

**KAREN:** Hi and welcome back to Student Connections. Well, this is a really popular session that I know loads of you have been looking forward to. We're going to be talking about the postgraduate options. And this is something that comes up all the time. What's going on? What do we do?

Well, now, we have some news. And I'm going to be joined by three people to tell you all about that. We've also had some mail coming in so do keep that coming. But we've got so much to cram into this next session that I'm going to try and fill you in as much as possible on all the postgraduate options. Questions in the chat, please let us have those. So if you've got any questions about anything specific, we'll try and cover it all.

But welcome to the studio. I'm here with Dan, Johanna, and Kesi. Introduce yourselves and tell us about your role in the postgraduate programme.

**DAN MCCULLOCH:** So I'm Dan McCulloch. I'm part of the team that's involved in the crime and justice master's and I'm chairing the module that's going to be called "Critical Perspectives on Crime and Justice."

**KAREN:** Brilliant. Excellent.

**JOHANNA MOTSKAU:** I'm Johanna Motskau. I'm responsible for the new qualification in forensic psychological studies, while also chairing production for one of the modules in that qualification.

**KAREN:** Lovely. Thank you.

**KESI MAHENDRAN:** And I'm Kesi Mahendran and I'm the Qualification Director of F-74-- I'll give you that code-- and that's the MSc in psychology. And I'm also going to be the chair of "Dynamics in Psychology," which is one of the modules in the programme.

**KAREN:** Wonderful. Well, welcome. The thing I love most about what you guys are doing is that you're taking students as cohorts as sort of groups of learners, through things. And one of the things about postgraduate study is that it's quite different from undergraduate, isn't it, in that you're having to do a lot more primary research? You're having to work things through in a different sort of way.

But you're developing things now with a very considered plan, much like we were talking about yesterday with the psychology, where you're thinking about what we're teaching and how

we're teaching it. Can you say a little bit about this community of learners and what people might expect if they were looking at postgraduate study in these sorts of fields with the OU and what your vision is for those?

**DAN**  
**MCCULLOCH:** So I think that what's really good about this community of learners is at times, there will be points where students are split into their subject areas. But also, there will be times where they're working together, say, on the qualification side, or that they might be interacting in modules so that they can draw on these different specialisms. And then, you can draw on the experience that different people can bring and the knowledge that goes with that. And I think that's something very unique about studying a set of master's qualifications.

**KAREN:** Absolutely, because it's so important in an academic community to know who to talk to and when and to be able to have that support and feed off things that other people are doing and be inspired, isn't it? And I guess for a lot of people with distance education, it can feel quite a lonely process. So that's a really important thing.

**JOHANNA**  
**MOTSKAU:** But also to have that assurance that you're studying with the same group of people all across and you can draw back on them. We'll have a qualification site that wraps around all the qualifications to make sure you can stay in touch with those people. Also, we're wanting to have a coherent group of tutors who will look after students all through the qualification.

**KAREN:** Can you tell people how that will work?

**KESI**  
**MAHENDRAN:** Yeah. It's like having a coach, really. It's like having a personal tutor who's going to work with you right at the beginning of your master's so you can set objectives. Why are you studying this? Why have you gone from undergraduate to postgraduate and taken that leap? They're going to work with your initial objectives and how you respond to feedback during your master's and stay with you throughout right to the end, to your dissertation.

**KAREN:** Excellent. Well, I'd like to talk specifically then about some of these areas. And Johanna, I'd like to ask you first about the MSc Forensic Psychological studies. Could you just explain what that's going to look like, when students might be able to consider it, et cetera?

**JOHANNA**  
**MOTSKAU:** It starts with all the other qualifications in 2016. And I think the most interesting is usually what the topic areas are. So we look at the legal and the criminal side of how psychology can help the law and law enforcement understand how people operate, how people remember. So on the one hand, we have really important areas around memory, suggestibility-- what do

witnesses remember? Is it possible to remember something that never happened and how does that come about? Is it possible to suddenly remember something that did happen but that you hadn't been aware of for years?

