

KAREN: Welcome back to Student Hub Live. Well, it's been a wonderful day. I think everyone is really, really buzzing and super excited to start their studies. Don't forget that to support you, we've got lots of events lined up at the Student Hub Live. So do check out the website. Subscribe to our mailing list so that you'll be the first to find out when we've got events to support you and your studies.

And if you are a new student, on module start day, on Saturday, we've got three online workshops that you can book your space on, and we'll show you all around the virtual learning environment and talk about time management and lots of wonderful things there as well.

So our final section here from our faculty of business and law freshers event is about apprenticeships. And I'm here with Maria Smith, who is the assistant head of student experience, specialising in degree-level apprenticeships. Welcome, Maria. How are you today?

MARIA SMITH: Thank you very much, Karen. I'm delighted to be with you today and part of the team welcoming our students embarking on their studies with us so. Good to see you.

KAREN: Brilliant. It's been a really wonderful day, and we've still got hundreds of people in the chat box out there. And we've been having a wonderful time, some people finding out about new subject areas that they may not know about. And I think this will be one of those situations because I think that when people often think about apprenticeships, they may not think that it can actually result in a degree. So how familiar generally are people with this idea of degree apprenticeships?

MARIA SMITH: Yeah, I think not that familiar. It's a pretty new area, I think. And the recent growth in degree apprenticeships has come about really since 2017 with the government's introduction of the apprenticeship levy. And that's meant that organisations can draw down against the levy to fund apprenticeship training and assessment.

And that's great for organisations because they can develop the talent within the organisation in return for making a commitment to their apprentices. They need to commit to giving apprentices 20% off the job training time and giving opportunities

to sort of apply their learning. But there's also great benefits for the apprentices, for our students, because it means that they can undertake their apprenticeship training and get a degree or get a master's qualification fully funded by the levy, so they don't need to worry about finding the funding themselves or getting a student loan.

They can carry on working, so they're earning whilst they're learning. And because they're still working, the key part of the apprenticeship degree is they can actually look to apply that academic learning in the workplace. So it's very sort of practical and meaningful for them. So, yeah, so I think there's lots of benefits.

KAREN: James asks, are degree apprenticeships like knowledge transfer projects?

MARIA SMITH: Ooh, I'm not quite sure what he means by a knowledge transfer project. I'd need to know more about what he means by that. They are basically the coming together of the requirements of an academic degree or master's and the requirements of an apprenticeship standard. And I'll say a bit more about the standard in a moment.

KAREN: That's wonderful. Oh, Lydia said gorgeous Spaniel. Well, I just have to make sure she's being very well behaved because yesterday I was interviewing the vice chancellor, my cat came in and started cleaning herself. It was so embarrassing. I didn't notice because I was paying attention, but everyone else did, which reminds me never to work with children and animals. But they howl outside the door if I don't let them in, so they're free to come and go as they wish.

So we've seen some of the things. And we'd like people to fill in our word cloud at home. And remember, you need to put three things in or the results won't submit. So we'd like to know what your impression of apprenticeships is, and also are you already studying a degree-level apprenticeship with us?

The numbers, I guess, are quite small. We've got lots of business and law students here today. But we may well have some students on apprenticeship programmes with us also. So there's this whole idea, I guess, Maria, about doing things that have a degree level, but also the application, the practise-based component, then, of an apprenticeship. What is studying it at a degree level, then, all about? What makes it distinct from, I guess, just a standard apprenticeship?

MARIA SMITH: Yeah, that's a really good question. And so clearly the degree level means that the students will meet the requirements of the degree. So they will either get an undergraduate honours degree at the end, or they might get a master's qualification at the end. But I suppose for me and for us in the faculty, the key question has been what makes our degrees different to turn them into an apprenticeship degree qualification?

And I suppose the important thing to realise there is that all apprenticeship qualifications are based on what's known as apprenticeship standards, and they outline the requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviours that our students must demonstrate at work in order to be successful and get their apprenticeship qualification.

