

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to Student Hub Live Faculty of Well-Being, Education, and Language Studies freshers event. This session is about becoming a professional, approaches and attributes. So for those of you right at the start of your OU journey, this is a key thing to bear in mind as you progress in your career. And for those of you who are already midway through, it might be something that you'd like start focusing on and refining now.

Now, we're going to introduce you to my guest in just a second, but before that, I just wanted to nip over to Kieran on the hot desk, and see how everybody is doing, and whether there are any questions we can help with. There's been so much chat today. Kieran, how's everyone at home?

KIERAN: Some students saying they haven't received their module materials yet. So speaking as an academic at the university, someone who is a tutor and also a staff tutor, just a couple of hints for those students. There has been an extension of the enrollment date for the Open University, so there might be some of the paper-based materials might arrive a little bit later. But for the vast majority of modules, you can still access those materials online. So if you go online, and then go to the Assessment and then Resources tabs at the top of your student homepage, a number of things are on there that you'll receive through the post anyway, so that's a good starting point.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And if you are brand new, next week, we have a freshers event on the 28th of September. We'll be taking you through all the basics, and showing you how your student homepage is absolutely essential. And as Kieran says, there are alternative resources for your study. So you can get a PDF version of your book, for example, if you have it there, and also take a look at the study planner. It's great to get ahead, but don't panic if not. We've still got a little bit of time before the official module start date. Any other questions we have, Kieran, right now?

KIERAN: No, it largely revolves around that. And there's also been a lot of interest too regarding the last discussion, which segues really nicely into Eric and Kerry's discussion about professionalism online, and those fit quite nicely into the next topic.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well, let me introduce you to my guests. Eric Addae-Kyeremeh has worked tirelessly on this programme, and in fact, many other programmes if you've been to our Student Hub live events before. He's a senior lecturer in educational leadership and management with over 20 years experience in post-compulsory education. And he's also a chartered manager, chartered IT professional, and an academic. And so he brings an interesting perspective to us in terms of becoming professional.

And we also have Kerry Jones, who is following a career in the health and social care sector. So very different background here to Eric. And Kerry entered academia to teach and research on health well-being and social care related subjects, including person-centred approaches to working professionally with clients and patients. And Kerry is a lecturer in end of life care at Open University.

Welcome to you both. Now there are certain guidelines. I mean, one of the reasons we wanted the session was there are codes of practise guidelines, et cetera, that professionals are expected to abide by, and in fact, that are laid down by organisations like the National Midwifery Council, for example. And one of these guidelines is that the applicants are required to provide evidence of good character. So for example, compassion.

So is this something, then, Kerry, that you think that can be taught? Or is it something innate, inherent, within the person? This good character?

KERRY JONES (Lecturer in End of Life Care): Yeah. I mean the whole premise of this is that students are expected to show that they can professionally engage in the kind of practise without sort of being under supervision. And so to evidence this they have to try and demonstrate that they have certain characteristics, such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, and one of those being compassion, particularly in the health and social care sector, and just things about end of life care, certainly.

As to whether it can be taught or something inherent, I'm very much reminded of the fact in sort of work in my own profession and through conducting research that a lot of the time as I've made observations that we can see that professionals either have a very natural ability to show compassion or other people aren't necessarily.

And one of the things that we aim to demonstrate with students, certainly through the modules and as they develop, is the need to have this compassion. But how we demonstrate that can happen in lots of different ways towards patients, with clients, but also it's kind of our community of colleagues as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Now we've got some polls, Kerry, for our audience to answer. And we'd like to use those answers. Again, no rights or wrongs here. We're just interested in people at home's opinions.

So we'd like to know whether being professional means never showing your emotions to clients or patients. You've got choices there. It's also, is it important to have prior experience in the sector to demonstrate that you're more likely to succeed to professional registration?

So if you could let us know your thoughts on those polls, just click on the option that applies. And also, what support do developing professionals require in order to provide adequate person-centred care?

As a word cloud, remember, one, two, or three words. But you need something in each box, or the results won't submit. And we'll draw on that a little bit later.

So Kerry, you wanted to get some sense of people's ideas about what it means to be professional. Why was that important to you in terms of this session?

KERRY JONES: Yeah. I think it's important to be developing towards professional. And I don't think you can ever stop developing in that way. It doesn't just start when you become an OU student or wherever you might study. It's something that's always ongoing. It's always something that you engage in reflectively, or if self-evaluating, it's really important to do that.

And certainly at the OU on sort of certain modules that I'm involved with, particularly around health and social care, one of the things that does come up is that kind of need to be reflective. So that we're looking at those attributes of professionalism. So whether it's honesty, integrity, and what have you.