It's quite important in cases of historical abuse, for example, but then also issues around legal decision making. So what influences judges's decisions for sentencing or juries's decisions? The way people behave, gender, race-- what issues are there but also how experts could inform the court or maybe misinform a court inadvertently. How do people understand what neuropsychologists have to say about the brain? Is that helpful?

But then, also the crime side of things where we look at young offenders as mental illness and crime, sort of interpersonal crime and assault, those kinds of things, but also interviewing of suspects and deception. That's what students are often really interested in and that's what concerns the police, obviously, how to interview people in a way that they deliver relevant information but also how not to lead someone to confess to a crime they haven't committed.

So they're really intriguing issues there that psychology can help with, but also then always sort of keeping an eye on the fact that psychological research isn't applied practise and that some of the findings might be misunderstood or used in a strange way. So very important for the degree is to learn to read research, to acquire research, literacy, and to turn into the person that could help practitioners to understand or policymakers to understand how research works.

So this is a bit of becoming the Ben Goldacre of forensic psychology, if you want, just to put a little frame around it.

[LAUGHTER]

**KAREN:** People want to know when it starts and how long. What's the sort of package? So this all sounds really, really interesting, but how long and when?

**KESI**  
**MAHENDRAN:** So it starts in autumn 2016 would be the first foundation. And that, as Jo says, is going to run across all three qualifications. And that's going to teach you how to appraise science, social science, and how to ask the question. It'll tell you about how certain questions get asked, other questions don't get asked, and it'll just get you skilled up in the foundations of inquiry.

And then in '17, about February 2017, then this specialist modules start across the three qualifications. It will take you two years to do this master's, but it's pretty intense. I'll say that

straightaway. You've got to be able to dedicate around 20 hours a week to it and it's continuous, which is a little bit different to the undergraduate programme. You can stop if you need to. If life gets in the way, you can stop and then you pick up the year after, but two years all being good.

**KAREN:** So how might then students sort of experience this? Could you say a little bit about that?

**DAN MCCULLOCH:** Yeah. So I think, as has been said, the kind of continuous nature is something that is really useful because it's constant development. But there's also quite a lot of support there. So for students, they'll have the tutors. They'll have the students there to talk with, as well as the module materials. But also, we're hoping to develop within the qualifications site a range of resources that can help students in developing these skills more informally, as well as in their learning through the module.

**KAREN:** Brilliant. I'd like to just take a break before we look at these other two areas, just to see what's happening on the social media desk, because I'm aware there's a lot of chat and questions. HJ and Rachel?

**HJ:** There's some really good general chat about people interested in lots of different areas for master's and postgraduate. So yeah, there's a lot of interesting topics, as well, people are looking into.

**RACHEL:** We also have some questions, as well, particularly about the psychology MSc. Viewers at home are interested to know whether it's going to include advanced research methods to help towards a PhD.

**KAREN:** Kesi?

**KESI MAHENDRAN:** I wouldn't say this one will, actually. It will have a dissertation at the end, which will skill you in reviewing and assessing, but it's quite different than last master's, which had that a little bit more. So it could skill you up to a PhD, but it won't give you advanced research methods.

**KAREN:** Maybe now's a good time to sort of talk us through then, because you're overseeing MSc psychology, which obviously, whilst the forensic psychological studies have some aspects of psychology, it is predominantly more forensic, whereas this is more of a psychology. So can you tell us briefly about what that will involve?

**KESI** Well, this is a quite innovative MSc in psychology, because it's a lot to do with being savvy

**MAHENDRAN:** about psychology. So what it trains you in is understanding how psychology works. So you might find that quite often, what happens with psychologists is that they say, did you know that people generally are more likely to do x and y? And then, well, you get that on the radio nearly every morning, don't you?

