

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN: And welcome back. Well what did you think of that? I hear there's lots of chat going on, and people are really getting used to this.

For those of you who are new, welcome. Max has joined us from the Netherlands. And I'm glad you got the timing sorted, because we're in British time here. So you had an extra hour to get ready for this, but I'm glad you are here now, Max.

We've also got guests joining us from North America, South America, the EU, and other. I hear Uruguay. So lots of different places that you're all talking and chatting and connecting with.

Please, do chat. And if you are in the Watch Only section of the website, you can come to the Watch and Engage, where you can talk to other people. Fill-in these widgets, which are going to be really important for our next session. And with these wordles as well, we ask you three things because we need three things. But you don't have to have three things.

If you don't have three things, just put one or two and put an x, or something else, within the other box. Because it won't submit your answers unless you complete those. So when you've got the three things, types of widgets or interactive tools, you do need to chuck something in each box. Even if it doesn't make sense, don't worry. It will all make our word clouds a lot more pretty and full. So please, do do that.

OK, Kristen and Sophie. How's it all going there?

SOPHIE: Really well. Really well. Lots of people here. Lots of people from, like you said, all over the place.

KRISTEN: There's even someone from other, which we're wondering, where is other?

KAREN: Yeah. Who's put other? And where are you?

SOPHIE: It's nice to know that Sylvia's joined us again.

KAREN: Oh, good. I thought--

SOPHIE: Sylvia's back.

KAREN: Sylvia, I did say, I bet that Sylvia from Canada who's put other. Is it?

SOPHIE: So yes. I think we're all ready now. All really excited. Everyone's talking about their courses, their new modules. So it's lovely to hear from everyone.

KAREN: Brilliant. And for those of you who are just joining us, welcome. And we are going to put your questions to our panel. So you can email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk, if you've got any questions. And our Twitter hashtag is #studenthublive16. So do let us know if you've got anything you'd like answered. We'll try and do our best to do that throughout the day.

OK. So there's a lot of level 1 students doing business and law here. I bet you're interested in changing careers. We're going to find out.

So on your screen should come a couple of widgets, or interactive tools. And we've got four of these in our next section. So I'd like you to fill-in those at your leisure, and we're going to feed those into our conversation. So to do that, you click on the widget. You check which box applies to you, and then you close that. And then, you'll be able to see what everyone else thinks as well. So there's an added benefit to feeding in your input from that.

OK. In our next session, I'm joined by Elsa and Lynn. Welcome.

Elsa, you are a student who has just graduated. So technically, you're part of our alumni community.

ELSA: I am.

KAREN: And Lynn, you are from the Careers Advisory Service. So welcome. We wanted to focus on developing your career in business and law.

Now, we know that a lot of students are studying in this particular sector with a view to changing careers. So could you first tell us about why this is important. And why you've asked our students exactly what their motivation is for studying these sectors?

LYNN: Yeah. One of the questions we've actually asked students in the widgets is, are they career starters, career developers, or career changers? Because a lot of universities where students tend to be career starters. They're at the beginning of their career and perhaps haven't had work experience.

One of the things about our students is they're usually already in some kind of work or have had some experience of work. So they're either in a job where they're developing. And perhaps they're studying business studies because they want to move into more of a management role or have an idea of a role. Or, they might be career changers.

And particularly for law, when I ask most students who are studying law, what's your motivation, main motivation, for studying law, it's usually that they want to actually change law. And particularly, people are thinking about, I want to become a barrister. I want to become a solicitor, or a certain area. So it's always interesting to know when students start studying and are on their level 1 courses, do they actually have an aim when they're studying? Are they hoping that at the end of their degree, it's going to kind of push them forward to progress in their career or actually help them make that career change? Because there's lots of ways that we can help them alongside their study.

KAREN:

OK. Excellent. Well, we like to get a snapshot of where our audience are at. And of course, this changes because we don't lock down those widgets. But the majority of students watching right here, right now in live time-- because there is, of course, the catchup service available-- are in the career changes and career developer categories.

What is important? I mean, these are subjective, aren't they? You're putting yourself in a category. What's important about how you're defining these terms?

LYNN:

I think people find them difficult to know. Am I a career starter? Am I a career changer? Am I a career developer?

And I think we will traditionally say a career starter is someone who's had perhaps no experience of work. Someone who's developing their career. They're already in a job. It may not be the job that they want to be, but they're actually looking to move through and progress, perhaps, to a different point in their career.

