

PodMag June 2015

Karen Foley

Hi and welcome to the PodMag, our monthly news podcast from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University. I'm Karen Foley, and in this June edition I'm interviewing Belinda Tynan, Rose Capdevilla and Nicola Yeates.

But first here's the news from the faculty in June!

Top news, we have a new Vice Chancellor, Peter Horrocks (@PeterHorrocks1). And he's making quite an impact at the University and at our recent Charter Day, the Open University's birthday celebrations, he spoke about how important part-time education is, and also about the importance of putting students first as the University develops. You can find out more on the Open University's Facebook page and on Twitter. And at Charter Day, we also celebrated the University's Teaching Awards, and we accepted the award for Innovation for the Student Connections project, of which this PodMag is a part. They were presented by our Pro Vice Chancellor Teaching and Learning, Belinda Tynan, and I'd like to say on behalf of the team that it is a great honour to receive these awards and have our work recognised!

And on another thank you note, we'd like to thank all the students who've responded to the National Student Survey – we really do appreciate the time it takes and these results are very important to the University. We're delighted with the 92% satisfaction rating, and once again Social Sciences have been placed amongst the highest subject areas for student satisfaction. The responses from the survey though, also give us an opportunity to reflect on students views, and as a result we are currently thinking about how we can improve the quality of your learning experience, and also how we can make your qualifications more relevant in terms of employment.

And here are some events on June that may be of interest in the Regions and Nations as well as, of course, at the University in Milton Keynes. Do remember that many of these events are open to the public!

So, first, on the 3rd June at the OU MK there is an event in the afternoon called 'Process approaches between psychology and the social sciences.'

On the 4 June there is an event in Edinburgh at the OU in Scotland – it's a CCIG and OU Scotland knowledge exchange on a UK referendum on Europe

On the 10 June in the afternoon at the OU Library in Milton Keynes, Michael Pryke and John Allen have a seminar. They'll focus on some of the policy research that they have done which has been featured recently on the channel 4 documentary, 'Selling off Britain'. It's an Open space event, so if you'd like to come along email [openspace@open.ac.uk](mailto:openspace@open.ac.uk).

And then on the 26 June there is an all-day event at the Open University in London called 'Money, Debt and Finance: Towards a Political Economy of Financial Innovation'. It's the first workshop from the OU's Political Economy group. It's open to all and is funded by the IKD, so if you want to attend, please email [Socsci-IKD-Events@open.ac.uk](mailto:Socsci-IKD-Events@open.ac.uk) because spaces are limited.

Right, well first, I'm off to the Charles Pinfold Building to see our Pro Vice Chancellor for learning and teaching, Professor Belinda Tynan.

So, hi Belinda, how's it going? Really busy time of year! How are you?

Belinda Tynan

Oh look, it's an incredibly busy time of year. But I'm good! Really great! And as we head down towards the summer, although I'm really looking forward to the summer, I'm happy being busy as well.

Karen

Yeah, so last time I saw you was Charter Day and my goodness, there was a lot going on then! So tell us, how was that for you?

Belinda

Charter Day is such fun isn't it? Remember last year we sort of put in the Teaching Awards and we had videos by all the different awardees? We did the same thing again this year. We had a whole bunch of teams and people and, of course, Social Sciences won one of those.

Karen

Yeah, I know!

Belinda

You know, for the 'Connections' work that you've been doing with students. So I'm very pleased to have been able to present that to you and the team.

But, no, it's really special to be able to celebrate, you know, what people are doing in their teaching. And we've got some really talented teachers out there. I mean, some of the innovation we saw on that day, that's only a tip of the iceberg of what's actually happening out in the University.

Karen

Yeah, and it was the first time, of course, we had our new Vice-Chancellor talk. So how's it going with him then?

Belinda

He's amazing! He's so kind of, um... it's not that he's – not 'frantic' per se – but he's, kind of, really inquisitive. You know? And so he's asking lots of questions and talking to us all and he's meeting all the faculties and he just seems to be everywhere at once. Which I think is absolutely fantastic. He's really picking up on what all the issues are for the University and where the opportunities are. And he's been, sort of, playing with three ideas at the moment, that sit around the themes of being more simple – because, you know, we all have a moan about the bureaucracy so, how can we make things more simple? He's really keen on getting our innovation into practice. So we could use the Teaching Awards as a great example. If you think about, you know, all that innovation that was on the stage there, how do we then cascade that? How do we, sort of, share those learnings with others and, you know, push it out into the University? And then, of course, value. He's really interested in making sure that what we do offer for our students is value for money. But also value in other ways as well, just, sort of, not necessarily in that financial way. And the two big phrases that you'll probably start hearing a lot, certainly 'Part-time Matters' (#parttimematters) and 'Students First'.