And what we're going to train our students in is how to deconstruct that, really, those claims that psychology makes. So it's going to be about how psychology is made and also, it's going to cover distinct areas in psychology. So we'll cover cognitive psychology, we're going to cover social psychology, forensic psychology is there, and counselling and psychotherapy, which is an increasing part of psychology now.

**KAREN:** You'd mentioned before that it was slightly different to the research methods modules that we used-- well, the qualifications that we used to have before had. So who might be interested in doing this then if it's not the sort of PhD, academic route. Who might be interested in doing the MSc psychology?

**KESI**  
**MAHENDRAN:** I think if you're working and you're working in a sort of environment where psychology is coming into your organisation all the time, you're going to be one of the people in that organisation that's an expert in that psychology and how to appraise it.

And if you're looking to make a move in your job, this might be the ideal master's for you, really, not least because what we are going to train you in is how to commission new research and ask the right question and get the absolute latest in methods. They're coming back to methods. What we'll be looking at is online methods, researching at a distance, and that sort of thing.

The other thing that we'll do, which is going to be across all three master's, is this notion of expertise. So you are going to be the person in your organisation or in your home setting or in your voluntary work who can brief or can contribute to a consultation about an area that you care about that has a psychological component. So it's that kind of skill. It's quite a savvy master's, actually.

**KAREN:** Interesting. Interesting. And Dan, yours is an entirely different area. Yours is crime and justice. So can you tell us about that? What's that going to be?

**DAN**  
**MCCULLOCH:** Yeah. So initially, this kind of goes through the foundation module, as well, with this kind of skilling students on being able to read and interpret research.

And then, it moves into a module that looks more at theories of crime, at some of the ideas that critical criminology can bring and give us about the study of crime, but also some of this appraisal of research, of evidence, of the way that evidence is used in the relationship between theory, evidence, and practise and policy and being able to understand that, to appraise it, to perhaps be involved in thinking about the way that practise works in organisations.

And so the idea with this is that students then might be able to take it into their own working lives to perhaps use those skills to look at the way that working relationships happen and to think about those professional contexts and whether things are working as they should or whether they should be working perhaps in a different way, to be able to take that into those kinds of settings.

**KAREN:** Excellent. I know the chat rooms are light with questions and we'll come to some of those in a minute. But you'd mentioned and Kesi, you'd mentioned it, as well. Some of these areas are quite unique in times of the actual qualifications. They're different to things that are produced maybe at other institutions. In particular, Dan, this strikes me as something that is very different. Can you say a little bit more about that?

**DAN**  
**MCCULLOCH:** Yeah and I think this is different. What's very special about this is that it focuses on those processes, some of those critical debates, the things, as Vickie mentioned before, the power debate that kind of will be there, in terms of thinking about the way that power works and the role that it has and the way that different groups might experience that power in different ways.

So thinking about gender, ethnicity, class, those kinds of topics, but also thinking about-- beyond criminology as such-- thinking about ideas of social harm and not just thinking locally about that but also in a global context. On a global stage, how do we think about these things? Why do they matter beyond kind of the focus on crime as such?

**KAREN:** And I guess as a subject area, because as Vickie was saying before, so much of the terrain is shifting now and this whole area is probably going to be so fluid in terms of how we conceptualise this-- so an interesting-- a very relevant area to study as one I suppose that would be quite difficult to manage. And that's why that community, I guess, will be so important to people as things change.

**DAN** Exactly, yeah. And I think it is a constantly evolving area and that community can bring some

**MCCULLOCH:** really, really strong insights. And drawing on those different areas of knowledge, the knowledge that people can bring I think will really help to develop those ideas. And kind of the development along the way that students can take will be, I think, informed a lot by that student community.

**KAREN:** Because those are both very interesting ideas and I guess very robust methods-- that's the whole thing that's coming through here. We have to have these methods in place to be able to research all of these interesting questions. And so these qualifications give you that framework in a very structured and measured way to take you from this to that. Let's go to the social media desk. Rachel and HJ?

