

Bringing it all together - our students, research, and scholarship - 23 Jun 2022

ROB MOORE: Hello, and welcome to Student of Life with me, Rob Moore, coming to you from my study shack in rural Leicestershire. Lovely day out there today. I've got the doors open so we might get to hear some birds and some squirrels if we're lucky.

So really good to have you all with us today. And we've been joined by some of my colleagues from WELS So that's the faculty of Well-being, Education, and Language Studies. I've got a really interesting programme today. And we're going to be talking about research and scholarship, something that's one of those topics that we think of as being remote to us when we're students. But actually, it's something students can get really involved with.

We really want you to be involved with us and get involved with the chat throughout the day. And we've got some experts on the hot desk today. We've got Jackie Musgrove and Gill Clifton. And they're going to be answering any specific questions that you've got in the chat. You'll know their answers are there because they've got SHL next to their names in their responses.

And of course, we've got the wonderful HJ, who's going to be coming in and is going to be telling us about your comments and your thoughts. So let's start with you, HJ. Who have we got and where are they joining us from?

HJ: Well, we've got lots of people joining us in the chat. And I'm really pleased to hear that they're enjoying the sun as well. It's not just us in South Wales. So Paula says, it's very sunny here in Newcastle. Gill is in the Cotswolds but may have some storms forecast. So this good weather never lasts long here does it?

Sasha says, it's very cloudy here but yesterday was gorgeous. Sarah is reminding us in this hot weather we must hydrate. But unfortunately, chocolate doesn't help with that, which is news to me, because that was my fix for today. [LAUGHS]

And Caroline's made a great opportunity with the weather. Caroline visited New Covent Garden Market at 9 Elms yesterday. And 9 Elms have been planted, which sounds like a great opportunity. She said it was fantastic with the weather. And Torun gives us all an 'ey up as well.

So we're all coming into the chat. Do let us know where you're from, how you're feeling, and what you're studying as well. We'd love to hear. Or you could just sit back and enjoy. But our guests love to hear your fantastic thoughts, comments, and questions. And if you want to talk about chocolate like me and Alexander, by all means, do so as well. Everything goes in the chat.

ROB MOORE: [LAUGHS] Absolutely. And for the scientists out there, if you can come up with some rehydrating chocolate, I think you're on for a winner.

So today, I've got four guests with me in the studio. And I'm going to introduce them quickly. We've got Alison Fox. Now, Alison is a triathlete. And her personal research has been about early career teachers and their development.

We've got Steph Doehler. And Steph is a staff tutor who tutors on E117 and E314. and Steph's research focuses on the sociology of sport.

We're really pleased today to have a student with us. We love to have students joining us on Student of Life. And Kitty's joined us. Kitty is a BA honours student studying early childhood. And she's got a real interest in the development of children through psychological contract context.

And we found out, she's just published her first book. It's a book of poetry called Wild Violet and is a tribute to her mum. And I know that HJ's done a wonderful job. And if you're interested, he's put the link to the book in the chat box.

And then we've got Kate Breeze with us. So Kate's the associate head of the School of Education Childhood Youth and Sport. That's a mouthful, ECYS.

KATE BREEZE: [LAUGHS]

ROB MOORE: And [LAUGHS] she has the oversight of the student experience. And she's a staff tutor on EK313. So lovely to have such expertise with us today. And we're going to have a really interesting discussion about scholarship and research.

Now, you'll see a widget on the screen at the moment. So the widget, these are our little interactive activities you can take part in. And this one is a wordle. And it creates a word cloud. And what we want you to do is think of three words that come to mind when you think of the word research. And then, you can add those three words to the word cloud. And then we're going to have a look at that in a little while. And as always, keep contributing to the chat, keep asking questions. Those of you who are familiar with Student Hub Live know there's a bit of a competition. Can you put me off and make me laugh during the session? There's definite bonus points if you can. But we don't want you to put any personal information into the chat. Remember, it's a public forum. So just be careful what personal information you do share. So that's all that started. Let's get into the conversation. We're going to start with Kate. Now, Kate, scholarship and research, what are they? I'm not absolutely sure what the difference is between them. So can you tell us the difference between scholarship and research?

KATE BREEZE: Well, I'm going to have a try, Rob, but they do sit very closely together. And it's one of those things that I'm often thinking what is the difference between scholarship and research. I think one thing that helps me distinguish between the two is thinking about scholarship as being about our practise. And so for me, and for colleagues here, and indeed for our students, scholarship is about the practise of teaching and learning. And scholarship helps us to ask questions about the way we learn, and how we learn, and how we work with our students, how we teach our students, and how we build on our students' experience and their successes.

Whereas I think about research as being more about generating the knowledge and the knowledge of our specific academic subjects that we then build into our curriculum, and the knowledge that students then learn about as they study our modules. So knowledge, practise, that's how I tend to distinguish between the two. But research-- but scholarship is indeed a branch of research.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. So [LAUGHS] that's a little clearer. And I know, Alison, you're responsible for research and development in the school. And what do you think about research, and what is involved in your job? How do you support people to do that?

