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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome to the "Student Hub Live-- Open Justice" event. My name's Karen Foley, and I'm a lecturer and a tutor at the Open University. And I'll be your host for this session, which comprises an afternoon session for one and a half hours and an evening session tonight.

Now some of you may have been to these events before. They're live and interactive. And if you're here in real time and you're watching and engaging, you'll be able to see the chat that's going on. And also, you'll see some widgets that are appearing in your screen.

Now these interactive tools give you the chance to tell us things like where you are, what you're studying, at what level you're studying, and all sorts of information. And to tell us what you're doing, you just select the widget. It will then appear in a large screen. Choose the item that applies to you, for example, where you are or how you're feeling.

I mean, those ones, there are three options. And if you don't put three things in, they won't submit. So if you only think of one or two things, just put a full stop in the box. And then press Submit, and it will send your answer.

You can also see that there are different options to view the screen. So if you click on the bottom right-hand side of the interface, you'll be able to see that there are three layouts. So you can choose the one that feels best for you.

And if there is a lot of chat, and you'd like to scroll back to something maybe someone said, there's a Pin option as well. So you can just select that, and then you can scroll the chat through.

You can also engage with us on social media. And the hashtag for Twitter is #studenthublive16. And we have our email, which is studenthub@open.ac.uk, so studenthub@open.ac.uk.

So we hope that you are going to engage with us and talk about anything that's on your mind. Now that could be a question that you've got about pro bono law. It could be something to do with a law degree. It could be something about cake. It could be something about an EMA that you've got coming up, anything to do with your studies and being an OU student.

This is the place, really, where community happens. And it's your chance to interact with other students and tutors in the chat box in real time. And if you aren't watching in real time, this will be available on catchup. So if you can't come tonight, for example, you can watch again later. It'll be available very shortly afterwards.

So to feed in all of your comments in chat, we have our Hot Desk team. And Sophie and HJ are at our Hot Desk today. Sophie and HJ, welcome. How are you?

SOPHIE: Hi.

HJ: Hi.

SOPHIE: Good afternoon. Yeah, very good. How are you? You.

HJ: Me?

[LAUGHTER]

HJ: I-- sorry, I'm so distracted by this chat all the time. I'm good and ready and ready to put questions to our guests, and yes, any thoughts, comments, questions. We've also got Kate from the Open Justice programme in the chat with us as well. So if there's anything specific that you want to ask about the Open Justice programme, or anything she could help with, she's joining us as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Now we have a team of Kate backstage, who's going to be talk with you, and Emma. But I'm joined now by Francine and Hugh. And those people make up the core of the Open Justice team at the Open University.

Francine and Hugh, thank you for coming along today. We're going to talk a little bit about the project. And you're going to give us a web tour as well, to show us what's involved. So firstly, could one of you explain to us what pro bono law is all about?

FRANCINE: Yeah, absolutely, Karen. It's lovely to be here. So pro bono, it comes from a Latin word for the public good. It's about lawyers providing free services to people who need it, who can't pay for their legal services. And so it's a very important aspect of being a professional and being a lawyer. And it extends to law faculties across the country, not just in the UK, but in America and Australia and in other places in the world.

KAREN FOLEY: So what sorts of activities then take part as part of this? You've mentioned that it's providing a service free to people who maybe can't afford it. Why the Open University, then, involved with this?

FRANCINE: Well, as part of the Open University's social mission, it's really important to give back and create community. And that's one of the ways that we can give back in terms of the general public and helping them with legal advice.

But it's also absolutely brilliant for our students, because they gain employability skills, confidence. They learn about ethics, professionalism. And they get a little bit of an insight into what it's like to work in law and if they want to go into practise later on. So it has lots of real great benefits for students, not only in terms of them giving back and academics giving back, but also in developing their own skills as well, which is really important.

KAREN FOLEY: Can you tell us a bit about the project and how it came about?

HUGH: Open Justice is a project that is backed by the vice chancellor and our executive dean in the faculty of Business and Law. And it's got three main prongs, if you like. So we've got a module that's going to be up and running from October of this year, called W360, Justice in Action.