And if their career changers, they're often in something that's quite unrelated. So it can help us in the career service when we're thinking of the kind of help that they might need.

So for example, if someone's looking to change career, actually having a really good idea of the transferable skills they've already got that they can bring to the table. Because what we find is that's particularly pertinent for Open University students. Rather than thinking, actually, I'm at an advantage to students at other universities because I already have this bank of

experience and skills. I already have a really good understanding of what I don't like in a job. And therefore, I'm much clearer about what I do want in a job.

Actually, a lot of our students can see that as a disadvantage to bring to employers, and feel a bit like they have to apologise for that. But the actual reality is that employers are really keen to hear about that.

We've heard that graduate recruiters, when they get someone who's perhaps changing career at a later point, they're really pleased that they've thought about what they want to do. They have some experience. They have transferable skills they're bringing. And they're much more likely to commit to that company.

So actually for us, as a career service, actually getting to an understanding of where people are at the moment in their career, what they can build on, and what they need to take forward to make that career change or develop their career is really important.

KAREN:

Elsa, can you tell us a bit about your journey and how you're looking at having just finished your studies with the Open University? And now, looking forward in terms of career. Where are you at with all of this?

ELSA:

Absolutely. So I had a bit of an unconventional route to education. I went to primary school, and then my parents decided to home educate myself, my sister, and two cousins at home for our secondary school years. Taking GCSEs is very expensive if you don't go to school, so we only could do two each, which is English and maths.

So at the age of 14, we met with another home-educating family whose children were with the OU. So we looked into it. And at the age of 14, I enrolled as a young applicant. And it just went from there, really.

I did a variety of openings modules, tried anything, from child psychology to science and photography. And then, I decided at 16, I didn't want to go to college. So I had a family member who worked for Johnson & Johnson, the company. And it got me some work experience there.

Did some experience in the business. Loved it. And I decided that business was something I really enjoyed. I kind of did a bit of math, a bit of Spanish along the way, but settled in a business degree. And I did that from 14 to 21. And I've just finished. But I did it part-time so I could work alongside. So I worked for a retailer. And yeah, it was really good. It just gave me

flexibility to study, to work, to gain skills. So I've just finished, and I've got a job in an accounts department for a retailer, agricultural retailer. So it's all kind of been a bit unconventional, but I've got there in the end.

KAREN:

But this is it. Well, this is part of the problem with the Open University is there are all these fabulous modules out there that you think, I just have to do that.

But also, you touched on this idea about being unconventional. And our students are chatting about their various career aspirations, what they're doing. And there's no typical thing like an OU student. I mean, there isn't one. They're all so varied and all have these challenges to deal with.

What's interesting about you is-- am I right in thinking that you hadn't really engaged with the Careers Service when you were an OU student? Because they are one of the OU's probably best-kept secrets. Now that we've outed what the library can offer, I think the Careers Service is one of the next best options.

What was your experience in terms of support studying with the Open University? And it sounds like you found your own way a lot.

ELSA:

Well, we were just talking before coming on here. And I said, I didn't really know about the Careers department. And I said, if I knew it was there, I would have totally tapped into that and got more advice, more information. Because I kind of found my way from asking family members and other students who had gone to university. But I think it's a fantastic resource that students should definitely access because, like you were talking about, skills you might not realise you can build on and things like that.

KAREN:

No, absolutely. And a lot of students don't know. I mean, we asked people about how they would rate any Careers experience that they may have received in the past. And overall, the answer was fairly negative in terms of what people are saying.

I certainly found that. And I think particularly early days when you think, I have this really definite idea about what I want to do. I'm going to go and be a clinical psychologist was what it was at the time for me, which is not what I'm doing now. But you have sometimes these very definitive ideas about what you want to do.

And then, you go and see someone about careers and you go, how can I be that? Without

thinking maybe about whether "that" is the right thing for you and your skill set. And actually, what "that" might look like in terms of your day-to-day work-life environment. So Lynn, how can the Careers Advice Service help? And what sort of support is there available to students? How do you help shape those ideas, maybe when people have very definite or indefinite ideas about what they want to do?

LYNN:

Yeah. I think people can come to us at any point of their career. And it's interesting that you didn't get Careers advice. But what I like to hear is that you did seek a range of advice from family members and people who were at other institutions and study. And I think that's really important.

