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KAREN FOLEY: Now thank you so much for coming along, because we're going to be talking about one of the employability skills of your activities, which is really, really useful. I started doing this the other day. So it's a helpful guide that students can work through, and I know that our students really like the structured approaches that help them think.

David's given us a really lovely way of looking at problem solving. And here we wanted to take a look back and think, what is my OU journey doing? How are my skills contributing to things? How can I show those as being valuable to my employers? How can I upscale my CV?

All of these employability things are so important to students, and yet Georgina and Matt were saying this morning so often we forget how much we're developing as we're going. So I'm hoping that this can be a really nice pause for thought for students to think about selling those skills within their workplace and also recognising them in themselves.

PETER: That's right. It was interesting that I've had to write a number of references for people in the last couple of weeks. And so I looked at the kinds of questions I was being asked, and David had a post-it and I've got a post-it with them all on as well. So there were 21 questions, and only one of them was around educated to degree level.

KAREN FOLEY: Really?

PETER: So the other questions were around things like management skills, planning, communication skills, team working, supporting other staff, ability to motivate, problem solving, personal effectiveness, networking, self-determination. So a lot of those other things which aren't necessarily associated with your direct knowledge are really important to industry. And so as you're going through the study, it's important to recognise which of those skills that you're developing within the module, which skills you're actually bringing from lots of other things you've done.

Because most of our students are not blank canvases on which we write. They're coming with a whole wide range of wonderful experiences. And so right from the very beginning, right from that level one study, it's useful to reflect, to kind of think about which of the skills I have already, which are the ones I need to develop, which do I need to provide evidence of when I

go looking for a new job.

So part of what we've been trying to do is to develop that kind of planning process. And so there's a whole site here where you can start to look at what skills you've got that helps you identify what you need to do. So I think Helen is the person who did all the work behind this, so she can talk a little bit about what you do.

HELEN: Well, I should credit our careers and employability colleagues as well. I didn't quite do all the work. So we did work with our careers experts, and this is, as Peter said, this is a tool that we've developed fairly recently. I should say we developed it mainly for our open degree students who might be studying across different subject areas, but the activity is available to all students. And I know the link is available on the resources section of their Student Hub Life website.

KAREN FOLEY: It is, and I think HJ will put that in the chat as well. So if you want to go and do that while we're talking or a bit later, you can bookmark that page so that you can go back to it.

HELEN: So I'm just going to do a quick run through of the tool, but feel free to ask me any questions as we go through, Karen. So like I say, it's being developed based on the Open University seven employability skills, so a lot of this is embedded into some of the modules. So students might come across things to do with employability and personal development planning throughout their modules.

But this is something that sits outside of that. So as part of their qualification, it's an activity they can do at the start of their studies to kind of see where they're at. They might then go back to it when they start the next module or the next stage and kind of review again and think about how their skills have improved, where they might still need to develop. So it's available throughout their study journey and they can keep coming back to it.

So just to kind of-- hopefully. Yep-- just to kind of take you through. So we've got this assessing your skills section, and it's--

KAREN FOLEY: Can I just ask, when students fill this in, will anyone else be able to see the information? You mentioned they could come back to it. Is it something they could save as a workbook, or if they type things in will the OU say, aha.

HELEN: No, as far as I'm aware it's available only to that student. So it's done through their login, and everything that they do, the activity that they do on this tool will be saved for the next time they

log in. At the moment it's not-- we don't have an export function, but it's something that we would really like to develop so that students can present that to employers or to whoever it might be. But at the moment, it's all saved on the website so they can keep coming back to it.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's just for that student and they can use this as their personal work book. No one else is going to see.

HELEN: That's right.

KAREN FOLEY: That's a tool for them to use that they can re-access. Great.

HELEN: Yes. So what we've got is-- so on this first page-- now this is just an image at the moment. So a student has to click on the image to get to the tool. Oops.

