

The Open University | STEM 7th July - Get to know the Careers and Employability Services

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to The Student Hub Live STEM Showcase. Well, we've just been asking you what you would like to ask our experts. And some of the things that you said were things like how to get a dream job and also how to decide on your career amongst other things. But for those of you who are interested in getting your dream job, you're in luck because I am joined by three experts from the Careers and Employability Services; Alex Hession, Emily Upex and Mary Older.

Alex is a Careers and Employability consultant who supports students. Mary as well focuses on connecting employers with OU students and graduates. And Emily makes sure the OpportunityHub is kept up to date. And we're going to find out all about that today.

So we're asking you what your dream job was. And, Mary, Alex and Emily, while we're asking students what their dream job might be, what about you all? Are you in your dream careers? What did you guys want to do, Mary?

MARY OLDER: Well, I studied psychology at university. So I originally wanted to go into clinical psychology. But as we know, dream careers don't always happen in the way that we anticipate they will do.

So I ended up working in forensic psychology for a little while. And then I moved into employability and I supported people on unemployment benefits back into employment. And that experience is what brought me to working in the Careers and Employability Services at the OU. And I love it here.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, I wanted to do clinical psychology also. And I know lots of students do. But isn't it amazing how we can find these various things? We'll find out more about that in a bit. Alex, what about you?

ALEX HESSION: Well, I think I had a number of ideas. And I was stuck between social work and teaching. And I did actually go straight into careers guidance after I graduated and started working in a city school, supporting vulnerable young people. So I could see how there's a real combination of both those ideas in what I ended up doing. And then I moved on to working in colleges and on to universities and came to the OU 11 years ago. And I've been here ever since.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And, Emily, what about you?

EMILY UPEX: Similar to Alex, I had various ideas. I think while I was studying at university, I was considering teaching. I even considered policing at one point.

But after graduation, I started working in the Student Support Team at the OU. And since then, I've moved into careers. And I'm really enjoying it. So I've stuck with the OU. Yeah, moved away from teaching. But here I am.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, excellent. So very, very different places to, I guess, where we've ended up for now and where we first started from. Let's talk, Mary, a little bit about the careers online fair. I know you've been running it lately. And it'd be great to hear a bit more about that-- I hear it's gone really well-- and also about some other things that you've run over the last year for STEM students.

MARY OLDER: Yeah, of course. So within careers, we run a lot of events. And you're right, our online careers fair has been one of our big events that we've run this year. So it was called Welcoming Workplaces. And we ran it in April. And we had nearly 60 employers participate in the fair.

So it's an online fair where students are able to log in, visit employer booths and chat live with employers. So there's lots of resources that they're able to access. And they can have a look at the different opportunities that employers can offer too.

And one of the key focuses of this fair was that it was Welcoming Workplaces, so it was really about employers that are committed to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace. And they're also employers that we talk with regularly, so they know and understand about the Open University and about our students. And they are very keen to recruit Open University students. So that was a fantastic event that we had in April.

But across the year, we also run panel discussions with employers. We run various webinars and skill sessions. And we have Insight Days as well with employers. So there's lots of great opportunities happening.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, OK. And what have you got coming up in the not-too-distant future?

MARY OLDER: Well, it's actually perfect timing that I'm talking to you today because we've got three really exciting, different things happening over the summer. The first of which is our Employer Showcase, which actually opens tomorrow. So I think we're going to be sharing the link for how to sign up for it.

So the Employer Showcase is quite similar to our online fair. We've got over 60 employers present. The slight difference is that you can't chat live with the employers, but you can still send your questions over to them.

But we'll have a networking lounge open where students will be able to chat with other students. And we'll have our online careers booth, so you can put your questions to our careers team in the careers booth. But with having over 60 employers, their booths, there's going to be loads of resources and videos.

So it's a really good way to find out about different organisations, sectors that you might not have considered and think about how your degree can fit into those organisations by looking at the opportunities that they have. So that's the first thing that I'd say. We've got the Employee Showcase.

Then next week, we have a set of live employer sessions. So we have a video skills masterclass with Fujitsu happening. And then we've got two live employer panel discussions with Q&As.

