

KAREN FOLEY: In this short session, I'm joined by Rebecca Taylor, who is the executive Dean for the Faculty of Business and Law. Thank you for coming along Rebecca. Can you give us a brief outline about the Faculty of Business and Law?

REBECCA TAYLOR: I can. The Faculty of Business and Law brings together the Open University Business School and the Open University Law School. So the business school comprises about 36,000 students who are studying on our business degrees and the law school, now the largest provider of legal education in Europe, delivers the legal education to our students.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Thank you. So there's a lot going on in the faculty, a lot of innovative stuff happening. You've got a lot of students and a lot of alumni, and you meet students at various parts of the process. Can you tell us a little bit about the student body and about why you wanted an event like this specifically for business and law students?

REBECCA TAYLOR: Yeah, it's really important when students join us that they feel part of a connected community, that they really feel that they have support, that they understand what they need to do as they manoeuvre through their student journey. And we want to make them feel very, very welcome and we really want to make sure that they're informed about how they can step through that journey most effectively.

So this type of event introduces them to the University, it introduces them to the faculty, it gives them a more information about the innovative stuff that we're doing within that faculty, so what they're a part of, and it helps them to understand what they do at the different sort of milestones on their journey if they have questions, if they need support, or just understanding what that journey is going to look like for them.

KAREN FOLEY: And they stay with you, as well, because you've got a very loyal alumni. Can you tell us a little bit about how important they are to you?

REBECCA TAYLOR: We do. We have 90,000 alumni related to the faculty alone and 25,000 of those are MBA alumni. The Our Alumni, it's a very loyal group. They love being part of that community and we engage them in a number of different ways.

One of the things that we haven't done in the past is we haven't connected them directly with students in terms of giving guidance and support, but that is something that we're looking to

do this year and moving forward, is actually making that direct connection because we have a lot of alumni who are asking to give back and to, you know, the benefits that they got from their own studies, to help other students to really get the most out of their own studies.

And so we're really looking to make that connection more directly, and we hope that the students this year will really feel that difference.

KAREN FOLEY: And benefit from that.

REBECCA Yeah, and benefit from it.

TAYLOR:

KAREN FOLEY: And one thing that's so exciting is the innovation that's happening in the faculty. You've got so many things going on in terms of how you're both giving the students experience of working in particular environments, as well as doing new things. Could you tell us a little bit about the pro bono programme that you've got coming up soon?

REBECCA Yeah, so one of the strategic priorities for the University is around employability and what we
TAYLOR: want to do is we want to look for a lot of innovative ways in order to give students opportunities to enhance their employability skills and get practise and engage in the type of spaces that will help them with employment opportunities in the future.

One of the opportunities that we looked at was developing a pro bono law clinic in the law school and it'll look at specific areas of law and it will encourage students to engage with that process and actually develop some of the skills that they'll need when they finish their degree and they go out and work within that field, or in fact, if they want to change fields. It will give them the types of skills that they will need in order to do that successfully.

So we're very excited about the pro bono law clinic. It is just being developed right now. And I think that what it will do is it will give students an extra opportunity that we haven't been able to give them before.

KAREN FOLEY: So not only work experience, but also the opportunity, I guess, to give something back to their community and get direct experience of what it's like to practise.

REBECCA Absolutely. It is. You're right, it's not just about skill development, but it's also about an
TAYLOR: awareness. It's about helping them to be aware of some of the issues that people are dealing with, helping them to connect to what they're learning and the sort of theoretical material with

actual real world practise. It's helping to make that connection for them. And they will take that experience and I'm sure that it will help them when they finish their degree and they're doing to their chosen career beyond.

KAREN FOLEY: I also want to ask you about something else that links to employability. Can you tell us about the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership? What's happening there?

REBECCA TAYLOR: Yes, so if I talk a little bit more broadly, because then the students will really get a chance to understand how we look to link our research with what they're learning and to make their learning as relevant as it can possibly be, one of the other strategic priorities for the University is around academic excellence. And academic excellence at the OU really means linking the research that we're doing with the teaching and wrapping that in external engagement.

And by wrapping it in external engagement I mean making sure that that research and that, it has impact and that we're really looking at current issues and how are we dealing with linking to the political agenda and dealing with some of those issues that are current today. So that model itself is very, very beneficial to students when they come to us and they're working through formal qualifications.