KAREN FOLEY: Students like this sort of thing where you can track your progress, don't they? And also because there's a lot behind-- we're not going to be able to show the whole thing from behind each section here. But it's nice to be able to fill things in. And one thing I like about this tool is how easy it is to sort of access and navigate and fill bits in as you're going through.

HELEN: That's good feedback, and we're happy to take feedback on the tool as well. So each of the seven employability skills has a series of questions, so there are 10 questions for each. And these have been designed by the career service. And really the idea is very simple. You just go through and you select how confident you are with a particular skill.

So I'm just picking a few examples here. And you'll see that it kind of gives you of an overall total. So you can finish that one section and go to the next one. Do the same for self-management. Let's make a few of those really high. So you can complete them all.

And you can do the same thing for all seven skills, so you then get this summary of where you feel your strengths are and where you feel there are gaps that you could develop. So it gives you a nice summary, but you're prompted by those detailed questions. So things like, are you confident with using Word? Are you confident with using Excel? All sorts of things within that.

And you don't have to complete it all. You can do part of it at the start of your studies and then come back to it later on. And like we've said, it's kind of always there, so you can always go back to it and review at any time. So I'm not-- go ahead.

KAREN FOLEY: There's lots of nice questions in there as well, because in addition to having a tool where you

could sort of make some, I guess, broad claim about the extent to which you have things, those are nice questions and there about like information technology and are you using things like Google Hangouts or Skype. And some of those questions-- I don't know, Peter. When you're doing some of these references for people, how literal do people think-- like if they think IT, does that mean I can definitely do a formula in Excel or can it be these other aspects that are so much more valuable?

PETER: I think it's important to recognise-- it depends on what the job's about. So if it's a job in IT then clearly IT can have a lot more significance than others. But I think people are looking for a rounded person. So maybe it's a job in IT, but they'll be looking at people's personal skills, looking at your ability to communicate as well as your IT skills.

Or maybe it's a job in, I don't know, in finance but you need IT skills albeit not as much as you would for an IT job. But you'd still need to have those and you'd still need to be able to use those IT tools. And so it's about being able to show that, yes, you can manage these particular range of skills.

So, I mean, there was a-- I think it was the IT skills, yes, with to be able to use Word. Now you could use-- I can use Word to some extent to all that what I need to do, but I'm not an expert in using Word, so I'd probably put a three or four there. And I think it's about the kind of job therefore you're going for. If it's a job where you need lots of IT skills, clearly that's something you need to focus on. But if not, then maybe kind of 70%, 80% is OK.

HELEN: I think one of the things that we've talked about as well in terms of employability as a term is that-- and hopefully our careers colleagues would agree with this-- is that it's not just about employment in terms of paid employment. You might be wanting to go into voluntary work or even just kind of develop your skills just for your own personal benefit. So this is a useful tool regardless of where you're at in your career journey as well. Whether you're kind of looking for a new job, or whether you're at a point in your career where you're not quite sure where you're going. So I think it applies to a whole range of different scenarios.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes. And HJ is looking for some volunteer work, of course, now as I result. Although not right now HJ, because you need to be on the Hot Desk.

We asked some students which skills they felt they were currently good at, and also we asked them which they feel like they could develop further. And we've got the first of those results through, but if you haven't voted yes let us know which of the skills you would like to work on.

So currently, problem solving is one that students feel that they're doing best at. So that's come in with 58%, 17% for team working, 8% application of information technology, and then communication literacy is at 17%.

So problem solving is-- clearly with everyone having their EMAs and exams, that's the context, and it's important to bear in mind the context.

PETER: Studying with the OU is the problem they're trying to solve.

KAREN FOLEY: But indeed, I mean, you've mentioned some of the sorts of things that OU students, in particular open degree students, are often juggling a lot of things. And so sometimes there is a lot of problem solving that we don't give ourselves credit for.

PETER: Very much so. So, I mean, OU students are doing a lot of things. They're actually-- we mentioned about voluntary work. They're actually doing a whole range different other activities.

