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**KAREN FOLEY:** In this short session, I'm going to be talking to David Willett, who is the Head of Propositions at the Open University. And he's going to tell us about a really exciting apprenticeship programme that the faculty of business and law are working on.

So welcome, David.

**DAVID WILLETT:** Thank you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Tell us a little bit about what's happening.

**DAVID WILLETT:** Well, the Open University are launching three new degree apprenticeship programmes. And one of those is in our area of health, which is starting in October this year. And then two further new programmes, one in chartered management, and one in digital technology solutions, that will launch in the spring next year.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. Now, apprenticeships are a big buzzword at the moment, in terms of the political agenda. Why is it important, and how are the OU getting involved with this?

**DAVID WILLETT:** Well, I guess it's important for a number of reasons. First of all, from a political policy perspective, the governments have a top three manifesto pledge to have 3 million apprentices start in 2020, and we're currently on about half a million. It's important for employers because they're looking at new ways of developing skills and talents, and retaining talented people, inside their organisations. And then it's important for young people because degree apprenticeships offer a real alternative to that traditional full-time higher education route. So an apprenticeship combines full-time employment with work based learning, and a higher education qualification as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. And I guess that must appeal to people having both the work experience and a degree at the end of it?

**DAVID WILLETT:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So how does it all work, then?

**DAVID WILLETT:** Well, for young people I sign up, to be an apprentice, you need to be employed. So employers

go to market and advertise vacancies for degree apprenticeship programmes, and a young person's recruited directly by an employer, and is employed full-time on a permanent basis. Apprenticeship programmes, particularly our chartered manager degree apprenticeship programme, typically last between three and four years. So you'd be working, learning skills, developing your competence, and acquiring knowledge. And integrated into that work experience is your Open University degree. So I'll say in the chartered management degree.

And the attraction for a young person is not only are you getting all of that work experience in a real work environment-- so it's a proper job you're doing, you know, things that contribute towards the business-- but equally important is that you have no fees. So you have none of the traditional debt associated with going to university full time.

**KAREN FOLEY:** That must be very competitive and attractive to a lot of people. So how many people are you hoping to recruit, then, and is it competitive to actually secure a place?

**DAVID WILLETT:** Yeah, it's extremely competitive, particularly some of the larger programmes. So we know lots of the civil service run lots of programmes. There are lots of technology companies, food manufacturing companies. A whole range of organisations recruiting degree level apprenticeships. So it's very competitive. Young people are attracted by earning a salary. So earning whilst your working and learning.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So what would your advice be, then, for somebody who really wanted to do this? How could they stand out?

**DAVID WILLETT:** So for me, it's about really being able to demonstrate to an employer that you're committed to a work-based learning approach, that you have some of the skills and competencies that employers want. We know that employers want people who are great communicators, who can work in teams, who can solve problems. And they're the type of things that you want to be able to demonstrate going through any recruitment process.

Employers are less worried about particularly a young person's technical competence, because that's something they can develop as part of an apprenticeship. I think it's also important to say that apprenticeships are not just about young people. They're open to people of any age, so we're seeing existing members of workforces use the apprenticeship vehicle as a way to perhaps retrain, or become reskilled.

We're seeing lots of returners to work, particularly moms, who are returners to work using the

apprenticeship vehicle. So employers using the apprenticeship, and particularly degree apprenticeships, as a way of reskilling and upskilling an existing workforce as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So a lot more about the attributes, and then you get the skills as you go through?

**DAVID WILLETT:** Yes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** But how about the study, then? How does that fit into it?

**DAVID WILLETT:** So the study is planned over that three and a half to four year period. And so you're working and contributing to a job, working in a team. And then your degree study is a bit like most of the other Open University degrees.

So you know, it's a real blended solution, so a combination of distance online learning, supported by an associate lecturer, using the forums, but also supported by a practice-lead tutor, so somebody from the university that will come into the business and work with you, and support you as you go through your degree.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Wonderful. That sounds really exciting. So finally, how can students, then, find out more? Because this is launching very soon isn't it, for FBL?

**DAVID WILLETT:** Yes, it is. So you can visit the university's website. There's more information on our main website about apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships. You can visit the government's main website, so [www.gov.apprenticeships](http://www.gov.apprenticeships), where you'll be able to find out more information on that particular website as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, fantastic. David, thank you so much for filling us in on all that.

And I hope you can go to the website and find out more if this is something that's of interest to you.

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