ALISON FOX: Well, yeah, as Kate says, Kate and I both sit on the senior management team. And along with Jackie Musgrove who we've got on the hot desk today, we all share responsibilities for making sure there are connections between the scholarship that's being carried out that's carried out about our programmes for our programmes. But also, the research that might also be called scholarship, we have a

wonderful professional doctorate programme where all of those researchers are studying their own practise.

So as Kate says, they are engaged in practise-focused research, which could be another way of thinking about scholarship. And so, we want to make sure that all of that can be drawn on to inform whichever practise it's studying.

So we sometimes call it pedagogic research because it's research about pedagogy, about the way that curriculum is not delivered but shared with learners. We don't like to deliver curriculum here. But that's what it's all about. It's about exploring. As Kate says, perhaps the content that comes in from evidence-based research projects that we need to then talk about and share in our modules and with one another. So you might have heard about practise-focused research, practise-based research, pedagogic research. And that's where the overlaps between scholarship and research lie. But we work very closely together to make sure that anything that's relevant to the curriculum, the pedagogy, the assessment-- also about the assessment practises can be fed into what students experience here.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. And actually, we can have a quick look at the wordle, at the word cloud, to see what students are thinking about in terms of research. So if we pop that up on the screen, let's see the types of things that you're saying. So research, academic journal, interesting, the future, fun. Excellent. We like to see fun in research. New information.

The rabbit hole, oh, [LAUGHS] we talk a lot about going down the rabbit hole and going off at a tangent, definitely. Literature review, [LAUGHS] study, and investigation. So some really interesting points that are coming up there.

I just have a comment there from Angela, libraries are heaven. So absolutely. We all love a good library. So Alison, were those types of words you were expecting to see pop up? Is that what you think of when you think of research?

ALISON FOX: Absolutely. I mean, research is really about continuation of that natural curiosity that we all have. As we come to Open University, students are always curious about learning and about the next module. I was just thinking about going to graduation recently, where somebody was awarded an undergraduate-- two undergraduate and a postgraduate qualification all at the same time.

And so, research is a part of those modules and those qualifications that people are studying. But as I'm not surprised to see questions-- comments like demanding in there as well. So and the rabbit holes, that sort of being the feeling of potentially being overwhelmed by how much there is to learn.

And that's where we need one another. We need the scaffolding. That's where we have a curriculum to scaffold that knowledge. But also within research projects. However deep you dive into research, you'd think a doctoral programme was probably the highest sort of-- the largest project you could take on. It's actually the starting point. And again, people are on those programmes really thinking about how can I focus and narrow down this research so as not to become overwhelmed. Kate, I think--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ROB MOORE: Oh, yeah, Kate, is there anything you want to add to that? Were those the words you expected to see?

KATE BREEZE: Yeah. Yeah, they were. And I liked that mixture of words between thinking about the elements of research. So like literature reviews, and going to the library, or electronic journals, and finding out what's already there. And then those qualities about excitement and curiosity, because they're so important that they underpin our kind of research practise.

But I think the other thing for me, Rob, is that research and scholarship is really exciting. Because it makes a difference. We do it for a reason. There's a purpose behind it.

And that purpose might be trying to improve our practise, develop our practise, make things better for our students, or for the children and young people that we work with, for instance. It might actually be shared with policymakers and have a wider impact in actually changing quite structural things for children and young people, the way we educate children and young people, for instance.

And it also has an impact on the way we think. So as researchers, were always learning. And the way we think about our subject is always being challenged. And the way we think will always be changing. And equally, we share our ideas with other people to develop their thinking and their ideas as well.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ROB MOORE: And try to--

[LAUGHTER]

KATE BREEZE: Yeah. The other point I just wanted to make was that, as Alison said, research isn't an end in itself either. You don't do a research project and there's a full stop at the end of it. Quite often, research just leads to another question. In exploring one question you find 10 more.

And that's what, for me, is really exciting about research as well, is that it's about generating new ideas, new questions, and new ways of collaborating with other people to ask those questions. And for me, one of the exciting things is working with students to ask questions.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And just back to Alison for a second. Because Alison, I think you've got a video you'd like to introduce-- very briefly, because we're getting towards the end of the session.

ALISON FOX: Sure. Yes. Well, I was going to say that we've all been talking about the fact that you need to base your decisions, as Kate's been talking about, on evidence. So we asked one of our students and alumni of our master's and education programme what evidence meant to her and what engaging in research through her master's qualification had meant to her both in her practise and as a researcher. And she created this video for us.

ANNE: My name is Anne. I'm a primary school educator. And I'm thinking about research and its benefits in my context. What counts as evidence in my context depends on leadership or practitioner. For leadership, it would very much be the Education Endowment Fund, data from summative assessments as well as books scrutinies.

For myself as a practitioner, much more formative research data from what I'm seeing and doing within the classroom with the children, and self-selected research from Open University where I've completed my master's level course, or times educational supplement, and also union materials.

