# **Introduction**

**This file contains data used for research into the impact of Open University microcredential courses as part of phase 3 of the microcredentials evaluation study.**

**This document consists of vignettes of learners’ narratives about the impact of their courses. Participants gave their consent for this information to be deposited within ORDO and used for future research and learning in accordance with the OU Data Research Management Policy. The names given are pseudonyms.**

## Lisa

**Lisa\*, was interviewed in July 2022 about the impact of *Online Teaching: Evaluating and Improving Courses*, which she started in July 2021, deferred and completed in January 2022.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

I have now moved on to another role but at the time I was in a role as a trainer for exams officers. I work for an exam board, a large, international one, so I gave training to exams officers at different schools and there’s also an online training. It was a secondment and my manager said, ‘I want you to do some personal development’. So I looked at different courses, some on LinkedIn, some on UDEMY and then the Open University one came up and that’s the one we chose because it just content-wise, aligned best with my previous experience - because I have done training for quite a while - and what I was doing at the time, evaluating.

There was an existing course that I was looking at, so I was hoping to get some more information about what you look for in an evaluation, how you do it practically and that kind of knowledge around evaluating and improving courses. I think it was what I expected and more because I really appreciated the broader… We also looked at inclusion and equity and those kind of things. It was a lot more than I actually expected, so that was very positive.

We were introduced to different guidelines and frameworks to evaluate courses. I think the OSCQR is the one that stuck with me that I still have bookmarked. I’m still actually using that website to look at when I’ve got this course that is developed or I want to develop. Let’s make sure I tick all those boxes in that framework and also the Universal Design for Learning, I have bookmarked as well, so I’m using that for my job, just to make sure that I’m covering everything and I can say to people, ‘Well, you need to take this into account as well.’ I was not really aware of these frameworks before and all the different things to take into account, which is kind of the equity and making sure different people through the course will feel that it works for them.

The offer of the course was really good. The way it’s set up and the kind of challenging – think about this, look at this and write something out, that was really good. I really liked the short, kind of just snippets that you do. It’s very nicely paced. I really liked that there were lots of references to other websites that you could dive into. I think there was one website that was not up to date but as soon as I mentioned that to the mentor, that was amended. I wouldn’t change anything content-wise.

I really enjoyed the interaction with other trainees but that’s kind of where the issue was [slight laughter] because there were only four of us. I think there was only one other person who was studying at the same pace as I did. Other people fell behind quite quickly. That is the one thing; they weren’t kidding about the 13 hours a week [laughter]. When I started, I thought, 13 hours… I can squeeze in a day, maybe a day and a half if needed. That was my mistake [laughter].

We started I think with four or five people and then it came down to just the two of us. That person was not very interactive. She was just ploughing through the course. So, I posted a few times saying like, ‘Oh, this is my idea, this is my input’ and then there was just no responses or three weeks later and one of the other people finally caught up. The mentor, the person from the Open University who is actually involved, she tried but yeah, it’s just not quite the same experience. It could have been better if they said beforehand, ‘Oh, there’s just 4 or 5 people on the course’, then I might have chosen to move to a different cohort because you need at least eight or 10 people to get a good discussion going. I’ve seen that in other courses. I’ve done a few FutureLearn courses now, quite a while ago, one about emotional leadership and a shorter one on project management. There were a lot of people on there, which is a bit like the other end of the spectrum [laughter] but you do get the discussion going and people responding to you and that’s what was missing in this course.

It’s just getting the feedback and having people respond to you, responding to them, so having a really good discussion like you’d have in a classroom, for example, as well and people challenging you as well, saying, ‘I don’t agree with you’, ‘This is my take on it’ or ‘Have you thought about this angle of looking at stuff?’ So, it’s just kind of the deepening of knowledge by discussing it with others and being challenged on your viewpoints.

I was advised there was a role coming up in a different department, a new role, which was also very much learning and development. So, I’m still very much in the same field of courses, looking at courses and at some point developing them as well. It’s a slightly different environment. It’s with project management, instead of exams officers. The course showed my recruiting manager that I had this theoretical background now that I could put into practice in that role. She was quite happy to see that I did a microcredential at university level, theoretical background on learning and development, learning specifically but within that... The organisation that I work for as a whole is very much about belonging, inclusion, making sure that that is taken into account when developing learning materials, so I think in my interview, I said that the course covered those things as well. She liked that.

The course not including a Christmas break, that for me was a very big disappointment. I’ve got a young child. We visit family over Christmas. I actually had to write my assignment over Christmas. If we’re talking about inclusion of parents, then that was a big… I was a bit like ooh… There was no option to turn my work in later because there was quite strict deadlines. I had already deferred from the first one because there were some personal circumstances and my secondment was ending, so I couldn’t really do that again. I would definitely recommend that the school holidays are taken into account, just to give people a little bit more flexibility there. I think content-wise, it is a really good course and I really enjoyed it, so it’s more the practical side of making sure that there’s enough people there to have healthy discussion going and get that experience as well.

## Annabelle

**Annabelle\*, was interviewed in July 2022 about the impact of *Online Teaching: Creating Courses for Adult Learners*, which she completed in January 2022.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

With lockdown my service was vastly reduced. It was all on the phone and I did quite a bit of vaccinating. The work I was doing was quite boring and I guess I wanted a challenge. I’d been thinking about doing some kind of postgraduate study but I found my degree quite challenging and my confidence was fairly low, so I was looking at exploring really what was out there and came across these microcredentials and thought it sounds like quite a good way of dipping my toe in the water, just to test it out.

In terms of online teaching, at the time, my job did involve quite a lot of kind of teaching. Not so much teaching but more training, lecturing to either university students, or other health professionals. This was the second year of lockdown and everybody, including me was really fed up with what this course described as the ‘online pivot’, kind of taking what we were doing face-to-face and then just delivering it across Microsoft Teams with a PowerPoint. So I thought this would be a really nice way to explore how I could do that a bit more creatively, maybe a bit more effectively, because I thought it was really quite relevant to my service. Although I do a bit, other members of my team do a lot of online training, which had all gone online and I thought this could be a way that my whole service could benefit from this. As a result, they’d probably pay for it. So I thought, ‘Let’s give it a go’. I missed the first deadline, just missed it and when the second deadline came up, we were coming out of lockdown and I was offered a different role as well by the time I actually got to do it, which was a shame. The role doesn’t actually involve that much training anymore. But I thought, ‘I’ve signed up for it, it’s been paid for, I’m going to do it anyway’. I thought, ‘I’m still interested in postgraduate study and it will help me work out my own personal career stuff’. My husband is a primary school teacher, so I’ve always been quite interested in teaching, hearing him talk about his job, so I did have that personal interest as well.

