

KAREN FOLEY: Hello and welcome back to the Student Hub Live (re)freshers orientation event. There are loads of new students out there. You're all terribly excited and very conscientious I must say about your studies. And I hope that I've introduced you to some people who are going to make your studies a lot better and have shown you some things about The Open University that you maybe didn't know about. And we've talked a lot today about various things like stationery and biscuits. And we've had our Wheel of Ologies quiz and learned a lot about planets in the process. We've also had some live science and watched various things blow up and explode and light on the fire. We've had a really, really fun day.

And this evening's session, right now we're going to look at Ambitious Futures, a title that may seem a little bit esoteric but actually is all about the graduate programme. And I'm joined by Gemma and Scott to talk about this. Now this is something that I hadn't known about. And it's really interesting because the thing with The Open University is there's so many projects and initiatives that are absolutely amazing. Whereas a lot of people think that we're just about producing all these modular materials and teaching students, but so much goes on behind the scenes that people aren't aware of. And you wanted to tell us about the Ambitious Futures graduate scheme, which Gemma you're involved in, Scott you're on-- so a brilliant opportunity for us to find out more. So what is this scheme all about?

GEMMA
GODFREY: Yeah, so it's a national graduate scheme. So it's for the whole of the HE sector. There's over 13 universities that participate across the UK in this scheme. And the idea is get graduates onto the programme and working within the university environment. So it's a real great opportunity for our graduates to sort of experience the other side of university life and come and see about a prospective career in HE.

KAREN FOLEY: So this is about HE and careers in HE, because there's lots that go on apart from lecturing and sort of writing modular materials.

GEMMA
GODFREY: Absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: This is about the, I guess, administrative and academic-related side of running a university. That is really, really exciting and a lot of us get sort of hooked into because it's often so much more interesting. And Scott, you're on the programme. Now you've just joined us, haven't you?

SCOTT I have yes, joined actually four weeks ago.

SHERRIFF:

KAREN FOLEY: So the first four weeks of an 18 month or so programme. So how have you experienced then this whole thing? Tell us about what's happened in the last four weeks for you.

SCOTT OK, so it's been quite intensive. So in the first week actually I had an induction of Manchester with the Ambitious Futures scheme. So it's meeting graduates from other universities. And we went through sort of quite an intensive induction programme to give us a good general overview of the HE sector. And then since then I've moved in with enhanced employability and career progression within the university. So it's actually part of the student first strategy. And I've been carrying out some work with them in project management, particularly relating to mapping of student employability.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow.

SCOTT So yeah, it's been quite, like I said, a lot to take in in a short period of time. But it's been very good so far and very promising.

KAREN FOLEY: So Gemma, you said that lots of universities are involved in this. And you've been up meeting some of the other people. Now how does it work? I mean it's 18 months in length and people will have three placements don't they?

GEMMA Yeah, absolutely. So the first and the third placement will be with their host university. So when they apply for the scheme, they'll choose a university that they wish to work for, so for example the Open University. So they'll have their first and third placement with them. And then the second placement will be with another university on the scheme. So this is a really great opportunity to experience two different types of universities, so from a Russell Group university to other institutions that have unique points like the OU are totally online.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. But you'd obviously prefer, I guess, to get OU students applying for this particular scheme, wouldn't you?

GEMMA Yeah, absolutely. It would be fantastic to get a lot more OU graduates coming on the scheme and selling the OU story. You know, they've experienced the journey as an OU student.

KAREN FOLEY: A very unique journey.