So one of the first centres in that model that we put together was the True Potential Centre for the Public Understanding of Finance. And that really looks at financial capability and really raising the public's understanding of how they make financial choices. That's been so successful and has led to us developing a whole series of massive open online courses, which are free to the public, but also feeding into our curriculum to make sure that our curriculum is relevant and our students really, really benefit from what we're doing across the board.

And then we replicated that model in the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership. So again, really looking at areas that meet the social mission of the University, and that was a space that we were really excited about. And that space is very much around recognising that the voluntary sector doesn't have, they don't have a lot of funds in order to develop staff within that space, but actually the charitable sector, in particular, it adds a huge amount of economic benefit.

And so for us to be able to do some research around that area and then also to create a sort of educational space and to deliver that for free to that sector and for a lot of that learning to feed into our formal qualifications, it really develops people's understanding of that space, it adds value, and our students who are learning about that area will derive a huge amount of

benefit from the research and teaching that we do there.

So very excited about it, and the next one that we're looking in terms of replicating that model is around neuroscience and the law. So that relates to the law school. So again, another really exciting space that we're looking to develop further.

KAREN FOLEY: Gosh, there's so much going on and we don't have time to touch on it and those are just two examples, but you mentioned the MOOCs, the Massive Open Online Courses, and there's been a huge both investment and development of a really great range of assets out there. And some of these feed into credit transfers that people can use to then supplement things, some can be used for executive education to upskill people, and are really sort of important in terms of upscaling people who may have done something before, alumni for example, who just need to upscale and get some current knowledge about things.

Can you tell us, then, about why these MOOCs are so important and why you're growing so many of them right now?

REBECCA TAYLOR: We are. We're looking quite creatively about what MOOCs to develop and how those will have the most impact that they can possibly have. So some of them, for instance, link to our research areas because actually that adds real social benefit or it adds educational benefit if we're also linking them to our formal qualifications.

Others we've put on because we actually thought actually this could add value in its own right. So we've looked at different models of Massive Open Online Courses. They sit on FutureLearn. They're open to the public, so they're completely free. There are certificates that you can purchase at the end if you want to, but you don't have to.

And actually, most recently, our most recent innovation, is that we've done them for credit. So actually, you can take the MOOC and then you can go through an assessment module and actually you can get some credits that you can then put towards formal learning if you want to. So either you can have the certificate and say I've accomplished this piece, or you can earn credit for it and put it towards either an undergraduate programme or an MBA.

So we have a few credit bearing suites that are quite exciting, as well, because we hadn't done that before and that's a real development for us. Again of real benefit to our students if they choose to marry some of that type of learning with the formal qualifications, as well.

KAREN FOLEY: You've touched on innovative research that you're doing and also these various programmes. Can you tell us a little bit about how that's directly impacting or feeding into teaching and the curriculum?

REBECCA TAYLOR: Yes. So what we have done is we've looked very much at building research. It's around clusters, and the academics who are undertaking that research are also writing our teaching materials, and so actually, the link is already there. They're using the research that they're developing and actually feeding that directly into the teaching materials that the students experience as part of that learning journey.

But also with the sort of broader model of academic excellence around the research centres, that link, again, it's directly there. So for instance, around the True Potential Centre for Public Understanding of Finance, we're doing the research around certain aspects of personal finance and financial capability. That's feeding into the development of this educational arm around the MOOC space, Massive Open Online Courses.

And actually, all of that, those academics who are developing that are also writing our formal qualifications, and so they're feeding a lot of that learning and a lot of those sort of current issues into the materials that the students are then experiencing first hand in our degrees.

KAREN FOLEY: It's a thriving community of academics, students, alumni. And there's so much going on and you've got some great opportunities with the work you're doing with alumni, with LinkedIn, and various ways of connecting people. I can see why this is so important, and I wondered if we could end by asking some advice that you could give to our students who are maybe just starting. A lot of them are very, very excited about their learning journey. What would you tell them?

REBECCA TAYLOR: I would tell them to take advantage of every opportunity that the OU offers, and that's partly opportunities from the faculty, but actually opportunities across the University. To really get to know the University, to understand what we offer, to understand where are the points where they might need some guidance or support or help, to understand how to get that to so that we can make sure that they always feel supported through that journey, but also to look at opportunities to be involved in things so that they really feel part of a networked community.

The OU is an extraordinary institution and it offers fantastic opportunities to students who come to us for all sorts of reasons. And I think my best advice would be make the most of the experience while you're here.

KAREN FOLEY: Rebecca Taylor thank you so much for joining me. That's been a really wonderful introduction to the faculty. Thank you.