I knew it would obviously be online. I don’t know what I expected really because I’ve never really done anything like it before. My degree was more of the traditional route with lectures and way before lockdown or anything like that happened.

I found it was a lot more time-consuming than I expected. I don’t know if that’s because I’m a slightly slow - I don’t think I’m that slow, I don’t have dyslexia or anything – I’m a slower reader than most, really. I found that there was a lot of reading. I guess, now that I say that out loud, that’s not surprising, because you are studying, but I think also, it’s a lot of reading off a screen. If you print it off, that’s a lot of stuff to print, whereas when I was at university, obviously, we did read off screens… I used the library a lot and got real books and real articles that I could read. So, I did struggle a lot with the amount I had to read off a screen and also the pace of it, as well, because I had a week where my daughter was ill. She was three then, so I couldn’t study effectively whilst looking after her and then I was ill, inevitably. That’s kind of how it goes, isn’t it? And I really couldn’t read off a screen when I was poorly, so I got behind early on in the course and I struggled to catch up and there was no break over Christmas either. I really did struggle with having a young family. In some ways, it was okay because my job with my workload reduces over Christmas, so I was able to catch up within my working hours. A Christmas break would have been handy, just one week as a bit of a reprieve. I didn’t think about deferring. I just wanted to crack on and get it done really. I think deferring is really a last resort and they don’t like you to do it.

I found the content of the course really interesting. I really enjoyed the reading but it did seem like it was designed for teachers. And I’m not a teacher [laughter] and I found myself thinking, ‘Gosh, I don’t think I’m capable of doing this course. I don’t have the experience, the qualifications.’ I guess, in a traditional university setting where you’re studying with other people... When I think back to my undergraduate degree, I had my friends who I could meet up with. You’d kind of précis each other’s work, give that reassurance, which I really missed doing this course because you just don’t have that.

I used the comment function. I did use that quite actively and to begin with, loads of other people did and as time went on, it dropped off quite a bit, which was a shame, I think. I got the impression people were struggling to keep up with the course. I was getting comments about weeks I’d finished weeks ago. So I got feedback on my comments, which was lovely, but I was thinking, ‘Oh, I’ve nearly done now’ [laughter]. So I don’t know if the volume of work required weekly… Maybe that’s why the rest my cohort weren’t necessarily progressing at the same rate.

I found the assessment side of it really anxiety provoking. I think because my employers had paid for it, I was really scared of failing. More than I would usually be. But I was quite proud of what I’ve achieved, considering I’m not a teacher. I passed it with merit.

I found it really helpful, thinking about how I was providing training, what I was delivering, not so much the content but how I did it. That’s what I found quite interesting. I think it’s always been, in health care, what information do we want to impart, basically whereas this gave me a different way of approaching, how am I going to do that? It’s not just about reading off a presentation. That’s generally how it’s done. Ways of thinking about it more creatively and eliciting participation, which in a face-to-face setting I probably do more naturally anyway but doing it online, it just doesn’t come naturally. You’ve got to plan it. You’ve got to think about it. That’s what this course is about.

I have to say, it did kind of put me off! [Laughter] I’m glad I did it! A full-on masters, I’d find it really difficult. It made me think that may be online isn’t for me. I need to approach it as a kind of all or nothing. So, trying to do it alongside family life, alongside full-time work, I don’t think it’s realistic for me. Perhaps, right in the middle of lockdown, I might have been able to do it but even then, I’m not convinced really. If I’m going to do my postgraduate study, I think I’ll do it in a traditional university. I think I will go for a loan and reduce my working hours so that I have the time to do it. So yes, that was my take home when it comes to further education, which I’m still interested in doing. I’m always torn between doing something that’s going to improve my clinical practice and something that might help with my career progression, managerial or leadership type stuff, so… I don’t know.

## Tom

**Tom\* was interviewed in August 2022 about the impact of the course** [***Tackling the Climate Crisis: Innovation for Cuba***](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/cisco-python-programming/1/todo/120224)**that he started in October 2021 but was unable to finish.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

When I chose the course, I was just sat at the computer thinking about things I’m interested in. I’m quite interested in issues with the climate crisis and green technologies and because it was a course that was available, I thought, ‘I’ll have a look and see what it’s like, just give it a go.’ And that’s pretty much how it started but how it went, I think, just after the first two and half weeks, I was largely depressed at the state of the world and just kind of gave up hope on everything. I got to two- and a-bit weeks, so not even halfway. Looking back now, I would happily do it again because I’ve got more of a positive point of view at the moment.

I didn’t really know what to expect. I didn’t actually think where their issues in Cuba came from. I entered it with the state of mind that it was going to be how do we fix the world’s problems as opposed to thinking where they came from in the first place. It was interesting just to see how Cuba as a country is tackling their issues with coastlines and houses and things. And then I started to look at problems around the world and just a bit of history because I didn’t really know too much about the areas that we were looking into and then I suppose I just got into a bit of a research rabbit hole. It felt like a small snapshot of quite a bigger picture.

I do sometimes get sidetracked. I would find something quite interesting or I’d ask myself a question and I’d go, ‘That’s quite an interesting issue. What caused the issue?’ And before I’d know it, I’d looked at something completely different. I think that’s probably how I made myself a bit miserable. It would be nice if there were just like little warnings so people don’t go off too much of a tangent. One thing I’ve discovered from the course is that I do quite like economics as a subject, which I’ve never thought of before. It was interesting to see how the spending habits of people would change the actions of a company and also how a company reframes an issue. They redirect attention. They try to find a reason to say something else.

I dug my own depressive hole, unfortunately and then I did get to the point where I was thinking, ‘What’s the point?’ You know, if there’s such big players in the world that don’t want to get involved or don’t care. I think that if you can start grassroots for change, let’s say, locally, I suppose activism - I don’t mean standing on the streets with posters and stuff – it’s more like just doing small bits in your local area and teaching the next generation to help, if the one we are currently in doesn’t take much interest. It’s how do you get people to make a change and not get too down about it all when you explain it to them and look at the larger picture.

I work alone quite a lot because I’m an engineer outside, so I have times to rationalise and think, so eventually I can calm myself down and just look at the picture from a different point of view but I like to think there has to be some solution to the bigger picture. You need everyone… You need all the people, everyone with the extreme approaches and views to have the conversation, to try and understand it.

