in if you've used it? How have you found all of that this year? Do you think you've figured that out, or are you still learning that skill?

MILLIE: I have definitely struggled with the referencing, but my tutor was absolutely amazing and he's definitely explained it and I understand it now, but I'm definitely going to be working over that over the summer.

ELIZABETH: I actually really enjoyed the process of learning about referencing. It wasn't something I'd massively done before. And I think what my module did really, really well is it integrated it into the tutorials, integrated it into the lectures, and as we were learning about other stuff that would be there.

And it was the same lecturers, it was the same tutors who were talking about these different topics in criminology that would teach me about referencing. I liked that. I found it helpful. It was more engaging. You knew the people. You knew that you could ask questions. You had that back and forth with them, which I really liked.

Early on, I got to decide the right book. One of my tutors recommended it to me. That was a godsend. I loved that book. And being able to have that book and keep going back to it, it's a really easy layout.

And of course, there are all of the OU materials for referencing as well. So I've actually quite enjoyed the process of learning how to reference and learning in academic integrity. Well, the one thing I would say is that I recently learned Turnitin you could submit drafts to, which nobody had told me before. So really recently I learned that.

So there's still things that you have to figure out, even as you go. This is nearly a year into my model that I found this out. So you still have to figure these things out. But as a whole, I really enjoyed it.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Awesome. Thank you both. Is there anything else that you would like to share with any potential home-educated young people who are thinking of coming to the OU?

ELIZABETH: One thing that I didn't mention before is I was really nervous about going on any of the forums to start with. I just did them. I didn't touch them. I was like, oh, my gosh, that's terrifying. I don't know who these people are. It's online.

So I didn't touch any of them. And I would say maybe just have a look, maybe approach it, see what you think, see who's on there because I think it can be quite difficult with OU to connect with other students. And perhaps that's something that OU needs to improve on.

But I think, as a student, I think it's important to be open to connecting to other students, to finding people that are like-minded, that are into the things that you're into, that are interested in the subject that you're studying, things like that.

And I think that's really important. So I would say be open and active in connecting with other students, whether that be in your lectures, in your tutorials, but also in forums and things like that.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: I saw you nodding, Millie. Are you agreeing with some of those things?

MILLIE: Oh, 100%. For the first few weeks, I'd look through the forums every now and then and I'd get terrified because it's all people that I don't know. And then every now and then, there'd

be a picture of a dog. And that's what sold me. I was on the forums then. But they're actually definitely very helpful.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Awesome. Thank you both for coming in and chatting with me today and answering my endless questions that I have for you when I'm trying to find out about your experiences. And I'm really pleased to hear that it's overwhelmingly positive, I think.

It's great feedback where you've identified potential gaps for us to be able to work on as an organization that will hopefully attract other home-educated young people to the university and to OpenLearn as a platform for them to prepare for coming to the OU to do a university course. I'm always grateful to you for your time. It's fantastic to hear that you've had a positive experience, and that you must have got those end-of-year assessments in, which is wonderful. Do feel free to reach out to tutors or to the SST, the Student Support Team, over the summer, if you need to. And I hope that I will see you both in modules next year. Thanks, Millie.

MILLIE: Thanks so much for having us.

ELIZABETH: Thank you.

DR CHELLE OLDHAM: Thanks, Elizabeth.