We bring in those skills. As I said, they're not these blank canvases that are just coming from their study. They're bringing things from outside, and that's contributing to their ability to study as well.

So I think that's a real strength of our students, and it's a real strength that's recognised by employers when they're looking at people. Someone coming from studying with the OU have clearly have got those really-- they're determined. They're able to plan their studies. They're able to manage their time effectively just to fit in all of that study with all the other things that are going on in their life.

So those problem solving skills are quite key. But also a lot of the way that we teach within our modules is around kind of setting up problems, getting people thinking about how they solve problems. So it kind of comes out from that modular learning as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Now out of all of these, we've been asking people which they feel that they could currently develop further. And of course, there's a mapping on to these. And indeed-- well, let's see actually what people have to say about this, because this has been fluctuating.

So let's see the results for which of the skills could you currently develop further. So at the moment in the lead, we've got 50% with communication and literacy skills, followed then by team working at 21%, application of information technology at 14%, and then 7% with problem

solving and numeracy. So communication does seem to be one of the key things.

And we've asked students, which do you associate with employability skills? And some of the words that have been coming through involve things like communication skills, ability to self-start, articulate speaking, good timekeeping, being reliable, being resilient, being young, and all of these sorts of very positive attributes. But it does tend to link to communication. Is this something that's very hot right now in terms of employability.

PETER: I think, yes. Communication is really important to be able to communicate with other people, with customers, with your boss, a whole range of different things. And I think within the OU, particularly around TMA writing, we develop those written communication skills very well. And it's trying to develop some of those other communication skills that, I think, we're now building into our modules.

So, for example, I know of modules where you have to do a presentation. So just a short, five minute presentation on sitting at home using the OU Live platform, having a couple of PowerPoint slides, and just talking people through those PowerPoint slides. Even though our students are distributed, we can still test and develop all of those communication skills which you perhaps would normally associate with face to face universities. So I think there's a lot of opportunities there.

KAREN FOLEY: So would this be a good way to develop them by, for instance, like David was suggesting, speaking to your tutor and trying to problem solve problems? Or going to a tutorial and trying to explain things to other students with some of these interactive sessions?

PETER: I think-- that kind of going to tutorial, being part of a group, being able to, whether it's an online group or whether it's a face to face group, to be able to kind of participate, to be able to ask questions, to be able to respond and give answers, to be able to help other students understand, are really important communication skills. One of the things that I find quite tricky is that when I run a kind of an online tutorial is the number of students who don't really want to participate, who often say they don't have a microphone when I know they do have a microphone, but they're reticent in kind of coming forward. And so providing opportunities for them to do that in a safe environment, I think, is really important. And so I think we need to kind of develop and encourage our students.

HELEN: And we've got some-- if I can move us on with the tool as well, because not only have we've got this reflective piece, but we've also worked with a career service tier to provide some

advice and guidance about where students can go if they want to develop their skills. So that kind of moves on quite nicely. So I'm just going to navigate back to the main screen if I can. Sorry.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh gosh, because, of course, this is only the first part of it, isn't it?

HELEN: Yes. It won't let me go back.

KAREN FOLEY: How long might this take, Peter, for students to work. I mean, I know Helen said that one could pick up and sort of go back to things and this was saved. What would you suggest in terms of students interacting with this?

PETER: Well, I think what's most important is you don't get then too much time worrying about whether it's a two or a three or a three or a four. To go with your gut instinct and read the question and then-- where am I? I'm about a three.

HELEN: Yeah.

PETER: And move on. So don't spend too much time agonising, because it's not that precise.

HELEN: No.

PETER: It's about kind of getting a rough picture of where you are. So it shouldn't take more than 10 or 15 minutes to be able to pull it all together and get that kind of feel. And if it's something that you do at regular intervals during the OU study you can then see how your skills are developing as you're studying. And hopefully by the time you've finished, you'll have this vast array of skills. And you can think about what evidence do you have to present to employers when you're looking for new jobs.