- GEMMA** Absolutely, it is unique. And for them to go to other universities and to spread that story really
- GODFREY:** would be fantastic.
- KAREN FOLEY:** We've asked our people whether they'd be interested in pursuing a career in higher education leadership. 47% said yes. So 18% have said no, and 35% have said they're not sure. So for those who are not sure, tell us about some of the skills. I mean you mentioned project management. And there are all sorts of things that you learn on a degree that you have a fantastic opportunity to implement using statistics and mapping and various sorts of skills that you're learning, are really done in a unique way in an HE setting.
- GEMMA** Yeah, so I think the HE sector, universities are such a vibrant place to work. And it's becoming
- GODFREY:** ever so much more challenging now to work in the sector. So this scheme is really about providing people with those great skills to become great people leaders. And they will have skills, build up skills in project management, stakeholder engagement, lots of relationship-building skills, and also presentation skills. So it's the type of skills that they can take anywhere with them really and not just the HE sector.
- KAREN FOLEY:** No, absolutely. So we've talked about some of the skills that you can develop. I did just want to ask whether it had met your expectations because you've gone through this process of applying-- and we'll talk a little bit about how that works. But right here in week four, you're learning a lot. You're immersed in a really vibrant community both in terms of the scheme as well as at the Open University. Has it met your expectations Scott?
- SCOTT** Yeah, being honest, I know it's a cliché, but it's actually exceeded my expectations. I think
- SHERRIFF:** looking into where I am now in this position where I was, say, a few months ago and being in a university, it's amazing to be sort of immersed in this sort of environment with a lot of highly talented people and actually being able to contribute to some of the work so early on. So yeah, for me it's really been great and the people are absolutely fantastic here.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Well we've met lots of them and they're absolutely incredible in the various things that they do. So we talked about some of the aspects that might interest people in terms of the vibrancy, the diversity in terms of HE. But if there's this graduate scheme and you're doing 18 months in it, what then? I mean what sort of things would you use this experience for? Is it just applicable to HE or could you go into other areas in leadership, management, et cetera by using some of this experience?
- GEMMA** Yeah, so as I say, the general skills that they build up-- so project management skills and the

GODFREY: leadership skills-- are transferable across any sector. Really if we look at some of the graduates that have been through the scheme already, they've built careers in-- so the jobs they've gone onto are things like marketing and communication, international recruitment, general project management skills. So there's so many jobs that they can diversify into because of what they've built up over the 18 months really.

KAREN FOLEY: And what were your motivations then in terms of applying? You say it met your expectations. Was it just-- I mean, what is the salary range actually?

GEMMA So anywhere between 24,000 and 27 and 1/2 thousand--

GODFREY:

KAREN FOLEY: Depending on the university.

GEMMA --depending on the university. So when they apply it would be a different salary for each of the

GODFREY: universities.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, so that's a good amount. So why did you choose to apply then Scott?

SCOTT Yeah, so I mean for me personally, I wasn't actually aware of this scheme. I want to be perfectly honest, I wasn't aware of this scheme until about eight or nine months ago. But I really wanted to find a way to stay within academia. I was considering going on to do a master's. And I thought, is there anything I can do without having to go down that route and sort of having to fund to go on to the master's again?

SHERRIFF:

So looking at this scheme, I saw that it was advertising for leadership qualities. It was going to really develop these sort of key skills the project management elements as well. And I thought, you know, if I can stay involved within academia, it's going to be a great thing to do.

And also on a more personal note, going through my sort of academic experience at university and being a mature student myself, I really loved the ethos of the Open University and the whole social mobility. So I thought for myself, through studying has really helped me to get into this position. It's really given me this opportunity. So I can't emphasise that enough, the ethos. The Open University really did appeal to me and the university sector as a whole.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. And whilst you say that these skills are transferable, actually working in HE is a huge area, isn't it? There's so many people employed to do a variety of things. We had the research and academic strategy office up there doing the quiz earlier, but there was so many very, very

interesting jobs that can happen in the HE sector. So could you tell us briefly about that?

GEMMA

Yeah, I mean just having a role in the university enables you to experience lots across all the disciplines, so from HR to communications, marketing. Then there's the student-facing areas, so take all of the phone calls from the students. So there is so much that they can diversify in. And I think if you're a staff member within the university, you have so much opportunity to do shadowing and placements and really get involved in any area that you fancy really. So it's a great opportunity to experience any kind of role.

KAREN FOLEY:

We've been talking about apprenticeships recently. Is this sort of like an apprenticeship scheme then in terms of getting some work-based learning experience?

GEMMA

Yeah, so it is about work-based learning. So when you're on the scheme, you go through a learning experience. So you pick up a qualification and you can take that theory--

GODFREY:

KAREN FOLEY:

I love it, pick up a qualification.

GEMMA

Yeah, pick up a qualification.

GODFREY:

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY:

We all know it's that easy.

