

Being an MBA Student - Beginning your MBA with the OU – 21 October 2019

KAREN FOLEY: We've got Caroline Clarke, who's a senior lecturer here at The Open University and chairs B870, Managing in a Changing World, which is the core MBA module we've been already talking about. We've got Luqman Jimoh, who is the senior leader in the Master's Degree Apprenticeships. So you're going to add a very different perspective on this. And of course, Laurie, you have to stay here ...

[LAUGHING]

... as you always have done. So we're going to start talking about some of the ways in which the B870 will look at assessment and feedback. We've spoken a little bit about tutor feedback more generally. But people were worried about assessment and the exam, which I appreciate isn't on this module, which were quite relieved about, I think.

MICHELLE: Yes, absolutely, fresh module.

KAREN FOLEY: ... so that's good, and finding information about assessment and exams. So could you fill us in?

CAROLINE CLARKE: OK. So there's two TMAs and one EMA on this course. So ...

KAREN FOLEY: Hold on. I just have to do my bit. So the TMA ...

MICHELLE: What's a TMA?

KAREN FOLEY: ... is the tutor-marked assignment.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Sorry, OU jargon.

KAREN FOLEY: No, that's fine. It's just that we have all these times. And they're becoming incredibly familiar, as is the case. But yes, so the tutor-marked assignments, the ones that will be sent to a tutor, and then they'll be fed back on specifically.

MICHELLE: Not sent to by email but through the system. That's right, isn't it?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, the TMA system.

MICHELLE: You actually have a system. It's very easy to use.

KAREN FOLEY: Which is really easy to use. And it can't be broken either. And it's just like a file handler. It transfers the files.

MICHELLE: And there's opportunity to practice as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

MICHELLE: Sorry. You upload ...

KAREN FOLEY: So the eTMA system, so the TMA is the tutor-marked assignment. And then EMA is the end of module 1, right at the end of that year of study.

CAROLINE CLARKE: There's one at the end of Unit 1 that's tutor-marked assignment number 1. One at the end of Unit 2, and then the EMA right at the end of the module.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now Michael was talking about some of these feedbacks, as was Gillian as well. She was saying that the tutor-marked assignment gave us some really, really good feedback for when it mattered a bit later on. And some of the anxieties around submitting work maybe after you haven't studied for 30 years, any advice there for students?

CAROLINE CLARKE: Well, yeah. I was an OU student myself. And I was in a full time job and hadn't studied for a long time. So I know how terrifying it is. It's not quite as terrifying as speaking here right now.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: It's more terrifying for everyone at home, though, Caroline.

[LAUGHTER]

CAROLINE CLARKE: It's not. Believe me.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah. So sorry, what was the question?

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: That's fine. So advice for students about the TMAs, particularly about managing nerves with thinking, I haven't been assessed for ages. This is going to be awful. They're going to think I'm an idiot. That's what I often think when I'm about to submit an assignment.

CAROLINE CLARKE: There's none of that, really, because we're your biggest supporters. Now, it's really interesting because we don't have an exam. And the end-of-module assessment is something that you contribute to every week that you're a student. So it's not as though you're going to get to the end of the module and have to do loads and loads of work. If you've been on top of it, and you've been doing this particular activity that I can talk about in a minute, there shouldn't be any big surprises at the end.

So the EMA is based on a thing called tuning into managing, where you find something out with the media or piece of film or book or a conversation. And there's plenty out there at the moment. And then you put it into Open Studio. Write 170 words or just put some bullet points down.

And for TMA one, you're going to, part of your assessment will be to put four weeks of your tuning into managing in. Now your tutor will give you some really good feedback on that.

And then you can submit it again as part of your EMA. So it's like a practice. Here are my four weeks. Have I done it OK? And then your tutor will give you later feedback.

KAREN FOLEY: And that's fairly short. 170 words is only about a minute's worth of speaking. So it's something very tangible and minimal.

CAROLINE CLARKE: But it's got to bridge the piece of media that you found and what you've learned that week.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now it's a really exciting new module. And like many OU things, we split these up into units or sections of study. And there were three units within B870.