You don’t notice your own habits until you start studying a subject. I didn’t understand with the company I work for, how much single-use waste there is that you just see people throw literally into a hedge. We’ve had a recent renewal of vehicles and they’re just larger vehicles that use a lot more diesel. At an individual level I’ve made more of a conscious effort to separate the waste that I produce. There’s an incredible amount of cable ties that we get through. The waste, you separate it all up but there are some people that just mix and I have been guilty of that in the past.

I do have an issue at the moment with the Conservative government but I also have the guilt that I did actually vote for David Cameron, so is it my fault? It’s just self-beneficial government as opposed to a government that really cares. I know every country has their own agenda. At the end of the day, everything is only finite. There’s not unlimited money and unlimited resources, so in the end, people are in it for themselves but how do we balance it all? There has to be at some point a balance. How do we put back instead of keep taking out? I definitely wouldn’t vote for the Conservative government again. But who do you vote for? That’s always the question because you can either vote tactically to get them out or you just vote for a party that you believe in and they won’t get in.

I do meditation stuff and online, a bit of self-help because therapy is expensive. I found to open up and talk about stuff, to see other people’s points of view and have a conversation, as opposed to keeping things inside, it just helps. It’s just trying to take the things that upset you in many ways and not trying to rationalise it, you know, to the point where it’s okay to feel like this. It’s more of an understanding and trying to find out why you feel like that, you know, I suppose absurdism. We exist and that’s it and if we can make a positive mark on the world, surely that’s a good motivation to do anything and it helps.

I think it would definitely help to look at your own actions and your impact on the world, even what we do day-to-day. And you realise that you don’t feel you do much as a single person but then you view even your actions and how you speak to other people can change someone’s day entirely. For example, the park that I live near, there’s a litter bin and it has litter pickers attached. If you walk round the park, you can just pick one up. When you do feel like everything’s a bit hopeless or you don’t have much impact on the world, sometimes the smallest actions can affect somebody else and… Not always in a positive way because some people don’t want to be affected in a positive way but just knowing that you do matter somewhere and that you do have an effect, it does help.

I think the hardest thing was the remote learning. When you do it by yourself, you don’t always have people to talk to and if it’s a subject that you’re interested in, your friends and the people that you live with might not necessarily be interested in that as well. I don’t always talk to people if there’s an online option but if there was, it would be quite interesting to see what you come out with. Also group activities to get people to interact. I would be the person in the group that would just be a bit of a pessimist at times. If people were more down than me, I would probably be trying to lift them up a little bit. It was more like a Facebook comment at the bottom, rather than a WhatsApp chat at the side, which might help. It felt like more of a review site at the bottom, rather than somewhere you could have a conversation. You don’t get notified either that someone’s left a comment at the bottom. It would be interesting to see if it could be more interactive. My ideal would be a chat option on the right-hand side because you have your options to the left. It encourages you if it’s there, just a little text box, messages where you can just type to other students. It would be nice to have something a bit more interactive on there. You might bring up ideas that you haven’t thought of. You might have someone give you that support that you didn’t know you needed.

I drive around a lot and I work with my hands, so I can’t always read. I really enjoy audiobooks. If there was an option where there is an audiobook sort of chatting away when I was working and I could just flick back and listen to the things that I missed, I would find that would be incredibly helpful. I can retain knowledge a bit better that way.

The course is quite interesting and asks some interesting questions. I really enjoyed the videos and the fact that you can read through it at your own pace as well. I think at the time because I was quite busy and other things personally, trying to sort out a new house, I think I probably took on a bit too much or at one time, thinking it wasn’t going to be as intense for a short course. I’m hoping this isn’t the last one I do. I do feel like I’ve let myself down by not seeing it through to the end.

## Olympus

**Olympus\* was interviewed in July 2022 about the impact of *Digital Photography: Discover your genre and develop your style*, the course he started in September 2021, deferred and then completed in July 2022.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

I’m a member of the Royal Photographic Society. I was years ago but different things got in the way, so I wasn’t able to do much photography for a while and then I re-joined and I was just reading the magazine that we get twice a year and it just happened to have Open University, you know, a course. It was like, not like an advert. It was saying this is available. I’m looking to do Associate of the Royal Photographic Society (ARPS) and it looked as though it was going to help me along. I’ve been doing photography now for 48 years. There were two courses, a beginners course and the one I did. I decided I would go on the second, more advanced course because it was going to be more in-depth and it was going to take me through statement of intent.

I applied and I thought because it was an Open University course, it would be like when I studied with the Open University back in 1990. My two youngest kids, they’ve embarked on OU, so I’m virtually going along with childhood studies with my daughter and looking at that with her and trying to - not coach - but you know, I’m suggesting different things and it seems to be working. And when I saw the Open University, I thought ‘Oh, yeah, you know, it’s a good thing’ but the big difference is that we thought we were doing a course on improving our photography and the course is mainly pushing you in the direction of getting a job in photography or starting your own business. You know, a lot of people were saying, ‘I want to get an ARPS’ or ‘I want to get an LRPS or whatever and just improve our photography.’ We didn’t necessarily want to make a business out of it.

I enrolled. I paid my fee. The FutureLearn people I spoke to have been nothing but tremendous. Even if they told me, ‘You can’t be doing this’, it’s been in a nice way. I asked first, ‘How many people are going to be on the course? ‘Can’t tell you that.’ ‘Is there going to be a forum for us to talk about things before the course starts?’ ‘Data protection won’t allow that.’ I asked, ‘Are there any booklets like they do on normal Open University courses?’ ‘No, it’s online.’ I asked, ‘Is there a list of what we’re going to do?’ It was quite strange really because the course spoke about planning and preparation but there was nowhere on the course that you could plan or prepare. The course started on a Monday and between 1am and 3am on the Monday, we got the tasks for that week, whereas on normal OU courses, you’ve got your texts and it says, ‘Week 1, we’ll be doing this.’ There was no way of preparing yourself for the weeks that you couldn’t do it. I was a little bit disappointed because I was waiting for the course for quite a long time. I’ve done this course twice now.

I started in September. Two weeks before Christmas, my partner’s oldest sister had advanced cancer, her next sister had an emergency operation and the same sister’s husband found he had prostate cancer. It wasn’t a great time. I wrote to the admin team and they got me deferred. That was great but I was removed that course, so I didn’t know what happened in weeks 7, 8, 9 and 10. I had no access to it.