Karen

How do you think this is going to shift your remit then for the future?

Belinda

What is really exciting about it is, all the stuff we've been doing in 'Learning and Teaching, Vision and Plan' is very much aligned with the sorts of things that Peter's been saying. So I think for us it's going to be quite easy because we're already starting to map with faculties what they're doing, we're trying to draw out the innovation. Staff have been asking us for a long time about, you know, where can they experiment and how can they get out from underneath the bureaucracy? So I think it's going to sit really well and I'm really looking forward to the future. So I think he's going to start laying out those plans over the next three to five months. It's going to be a really exciting time period. But from everything I've seen thus far, everyone's responding so well to it. And, you know, especially after we had such a strong leader prior, you know, with Martin. Peter's just come in, he's very different, he's got a different approach, he loves talking with people and people are really responding well to that and I think he's really going to get underneath the skin of the University quickly. At Charter Day he said that he would really love the University. And I think he will. He's going to be a great leader.

Karen

Oh, thank you very much Belinda Tynan, that's been brilliant.

Belinda

That's my pleasure, speak to you soon.

Karen

OK. Bye.

Ah that's great to have some news from the University.

And now back to Social Sciences and I'm going to call Rose Capdevila and find out about this new CHIP (**Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology**) tool she's been working on as part of the Psychology programme.

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/chip>

Hi Rose! You've been involved with the new CHIP tool that's replaced EPOCH. It's a resource that helps Psychology students visualize the interconnections between psychologists through time, and it's been updated now to make the most of new technology as well as adding layers of new connections. Can you tell us what you find most exciting about the new tool?

Rose Capdevila

Some of the people listening to this might not be familiar with EPOCH but it was a great tool that looked at the history of psychology and the relationships between Psychologists and their approaches. Unfortunately the software for it became outdated but it was such a rich resource that we wanted to find some way to make the information accessible to students. So we took the data from EPOCH and completely revisualised it.

The new resource, which is called 'Investigating Psychology', appears as a star field. Every star, or node, is colour coded to represent a person, a context, a perspective or a method.

Through the links between the nodes the tool lets you explore the development of psychological thinking. Not only across time, but also within the context of social, conceptual and historical changes.

It also allows you to follow the development and application of different perspectives and methods and, through chains of influence, between researchers.

Lastly it has this narratives function which represents specific paths you can take through the information. A bit like Google Maps takes you from one point to another.

It's a completely open resource, thanks to 'Open Learn', and so absolutely anyone can use it. It was recently launched at the Annual BPS Conference and it's now ready to use as a tool for anyone teaching or learning CHIP.

Another important feature is that it can be continually updated. Just see the 'email us' link at the bottom if you have suggestions for any new material.

Karen

It's a fantastic resource and, of course, when we're structuring modules we're often using themes or questions to underpin the chapters In Psychology it's important to understand

how ideas and practices have evolved and how they are culturally situated. So Rose, how do you think Students will use this tool to consolidate some of these aspects?

Rose

The 'Investigating Psychology' resource has been integrated into the teaching of psychology.

As Production Chair for DE200, the Level 2 core module on the Psychology Qualification, I can speak best about that. We have a number of activities in which students will have the opportunity to become familiar with the resource by following-up questions around the conceptual and historical issues in psychology.

For instance, around the influences on and from psychology from other disciplines in other areas. Or how different contexts the involvement of women.

Towards the end of the module we encourage students to go to the resource to investigate the different methods and themes they could be using to complete their dissertations in DE300. At the same time, it's an open resource so I would encourage students just to go there and investigate and follow-up the links and whatever they find interesting and are curious about.

Karen

You've mentioned your involvement with Level 2 and 3 Psychology modules that are being written at the moment. But aside from this new tool, can you tell us what psychology students can look forward to in terms of the program you're working on?

Rose

Although we have accompanying three-volume texts, DE200 has been designed as a VLE-driven module so there are lots of great on-line resources. Audio, visual and interactive exercises. The module is organised around two closely intertwined themes; 'Asking Questions' and 'Working Across Boundries'. Each week the module asks an everyday question that can be answered by looking to psychological theories and research such as, can we do two things at once? Why do we like one another? Why do we help one another? What is the point of childhood?