CAROLINE CLARKE: There's three units. Yes, thinking about managing, contemplating marketing, and then integrating into practice. So it's six weeks, seven weeks, and whatever's left ...

KAREN FOLEY: Now you tell me that some of this content is quite provocative and challenging for students. Why is that?

CAROLINE CLARKE: Because I think for a long time we've been focusing, especially MBAs, on just about profit and assuming people work in private sector and just want to make lots of profit. This is much broader. And it's much more about responsibility we have managing. And we use it as a verb on purpose. It's something we do all the time. And you never arrive. So you're always managing.

And there's other things to consider. There's, obviously, the planet, there's peoples, how we treat people at work, how much we pay them, should we have ...

KAREN FOLEY: So it's challenging some of the stuff that we take for granted in the world and really thinking about those in slightly different ways?

CAROLINE CLARKE: Yeah, because I think a lot of the time, we're the goldfish in a bowl. We don't look at the water. So is it important if we agree that people should be on a zero-hour contract? And what does it mean for those people who are, for example?

KAREN FOLEY: So that's the importance of reflection throughout.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Yes. And it's always relating it back to your organisation. So when we talk about living wage, we'll ask you to look up whether your organisation has joined up. And they're on the website. So you're always relating it back to what you're doing.

KAREN FOLEY: So here you put in the chat who else is studying B870? And everyone's going, me, me, me. So the question then is how you going account, Michelle?

[LAUGHTER]

MICHELLE: I just said, should I ask anyone not?

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, right.

[LAUGHTER]

MICHELLE: So we go round.

KAREN FOLEY: We have lots of questions. And if we may, we can just blitz those at you, Caroline, because one other thing that we've been talking about is the residential schools. So this has been an area of both excitement and apprehension for people. What's your take on it?

CAROLINE CLARKE: Oh, yeah, it's going to be really good. And people are always apprehensive. I reckon it takes them probably, what, 30 minutes to relax and go, 'Oh, this is great'. We've got some good stuff. We've got fun stuff. We've got a great case study called Tony's Chocolonely. We're hoping they're going to send some chocolate for the students.

They're going to be practicing recording an audio, which is part of their EMA. And they're going to talk about tuning into managing in their learning journal. And yeah, fun stuff. It'll be really fun. People generally absolutely love residential school. I went to several myself.

[LAUGHTER]

They were very interesting in those days.

KAREN FOLEY: Well I met one of my best friends at a residential school a long, long, long time ago. So I know that they are absolutely brilliant. Another thing that we've been talking about before is applying some the stuff that we've learn to our own organisations. How does that work in this module?

CAROLINE CLARKE: Well, it works on virtually every activity. The activities are really important. And there's always a tendency, I know, as a student to think, I haven't got time to do activities. But they're all part of it. They're all part of the plan. And we encourage students to think about it in terms of their own organisation.

And as I say, the tuning into managing, it means you are an OU student 24 hours a day unless you're asleep because if you're on a train and you're listening someone talking, you're seeing the headlines, or you've just seen a film or anything, then hopefully it will speak to you. And if you are say on Week 5, and you found something much better on Week 2, load it up and decide at the end. You can still add to your tuning into managing all the way through. So we want you to go, 'Oh my god. I've just learned about that'. Or, 'I learned about six weeks ago and I'm gonna upload it'.

KAREN FOLEY: Applying it to your everyday. But I can see then why it's so nice to have various reflective toolkits because sometimes it can just all seem overwhelming. And then it can be a struggle to integrate and apply some of those areas. And so these reflective toolkits as well can find one way of actually sitting down and cutting the mustard in a particular way.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Yeah. Would it be helpful if I gave an example of ...

KAREN FOLEY: Go on then.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Because some of what I've written came out my own tuning into managing. So I was going to the gym. Just thought I'd throw that in.

KAREN FOLEY: Going to the gym. Right OK. In your spare time.

[LAUGHTER]

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

CAROLINE CLARKE: And I was listening to Radio 4. And they were interviewing the CEO of Lush. And he was talking about how he's going to sell the company to the employees because so many ethical organisations have sold out. And I'm not going to take too much because that's part of the activity. You've got to match up ...