And also, it incorporates two fields of legal activity-- firstly, a virtual law clinic and secondly, a public legal education outreach. So the module is designed to try and explore issues to do with employability, professional identity, ethics and social justice. And the idea is-- the exciting idea, really-- is to allow students to get involved in the community either by helping people with their legal queries.

So if you're a student on the module, you'll be taking calls from members of the public with a legal problem. And your job will be to go and do some research, find out what is best for them in that position, and give them some legal advice. And the legal advice will be supervised by members of the Open Justice team.

And then secondly, the other key aspect is the public legal education activities, which have a whole gamut of different possibilities and opportunities, including students working in schools, in prisons and in other areas of the community, giving legal advice and education.

KAREN FOLEY: I'll be talking to some of those students later this evening and also discussing public legal education in prisons. Do many people know that they can get some of this free advice? I mean, it's such a fantastic resource and so useful for students as well. How well known is it?

HUGH: Well, the project's just been up and running since September. So we've been in the design and piloting stage. And we're hoping for the virtual law clinic to be launched later in the year, hopefully, in July.

And then we'll be relying on the Open University student community to really spread the word about this really useful opportunity for members of the public, or perhaps members of the Open University community, to have an outlet for getting some legal advice, because the changing climate in terms of the provision of free legal advice and support within the UK is quite a difficult area at the moment, because there's a lack of funding.

So it's really beholden on law schools such as ourselves to share our expertise more widely. And students, by the time they get to level 3, and most of the students who will be involved in the project will be level 3, so they've already studied law for perhaps three, four, or five years. And so they'll have a lot of skills to be able to share with the public.

So we're hoping we'll be able to use this project to tap into that skill base, that knowledge base, and that enthusiasm to be able to share student levels of understanding with the wider public. So it's a great project to be part of, and it's an exciting stage.

KAREN FOLEY: It's fantastic, because so many people studying with the Open University will think, well, it's very difficult to get work experience and access to doing things. It's often about studying on your own. And that just isn't the case here. And there are so many new initiatives within the law school. I mean, the virtual law clinic, for example, as well. There's so many ways that students can actually do law.

FRANCINE: I was going to say, one of the great things about this as well is that they get academic credit for it as well. So at the moment, it's going to be part of the last final level 330 credit module. So students will do these activities and study the issues around it, around professional identity and ethics and get academic credit. So it counts towards that law degree. So it's a win-win for students.

And in the future, what we'd really hope to do is extend it extracurricular to students. So as the project grows-- we're in the beginnings, the infancy stage of it at the moment. And so we want to make sure that we can get everything right and support it properly. But it's the kind of a project that we hope will grow and grow.

And we'll be able to offer it then to students extracurricular so that more and more students can be involved, because as you say, this is a really valuable thing for students to get involved in. And it helps so many different aspects. It makes their real life study into action, effectively, which is really valuable.

KAREN FOLEY: So essentially, this is part of the third level, W360. But who can actually get involved now? Because this is all just the beginning, isn't it?

FRANCINE: Yeah, so we've got a pilot that's just started. And we've already advertised that to our existing level 3 students. And we've got some students working on that pilot with us now.

So the virtual law clinic starts in July, and the public legal education activities have started. So we've got some students extracurricular trying it for us and being our guinea pigs. And they've been absolutely fantastic so far. They've really been committed to it, which is absolutely brilliant to see.

And then in October, it becomes part of W360, Justice in Action. And students will start to do this project as part of their law degree. So it's starting in stages so that we can trial everything, get everything started, because this isn't a traditional OU project. There's a lot of different people involved in this. So there's been a lot of work in the buildup to make sure that everything is working according to plan.

KAREN FOLEY: So how can I find out more then?

FRANCINE: Right, so I'm going to give you a little web tour now, hopefully, fingers crossed. So just to say that our website is in draft at the moment. We're just developing that. But it will be going live very shortly. So this is just some slides from it to give you an indication.