One of which is focused on applications and the pre-interview assessments that you tend to get that are happening online now. And the other is focused on interviews and assessment centres. So it's a great opportunity to come along and hear from different employers their top tips for how to get through that often tricky recruitment process to secure your job. So come along, hear what they've got to say and put your questions to them as well.

And then finally, we've also got our summer session of workshops within careers. So that's with our Careers and Employability consultants focusing on CVs, application forms, networking and interviews. So they're live and interactive sessions.

So there's loads happening. And I know Emily is going to talk later about how to sign up for all of these. But, yeah, we are very busy at the minute.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, gosh, there's lots going on. So you guys run lots of things that people can go to, like these sorts of events. But, Alex, I wonder if there are any other things, perhaps things that didn't require people to actually go and attend anything that you'd like to highlight perhaps even for students who are thinking about graduating this year.

ALEX HESSION: Yeah, I mean, definitely. So I'm really excited to share a couple of interactive tools that we have that are great for graduates and job seekers alike. So firstly, we've got CV360. So if you do have a CV and want to get it reviewed, you can upload it into CV360.

And this particular tool looks for common mistakes that people make when putting together their CV, which often means that they're deselected in the application process. So it helps people pick those things up. You get fantastic tips and suggestions on how to improve your CV as well. So a lot of organisations are using applicant tracking systems these days. And this particular tool helps you to overcome or how to approach that particular way of getting your CV through to the next stage of interview.

And the next thing we have which is related is Interview360, which is a video interview interactive tool. So you actually go through the process of an interview. You ask questions. You're videoed. You're given time to reflect on the answers.

And then you get suggestions about how you might improve as well. And that's all immediate. So you'll get those suggestions straightaway. So for example, I spoke to a student a couple of weeks ago who hadn't had an interview for over 15 years. And so I signposted him to Interview360 because I really see it as a low-risk way of being able to get an objective view about how you might come across in an interview and along with the opportunity to develop those interview skills and build up your confidence in practise.

KAREN FOLEY: And that would be really good because today we asked people how confident they were in making job applications. And people aren't feeling very confident at all, Alex. 39% said that they felt unsure. And 39% said not at all confident.

So there's a lot that we can do. And I think it's very usual, I guess, to feel unconfident. And how nice to be able to be in that safe place. Have you tried it yourself?

ALEX HESSION: Well, actually, yeah. I have had to go at Interview360. It is a real eye opener. I would really strongly recommend anybody who is perhaps going to be faced with an interview in the near future to go ahead and try it. So for example, I found out that I use a lot of filler words, especially the word "Um."

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, no, it's quite painful, I know, watching yourself on video and seeing these things. But when you're aware of it, then you can really try to do it. And I guess you can do it several times, can't you, to make sure that you're practicing and rehearsing some of those answers?

ALEX HESSION: Absolutely, you can go back. And it's the same with CV360 as well. Once you've taken on board the feedback, you can either upload your CV again and get a fresh set of feedback and the same with Interview360.

You can watch yourself back, which, like you say, is painful. But it's a good pain. It's a positive pain, honestly.

And then you can then try and improve as well. But honestly, practise is one of the biggest things you can do. And practise out loud, hear yourself saying the answers to questions is really, really useful.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, OK. Well, let's go to you, Nicola, because my dogs-- I know you've got stuff to talk about. But my dogs, by the way, are under the table, making a very big racket. This little monkey here is being very naughty.

So for those of you at home who can hear some sort of rumblings, sorry about that. I'll get that sorted in just a minute. But, Nicola, tell us what people are saying their dream job is. And what can we ask our panel here today.

NICOLA
MCINTYRE: Hi, there. I hope my dog is going to remain quiet for this moment. OK, so not too much talk about dream job. Just Laura has said that she always wanted to be a choreographer because she's always had a love of nature. So now she can combine them both with nature conservation.

There are a number of questions, I think, that some of the students would like to put to the experts. So somebody-- Bianca has asked which STEM careers would fulfil her preference to work outdoors. And a lot of chat about getting voluntary experience. Liz and Susan have asked about how to go about getting voluntary experience.

So a few answers to those questions in the chat box. Elaine said that she called her local Citizens Advice bureau for that. Shelley is volunteering at a local memory group for people with dementia. Laura looked to her local Wildlife Trust and got some opportunities from there. So it's a case of looking around, I think.