So all apprenticeship students need to go through what's known as an endpoint assessment. And to achieve that, they need to achieve their academic degree or master's, but they also need to demonstrate and show that they've actually applied their academic learning at work. And in the Faculty of Business and Law, because certainly two of our apprenticeship programmes are focused on management and leadership, it's about helping them develop the skills, knowledge, and behaviours to become more effective managers and leaders in the workplace.

KAREN: So it's this application of knowledge and skill. And we don't have people live right now who are studying on our degree apprenticeship with the Open University, but a lot of people are really interested in thinking about it for the future. So we can sort of come into, I guess, the topic of what the OU offers.

This isn't something that the OU offers entirely on its own, but we do have a very robust provision with a lot of different organisations. So what does the Open University offer and the Faculty of Business and Law in terms of apprenticeship programmes?

MARIA SMITH: Yeah, well, it's great to hear that people are interested and excited to sort of explore the opportunities. And the OU as a whole has launched a number of apprenticeships. So other faculties offer them in digital and technology solutions, nursing, and social work. But our faculty, the Faculty of Business and Law, has three apprenticeship programmes. It has the Police Constable Degree apprenticeship

programme, which is our newest one. And we had our first group of students start on that in July.

And then it has the Chartered Manager Degree apprenticeship programme. That's been running now since 2017. And our Senior Leader master's degree apprenticeship programme, which has been running since 2018.

KAREN:

That's wonderful. And I'd like to find out a little bit more about that. And I just sort of wanted to expand before we did that on some of the things you were saying before about how students combine the theory and practise. What output do they have? Is it a portfolio of work in terms of how they demonstrate that they've met some of these? Or is there some other way of assessment? How is it all assessed?

MARIA SMITH:

Yeah, that's a really good question. So I touched on the endpoint assessment. So that's the culmination and bringing it all together. So before they even get to the endpoint assessment, they have to go through a process called gateway. And that's where they've successfully passed their degree or their master's qualification.

And then at the endpoint assessment, by that point, they need to have a portfolio of evidence. And that's evidence of how they've applied and demonstrated the skills, knowledge, and behaviours at work. So they've got a portfolio. And they also have to do a project showcase. And that's, again, about them applying their learning at work to make a real difference in their organisation.

And they will also need to take part in a professional discussion with an external assessor. So at that professional discussion, which is kind of where it all comes together, in a live assessment day, then they'll be quizzed a bit more about their portfolio of evidence, and they'll also do the presentation of their showcase project. So that's kind of drawing it all together.

And sort of to go back to what you were saying about what's the difference between a degree apprenticeship and perhaps other apprenticeships, I think the real benefit for our students, particularly if they're working management, is the degree will sometimes give them the kind of underpinning knowledge, the theories, the frameworks, the approaches so that they can understand why it's effective to take certain approaches as a manager or leader.

And that can really help to build their confidence, that they can understand what some of the underpinning theories and models are, in terms of either management, leadership, or business, really.

KAREN: No, that's really important. The other thing I think that's really worth mentioning is that we've been talking a lot about tutors and tutor support. But with a degree apprenticeship, people also have a practise tutor. So they get additional support in their workplace or work setting as well, which is also important.

MARIA SMITH: Yeah, absolutely. The practise tutor was a new role, really, which we developed to support our students going through the degree apprenticeship programmes. And they're with the apprentice, with our apprentice all the way from the start of the qualification. And the qualification, typically the Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship can last about 3 and 1/2 to four years. The Senior Leader lasts up to three years.

So they're with them from the very start of that journey all the way through the qualification to the end. They'll have regular meetings with them. Their role is very much to help them think about, how can they apply their academic learning at work, supporting them in building the portfolio, supporting them with the showcase project, and the preparation for the endpoint assessment that I mentioned.

And they will also be their module tutor. Because one of the things I haven't mentioned is on our degree apprenticeship programmes, we have work-based learning modules. So on the CMDA and the Senior Leader master's degree apprenticeship, our students will do the cool compulsory modules of that undergraduate or master's programme. But then they will also do work-based learning modules. And then that, again, is about helping them apply the learning at work and build that portfolio of evidence.

