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KAREN: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. In this session, we're going to be talking about supporting students in Wales. And I'm joined by Rob Humphreys and Darren Jones. Thank you for coming in from the Open University in Wales.

Now some of you may be studying in Wales, and we've got a map on the screen. So if you'd like to let us know where you're studying, whether in the UK or abroad, click a dot on the screen to let us know where you're at. We've also got some questions that we'd like to talk about.

So going back to this idea that Peter Horwitz was talking about earlier about studying with the Open University and experiences and work placements, et cetera, we're going to talk about some of the ways in which the Open University in Wales are actually delivering on some of this. So we'd like to know why you chose to study with the OU. What do you look for in terms of the perfect work placement? And if you were to start your own business, so the entrepreneurs out there, what would be the most important job to you? So do let us know, and we'll feed those into the session.

Darren and Rob, thank you for coming along. You're both very interesting because you are such good advertisements for lifelong learning and changing careers and doing something. So can I ask you to both introduce yourselves and tell us how you've managed to turn things around quite dramatically for yourselves to get these wonderful jobs you have now?

ROB HUMPHREYS: Well, Prynhawn da first. Well, good afternoon, everyone. When I left school, I am from Mid Wales originally, near a place called Welshpool. I was a labourer, unskilled labourer, for seven years.

I'm leaving school not really sure what I wanted to do. I had to get my head down and earn a bit of money. It wasn't very much money. That's for sure.

And later, I was very fortunate to get a scholarship from my trade union at the time to study at Ruskin College in Oxford. It's a well known second-chance college, as these things were described at that time. And then thereafter, I went to Cardiff University as a mature student, got a degree and so on, and entered academia, and then pitched up in the end as director of the Open University in Wales. So that was something of a journey, yes.

KAREN: What about you, Darren?

DARREN JONES: Well, I didn't really take my school studies very seriously. I failed all of my GCSEs at the first attempt. And I had to go back to the sixth form.

There were a couple of bereavements in my family then when I was studying my A Levels. So I was kicked off of my A-Level courses, so school just didn't work out for me at the time. So I went to work in a factory. I was in a factory for five years. I thought I'd never escape from it.

But I took a gamble, did some adult education in my 20s, passed a few qualifications in night school. I managed to get some different jobs and start working, helping people rather than producing stuff in a factory. And I passed my masters in my 30s.

So for me, adult education and learning came much later. And I think that's really important for the people that I work with, is to say that there is always an opportunity to change. Whatever you're doing now isn't always the thing you'll be doing for the rest of your life.

KAREN: Now, Rob, the OU in Wales have some really exciting initiatives, and we're going to talk to both of you about some of those. But some of the new students here may not realise we've got these national centres and that for those centres, and we're just focusing on Wales here in the session today, there are different legislative issues and different sort of things that each nation will be contending with. What are some of the things you're working on?

ROB HUMPHREYS: Well, I think the first thing to say, Karen, is that the OU is unique in the UK in that it works across all four jurisdictions, all four nations of the UK, so England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. And we receive public funding from each of the governments across all four nations. No other university is in that position.

So that carries with it obligations to those governments, and things may be different policy-wise. Now if you're an OU student and you're studying Shakespeare, or chemistry, or history of music, whatever it might be, that may not be terribly interesting to you. And why not? Because you've come to study those things, which are very exciting and so on, and that's what you want to do.

But nonetheless, the rules and regs around student support and finance and so on, they are different across all four nations. So we need to make students aware of those differences. You need to get the right advice. In the National Centre in Cardiff, we've got loads of brilliant and committed staff who work to make sure our students do get the right service and quality advice that they need.

KAREN: And we've got Anne and Joanna, who have logged in from the Cardiff office, who are going to be answering questions in the chat. So if you've got any questions, if you're a Welsh student and would like to say hello to them, then please do so. Rob, you know, some of these are specific to Wales. But, of course, every nation has its things that its campaigning for as well. So what are some of the things that are specific for you right now?

ROB HUMPHREYS: Well, the biggest game in town in Wales right now is something called the Diamond Review, which was a review set up to look at the whole system of funding for higher education for all universities and for students studying at universities right across Wales. I was privileged to be appointed to that review. It made recommendations in the middle of last year. And the Welsh government has by and large accepted those recommendations. It's a consultation at the moment.