KAREN FOLEY: Because that's the most important thing I can see students getting out of this is being able to identify what's a hot property right now and then how they can evidence that. And so whilst we've had all of those one to five scales, there's also some more reflective stuff here that students can use.

HELEN: Absolutely. So I've just moved us onto the next section, section three. So this is hopefully called Pause for Thought. So again, anything that a student records on this screen will be saved for the next time that they come in.

So we just got some questions in there about the tool itself, so we're actually prompting

students to think about, were the results what you'd expected? Did you identify any areas for development that you kind of hadn't thought about before and identifying the skills that you might like to use in the future. And like we say, just coming back to that at various points through the qualification.

And then in terms of--

PETER: But again, you as the student are the only people who see that.

HELEN: Yes.

PETER: Nobody else can see any of it.

HELEN: It's a private record.

PETER: So it really is a kind of reflection just for you.

HELEN: And it-- I mean, that's not to say you couldn't have a conversation with your tutor or with a careers adviser at any point during your studies if you wanted to talk about that in a little bit more detail. But hopefully this is just a starting point to get students thinking about the things that they need to develop and where they can go for that kind of talk.

KAREN FOLEY: And these are so important, because often people have this goal at the end. I want to be a psychologist or I want to be a this. And then they progress through their qualification and then think, I'm really not getting on with all this math so I'm really not getting on with this. So actually I really like writing reports. And so being able to reflect on these skills can help you and show you on the right qualification.

HELEN: Yeah. And I think as well, just as we were talking earlier, it's important to remember that you might just be starting your OU studies. You might just be doing your first level one module and looking at some of the questions and the writings. You might not come across some of those things until level three. It might take a couple of years for you to come across those skills, and that's fine and that's the whole reason why you can kind of keep coming back to it.

But on this page, section four, it's then about developing your skills. So there's a link to each of the seven employability skills down here. So if I take communication and literacy, because that was one that was identified from the widget, so again, towards the bottom of the page we've got some links to various resources. So some of them are from the career service.

Some of them are an OpenLearn material so they're publicly available. Sort of small skills activities and little courses that students can do. Again, to demonstrate to an employer if necessary that they've spent some time developing that skill. And the MOOCs, the Massive Open Online Courses as well. So there's some stuff in there around effective communication that they can visit.

And on each of the-- for each of the skills there's also an interview question built in there as well. So this is, tell me about a time when you had to communicate a difficult message. How did you go about it?

And the idea being just it prompts the student to kind of think, what if I was going in for an interview and this was one of the skills that had been identified, and I was asked a question about it? What's the kind of thing they might ask me and how might I respond to that question? So it just gives them a bit of time and space to think about that.

Again, none of this is compulsory. They might only want to look at one or two particular skills. But it's all there if they come across it during their course and they want a little bit more of a guided right through. So yep.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That looks fantastic. And what I like is that you can sort of, I guess, take this snapshot of where you're at, and then think about what matters to you most to develop. And then there's some really nice bite-sized chunks of ways that you can actually go about developing those. And like you say, Peter, evidencing how you've been able to demonstrate those key skills.

PETER: And in particular, I think that you might want to change directions. So you might want to go off into employment in a different area. So thinking about what are the skills you need for that new area, which ones do you need to strengthen in order to kind of to get an opportunity for an interview, et cetera. Providing the evidence is really important.

KAREN FOLEY: I think this is going to be great. And we've got the links that HJ has put in the chat, and they're on the Resources page of the web site. So do make sure that you bookmark this page, and you can go and access it when you want to.

Also, it can be a very positive thing to do something take a step forward, even if it's a small chunk of activities like something on OpenLearn that is bite-sized, or something a bit more substantial like a MOOC, et cetera. That you can then start to work through to really start building these skills up so that by the end of the degree, you're all set and ready to change

careers if that indeed is what you want to do.

Sophie and HJ, can we just go and see if there are any last minute questions that Peter or Helen can answer?