[LAUGHTER]

... who owns these?

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, this is a cliffhanger.

MICHELLE: I love it. You're a natural.

[LAUGHTER]

CAROLINE CLARKE: So for example, Innocent Smoothies, they've been out. You're going to have to match up. You have three minutes to match all these organisations. So we've got some fun activities. But that was my tuning into managing. I thought, well, OK. So someone on here talked about ethics. We're writing a block on ethics. This sounds like a fun thing. And so they're going to listen to the audio and do a bit of research on Lush.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's that link between ethics and profit and where that balance applies.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Yes. And Tony's Chocolonely, who we will be using at a residential school, they were set up by journalists who wanted to end slavery with the cocoa beans. And they made a film about it about how these six-year-old children are picking cocoa beans. And no one took any notice. So they threw in their job. And they set up Tony's Chocolonely. It's called Chocolonely because it's a lonely path to slave-free chocolate.

KAREN FOLEY: And what a wonderful guest to be using.

[LAUGHTER]

MICHELLE: Exactly.

CAROLINE CLARKE: We've been out, and we've been filming with Tony's Chocolonely. And students will be using the filming stuff as a challenge. And like I said, hopefully there'll be some chocolate on every seat the first night. So it's fun stuff, but it's serious. We want people to understand it's serious. Managing is a serious business.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you, Caroline. I can't believe you were so nervous coming on here. You can have some chocolate. It has been super exciting really, really packed with questions. I want to talk about the various different pathways. But anything urgent that we cover for now?

MICHELLE: Just a few things on the residential school. So is there one per year? Again, the question's about when are they and how do we do the residential schools. And just concerns around, thanks to Charles, who said that it truly transformed my understanding of the course I was doing and gave me a brilliant insight into different ways to view the course. If the B871s are anything similar, then I would highly recommend them.

But there is a question about when and how to enrol. And, my apologies, [INAUDIBLE] has said, I live in Japan and plan to go to Europe for the residential school. I'm looking forward to the trip. My concern is temperature. It seems to be freezing in northern Europe in February.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, it is. Bring a coat [INAUDIBLE].

MICHELLE: When can we get them? How can we get them? How many are there?

LAURENCE KNELL: So as soon as a course opens, students should have some access to it to be able to see the dates and to be able to book. But once they're online, take a look. If they can't find anything, they should contact their tutor, who can help guide them towards the right place. But Student Home is the place to go.

KAREN FOLEY: And how many students attend each residential school?

LAURENCE KNELL: That's a great question. I'm not sure how many for B870, Caroline. Do you know how many places are in each one?

CAROLINE CLARKE: I think maybe we've got a limit of 70 or something like that. There is the online. But it's much better to go, if you can ...

KAREN FOLEY: So it's enough, that it's not going to be two people. No chocolate online as well.

CAROLINE CLARKE: No chocolate online.

KAREN FOLEY: Bring your own.

[LAUGHTER]

CAROLINE CLARKE: I'm going to give a prize for the best team. You get a load of chocolate at the end.

MICHELLE: For those students who can't attend the in person, the online is equivalent?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

CAROLINE CLARKE: It's equivalent minus the chocolate.

MICHELLE: Equivalent minus chocolate. There you go.

CAROLINE CLARKE: It's the same learning, but no chocolate. And no bar in the evening.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, I think [INAUDIBLE] should come over.

MICHELLE: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes. Absolutely. Any other questions?

MICHELLE: That's it for now. Thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you. So I wanted to talk about the different pathways that students are on because some students will be on a longer pathway. Other students will be on a different programme, which is the SLMDA. What does that mean?

LUQMAN JIMOH: The SLMDA stands for the Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship, which is an apprenticeship pathway to the OU's MBA. And like you rightly mentioned, we will have students who are on that particular pathway. And linking back to some of the points that Caroline made earlier about tuning into managing, the emphasis there for students on the apprenticeship pathway is the integration of their learning into practice.

