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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the "Student Hub Live-- Open Justice" special from the Law School at the Open University. In this session, we're going to interview two students about how they've taken part in Open Justice activities. So welcome, Eva and Owen. We were also expecting Ilana, who is poorly, unfortunately, and can't join us tonight. But she sent us some contributions in. The three of you did some really exciting work at a school in Milton Keynes. So can you tell us what you did? Owen?

OWEN: So we were given a brief by the school. And we were invited in to talk to two groups of students. We were invited to talk to the sixth formers, what they call yoghurt pots, the young and gifted students about human rights and the implication of the human rights, and human rights of the exit from the European Union.

Between the two students, we did a bit of a career session with the sixth formers. And then afterwards, we talked to the student council. And we were discussing cyberbullying and being a victim or being accused of cyberbullying.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. So this is a pilot really. And that's the sort of thing that students who are studying law with the Open University could have actually go on and choose to do. So they could take part in the Pro Bono Law Clinic and also Open Justice activities like this.

OWEN: Yeah, I think so. I think the Open Justice project obviously feeds into the new W360 Pro Bono module. And the team that are writing that are also running the Open Justice project. So I think really you've got an opportunity to get involved with the Open Justice project before you even get involved with the module, which would be quite good for those students, give you a bit of a taste of what's to come.

KAREN FOLEY: And we asked people about what pro bono meant to them. And I'd like to see what our audience have said. And I'd also like to ask you both what it means to you, having taken part in some of these activities as well. So let's see what you said at home.

Social good, free help experience, giving good, gaining experience, responsibility, contributing, advice, education, public benefit, all sorts of wonderful, positive words coming through there that really tap into what Paul was talking about earlier about the mission of the Open University

and how this can tap into social justice. Eva, what does pro bono mean to you?

EVA: I think it's about giving something back and taking what I've learned and being able to pass it on to other people to help them in a way that's going to be useful.

KAREN FOLEY: And what about you, Owen?

OWEN: I think pro bono really is more about, to me, about helping the more vulnerable in society when things do come about law and making sure they have access to our legal system and equally to those that can't afford it, by making sure that those who provide it balance out their time really between the commitment to paid representation and non-paid representation, to make sure that, let's say, everybody's got a fair access to the legal system.

KAREN FOLEY: And there must be something, I guess, that you would benefit from taking part in these things as well. And I'd like to come to that a little bit later. But first, I'd like to ask you a bit more about the project that you did. Because working as students at the Open University, you must have access to online tutorials, and your tutor, among other students and forums, and a range of ways of networking. But you had quite a challenge because the three of you needed to come up together with a consolidated programme for a school and put that into a context within what the learning already was.

And so you had to go and research and found out what students know, what things may be of interest, and how you would actually construct that as a teaching session effectively. So that's a really big challenge. How did you do it? I mean physically, how did you organise yourselves and work out what you were going to do and how you were going to deliver it?

EVA: We split the tasks between us. So Owen took the first part, dealing with the human rights issue. Ilana took careers, putting together all those because she'd been to lots of career fairs and felt that she had a good handle on what to do. And then I ended up with the social media and cyberbullying side. So we each had our own little areas to research.

And we fed into each other as well. So Ilana was able to provide Owen with some case law to use in his. Through my day job as a careers advisor, I was able to give some information to Ilana as well. And we kind of went through the materials. We met a few times online as group discussion, so that we could pull everything together.

KAREN FOLEY: Was it challenging to fit all of that in and organise your time together, the three of you?

EVA: In amongst everything else, yes. Yeah, fitting it in between the studying, and the assignments, and then work, and family, it was an extra thing. But it was worth it. It was definitely worthwhile.

KAREN FOLEY: How did you then go about choosing what you were going to use within these sessions and researching what the school already was delivering in terms of knowledge around these areas?

EVA: From my point of view, working within a school, I knew that in terms of cyberbullying, social media, that schools have their own safety policies in place. So the students know about how to keep themselves safe and the kinds of things that they should be looking out for. So I approached it from the opposite point of view. As rather than being a victim, what happens if you were going to be accused of that? Then how that could then lead, what laws would you break?

KAREN FOLEY: What about you, Owen? I mean, your area was arguably more complex in terms of what's happening right now in the current climate.

OWEN: It was more complex in the sense that-- I think what was really the pressure with that was we had specifically to include a Brexit infraction. And it was looking at, because there were so many angles you could go from on human rights, it was-- and regards in what they'd already done and what they already knew, we just went-- I went from really a basic-- they knew nothing only very little, and just sort of guided them into the main body of the presentation we were doing.

But we-- well, I actually did-- what I actually chose to do-- we had two options. I had discussed it with Ilana and Eva. And we decided to go with looking at the difference between the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention of Human Rights and how our exit from the European Union will withdraw the Charter of Fundamental Rights as citizens of the UK.

