

Careers advice

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Hi, I'm on social media desk now. I'm joined for a session now about the careers advice service that Liz is going to be chairing with Ellen. And also in the chat, we have two careers advisers who are going to answer all your questions I'm told. So fire them at us.

And on that note, I just wanted to mention that we have two options to engage with this event. There's a live and interactive way. You can see our chat box. And that's the one we're monitoring.

There's also a watch only. And there is a chat box on there. But that's not one that we're engaged with. So if you want to come into our chat, do so. Come back to the website, studenthub.kmi.open.ac.uk. And then come into the live and interactive button. And there we'll be chatting during this very session.

But we've got a lot to get through for this session. So I'm going to introduce you to Liz and Ellen.

LIZ MARR: Hi, everybody. It's really good to be back on 'Student Hub Live'. And I've been really missing it the last day and a half. But actually it's very opportune that I'm here now because this morning I was at the degree ceremony in Milton Keynes.

So I was watching the people who just finished walking across the platform. And a lot of them will have already started thinking about what they're going to do next. And that's what we're going to find out a little bit about this afternoon.

Now, I was just talking to Ellen earlier about career aspirations. And when I was young, what I really wanted to be if I grew up was a mermaid. What that says about me, I'm not entirely sure. But I want to ask Ellen what she wanted to do when she grew up.

ELLEN COCKING: Oh, and I wanted to be a vet.

LIZ MARR: Oh, a vet. OK.

ELLEN COCKING: I was the typical sort of girl loving animals. And things so, yes.

LIZ MARR: Sounds a bit more practical than a mermaid. But there you go.

ELLEN COCKING: Well.

LIZ MARR: So actually I know that there's quite a few of you are new. You're just starting your studies. And of the questions you might be asking is why on earth should we start thinking about careers now? So, Ellen, what would you say to that?

ELLEN COCKING: OK. Well, there's lots that students can be doing at this early stage. And I know that quite often students will say, yes, but I'm just trying to get to grips with my studies. I'm getting used to OU study. And that's completely understandable.

I suppose my message is try and do a little bit as you go along. Because if you aren't sure what you want to do yet with your studies, and it's really early days so you haven't explored your subject yet, then it's really important to be thinking, doing some research, and being up-to-date with what's out there.

The vast majority of graduate-level opportunities don't specify what subject you need to have done. It's important obviously that you studied a subject to a high level, but it's actually also the skills that you get alongside that that are absolutely crucial to employers at the end of the day.

So if you're studying for career reasons, actually understanding what skills you're getting out of your study, whether it be English or business or IT, whatever, there will be transferable skills that you are developing such as problem solving, communication, decision-making, whole range of different things that are part of the curriculum. As well as all the other things outside. So it's really important to recognise what you're getting from your study. And, as I say, doing some research and looking at what the possibilities are out there.

LIZ MARR: OK. That's really interesting. Because we were talking earlier about the problem that people face now is that we don't even know what skills are going to be needed in the next 5 years in a lot of careers, let alone in the next 20. So actually preparing for something is quite challenging. So if I was a new student and I'm starting on my open degree today, when would you suggest that I get in touch with you in the careers office?

ELLEN COCKING: Well, I think the first thing I would say is that it isn't just about actually talking or emailing a careers adviser. We've got a whole range of different resources that people can make use of. So we have a website that's - I'm using my hands here because it's massive. It covers all different areas of the career-planning process.

And what we also do is run online forums and webinars that students can attend when they're actually kind of being delivered live. But also they can go to afterwards when they're recorded and listen to them again and again, write notes. And we tailor those to particular topic areas, say things like what can I do with a Psychology degree, for example, or what can I do if I want to change career?

And by engaging with some of those resources, you may not have the questions formed that you really know that you want to ask just yet. But by listening to the sorts of things that other people are asking, then that will help you with your own thinking processes. So if you're right at the beginning, don't worry about not necessarily knowing what to ask.

Just get into those areas and use the resources. And then that will start to get you thinking as to, well, OK, well, what do I need to ask about for me? And then you can contact the careers advisers via our website. There's a contact page on there. And ask a question.

It may be that you just have an email conversation with one of our careers advisors, or you might speak to them by phone, or even Skype as well. So, yeah, we've got all manner of different ways of communicating.

LIZ MARR: Excellent. I think we've got some questions coming in actually. Karen, HJ?

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, yes. I've just been saying to everybody that they can send all the questions to HJ. I'm still trying to figure all this out. So you've got a whole bank, haven't you? I need this pin function.

