

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live induction for the Open University Business School and the Open University Law School. I'm talking to Mike Lucas about apprenticeships in this session. Now Mike, apprenticeships are a new feature of the OU's work, and I'm really hoping you can fill us- and I know we've got some students in the chat for whom this is very relevant. And you let us know at home if you'd be interested in an apprenticeship programme year or no, and also have you learned something new and will you come to another of our events? So fill those widgets in as I'm talking to Mike if you would be so kind. So Mike, tell us, what is the buzz about the apprenticeship programme?

MIKE LUCAS: Well the apprenticeship programme for the faculty is a chartered manager degree apprenticeship. But perhaps it's as well to say a little bit about the background to apprenticeships first.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, absolutely, becomes they're very topical.

MIKE LUCAS: Yeah, indeed. Well the Open University started its work on degree apprenticeships last year at about this time and launched a programme called the chartered manager degree apprenticeships. Essentially apprenticeships themselves are programmes of learning and development which are agreed between an employer and an employee who becomes an apprentice. And they will lead to a qualification. And they will lead to improved effectiveness in work and significantly better competency and performance within that apprentice's work role.

The traditional kind of view of apprenticeships is that they're relatively young people. Many of them across the country are actually not in higher education, they're in further education. So they're doing qualifications at what we call level two or level three, pre-higher education. But some of the more contemporary apprenticeships since last year, which work to the new sort of standards for the institutes of apprentices, they are at those higher levels. So we started to talk about higher apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships. And so the Open University is focusing on those degree apprenticeships at what's called level six, which is a traditional undergraduate degree level, or level seven, which is a master's degree.

KAREN FOLEY: So there's something that's changed then in terms of the position at these levels. So whereas before, further education, people were working alongside, learning, including those perhaps in

different areas than the one that you're talking about right now. But also I guess the OUs have quite a longstanding history with the National Health Service and social services as well. There are other areas of the university. So this idea is not new but the way it's shifting is new, isn't it.

MIKE LUCAS: That's right. I think the idea that these higher level apprenticeships and degree-level apprenticeships are becoming much more relevant to the professions. Health and social care are two good examples of the way in which apprenticeships have already taken hold. For us, the areas of management and, perhaps in future, law, and some of the professions allied to business like accountancy, things like that, they may come to the fore. These are much more traditionally graduate professions. And what we're beginning to see is the melding of that professional training in these areas with the more academically rigorous approach that we take as a university.

KAREN FOLEY: How do people get involved? How does somebody say, right, I want to do an apprenticeship. That sounds like brilliant fun. Yes, that's for me. What do they do?

MIKE LUCAS: Well actually they don't directly with the university. They have to get taken on by an employer as an apprentice, so on a particular programme. As I said, an apprenticeship in principle is a degreed programme of learning development between an employer and an employee.

So what will happen as a result of some changes to government policy this year is that more employers will be looking to place not just new recruits, as is the traditional sort of understanding of apprentices on apprenticeship schemes, but existing members of staff. Those government policy changes require medium and large sized companies to provide to what's called an apprenticeship levy pot. And they can draw on that levy pot of their own in order to fund programmes of learning development for, as I've said, for new employees or existing employees.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's a way of upscaling people who are either in the organisation or not, in a formal way, and the OU already providing the learning that goes through all of that side of things.

Kristen, I know you said that there were some people here who might be finding this session very relevant. I wonder if anyone's- I know it's a school run time right now, but is anyone on the chat who's following this particularly interesting and is there anything else to feed in right now?

KRISTEN: Yea, I think both Deborah and Kerry say that they're doing is a CMDA. And one of the things

that they're talking about is how you make time for it because you are working full time. And then the other thing that they're talking about is that they are not your average age for what we would expect of apprentices. So it's kind of interesting. They're echoing the same types of things that you're saying here.

MYCHELLE: And I might just add, it's 30 and 44. So it's not just a little bit- there's a range. Anyone can do it.

KAREN FOLEY: No, absolutely. So there are some things that are very common for OU students, but I guess there is a slightly different cohort of students who are within these programmes. One of the modules I teach on, we have paramedics, and they have very different pressures than the other students. I mean everyone has the problem with time and stuff coming into the whole issue of part-time study. It's very common. But there does seem something unique.

But equally there seems to also be access to quite a good support network because people are in employment settings where they're able to apply things as well. So there is that sort of side of things that can be a positive.

MIKE LUCAS: Well I think I think the most distinctive feature of a degree apprenticeship is it's an attempt to put together the intellectual rigour of a degree study with the practicalities of learning in the workplace. So actually what we've done is we've developed a significant proportion of new courses and modules which are geared to the application of ideas, the application of knowledge in the workplace. And that hopefully allows our apprentices to manage their time so that actually some of their study time, some of their learning time is actually done on the job.