And then we went on to look at-- so to get the sixth formers to think about it, well how do we deal with all the case law that comes with that? And how do we modify it, as in when we leave? Which was quite interesting, which was interesting because a couple of days before, of course, the government said, this is exactly how we're going to do it. And I was thinking, well we haven't really got time to go back and change that. So we'll have to run with it. And hopefully they can say, well we already know.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, no, absolutely. Now, Paul was talking before about how useful things like this can be in terms of practicing some of these skills, gaining effect of the experience, and also helping shape the areas that you may or may not choose to go in in terms of progressing your careers. Now I know Ilana had said that she didn't feel she was very academic before her degree.

And I also know from my experience tutoring that many OU students can feel a bit like impostors. They think maybe I'm not so good. Maybe other students are a lot better than me at all of these things.

So can you tell us about that experience, about being students and meeting up, in particular when you've been studying at a distance and meeting in these online rooms and not seeing each other face-to-face? Is there anything you can share with us about how that experience was and how you've grown from that?

EVA: It's a really interesting experience to be talking to people and actually have no idea what they look like. And it was one of the points that we pulled out for the talk about social media, about how modern technology is very removed from how we used to communicate, which was all face-to-face. I think it helps to make you a lot less judgmental about other people and also to look at yourself in a slightly kinder view as well, because you realise that other people are looking at you just purely from the sound of your voice and the synopsis that you've given of your life. So it kind of helps from that point of view that you can sort of go and be a bit more open-minded about situations.

KAREN FOLEY: Is it also harder to tell whether or not they take your advice because they're online? I mean, sometimes it's difficult to know whether people are agreeing with you or not, or whether they're just saying OK. How did that online experience impact?

OWEN: I think from when we-- online, as you say, you sort of get-- it's all very text based. And it was really different obviously this time because we did meet online in the Open Justice project, the Blackboard collaborator room, where we met Hugh and Hugh gave us our briefing. And that wasn't really foreign, because if you've done online tutorials, you know how that works.

I think that the thing was is when you lead up to it and you're going through it, you know that somehow all three of these prior components got put together. And we don't know what we look like. And we didn't have photos of each other.

It was just-- we've run over it somewhere beforehand, ran through it. And somehow it worked in such a short period of time. And so what you take away from that really is that, from the academic side of it, is how easy it is just to work with each other about things you already know, and how easy it is just to work and just let things actually happen really. And don't really worry about it, because it will work all right on the day. That's what I took away from it.

KAREN FOLEY: So tell me then, in terms of teamwork, because it sounds like you were all very organised. You split these areas up. And whilst you've got an approach to what you're doing, and there's a sort of structure to it, it seems like you were all working fairly autonomously within your projects, although feeding into each other, as you mentioned, Eva, before about sharing advice, et cetera. So to what extent were you really working collaboratively?

And how much of it did you do on your own? And what was the impact of that? Was it nicer to do things on your own or nicer working together?

Everyone's got different preferences. There's no right or wrong with that sort of thing. But equally, I'm just conscious that you did a little bit of both in your experience generating this.

EVA: I think it was kind of the best of both worlds because we took our own initial ideas and put those into practise and then we sent each other what we'd put together and then asked for feedback. And so we could then adapt and change things and sort of tweak them. So it kind of worked both ways. It was nice to be able to bounce ideas off each other and just improve what we'd done. It worked really well.

OWEN: It was, from my point of view, I really enjoyed collaborating with Ilana and Eva, especially with the human rights. Because although I know human rights from an introduction module, Ilana has gone through and Eva have gone through the more core human rights modules. So especially when it came to looking at case law, it was like I mostly could have found it, but it was like, I'll just ask these guys because they'll be able to point it out.

But with regards to working together, although actually designing it and what we were going to do, we were up to our own, which was a remarkable freedom given the fact that we were going to do this project. I was kind of expecting Hugh to come in and tell us this is what you're going to do. And this is how you're going to do it. And this is going to be what resources you've got.

And as you picked up earlier a minute ago, what did you know about the school? Well, we

didn't know anything. We just had to go in and ask what was there. But when it come to collaborating actually on the day, I actually designed the presentation to be split between the three of us. So we all took a little bit of a section and designed it and scripted in that way. So, and I think you did the same a little bit with yours, didn't you, with the cyberbullying. Oh, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Now we have talk highly of Hugh because he's coming in next. But we were talking a little earlier about the supportive nature of working with tutors and practicing solicitors and barristers and how students could both feed off those and get their experience. So what was it really like then?

EVA: In terms of being a student?

KAREN FOLEY: Being a student and having access to those sorts of people who were both mentoring or tutoring you, but also who had a lot of experience and were probably feeding in ideas to shape what you were doing.

