

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to Student Hub Live. Now, one of the things Student Hub Live seeks to do and hope we do do, is to facilitate academic community. And it's really important to us, because we know that it results in often happier, and more successful, students. So, thank you for being a part of it.

But this session is really important because we're going to be talking about the new Student Charter. It's something that's just very recently been launched. And it's really, really important because it's all about a set of values that we will sort of stick to as a community. And so that makes the terms of our interactions with each other really, really important. So to talk about this, I am joined by Sarah Jones, who is the OU Student Association President. Welcome Sarah.

SARAH JONES: Hello, hi.

KAREN FOLEY: Hello. And we have Patrice Belton, who is the Vice President of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion. Welcome Patrice.

PATRICE BELTON: Hiya!

KAREN FOLEY: Hello. And we have Julia Levett who is our OU graduate intern within PVC Students.

JULIA LEVETT: Hi, everyone.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you for joining us today, Julia. Hello.

JULIA LEVETT: Thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: So, we're going to talk about the Student Charter. So Sarah, what's happening with the Student Charter? When was it launched and why is it so important?

SARAH JONES: So, it's literally just been launched. And it's one of these things that's really, really important because it forms the very basis for how the community within the OU works. It's the very foundation stones for where everything else comes from. It's, as you were saying before, it really does explain the values and the way that people should behave towards each other, and how we work together as a community. And I think that, that is probably the most important thing.

And when we were rewriting the Student Charter, one of the things that we were trying to decide was whether we called it Student Charter, or Student Community Charter, or Community Charter. And we decided that Student Charter, the way our community works, was the best way to call it. Because that's exactly what it is. It basically does what it says on the tin.

KAREN FOLEY: So Sarah, now you're talking about the Charter. And I know these things are important. And having been in many meetings where we have these sorts of statements and quibble over words and things and talk about the rules of engagement, it sounds a bit, you know, not boring. But sort of - I don't know, it doesn't sound so cool.

But it is really, really important, isn't it? What's in it? And why has it changed so much? And, like, what does that average student, eating biscuits at home today, need to know about why this is going to affect them?

SARAH JONES: Yeah, the Student Charter has been around for a little while. But it gets a review every year. And this year we did a really good review on it. And it was decided that it needed to be shorter and more concise, so students could understand what was going on in it.

And what it does, is it really does form the very basis for how we work together, how we deal with each other. And if you've got something good to say, it shows you how you can say it. If you've got something that's not so good to say, it shows you how you can say it.

And it's really about - it really does form the very basis for everything we do. Modules will be, sort of, looking at the Student Charter as something that they will use as they write their modules. And so it's going to be ingrained in absolutely everything that we do.

One of the things that it is used at the moment a lot for, is complaints. So if a student has a complaint, the Student Charter is brought up. But it would be really great if we could see the Student Charter being used as something that we can say, this is an inclusive way that we can behave as a community. And these are the things that we can bring out of it.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. So it's got things in there like who it's including. And that's really important. Because sometimes when you're designing something, it's really easy to forget, actually, I must remember that this group of people may appreciate this, this group of people may appreciate that.

These are the values and ways of talking to people that are really important. And I guess those rules and parameters do matter, because they're things that sometimes we can forget about if we're writing about psychology, or something that's super interesting, but forget about the community that we're trying to embrace through that.

SARAH JONES: Yes, absolutely, absolutely. It's so important to include everybody.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. Now, you've re-revised it, and you've worked really closely with students in making those revisions. How have you done that?

SARAH JONES: There has been a lot of student partnership in this. So, the group that looked at it was formed. Julia was in the group. And then there was some other people from PVC Students Office. And there were several students, and the students took it in turns, basically, to chair the meeting. So it really was a student-led project.

And we looked at it in great depth. And we had some very experienced students look at it. And all together, we decided what would be best to keep in and how best to phrase things. And it really was very much a partnership project between students and staff.

KAREN FOLEY: So Julia, you were in these meetings as well. Can you tell us some of the highlights then, that came out of it?

JULIA LEVETT: Yeah, I was involved all the way through the review. So, having recently joined Student Voice team as an OU graduate, I got sort of a perspective on being a student,

as well as a staff member. And it very much was, as Sarah says, a partnership effort between the Students Association and staff.