I was put on the next available course in March only to find at week 7, I was booked to go on holiday. I should have gone during Covid. I asked the travel agent about the Internet over there and he said, ‘It’s excellent’. I bought myself a little laptop but the Internet was appalling, so I missed week 7, 8 and the start of week 9. I emailed the admin team but it came back that I couldn’t defer again. So I had a week to catch up on three weeks work and do my assignment. It was difficult and this is why I say if we’d had a booklet, at least I could have done the booklet. I missed Zoom meetings, where I could have listened to the tutors and comments from the other students and shown some work and seen if that was of the required standard. So I cobbled together what I could. I’ve got my results the other day, not as good as I hoped but, you know, the circumstances were a bit difficult.

There were times when there weren’t enough hours in the week. I remember one week, there were these 18 topics but one said, ‘Estimated time three hours’ and then the next one three hours. You know, if you’re going to take a landscape, you’ve got to go and find one and you got to have the right time of day or whatever. I did find it was difficult in that respect.

Part of the course was giving feedback and conversing in the comments section. Now, if you’re going to take a minute to read a comment from another student and there’s 192 of them, that three hours and then you’ve got to reply to one and you’ve got to think of a nice way of saying, ‘I disagree with you’ or a way of agreeing with them and putting your case. It did become a lot of reading. The good thing about when I studied in the 90s was that we got to see the other people at tutorials and we got to know each other, especially when we went to the bar afterwards and we had a laugh with each other and there was summer schools as well. But here, we didn’t get to know particularly anybody. I mean I’ve got people that I’m in touch with now or I’ve followed them on Instagram but it wasn’t the same in that respect.

I have actually printed out most of the course. I would pay more for a course with a printed booklet. It cost £450. It probably cost £50 for me to print everything off. In my RPS membership, you can choose to get a booklet or just have stuff sent digitally and the cost difference is 33%, so you can choose then what you want. I would pay extra because then it would give me the opportunity to have worked through what I missed and to plan.

There was product photography and there was food. Looking at the things that the people had done, oh yeah, it was quite inspiring. Some of the images that they’d taken and what they had to do to get this picture really opened your eyes. I can’t kneel down because I had a car accident many years ago. The only way I can take photograph if I want to get down to the level of some of my grandchildren, I have to lie on the floor. And obviously there’s things that we all have problems with whoever we are but you can aspire to get something out of it and think, ‘How can I do that? How can I get this shot?’ You’ve got to know your limits, not just your physical limits but your funds and your location. What the course has taught me is to make the most of what you’ve got. Squirrels can be just as important as an iguana in a different country. You don’t have to go miles to find something.

I enjoyed the vast majority of the course. There was things that I’ve never even thought about. I’d never taken a picture of a piece of cake in my life and yet, I set it all up. I baked a cake myself. I cut a slice. I built the background. It was well received, as well, the photograph. For another picture, I made myself some bubbles. I created them in Paintshop Pro and I absolutely loved it. I didn’t think I would because I’d not done that sort of thing before. So, it really opened my eyes and it’s certainly broadened my horizons.

I didn’t take as many photographs this time on holiday. I’m waiting for the right moment and so the clicks on my camera get less but the results are far better, quality over quantity. I go out with an objective. All because of the course, I went to take the two sides of Santa Maria in Cape Verde. I saw the affluence in the five-star hotel and I took a trip down into the town itself and I saw the difference between the haves and the have-nots and I came away with tears in my eyes. The people were living in shacks. They don’t consider themselves poor. That’s what they are used to but the contrast of what we were experiencing and what they experience and if that’s what photojournalism is sometimes about, bring it on because it has to be known and it’s really made me more aware. I went out especially with a statement of intent just in my mind to find pictures which showed that, you know. And I probably wouldn’t have done that, not in such a positive and objective way, without starting on this course. And I’ll take that along with me.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. It’s wonderful because you are taking the students’ views into account and it means an awful lot.

## Sean

**Sean\* was interviewed in July 2022 about the impact of *Cyber Security Operations (Cisco)*, the course he completed in January 2022.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

I have studied one year of computer science and two years of psychology but I’d been out of education for a very long time and although I had a good, strong technical background, I was very poor in academic writing. Being dyslexic, I have to go letter by letter. When I left secondary school, I only had about two or three GCSEs and they were just scraped by. A lot of my life, I’d been told, ‘You’re stupid.’ Dyslexia wasn’t even recognised.

I’d been in America and I’d been in the army in Bosnia. I was then in a five-star hotel, a porter. I solved a problem with the security alarm system and the engineer, he’s like, ‘What the hell are you doing here carrying bags? You’ve just solved a problem that Microsoft, every location in the world said was impossible. You just saved the hotel £60,000.’ So from that point on I wanted to get on…

But I was still kind of hurting from having to drop out of my degree and sitting with £16,000 in student loans with nothing to show for it. I ended up in BT coming up to the pandemic. I was in the billing and answering the phone and it was just a barrage of obscenities, you know. So, that like really stressed me out. I ended up leaving that and just as I was on ESA, on sick, the Up Skills had… I’d seen it on Facebook. So I applied for the OU FutureLearn cybersecurity operations course and then there was another one with Immersive Labs as well.

Starting the microcredential, I was really excited about getting onto the programme because I thought that bus had passed me and I was going to be stuck in low level paid jobs but I was worried about my academic writing. Could I do this? But as I went through the stuff in NetAcad and knew my technical abilities were coming through, that gave me strong confidence in myself. Through the OU and the independent learning, some that I had from some of the other students, I just gradually gained that confidence. As long as you put in that wee bit of extra effort, it just built step-by-step. If you did get stuck, you could go and pose questions and get some help from other people and from the tutors. You could see from the feedback what was important and what wasn’t.

I made some really good friends. One of the guys had posted on the FutureLearn on the replies to comments, ‘I’m starting up a Discord.’ Now, I’d never used Discord before. It was what the young people use. I had no idea really what it was. He’d created a room and put a link to it. I kind of randomly went into it and a few of us just gelled and we were posting stuff and helping each other with the things that we were struggling on. Because I had extra time, I was able to do all this extra reading and I would take all the links and put that into the Discord for the other people and say, ‘This relates to this and this relates to that.’ And I would do the research and send them the links once I had validated their usefulness. There were quite a big group at that stage but a lot of people weren’t really contributing to it. So, although it wasn’t my personal preference, the moderator, he trimmed it down and the remainder of us stayed and bonded to a really close kind of group, family and stuff. There’s about 10 of us. We put up job postings and video trainings.