HJ: It's all on me this one. But, no, we've got lots of great questions for you. Andy had a question about whether OU degrees generally have a good standing among potential employers in the job market.

LIZ MARR: I'm going to let Ellen answer that in a minute. But I would just like to jump in with something that our new Vice Chancellor Peter Horrocks said this morning.

He said he had a problem with language. Because you talk about in student terms, full-time students and part-time students, and he said OU students aren't part-time students, they're double-time students. Because they work so much harder than full-time students. And they carry all these other responsibilities and are working, et cetera.

So they're actually - their degree is probably worth at least twice if not three times more than a degree from another institution. But I'm going to Ellen put some kind of more practical response to that.

ELLEN COCKING: OK. Well, no, I would actually agree with you. Because I think time management is a skill that every OU student will hone. By the time you get to the end of your first module probably.

But the question about do employers value our degrees? I think the answer is yes. I think what you will find when you go out into the job market and you're selling your OU degree is that some employers will already be aware of the OU and how it works, others won't be.

And that's where we can help students to best sell that degree and to set out what it is you've developed and gained from doing the degree. And actually to be able to recognise the time management skills that you've got as a result of study. And the high levels of determination and initiative in studying by yourself as well.

So it's a matter of communicating that to employers in a language that they understand and that they value. So it's about pulling out the skills. And that's what we can help students to do.

But what I would also say, Liz, is that we have been focusing quite a bit more over the last year in developing links with employers, particularly with graduate-level employers. And we were testing out, if you like, the appetite of those employers to advertise their vacancies with the OU.

And we've had a fantastic response. So we are advertising loads of vacancies on JobZone, which is our online vacancy service that students can sign up for. So if you go to our website, you will find it there.

And also I think we're involving employers in some of these online webinars, the OU live sessions that we are running. So, for example, IBM, Ernst & Young, PricewaterhouseCoopers, which are some of the big name kind of graduate recruiters have

actually run webinar sessions with us to help students understand the sorts of opportunities they have available, how to apply, and the fact that actually these employers are genuinely really encouraging OU students to apply.

LIZ MARR: Great. We know that quite a few of our students are already in employment. So other ways in which you can help those students to sell themselves for promotion to their own employers, what kind of things would you advise there?

ELLEN COCKING: OK. Well, I think that would be a matter of really sort of sitting down with a student by phone, by Skype, however, and talking through where they feel their strengths are, thinking about where they actually want to get to, and we can then help them to think through the options that they have available to them, either within their current company, within another company potentially, researching the market, and looking at how they can best sell themselves.

And quite a lot of our students do look at a career change as well, not just necessarily progressing within the same career. And similarly, actually working through the process of, well, what's out there? What possibilities might there be? What connections can I make with the combination of skills that I have and my interests and things that might be out there?

And I think what our careers advisors are very good at doing is actually helping students think through, OK, well, what are my constraints? What can I not do? I might be constrained in terms of, well, this is actually where I've got to live. And I can't move because I have lots of responsibilities. And my family's here. And I don't want to move the kids from school. And that kind of thing.

And actually kind of talking through and exploring and thinking about all of those different things as well. So the advisors are, as I say, very experienced in having those sorts of conversations with our students, who have really complex lives. So it's something that we can help with.

LIZ MARR: Great. So, Karen, have you got to grips with this question stuff yet?

KAREN FOLEY: There's so much going on. And I'm just talking to people about high tea. And Davin says, oh, it's really good. And I'm saying it is really good. I'm really enjoying watching it. But I've got no idea what's going on.

So I'm just having people to email us. But we've had loads of questions. Have you got all of these?

HJ: I have, I think. You're preparing so much for your high tea, I think it's distracting you a little bit.

KAREN FOLEY: I don't know how you do this. It's really hard.

HJ: But Julie's got a great question about graduates. So she would like to know, generalising the question, but what services do recent OU graduates have access to and how long is that for?

ELLEN COCKING: OK. Well, we can help our graduates for up to three years after they have finished their studies. So the services that we provide to all students are available to our graduates for three years. So the whole gamut.

And if you happen to forget your OUCU, your OU computer username in order to log in. Because some of the services are password protected and for students only. Then you just need to ring up the computer help desk. And they'll help sort it out for you.

LIZ MARR: Oh, brilliant. So right from the start all the way through to three years after you've graduated.