EVA: I'd say it's essential. You go to different tutors. And different tutors have different ways of working and different ways of approaching the advice that they give you. And some, like all teachers, are better than others. I've been very luck that I've had some very, very good tutors.

And the face-to-face tutorials have been absolutely fantastic. Being able to go there, and see them, and get their input, then you can ask them questions about some quite complex areas of law that perhaps you haven't quite grasped. And they can explain it in a different way. And then all of a sudden it makes sense.

And because they've got that practical experience, it's not just that they're teaching. They've actually applied the law. They've been out there experiencing it. It makes such a difference.

KAREN FOLEY: I'd like to take a quick trip to Sophie and HJ, and see what's happening on the hot desk and if there were any questions there that people would like to ask our students.

HJ: I don't think we have any particular questions, but there are some interesting threads that we're talking about about the law keeping up with things. So we were talking about earlier about driverless cars, and responsibility, and how does that look going forward with AI, which was quite interesting. And on volunteering as well earlier, we were talking about some people who volunteer for a trade union, giving advice at their work. And Kersie says she volunteers for a talking newspaper, which must be quite an interesting experience, where local newspapers are recorded for the deaf, which I think is lots of great transferable skills, which may not

necessarily just be legal but would be--

SOPHIE: Cyberbullying as well has been a big one. It's been interesting to hear about that. We've been discussing how the law will keep up with technology and things like-- the laws that are coming in for things like cyberbullying and stalking, things like that are actually, I think, quite slow. The laws have taken quite a while to go into effect. And if technology just keeps getting quicker, what does that mean for the law really? So it will be interesting, I think. Yeah, but it's been a nice little discussion.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow, very, very busy. No wonder you've been so quiet there, you two. Right, we were asking students earlier today in the session what they were planning on doing with their law degrees. And a lot of students didn't quite know. So I'd like to ask you both what you're planning on doing with your degrees when you qualify, and also whether engaging in any of these experiences has helped shift any of those aspirations. So, Eva, could we start with you?

EVA: I'm like most of the other students. I don't know. I came into doing law because it was something I wanted to do at school and I got talked out of it. So I'd always thought, maybe I could.

And I was thinking about changing direction and having a new career. So I started it with the idea of becoming a solicitor or a barrister. I very quickly decided I wasn't cut out to be a barrister. And the further through the course I've got, the more uncertain I've got about actually whether I want to go into the profession or just use it for other purposes. I've really enjoyed looking at the European law, human rights, constitution, and thinking maybe it's going into those areas that would interest me more. But I'm really not sure. It's-- yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: What about you, Owen?

OWEN: So I started off more on the pathway with my degree kind of like I think a lot of students think, I'm going to be a criminal barrister because that's where the interesting work is. That's where everybody aspires to. And as I came in, I just kind of decided I didn't really want to be a barrister. That's not for me. I'd maybe want to be a solicitor. But also I found that there were other things I found more interesting aside from criminal law, like Eva said, constitutional law, human rights law, international law, that really piqued up more of an interest with me.

But one of the things I've also thought about is also going into teaching. So this project gave me an opportunity to actually put the law, what I've learned in law, into a teaching environment

and actually experience it for a little while. So I've kind of taken away from that, that is something I would want to do. And I've spoken to some schools in my area as if to go-- actually do some experience there, I think, because that's what the OU career services said. That's something you might want to do, get a bit more work experience, get me a bit more experience there. And it's something I now followed up since doing the project.

KAREN FOLEY: I mean law is one of those vocational degrees that often we think, well you must have it with an end goal. But as you're both saying, perhaps there are other things that have come out of it. We were talking earlier today about some of the employability aspects and the transferable skills that one picks up when doing law degrees. And we spoke about some of the skills in terms of writing, and researching, and things that would be very valuable within other professions as well. What's been the best thing you've learned within this whole journey?

EVA: Being able to write concisely. A key skill, yes. The word limits are so strict on the assignments within law that you have to be able to explain your point clearly and precisely in as few words as possible. And that's very useful, I think, in everyday life when you're trying to get a point across.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. What about you, Owen?

OWEN: I think what you've learned really is feeding into that is working out the element of an argument or the element of a point or a position that you're going to make and not just writing with no end in sight. And then, again, to talk concisely and write concisely, just not written, but vocally as well, is to know what you're going to write, and in what order you're going to write, and to what extent. And that's been a key skill.

KAREN FOLEY: So really about structuring and presenting an argument.

OWEN: Yeah, that's it. Yeah, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Really, really good skills. Thank you both for filling us in on that project. It sounds really exciting. It sounds like you've got a lot out of us as well from yourselves. So thank you, Owen and Eva, for filling us in.

Right, we're now going to have a video break, which is Louise Rae on family law. And then I'm going to be joined by Simon Lee, Paul Catley, and Hugh McFaul, talking about social justice, public legal education, and the Law School. We'll see you after this video.

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