There is a lot of informal advice there. So you've probably already had conversations about your career. And I think sometimes coming to a Careers advisor, it's just part of that continuum of exploring ideas that you've already had. So the kind of help we can provide for someone--

I mean, if someone's at the really early stages. Perhaps they're starting studying with the Open University, and they know they want to change career. But really, they're not sure what they want to do.

Well, for that student-- unfortunately, I'm afraid there's a lot of work that they need to do to put into that. No one can be a-- I'd love to be a magician and just be able to say, ah. I can look at you. I can assess by your forehead that you're going to be a palaeontologist. But unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. Otherwise, I would be very, very rich.

There's a lot of work you need to put into that yourself. And our Careers Advice website is great. You can, as a student, access that now. We've moved on over to the Help Centre. So you can access that on the Help Centre

And if you have a look at that, there's a lot of resources about knowing yourself well. And that is the key, really. And of having a better idea of what makes you tick. What sets you apart from someone else? What skills are you already bringing to the table?

And many of us, especially our students, have a whole range of skills. Lots of things they can do. But actually having an understanding of which skills you enjoy using. If you think about, well, yeah. I can do that. I can do that really well. But would I want to do that every day in my job? No. So actually, getting a sense of what you not just do really well, but what you'd like to develop and do in your job. So there's a lot about knowing yourself.

I've brought along the "Career Planning and Job-Seeking Workbook." And this is one of the resources that we often flag up to students.

You can access this on the Careers site on publications. As you say, go to the Help Centre. Go to the Careers site, and you can find this on the web. Or you can ask for a hard copy.

Now, this is a really useful book. At the start, the first section is called "Knowing You." And it's lots of exercises about knowing yourself, thinking about what your motivation is. Thinking about what your values are, what your skills are. Getting an idea of what you need to develop. What kind of employer would you like to work for? What kind of industry? It's asking you all those questions that really, if you go and see a Careers advisor, that's what they're trying to help you work out.

So what I'd say to students is there's a lot of work you might want to be doing before actually booking in to see a Careers advisor. We do see people on a one-to-one basis. So we can see people by-- well, we see people virtually by Skype.

Yesterday, I had two Skype interviews with students, which was great. Those were 45-minute interactions. And it was really helping the student concentrate on what was important to them at the time. There's no one-fits-all in terms of how that interaction might go.

So it could be helping someone with the very practical things, like CVs and application forms. Or it could help someone kind of just work out where their thinking is at that time, and what the next logical step for them to take to help them move forwards. So I would advise students, engage with us early at their first year. It's never too soon to start thinking about your career. You don't have to have a fully-formed idea of this is what I want to do before you talk to us.

And as I say, we can direct you to lots of services like the services on our website, webinars, forums, that you can use before you actually speak to one of us on a one-to-one basis.

KAREN:

Excellent. I want you to tell us how we do that before we go to the hot desk. And also, I want to ask about your experience in terms of how you sort of got to where you are. But Lynn, very briefly, how do people then access the support that you're talking about so they can get access to interviews? Obviously, there's a lot of help. They can download this booklet, or request it. And this, I take it, is on their Student Home page?

LYNN:

Yeah. If you go onto your Student Home page, and you click into the Help Centre. Luckily,

we've moved over to the Help Centre. I think previously, we weren't on the Help Centre. And therefore, students perhaps didn't know we were there, that it was one of the resources. And we've just moved there. So we are hoping this year, we will see much more students seeing, oh, Careers Service.

If you click on Career Service, you get a lovely home page for the Careers Service. And it's got pictures and kind of gives you an idea of where you want to be. Kind of, are you thinking about what you want to do? Are you looking for advice on CVs and application forms? Are you looking for webinars that we're running or have recorded?

And if you go into Webinars, for example, you would see webinars that are related to your subject, or webinars that are recorded, perhaps, that are related to kind of what to do with a degree in the subject.

KAREN: And we did a lovely session yesterday at the Student Hub Live on CV writing, didn't we?

LYNN: We did.

KAREN: And so if you missed that, you can get that on the catchup service, which is available. So all of the Student Hub Live events that we've been running recently will make a really useful start to your study. So do check that out if you want to learn more about CV writing. Or, in fact, any other aspect about OU study. We've pretty much covered a lot in the last few weeks.

Sophie and Kristen, I hear there's a lot of chat going on. Are there any questions that our panel can answer?

SOPHIE: There are so many-- so much chat going on about careers. All sorts.

KRISTEN: Yes, very much so.

SOPHIE: There's a lot of people who are changing careers and things like that. I know you've picked up quite a few people who were changing.