So what you will find is the Open Justice website, which will start off talking about all the different aspects of Open Justice, the law clinic, the public legal education activities, and the Justice in Action module. So there will just be an overview in the front page of that, just telling-- where we give a little bit of detail about what's involved.

And then, what I think will be most interesting to people, particularly outside of the Open University, is the Open Justice Law Clinic. So this is an online law clinic. Most law faculties have some sort of law clinic, but generally, it's a face-to-face one. So ours is a unique offering to do it online.

And so what will happen is-- you'll see the circled box there-- is that we have contact forms so people can send details of their inquiries to us, that will come through to our students. And they will be allocated in little mini firms to investigate, to interview and to provide legal advice.

So it's going to be an advice only clinic. And you'll see on that page, we outline the areas that we're going to be involved in. So things like contractual disputes, clinical negligence, civil litigation, building claims, consumer rights, small claims.

The idea of the clinic is to start small so that we can make sure that we give really effective advice. And our students are supported through this journey. And as it develops, we hope to expand, because we want to bring on other people to help us so we can expand our areas of law.

But to start with, we're going to be looking at these areas only. But if people come to us with other queries that we can't help with, the idea is that we will signpost them to other organisations that can help them, because that's a really important valuable function that we can do to provide for the community.

So it is a really novel way that the students are going to work. And actually, it really taps into the way the law is changing, in terms of engaging in technology and using technology to provide access to justice. So we hope that we've got something that's quite unique and that students are going to be really excited.

And members of the public, anybody can ask for our help. They don't have to be an OU student. They don't have to be somebody connected to the OU. They can be anywhere. So we do lots of marketing to let the general public know about this. But it's about us building our community and our wider community outside the OP University. So that's where people will start with their information.

And we also have just some Frequently Asked Questions. So we'll have lots of information on the website so that if people have got general questions, they can ask us, they can do so, like who can use the Open Justice Clinic? How does it work? How to get in touch with us so that we can probably answer lots of those kind of issues to start with.

And so that's the bare bones of the clinic side of the website. I'm going to pass it on to Hugh now, because he's going to talk about the public legal education side of the website.

HUGH:

Thanks, Francine. Yeah, so the public legal education part of the website gives you an outline

of the kind of activities that we'll be getting involved in and the kind of community groups we'll be working with. So one of the exciting parts this project for me is that we're giving students the opportunity who-- Open University students often working on their own, to work in groups in face-to-face environments in the community, providing this public legal education.

But in addition to that, we're hoping to make use of our presence on the internet to provide a space for reliable information about law to the general public. So the website at the moment, explains the kind of projects that are ongoing, the kind of projects that we're aspiring to do, and reaches out to the community to see where our services will be needed in of use.

So, for example, we've already started to work with some schools. We've got students currently working for the Personal Support Unit, which is a legal charity to help people who are litigants in person in the civil courts. And also, we've got some students working in some immigration and asylum areas in a law centre in Lambeth.

So there's quite a variety of activities ongoing. And we're planning to roll out some work with some prisons and some ex-offenders working alongside the St. Giles Trust. And we'll talk a bit more about that later on.

But I think what's nice about this project is it offers an exciting mix, I think, of face-to-face opportunities for students to work together in groups in their local communities, but also, to build a presence on the internet to provide public legal education in an easily accessible way to a very large scope of the public.

So it's that mix, I think, for me. It's the innovation online and also the face-to-face opportunities for students that make this a unique an exciting project.

KAREN FOLEY: Now a lot of students study law with the Open University for different reasons. And some of them will have a very clear idea about what they want to do with their law degree. Now we asked our students who are watching right now what they plan to do with their degree. And 38% said, practise law, but 63% said that they weren't sure.

If we consider this whole idea about open justice and an idea of practicing, do you think doing pro bono work would help people decide what they might want to do?

HUGH: Oh, I think this is a great opportunity for students to get an insight into what legal practise is like and also to get some professional experience with different members of the community.