And you know, we're very much aware that when we're talking about values and certain attributes and having the right ones, if that's the right word, that all depends on our own

ideologies, our own attitudes, our preferences, how we've been socialised. But certainly within a profession, our aim is to do just that. It's kind of socialised people in a certain way to kind of be passionate, to kind of develop further within those characteristics. Because it's great being able to get through your studies and show that you were able to come meet those certain criteria. But it's also important to be able to show, to demonstrate, that you have these certain characteristics that kind of make up the whole of that particular profession so that when they're going into certain employments and they can show and demonstrate to certain employers they are that kind of key professional that can provide the best care to patients, to service users, to clients, and can be the best in that profession.

KAREN FOLEY: We'll get the results of that poll later, Kerry. I'm just start mindful of time. And I want to ask Eric some questions also.

But I wonder if you can talk a little bit about person-centred care before I do. Working within health and social well-being and social care and education involves often dealing with real people with challenging and complex needs. And often they're in the process of very difficult times themselves physically or mentally.

So why is person-centred care so important?

KERRY JONES: Yeah. I mean, person-centred care is hugely important, whether it's in health and social care or within teaching and learning. And certainly as an academic, that's something that's always on the forefront of my mind when I'm sort of dealing with students, sort of teaching students, et cetera.

Essentially it's about being person-centred, it's having an approach where you're not looking at somebody as a patient, as a service user, or as a student. You are coming in to learn or to obtain a treatment or what have you. So it can vary across sectors.

It's the factors that you're looking beyond a student, a patient, or a service user, and you're seeing the greater whole. So you're considering what their preferences are, their needs, their kind of backgrounds. You're trying to get a sense of who they are and what challenges they are experiences and trying to work with them in a way that's actually acceptable that can also meet their needs.

So say, for example, we have students who have a variety of declared disabilities, a variety of needs. And as moderating chairs or as people who run modules, our aim is not just to get them through the module, but to find a way that's acceptable and that can help them through that particular module in a way that they can feel able to do so. So it's by looking at the kind of bigger whole, not just looking at the student or a patient or a service user, as I said, but looking at them much more deeply as a person.

KAREN FOLEY: But I mean, Kerry, is it really possible to do that? In particular when we've got our own biases, our own workloads, our own time commitments. Some of these things sound very ideal, and indeed, they are. But how feasible is it?

KERRY JONES: Yeah. I mean, again, being professional and sort of developing professionally, you're going to come up against this time and time again. There's going to be instances. For example, you could be running a clinic. You could have somebody coming in

who you don't think is able to kind of verbally say what they can say. So you turn to sort of a carer or a family member.

And it's kind of bearing those biases in mind where we think we know what we know. But it's actually challenging that a bit further.

And also, in an ideal world, we want to be doing things in a certain way. Again, there's instances where we can't replicate systems or we might be short-staffed, et cetera.

But I think the key thing is to kind of where we see something that we're uncomfortable with is to be able to kind of have the sense that we can challenge that, even if we're kind of, let's say, junior colleagues and what have you, and to know who is the go-to person or to the go-to what have you to try and kind of challenge that kind of sense of what's going on and to kind of really look at that much deeper. And like, again, this is where reflexivity comes into the pictures that we reflect on our own practise. We see what we can be doing in a certain way.

And as professionals, actually question ourselves, why do we work in a certain way? And why are we thinking in a certain way as well. And I think that's a continuous issue which reflects part of our development that never ends.

KAREN FOLEY: No, exactly. And I mean, it's an interesting thing, Kerry, because you were sort of talking about the nature of emotions. And we asked people earlier whether being professional means never showing your emotions to clients. And people at home, if we take a look at the results from that, well, they disagreed with the statement, with 87 percent of them disagreeing.

So I guess it taps into what you're saying there. It's about working with yourself, being congruent with the way that you're feeling so that you're able to really understand the lived experience of that end user. Because these things are so important, aren't they? Very often in particular if you're vulnerable at a challenging time, it's really important that some people can relate to other people because those are things that will be etched on your mind often forever.

We also asked students about whether they thought it was important to have prior experience in the sector to demonstrate that you're likely to succeed. And here the results are very interesting. So 70 percent said no. What is your view on that, Kerry?

KERRY JONES: I'm really glad, I'm really glad, actually, to see that the people don't necessarily think they have to have prior experience because that's one of the beauties about studying with the OU. There's lots of kind of introductory modules to kind of lead you into the profession.

And it's not just about being academically ready, necessarily. You could have those kind of core competencies that we talked about already-- compassion. You have some ideas, there's transferable skills from life experiences, from other work situations.

So I'm glad to see that number as well. And bearing in mind, if there aren't a sort of work-based modules or people aren't involved in employment at the minute, the whole premise of some of the modules is that it's designed to kind of level people up towards that professionalism as well.

So part of the learning materials, it kind of over time sort of gradually builds you up to be able to kind of develop that sense of professionalism, so that by the time you come to the end of the course or the end of degree, if that's the route that somebody is taking, then you're fully fledged to kind of go out there with those kind of key skills. So very well set up to do that.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That's wonderful, Kerry.

Eric I must come to you. And we're going to have to run over ever so slightly on this session and take a couple of minutes out of Kieran's session next because I want to sort of translate this. We've heard from the students in terms of what they think digital professionalism means to them.