ELLEN COCKING: Yes. Well, what we recognise is that sometimes students aren't necessarily ready to kind of sort their career out. There is so much to do, isn't there, with your degree, fitting everything in. So we recognise that students aren't necessarily ready and have the time or the capacity to think about where they want to go. And they actually they might just need a little bit more time to work that out. So that's why we provide that service.

LIZ MARR: OK. One of the things that I think is really, really challenging for people is actually creating their CV and keeping it up-to-date. What would you advise about that?

ELLEN COCKING: Yeah. It's a tricky one, actually, because we were having a conversation outside, weren't we, about the fact that we don't all necessarily record as we go along our achievements and things that we need to kind of remember and how we've developed particular skills. But it is a good idea every so often if you can refresh your CV.

We do have content that students can look up and use. And we also have a CV builder tool as well on our website that students can make use of. And then get a careers adviser to check it for you and give you some comments back. So we can give that feedback.

But, yeah, you can go sort of 10 or 15 years and not need to update your CV because you stayed with the same employer. And I completely understand that. But if, as people are going along, even if they've just got a Word document that you can just put things in that you're proud of or that you feel actually I really learned something there.

And not just learned in terms of knowledge learned. But learned in terms of a skill. So, yeah, actually that project I did at work, oh, that really stretched me. It really made me learn about how to manage people, or my decision-making skills are so honed now as a result, or whatever. And just reflecting on that and just writing a couple of lines, it will come back to you later. So it'll make updating later on much easier.

LIZ MARR: Yeah, yeah. Because it isn't just your achievements at work, is it? I mean, it's your achievements in study. And your achievements in how you apply that in everyday life. Has all kinds of things.

I remember meeting a young woman once who was seeking careers advice. And she never had any work experience at all. And after a bit of probing, it emerged that she'd arranged quite a few family weddings. And that's a huge responsibility organising weddings, particularly big family wedding.

And it's being able to translate that, isn't it, into things that employers value. And then linking it into your study experiences.

ELLEN COCKING: One of our repeated conversations that we have with students is, well, yes, that counts. Of course that counts. And so often students will say, well, I just did this. No you didn't just do it actually.

There's some really valuable skills in there. And if you didn't get paid for it, that doesn't matter. It's what you have done and what you have gained from.

LIZ MARR: OK. We've got another question, HJ? Oh, Karen.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm trying to get this cup of tea to Alana. I really can't get further than that. But here you are, Alana.

And it's really nice to hear from - oh, I think I'm getting the hang of this. He said he was waiting until the end of that conversation to jump in. So welcome. I'm glad you have jumped in.

But he has a really, really good question. Do the Career Service have any sort of conflict of interests towards the OU? If there were routes that could take someone into working for the OU, are the egg shells that need to be trodden on?

ELLEN COCKING: Well, I think if somebody was interested in applying for a position at the OU and they are a student, I don't see that as being a problem. Every application would be taken on an equal basis. So it would be a matter of researching the job and applying through the usual channels.

LIZ MARR: Well, I can answer that because I have been an OU student. And I am now employed by the Open University. Admittedly, it was quite a long time ago.

ELLEN COCKING: Well, ta-da then.

LIZ MARR: Ta-da.

KAREN FOLEY: I also just worth mention and clarifying for people who have just joined that what you're talking about is, obviously there are careers that the OU, but also that you help people find careers elsewhere as well. So whilst there are some things like with such assistants and job opportunities here, that's just one of very, very many aspects that people could be looking at.

What other questions are there?

HJ: Well, unfortunate I'm quite distracted because Eleanor's talking about food. So if we could please hold off on the food talk a second.

KAREN FOLEY: Oops, I'm sorry.

ELLEN COCKING: There's careers in food if you like.

[LAUGHING]

KAREN: We are.

HJ: But Andy's got a great question about essentially how you can connect with the Career Service. He asked, does the Career Service offer face-to-face tutorials by Skype or other means?

ELLEN COCKING: Yep. We do offer Skype. So students can connect with us via that medium. And, yeah. Simple answer is yes. What more can I say?

KAREN FOLEY: Good. Keep them brief because we got lots.

HJ: Yeah, yeah. Well, Rachel asked a great question about - I'll generalise in this one a bit for everyone. But she's asking about moving from one career to another. So some people study but what other steps do you think people could take in order to make that move?

ELLEN COCKING: OK. Well, I guess the first step really is to do your research and check out what is needed in the career that you want to move into. And it may well be that the work experience that you already have is sufficient. But it might be that you actually need very relevant work experience. And you might need to go out there and find a way of doing that.