My views on evidence gathering have changed hugely through the Master level study with the Open University. So where before I was very much reliant on media and management research that was presented to me.

Now I much more think about how the evidence has been gathered and what tools were used for that gathering of the evidence that's supporting that piece of research. And I give myself much more permission to examine, and question, and decide whether or not I agree or whether it fits the context with which I'm working.

It's definitely saved time when I'm trying to make sense of a problem, understand my professional behaviours. Having been doing the job for many, many years, I feel much more connected and supported to a group of educators and other researchers, both novice and expert. Think much more strategically about the end goal and how research can help me to achieve that. And finally, strengthened my sense of agency, and voice, and identity.

I really imagine it as that form of an adventure, using the process of research as a way to guide myself through unknown territory and trying to identify what will be the right tools to take on that journey. And there are so many tools to choose from in research.

Also another really important idea is holding on to that of treading lightly, of using the ethics, and thinking very much about the impact of the research, and why I'm choosing what I'm doing, and asking the question that I am in order to tread lightly as I try and find the answers or better understand my situation. Well, it has always been impacting my practise. I just wasn't aware. And the Master level course and the dissertation helped me to understand much better the impact it does have and what impact I allow it to have.

ROB MOORE: So thank you for bringing the video, Alison. That was excellent. I think we're going to jump straight over to HJ now to see what comments we're getting from the students. So HJ, what are students saying about scholarship and research, and what sort of questions have they got at the moment?

HJ: So we've got a lot of people interested in doing research themselves, which is fantastic. So Paula's interested in researching economics and gaining broader insight to the subject. Debra's studying for the new art history and visual cultures degree. And Deborah says, I'd like to do some volunteer research for my local museum and art gallery at their collection, which sounds fantastic.

Anna is just about to start the MSc psychology conversion and is looking to go into research afterwards. And Alexander says, I work with a protest demonstration group. So for the last 10 years, I spent my time researching unavoidable deaths in the care system.

And Deborah has a question as well, which would be really interesting to know from our guests. So Deborah is just starting out and wants to know, any recommendations for a beginners book on the research process, or generally, where would you start if you're looking to research something and haven't had experience before?

ROB MOORE: Excellent question. And I think our topic three is the perfect place to come back to that one. So remind me of that question when we come back to topic three, because I think that's the right place to answer it. Our second topic, we're going to be looking at student well-being and mental health. So you've got a new tickertape question. So there's a question going across the bottom of the screen. And we want you to share with us any hints or tips that you might have to help you maintain your positive mental health. So if you can pop those into the chat box. And what we'll look at then is we'll come back and see what suggestions you've got.

Now on this topic, we're to be talking with Steph and Kitty. And we're going to start off with Steph. And Steph, I believe that you've been working on the student well-being and mental health handbook. So do you want to introduce that to us and tell us a little about the handbook?

STEPH DOEHLER: Yeah, absolutely. I think to begin with, it's probably worth giving just a little bit of brief background here. So a couple of years ago, the School of ECYS, which as you said earlier is quite a mouthful, Education Childhood Youth and Sports, created the ECYS Student Voice and Well-being group. And within that, we've got representation from both staff within the school and also student ambassadors.

And it was our ambassadors who at the beginning of this academic year that we're just finishing up with suggested that we work on the development of a well-being handbook to really support students through their studies. There's a lot and a wealth of information out there on student well-being. And the OU has a lot of support and tools. But actually, sometimes pulling some of that together to create one resource, it felt like it would be really beneficial for students.

So over the last six months, a project team of four of our student ambassadors, two members of staff within the Student Voice and Well-being group, myself included, and a couple of associate lecturers have created this handbook. And it's based on the five ways of well-being. See if I can remember them off the top of my head-- connect, give, take notice, keep learning, and be active.

And within the handbook itself, each way of well-being is introduced. It's supported with a range of activities that students can undertake to help develop that area. But most importantly, it offers a kind of holistic approach to support in a student's positive well-being. The handbook also includes several pieces of artwork and poetry by our students to really bring the student aspect and their involvement of it to life. And the key to the handbook is that it's a resource that's been developed by students for students. And students who decide to have a look at it can complete it or work through it at their own pace. It can be picked up at different points of the year whenever a student sees fit. It doesn't have to be completed in a kind of linear fashion, sort of one page after the other. So literally, someone can have a look at it, do a few activities, and then come back to it at a later point, whether that's days later, weeks later, maybe even months later.

And it's been created as an online PDF document with the overarching aim of increasing visibility and increasing the profile of good mental health and well-being, what is really a key and an early stage in the students study transitions.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. I think we're going to pop over to Kitty now, one of the students who was involved in developing this. And Kitty, what I'd like to know is, how did you get involved, what part you played. But before all that, tell us about your poetry book. Tell us how that came about and how you came to publish it.