HJ: I think there's one really good one Shantelle had. And Shantelle says, one of my current employability concerns is career-related work experience. Everything would be full time and unmanageable, but from what is being said any volunteer work, et cetera would display transferable skills, and the subject knowledge from my degree may not be so important. I think that's a good point there from Shantelle.

HELEN: Yep. And that kind of follows on from what Peter said earlier as well. It's not just about what you get from your studies. It might be demonstrating skills that you've got from hobbies or from other activities that you do outside of your studies or outside of the workplace as well. So kind of think outside the box in that sense.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. And the hardest thing is making-- is, I guess, identifying them and having that head space. And this is a really nice framework that people can work through to say actually. Being able to use all of these various social media tools, for example, is a very good display of my communication et cetera. So, yeah. Some really nice ideas.

PETER: I have a story about an undergraduate OU student who was doing chemistry, and she wanted to do a PhD. And she was concerned that she didn't have enough laboratory experience because she wasn't working in a laboratory or whatever. And so we managed to get her a small bursary to come and work in our labs here for about six weeks or so. And I was able to write a letter saying about all the skills that she'd developed working in our laboratory, and she's now doing a PhD. She's just in her second year, I think, and just published her first paper.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. Oh, that's excellent.

PETER: Yes.

HELEN: So I think it's always worth asking. Ask the question if there are places that you can go to get some work experience, and don't be afraid to kind of be bold and see if you can get some kind of work shadowing or some kind of short term experience with somebody. Because a lot of places are willing to help. And like Peter says, you can then get evidence that you've done that

and you've got the skills as part of that.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Peter and Helen, thank you so much for coming along, and I'm sure people will find this incredibly useful. And thank you for explaining it. It looks like it's a really, really good resource. Thank you.

All right, so that's the end of that session. And Jonquil will be giving us a little bit more practical advice now to follow that up. Jonquil is from the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and in addition to being an economist is our employability expert. So she'll be giving us some hints and tips, et cetera.

So let us know if you've got any questions. Some really good points there about work experience. Sophie and HJ, what's the chat all about at the moment? Are there any other questions that we should put to Jonquil?

SOPHIE: I don't think there's any particular questions at the moment. So if you can get those into us sort of as soon as possible, that's great. We'll pop them forward to Jonquil.

We have a really nice comment from Bruce, actually, saying that he's really glad that he can make it to the Student Hub sessions and he can make it live. He says it really warms his soul, so it's really great that we can have you here. It's nice to be back again. It seems like it's been a little while actually since our last session. So--

HJ: Yeah.

SOPHIE: --it feels like it's been ages, so it's nice to catch up.

HJ: But we've got another one next week, which is really good as well. So yes. We'll tell you more about that later.

But just on some of the points that Peter and Helen were talking about, Sylvia was talking about for her degree in classical studies, it just seems that we can really be as-- working in the university or museum. But she's also said a lot of people have actually used their transferable skills that she knows of working in government, which is quite interesting. So that may be a path for Sylvia as well.

And Shantelle was saying earlier that she was studying while she was waiting at the vet's. And I think Sophie pointed out that is a good--

SOPHIE: That's your productivity and using your time wisely. I think those are good things you can put on your CV for that one. So yes. I think you've done well.

HJ: I think a good comment as well is being on the bus for reading. We had a good conversation about that, because that's something I did. So yes. I think lots of great transferable skills from being in the OU.

But Bruce had a great comment, which I think links nicely to this session because we were talking about the open degree. And Bruce says, I prefer flexibility and variety and was a little torn between pursuing a course that would have been more interest and passion than directly career related and structured. But he's underway on his course now, so maybe Jonquil some great advice in this section about our pathways.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely. Well, thank you both, and thank you for those questions. And do keep those coming in the chat and let us know where you're at. It's great to share your experience and your stories with other people, because often there are commonalities that you can identify and meet new students and talk to them about too.

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