[SIGHS]

Where do you start?

[LAUGHTER]

**RACHEL:** There's a lot of interest in the Chat Box about up and coming postgraduate modules at the OU so that is absolutely fantastic. We're trying to theme some of the questions. So we're on a funding theme at the moment. Students are interested to know whether similar to as they call "brick" unis, will the alum be given discounts for people who studied their undergrad and then postgrad? And you've also got another one, as well.

**HJ:** Yeah, on that point, it was just a general point about funding, because of course, when you do an undergraduate, there are student loans and things like that available. There are some changes happening in England, as well, with postgraduate funding. And so people just want perhaps a short expert guide to general--

**RACHEL:** To discounts and funding.

**HJ:** Discounts and funding. There we go, got my words out.

**KAREN:** Who'd like to take some of this?

**KESI**  
**MAHENDRAN:** That's a tough one actually as qualification directors because obviously, we don't have a hand in that. But I'm rather hoping that it's going to be the same as the undergraduate programme, in that it's going to be possible to secure a low-interest loan on it, which is tied to the idea that your earnings have to be to a certain level and then you pay back on that arrangement. We

haven't been given anything on this yet, actually.

**JOHANNA MOTSKAU:** No. But I think there are spaces to watch out where that kind of information will go up pretty soon. And I think the alumni idea is a strong one so I can see that working.

**KAREN:** Excellent. I wanted to talk a little bit, as well, about assessment and how people actually move through this process. What happens? Undergraduates are very used to their TMAs and getting this feedback that we've mentioned. How is that going to work in terms of the postgraduate qualifications.

**KESI MAHENDRAN:** Well, I think that picks up on what Dan was saying, which is that what we're going to do is it's going to be a little bit different. Again, this is another innovation. It is not going to be essays and then you do an exam. There's a real absence of exams in the master's. Is We've got end-of-module assessments.

And what we're going to do is we're going to combine people's own expertise in their settings, whether that's work or elsewhere, with the topics. So some of the topics in the MSc in psychology are leadership, expertise, public opinion. And these kinds of topics are going to be there. So there will be TMAs but very quite light, isn't it? It was light on TMAs. And then, ICMA's, we're going to do blogging for people who are interested in blogging. So it will be a great opportunity.

What we're going to do is called "authentic assessment." It's a new way of doing assessment, but it's the sort of assessments where your own expertise, opinions, and so on can be used and you get a voice. You start to develop an expert voice. And we'll have a moment across the three qualifications, because we're holding our students together as a cohort, where you'll start to work out whether you've got an expert voice or not and how you're getting there.

**KAREN:** Could I just mention for all our new students out there? The TMAs are Tutor-Marked Assignments and ICMA's are-- what's the technical term?

**DAN MCCULLOCH:** Instant Computer-Marked Assessments.

**KAREN:** Instant Computer-Marked Assessments. So that's like a little quiz online or something that your tutor doesn't feedback laboriously. But the TMAs are an integral part, as you will soon learn throughout your OU journey, of the whole distance tuition support that you receive. So you'll often complete an assignment of some sort, be it essay writing, short questions, et



cetera, and then, you get extensive feedback, which is the most important part, really, of your learning. If you take all of that feedback on board, it should provide a really clear way to improve next time.

And the thing that I think is so reassuring about them, especially I guess for postgraduate studies, if you've got these little benchmarks that you're regularly going through, you can then track your progress, can't you? And it sort of holds you in that space so that you're not getting to the end with 10,000 words to write and nothing to write about. It takes you through that.

So could you say a little bit about that sort of journey? You mentioned blogging and sort of light-touch TMA-type things, but how will that sort of look to people? Twenty hours a week, what are people going to be doing? Are they going to have five or six throughout the year?