GEMMA

That's it, absolutely. Well it is for these guys out there, if they can do it. I mean--

GODFREY:

KAREN FOLEY:

They're good.

GEMMA

--to be an OU student you've got to have some fantastic skills, haven't you? So yes, it's going through a programme of learning while you're on the scheme and transferring that back into the placements that you undertake as you goes through. So yeah, it's really building up some great key skills.

GODFREY:

KAREN FOLEY:

Now this is an early stage of opting in at the Open University, or involved with this programme, which is brilliant. It's been going for a little bit of time now, and hopefully it's going to continue over the next few years. We've got a lot of level one students here at the Student Hub who are just starting their journeys, so they're not due to graduate within the next year. But the ones who are, if they're graduating in the next year, we asked them if they'd be interested in

applying for the next intake in September 2018. Let's see what they said.

57% said yes. So that is good. 43% said no. So a lot of people interested in applying. And as you say, you'd like OU students to be able to apply, even though anyone could apply for this at any university. But there must be criteria and sort of process. So talk us through who's eligible and what do people do.

GEMMA

Yeah sure. So you can have a degree in any discipline. So it doesn't matter what your

GODFREY:

degrees's in, you can apply, as long as you've got a 2.1 or above, that's the national standard that they would like for the scheme. And as long as you've graduated within the last five years or about to graduate before September 2018, then you can apply for this round. And application process is already open for this round. So it's just about going to the Ambitious Future's website and applying via that. And it will be an online application process first of all, and then it will proceed through to a video interview, and then finally an assessment centre. And then from there if you're employed, great, fantastic. Your journey begins.

KAREN FOLEY:

Wow. So let's take a quick trip to HJ and see what's happening on the desk.

HJ:

There's a lot of people that are interested in this. They said they haven't heard it before so they're liking the opportunity to hear about it. And I put the links in the chat so we can have a save and look at all the detailed information as well.

But we're just talking about like the accessibility of the programme. So some programmes are quite flexible with things like age and additional needs and things like that. So like Fast Stream's a good example. What would you say about-- because the OU has a large population of disabled students, about them applying as well, maybe some reassurances on that part?

GEMMA

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, it would be fantastic to hear from whoever is interested. And of course

GODFREY:

the OU is an open employer. We'd love to hear from anyone who's interested. And of course we'd talk to them about accommodating their needs in any way that needs to be accommodated.

KAREN FOLEY:

What are some of the attributes that you think enable people to succeed in this sort of programme?

GEMMA

Definitely motivation. So it's a real desire. And as Scott said, it's that desire to want to stay

GODFREY: within academia, within HE, and to experience that sort of journey for the student on the other side and make a difference. I think if you want to make a difference in learning and lifelong learning, then it's a perfect place to be.

KAREN FOLEY: And the OU is somewhere that, as you said, is really committed to that. And actually a lot of the stuff that goes on behind the scenes makes a massive change in terms of people's ability to be able to connect with us, both in terms of curriculum and accessibility and various things. And the mapping that you're looking at Scott is really interesting too.

What do you think, Scott, people might need to be in a role like this? Is it a scary place? Are there are lots of sort of management things going on? Because I often think, higher education must be quite stern. There must be a lot of important things and minutes and formalities and things that people might think, oh, that sound a bit boring or scary--

[LAUGHTER]

--in maybe not that order.

SCOTT
SHERRIFF: No, I think the thing about higher education-- I've done several other jobs before coming into the academic environment. And to be honest, it's a challenging environment in a good way. It's very stimulating to be around, like I mentioned earlier, so many sort of really intelligent and sort of driven people. And having that sort of mentality and that positivity really does bring out the best in you. So I think if people are concerned about that, I think be open too. It's going to be challenging but it will bring the best out of you. It really has for me in such a short period of time. I'm really transferring a lot of my degree skills into the work environment and it's really taken me up to that next level I feel.

KAREN FOLEY: It's incredible, I often think there's so many amazing people here at the OU who often end up being incredibly specialist in a very, very small area like learning analytics or this, that, and the other. And actually they know an awful lot about one thing, but you can go to a meeting and they might not know much about what you're doing. And it's a really sort of nice space to be able to say, actually, I don't know about that. Fill me in. And you might ask them about various things. But no one's at that sort of hierarchical level where they're all of a sudden very important and it becomes a little bit scary. It's a great space for exchanging knowledge based on, I guess, what you know. And it's OK not to know everything.