I was able to put 830 hours into the course. There’s only me and my mum here now and I would just get up in the morning, boot up the computer and straight in. Research, research, research. Read, read, read. I actually use text to speech, which is one of my favourite things. I put it at 1.5 speed because sometimes my mind can wander, especially if it’s hard to connect information. So, it highlights the words and the lines in yellow while reading to me.

I did think that there was a good balance, a good relationship between the theory and the practical end of it and it is important how everything interlinks and the structure it gives you. It’s very easy to go to NetAcad and then forget to go back to FutureLearn to do the microcredential bits. So they were saying, ‘Don’t forget to come back.’ I thought it was a nice marriage. It did have a bridge between the two and you were getting an explanation of what the next thing in NetAcad was and some extra reading. So having the theory complement and the practical gives you a more rounded, a more complete picture. You can work out then on your own what the next part is. You see it in the comments… The reason why people are coming… I mean, I can learn a lot from YouTube and some of the free content is absolutely fantastic but you need to learn these core fundamentals before you even think about going any further. And they’re giving you the tools to help yourself. The amount of stuff I was doing beforehand compared to the amount of stuff I was doing after... It’s just exponential like.

At the very end there was an essay that had to be written. I found that very hard because I hadn’t done any academic writing. It would have been easier if you had more words in it. I actually got a friend of mine to help with proofreading. He looked at each sentence. Later, once I got access to the library of the University of Portsmouth, oh my God, it was like Christmas. I actually got my hands on academic writing books and they run special classes for academic writing because they’re kind of aware of people coming from industry and they maybe have no academic writing experience. The Open University could produce a document or something on academic writing. If you had access to the University library you’d be able to get the information from that and again, help with the academic writing and stuff.

If the course had been 16 weeks, it wouldn’t have been too long. If you incorporated academic writing and help with CVs, I think it would benefit everybody. It’s not just about trying to get everybody into jobs. Cybersecurity, there’s millions of unfilled jobs. It’s getting people trained up to a good level where people can pass it on to their children, co-workers, they can keep themselves safe from being hacked or scammed. I think maybe the available funds to people might be a slight barrier. I don’t think you’re going to get a student loan to necessarily do it. I guess that’s one of the ways that the government has to step in and they have been stepping in in Northern Ireland with the Up Skills.

Then randomly, I just seen this advert on Facebook for the University of Portsmouth, which was a Masters in Digital Forensic Investigation and Cybersecurity and I just thought, ‘Oh my God, that would be totally amazing.’ So, I put in my application and I was able to say that I’d done the Cisco cybersecurity operations course and I passed that and I had a microcredential from the Open University, and the Immersive Labs, and there was another website with free training. Unfortunately, there was a kind of bereavement in the family, so I had to put the Masters on hold. I’m going to start next January again. So I’m now doing the Python course with the OU. We’re just starting week 2 there now. I done a bit of Java programming when I did my first year of computer science, so it’s going quite good.

I’m looking at jobs on Indeed and everybody seems to want a unicorn. It lists about 10 different things. Python is definitely a thing that’s wanted along with the other credentials. That’s gonna be a big thing. With a programming language, it takes a lot of commitment and you need to be at it every day. It’s very hard to keep motivated and you can get lost. There are so many courses on YouTube but it’s the structure that I loved about FutureLearn and the OU. With the cybersecurity course, each week you had your step tasks and as long as you made room for it and kept at it and when you didn’t, you got notifications to say like, ‘You need to engage here and you need to be writing comments and stuff’, ones that you understand. And it’s that engagement and that not nannying but support that really kind of makes it successful. I noticed that if I tried to learn Python, I could learn may be a few commands and stuff but in this structured course, it just keeps you motivated and gives you direction and feedback as well. I wouldn’t say that you’re carried through it but you’re definitely helped along. That’s where it will stand out from other programmes.

## Andrew

**Andrew\* was interviewed in August 2022 about the impact of the course** [***Cisco: Python Programming (OpenEDG)***](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/cisco-python-programming/1/todo/120224)**that he started in October 2021 but was unable to finish.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

I want to say I’m a programmer in work but it’s a bit more complicated than that and the languages that I would use for writing my scripts and doing stuff like that are sort of out-of-favour now. The course that I was looking at - Python - is the new in language to have and to know, so when I seen the Skill Ups as part of the Northern Ireland economy system process, I was like that’s the course for me. I need to do that. That will be valuable for me in my day-to-day job.

Some of the stuff I work on, I have a choice of languages I can use, one of them being Python and I know Python is the way of the future, so I’ll try… One of the reasons I was doing this course was to start building up that library of code that I have in Python. I can use one of the other languages that I know to do the stuff day-to-day but Python is the way stuff is going in the future. A lot of the systems are going, ‘We’ll just use Python.’ So, I want it to use going forward if that makes sense?

It’s the second course I’ve done through the Skill Up programme. The first one was for AWS and when I saw this one, I was like, ‘Ooh, this would be much more relevant to what I do day-to-day and can improve my skill set no end.’

The first course was okay, good as well. It was a completely new skill set and took me a lot longer than it did to do the first half of this one. I did enjoy it and thought it was quite good and I think that’s why my wife went, ‘Okay, that worked out quite well. I’ll try one.’ And she picked a business one from the OU. I can’t remember which one to be honest.

I fully expected the Python course to be an online course where you would watch a set of videos, you would have a set of labs that you follow or a set of scripts you were expected to produce and they would be marked and it’s exactly what I thought it would be. I thought the course was very good. It was how I thought it would be delivered and it’s exactly what I got. Here’s a set of videos. You watch it. You understand it. They laid it all out. You practice what the video said. Next bit built on that knowledge and it worked its way through.

One of the advantages that I had is that I have degrees in computing and have been at it for a very long time, so I knew the theory behind all the stuff that they were trying to teach. You know, I didn’t have to understand what a hash table was, I didn’t have to understand what a dictionary is, I didn’t have to understand what all the variable types are. I already knew that. I just didn’t know the syntax of Python and how Python works and manipulates all that. So I had all the background, so I was able to do the first half of the course within the first week because I was able to go, ‘Yep, I know that, move on. Produce the work.’ And then I went on holiday to Chicago and then I come back and hit Covid. And then I was wiped. I just couldn’t move. I was basically bedridden for 6 to 8 weeks.