**DAN MCCULLOCH:** So if we take, for example, one of the modules, "Critical Perspectives on Crime and Justice, that's got two TMAs and then and EMA, End--

**KAREN:** End-of-Module Assessment.

[LAUGHTER]

**DAN MCCULLOCH:** But the idea is that they build on each other. So the first one kind of looks at using theory to appraise a real-world topic. And I think real-world issues is another focus of these assessments to make them relevant to people that are studying. And then, the second one looks at how might we put together a proposal for working with a group.

And then, the third looks at a policy document and says, well, how do we look at this policy document critically? And it's that critical appraisal and that critical voice, I think. We're aiming to development that expert voice is really important. And a lot of the topics, the content, and the skills within the module, because there's also a focus on skills within assessment-- not just delivering content, but building up these skills-- that really works to develop that expert voice throughout the whole of the qualification.

**KESI MAHENDRAN:** I think because you've got forensic there, as well, and counselling and psychotherapy, which will be in the MSc in psychology, you also get practitioner skills, this kind of reflexivity in how you're working with other people, which, again, is going to be really ideal for people who are in organisations where social science and psychology is coming into the organisation.

**JOHANNA** Also to say, it's a lot of online study. So you'll find yourself researching topics and reading text

**MOTSKAU:** a lot. Obviously, that's part of the bulk of study, anyway. But you'll find yourself able to mould to your own interests quite a lot because you're given a starter and a topic area to learn. But also, fill that with the content you're interested in and find literature online.

And also then, it's sort of interlaced with activities that allow you then to share that content with others, put it up for discussion, create your own blog maybe that other students could assess. So it's kind of a varied type of activity that allows you to put your own interests first and also allows you to reflect on and relate to current topics, whatever's happening in Parliament, in issues with court, issues with crime, issues with psychology being an expertise mentioned that could immediately philtre into the module. And that makes it quite rich, I think.

**KESI**  
**MAHENDRAN:** And one thing I would say, Karen, I think one of the things that's going to be key to the learning journey for MSc students is the qualification website, not least because we're completely redesigning it. It's not the same as the undergraduate programme one. And what we're going to do is it's not going to be quite like having your own Twitter space, but it is going to have your own profiling space. So you'll be able to profile yourself, you'll be able to put up your own interests, and you'll be able to tag and connect to other students who have the same interest.

**KAREN:** How nice.

**KESI**  
**MAHENDRAN:** So don't you see what I mean? So you're building a community all the time. It doesn't necessarily need to be in your own master's, as well. It could be in the crime and justice master's, because you both care about young people or something like that.

And then, you have performance metrics. Not quite like the sort of iPhone sports performance metrics, but you'll get-- all your metrics will be there, then a future one, which will be a networking space. So our qualification website's going to be really key. It's going to be like walking into a space. There's going to be rooms to look at your performance, to think about your future, to talk to ex-students, and so on. So that'll help.

**KAREN:** So you've talked about the virtual learning environments, I guess, in terms of the qualifications aspect and how innovative that is in terms of these networks and communities that will be on offer. Within those modules then, how's that going to work? Are there going to be different communities? What's the virtual learning environment like? People will be on the library a lot, I imagine, doing all of their research. But are there any other ways that you're sort of designing

this into the curriculum?