And the work they do in the workplace is supported by one of our tutors. In the case of our faculty we call them practise tutors on the chartered manager degree. In other faculties I know that they have slightly different titles and roles. But the aim of those- the purpose of those tutors is to support the students throughout the period of study, not just on the academic module that they're studying for that particular academic year. So they are looking to help the students identify the opportunities for learning in the workplace, to match the evidence of that learning up against the standard, which is how we refer to the apprenticeship sort of framework, the framework of outcomes, and help them throughout to build up a picture of their professional competence and their ability to do their job better in the light of the subjects they're studying on our business management modules.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, I mean there's this big talk at the moment about personalised open learning and about how important it is to get your learning suited to your individual requirements, your desires, et

cetera. And I know as a university we focus on this, but really this is the epitome of that is really thinking about how you can actually tailor something to fit in so that you can effectively double up on the time it takes to do it, which is very clever indeed. But if you're very busy, how do you get a sense of that? Is this something your practise tutor would go through with you to identify individual ways that you could perhaps narrow the two?

MIKE LUCAS: Absolutely. So from the outset of the programme they establish an individual learning plan. And that learning plan is reviewed on a regular basis. So there's a regulatory requirement on apprenticeships. The tutor, the learning support person has to review that quarterly, on a quarterly basis. So at least once a quarter they get to review the individual learning plan.

But actually as people know who have engaged with the Open University, our tutors are in regular contact with the students. So actually it's a way of formalising a lot of what's going on in terms of the interactions between tutor and student. And again, it's over the evidence that proves that their competency is growing and developing.

KAREN FOLEY: I know, absolutely. What sort of feedback have you had then from students who do this? What are some of the key benefits, I guess, of being involved in a programme like this and some of the success stories so far? I know it's very early days.

MIKE LUCAS: Yeah, it is very early days. We've only had two cohorts start. We're just about to start our third cohort. The initial feedback, very positive in terms of the immediacy of the impact of the learning. It's, I think, balancing the challenges of working and learning in such an intensive way and learning the process of application that we're interested in and we're interested to see whether we got it right.

I think it's still in development, so there's still work to do. But we are learning quite fast. And the second phase for this first cohort in their second year will be coming up very soon, later this year. And we hope that that first cohort will see the developments, the improvements in what we're doing.

Other early feedback, we're also very keen to make sure that the employers are part of this picture, because the employer is the other part of the support network. We have a team working as part of the university called the apprentice programme managers. And they work very closely with the employers to make sure that the apprentice is getting the right learning opportunities, that the types of evidence that are being produced are of the appropriate

quality, and also that the employer is happy with the programme that their apprentices are receiving.

So there's many channels of feedback. It's a work in development, as many things are. But we've had some early very good feedback.

KAREN FOLEY: And tell me about the plans for the future in terms of degree apprenticeships.

MIKE LUCAS: Yes, well quite clearly we have only two, coming to three cohorts on this chartered manager degree. So obviously we will need to complete the programme. We're working with a whole range of employers to try and make sure that we are producing a programme which is appropriate for that full range. And we are also interested in and actively talking to various organisations about partnership. So the chartered manager degree itself will develop, I think, and build into something hopefully larger, hopefully quite multifaceted with regard to the kind of employers that use it.

But we also have plans afoot to develop and deliver quite quickly apprenticeships to other standards. There's one that's in development at the moment. It's hopefully soon to be approved for delivery. We're waiting with bated breath. And that's a level seven apprenticeship for senior leaders, as the standard says. And that will be at master's degree level. So it will be a postgraduate offering. And we'll be talking to some of our companies that we already work with and some new ones who may be interested in a cohort on to a postgraduate qualification.

In addition to that, the faculty has been leading a cross-faculty centre in the development of policing organisations and policing practise. And so we're looking very, very closely at the standards which are coming out of the work of what's called the trailblazer group in policing, all the way through from police constables. And there's been a very active discussion nationally about whether police constables should be graduates. Apprenticeships could be one route there. But I think in future we'll be looking also at police leaders, managers, supervisors, and looking at the types of qualifications they'll need as well.

KAREN FOLEY: So do you think this is the direction it's all going? I mean, you mention some of these very qualified people who maybe don't have a degree. And there's so much emphasis right now on degree qualifications. Is this apprenticeship thing a way, I guess, as trying to sort of get some sort of level of knowledge base to people who are very specialised already?