Emily Smith has talked about how great she found the career service. So she was made redundant. And she has now managed to get a lab procurement role at a pharmaceutical company. So she's delighted with the service she's received.

I asked the question, what's the weirdest, strangest interview question you've been asked? A couple of things have come into the chat box here. So Lucy was asked what sort of soup she is.

And Yvonne has asked what kind of animal she would be. That's when she was applying for a senior clerical role. And somebody else was asked what they would do if they won the lottery. So lots of different types of chats going in there.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, that's excellent. Thank you. Now, we've also been asking people at home what their dream job would be. So let's take a look at our word cloud and see what sorts of things are appealing to you at home today.

So top of the list here, we have research. But other things like being a scientist or doing teaching would be excellent. We've got a really nice session in just a couple of sessions about teaching mathematics. So do stay tuned if you're interested in teaching.

Working at university. Doing something high paying, I think we'd all quite like that. Looking at being a maths teacher, network engineer. Something in America. I know we've got quite an international audience today.

Nature conservation, something ecological. Sustainability coming up there. So lots of interesting areas here. So what were some of the answers to those questions? What did our student say who was asked about the lottery spend?

NICOLA
MCINTYRE: I don't think there was an answer. I don't think they said.

KAREN FOLEY: No, I think she said she'd open an animal sanctuary. I think this was Bianca. And actually, I was asked that question once. And I said I would create a psychiatric hospital which dealt with well-being and mental health and that's what I would spend it on. And the person I told that was not impressed. I think you're supposed to say stuff like yachts or holidays abroad and things like that.

And she also said that she got the job because she was in a vet's practise. So again, it's all about tailoring your answers for the right situation. So I guess it's being sensible and tactful with some of those odd sorts of questions that we get asked.

OK, so back in terms of some of these things that the Careers and Employability look at. Alex, you've spoken about some of the things that students can do. But some students-- we've spoken to people who suffer from anxiety-- may not like that sort of thing. They might find something better like a one-to-one consultation. Is that something that students can do?

ALEX HESSION: Absolutely, so that's still something that is very much on offer for students. So if you are somebody who would prefer a one-to-one telephone conversation or a Skype conversation with a careers consultant or an employability advisor, that's absolutely fine. And if you're somebody who prefers email for whatever reason, then that's fine as well.

And I think Emily might be telling us a little bit in the future about how to make contact with the careers team. But absolutely, yes. We're very busy with appointments at the moment.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, OK. No, that's wonderful. Now, the other thing that we talked about briefly in terms of areas that we mention is OpportunityHub. And, Emily, this is one of the areas that you focus on specifically. So can you tell us about how students book some of these one-to-one consultations on OpportunityHub?

EMILY UPEX: Yes, of course. So all current students and students who have studied with us in the last three years have access to OpportunityHub. So you just need to sign on with your OU email address. And you use your Student Home password.

Once you're in the platform, it's really quick and easy to book an appointment with a consultant. You head to the Appointment section. And you can select from a list of topics what you might want to discuss in your appointment whether that's your CV, your options after graduation, preparing for an interview. And then you're presented with a calendar. So it's really easy for you to manage your time with regard to what's available.

Once you've booked your appointment, you'll receive reminder emails. And you can also manage and cancel that appointment all within the system as well. So it makes it really easy for the students to access that service.

And in OpportunityHub as well, you can also access the Events section. So Mary was mentioning earlier the various events that we offer throughout the year. So OpportunityHub is the place to go, really, to keep up to date with what's on offer.

Not all events require bookings, but some do. So OpportunityHub is where you would book your place. If an event is fully booked, you can add your name to a waiting list. And then if a space becomes available, you can book on. It's definitely the place to go to keep up to date with what's coming up. And now you can book onto the panel events that are happening next week.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, that's a really simple, easy thing to use. Let's take a look at a couple of screenshots there if we may, Emily, just to show people again what's in the school. So this is the welcome page, isn't it?

So this is where you search for opportunities. And you can scroll down a number of different keywords and types of options. If you're looking to book an appointment.