But the key things for OU students who are part-time students are that it's likely to be a much more generous support system than previously, particularly if you're on lower income. And if you earn less than 25,000 pounds a year household income, it may well be free to study. And in addition to that, there will be means-tested maintenance grants for the first time for part-time learners.

So depending on your income again, you may well get a grant to help with your living costs. So that's a very different regime to the one which applies in England at the moment, for example. And we're very optimistic about it. We think it could lead to an expansion of our student numbers in Wales. And depending exactly on what is implemented in 2018 when the government hopes to implement, we think it could be a great deal for OU students in Wales.

KAREN: So you're very much on the campaigning side, working with government to try and offer the best for our students. And, Darren, you're doing a lot with the more practical side of things as well. Both of you, I guess, have moved from trades to academia.

And a lot of students in Wales will be looking for a career change, so that that may sort of prompt their studies with the Open University. And even if they're not, even if they're doing something that's quite generic, having a degree can often really enhance your employability. But you're doing something quite interesting with pre-careers advice, and this is really relevant to new students at the Open University. So can you tell us about what you're offering?

DARREN JONES: Yeah, this is a new and exciting service in Wales. You would have seen Penny and Hayden in the video earlier. Now Penny and Hayden, if they haven't already, they'll be contacting students in Wales pretty soon to talk about the service that they can offer. And that can be quite intensive, right from day one of a student's career with the Open University.

They can provide help and support with CVs. So if you've got a CV, or you've never had a CV and you'd like somebody to take a look at it, then Penny and Hayden can give some professional advice on that. They can also support with things like job applications, looking for the right job, and also giving advice on the competency-based questions, which are in every job application these days.

That's pretty essential support, really, because if you haven't got an awful lot of experience in applying for those industry-based jobs that you're looking for after you graduate, then Penny and Hayden can provide that support right from day one. And this is the really exciting part of this, for three years after you graduate as well. So that service can be with you for a long time.

KAREN: We asked our students why they're choosing to study with the Open University. And 76% of them, so the vast majority, have said that they're doing so to improve their career prospects. So this is a real key issue for our audience right now.

DARREN JONES: Yeah, it is really essential. It was why I went back into education in my 20s and 30s. And I think one of the key aspects of the project is that support and advice is there for you if you have any questions about how you can improve your career prospects and how you can make yourself more competitive in the employment industry.

There are a lot of people out there competing for a lot of jobs. And people like Penny and Hayden can give you that extra edge, really, in terms of how you approach job seeking, how you armour yourself up in your CVs, and how you give the right answers within job applications as well because competency-based things are really difficult if you're not used to doing them. I'd give Penny and Hayden a call, and they'll be able to help you.

ROB HUMPHREYS: I wish that was around when I was studying as a mature student. I was studying full time. But I really wish that kind of service was around because I knew virtually nothing about it. I had to learn the hard way.

We've all been rejected for jobs, I'm sure, in the past, and you have to take it on the chin. But the key thing is learning and moving on. But this kind of service. I think I would have learned a lot quicker if I'd have had the service of Darren and other colleagues in the Wales office at the time.

KAREN: And things change so quickly as well in terms of what people are doing, how CVs are laid out, what sorts of formats and things people are after. So it's good to be up to speed on things, even if you know what you're doing. But, Rob, I can hear people saying, but I'm not in Wales. So Penny and Hayden sound great. But what about other OU students and careers advice?

ROB HUMPHREYS: Well, we've got a wide-ranging career service in the university which serves all students, right across the institution. The kind of stuff Darren is talking about is this classic example of things being different in Wales in the terms of the detail where we deliver, but also the same, because we offer a strong student support service, including careers advice, right across the institution.

So there's no need to worry if you don't live in Wales. You're welcome to come and live in Wales. Anybody can live in Wales.

KAREN: Though it's very wet, isn't it?

ROB HUMPHREYS: We'd be delighted to see you all. It's very wet in Milton Keynes today. But don't be concerned about that. You will get a good career service from excellent, qualified staff wherever you live in the UK.

KAREN: We've got a very Welsh studio, actually. I was just thinking, you know, with HJ and me obviously teaching in Wales and you guys. Sophie, have you ever thought of living in Wales?

SOPHIE: Well, actually, it's funny because my brother is studying in Wales at the moment. He's at Bangor University. I've been, but I didn't stay. I drove there and back.

