

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences virtual Freshers' Event. Now, in this session, I'm going to introduce you to some directors of teaching. Now, what are directors of teaching, you might ask. We're going to find out. And I am joined today by people who are directors of teaching but also have other important roles in the faculty.

So, we have Richard Marsden who is a senior lecturer in history and is the current director of teaching for the school of arts and humanities. We also have the lovely Matt Staples, who's the director of teaching for the school of social sciences and global studies, and Rachel Penny, who you may recognise from our previous session, who is a director of teaching for the school of psychology and counselling. So, welcome.

Richard, can I start with you? I wonder if you could start talking a little bit about the schools and the specific subject areas, and the disciplines, because many of our new students aren't going to be familiar with what a school is and how we sort of categorise things. So could you give us a brief outline, please?

RICHARD MARSDEN: Yeah, no problem. Thanks, Karen. So there are three schools in the faculty of arts and social science, which is FASS for short. Universities love acronyms, so FASS is the faculty, and then, as I say, three schools inside it.

The school I'm director of teaching for is the school of arts and humanities. So there's arts and humanities. There's social studies and global studies, which Matt is the director of teaching for. And then, there's psychology and counselling, which is Rachel.

Now, each school is made up of kind of disciplines that kind of sit nicely together. So in arts and humanities, that's classical studies, art history, creative writing, English literature, history and music. So we think those kind of sit nicely together. But we also kind of run qualifications with other schools.

So you can do history and politics. The politics department is in Matt's school. You can also do English literature and English language. And the language part of that, the kind of linguistics part of that, is in another faculty - the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education, Languages and Sport.

But one thing I wanted to mention is that although we kind of have these different disciplines, in arts and humanities, one of the most popular degrees we run is the BA in arts and humanities. So, what that allows you to do is to kind of study across all six of the disciplines in the school, and some of the others I've mentioned, as well, outside the school. And just one other thing to kind of flag up, I suppose, is that although we have these disciplines, they kind of work very closely together.

So particularly at Level 1, on A111, which I imagine a lot of you guys will be starting on next month, it's a kind of interdisciplinary module. So what that means is that you study all six - well, there's actually eight disciplines, because it includes some from social studies and global studies as well. And then, what happens for the second part of Level 1 is you choose a module that allows you to start specialising in the subject you intend to go on and study in Level 2. So, the schools are groups of disciplines, but really, what we like people to do and what people like to do themselves is to kind of study across a lot of those disciplines.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. I mean, the whole point of these groups, I guess, students don't really need to worry about which school they are in, et cetera. But one of the things that we found very helpful in terms of, I guess, an organisational structure is that it allows us to talk to other people who are doing similar sorts of things, but also recognising that certain schools will have certain discipline areas that may be more pronounced, for example, but that everything sort of often does work in tandem because there's very often an interdisciplinary aspect to most things - in particular at Level 1, also.

RICHARD MARSDEN: Absolutely. So, the schools are just ways for us really to organise what we do. And they're not a barrier to what students do at all. So I think that's a really important point. Thanks, Karen.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. No, that's wonderful. Well, thank you for that overview, as well. It's interesting, I think, for students to find out more. Matt can you tell us about social sciences and global studies?

MATT STAPLES: Yes. Like Richard's school, it's quite a big and varied school. We've got eight disciplines - development policy and practice, economics, geography, philosophy, politics, religious studies, social policy and criminology and sociology. I'm glad I managed to get that in one go.

KAREN FOLEY: Very good. I'm impressed.

MATT STAPLES: We've got qualifications across all disciplines. And then, like Richard's school again, we've got a very popular BA or BSc, social sciences, where students can study across the disciplines and do a choice of modules. Or they can do a social sciences core and then specialise in one of those disciplines as well.

And then, we have a number of joint or cross-faculty qualifications. Richard mentioned history and politics, which is a joint between us and arts and humanities. We've got joints with philosophy, as well, with Rachel's school.