So whether your client group is a group of students in a high school or an individual with a legal problem, this is a facility where students can really see what it's like to work in a legal setting with diverse members of the public. So in that sense, it really does give a flavour of what some of the issues within legal practise is about.

I think that's one of the things that's interesting about writing the module is. We've tried to reflect on the kind of experiences students will encounter when they do this kind of pro bono work and to help students to reflect on the kind of skills that they're going to develop and the experiences they're going to have to help build their own professional identity.

So I'm not suggesting that everyone who does these activities will go on to legal practise, not by any means. But they'll have a much more informed sense of their future career progression.

And of course, law is a competitive profession, and it is really helpful for candidates who are going for job interviews or applying for training contracts or people just to show that they've engaged with the community in a legal setting. And we're offering students a variety of opportunities to do that. So in that sense, yes, I'd say it's definitely of great use to students who are aspirant to become legal professionals to engage in pro bono activity.

And of course, once you're in the profession, there is a prior tradition, really, within the legal profession of giving services for free to people who are in need. So there is a sense of professional responsibility still within the legal profession, where lawyers will, in certain circumstances, work for nothing if they think that the cause is deserving. So by engaging in that as a student, it is becoming part of that wider legal profession.

KAREN FOLEY: So there's obviously this moral aspect to it. But in terms of helping students make career choices, I mean, Francine, you mentioned quite a wide range of advice that students would be able to give. And I wanted to ask you about, firstly, how that was regulated. And I know we'll be talking a little bit later with Emma, with some mock advice, and talking to students and tutors about how that relationship works.

But I can see then that looking at these things may be very different in principle. Here you mentioned the sorts of people who are coming through, or the sorts of settings, for example. How might actually being in those environments help people make more informed decisions about their career direction?

FRANCINE:

Well, I think certainly the advice, what's really great, for us in particular, is that we will get to work with students, because all the advice they give in the clinic will be supervised. So that involves myself and some other academics. But we're also qualified solicitors as well. So we're taking our practise skills and our academic skills and bringing those together.

So students get a really great opportunity to work with us, so to understand what it's like to give advice. So they will understand about identifying legal problems, being able to research some advice, and then actually interviewing the client, actually talking to members of the public who they've never met before, and asking them lots of different questions about the type of problem they've got, finding out about it. And then they will work together in teams to look at that advice and create the advice for that particular client.

But everything will be supervised. So they will work with us as part of that journey. And we will be able to give them lots of advice and tips about how to work with clients, how to interview clients, how to frame advice, because although these are skills that they've developed as part of their law degree, they're what we call more black letter real academic skills. But we want to transfer those to professional skills. And there is a journey that students need to take in order to do that.

So I think it's a great insight into what it's like to work in a law practise. But I also think what's really valuable for students is, if they decide that actually working in the legal field isn't for them, what we're giving them is an opportunity to develop transferable skills. All the skills they're going to be involved in-- the presentation skills, in terms of public legal education activities, in terms of giving advice, interviewing skills-- are all exceptionally valuable skills for whatever profession you go into.

So everything they are doing, whatever career they decide to go into, all the skills that they're learning are going to be really valuable and look fantastic on their CV, because it's not just law firms that are interested in what students are doing outside of their degree. It's other professions as well. So they've got lots of great things to talk about at interview, which would be really important for students.

KAREN FOLEY:

I'm going to take a quick trip to the Hot Desk. But when we come back, I'd like to know from both of you, because you're both practicing, what sorts of things have come up for you in your career histories where you've maybe got involved with something, like our students might do, and thought, actually, that's really changed my perception of what it's like to work in that

environment? Maybe it's something that swayed you to one direction or away from one. But let me first go to Sophie and HJ and see what people are talking about in the chat.

HJ: I think we're just talking about a few different things at the moment. One of the things that we're talking about is volunteering and gaining experience in law. And Ryan says that he volunteers for a trade union and gives employment law advice as well.

And there's a lot of interest in the Open Justice programme. And Kate's been filling us in on that in the chat and giving us some more details for when it comes out. But yeah, there's a lot of excitement for it.

