

## PodMag March 2017

### **Karen Foley:**

Hi, I'm Karen Foley and welcome to the March PodMag, the audio news magazine from the Faculty of Arts & Social Science at the Open University. In this edition we take a look at the Open University in Scotland and I interviewed Khadija Patel about an exciting partnership with the OU, Rolls-Royce and Unite the Union. Then Pete Cannell talked to me about open educational resources and how these are being used to transition learners in to higher education.

Finally, Gill Ryan talks about how these resources are being used to target hard to reach students to widen participation.

But first the news.

The first programme of the Lords was aired at the end of February. Now this is a three-part TV series for BBC 2 and it's a TV first because Meet the Lords takes viewers behind the scenes at the House of Lords with exclusive access and unique insights in to what's been a really turbulent year for the peers as they battled it out with the government over dramatic changes to the political landscape.

If you aren't able to watch live it's available on iPlayer and there is a lot of material including a short course on OpenLearn if you want to know more.

Since this edition focuses on the OU in Scotland we've included some news from the nation. Now graduations are always a really special time of year and a chance to celebrate success and in the Scottish graduation 560 graduates and honorary graduates were awarded their degrees.

The OU in Scotland also welcomes Professor Peter Scott as the new Commissioner for Fair Access. The role of the commissioner is to be an advocate for disadvantaged learners working across the education system to provide strategic leadership and to drive change.

At the opening of Ayrshire's new Kilmarnock campus last month Scotland's first minister the Right Honourable Nicola Sturgeon met with a group of students who are studying towards open degrees at college through an OU college partnership as well as meeting recent graduates from the programme.

And there are often events about writing but rarely are there events about reading. And as part of Book Week Scotland and Being Human - A Festival of the Humanities members of the public took the opportunity to explore how people both in the past and present have read and about Edinburgh which is famous across the world as a city of

writers but also a city of readers. The event was called Edinburgh A City of Readers and it took place at Blackwell's bookshop in Edinburgh in November. And it was hosted by the OU's reading committee's project team and OU in Scotland's Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences.

Now let's turn to some interviews to find out more about what is happening in Scotland. In the first interview I spoke to Khadija Patel.

Khadija, how does OU study work then for work based learning students?

**Khadija Patel:**

Hi Karen. We have over 70% of students studying with the Open University in Scotland and learning in the workplace. The OU offers flexibility study in their own time which works well for these students and their employers.

**Karen Foley:**

So can you tell us about one example of a partnership that's happening right now?

**Khadija Patel:**

We have an exciting project where we're working with Rolls-Royce and Unite the Union. From the OU perspective we offer additional support with efforts to employ a union involvement.

**Karen Foley:**

So what sorts of things are they doing? Would this be very much engineering based?

**Khadija Patel:**

Many of them are doing engineering degrees. Some of them doing business and management degrees. Others are doing Open Degrees. It's entirely the student's choice which course they want to study. Some students are doing standalone module. So it's very varied but I suppose the main thing is that it is related workplace learning.

**Karen Foley:**

It sounds really exciting, you must have so many students doing this.

**Khadija Patel:**

We have had over 300 students studying modules with us. And we currently have 35 students on the programme.

**Karen Foley:**

You spoke about shop floor workers getting involved in this and clearly, you know, the idea about applying what you're learning is brilliant. But what other key things are they benefiting from as part of this experience?

**Khadija Patel:**

The other thing they're benefiting from is learning confidence. A number of students who have sort of said, I study with the OU, I feel more confident. I'm able to express myself clearly. I've improved on my report writing skills. I'm better at communicating. And I'm able to apply my learning in practice.

**Karen Foley:**

And it must also be brilliant at progressing careers. Is that something you've seen?

**Khadija Patel:**

Absolutely. Quite a number of students on the programme have been given secondment opportunities.

**Karen Foley:**

So this sounds like quite an obvious question but why are the OU involved with this? And more specifically who is involved? Is it broader than just your area?