And then, we've got criminology and law, economics with math. And I could go on. We've got environmental studies, as well, which is also very big, which we share with STEM.

Similarly to arts and humanities, students will start with Level 1 modules, which are fairly interdisciplinary in focus, DD102 or 103. Or they will start with more disciplinary module, which would be 105, criminology, or one of the economics Level 1 modules, DB125 or DD126. So there's various routes and kind of methods students can progress through the school. So I hope I've touched base with some of the things that students are doing. Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: That's wonderful. And you'll get to know all of these codes and sorts of how they relate to various things along the way. But I think the important point that Matt's made is that very often, there is a sort of core Level 1 module that's either quite interdisciplinary or sometimes specific. And with all of these new qualifications, which are so exciting, allowing students to really specialise in areas, eventually, that they're interested in, it's also common that students do sometimes change their pathways.

For example, if they're doing an interdisciplinary module and think, actually, this isn't what I really thought it was. I'm very interested in this area. So you can speak to the Student Support Team along the way, because there's plenty of flexibility.

So this is why it's nice to know that there are so many qualifications open to you. Or you can always do an open degree, as well. So many students will adjust and shift their patterns, and it's very important to keep in touch with the Student Support Team and also the Careers Team, as well, about what you're doing and whether or not you want to change that. Rachel, I imagine the school of psychology and counselling, though, is quite easy to describe. Tell us about it.

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah. So we have less disciplines, but they're really important disciplines, of course. So we have a number of psychology qualifications within our school at the moment.

And we have our core psychology qualification, where you can choose from lots of different optional modules. But we also have a number of different qualifications that would allow you to focus on particular sub-disciplines within psychology, for example social psychology, forensic psychology, or counselling psychology. And all of those qualifications are accredited by the British Psychological Society, and that's really important if you want to become a professional psychologist at some point. So we have that.

But we also, like the other schools, we have some qualifications which we share with other schools. So there's a criminology and psychology one that we share with Matt's school, and other ones, as well. And lots of our open degree students take psychology modules as part of their qualification, as well. So there's lots of opportunities for that.

And we also offer a foundation degree in counselling, which we do in partnership with the counselling and psychotherapy central awarding bodies. So actually, we're working with a partner outside of The Open University that allows us to do that. So lots of different ways to kind of really have a great provision for our students.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And those accreditations are very important if you want to work in counselling or psychology, for example. But also, many students, for example, from sports will take a psychology course in sports motivation -

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: - et cetera. So it really does speak out to many different areas of the university, also. So let's focus on this director of teaching role here, because while we think it's great to talk about our jobs, actually, this is something that is a lot of interest to students, because - Billy was talking before about the student voice and getting involved with things, and we had some students who were very interested in exploring those and finding out why he was doing that. But the director of teaching role is something quite specific. Richard can you talk a little bit about why it's so important and how you're actually working with students?

RICHARD MARSDEN: Yeah, sure. The director of teaching role, I suppose the main responsibility is to make sure that the education that your school offers is of a high standard and that we respond to what students say and what students need and want, and also that we

kind of keep working to improve things. So it's kind of taking responsibility for the education that we give to you guys.

So, directors of teaching don't do that on their own. They're kind of helped, and supported by a group called the board of studies. And there's one board of studies for each school. And boards of studies kind of have collective responsibility for the areas I've just described.

And each board consists of kind of people from the various disciplines that make up the school, but also, very importantly, people from other parts of the university, such as the library and especially the student support team, who we work very, very closely with. And what's also really crucial to the board of studies is the fact that we have representatives from the associate lecturer community. And, of course, we have student representatives on the board of studies so we can kind of get the students' take on everything that we're kind of trying to do, trying to improve.