SOPHIE: Yeah, there are. It's nice to see that Ryan is nicely engaged. He's studying the LLB, and he's found it very intellectually stimulating. And Cassidy is also enjoying her law degree. So it's nice to see that people are out there enjoying it. [CHUCKLES]

KAREN FOLEY: Good. And remember, if you haven't been to one of these events before, it can seem like there's a lot of theoretical context and academic stuff going on here. But you can really talk about anything that's coming to mind and share your experiences with other students in that chat, if indeed you would like to. Or you can just enjoy and watch what's happening here.

So Hugh and Francine, tell us something that has changed your direction in terms of your career progression.

FRANCINE: So I think, for me, I started off working for a large corporate practise when I first-- so I did my degree. I did what was the LPC at that time. And I got a job which I was thrilled to get, because getting a legal training contract is really valuable. And it's very challenging, even in my day, and I'm quite old now.

And I got a job with a firm that was a fantastic firm. But what I realised, it was working for lots of defendants, so big corporations. And after my training contract, what I realised, I did some work volunteering at the Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau, and I realised that, actually, I wanted to work with people, individual people.

And so I actually made a transition. I changed firms, and I flipped from one side of litigation to the other. So I started working for claimants, for individual people. And I found that just much more satisfying, and the ability to help people and to take quite difficult stories and being able to work with someone through that process, and at the end of the day, to get damages for them, hopefully, and their action has been successful, but even if it isn't, of being there

through that journey with them. And I found that so much more rewarding than actually working for a large corporate practise.

There are lots of big attractions to working for large corporate practises. But actually, for me, what I realised through my volunteering and my finding out about myself, was actually for me, working with people, individuals, was much more important and much more job satisfaction and rewarding. So I think that, for me, that's my biggest change.

KAREN FOLEY: What about you, Hugh?

HUGH: Well, yeah, I mean, I think one of the things that strikes me as we're talking is some of the conversations I've had with the groups that we're reaching out to. So, for example, I was in the St. Giles Trust in London quite recently. And we were talking about their work, helping ex-offenders reintegrate into the community. And someone once said to me there that there's a real role for public legal education in these kind of contexts, because when people are making this transition from prison back into mainstream society, there is a potential for difficulty there.

And someone once said to me that it's better to build a fence at the top of a cliff than provide an ambulance at the bottom. And I thought that struck me really in that context, because if we can provide people in that context the basic levels of legal understanding in a whole range of settings, whether it's housing law, benefit law, issues to do with immigration and family, we can help people in that context navigate the legal problems they're going to face.

So, for me, I think that was a real light bulb moment, if you like, in terms of the potential for this project, to have an impact within certain community groups. So that really showed to me the impact that education can have in these contexts.

And I think what's exciting for me is the thought that all these people out there on the chat box, and so on, have got legal skills. They've got understanding, and they're in demand within these groups. Really, our job is just to put the two groups together, I think.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. And you two are both going to be very much involved with the students who are participating in this. And what I really like about what you're saying is that this is part of a journey, and probably one that hasn't ended. You're always changing. And like you say, the law is changing. And I guess there are more options as well to get involved with. So it would be really nice for you to interact with those students and share that advice, as well as for students to obviously learn from you.

FRANCINE: Oh, absolutely. And we both tutor as well. So we are always engaged with students. And that's the joy is to actually work with real students and to see their journey. And so we know that from this, we're going to see the confidence in students grow. And it's an absolute privilege to witness that and watch that and to be able to support them through that journey.

And even though our students are going to be level 3, we're offering them an ability to develop new skills. So they're always learning. And I'm really passionate about lifelong learning. And we get to witness that and see that. So I think we're really excited about that.

HUGH: Definitely. I mean, I think one of the things I'm most looking forward to is working with small groups of students in these community settings, in their local communities, to help them make a difference and make an impact using the skills that they've gained and the knowledge that they've gained during their four or five years of legal study with us.