**Khadija Patel:**

What we're trying to do is to reach hard to reach students. We've drawn AL support to help us with the programme. AL's have the expertise in work based learning, in their subject specific areas and delivery in the workplace.

**Karen Foley:**

And you're primarily working then with the unions arranging this. Can you tell us briefly about your role in the process?

**Khadija Patel:**

My role is basically student facing, it's around module and qualification recruitment, developing partnership and Rolls-Royce is just one example. There are other exciting projects that I'm involved in.

**Karen Foley:**

And I hear you had a celebration of your students' success recently. Tell us briefly about that?

**Khadija Patel:**

Yeah. We had a celebration event just on Monday. And it was good to see and there's always an emotional element when you see students handed out certificates. We had Rolls-Royce employers. We had Unite the Union. And we had Scottish Union Learning all at the event.

**Karen Foley:**

It sounds absolutely fantastic from so many perspectives. Khadija, thank you so much for telling us about it.

**Khadija Patel:**

Thank you, Karen.

**Karen Foley:**

Widening participation in open access are important areas for the OU. And a lot of work is happening in Scotland. I spoke to Pete Cannell about open educational resources and how they are being used.

Pete, can you tell us about opening educational practices in Scotland?

**Pete Cannell:**

Open Educational Practices in Scotland is a cross sector project instigated by the Scottish government and Scottish Funding Council and led by the Open University in Scotland. It's a project that's concentrating on the way in which open educational resources, courses in particular are used in the real world by particularly non-traditional learners.

**Karen Foley:**

So what sort of things do you mean then by these open resources? Are these MOOCs?

**Pete Cannell:**

No. They're thinking more widely than MOOCs. In fact, by and large, MOOCs are not open in the sense of being openly licensed. We're really interested in what open licensing allows people to do. And so we're looking at different models of both the way in which courses and the practice that's wrapped around courses are designed. And also about different models of curriculum development, I think as well.

**Karen Foley:**

So you're really I guess trying to tap in to how these resources can be used as a transition point for people in to further or higher education?

**Pete Cannell:**

That's right, yeah. The remit that we were given was very much about widening participation. And making sure that the wealth of resources that are online are open to everyone and not just to those who've had, perhaps, privileged access to higher education previously.

**Karen Foley:**

Now digital learning I something that I often see on my Facebook feed. There are courses everywhere. There's so much information out there. So can you tell us then how this is fitting in to I guess the digital landscape and the whole range of resources that people have at their fingertips?

**Pete Cannell:**

What you just said is in a sense both a kind of promise and also the problem because there is such a wide variety of material available. And particularly outside the formal sector, university and colleges, the potential of the resources that exist is really of great interest to third sector organisations, trade unions, voluntary organisations. A whole range of different people.

But actually where you start and how you choose is also really a big issue. And so that's one of the things we've been working on really closely is what does educational practice look like and what does pedagogy look like when it's not enough just to give people, you know, a whole bunch of URLs and saying, you know, you're bound to be able to find something that suits you. But actually how you choose, you curate, you actually put some structure around this kind of cornucopia of resources that exists.

**Karen Foley:**

So it's really enabling the students to both engage with it but also participate may be?

**Pete Cannell:**

Absolutely, yes. The first stage is getting the engagement. The second is what you're going to need to do to keep people engaged and interested and feeling confident about it. So it's partly things that we have known for a long time about, you know, the way you structure materials. But it's also encouraging people to make use of the peer support that's around them.

**Karen Foley:**

You talked about open licensing and I think one of the great appeals to things that are in the open market is that you can take those and contextualise those. Is any of that happening at the moment in terms of these resources being used?

**Peter Cannell:**

Yes, it's beginning to. As people have started to feel confident about using we've now started to find that their eyes open to the possibility of actually making resources their own. And so you might take resources that have been produced for a, you know, a sense of mass audience. And then you can actually make them more bespoke or contextualised for a particular slice of that audience by use of reversioning and remixing.

**Karen Foley:**

I was talking to Khadija earlier about work based learning and work based practice. Is that something that you could apply to this sort of thing? I'm just thinking about, you know, people in the professions like nursing, for example, whereby they might want to be able to share best practice.