So one of the things that directors of teaching do is to advise kind of the school and the disciplines on curriculum development. And what that basically means is trying to work out what subjects we should teach, what modules we should make, what those modules might look like, how they might work for people, and how they fit into our qualifications. That's a big part of what the director of teaching and the board of studies does. And the role of the board of studies in that, this group of people who advise the director of teaching, is to bring their expertise and give that kind of feedback on new ideas for modules and qualifications at different stages of design. And then, the aim of that is to kind of make sure that what we do is the best that it can be.

KAREN FOLEY: It all links to a lot of the processes that the university goes through in terms of quality assurance, et cetera. But these boards of studies are wonderful places, actually. And I'm on one. And we have, as you say, Richard, lots of different representatives.

And if I were a student watching this at home, I'd think, oh gosh, I couldn't possibly contribute to that. But when we ask students about their opinions and their voices, they may go and gather some data for us. They might ask their colleagues, what do you think of this, what do you think of that, et cetera. Or they might say, actually, I don't really like it like that.

So it's just giving general feedback in terms of that. It sounds very sort of robust. And I guess it is in that sort of sense. But also, it's important that the student voice doesn't necessarily need to be anything profound or over and above. It's just really saying how those students are experiencing it and what they're finding out from others, isn't it, Richard?

RICHARD MARSDEN: Yeah, absolutely. So I think it's fairly easy in any organisation for people who are kind of leading on things or making things to kind of just think, what I know is best, and we're going to go and do this. And that's a fundamental mistake, because if you're not listening to the people you're providing a service to, providing an education to, then they're going to go off you very, very quickly. So yeah, it's absolutely crucial. I may well talk a little bit more about the role of the student rep a little bit later if that's all right, Karen?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, that's perfect. We'll make some time for that. Now, Kerry wants to know - we must just answer this quickly, because she's highlighted all of her books. Are they hers to keep, Richard, her module books?

RICHARD MARSDEN: Yes, they are. So the only drawback with highlighting them is you can't flog them on eBay afterwards. But they're yours to do whatever -

KAREN FOLEY: You wouldn't want to.

RICHARD MARSDEN: If you finish your module and you got a wobbly table, just bear it in mind. Those books are very handy on that front.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you so much. And also, someone's interested in a linguistics degree. You're going to have to come along this afternoon, because we have a different session about applied linguistics. And so, we'll be talking about that. But do come along, check out the programme, and see which sessions - late afternoon - you'd like to come and watch to find out more about that.

So, Matt, I wonder if we can follow up from what Richard was saying? So Richard's really been talking about how, I guess, we're informing the curriculum and showing quality, et cetera. But once that's done, directors of teaching are sort of very actively involved in the presentation of that curriculum. Can you talk us a little bit through what happens?

MATT STAPLES: Yeah, they're very much so. I mean, once we've decided which modules and which qualifications we're going to present, and they're live to students, students are on them, we engage in something which we call active presentation. So we, as directors, are teaching, and directors of the SST, we work with module teams to make sure that what we do is the very best we can do.

We look at data. And we get feedback from students, feedback from ALs, and look through how we're presenting the module, how the content is working, how we're assessing students, how the tuition strategy is working. And we look to improve things on a - it's continuous improvement. It's kind of monitoring and enhancement, as it were, throughout the year.

If there's things that the university wants us to look at, new initiatives, we would again work with module chairs and module teams. We get together on a regular basis to look at best practice and maybe some modules we're implementing, and to work together as a kind of team effort. And we would lead that as directors of teaching. So two things I would kind of rein - go on Karen.

KAREN FOLEY: What stuff have you done, then? If you're saying we are doing stuff as a result of this, can you maybe give us an example of how you've actually joined things up?

MATT STAPLES: Yeah, two concrete examples. One is we introduced an SSGS. Students were saying they'd like a kind of guide at the start of the module to help them answer any questions they have, because lots of questions were coming up in welcome forums. And so we implemented a quick -

KAREN FOLEY: What's an SSGS, Matt? That's one I haven't heard of.