KITTY FRENCH: Oh. Thank you very much, Rob. That's a great question. So I've been writing poetry on and off since I was 15. And during the lockdown, I came back to poetry. It's always been a love of mine. And I just decided to sit down and write one night. So I started writing and compiling all my poetry. And I found a lot of what I had written had been about my mum. And recently, on the day that I published the book, it was the anniversary of her 15th death. So I thought it was a good way to honour her memory. So that's how Wild Violet came about. And it's been selling quite well.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. And of course the links are there in the chat box. So hopefully it'll sell even better after today. So did you find that that experience helped you with taking part in this project?

KITTY FRENCH: It did indeed. I've been a student voice and well-being ambassador for just over two years now. And in my role, I felt like it was really important to engage with the students from my perspective, as well as working with the teams that work with the students. And a lot of the questions that I was getting through from students was about well-being, study anxiety, maintaining mental health, and imposter syndrome.

And I thought, well, I'll take this information because it's a good starting point. So I took it to a team meeting one day. And that's how the birth of our well-being handbook came about. Because a lot of the

resources that I found were proven to be a little bit outdated. And I thought, it didn't really reflect the whole student experience as I saw it.

So we took that information and we decided to collaborate with students on artwork, poetry, just gathering their voices and seeing what mattered to them, and what was the most important thing they wanted to say, and how we could best support them during their study journey.

ROB MOORE: Wow, that sounds fantastic. And if students engage with the handbook, what are the types of things you hope they're going to get out of it? So when you started this project, what was the end goal? What do you want students to benefit from most?

KITTY FRENCH: Well, the first thing that would be most important to me as a student myself is that it brings greater awareness of student mental health and well-being to not just the students, but to the University as well so we can take a more proactive approach on supporting students through their study journey. And I also want students to feel like they're not overwhelmed, that they're not alone. There is support out there for them should they need to contact it.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. It sounds absolutely fantastic. And Steph, I'm wondering if you could give us a bit more information on when we're going to find out a bit more about the handbook, when we'll be able to perhaps see it or hear about it?

STEPH DOEHLER: Absolutely. So we're at a really exciting point in the development of the handbook at the moment. Because the content's been written. And as I speak, it's currently under design. So soon, the project team are going to be seeing the resource really brought to life with not just the content but the design that sits alongside it.

The wider ECYS Student Voice and Well-being group is going to be working on a dissemination strategy over the summer so that we can establish how this resource can reach as many students as possible across the University.

So our initial aim is that it's going to sit-- the handbook will sit on qualification induction sites as well as general programme sites. And we also have a hope that tutors are going to advertise it to their students so that students know exactly where to find it in the new academic year.

So I guess for now it's a little bit of a watch this space. Because it's going to be launched in line with the new academic year. So students are likely to hear a lot more about it at the end of September start of October in line with the new presentations.

ROB MOORE: Brilliant. And I know that the team on the hot desk have been putting some links in to some of our current materials. So if you want to start immediately looking at some of the mental health and well-being materials, there's some things there to get you started while we're waiting for this to be published.

I'm going to jump to HJ now. So HJ, what are we hearing from the chat box? And also, we haven't really asked where our furthest flung student is yet. Where are people joining us from?

HJ: [LAUGHS] No, we haven't quite got there yet. But if everyone wants to let us know, you'll see a widget to the left of the screen where you can put a little dot on the map or tell us where you're hailing from. We'd love to know and try and see if you're the furthest student out there. That'd be really interesting to see. So before we start on our question, I know, myself included, we think it's such an amazing achievement that one of our fellow students has published a poetry book. Deborah says, many congratulations. And Jackie, who's helping in the chat agrees, it's a fantastic achievement. And thank you so much for sharing your story and your poetry with us as well.

So we asked the question, do you have any hints and tips of things that work for you to maintain positive mental health and well-being throughout your studies? And we've got some great ideas and responses. So Cesia says, engage with nature every day. I always take time out to walk my study buddies, which is fantastic. We all love our study buddies. So spend your time with them.

ROB MOORE: We love the study buddies.

[LAUGHTER]

HJ: It's always good to take a break and have a little cuddle with your study buddy or some time out, isn't it. That's what we like. Paula says, I found that keeping in contact with my tutor and my student colleagues really helpful. And making use of the OU network. I know myself, sometimes when you're stuck in a bit of a rut, can be hard to remember, can't it, Rob, that there's so much support around you.

ROB MOORE: Yeah.

HJ: And yeah, definitely just keeping in mind that it's there can be helpful. Joanne says, rest and replenish your mind is also important following intense study periods. And Paula says, don't be too hard on yourself. We're always our own biggest critics. I think that's something to remember. We set such high standards for ourselves.

And sometimes, just the fact that we've completed something, passed something, read a page, read a chapter, that's an achievement in itself and we should recognise that. So lots of great hints and tips. So do let us know your hints and tips as well. We'd love to hear them in the chat.

And I'm sure Rob would love to hear as well, who's our furthest student out there? Fill in the map to your left and let us know.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. Shall we have a quick look at the map and see where we're distributed? I'm dead easy. I'm right in the middle. That's where I sit. Can't see if there's anybody off the maps. We're all over-- is everybody joining us today from within the UK?