**Pete Cannell:**

Yeah. And we found that the interesting areas of professional development is really growing rather rapidly. And it's strongest in areas of their practice base, like the medical profession, particularly nursing, social care. And also really an interesting push from part of the education sector. So in fact we're working on four small projects with various parts of Education Scotland who have an interest in the professional development of teachers.

**Karen Foley:**

Pete, thank you so much for that interview. There's a lot of stuff happening at the moment. And it's great to hear how dynamic and interactive it is and inspiring people to hopefully go on and progress their education.

**Pete Cannell:**

OK, thanks. It's been great to have a chance to talk about it.

**Karen Foley:**

And there are some really interesting examples of the way that open educational resources are being used. Gill Ryan is involved with some projects that are having quite an impact on hard to reach learners.

Gill Ryan, you're the Learning Partnership's officer at the Open University in Scotland. And you're involved in a really exciting project using open materials to widen access, widen participation. Can you tell us about what you're doing?

**Gill Ryan:**

Well our project is called Open Learning Champions. And the idea is not really about the resources but about the relationships that people already have. And using those relationships to introduce people to open learning resources even when they may not be considering returning to learning.

And the idea is to introduce in a very gentle way to build people's confidence in learning and plant the idea that maybe this is something they'd like to return to. And the idea is that the champion is somebody who's already working in a setting. And we've got a lot of partners in voluntary and community organisations so I'll use that as an example of a carers organisation. So we've got a support worker who already has that relationship with the carers. And they introduce an open learning resource that might be relevant to their caring role and maybe runs a course with them.

So the idea is that they might introduce a resource that's relevant to the caring role that engages carers. And they might run as a group or they might offer it as part of that one-to-one relationship. Or they may just signpost them and say this is something you might be interested in and the carer can go and study it by themselves at home.

So we've developed a few resources to support that. And we have a resource for Open Learning Champions which is all about navigating open learn, facilitating the use of the resources and case studies of how other organisations are using them. And then we've got open pathways to higher education which is a guide for learners. And it helps them kind of plan their journey from very, very short kind of engaging resources on OpenLearn up to more challenging things like badged open courses. And then from there if they want to take their journey further they can enrol for an access module of Level 1.

**Karen Foley:**

Now you've talked about some of the situations and settings that you're using some of these resources. And I'd like to pick up on the work that you're doing with carers because you're using quite a specific resource with them, the reflection toolkit. Now what might be the benefit of actually investing time development something like this with that sort of setting?

**Gill Ryan:**

OK. Well we had the reflection toolkit and some carers organisations were using it but they said it was a bit too broad. And the carers were looking for something more relevant to their caring role. So we adapted the reflection toolkit using OpenLearn Works. We re-versioned it as Caring Counts.

So we've used this with a lot of carers organisations. There's a lot of carers centres here in Scotland who are using it. And we've evaluated, you know, some of the impact of that. And one carer in particular said that what made the difference for her was getting the badge. She'd had to give up work for caring and she'd been out of the workforce for 13 years but she was getting to the point where she was feeling like she could maybe return to the workforce. And the course came along at just the right time for her.

And at the end of it she felt, you know, instead of having that 13 year gap on her CV she actually had something to show for it. That she could use her digital badge as a way to trigger a conversation about skills and the qualities that she gained from 13 years of caring. And how they were transferrable to the workplace. And she said instead of feeling self-conscious about it she now felt, you know, motivated and able to articulate all the things that she'd gained from caring. And more confident about what she could bring in to the workplace.

**Karen Foley:**

Gill Ryan it sounds like the work you're doing there has a massive impact and is really relevant as well for a variety of sessions. Thank you for filling us in on that.

**Gill Ryan:**

No problem at all, thanks Karen.

**Karen Foley:**

If you want to connect with the OU in Scotland they have a Facebook page and a Twitter account and the links to those are in the transcripts. And there's also one of course for the Faculty of Arts & Social Science.

That unfortunately is all we have time for in this edition. Thanks for listening and see you next month.

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