I consider myself lucky. I won’t say I have long Covid but I still have tiredness and exhaustion and sleepiness. But I was just wiped. I couldn’t even watch TV, I was so tired, never mind complete a course. I wasn’t even well enough to look at deferring. My wife, she had, I don’t want to say problems but it seemed to be difficult to defer. She signed up for a course, then moved jobs and the examples that she needed to use, she didn’t have yet because of the new job and they had to give examples and comment on other people’s examples. My wife was commenting on other examples but she was being pushed, ‘You need to put something up.’ My wife’s going, ‘I don’t have this stuff. Can I defer?’ ‘No, just keep going.’ So, I was like, this must just be the way. You can’t defer it. And she ended up just giving up completely and walking away from it. They wouldn’t let her defer it and she didn’t have the skill set to produce the stuff she needed. So I thought, there’s no point if my wife, who’s been asking and asking and asking for a deferral, there’s probably no point for me to try and do it. And as I said, I couldn’t move. If my wife had a different response, I could possibly have asked her to login and defer me.

To be honest, I wouldn’t say it hasn’t given me any skills. It’s given me a little bit but it’s one of them things. You need to practice. When I said I hadn’t learnt anything, it’s because I hadn’t been able to practice it more. I’ve got 5% of how the language works, you just need to do stuff in it to learn it and cement it in your head and that’s where the second part of the course is. You would be applying continuously all the stuff you’ve learnt in the first bit.

If I had to write a script in Python, I would have to sit and go, ‘Okay. Let’s start from scratch. What’s the start of the syntax language? How do I start the programme?’ Because it’s not cemented yet. I’d pick it up fairly quickly but I couldn’t turn round now and write a script of Python off the top of my head.

I’ve actually a colleague doing the current Python course. I recommended it to my colleague and he’s actually signed up for it. He’s doing it now. He wanted to do stuff, the stuff that I do and I said, ‘Well, here’s your start.’

I don’t know whether the course is still available or not. You know the Skill Up thing that we have in Northern Ireland? So, it was free. So, it was useful. If it was free, possibly I would do it again, but there’s no way I could afford to do it myself. The only thing I would say is about deferral. I wouldn’t have been able to ask for it but yes, let us defer it easier.

## Ethan

**Ethan\*, a member of staff at the Open University, was interviewed in August 2022 about the impact of *Online Teaching: Creating Courses for Adult Learners*, the first course that he studied towards the PGCAP qualification, which he completed in January 2022. Ethan also mentions the second course he has recently completed, *Online Teaching: Evaluating and Improving Courses*.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

I started with the Open University in 2000 and there came up an opportunity to be a staff tutor. It was a temporary placement, so I applied and I got it. Then the school offered one or two of the staff tutors the opportunity to do the PGCAP. So, I put my name forward and I was selected, so that’s how I became… The first microcredential was October last year. In the meantime, in the middle of the pandemic, in lockdown, I’ve been made permanently a staff tutor and I’ve kept on one or two modules as an AL as well.

I felt it would help me understand and enhance how you go about creating or preparing work for an online course. I think it achieved that because quite a bit of what I’ve experienced, on both modules actually, is they’ve extensively expanded my knowledge in relation to some of the theoretical and practical implications of developing a course online or evaluating a course online, some of which I probably wouldn’t have been familiar with. The other aspect of it too is that they both provide extensive resource that when I do go to do a bit of work on working on courses and modules, I can utilise some of what I’ve learnt.

I gained knowledge and skills from the introduction into the anatomy of the 21st-century educator, one that set out some useful characteristics, attributes that you should have. The other aspect of it was the Universal Design for Learning, which I think I may not have been as conscious of when I was an AL. As an AL, your work is supporting the students. When you have to think about how you go about designing that learning for students, the UDL, actually gives you a framework.

I found it helped me understand the useful foundation that exists within the theory but it also provided a kind of how that theory is worked to or implemented in practice. My main module when I started out with the Open University is [name of module]. I still tutor on that and… We very much teach that it’s about embedding the theory, embedding the concept, the ideas that you are presented with, and they all aren’t necessarily contextualised in the one situation. Some of them may well be and some of the may not but it’s about embedding those in your practice. I think that’s what the module did in the process that you went through, a stage-by-stage process through each of the different units in the module up to addressing the assessment at the end - and I think the assessment at the end was very useful. It asked you to reflect back and in enabling you to do that, it asked how you’d work this through in your own practice. I think that was beneficial. I got a bigger picture from the theory because maybe some of this, I’d been doing in practice in my AL work but I now understood what was the theory to support doing that. So I think, I suppose certainly in that initial module, some of the theory informed me in practice because I would have a significant understanding that it’s important to embed what you learn in practice from my other experience with systems thinking and practice.

I think the need to build in equity and accessibility, that’s quite a bit of a challenge for us. I suppose it’s about recognising that probably, your own self-awareness, about that you come from a certain perspective. You come from a certain culture. You come from a certain background. I’ve always kind of understood the value of education but... I suppose what it enlightened me is that everybody has the… What people have, the kind of maybe determination to learn… Not everybody… It can be a challenge and struggle for people because of the context they exist within. While, you know, because of my AL experience and because I’ve been always engaged and developed and studied myself and got qualifications, that’s a whole lot different to maybe what some of our students are experiencing. And we have to be quite conscious that, you know, a student might be not living within the same social economic dimension as ourselves. They may have several challenges that exist around the nature of the work that they have or not having the work. They may have challenges around their family commitments, their social commitments, the resources that they have available to study. Not everybody has a computer, you know, so that idea of building equity in so that you design your course so that there are opportunities… Other opportunities in which the student can engage, whether it’s downloading material or providing them with print alternative. I think that instilled this idea that you have to be aware of equity in what you’re doing in relation to designing a course because we can design a course from our own presumptions but then that’s not necessarily the experience that students can have themselves. And do have. We have a vast array of diverse students, so therefore, they’re coming to it with all kinds of different challenges.

As a staff tutor, I’m only beginning to get involved in presentation on modules. I think I have an awareness of certain aspects and certain concepts but whether I’ve implemented those as yet, I’m not sure. I probably will have opportunity to do that. I think as well, you need a period where you done some of the work and then you need time to reflect back and see have you done it differently based on what you’ve learnt in relation to what you’ve learnt in the course itself. I think I still need time to do that cos I think we’re only six months on from the presentation. As I say, whilst I’m involved in some module presentations and things like that, I think I still have…I think as always, we have a lot to learn. So therefore, it is an evolving process of learning and therefore, I think that I will, as I develop more practice in these type of areas, then I will have a different… I will have some time to review, reflect and then maybe progress that learning and progress what I’ve learnt.