So this time, I'm staying. I'm going to do a little bit of travelling through Wales up to Bangor. So, yeah, I'm quite excited to go, actually.

KAREN: Oh, it's very pretty.

SOPHIE: It's supposed to be lovely, and I'm a little bit gutted that I haven't been.

ROB HUMPHREYS: Lovely views of the mountains and the sea in Bangor if the clouds are not too low. It's very beautiful.

SOPHIE: When I drove, I drove through the mountains, and it was lovely. So, yeah, hopefully I'll get a little bit of hiking done and things like that. It would be nice.

KAREN: Sophie is a maths student.

ROB HUMPHREYS: Nothing wrong with that.

KAREN: So tell us about GO Wales then, because this is the work experience. And we've been asking people about what they look for in terms of the perfect work experience placement. And 53% of our audience said it was a chance to learn job-specific skills.

29% Talked about actual, meaningful work experience, followed by a good employer. And earlier when we had the careers advisory service on, we were talking about some of the things that people were looking for in terms of ethical considerations and terms of service. And then to understand the world is a lower amount, 6%, perhaps because these people are mature students and have quite a good understanding of things at the moment as well. What are your thoughts on that, in terms of the work experience placement?

DARREN JONES: Well, GO Wales is a really unique project. It's a partnership between nine universities in Wales, and it's partly funded by the European Social Fund. And the difference about the work experience project that I work on, which is GO Wales, is the work experience is tailored to the needs of the student.

So it's not me as an advisor telling a student, I've got a great placement for you. Turn up Monday morning at 9 o'clock, and you'll be there for a couple of weeks. It's actually about working out the needs of the student.

So if you have a student studying a particular subject, and they want to work in a particular industry or with a particular business, then we'll sit down and work out how best we can put that placement together with the employer and with the student. And it's broken down into three different opportunities. We've got work tasters, which are up to three days in length. And that can be just shadowing someone, so just maybe yourself. Somebody would come and shadow you for three days, look at what you do, observe, just learn from the work that you do.

The next stage is work shadowing. That's up to four weeks. That's a little bit of shadowing, looking at somebody's job, maybe doing a little bit of the work themselves as well. Both of those are voluntary.

But we've got a third phase, which is a really interesting one, and that's up to six weeks long. And that could be paid placements. Now, again, it's with a business, but that's taking on a particular project, working on a particular piece of work for about six weeks. You'll become an employee of that business while you're with them, and you get paid a wage, an actual salary during that time as well.

As an advisor, I would work with the students to look at what their learning needs are, what their skills are, what their desire is in that industry when they graduate as well. And, really, that's the important thing because they'll come away from that with actual industry work experience. So they can put that on their CV. They can put that on job applications.

They've got to contact as well. And previous GO Wales programmes have seen 75% of students go into employment with their placement providers because they've made that relationship, too.

ROB HUMPHREYS: I think it's worth saying that we encourage OU students. Don't be shy in coming forward because if I was an employer, and I had the prospect of taking on somebody on a placement, I'd think, oh, these OU people, they've already got some experience in life. This is a good thing. So what Darren and his colleagues are doing is just giving a bit of a push and a leg up and some advice in terms of how you deploy that life experience and, of course, your experience of studying with the university.

KAREN: Yeah, you mentioned that there were a lot of universities funding, sorry, collaborating on this. But how are you getting the funds for this then?

DARREN JONES: Well, it's funded from a number of sources. The Open University has funded some of the project, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and also the European Social Fund of the Welsh government. So it's a collaborative approach.

ROB HUMPHREYS: Can I add, Karen, that this is a very good example of how the OU can work across the four different parts of the UK? So in Wales, assuming this project goes really well, it works well, it's a classic example of how we can roll it out in a wider frame later on. So things can be trialled in one of the nations of the UK and then deployed if they're successful, or adjusted and deployed, in the other three nations because it's proven. And we've tested it.

KAREN: Excellent, and so this is something that we're already working on. And it's one of the things that I think often Open University students say. Well, how do I get a chance to actually get some work experience? And this is a really neat way of doing that.

And we'll have the details on the resources page if you'd like to find out more about how to get involved with that particular side of things. But across the university, there also are lots of things that are going on. The Faculty of Business and Law, for example, are launching a probe on a law clinic, and there are loads of opportunities to get involved.