SCOTT Definitely. I think you're right in saying that sort of hierarchical structure. It's not like your

SHERRIFF: traditional corporation, because I mean the other graduate schemes I looked into, it was very much they were looking for a very specific type of person. Whereas this one, it really did encourage you to bring out your own strengths. They're not looking for just a lot of clones. They want individual people who are going to contribute something different. So I think for me, that was a real sort of a draw of it when I was going through the recruiting process. Well actually they want me to be myself, and that's really encouraging.

KAREN FOLEY: And had you studied with the OU first?

SCOTT Yes, I actually did a certification for higher education in humanities. So anyone doing AA100,
SHERRIFF: A105, I've done those before. And then I was actually in the armed forces when I did that. And then afterwards I transferred into full time education with the University of Buckingham to finish my degree.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. What sort of things have people gone on to do Gemma who've gone through the scheme?

GEMMA All sorts. I mean, we've got some people who have continued in sort of an academic sense
GODFREY: and gone for more PhD areas. But we've also had people that are doing marketing work, project management, policy research, international recruitment of students. So there's such a diverse range that they've gone on to do. But there's loads of case studies on the Ambitious Futures website which talks about what people have gone on to do.

KAREN FOLEY: And what are you hoping to do at the end of it? Not that you're wishing the time away Scott, of course, but--

SCOTT Yeah, it's difficult at the moment. I've come into this with a very open mind. I want to see what
SHERRIFF: there is out there. And I think that's the beauty of doing three separate placements. At the moment I'm quite keen to try out research management. That's something perhaps we can look into in the third placement, which as of yet hasn't been agreed. So that's what my initial thoughts are. But I'm very much open and I want to see where I am at a year's time to see where I really want to go.

KAREN FOLEY: And what about this idea of sort of swapping between things, almost as you settle in six months down the line. How do you feel about going to Cambridge?

SCOTT Yeah, I mean going to Cambridge I think is going to really give a different aspect of higher
SHERRIFF: education and a different way of running an institution. So I think having that versatility for

going to another universe and finding out how they run as well I think is going to benefit me personally, and then hopefully when I come back to the OU sort of benefit the team I'm within as well. I might bring in some fresh ideas, things like that.

So I think, as you said, about three separate placements and jump from one to the other I think is a good thing. It's not easy to do, but it's a good thing because ultimately you're going to get a huge amount of different skills across a broad spectrum within a short space of time of 18 months. So it's very good. And it's-- like I say, those transferable skills, it doesn't have to just apply to higher education. It can go into anything really.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, now we've got some links and possibly a video as well that we can also share at the end of the session. But the application process opens quite soon, so can you give us an idea of the time scales and what people might do?

GEMMA Absolutely. So the online process is open now, so they can look into the Ambitious Futures web site and join online to answer questions. From there they will be asked to participate in a video interview. And then it will be whittled down. And of course they'll go through an assessment centre. But it's open. The online process is open until the end of January. And then the assessment centre will be around March time.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, so people can find out more about that. And we've put the links and about the Ambitious Futures website. And also there's a promotional video that we've shared in the chat as well. So that all sounds great. How many people do you think are going to apply?

GEMMA Oh, well I hope loads. The more the better. The more the better.

GODFREY:

KAREN FOLEY: And if people can't or aren't eligible to apply this year because they haven't graduated, is this something that you expect to be ongoing? I know it's early days yet for the OU.

GEMMA Yeah. We would love to keep going with it. Other universities are fully involved with it. So across the UK there are plenty of universities that are participating and will continue to do so.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. It sounds like a fantastic programme.

GEMMA It is absolutely fantastic. And people we've had through and the other graduate trainees that we've met are just so amazing. And they've got so much enthusiasm for it.

GODFREY:

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well Scott and Gemma, thank you so much for filling us in on that.

We're going to take a short video break and we'll show you the Legacy Garden now, which is another lovely area on campus. And then we'll be back for some discussion about religious studies. So join me in a couple of minutes for our next session. See you soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]