I think on the first course, the timing didn’t present as great a challenge as it did on the second one. I tutor postgraduate modules from November to April, so I had some scope to get started, to get well into the pace on the first one. The second one started in March and I got a good enough start in the first couple of weeks but then the modules that I was tutoring had their final TMA and EMA, which meant I wasn’t able to engage as well for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. I fell behind somewhat, so that in itself impacted in that I didn’t engage as much and I would have liked to in the conversations. I did that much more in the first course and the reason I found that helpful was, of course, when you go to draft your assignment, you’ve much more material because you done much more engaging and reflecting within the responses that you’ve given on the course. Part of the assessment is that you’ve brought in others’ perspectives and you reflected on your own reflections as well as you’ve progressed through each of the weeks, which is what you need to have prepared your material for really. I can plan for better next time and I’m already beginning to make plans. I can make a request around agile working, so that I give myself the scope to engage fully with both.

The one other aspect I would say is a real positive about it is that it’s timetabled stage by stage, step-by-step. I find that a real benefit to me because it sets out what I need to do. I did a Masters with the Open University as well and sometimes, what can be a real struggle is that planning, whereas this course sets it out for you and you just need to follow it. So, I suppose it’s a motivator, it’s something that keeps you on track and it’s something that enables you to manage your study, manage your engagement with it better. As I say, when you are studying on your own, it can be quite a struggle to… Some of us procrastinate and I think there are occasions when I do procrastinate [laughter]. This actually helps when you have to try and address that.

## Eva

**Eva\*, a member of staff at the Open University, was interviewed in July 2022 about the impact of *Online Teaching: Creating Courses for Adult Learners*, the first course that she studied towards the PGCAP qualification, which she completed in January 2022. She also mentions another course, *Online Teaching: Embedding social, racial and gender-related equity.***

**\*Pseudonym**

I’ve been doing variations on the Applaud Programme since 2010 in various different HEIs where I’ve been employed and I’ve never completed it because other things crop up. I have got a PGDip in higher education but it’s like 15, 16 years old. And the world was different. Education was totally different. I don’t have much knowledge about online and distance learning really, other than what I’ve gleaned. It looked like those microcredentials that make up the PGCAP tick so many boxes. I knew I wanted to do it because I wanted to get my Advance HE fellowship. I also really liked the idea of a taught component instead of just putting together a portfolio and writing a reflection. Sometimes, you really need to learn some new theory. I was lucky enough to get onto that first cohort. It was a last-minute thing. I think it would be good if there was more information. There wasn’t much information when I started.

I’d done some FutureLearn learning and I thought, ‘Ah, this is good. This suits me.’ The way it’s structured, the way the platform works is more suitable for my learning style than the traditional, the clunky OU modules. I liked that it was quite short and sharp. It was 12 weeks, just one final assessment, so it felt like you could just get your head down and work at a pace that would suit me and the course seemed like a good introduction to key issues that you need to be aware of in designing online learning.

I was in production for two modules at the time, so it really appealed to me because it helped me in my practice. It was quite a lot of theory and I was happy with that because I was doing quite a lot of the practical stuff in my day-to-day work. UDL was probably the thing that really helped and using open resources. I’ve come from a background that expected you to create everything yourself. So the encouragement to use open resources and to share those things and to make education more accessible for everybody, rather than just those people who are privileged, it felt like it was quite a challenge to the traditional model. That opens up a whole new set of opportunities.

That was helpful to me, to write from a different perspective. The development of personas was a completely new thing. I’ve always had classrooms before. I’ve always known exactly who I’m writing for. I can see them and name them. You’re located in a particular region or place. So you write to your population but the OU’s population is everybody, so the only way that you can begin to capture that is to have your eyes opened a bit to some of these issues. I think it improved my module authoring. It’s trying to bring it to life for a variety of people, seeing students as individuals, accessibility, UDL and thinking about baseline design that would have something for everybody in, rather than writing and then having to adapt everything. So it made you think about it in a different way. It was about thinking about the writing voice and position that you take and the position that students might be in and all the barriers that they may experience.

I was a student on the microcredential plus a standard OU module at the same time, so it was really interesting to compare. The big chunky 60 credit one, TMA after TMA after TMA, relentless really, whereas you knew at 12 weeks on the microcredential, you do the EMA and then you move on. You have a break. The traditional module was old and didn’t really reflect how dynamic the reality of the world is, so I found that quite irritating at times. Tutorials are not offered on the microcredentials, which I prefer frankly. I prefer to get on with it, just read the post and comment if you’ve got something to say.

The main difference is the simplicity of the microcredential. You start it, it’s really clear, week one, here’s everything that you do. You can click ahead, so you can look at what’s happening each week. You can go back and forward. If you don’t have much time one week, you can catch up with it. So the structure and the flexibility to move around is really, really good and it’s so coherent and tight compared to the long, drawn-out modules.

The mentors are available, they respond. That was really helpful. It felt more immediate than the tutor response in the traditional module. The two mentors worked together really well because there was always somebody around. The team clearly had a strategy: don’t answer the question in the help area but send the person back to the place where that information is. It felt like the team had thought through how to respond to students and how to encourage people to participate in the forum with the posts. Being part of the OU internal cohort, we did the community of practice meetings. And we were reminded to make contact with your own cohort. So, we’ve been supported to make use of the group outside of just the microcredentials and the enthusiasm of Bart and Liz in those first few meetings was really great. So, as a team, they were very responsive, which takes the stress out.

The OU could make employability skills more explicit. It was easy for me because I was employed in this area, embedded in this world and it was obvious to me why we were doing what we were doing and what it would give you but I don’t think it was obvious to other people. Their posts were questioning, ‘Is this relevant to me?’ or ‘How can I make this work?’ The mentors were really good at giving suggestions but whilst it may be mapped to employability, I think it’s really useful to tell the students.

I really would recommend the microcredentials. I keep saying to my colleagues, most of whom have no idea that there is this OU PGCAP in place. I’m going to endless modules in production meetings and discussions about the inclusive curriculum tool and the EDI meetings. I’m saying to people, ‘Oh my goodness, there’s a microcredential, *Embedding social, racial and gender-related equity*. Cancel all these meetings. Send everybody on that! That’s the course! Everybody go and do it!’