MATT STAPLES: Social sciences and global studies. That's our school. Sorry, social sciences and global studies. That's our school.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, great. Thank you.

MATT STAPLES: So we implemented a quick start guide, which students will get, either in their pack or sent to them online, with loads of the answers to the questions that they've been asking in previous years to help them get started on the module. And then secondly, we've had a FASS-wide tuition review. And we've implemented a tutor student group meeting at the start of every module, because that's something that students said they would value and something that the tutor said they would value, as well. Some modules were doing it anyway, but we've mainstreamed it in response to feedback we've got from students and through discussions between module teams, directors of teaching, and ALs. So those are two concrete examples of how we've responded to feedback and implemented change.

KAREN FOLEY: That's brilliant. And that sounds really, really helpful. And again, things that really mean something to students that one can implement if only one knows about them, and that's why the student feedback has been so important.

Pauline says it's lovely to put faces to names. I'm guessing, Pauline, you're studying DD102. So we've talked about what's happening at the planning stage. We've talked about sort of what's happening in the module.

Rachel can we talk about, I guess, at the end of the module in terms of the director of teaching role? Because many students don't really understand some of the processes that we go through as a university to make sure that every student's qualification is fair. Can you talk a bit about what happens at the end of the module results process for students, each presentation?

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah. So again, one of our roles - because there's a multifaceted role, really - we oversee the module results process for students who are studying in our qualifications. So that means working with the module teams and working across the schools to do those last checks before module results are released and just to make sure that the results are fair, they're the right results for students, and that they're consistent.

So it's just that kind of extra layer of quality assurance. And that's really important just as part of the whole bit of the year. So we're planning, we're working during it, and then, we're also involved at the end of each year. So I think it's a real holistic view that we need to take, actually, just to support our students through each step of their journey, actually.

KAREN FOLEY: No, it's really important. Right, so people are talking about accredited and non-accredited counselling courses in the chat, which is a very important issue. And I guess a lot of that depends, to some extent, about what you're wanting to do with your qualification. But -

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: - it's great to know that those OU courses are accredited also. So the students can be assured that there is a quality around their teaching, as they would be. But it's nice to be so explicit about the stages of those processes and also the student voice within that. What's another example, Rachel, about how students benefit from some of the work that you're doing in terms of quality?

RACHEL PENNY: Yeah, so as well as the active presentation part that Matt was talking about, there's also a process called the QME process, which is about quality and monitoring

enhancement. See, as Richard said, we love a good acronym. And that's all about at one point in the year, we do kind of reviews of the modules, of the qualifications, and as a whole board studies' view. And that just gives us a kind of snapshot in time about how everything's going and how everything's gone over the previous year. And that's really helpful because that informs our planning and what our areas of focus will be.

But it also allows us to share examples of best practice with colleagues across the university and also to hear about some of the great work that's happening in other parts of the university that might also benefit our students. So it's a real two-way process. And it just allows us to check in with each other. And as I said, really, it's always about finding new ways of supporting our students and hearing what other parts are doing as well.

KAREN FOLEY: And there are certain priorities that are set for some of these boards of studies from students. Richard can you tell us about some of those priorities and what you're trying to do to work on specific things to enhance fairness and equal opportunities for people to participate?

RICHARD MARSDEN: Yeah, no problem. So, it's the directors of teaching that kind of set priorities for the board of studies, but that's kind of in consultation with lots of other staff members. We don't just make stuff up off the top of our heads, although much as we would like to rule by diktat, but no, we wouldn't be allowed. So we set priorities about how can things be improved and what are we going to work on? Because I think if you try and work on every single thing at once, you don't get very far.

So what we try to do is take our cues directly from student feedback, firstly, and secondly, from the kind of data analysis that Matt was talking about, like what's working for students and what isn't working for them. So, for this year for arts and humanities, our big priority is to work on providing even better support for students from ethnic minorities, for students with mental health conditions, and also for students who are studying two modules at once. So, what we want to avoid is, kind of, unequal outcomes for students who are in different circumstances or from different backgrounds or making different study choices, because the whole point of the OU is about opportunity and equality. So, that's absolutely core to our mission.