And the students' input into the Student Charter, and how it changed, was through student consultation. So students were able to comment in forums about what they would like to see change, and how they saw the one at the moment. It's quite long and very, sort of, difficult to relate to. Lots of people weren't necessarily aware of where to even find it.

So it was small changes, that's all really about making sure that people are much more aware of the Student Charter. There was one element of it that came up about the name, Student Charter, not necessarily meaning much. But I think the consultation has decided, that actually, to keep it the same was fine.

But we've given it a subtitle of, how our community works. So it sort of brings us a bit more together. And hopefully, by promoting it on things like Student Hub Live, we can share it so people won't need to be - a big deal about the name. It will just be, people know what it is, because they've heard it.

KAREN FOLEY: That's brilliant, thank you very much, Julia. Now, we asked people at home whether they feel part of the community. Seventy-five percent said yes, twenty-five percent said no. Oh, I hope you do feel part, you are part of our community. You're part of our OU students' community.

But if you do, maybe you can tell us why you do. And if you don't, maybe you could put something in the chat about what might help you feel part of a community. It's something that we're really trying to understand more of at The Open University.

In fact, Julia and I are working on some projects together around that. So it's really, really important that irrespective of whether you want to be included, you know that you are welcome with open arms to the various aspects of community that we have here at the OU.

So, we've looked at the Student Charter, et cetera. And we've also asked students some questions as well. But I wanted to ask Patrice, do you think, then, that being part of a community is an important aspect of the student's overall journey, in terms of study? Is it really necessary? And how might the Charter sort of play a role in how, I guess, engaged in a community our students feel?

PATRICE BELTON: Absolutely, I feel like it's really, really important because the Charter is like the foundation. It's the cornerstone. It's the DNA of what we do here as students, and what the OU look to do, to kind of get guidance on who students should be when they come into the environment or the community.

And for me, it's so fundamental to have it as a mandate for students, because it gives them something that they can reflect on. It gives them something that they could aspire to, if I could say it like that. And the way how we've been doing that, for example, is by bringing together all these wonderful things that students do, from societies, to clubs, et cetera, and all of those.

The way how we engage, the way how we interact, et cetera, they're all governed by the policies and the Student Charter. So in order to make a community, the Student Charter is the thing that we lead with, if that makes sense to you.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, absolutely. Let's take a look, Patrice, before we start talking about the types of community and the notions that people have. We asked people at home what community means to them, and also the OU community. So first, let's look at the OU community. How do people see our OU community?

Well, the key words coming up are supportive, and that's wonderful. Friendly, inclusive, welcoming, online. Their new friendships, interested, available, respectful, engaged. Wide ranging, study buddies, vibrant, a social group, excellent, accessible, want me to succeed, and helping each other.

Some really wonderful, positive words there to describe the OU community. Patrice, can I ask you to reflect on some of those that people at home have said?

PATRICE BELTON: Yes. So for me, definitely, I think you need support. For me as a student coming through with anxiety, well, when I started anyways, my study, I came through with anxiety and depression disorders. And not knowing how I could navigate, even until now, I'm really nervous right now.

So I can imagine there are other students out there who are really quite nervous, just as I am. And having someone that you can relate with, having someone that you could turn to and reflect with, it really, really does help. And part of being a student is finding your people, finding your place, finding the thing that makes you feel grounded.

And that's what we want to do here with the Student Charter. Mutual respect, mutual honesty, mutual partnership. And that's why we need the structure, just in place, so that everybody knows what we're working from in order to grow together.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. The other Wordle that I'd like to take a look at, Patrice, if I may, is what does community mean? So this is slightly different. This is not what the OU community is, but the notion of community, I think. So let's see what people said. A community is something that's very supportive, has friends.

Friends and connections seem to be really important here. Chatting with people, helping each other, compassion, team spirit, tolerance. Collaboration, respect, wider society. Like-minded people, common goals, inclusivity. Not feeling alone, international, unity, neighbours, social, a listening ear.

Lots of wonderful words there as well, Patrice. And one of, I think, the important things that is in the Charter is this notion that community can mean different things to different people. We don't all have to be outgoing, extrovert, happy, bubbly people helping each other all the time. There are differences, aren't there? Tell us about how that's reflected in the Charter.

PATRICE BELTON: It's reflected in the Charter, because the Charter sort of highlights those that are really - let me change what I'm saying here. So it comes in many forms, definitely. And it's about identifying with something that's bigger than you. That's what I wanted to say, it's identify with something that's bigger than you.