And as Rob says, you just need to step forward because I bet not many people really are able to say, well, yes, let me come and do this, because they think so many hundreds of people applied. What's the process like, then, Darren, in terms of how people get in touch and get initiated into this programme?

DARREN JONES: Well, they can either contact us direct by ringing the number on the resources page for the Cardiff office. They can email [gowales@open.ac.uk](mailto:gowales@open.ac.uk), or they can visit the national website, which is [www.gowales.co.uk](http://www.gowales.co.uk). There will be lots more information on our website to give prospective participants. So, yeah, just give us a call if you're worried. If you want any clarification at all, just get in touch.

KAREN: Brilliant, excellent, and one of the friendly advisers can talk you through some of that. The final thing I wanted to talk about is this whole idea about the Youth Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Project. We asked people if they were going to start their business, what would be the most important thing? Now let's see the results of this particular poll.

And we're just getting it ready. I know what they are. I'm going to tell you.

It's 47% saying, knowing about how to turn my ideas into a feasible business. And you can see that on screen now. Having someone to guide me through the early stages is the next most

important thing. Knowing what skills I have and what I need to gain, and then the difference between a business plan and a balance sheet, so a lot of very topical things there. Darren, what's your take on that?

DARREN JONES: Well, that's really interesting actually because the first two answers, which the majority of people responded to, are really the two key objectives of the project. And it's a really interesting programme as well. It's run by colleagues in the Cardiff office, and it is specifically tailored at raising awareness for our students who really have a great business idea but really don't know what to do.

So if any of our watches fall into that category, then this project really could be for them because it is about offering advice. It is about an adviser giving one-to-one support. And it is about access to online resources, the ability to attend workshops, and one-to-one sessions, face to face, as well. So, yeah, if you've got a really good business idea, and that's all you have, then this project could be something for you.

KAREN: I mean, this is a massive growth area. I know that the business school are doing a lot of modules that are linking to entrepreneurship. But this is targeted at 18 to 30-year-old students, isn't it? So there's something here, and that's not to exclude any other people who are very welcome to get involved in some of the other initiatives across the university. But young people getting into business can sometimes need a bit of support, as you say, taking those ideas from concept to an actual business plan. So what sort of support and help can you get in terms of making something into a sustainable business model?

DARREN JONES: Well, firstly, the online resources are open to everybody. So in terms of the one-to-one support, that's going to be specific to each category. But the support can be sitting down to have a discussion initially with one of our advisers about, OK, I've got this great idea. But I really don't know what to do. I really don't know how to take it any further.

So it will be about guiding people through that process, about, oh, you've got a great idea. But you now need to think about the practicalities of setting up a business and those stages. So it's about guiding people through those early stages, which quite often are when most businesses fail, because if you haven't got the structure and the knowledge, most business ideas never actually get passed the ideas stage. So it is about guiding people through those initial muddy waters.

KAREN: So you've talked about three real key ideas here about just some of the stuff that's happening in Wales. We've talked about the pre-careers entry advice, the GO Wales Initiative, and the Youth Enterprise Entrepreneurship Project. But, Rob, I'd like to end by asking you about just general things about studying in Wales then. Is there anything else that you'd like to add in terms of what students can expect and some of the things that are going on there?

ROB HUMPHREYS: Well, in general, what they can expect and what they experience is the same, I hope, wonderful experience that they'd get if they were an OU student generally, whether they lived somewhere else in the UK or, indeed, somewhere else in the world. We aim to provide a very enriching educational experience.

In addition in Wales, there's a lot of the stuff, it's close to employment and employers. We are close to them because it's a more intimate environment in Wales. And what Darren and other

colleagues are doing is very, very important to the university, but also to the wider Welsh economy.

But we also are developing Wales-specific modules, for example in Welsh history, so that student citizens of Wales, or indeed citizens of somewhere else, can learn about the history of Wales, which has its own distinct issues, events, and, indeed, argument within it. Last week, we launched a new course on discovering Wales and Welsh. It's a chance saloon beginners-level Welsh, the Welsh language, but also learn something about the history in which the Welsh language has found itself over many centuries. And that was a huge success, launched at the National Assembly for Wales, so on. And so far, we've got at least as many students in the USA on that as we have from Wales, which I think is a massive plus for us.