Students in an apprenticeship pathway have an additional expectation in terms of a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates their professional practice and competence in their workplace. So importantly, students will study B870 collectively. But in terms of tuning into managing, the emphasis in terms of integrating what they learn into their practice is really, really an important one for students in the apprenticeship pathway.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And it's really nourishing and enriching to have different cohorts of students, and also to recognise that different students are bringing different things in. But I guess one of the key differences here is that students on an apprenticeship programme will have a different workload. How does that differ?

LUQMAN JIMOH: One thing to bear in mind for students on the apprenticeship pathway is they have, in addition to the core academic modules that they will study, a work-based learning model, leadership in practice, which is a new innovative model that serves two purposes. The first one being that it awards academic credit for the MBA itself.

But equally so, it serves as a framework for students to be able to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and behaviour expectations of an apprenticeship standard so that they're able to gather evidence of their professional practice in a portfolio. So in terms of the intensity of study, students on the apprenticeship pathway should bear in mind that at some point, they will have concurrent study, which means they're studying the core academic model alongside the work-based learning model. So it's important to bear that in mind as part of their planning.

KAREN FOLEY: And it's interesting that you were saying the other day that they're not binary possessions. They're very much integrated within what students are learning and how they're applying it. So as part of sort of developing this portfolio then, they have a practice tutor, which is different to an associate lecturer or tutor that they would have on B870, for example. How does that work?

LUQMAN JIMOH: The practice tutor is assigned to the student from one student enrolls and supports them right throughout their qualification. And the emphasis is the practice tutors are season, experienced practitioners who are also academics, who support students in terms of their learning journey throughout their apprenticeship pathway. And some of their emphasis

is the practice tutor is a key point of contact, who will tutor on the work-based learning model, but equally so, support the student in the points around integration of learning, what they've learned integrating into their workplace, and supports them in the correlation and curation of appropriate evidence for their portfolio. So that support is really, really key in terms of how students can bring their learning back into their workplace and deliver value for their organisation.

MICHELLE: There are loads of SLMDA students on here, which is great. So a quick shout out, Tessa, Anne, Emily, Lise, Anita, Abigail, Carl, Michael, and more. Madison, Marie, Richard, all on here.

LUQMAN JIMOH: That's excellent.

MICHELLE: Yeah, it's great.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: And I thought you might ask that question. And let us know if you've got any questions that you'd like us to put Luqman as well because I want to ask then, how are these students going to manage their time? And what is your experience as a tutor seeing students go through this process?

LAURENCE KNELL: I think that there's always that initial 'Oh my god, what have I done?' that all students have. And I think Caroline could possibly relate to that from her own studies. But the key thing is, as Gillian was saying earlier on, for anyone who was listening to Gillian, have a plan. Work to that plan.

But one of the best pieces of advice I've ever had actually came from a former student of mine. Had a very senior role within the financial services company. Spent a lot of time on planes, always travelling, but was determined to do an MBA. And what he said is you have to try and integrate both work and learning. If you try and treat them as discrete things between work, between learning, between family, you'll explode. You can't do everything separately.

And the key benefit of that as well, apart from saving time, is also you're able to apply all the great stuff that you're learning in real time. So as you're learning about leadership or about ethics or about marketing or anything else, you can take it back in. And that same student told me a story about actually doing a presentation and having a senior consultant from one of the big consultancy companies coming after him afterwards saying, that's brilliant. Where did you do your MBA? And he said, I'm only in the first year of my MBA with The Open University. But for him, it really validated that fantastic experience.

And the final part of the story is that the senior consultant who came up to him had also done an Open University MBA. So it was a brilliant networking and learning experience for the two of them.

LUQMAN JIMOH: That's great.

MICHELLE: So we have a couple of questions on here. Is there already an SLMDA online forum?

LUQMAN JIMOH: Right, as part of the work-based learning model and induction on SLMDA, there is a forum that students will study on the SLMDA pathway. There's an induction site. And that has a whole forum attached to it. There is equally a forum attached to the work-based learning model.