MIKE LUCAS: I think in some professions that's the case. I mean I mentioned the police as an example and

this debate about graduate level. I think graduate status has been seen in a number of sectors anyway over a number of years- education, health, social work- as a marker of professional status, as the first step of professional status. So I think this is more of a consolidation of what's happening there. I think in policy terms it's a way of involving employers more in that movement and that debate.

Is that the way everything's going? No, I don't think I'd be quite so bold as that. But certainly it provides some really interesting opportunities for people who are working with employers to get qualifications funded and key skill's needs and key skills developed, particularly in areas like management.

KAREN FOLEY: So we were talking before about Silicon Valley and we were talking about looking into the future and saying 40 years ago we thought that everyone would be robots now doing all of these jobs, et cetera, and it hasn't sort of quite transpired this way. My point is is that you're in a very sort of fast paced area of partnerships where there's a lot happening in terms of policy level and the delivery of content basically by higher education providers, not just the Open University. It's a very, very topical, very current sort of area, and one that is sort of moving very, very quickly and rapidly. So crystal ball gazing then, where do you think it's all sort of going and how quickly do you think some of this development is happening? Just so we can watch this on the catch up in a few weeks and go, oh no. Phew, nothing happened. I mean the end of the world didn't happen the other day, so that was good. You can't always know for sure.

MIKE LUCAS: Well, I think if I'm a little bit cautious about that, it is very fast moving. And I think one of the challenges that not just myself but a lot of colleagues have been involved is keeping up with the pace of development of apprenticeships.

I think there's a lot that's been learned in a very short time not only in universities and at the Open University amongst them but by employers, and also by policymakers. And so there does seem to be emerging a consolidated picture about the nature of a national standard for particular professions. There seems to be more professional areas and sectors becoming interested, more specialisms at that higher level, at degree level. So I think what we might fall into is a number of professionals, a number of professional sectors rather all developing a vision of graduate professional status. And the other thing is, it may well have an impact on the way in which degrees are funded for people who are interested in those professions. And I think all of those things are incredibly positive.

So I don't think I have a clear vision of the future. But certainly I feel fairly optimistic from those perspectives.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Well, thank you very much for coming along and filling us in Mike. That's been really, really interesting. And we'll watch this space and see what happens. But it certainly is a very exciting areas to be in right now, and some great prospects as well for the students who are going to be connecting with us.

OK, well, thank you very much. And thank you Zoe for kicking off the discussion about brain food. HJ, other people have much better ideas about brain food than biscuits.

HJ: Apparently snacking and biscuits aren't good all the time. I'm not sure how I feel about my stash now.

KAREN FOLEY: Well I think you should share your stash and possibly broaden it a little bit because you're going to see other food if you're going to be healthy and on that chat desk tonight.

HJ: Yeah, maybe we can get some good advice. I heard Zoe's got some good recipes perhaps and maybe we could have some of those. But yeah, I thought since it's coming to the winter I needed to stash, but perhaps there's some better things I could have.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. No, it is important to eat when you're studying, but also the right food goes a long way I think. All right, Kristen, Mychelle, any other final thoughts?

KRISTEN: Well we're just we're just talking about where people are checking in from. Let's see, we've got someone sitting in their kitchen. We have someone from Tamworth and Swindon, Manchester. Is Lyra in her kitchen? And HJ, you say you're in the studio. That's just because you want to be near the biscuits I think.

[LAUGHTER]

MYCHELLE: It's been such a nice chat room today, lots of sharing of really good ideas from the students about how to be motivated for study, how to plan for study, helping each other when they're a bit anxious. So it's been a really good chat in the chat room today.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh wonderful. Well thank you both. And thank you HJ for being in the studio as well, steeling all our food. We're going to have a bit of a break now from our live discussion. But don't worry because there's plenty of other stuff coming up for you later this afternoon. We're going to be

replaying some previous content from last year's induction event. So there's some very interesting discussions that you can engage with, and also some general things that you might need to know about various systems and processes at the Open University.

The chat's still going, so please keep sharing your ideas and tips. Talk to each other, et cetera. We'll be back at 7 o'clock tonight for some interesting discussions and a moot. So please join me then from 7:00 until 9:00. But the chat will be continuously going this afternoon as we have these replays for you.

There are also other Student Hub Live events as well coming up. We have one tomorrow morning in fact where we're talking about reading, writing, note taking, and getting ready for your studies. So do join me from 10:00 till 12:00 then. The afternoon, we've got some special events as well for sports and fitness and also early childhood and youth. So do check out the website for the full range of programmes that we've got over the next few weeks.

But thank you again as Kristen and Mychelle have said for sharing all of your ideas and tips in the chat box, for being so supportive of each other. OU students really are the best and you've really shown that today. So thank you very much for sharing.

We're back tonight at 7:00. So we'll see you then. Have a good afternoon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]