## Anna

**Anna\*, was interviewed in August 2022 about the impact of Online teaching: Embedding Social, Race and Gender-Related Equity, which she started in October 2021 and completed in January 2022. She also talked about a second Open University microcredential course Online Teaching: Accessibility and Inclusive Learning, which she started in March 2022 and recently completed.**

**\*Pseudonym.**

I've been interested in in the topic of inclusive teaching, and I was looking for opportunities to learn more about it. I came across *Online teaching: Embedding Social Gender and Race-Related Equity*. I signed up for that because I thought it was unique and it was really relevant to what I was doing professionally.

I think I expected the equity course to be practical and I was hoping that I could get in depth information and theory about equity at the same time, learn how to do it in the course. There's a lot of conversation about embedding equity or making courses inclusive but not much information relates to how to do it, so instructors still don't know how to do it. And I didn't know how to do it in terms of activities or strategies or teaching presence, so that's the kind of detail I was looking for.

The first thing that I that I noticed was the overall design of the course as a way to embed equity. I'm talking about the flexibility where all the weeks are open. I was able to review any portion at any time, so study at my own pace. It was eye-opening that assessment can be postponed, that students don't have to have deadlines throughout the course because that creates an open environment where they are empowered to make their own choices and to make the learning fit their life, right, as opposed to the other way around? I'm limited as an educator because in my institution there is a requirement that students receive a portion of their grade by a certain week so that students can decide whether they stay in the course or not. Now that I'm thinking about it, it is another learner centred strategy where it gives students power to decide. I really liked that flexibility of not having a deadline throughout, but at the same time it’s not a bad thing because some students might benefit from it.

The educators were present through the learning materials, videos, storytelling. Each week was written by someone else, and the names of authors were provided. This practice offered transparency and additional personalised presence of the educators. I really appreciated this practice and have advocated for a similar approach in my workplace. It humanizes the course content and learning online.

I was working with a with a group of subject matter experts, but I needed to understand as a designer, so that I could help create an equitable environment. So, one thing that I implemented based on the course was the downloadable content PDF. In our LMS, it comes in an HTML page and it's not visually formatted in a way that may foster learning for some learners, and it requires a number of clicks.

The balance between theory and practice was perfect. The course had an impact on my thinking in terms of, for example, inclusive language, so using pronouns and always considering how I address folks. I immediately started adding my pronouns to my introduction and I have a little button that I carry with me with my pronouns. It was a learning process because I'm taking a language course and the instructor is… identifies as ‘they’ and it took me a little bit to get used to using the pronoun. One has to be really intentional about doing this and sometimes I've made mistakes, but I just kept pushing myself to learn it and to be really mindful about using the correct pronoun.

It was great, very informative and I keep going back to the materials even today and thinking about what I've learned. It was very easy to contribute to the comments. I really like how the platform is set up with comments attached to every piece of content, every step because other LMS don't do that, and the experience is completely different. So, I knew that that I could use it. It's just that with this course design where it's open and flexible and learners are at different points, it's been hard to find someone who's at the same point. With smaller numbers especially, it was quite lonely from that social aspect.

I would have appreciated periodical synchronous sessions and I would be willing to pay more for a course that included these, just to talk about the things that we were learning about and listen to what other participants were thinking. I sometimes felt I wanted to talk to someone, and I couldn't because the learners were all at different points. I would try to drag a colleague into a conversation, but it wasn't always that they were at the same point of learning about equity. I wasn't able to have a conversation. My overall experience, even though at times I felt lonely, I really, really liked the course and what I learned from it.

And then I wanted to continue. So, I signed up for *Online Teaching: Accessibility and Inclusive Learning*. Both courses offered different presence strategies to address diverse learners' needs, and I appreciated both as a learner, instructor, and a learning designer. The accessibility course offered a different approach in that the tutor maintained consistent presence during the course through their responses to posts and using the like button on all posts as an acknowledgment. There was one conversation that was really helpful. The tutor prompted me to add more information to what I was thinking about that I wouldn't find in the course, or perhaps anywhere else, and it made me think about other aspects of learning online. Whenever there was a response, they would definitely add to my body of knowledge.

I feel more confident in advocating for accessibility. I've been quite outspoken at work and about creating accessible materials. I know where we have gaps in terms of the materials that we share or we create, so I've been working to address those. People have started calling me an expert, although I don't feel like that yet because there's still lots to learn. What I've learned shows in in my conversations with colleagues and in the work I do.

One thing that was eye-opening was learning about the social model of disability. That really has changed the way I think about everything. That really gave me urgency to advocate for creating inclusive materials from the design stage. We are creating materials, not for everyone, but from an able perspective, right? And then everybody else needs to almost beg for a strategy that will help them to learn. So that's what I'm trying to always bring to the conversation and change the way folks think.

I facilitated a course in the winter. I'm not able to change the course design but I worked with the learners and as soon as I understood their personal circumstances and challenges, I modified the assessment schedule so that it would work with them, and they really appreciate it. It made an impact on how I teach as well, and the learners were really appreciative of that.

In this course, it was a challenging for me to stay on track. I was really good for the first few weeks and then we got really busy, and I also was traveling internationally to visit family, so I fell behind. It was really difficult to get back on track. Even two days before the deadline, I was thinking whether I should be submitting my assignment because I just didn't feel that I was able to do my best. I pushed through and submitted. I didn’t know I could defer. Perhaps I missed this in the information. That would probably really alleviate some of the stress. Maybe if the tutors notice that someone hasn't logged in for a while, perhaps if they reach out to the learner? I wonder if occasional optional synchronous sessions would have helped me stay on track. Some learners would want to join the conversation and you'd have to be prepared, right? So then it pushes you to keep reading, keep studying, keep completing the activities. With Maha Bali's Roumy cheese analogy, one practice that is equitable might not be equitable for somebody else. Incorporating synchronous sessions may be exclusive for some learners but I was teaching a course a few years ago and synchronous sessions were fully optional and there was one person who didn't participate. So, I reached out and I invited them, and they were fully aware of it, and they were fine with not participating. But there was a group that was constantly attending those sessions.

I started another short course in leadership, but I dropped that course. It had to do with the time, really. Because of my workload and some additional commitments, I wasn't just able to stay on track. It was just one hour a week but that one I didn't pay for, so you know… I signed up for it again and I will do it because it's also relevant to my work.