And when students study the work-based learning model, they have, with support from their practice tutor, a Tutor Group Forum. So there are those variety of opportunities for students to share and come together as a community in terms of their learning and their overall experience on the qualification.

MICHELLE: And Aziz has asked, when are we likely to be assigned practice tutors?

LUQMAN JIMOH: Usually in terms of the practice tutor assignment, that would be communicated via the apprenticeship programme delivery team. So students will find out very soon in terms of who their practice tutors are. And that information usually can also be found on the study home site as well.

KAREN FOLEY: It's one of those funny times when everyone's enrolled. And then we have our cut-off date. And then work very quickly trying to get people connected with their tutors and things. But it can be quite anxiety-provoking while you're waiting for that to happen. But students don't need to worry yet because they can go off and find the library and go and do all the resources before the course starts.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Sorry. There has been quite a lot of chat on the welcome forum. And I've been reading it all. And I'm so chuffed. The students are awesome. We have the backgrounds, what they're doing, what they're, the challenges they've got. I would say if you want something done, ask a busy person. And these people are busy people.

[LAUGHTER]

And they're going to be OK.

KAREN FOLEY: They will. Yeah.

MICHELLE: And then the last question we have so far is, to what extent do we need our employer to cooperate with our studies?

LUQMAN JIMOH: I think that's an important point. I think that conversation and discussion that you have with your employer is quite important quite early on, particularly in the context of the job learning expectation on an apprenticeship pathway. Apprenticeship rules stipulate a minimum of around 20% of the job learning time. So having those conversations very early on with your employer is really important to secure the space and time to be able to undertake your learning. So I think this is a critical element of getting yourself into that mode of study very early on if you seek and negotiate those discussions with your employer very early on.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you, Michelle. We've only got five minutes left of our live broadcast. If there are questions that we haven't covered, this is your last few minutes to get those in to Michelle. And we'll try to cover them at the end. But right now I want to talk about something in Unit 3, which is overwork.

[LAUGHTER]

So an interesting topic and one that you put towards the end of this first year of B870 as well. So you want students to complete questions about their work life balance, which is really, really interesting. And we started the show saying that so many students are juggling so many different things and often feel that they're the only one perhaps not managing those balls quite as coherently as everybody else.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Yeah. We don't concentrate so much on that phrase work-life balance because I think that is such an, it just doesn't work now. It just seems that everything is so intermingled. But the question, we're looking at over work. And I just thought about some questions that students might want to answer.

And it's all about emails, in fact, because there are some directives in certain countries now. You don't send an email after time. The server doesn't deliver it weekends, et cetera. So it was based on my own experience where I scored maximum points.

[LAUGHTER]

It's not ...

[INTERPOSING TALKING AND LAUGHING]

CAROLINE CLARKE: That's not a good thing. It's not scientific in the sense it hasn't been validated or anything. But it's basically how many people have emails on their phone? Do you ever check your email at night, at the weekend? Do you ever take work on holiday with you? And it's all these kinds of things to make us think how much time we are actually working.

So, Unit 3 is around human rights. So one of the human rights from the declaration is everyone has the right to rest and leisure. And that's why we're looking at things like overwork and this habit we have of reading our emails. And then people respond to them at midnight as well. [LAUGHS]

KAREN FOLEY: It can stress you out. And sometimes I catch myself saying, why are you responding now? And you think, well, because I can. And it's this thing. I was speaking to some students the other day. And I said, what is the main thing that distracts you? And they all said their phones. And it was so interesting, because just because people know you're connected, means that they somehow feel that their response can be appropriate. And it isn't always, is it?

CAROLINE CLARKE: No. And I've seen some students bring this up in the welcome forum. And I said, oh, great, because you can love Unit 3. But it was about life. It was about responding and the expectations on everyone. And we all actually fuel that by reproducing these practices, of course.

KAREN FOLEY: But we've been talking about the integration between what we're learning and what we're doing in everyday life. And so this then begs the question about to what extent we do integrate some of those things as well. If we're constantly thinking about how someone's going to sell a business when we're at the gym, et cetera, you can see how your

brain is overworking in those sorts of areas. So where is that balance? And what can we recommend to students about perhaps managing some of that in terms of their own study life?