So it's, I think, in some sense, I can sense that some students have got a real enthusiasm. They're like a tightly wound spring, in a way. They've got lots of energy, lots of abilities. And it's just a matter of putting that in the right direction and making these connections that can really release that energy, release that enthusiasm and release that knowledge and experience. And I think there is real potential for this project to have a significant impact. So watch this space.

KAREN FOLEY: You both seem very lovely, and I'm sure the students really enjoy working with you. But some of them, I imagine, may be a bit anxious about going and practicing on the public for the first time. What advice would you give those students who may feel a little bit anxious about that?

HUGH: Well, the way we've written the module is to give students some advice about that, because it's not easy. Some people find that the experience of speaking in front of an audience nerve-racking. And I think everybody who's been in that position can give some stories about feeling nervous.

I mean, we met a colleague of mine, a barrister in Manchester, last week. And I interviewed her for the module materials. And she was a very accomplished barrister with long years of practise and a very successful legal practise.

And you'd think that this person would never have had dealt with nerves, because she looks so accomplished, so polished. But she talked about how, at school, she was a very nervous public speaker. And people would never have thought she could have worked as a barrister.

So I think the advice I give, and it's the same advice that Louise gives in the interview, is that you can learn certain techniques to overcome nerves in these settings, some skills that will allow you to make effective presentations. And once you have the confidence that you've got these skills in place, the nerves dissipate somewhat. I wouldn't want to say that they go away completely. And I think a certain level of nervousness, or apprehension, can actually improve your performance.

But the way we're going to set up the project is not we're going to just throw people into the lion's den, if you like, without any preparation or support. We'll help students develop the right kind of skills that they'll need for this type of work.

And also, because a lot of this will be based in groups, there'll be a sense that students can rely on each other. So quite often, the presentations we'll be doing face-to-face. And certainly, the researching of the legal advice will be done in groups.

So if a student is feeling anxious about getting involved, I would say that's all the more reason to get involved, because it's a supportive and informed way of getting some experience, because no matter what profession you go into, there will always be occasions where you'll be expected to speak in public, whether it's giving a speech at a family occasion or giving a presentation at work.

So these skills that we're trying to develop and bring on are really useful, really transferable. And they have real professional utility, I think, for our students.

KAREN FOLEY: And in particular, I guess, for students who maybe don't want to go and practise law. Like you say, there are very good transferable skills that they can use to add to their CVs and increase their current careers at the moment, even if they aren't planning on actually going into practise.

FRANCINE: Absolutely. And also to remind students that because it's a module, they'll also be working with associate lecturers who they'll be very familiar with. So it's a whole community of people that are going to be there to support them.

And the fantastic thing is that we've scaffolded this module, so that we build in all these skills and all these opportunities to practise these skills, so the interviewing, the researching, the presentation. And then getting them to think more broadly about what it means to be a professional, things about legal ethics, so giving them some dilemmas to think about, which I

think students find really interesting and fascinating.

So it's a fantastic module. And it's all scaffolded so that they got lots of help and support. So they have the Open Justice team out in the academics. But they also have their associate lecturers, and some of them, they might have had them previously. So they've got a fantastic support network around them.

So they won't be on their own. Everything they will do, they will have the opportunity to practise. And one of the things that we're really excited about is that our module is going to be, I think-- I'm hoping to say this right-- it's going to be the first module to have virtual reality. So we're using virtual reality to help students develop their presentation skills, which is exceptionally exciting for us. And we think the students will be really excited by it as well.

So they will have lots of opportunities for practise. We won't be dumping them into a school and saying, here you go. Do a presentation, or anything like that. There'll be loads of support and loads of help. So they don't need to worry.

But as you said, even if they are worried, please think about doing it, because actually, doing it in this environment where you've got lots of support will really help you if you want to transition to a different profession. So you're not doing it for the first time in your first job. You're doing it here in a supported environment.

KAREN FOLEY: It sounds really exciting. Thank you so much for filling us in on that. And we're going to be showing you how students go about giving mock advice in our next session. But before we do that, we've got a short video for you, which is Hillary Summerland talking about pro bono law. And we'll be back in about five minutes with some mock advice. See you very soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]