KRISTEN: Quite a few people changing their careers and going to the OU and studying while their children are young. A couple of people are talking about how managing their health issues, they're able to study with the OU. It's just incredibly inspiring stories.

Some people are going-- Laura's changed her career a few years ago, and now she's doing her business management degree to develop her career further. So it's interesting how you

can go from being a career changer to a career developer. So you're not always in the same kind of study mode.

And a lot of people have talked about how just OU distance learning means that they can study while they're working, taking care of family, or dealing with health issues. It just provides a way for them to make a difference in their lives.

SOPHIE: There is. There is so much of that. And it's lovely to hear some really positive comments, actually. I have popped in the chat the link to the Careers Advice and the Student Help Centre. So if you do you have any questions that can be answered there, please do have a look.

Anything that we haven't covered, or anything that you think of later maybe, if you drop us an email, studenthub@open.ac.uk, we can then forward your question on to whoever will be best to answer that for you.

KAREN: Excellent. Thank you very much. We also asked you what sorts of things you're most likely to use on the Careers site this year. And most people were interested in webinars.

The faculty of business do some brilliant webinars. I've heard all about them. And I know that a lot of people really, really value them, especially students who want to work on their continual professional development. So 28% of you said that. And also, student forums are the second most popular aspect that people are enjoying, with 23 saying that they're interested in student forums related to developing careers in business or law. So do check out those resources.

But Elsa, I just want to turn to you. Because Lynn was talking about this whole idea of concepts that we think about in terms of changing careers. Did you ever want to be working in accounts?

ELSA: No.

KAREN: Was that something that you thought-- so how did you navigate that journey? Because as Lynn says, you've sort of found that yourself, which is a great way of doing things. And as Lynn says, there are so many more things than just the subject areas about who you're working for and what size company. Tell us about this.

ELSA: Well, I still don't really know what I want to be doing in business. Because business is so broad. And that's what's so great about it. And within the business degree, all the modules you do, you can pick and choose whatever takes your fancy, really. So I did anything from logistics,

to marketing, to all sorts.

So when I was doing part-time, I just worked in retail on the shop floor. And I really enjoyed that, but I wanted to do like kind of behind-the-scenes head office work. So it was just a local retailer who had a head office near myself. So I just inquired to see if they had any-- what jobs were going there. So I found this one. And it was just kind of dealing with everything really, in the accounts, finance. So it just took my fancy.

And you know, there's loads of career opportunities within my company now that my manager is keen for me to tap into as well. And then when you're in a company, you can progress in there and see what you would like to go from there, really.

KAREN: You've perfectly summed up the reason we have this sign here. Don't follow it. Because there are so many different avenues in business, aren't there? Accounting, I think, leading mainly to jail. Not that there's a direct link. But there are so many different aspects.

Sophie, have you got a question?

SOPHIE: We do, actually. We have a question from Max. So he says, does the OU offer internships or work experience summer schools, et cetera? Which I don't believe that we do. But is there anywhere that you can maybe direct him to? Maybe volunteer work, or anything like that, that you think might be good?

KAREN: Is this Max in the Netherlands?

SOPHIE: It is, yes.

KAREN: OK.

LYNN: So it's worth knowing where Max is, because that obviously makes a big difference. Unfortunately we don't necessarily operate work experience or internships directly from the OU. And that's partly because just our students are everywhere and it would be really difficult for us to set up. We do give lots of advice.

And if you go to the Careers Service web page, there is a whole section on work experience that links you to specific sites, like the Prospects website, which is a really good website for graduates. Or the Target Jobs website. And they provide information about internships.

Or you can book in to see the Careers advisor and find out what's more available in your area

and get more targeted support for you. There's a really good website for people in this country, www.doit.org. And that's a really good way of looking at what's available in voluntary work in your area. You put in your postcode, and you can search on the kind of activities that interest you.

KAREN:

Thank you so much, Lynn and Elsa. That's been absolutely brilliant. And Sophie's going to put some links up in the chat with the various Facebook and Twitter accounts for the Careers Advisory Service as well. And the Toucan group. And also, there's a really nice LinkedIn community that you might want to connect with also.

Do check that out. I'm sorry, but that's all we've got time for. So Elsa and Lynn, thank you so much for coming along. And we'll see a little bit more of you, Elsa, later.

We're now going to look at a video that's all about alumni. And then, we're going to come back and Neil Graffin is going to tell me all about the law, and how it is studied. So we'll see you after this short break.

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