The module highlights that, in asking specific questions, psychologists often have to rely on different sub-disciplines. For instance, students will learn how, in order to help patients who have suffered a stroke, psychologists will draw on biological, cognitive, developmental and social psychological approaches. Students will also be learning how to conduct research. They will be able to participate in original research, replicate classic studies, see research in action, hear directly from active researchers and reflect on the research process.

We're all really excited about the module and looking forward to its first presentation in the autumn.

Karen

Thanks very much for that Rose. It sounds really exciting and I'm sure our psychology students will find it very useful!

And time for one last interview and this time I'm calling Nicola Yeates. I want to ask her about this research project she's been doing that's getting so much attention.

<http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/prari/>

So, hi Nicola, now you're the Head of Department Social Policy & Criminology, and also you're involved in an exciting ERSC research project that I wanted to talk to you about today. So can you tell us a little bit about your role in this project, and where you are with it?

Nicola Yeates

Yes, of course. It's a two year project, we're looking at poverty reduction and regional integration within South America and Southern Africa. So my role is as a PI, that's why I'm basically the Project Director. So I'm leading the project in collaboration with four other research institutes and universities based in Europe, in South America and in Southern Africa and the Open University is the lead institution.

We're about half way through the project at this stage so we're currently at a very exciting stage of collating our data, our research findings and looking to see what some of the emerging trends and findings and conclusions are. We're also setting-up a series of workshops – policy workshops – for later in the year and they're spread across the principal research sites in Ecuador, Botswana, Argentina and South Africa. So there we'll be talking to our various communities of stake-holders.

Karen

Your real concern though is Social Policy, and so here it's about the effects in terms of health policy. Can you tell us a little about some of the things you are looking at specifically?

Nicola

Yeah, so some of the things we're looking at in particular are looking at the potential benefits of regional integration, in so far as they relate to health policy, so we know, for example, that regional integration can, for example, amplify the voices of smaller and developing countries in global policy-making. We know that they can galvanise support for and foster ownership of regionally defined rules and standards. And that can frame the particular ways and set standards for national policy makers. We know that they can pool resources and risks to help scale-up social protection and health and thereby reach a much greater proportion of the population. And we know that they can create platforms and fora for member states to discuss key priorities – what their key priorities are for regional action and to work out context-specific responses.

So we're interested in the benefits of regional integration, we're also actually interested in what member states, through the regional fora, are actually doing practice. And that's the real research focus of this particular project.

Karen

You're also interested in whether there is a 'pro-poor' policy in place in these regional organisations that you're looking at. Can you tell us why that is important?

Nicola

That's right, well it matters, I think, because, quite simply, there are so many people living in conditions of extreme poverty globally. There are still 1.2 billion people living in poverty who do require much better support by all development partners at local, national and international levels. And it also matters, I think, because we just can't take it for granted



that public policies, social policies, and health policies actually do reduce poverty or that they address people who are living in specific conditions of poverty so we can't take it for granted that public policies will reach people living in poverty at all. So we're looking at this, not only in terms of what regional policy makers are actually saying about what it is that they're going to be doing, we're also looking at their experiences of regional health policy-making as practice. So, are they actually doing, in practice, what they say they will do, in principle?

And all of this matters within a much broader global context because of the current dialogues and discussions going on around the next phase of the Millennium Development Goals.

So, in September of this year, 2015, all governments will be meeting to approve a set of commitments for the next 15 or so years of global development policy and practice and those are called the 'Global Development Goals' and that's a really key and really significant moment within global policy-making that we as a project can make contributions to. Because one of the areas that has been neglected has been the ways in which regional organisations as, kind of, intermediate actors, between national governments and global organisations can actually have a much more effective set of contributions to make in terms of delivering 'pro-poor', 'pro-social equity' policies regarding access to health and medicine.

Karen

Thanks Nicola Yeates... really interesting and valuable research and I'm looking forward to seeing how it develops.

Nicola

OK, All right, thanks very much for that Karen. Bye.

Karen

And that's all we have time for here today, so let me just remind you how to keep in touch.

Close:

Your qualification websites will give you the information about Student Connections, and you can also keep in touch on twitter - @OUSocSci. There's also our faculty Facebook page with the Friday thinker each week and if you want to email us we are [podmag@open.ac.uk](mailto:podmag@open.ac.uk)

That's all from me, Karen Foley - bye for now, and thanks for listening.