HJ: Well, we've got four people in Europe, haven't we. And it's nice to see there are some fellow Welsh students with us as well. I'm very proud of that. We always got a good showing, a good Welsh contingent, don't we. [LAUGHS]

ROB MOORE: Excellent. And I quite like the comment from Helen here. She says, it's scary to take time out of your study because of the deadlines. And sometimes focusing on your own mental health can seem like it's counterproductive. But if you're refreshed, if you come back feeling ready to work, you will speed up. And hopefully the swimming in treacle feeling will go away.

So thank you, Steph and Kitty for taking us through the handbook. We'll be coming back to you again in a couple of moments.

We're going to move on to the third topic now. And Kate's going to talk to us about some project awards. So the EK313. We love our acronyms at the OU.

KATE BREEZE: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

ROB MOORE: EK313, issues in research with children and young people. So Kate, could you tell us about the awards that you're involved with and how do we set up?

KATE BREEZE: Yeah. And yes, it's a mouthful, isn't it, again?

[LAUGHTER]

And we're actually going back to this topic of research, Rob, because as you said, this module that I tutor on is all about carrying out research with children and young people. And it's the final module that

students studying in our school, students studying for primary education to work in early years, to working with other children in youth services, it's the final module that they study.

And quite often on degree pathways, the final module does have a strong research emphasis. Because our final years hope to equip and launch students into postgraduate study if that's what they're interested in and actually develop those skills of research that they'd need to do that.

So on our module, the final assessment that a student has to do is a plan for a small-scale piece of research that they could-- could carry out in their workplace. So they don't do it. They just plan it. And what I was hearing was students saying, oh, but I really want to put this into practise.

And a couple of years ago, a student actually rang me after she'd graduated and said, Kate, will you supervise the piece of research that I want to do following having done that course? And I thought, well, yeah, I can help. But maybe there's a broader issue here about how do we encourage our students to go ahead and have a go, to take what they've done and put it into practise in their workplace as practitioners. So this is a Practitioner Research Award that we've set up in partnership with the Children's Research Centre which is one of our research centres in the Open University. And in its first year, we were able to offer three awards.

And we prioritise students who have what we call protected characteristics. So students from Black, and Asian, and minority ethnic communities, care experienced students, students with disabilities and mental health difficulties, and also students who worked with children and young people who come within those kind of specific categories as well.

And we were able to offer three awards. And in this last year then, we've had three students who've gone ahead and put their research into practise. We've had so much interest this year that I went back to the school and begged for a bit more money to offer four awards. Because we've also had students who wanted to do research particularly connected to the impacts of COVID on children and young people. So we've introduced a fourth award that specifically is focusing on COVID and the impact of COVID. And what we offer students is one-to-one mentoring throughout the year that they'll be carrying out their research. And that's mentoring through with an associate lecturer or a member of the central academic team.

We offer the use of the resources from the Children's Research Centre. We offer a series of workshops. We're a very small group. We work together with some of our academics looking at more advanced research issues, particularly ethics, for instance.

And we also offer a bursary of up to 500 pounds to pay for expenses for doing that project. So we found that our students have used that money to buy cameras, buy equipment, and maybe buy a bit of cover for their time while they've been doing the research. And the three projects we've got at the moment are all taking place in schools.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. It sounds the opportunity to not only plan but to carry out that research sounds fantastic.

KATE BREEZE: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: If I could bring us back to the question we had earlier from Deborah. Are there any books that you can recommend to help people start with their research? So those of us who aren't [LAUGHS] research experts, what's a good starting point?

KATE BREEZE: [LAUGHS] Well, that's a very good question. Because we tend to be quite subject-specific. So I might bat this question back to Alison in a minute. If you're interested in research with

children and young people, I really suggest that rather than starting with a book you have a look at the Children's Research Centre website.

And there's some brilliant resources on there about how to carry out research, but particularly how to encourage children and young people themselves to become researchers. So they're skills that we share right across the board with children, and young people, and ourselves as researchers.

So I would say, start with the Children's Research Centre website. But Alison, perhaps you'd like to come in there because you've probably got some more generic advice there.

ALISON FOX: Hi. So well, I would say, like you were saying that it depends on the sorts of research you want to carry out. And so, I think the library-- people pointed to the library as the best place to go.

Because if you're interested in-- you were talking about practitioner research.

If you're interested in action research, there are some really key authors that have written in a really accessible way, in a very practical way. But it might not be that that's the sort of design you want to carry out. There are generic books about the research process and social science.

But the library staff will be the best to guide you. Because there are tomes that we recommend. And we guide those and use those to support particular programmes. But actually, you don't want to read a tome of everything you could do and refer to different tools you could use. You don't want to be overwhelmed when you start with all the possibilities.