So practise tutor is their module tutor on the work-based learning modules and supports them all the way through their journey.

KAREN: That's brilliant. I'd like to talk about the two specifics. But before I do that, Jamie just wanted to ask a quick question about the workshops on the 3rd of October. I see that they are all full now. Jamie, they will be recorded, and you can watch them later. But we do have a whole programme of events. We only promote them three weeks

before the dates of the events, though.

So do subscribe to the mailing list, and then we regularly update you with when we've got events on. But we will have lots more. We're aware that the demand is high for those. But unfortunately the spaces are limited because of the capacity of our online tutorial system for those workshops. But we will be running more anyway.

So you've mentioned two of the types of degree apprenticeship, Maria. There's the CMDA, which is the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, and that that's sort of, I guess, a degree-level one. And then there's the Senior Leader Master's Degree and Apprenticeships, the SLMDA. There are two different ones.

But students can't just say, I want to do an apprenticeship, like they would to be 100 and enrol on an OU module. It's a little bit different in terms of how they get to that point. So can you talk a little bit through that process and also what is required of students?

MARIA SMITH: Well, they need to be supported by their employer to take part in a degree apprenticeship. So somebody must be in employment in order to take part in an apprenticeship. So if students are already working within an organisation and they want to see if this is going to be an opportunity for them, then I would suggest that they get in touch with their HR or their training department and they find out if they are already offering those sorts of apprenticeship programmes.

And if they're not, they might want to encourage them to think about it and perhaps to contact the Open University to hear about how we can partner with them. So our business development unit works with employing organisations. And it will be through that employer supporting an apprentice that they will be able to come on to one of our programmes.

If they're not already working within an organisation, then they can search for organisations that run degree apprenticeships. So the government has a website, and it's got a sort of find an apprenticeship area on that. So we can share that information with people afterwards as well.

And the Office for Students has got a very helpful section on their site as well, which gives some good pointers about how to find out more about degree

apprenticeships. And obviously look at our site for general information about the apprenticeships that we offer as well.

KAREN:

That's wonderful. Now, you've mentioned a lot of the support available. You've mentioned that they have a module tutor, like everybody else does, and a practise tutor who may help in the workplace. We've also been talking about other support all OU students get, the student support team, careers, and library, et cetera.

But there's also an apprenticeship programme delivery manager who liaises between the employment and the Open University. Why is that such an important part of an apprenticeship setup?

MARIA SMITH:

Yeah, that's really important because it's very much the relationship with the employer and the workplace is fundamental here. And so there's issues around funding. And actually our business development team and our apprenticeship programme delivery managers are experts in the funding rules.

So that if, for example-- a typical example, we've had this year is a lot of our Senior Leader students actually work for the NHS. And you can imagine they were very impacted by the pandemic. Their workload massively increased. Now, there are certain rules and regulations about whether or not people can take a break in learning. And that's linked to the funding. And the funding agencies were supportive because of the extreme situation that people are in.

But it will be the apprenticeship programme delivery manager who will work with the Open University and work with the employer to make sure that we're following all the correct funding rules and regulations. And similarly, right at the start, I think I said that employers have to make a commitment to support their apprentices in terms of aspects such as giving 20% off-the-job training time.

Now, if we find that an employer is struggling to meet that commitment, that, again, relates back to funding, and so we sort of escalate that a little bit to the apprenticeship programme delivery manager so they can look to have discussions with all parties and see how we can best support the student.

KAREN:

That's brilliant. Maria, we've got a couple of questions from Michelle, from people at home. Michelle.

MICHELLE: Hi, yeah, so Jared wanted to know if there is a-- oh, sorry, it was Lydia who wanted to know if there's an age limit on apprenticeships. And that came out a couple of times about the age. And then Jared had a question about, how does it work with the apprenticeship and the degree? Do you do one then the next? Are they alongside each other?

And then there were just some general questions. I think you've answered the other general questions. If we can look at age and how it works. Thanks, Maria.