And that's what the Charter does. It reflects statures that, students who are really, really disciplined can follow. It also looks at students who are feeling a little bit out there, a little bit nervous, not necessarily sure of study environment. It creates a structure for them too. It also helps steer how we mobilise, how we organise ourselves.

And it helps us to develop those little pockets of communities in those lights. And then bring them together to unite each other. So that's pretty much how I see it. But I don't know, necessarily, how you do. But that's how I see it.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And it's important to recognise we all have different perceptions. HJ, what are people talking about at home? How does this resonate with our audience?

HJ: A lot of us really feel like that. We've got a great community here at Student Hub, which is fantastic to hear. It seems that we all agree that we learn a lot from each other. And it's great to see people from event to event. Some people said, though, that they don't feel like part of the OU community yet. But they feel that it's only because they're just starting out.

And I think that's absolutely right. When you're finding your footing, you may just be concentrating on your module, or speaking to your tutor. But as you, sort of, grow and gain confidence as being an OU student, you kind of get the confidence, maybe to join in some forums or join in some of the Students Association activities. So although you may not feel like part of it now, or you're just getting your footing, the OU community is always there. It's so supportive as well.

So we are looking forward to hearing more from the Students Association as well, because they've got loads of ways that we can get involved and be part of the community and do things locally as well. So, there's loads of ways you can get involved. And like a lot of people, find your footing first and then the community's always there.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And our next session is going to be about Student Voice. And then Sarah, you'll be re-joining us to hear about the OU Students Association. So we can talk about volunteering and all of the sorts of roles that are available there afterwards also.

I think one of the important things as well, to sort of identify, is that it doesn't have to be consistent. You know, you don't need to sort of jump into the OU community and sort of be a regular on forums. It's okay to, maybe, get involved a little bit later on. Or sort of, up and down, weight your, sort of, time scale on some of these platforms as and when you can.

I wonder, because we've only got a few minutes left, and we are going to be coming in to talking about Student Voice and volunteering, if we can sort of shelve those bits for later. But if I could end by asking all of you about why building communities that students can identify with, why that's important in terms of their studies. Because most of us really care about our studies. So how is this community aspect going to help? Sarah, could I come to you first?

SARAH JONES: Yeah, for me, my community is my forum group. They're the people that support me through my highs and my lows, through my studies, through my whole degree. It's been my tutor group that have really, really supported me.

They've been doing exactly the same things as me. And we've all been dealing with the same issues and same problems, same things with families, same things, all been dealing with the same things and supported each other through.

And as you can hear, my kids in the background. We've been studying with our kids in the background. And to me, that community has been the supporting thing that has got me through my degree. And I just think it's so important for students to, sort of, feel that community.

KAREN FOLEY: Julia, you're studying as well. How's community important to you? What does it give you in terms of your studies?

JULIA LEVETT: I think it doesn't necessarily feel big to me. So sometimes a community might just be, that I've managed to maintain a couple of friendships through people that I've met on certain modules. And we sort of keep in touch. That could be a sense of community for me. And that's sometimes all that students need.

And then, occasionally, you might take up opportunities that make you feel a bigger sense of community. So, I think it changes throughout my student journey, actually, depending on what opportunities are available.

But I think, always be open to having some opportunities. Because actually, it does bring you a lot, even if you're not looking for a sense of community. Actually, when you find something, it's quite impactful when you get it.

KAREN FOLEY: We're all very different, aren't we?

KAREN FOLEY: Patrice, could I have a super quick final word from you, also, please?

PATRICE BOLTON: For me it's about solidarity. It's about resonating and joining forces towards the greater good, towards attaining what you came here to achieve in the first place. So for me, definitely, I think community is so important.

And had I not met some of the people that I did on my journey, I don't think I would have been here today. So I think that's what I would like to leave with you all. It's fundamental for your study, absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well, thank you so much Patrice, and Sarah, and Julia for coming along. It's been a really interesting session. And we'll see some of you again back very soon. But for now, we're going to show you another campus tour video.

And then I will be back to talk about Student Voice. This is, again, something we talked about right at the start of today that's really important to us. So we'll tell you how you can give feedback to your University. See you in a minute.

[MUSIC PLAYING]