- DAN** Yeah. So at points within some of the modules, there will be activities where people are
- MCCULLOCH:** working in small groups or together to kind of reflect on these topics. But also, there's a lot of points at which, for example, you might look at case studies or things like that or take a critical approach to theories or pieces of evidence. And in that, hopefully, what we've be looking for is that students might work together to critically appraise these or to think about these cases and to bring these different perspectives to really build up this knowledge base.
- JOHANNA** And we'll use the sites also to present activities that are quite rich. For example, we'll have a
- MOTSKAU:** mock jury activity where you see a fake court case that's made up. And then, you meet in your forum and discuss what you've heard in evidence and make a decision and then later on, reflect on what the discussion was like, what things were focused on. So that's kind of quite involved and engaged in that way and quite real-life, in a sense.
- KAREN:** Excellent. We've had questions about how much time this will take to study because of course, people are dropping in and out all the time. And you were saying before, it's around 20 hours a week.
- JOHANNA** Yeah.
- MOTSKAU:**
- KAREN:** So how might that look then for people, because there's so much here and I can imagine getting very sidetracked in some of these forums and some of these online libraries. How might people structure that? Can they do it when they're working or how can people sort of fit this in and how might that look for them, in terms of their experience?
- KESI** It's a big commitment, but it is a supported commitment. You will have your personal tutor and
- MAHENDRAN:** I think they will give you a lot of guidance about how not to get distracted. But that is-- being a postgraduate student is learning the art of not getting distracted, really, and staying focused on the topic to hand.
- KAREN:** What happens if they might? Do they have to study every week for 20 hours a week or what happens then? Are there any breaks?
- KESI** We try to keep it pretty balanced, in that we don't want to get these kind of hot spots where
- MAHENDRAN:** you're really pushing up your hours because the TMA's around the corner. So we're trying to keep it pretty balanced. And that would be my advice is to allocate that kind of time. In terms of

the gap between modules, obviously, you've got Christmases and Easters and things like that will work between modules. But again, it doesn't really add up to more than a couple of weeks between modules and then you're on to your next module.

**JOHANNA**

So in a nice way, we sort of use that to make sure the modules also align nicely. So what

**MOTSKAU:**

you've done in the last module will help you in the next. And as Dan said about the assessments, one assessment will be the preparation for the next one. So you're not necessarily starting afresh every time, but you're building.

And I thought a nice way of saying the distraction and the getting sidetracked is actually part of your study in this sense, because researching online means you end up in a strange place often. But that could be where you find something really interesting. So we're allowing time for that to happen, because it can be very productive. And you find discussions you wouldn't have otherwise been aware of if you'd stuck in the library reading journal articles.

**KAREN:**

Absolutely.

**JOHANNA**

So we appreciate that that can happen, but you get a lot of scaffolding. And we'll make the

**MOTSKAU:**

most of your getting sidetracked, hopefully.

**KAREN:**

Oh, good. Well, there's been so much discussion. I'd like to end the session by just coming to you, Dan, and asking a bit about the role of the tutor. Kesi had mentioned that they were very much like a coach throughout this process. And we've talked about assessment and how much time it would take. Can you just finally say something about that relationship that people may have with someone who's guiding them through this journey?

**DAN**

Yeah hopefully. What we're hoping for is that the tutor will kind of act as a guide but also that the student will play a role in that relationship and talking to the tutor, telling them what they're hoping to get from the master's, from their study.

**MCCULLOCH:**

And so it's kind of a two-way relationship that kind of is perhaps a check-in at certain points-- see how you're doing, see how you're progressing, but also so that the student can have this dialogue with the tutor throughout their study and then progress together, rather than the student feeling perhaps like they might in other instances, perhaps in other senses, other study formats where they might feel like they're alone in this journey or a little bit isolated. Hopefully, the support mechanism will be there.

**KAREN:**

Excellent. Well, Kesi, Johanna, and Dan, thank you so much for coming in. That's been really, really useful for our audience at home. And to keep in touch with us, you can find out more on the Resources page of the website-- very, very exciting developments on it. People will be looking forward to seeing those. Right. What we're going to do now is we're going to break our live stream. So if we pop off air, just come back on in the way that you entered before.

And if you are watching only, choose the Live and Interactive button so that you can see a lot of the chat that's happening. And you can do that by visiting the website, [connections@open.ac.uk](mailto:connections@open.ac.uk).-- sorry, that's our email address. You can visit on our website, [connections.kmi.open.ac.uk](http://connections.kmi.open.ac.uk).

We're going to have a little break now and we're going to watch a video during that time after we break in the live stream. And this is all about collaborative learning-- from this conversation, such an interesting and integral part of OU experience. So let's have a look at how that works and we'll see you back for the next discussion, which I know you're very excited about, in about 10 minutes. I'll see you then.