And so, I would say, talking about the topic, the context that you want to research, and the type of focus, the questions you have, that the library staff if they can't answer it themselves, they know their subject areas and the disciplines very well, they'll come back to colleagues in those areas and ask for some recommendations. The library is a fantastic resource.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And if students aren't aware, the library actually runs training sessions on a whole range of topics. And I believe research techniques is one of the sessions they run. So if you've never been there, go to the OU Library website. Have a look. See what training sessions are coming up. And you might find you can actually have a session on research itself, which is a really nice opportunity to get started. And of course, who knows, you may be taking part in the project and carrying out the research yourself in the future, which would be fantastic.

We're going to jump back to HJ now and see what students are saying. We're going to be coming to have a broader discussion on student engagement with research in a moment. So this is a good point for you to ask any questions that you want us to put to the panel.

So HJ, it looks like we've got 85% of our audience are currently studying. So over 85% of the audience studying. What questions have they got? What do they want to know so far?

HJ: So one thing, and I think it's a fantastic question from Deborah is, we talked about the well-being handbook earlier. We're interested to know if the well-being handbook will have anything for neurodivergent students, as we're very diverse in the OU. So be good to know if that's covered as well.

ROB MOORE: We we'll definitely cover that in the next topic. So panel members, get ready for that question. That's going to be popping up in a moment. So any other questions leaping out, HJ? Anything else that perhaps they'd like to have clarified or something we haven't covered yet?

HJ: So I think we're all happy in the chat. And we've been putting the links in for the library sessions as well. I've attended one myself. And they're definitely very useful. I actually sometimes have attended [LAUGHS] the same one a couple of times. Because you always get so many great hints and tips from it.

So if you've got any tips or things that you found, I know there's a great OpenLearn course on postgraduate research that someone posted in the chat. Let us know about it. It's always good to share, and we'd love to hear about your hints and tips as well. But we got some great questions. As Rob said, we do have them in mind. And we will get to them for you.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. And yeah, I can't endorse that enough. You guys have got a lot of really useful resources and hints that you can share. So share them in the chat and we'll make sure that everybody gets to see them.

So for the last 20 minutes or so, we're going to have a more broader group discussion about how students in general have got involved, what they've said about research and scholarship. And I'm going to give you each a chance to come back on this. But also, if you can keep in mind that question about the handbook.

So I've got, probably Steph, when it comes to you, specifically if there's anything in the handbook about neurodivergent students. So actually, let's start with Steph. Just to throw you out of order, start with Steph. Is there anything in there, Steph, that specifically deals with that question?

STEPH DOEHLER: Short answer is, yes. The longer answer is, one of the key things--

ROB MOORE: Yes!

[LAUGHTER]

STEPH DOEHLER: One of the key things-- I should have just stopped there, shouldn't I? One of the key things we wanted to do in this handbook is make sure that we were talking to diverse students. Because as we know at the OU, there's no one size fits all for our students.

When someone asked me, what is a typical OU student, I always say, there is no answer to that question. So it was really important to us that that kind of thing was absolutely acknowledged.

The students who, or I should say, the four students that were involved in the development of the handbook have various diverse-- various elements of diversity. And within that is neurodiversity. So actually, sections of the handbook have been written by students with neurodiversity.

So yeah, absolutely. And that, as I said, was really, really important to us, that everyone-- students' needs were catered for within the handbook. So yeah. A longer winded answer, but short answer, yes, absolutely.

ROB MOORE: No, thank you. No, that was great. That's what we wanted to do. So Alison, tell us about your engagement with students and research and how you've managed to get students more involved? And I'm looking for some nice anecdotes of things that you've seen from some of the students.

ALISON FOX: Great.

ROB MOORE: [LAUGHS]

ALISON FOX: I just want to follow on from the previous discussion just before I move into that. Because you mentioned OpenLearn. And there is a 'Becoming an Ethical researcher' OpenLearn course which anybody can take that was designed for students all across the University and covers a whole range of topics, as Kate was referring to, ethical issues, and we were talking about earlier, even in Anne's presentation, even the topic itself raises ethical issues as what should be researched. So if anybody's interested in having a look at that course, I wanted to give that a little bit of a plug.

But in terms of consulting with students, one thing I would highly recommend is if you ever get a chance to engage with the student consultation panel, which is in itself a sort of form of research in that it's got a very structured set of questions.

And particular, I was involved with the consultation about the draft of the teaching and learning plan. So you can imagine that's going to inform our thinking about the sort of scholarship that we should be carrying out to respond to students' views on that teaching learning plan, but also to feed into our teaching and learning.

And I was responsible for the thread that was looking at what will become a principle three, which was looking at the principle that OU teaching and learning should be an academically rigorous research-based, research-informed process. So referring back to the points that Kate was mentioning earlier about both the curriculum and the content of the courses that you study.

And things that came out of that were that the students really wanted to be more aware of what research was going on and what scholarship was going on, and perhaps weren't aware of the scholarship centres that we have.