And I realise that for a lot of our students who are already employed, that's actually quite hard to do. But I think it's a matter of using your negotiation skills and your persuading skills to connect with an employer. And maybe just start off by finding an employer in a context that you need to get experience of.

And talking to them and just sort of seeing if you can go and visit. Start with that. And have a conversation. And see if you, through your contacts and your friends, is there anybody that does that kind of role that you could talk to.

And once you've talked to them and kind of developed a bit of a rapport, oh, could I come and shadow you for a day maybe. It will depend on the career as to whether confidentially that's possible. But it's a matter of trying out these little avenues.

And a lot of volunteering organisations will be looking for people as well. And volunteering, quite often people will have the misapprehension that you need loads of time to do it. There will be some constraints depending on what the opportunity is. But quite often one or two hours that people give of their time is all that is asked for.

And you can get a lot out of that time. So there are different ways that you can get that work experience in order to give you - and it gives you an insight into the career that you want to get into as well, whether or not it's needed. And that will always look good on your CV or in a covering letter to say, you know, I contacted and I spent some time and et cetera.

LIZ MARR: That's interesting because actually Open University students are so busy all of the time.

ELLEN COCKING: Yes.

LIZ MARR: That a few hours volunteering on top isn't really going to make much difference to their lives, is it?

ELLEN COCKING: No, not much.

LIZ MARR: Not much, no.

ELLEN COCKING: It may be a one-off. You've got to be creative. You have, haven't you, when you got little time.

LIZ MARR: So I think we should be encouraging people to volunteer as well, HJ.

HJ: Yes. Great way to get experience. We've had so many questions. So if we have missed your questions, I'm sure we'll be happy to answer them. And we'll send them to our Career Services.

KAREN FOLEY: It's not that we aren't paying attention, is it?

HJ: No. It's just there's so much of this stuff going on. But, yeah, use the email, studenthub.open.ac.uk.

ELLEN COCKING: Can I make a plug here?

HJ: Yes.

ELLEN COCKING: Part of the Career's website contains a record of forums and OU live sessions that we have already run. And it's our careers workspace. So if you go on to the Careers website and search for that, you should be able to find it.

And that has got lots of forums, where students have been in and asked all sorts of questions very similar to the things that people are already asking. So our quick queries forum, for example. It is just that, quick queries.

So I would just sort of suggest that people do that. And it may be that one of our advisors, who is on the chat box might be able to put the link in.

LIZ MARR: Brilliant. Let's hope they can. Have you got any more last minute questions?

KAREN: I'll go and do one more.

HJ: OK. One great question from Alan is do the Career Service give advice on interim employment that can enhance or go along with study? So I think it's really about work placements during study. Advice for getting it and where we can get that advice as well.

ELLEN COCKING: Yes. Absolutely. So of course we can help with that. We're in contact with employers. And we are also able to advise students as to how they might be able to go about that themselves.

And what I would say is go to the Careers website, look for the contact page, and get in touch with us and ask the question.

LIZ MARR: OK. Great.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you very much, Liz, for giving me a rest, which I've really enjoyed. It's been absolutely wonderful.

LIZ MARR: Before you finish off, Karen, can I just ask Ellen one last question?

KAREN FOLEY: OK.

LIZ MARR: What would you advise me to do if I wished to pursue my career as a mermaid?

ELLEN COCKING: Well, first of all, I would ask you about your swimming experience.

[LAUGHING]

Am I allowed to make one last plug?

KAREN: Yeah.

ELLEN COCKING: I didn't know whether there was time. I just wanted to kind of say just three things just to kind of recap for people. That however early it is, please start thinking and doing your research and don't make assumptions. Whatever you know, check it out and make sure that it's up-to-date.

And ask questions and do record the great moments. And if you can, if you're on Facebook or Twitter, look for Open Uni Careers. And you'll find us on there. And we put all our resources and events and things through there. So you'll find us.

LIZ MARR: Start now, ask questions, record everything.

ELLEN COCKING: Yeah.

LIZ MARR: Great.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you very much for that. And thank you Jane and Siobhan in the chat, who've been doing a sterling job answering everyone's questions. And as such if there is anything we've missed, then do email us. And we will get the answers to you because there's been lots going on.

Lots of links as well. And people are saying they've got too many tabs open with all of these links going on. Don't worry, we'll chuck them all on the resources page of the website. And then you can have a look at them later.

Right. Well, we have now got a little video break. And we're going to look at a fitting study into your life from the library. And then we have a session with Suzanne all about time management. So I'm really looking forward to that. We'll see you in a few minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]