I suppose another example, in arts and humanities, that we're kind of further through with, in a way, is independent study. So what we were hearing the last few years is that a lot of students want to have the opportunity to stretch their legs, to spread their wings, and move outside of the OU module materials that you all get sent or get given, and work a little bit more independently. So, what we did there was we tried out some approaches to that on a Level 3 dissertation module.

And then, we looked at what worked, looked at what didn't work, and then we applied those to our two new Level 1 modules, which is A112 Cultures, and A113 Revolutions. So, they're the two modules, you'll study one or other of them after A111. So they kind of, quite early in your studies, encourage and enable you to start studying a bit more independently and making your own decisions about what you study and how you study it. So, yeah, another example there.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, we're nearly out of time, and I know, Richard, you wanted to talk a little bit about that role.

I just wanted to add a couple of things, which I know there's been a lot of work in the faculty around creating communities. And there's been a lot of work, I guess, since COVID, as well, about developing face-to-face and online study days, where people can come together, students and academics, and enjoy talks. And the faculty are really sort of trying to get involved with those different societies, et cetera. So there are lots of qualifications and societies that people can get to grips with.

And also, we've been talking a lot earlier about student voice and the importance of those things. And there are student consultations that happen in all three schools, where, I guess, we're seeking to hear students' voices in a variety of different ways. Richard, can you sort of wrap up with that sort of aspect and also what you wanted to say about the role that Billy had earlier, that many students were interested in?

RICHARD MARSDEN: Yeah, absolutely. So, as you say, Karen, we have lots of ways of gathering - of listening to students, basically. So we have a survey at the end of every module. We have the national student survey at the end of every qualification. But we also have consultations with students, both face to face and online every year. And they're kind of done by school, but they're also done by area, so geography is taken into account.

But over and above that, we have this system of student reps, student representatives, which I mentioned earlier. And they are supplied to us, if you like, by OUSA, which is the OU Students Association, which I'm sure Billy was talking about earlier.

So those reps are appointed by OUSA. The OU has no say in that, so there's no control in that sense. So vacancies are advertised in the summer each year. Applications are judged against the kind of role description, which is available on the OUSA website. And then, as I say, OUSA decide who those reps are.

And then, those reps, they come along to Open University meetings, like boards of studies, and lots of other kind of meetings. And they basically tell us what they think about the different things that we're doing, the improvements we're trying to make. They tell us what's working, what's not working. So, anyone who's interested in that role, learning more about that, should definitely check out the OUSA website, which is just www.oustudents.com. But I think it's a really worthwhile thing to do, and it's incredibly valuable to us who work at the Open University, of course.

KAREN FOLEY: That's absolutely wonderful. Well, I'm afraid we're out of time. But that's been a jam-packed session. Rachel, Matt and Richard, thank you so much for joining me and sharing all of the wonderful work. I imagine you guys don't have a lunch hour with all those things you've got to do.

It's great to see, I think, for students, how many of these things that they don't need to worry about, the quality and enhancements, et cetera. But it's so reassuring to know that those are in place and that those are fed through. So again, like we were talking earlier in the day about Level 1 and these interdisciplinary aspects feeding into something as students go up the qualification, it's great to know that there are people overseeing those processes, and also making changes so that these changes aren't just things that are in the pipeline.

It's practically how are they working? How are we evaluating them? How are you reviewing them? And I think that that, in itself, is so reassuring for students to know that there are people overseeing that nature of their degree. So thank you very much for that.

Right, we're going to show you a couple more video breaks. We've got a FASS in Fifty, an introduction to some more of the academics and the faculty. And then, we'll show you a video about discovering arts and humanities at The Open University and psychology degrees at the OU. I'll see you after this video break.

[MUSIC PLAYING]