So we should have mentioned earlier that not only do Kate, and Jackie, and I work very closely with one another in the school, but we work very closely with Claire Saunders, who runs our WELS Scholarship Centre, which is called PRAXIS. There are other scholarship centres in the other faculties. You might have heard in passing reference to eSTeEM or FASSTEST or SKYLER. But as you say, we love our acronyms.

ROB MOORE: [LAUGHS]

ALISON FOX: They all mean something in their longest term. But they're all centres for scholarship. And they're allowing us to target the sort of scholarship that is carried out on important topics but also to bring together the learning from that within faculties and across faculties. So students were asking to be more-- they were aware of that.

In particular, one strand that Kate mentioned earlier is that nearly-- a really strong push is for students to be involved with as many of our scholarship projects as possible. And Kate will be able to give some examples of those.

But it's not just-- it can be from student-generated ideas as well. And Anne didn't have time to talk about it. But Anne in our Master's programme actually came up with an idea for a research project. As she moved through the programme and she was working as a student coach where she was supporting some of the other students in other modules, she started looking at the forums.

And she started to get very cross that we were putting content up that was challenging our thinking about learners' identity and agency and how it was challenged by the assessment regimes in schools and colleges. And she said, this is happening every year. And we're all learning about it. And we're all getting to become very activist about it. But we can't act alone just because we've studied our course and we've gone back as an individual. Can we do something about our collective learning about this?

So we've been carrying out a project looking across the students post but also interviewing students. So students have been interviewing other students. And yeah, we've delivered some seminars about it.

And Anne's helping us think about where we should feed those findings back. So she's very involved with the unions. So we're going to speak to those. We're going to go into practitioner-focused journals. So having an idea and coming to people with the idea is definitely a possibility if we can make it happen as the example that Kate's scaled up as well for her module.

ROB MOORE: That's fantastic. Kate, it's great for the students.

ALISON FOX: I can talk about the conference, but I think you're going to prompt me about that later.

ROB MOORE: I'm going to ask you about the conference as the last thing we chat about.

ALISON FOX: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: So don't worry, we'll get the conference in. I just want to pick up on OpenLearn, something you mentioned there, the people on the hot desk they are right on the ball. And the general link to OpenLearn is there and the specific link to the short course that you mentioned. I want to come to Kitty now.

So Kitty, we're hearing a lot about students getting involved in scholarship and research. I know when I was a student when I first started, I was a bit nervous when I was talking to academics and a little bit worried that, what can I bring to the table? So how did you find it working with all these super clever people and taking part in research? How did you manage to get over those nerves? Because it probably paralysed me.

KITTY FRENCH: Yes, you're right. I was very nervous at the beginning. But then I started thinking about all the opportunities that I would have to learn and experience research in different perspectives, in the ways that I could interpret it to ground my base knowledge and further support my studies as a student. So it was quite exciting in that respect.

I did just want to quickly point out, there is a research website that might be useful for everyone. It's called BERA. And that stands for the British Ethics and Research Association. And that was one of the websites that I used to learn about researching. Because obviously, at the time I had no idea about research, what it was, what it involved, or anything like that. So I went to this website. And I got a lot of good information from there about research, how it works, what you can do to support yourself.

Because obviously, when you're researching, a lot of the time you are doing it yourself. So you need to learn how to put that implication into process. And by working with others in the University, you start by having a conversation. You can find out more information. And it's really helped to develop my research and study ethics.

ROB MOORE: That's fantastic. And hopefully we've inspired a few of you out there to come and get involved in research in some of the scholarship projects. So let us know if we've inspired you and you're going to start looking at some.

I'm just having a quick look at my list. Steph, I think you had a little more to add because you answered our question last time. So is there anything you wanted to add on any feedback you've had from students as you've been working on the research and scholarship?

STEPH DOEHLER: Yeah. I think it echoes a lot of what Kitty said that I think sometimes students do feel a little bit apprehensive getting involved in things that are maybe stepping away from their usual modules and so on. But the feedback we've had from our ambassadors, and Kitty's alluded to this already, the feedback we've had from our ambassadors of being involved in various projects is actually how generous they've been with their time.

And they absolutely have been generous with their time. And but how much they've got out of it. And I think that's been really important.

As I mentioned earlier, this holistic approach to well-being it's actually also a holistic approach to, I think, being an OU student as well. So getting involved in different projects that stretch beyond their module materials, their assessments and so on, I think just gives students really invaluable experience, broadens their own knowledge base.

And certainly, the feedback I've had is that it develops skills that they can not only use in their studies, but they also take into other elements of life, whether that's the workplace and so on. So yeah, I think it's

something that be aware of. It's something that you are interested in, take that leap, take that jump. And you'll find that you have some very supportive staff to help you along the way with that.

ROB MOORE: Fantastic. And it's another opportunity to develop those real transferable skills that we don't just use in our studies but we can actually take and use in all different areas of life. I want to make sure I give Alison enough time to talk about the conference.

So Alison, I know we've got the link to the conference on the Student of Life website. But tell them, those who've joined us, why they need to go and do something now? Oh, I can't hear Alison at the moment.

ALISON FOX: Sorry.