CAROLINE CLARKE: I'm a great believer in non-work, which is where you take the dog for a walk or you do something else. And actually, sometimes that completely frees up the mind to, things pop in, rather than this pressure of sitting down at a desk. I can only work when I'm at a desk. Because of tuning into managing, actually, you can work ...

KAREN FOLEY: Wherever.

CAROLINE CLARKE: But I don't really see it as work because hopefully, everyone is really curious about how to understand life. And this is really what we're doing here.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's about sparking that curiosity as opposed to feeling obliged to apply everything in every setting. Although, of course, for the apprenticeship, you need a coherent account of things going on. So it's important to document that.

LUQMAN JIMOH: Absolutely. And that's the emphasis that the workplace learning model places on the framework for curating evidence to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and behaviour because that's a core requirement in terms of the gateway for an apprenticeship programme. So students would have to be conscious of that in terms of how they plan their study, particularly in the context of concurrent study as well.

I find that I would do difficult task. Those moments where I feel a lot more concentration, so perhaps, first thing in the morning, but we all work in different ways. So again, it's about finding those strategies that work for you and reviewing whether they actually do work for you. I've heard from students say that actually, at the end of every module, I review what I've done in the on that module, and make that judgement as to whether I want to do the same thing for the next module. Again, it's about finding what really works.

KAREN FOLEY: And everyone's so different, aren't they?

LUQMAN JIMOH: Mm-hmm.

KAREN FOLEY: Any final advice from you?

LAURENCE KNELL: I think it's picking up on all of the points that have already been made and looking for those opportunities. You think about, say, the first part of B870, very much about management leadership. Even just listening to the radio, watching the news, watching movies, you can think about different management styles. And so you might, for example, look at senior politicians, don't want to name any names, but senior politicians.

CAROLINE CLARKE: Plenty going on.

LAURENCE KNELL: Plenty going on. And think about leadership styles, which you might find really intriguing. But that then might lead you to recognising and discovering there's actually a lot of work that's being done about leadership traits of American Presidents and British Prime Ministers over time. And so there's always more that you can discover. And so it's just finding those moments that are really interesting and great little learning opportunities for students to discover and engage with.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And a lot of data at the moment. We're out of time. Is there anything really urgent we haven't covered?

MICHELLE: No, just to say to Luqman that you'll be pleased to know there's a buzz on here about one file and time sheets. And some of them have already completed their time sheet.

KAREN FOLEY: That's brilliant.

LUQMAN JIMOH: No, that's our idea. You're familiar with the performance system. That's great.

MICHELLE: So people are very excited. I suppose the only last question is, do we have visibility of the work-based learning portfolio already? And Richard followed on to say what size should the work-based project be? And is there a time slot? So maybe rather than the answers, where can they go to find those answers?

LUQMAN JIMOH: There's information on the work-based learning module, BBXY857. A student may not yet have access to that particular module because it's assigned at a particular point during their journey. But there's a wealth of information in that module. And you could also speak to your practice tutor and have those early conversations about the nature of the project, about the nature of the work-based learning module, about the portfolio, and particularly the SLMDA apprenticeship standard.

MICHELLE: Great. That's really helpful. Thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you all so much. I hear everyone's really excited about residential school. They're all planning their trips and snacks.

MICHELLE: So little talk about chocolate, but a great buzz anyway.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. Yes, very, very serious. It's great to see everyone so geared up and excited about their studies. So thank you all for joining me today. Thank you, everybody at home. I hope that's been a really fun start to the academic year and that you've had a lot of your questions answered, that you can go and visit your module home page and find out more information, and that within the next few weeks, you'll be allocated your various tutors. And you can certainly ask them questions.

But otherwise, go on the welcome forum, where Caroline's been enjoying all your support. And do support each other in your studies as well. Thank you all very, very much for watching. And we hope you can join us at one of our other events. If you're interested in seeing any other support that we've got from The Open University at Student Help Live, you can check out the Student Help Live website. Bye for now, though. And thank you for watching.

[MUSIC PLAYING]