KAREN: So lots and lots going on. And I guess students can look at the OU in Wales website as well to keep updated with things.

ROB HUMPHREYS: Of course, just drop on the website. Or, indeed, call 029-2047-1170.

KAREN: Brilliant, and then you can speak to one of the advisers who have been in the chat or the very friendly team. They are lovely. Thanks for making that video as well. It's really nice to see, you know, the national office and see some of the people in there, put a face to a name. And students can see what's going on. It's lovely.

ROB HUMPHREYS: It's a great video, all the better for the director not being in it, I think.

KAREN: Well, thank you so much for coming along to do this session. It's really interesting, just learning some of the things that are going on in Wales. And do take advantage of the offer to find out more about those projects and initiatives if they're of interest to you. [NON-ENGLISH] Darren and Rob, thank you for coming along today.

Sophie and HJ, how are you getting on in terms of the chat? Sorry. We had so much to cover in that session. And I also wonder how you're preparing for the quiz.

SOPHIE: Evaghn has gone very quiet.

KAREN: Where is he?

SOPHIE: I'm a little bit worried. He's in the green room. So I'm hoping, he says that he's got distracted by food.

I'm hoping it's food and not the questions. I'm hoping you locked them away for me. I'm a little bit worried.

HJ: I have nothing to do with it. I saw this fighting between Sophie and Evaghn. Well, everyone at home can join me on the chat because we'll be Team Home. And we always know Team Home wins. So we don't need to worry about that.

SOPHIE: Team Home get Google.

KAREN: No, they don't, Sophie. They're not allowed to cheat.



HJ: But we have had some people sending us some stuff as well, which is absolutely fantastic. And we decided that we'd send you some stuff back as well. So we've got, like, cool maps and stuff that we can send back if you want to send us some stuff. So we'll pop those on the board later and show you.

SOPHIE: Just some nice comments actually on OU Wales, Elizabeth Jenkins, she said that she's had a lot of tutorials there. And it's very helpful, very helpful staff, lots of [INAUDIBLE] tutorials, even a little kitchen for making drinks and preparing lunch. And she got to look at some module materials. It helped her decide which module to choose, so she's really appreciative of the OU Wales offices, which is nice.

HJ: And I popped down there for tutorials as well. And I definitely agree with her, yes. Lovely staff there, and they're all so kind and helpful. And I was actually talking to Darren about, I was looking into the postgraduate funding in Wales as well. And we're soon to hear about that. I think on the 14th, he said. And Anne was letting him know that I think the OU in Wales has been in discussion about some of that as well, which is great. But I think Jordan might have a look at this entrepreneurship.

SOPHIE: Yeah, there's a lot going on in OU Wales. It's nice to see such support for everyone, and it's lovely. So we have had a couple of selfies in as well. We're going to get this printed off as soon as possible. And we'll get them up on our board hopefully just after the quiz, that I'm going to win.

KAREN: Lovely, if you haven't sent us a selfie, yes, I know, the quiz. Everyone at home is going to be going, what's this quiz? The quiz is a Wheel of Ologies quiz, and it's a chance to have some fun.

We thought that all Refreshers Week should have a bit of light-hearted entertainment. And so we're going to be having Dave Rothery, who is a professor of planetary science, and he is going to be our quiz master for the afternoon. And we're going to be spinning Wheel of Ologies in a multi-choice game that you can play against our panel here in the studio. It's a lot of fun, so do stick with us when we come and do that.

The questions, I'm assured, are still locked in the safe. So I don't think Evaghn will have had access to those. But we'll be having a short break now where we're going to be playing one of the boot camp videos that we did previously.

Now if you've missed any of these, there are a wealth of resources about all sorts of things. We're going to be talking to you about how to submit your TMA.

So this is a step-by-step approach, which is a really handy guide for people who've never submitted a tutor-marked assignment before. And in this video, we're going to be talking you through that process with [INAUDIBLE] Horn.

But there are a lot of other videos, so check out the website for those resources on all sorts of things like critical thinking, being a reflective learner, making the most of the online environment. There are lots and lots of Student Hub Live videos there for you to have a look at if you would like to. But let's enjoy this video for now. We'll be back very soon for the quiz, which I'm very much looking forward to. So we'll see soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]