ROB MOORE: Ah, there we go. [LAUGHS] I can hear you know.

ALISON FOX: So yes, we took from the consultation that I was talking about, and I should say that Steph Doehler is now on that student consultation panel. So if you want a friendly face, then go to one of those student consultations. We do listen.

And one of the things that people were saying that they wanted to hear about was stories from other students about from different stages of study. They wanted to hear about research in our school. And they wanted to get involved with thinking about it.

So we're running a conference. It's actually starting tomorrow with the PGC Wales course, where all of the students carry out a piece of research as they train to be teachers in Wales. And then on the Saturday, we've got a conference that you can sign up for. The deadline's 5:00 o'clock today. That's why it's really timely for us to have a chance to speak to you about it.

And we've got student stories and show and tell. Then we've got a showcase of research. And then we've got a workshop in the afternoon where we're using personal development planning. It's all led and organised by students for students. And we're really excited about that. This our first time that we've tried that. And we hope it will be an annual event.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. So anybody can come along and register for the conference? It's just use the link, is it?

ALISON FOX: Yes.

ROB MOORE: Is it that simple?

ALISON FOX: Yes. We do have a limit, because it's the first time we are hosting it. So it's the first 250, that's as many as Teams will host--

ROB MOORE: Oh, right.

ALISON FOX: --people.

[LAUGHTER]

But we're not quite there yet.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. So if you want to take part, there's still a small amount of room, so be quick. So I'm conscious, Kate, that we haven't come to you yet. Is there anything you wanted to add from your point of view, just in a couple of minutes, but anything you wanted to add as the final comments?

KATE BREEZE: Yeah. I think, first of all, what we've heard lots of examples today that research and scholarship involves all of us. And there are opportunities for all of us. And students should really believe in themselves that they can be part of our research and scholarship activity. And that's researching topics that are really interesting but also helping us research teaching and learning in our University and research the student experience.

So our student voice work is very much about hearing, and exploring, and researching the student experience and how we can make that experience even better in the University. So I think that's one point.

And just a couple of examples from my own school. In Praxis Research Centre is one of our priorities this year is building our partnerships in scholarship with students. And we have two wonderful projects going on at the moment where staff and students are working together to form a scholarship team, exploring the experience of Black students and South Asian students actually specifically in these two projects and in order to develop a more inclusive teaching resources, learning experiences, and look at closing some of those vital awarding gaps that we are being challenged to address at the moment.

So get involved is what I want to say. Get involved. You'd be very, very welcome.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. We've definitely sent some challenges out today. So I think it might be worth having another quick look at the word cloud to see whether this discussion has prompted any further points. And then we're going to get to HJ who's going to talk us through any more points that have come up in the chat.

So what-- oh, future, journals, innovative and interesting. I've noticed that interesting has grown quite significantly on the word cloud, which means more of you are putting it in. Advancing societies. Excellent. So making a difference, research and scholarship making a difference.

So HJ, for the final time this session, what have we heard from the chat box?

HJ: Well, I'm really pleased-- we talked about earlier, but Paula said she got involved with the FBL student audit for the OU, where they reviewed B302 specifically regarding inclusivity, diversity, and representation and reviewed the EMA guidance and collaborative activity as well.

So it's great to hear that people are getting involved. And it's always great opportunities to build your skills, whether you get involved with these audits, the Students Association, just your local community on your module through the forums and the pages as well.

And Gill, who's been helping me in the chat, and Joanne, have been sharing lots of great resources for research as well. But if you're a bit like me and sometimes think, these are all great. How do people know about all this? Don't worry at all. All the main resources we've talked about today we've got on the page for this session that you can look back on, including those great OpenLearn courses.

And while you progress through your study, it may be a case that you don't need these things now. But later on you'll think, oh, I remember that session when I heard about this really great OpenLearn course on research. I think I'll do that maybe over the summer to prepare for my level three modules. So there's lots of time.

And as you go along, I know some people are nervous. You'll develop your skills. And you'll come to be a very good researcher and probably better than you realise. We are our own harsh critics, as we said in the chat.

So thank you for everyone who joined us and sharing all your thoughts, comments, and questions, and those fantastic links. I know we've got some workshop sessions coming up as well on critical writing, which will help us when it comes to thinking about research and evaluating it as well. So I'm sure we'll see everyone in the chat there soon.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And thanks for emphasising that, HJ. Yes, if you want to come to some of the workshops, come and join myself and Isabella and have a bit of a giggle whilst we'll talk about some really serious topics at the same time.

So I'd just like to say thank you to Alison, Steph, and Kate for joining me today. And to Kitty. It's lovely to have students join us in the session. So you did a fantastic job, Kitty. And hopefully you've inspired some other students to come and join us in this sessions.

So it's been great to talk to you all. Remember that you can watch this video back on YouTube later. And all of the resources, including the OpenLearn resources, can be gained from the website. So thank you everyone for being involved. And I look forward to seeing you next time. So Rob in your study shack saying, bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]