So we're going to just have a quick look at some of those results. And then, Eric, I want to sort of translate that from the-- I guess-- the work practise into the community of practise, which is your area.

So here are the results of what people said. What do you mean by developing professionalism? So empathy, support, mentoring, compassion, experience, all the key words that are coming up.

But things like up-to-date training, respect, self-image, guidance, warmth, team, opportunity, regulatory, resilience, counselling, tutors, et cetera. So there's lots of words here.

Eric, can you tell us a little bit about how employers expect people to possess some of the attributes, as well as the community of practise? Or maybe focusing on the community of practise a little bit more.

DR. ERIC ADDAE-KYEREMEH (Associate Head of School (Innovation): Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport): Yes. Yes. I think Kerry has sort of taken us through quite a lot in terms of what is expected of a practitioner in the workplace. So I'll pick it up in terms of the community of practise. And I think she started looking at that mentioning the NMC as an example, which is the professional side of practise.

But I'm looking at it from that. So I look at professionalism at three levels. So there's the employer level. There's the professional community level. And then there's the individual.

So at the community of practise level, it can be formal or informal. So formal will usually entail codes of practise. That will normally be published by the professional association that you're a member of. And as a practitioner, you'd be expected to work to those codes.

So for example, as educators the general teaching council in England, the general teaching council of Scotland, will more or less publish a code that we are expected to adhere to. And these codes look at teaching and also looks at personal and professional conduct.

And these are very, very, very important because flouting them could mean that you could be formally expelled from that professional body. But informally, as educators we also have our own codes of practise, which more or less demonstrate how professional we are.

So issues around integrity are very, very important. But we also have to have high aspirations for our students because that's exactly why we came to these jobs for.

We also have to commit to continuous learning. So that's why we're always looking for new ways to improve our practise, new ways to learn new things so that we can actually improve the service and the support that we provide to students.

We also want to act responsibly at all times. That's very, very, very important for us because we're beholden to each other in terms of the community of practitioners, as electorates, and as teachers.

But last but not least, showing mutual respect. And this is something that is very, very, very important, even for students that in the journey. Showing mutual respect for each other is one of the key attributes that would expect you to espouse at all times within the community that you work in.

KAREN FOLEY: You've given a wonderful summary there, Eric, of a community of practise, which for many students is so important because it is in that space where we can have that integrity, trust, respect, and hope, that we could really develop and articulate the way that we learn, how we learn, but also what we're learning. So it not only offers a space to share and develop skills and techniques, et cetera. but also a space to clarify and articulate our thinking.

But I wonder if you could end by telling us about what being professional means, then, for the actual individual. What does it mean for the student out there now?

DR. ERIC ADDAE-KYEREMEH: Student. Yeah. I think that's also a very, very-- and for me, a very, very important aspect of being professional. It's mainly around kind of developing a positive reputation for yourself. And I think one of the things that you-- the previous session, which is around digital professionalism, fits into this perfectly.

And some of the words that came out of the word cloud are very, very, very, very pertinent. And so issues around empathy, issues around respect, issues around commitment to continuous learning. These are very, very important aspects of being a professional for yourself, because you will have values that you hold dear to as an individual.

And one of the things you do want to do, whether you are in practise, whether you're at home, whether you're in the workplace, you'd want to demonstrate that at all times. So it's mainly about you, the individual, having a positive reputation for yourself.

So whether you are in the student forum engaging with your peers, whether you're in social media engaging with the rest of the world, you'd want to make sure that whatever you're doing holds high in terms of your level of integrity as an individual, you hold yourself high in terms of the respect you're showing for others. You also have to make sure you're holding high in terms of listening to others. These are all very, very important personal attributes that a professional is expected to sort of work through with.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And I think there's also something there about critiquing other's work and doing so in a respectful way, Eric, because you know, very often if you care about somebody, you can help them develop their own thing. But being kind and evidence-based in terms of how one is doing that can really help the individual or hinder them. And that community of practise is important to adhere to those values, isn't it?

DR. ERIC ADDAE-KYEREMEH: Yeah. That's very true, Karen. And that's one of the things that is sometimes sort of a bit confusing for students because providing academic critique, it's a good thing. It's not disrespectful. It's the way it's done.

Because one of the key things you learn from your studies is being able to challenge, and that challenge is done in a respectful way. And that's what academic critique is all about. That's the key thing. That's a personal attribute that is enshrined in a lot of the curriculum that you come across as a student. But we'll also hope that post-graduation you take that attribute into employment and into your practise.

KAREN FOLEY: Kerry and Eric, that's been a fascinating conversation. I wish we could continue. But it's all we've got time for today. Thank you so much.

And I very much hope that students can remember this when they're reading their TMA feedback, when they're thinking, oh, gosh, they're thinking this critique here is valued by someone who cares about me and is nourishing me and is helping me to develop in my academic role. So thank you very much.

All right. We're going to show you another of our campus tours. And then I will be back for our next session, which is about learning to learn. See you in a second.

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