EMILY UPEX: Yeah, so you've got lots of options for appointments. And it's also where you can search for jobs based on your location, your keywords. So, yeah, the system's really intuitive and talks you through what you need to do so that you can help narrow down your search and find what you're looking for.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, and there are also the events as well. So we've been talking a lot about those. So OpportunityHub really is the central repository where you can make these bookings and search for events. And it's all very clear and easy to use. I don't think people should get too lost there. So that's really, really good.

We've heard from a lot of people today. Actually, Kate on the subject of weird questions said the last weird question was when the last time she cried was. So I'm not quite sure what an employer may want to know from that. But it'd be interesting to see what you said, Kate.

Laura says she's never had a proper job interview. She's only had a couple of informal chats, so no idea where to start. With no formal qualifications, she could never fill in that section.

So I guess we've seen a lot of people particularly coming through the Open University, which is open, who may have been in a job for a long time, may be seeking to go on to a different career path and may really struggle with some of these things that other people who've been through the employment wheel, I guess, would be more familiar with. What are your thoughts on those things? I'm not sure if anyone would like to feed back on some of those students who may feel a bit out of the loop of employment.

ALEX HESSION: I guess I would say that one of the things that they could do is obviously go along to Interview360 or CV360 if they felt that they wanted to try something in quite a low-risk way so they're not actually having direct conversation with somebody. But I would suggest making a one-to-one consultation or getting in contact with us because we deal with students who have these sorts of backgrounds. And there's always something we can do to help them.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely, and I don't know if you guys have any feedback just on that topic. We've all been talking about the questions. Kate's actual response was she said it was about a sad movie because, actually, she'd been to a funeral and she felt it was a really inappropriate question.

Do any of you have any advice if you do get some of those weird questions where perhaps you think, actually, this is a bit of pace? I'm not quite sure how this is relevant. Anything that you might suggest to somebody who'd experienced something like that?

MARY OLDER: I would say the most important thing is just to try and be honest in your answer. I think a lot of the time that's what employers are looking for. I think it's a way of trying to get to know you a little bit more beyond the questions that are more typical, perhaps about teamwork, that we all get in interviews. Those questions are trying to find out a bit more about you as a person. So just be honest.

And also, just remember that the interview is about you finding out if you think that organisation is right for you as well. So it's a two-way thing. But, yeah, just be honest and be yourself.

KAREN FOLEY: That's really good advice. And I think so often we forget that actually it is about sussing each other out, Mary, as you say. And you are there in a work context. You're not there to give your heart and soul willingly to anyone who's just going to answer those questions. But equally, there is that power dynamic, I guess, that goes on particularly if you want those jobs.

OK, so we're nearly out of time. One thing people have been talking about today is volunteering. And also, I wonder, Emily, if finally you can briefly tell us about some of the job opportunities and also internships on OpportunityHub.

EMILY UPEX: Yes, so OpportunityHub is home to a wide range of job roles, including volunteering opportunities. We work with a lot of charities that are looking to recruit OU students. I know a student mentioned Citizens Advice earlier. And we work really closely with them across the country.

And so, yeah, on OpportunityHub, you can access full-time/part-time roles, permanent, temporary, graduate schemes, internships. So everything and anything, really, is on there. So I'd really recommend having a look and seeing what's available. It's a good idea to have a look at job descriptions even if it's not in your local area just to see the roles that are out there to learn a bit more about what you might want to do.

And internships in particular, we do offer a range of OU-exclusive internships throughout the year. We work with smaller organisations to offer internships that are virtual, so you'd be working from home in the most part. Some of them are hybrid. So there's a mix of office and home-based working. But majority are virtual. So definitely, keep an eye out on OpportunityHub for those roles as well because they're a great chance to get some work experience.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well, Alex, Emily and Mary, thank you so much for coming along. It has been a packed session. I think there's lots of advice and inspiration there for everyone at home. We've got all of those links. So they should be in the chat box there.

And we're also joined by Heather and Matt in addition to Nicola, who are also managing our chat. So please make sure that you make the most of this opportunity to ask them many questions that you may be interested in as well. And I know Nicola's been doing a fab job of answering lots of questions.

We're going to have a short video break now. We're going to show you one of our Dan Weinbren campus tours. And then we'll be back to hear more from the Open University Students Association and about opportunities for you in terms of getting involved. See you in just a moment.

[MUSIC PLAYING]