MARIA SMITH: OK. OK, as far as I know, there shouldn't be any restrictions in terms of age. Obviously people need to be supported by their employer for the length of the apprenticeship. I think that's the key thing for employers to be thinking about when they're putting people through, that that person is going to have secure employment with them for the duration of the apprenticeship.

But no, there shouldn't be an age limit. If students want to do the Senior Leader master's degree apprenticeship because they are studying for an MBA, they need to meet our entry requirements. So they will need a minimum of three years' management experience, as well as usually an honours degree. But no, there shouldn't be a sort of age restriction other than those that I can think of.

In terms of how they work together, so if we look at the Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship, then as I mentioned, we kind of integrate the work-based learning modules as they go along. So it's not that they study the degree and then they study the apprenticeship aspect. They, in fact, have three of the modules, the sort of optional modules that they would normally do on our Business Management degree replaced with three work-based learning modules.

So they're integrated, and the students are very much encouraged to build their portfolio all the way through. Yeah, does that answer that question or those questions?

KAREN: That's wonderful. Thank you very much, Maria. That's wonderful. And that's been such an interesting insight into the world of apprenticeships. Michelle, we'll put the links in the chat. So if you're interested in finding out more about the two of our more popular programmes that are on offer, then do take a look at those. And

perhaps you can even get your employer to buy in on it with you. So that's always a good option as well if there aren't ones on the market already.

So we've had a wonderful day. Michelle, what has been your best bit of today? And how's everyone at home as well?

MICHELLE: Well, I would have to agree with those at home, Karen. The inside of your house is stunning.

KAREN: Oh, thank you.

MICHELLE: And we had a lot of love for your house, and we had a lot of love for Megan.

KAREN: Oh, let me get Megan up. She's asleep on the floor right now, isn't she?

MICHELLE: Well, I kind of have to do the same, then. I've got my Gary here, and you've got your Megan. But I thought there were so many wonderful tips. I loved the law discussion about the ethical decisions that have to be made. I thought that was brilliant.

But the chat box today, the students in the chat box were so supportive of one another. And I do believe that some friendships have been made. And I did post in there that I'd love to see a student have live marriage.

KAREN: Oh, yes, that would be amazing. We'd definitely be invited, I think. I hope so.

MICHELLE: And our pets, of course.

KAREN: And all the other hundreds of wonderful OU students. It would be wonderful actually, yeah. That would be great. Oh, it has been such a super day. I love it when people start the day feeling a little bit anxious and then all of a sudden realise that they're not alone and that there's some wonderful, friendly people at the Open University as well, who will make this journey just so incredible.

Not only are the students great-- we've met some amazing associate lecturers-- but also the academics who are writing these modules. We have a great time creating them and thinking, how can we teach in the most exciting and innovative way? How can we use a range of modalities of print, of online, video, audio, quizzes, et cetera to really inspire students? And I think that's one of the things that makes the OU so exciting is that speciality in distance learning is just brilliant.

But I hope you've all had a wonderful time today. Michelle and Gary, thank you very much for managing all of our chat. And thank you to all of the guests who've been on. And thank you to the students who have made this absolutely wonderful. It's really lovely meeting you. Like I say, there are lots of other events here, not only at Student Hub Live, but also, as we've mentioned, the library, the career service, and not to forget the OU Students Association also, who have lots of meet-ups, et cetera.

But it's been a really wonderful day. I hope you're feeling happy to start your studies next week. I hope you can join us for more events in the future. There's a lot you can catch up on in our Student Hub Live YouTube channel. And also in our Adobe Connect room, there are lots of workshops there that you can watch that have been recorded for us as well.

Megan says I've made a bunch of friends. I feel so much more excited now. I just need to wait to speak to my tutors and keep myself calm. You absolutely do. But embrace those nerves, Megan. It's a really, really wonderful journey. You're never going to start to your OU degree again, so make the most of it and treasure the experience.

Because believe it or not, as I'm sure Michelle will testify, it goes far too quickly. And before you know it, you're at the end and then looking for another degree to do. So do make the most of it, everybody. Thank you so much for your time today. Take care, and I hope to see you at another event very soon. Bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]