

Learning & Teaching @ Newcastle Podcast

Introducing Emily and Josh our student podcast voices. National Teaching Fellowship with Dr Lindsey Ferrie. Part one of our look back at learning through the pandemic with Dr Adam Potts.

Hello and welcome to Episode 5 of the Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University podcast. My name's Ben Steel and I'll be the host for this episode.

Now, this episode is going to be a little bit different. We've changed the format ever so slightly. The last few episodes have been a longform conversation with some great guests. But in this episode, we're going to take a bit more of a bite sized magazine style approach.

First of three features today. We'll introduce Emily and Josh. Emily and Josh are two students here at Newcastle University. And we wanted to get a feel, a student voice of what is goes on within the university. Now, Emily and Josh will be popping up at key milestones in the academic year to just express what students go through. Whether that be assessment or settling in or freshers week, whatever it could be. In this episode, we will just introduce Emily and Josh or they'll introduce themselves and we will discuss what it's like to get your results and those initial feelings when your place has been accepted.

The second part of the episode, we catch up with Dr Lindsey Ferrie about national teaching fellowships, where we discuss the process of applying and the importance of achieving an NTF.

And finally, we have another regular feature, or the start of the new regular feature where Dr Adam Potts speaks to students about their experiences of learning through the pandemic. In this instalment, Adam and the students talk about virtual lectures and virtual seminars.

Let's get start with Emily and Josh here they are to introduce themselves.

My name's Emily. I'm studying zoology and I'm going into my third year at Newcastle University.

Hi, I'm Josh and I've just graduated from doing the fourth year of chemical engineering, and doing a masters degree here.

So the first question I ask them was, why did you decide to go university in the first place and why did you choose Newcastle University?

I must admit that I didn't want to come to university at first, so I got my A Level results and I decided I wasn't ready to come. So I took a year out and I worked and I travelled and actually helped me realise that if I wanted to pursue a career in what I was passionate in which is zoology, I would have to come to uni. So yeah, I don't think you need to rush these decisions. I think everybody's unique and we can just go at your own pace.

I always knew I wanted to go to uni. My sister's eight years older than me and I used to visit her at uni and she was there for five years. Speaking to her and her flatmates, that kind of

stuff. And I just always wants to come from that moment, really. And as far as choosing Newcastle, chemical engineering is not available about many unis. So it kind of gave me a bit of a smaller list anyway. And I look to say the top ten chemical engineering universities in the country and then I've narrowed the list down from there based on I wanted to live in a city university, not campus one. I didn't want to go to Scotland to do the extra year, so on, so on. And so I ended up with a shortlist. Newcastle was my favourite option after going round doing all the post-application days. I just thought that the lecturers and the students that I spoke to, they were more friendly, nice to speak to, more approachable, that kind of thing. Yeah. As soon as I visit the campus, I just knew that I wanted to study here. Everyone was just so nice.

It's always exciting when you get your results. But what was it like to get your spot at Newcastle?

So, I think for the majority of students it's a lot of anxiety and nerves thinking about the results to get into my course. But for me, it was more relief that it was over and done with and had I actually had my results now and depending on those, I could decide what I wanted to do. So it's a lot less pressure. And yeah, it was a big relief. It was nice.

As Emily said, it was quite a bit of relief. Less so because of what results you got. But more so having the security of knowing what you do for the next four years. Because until you've got the acceptance email letter from the university. You don't know what you're doing. It's completely up in the air. And you know what you want to do. But it's not confirmed. And just having that confirmation just puts you mind at ease and then you can focus on the next stage. And, you know, I'm going spend the next four years doing a master's degree at Newcastle. Then just focus instead.

Alongside excitement, though, there is some kind of initial worry or anxieties. So what were those initial worries when joining University and potentially even home?

Yeah. Initially having to find someone to live, I suppose, and paying rent and bills. And that was that was kind of scary because you're doing it for the first time I had no clue. They don't teach you that in school. I mean they should, so I yeah I was a bit clueless. But I suppose I had the support my parents to help me with that, which is great. Not everyone has that. But yeah internet, that's a good resource if you don't know.

I had the luxury of going into student accommodation first and that kind of acts as a bridge between you have to sort things out on your own and find it really easy because all you do is you pick your options as you favourite accommodation. You know the price is going to be. All the bills, all the Wi-Fi, they're all sorted out. They're all in one wrapped up bow. Really. And with that, it means that when you do go into second and third year, you've got the experience speaking to people in the year above you or you've got a couple of months to sort out with your friends rather than just being dropped straight in it. I think that is one of the massive benefits the student halls.

One of the big questions is what do you do first as a student? Once you've achieved your results and got your place. So what did Emily and Josh do once they knew that place was sorted?

Of course, accommodation like we've just been to take a trip to IKEA. I'm sure everyone's going. But if you haven't, then please, you have a visit because you can find everything that's helpful before you move in. Then you might not even know you need it, but you find it. I also signed up to freshers because I felt like that was a great opportunity to meet new friends. I actually did meet one of my best friends on freshers. So yeah, definitely get involved with that.

I think it can be really easy to both underdo and overdo the preparation phase, especially if you go to student halls. Where, it's slightly more structured. You don't need to bring an excessive amount. You just need to bring a bit of bits and bobs like a lot of the student halls will give you a small crockery package. That will give you one of each items. That's enough for you. You can bring more stuff if you want, but it's not necessary but just make sure you've got like some bedding. If it's not with your accommodation, you've got some towels, you've got like a hob pan, frying pan, that kind of thing. And the rest of it you can kind of sort out when you're there, like if you bring a phone, a computer, all of your clothes and like a couple of things get through the first couple of days, the rest of it really falls into place. When you realise that you actually need something, you don't need to go completely over the top. Just bring all the things you use at home and then a couple of things you might need from the kitchen and you can over the whole week of freshers, you've got plenty of free time to go with your friends over on your own and just pick up whatever you need from town. It's quite simple, really.

Yeah, that's the great thing about Newcastle Town Centre is that there is a shop for everything you need. So yeah it's fine.

What else would you recommend before your first day?

Sometimes they'll send through maybe a reading list or like this is a couple of things do over summer. So I think get on speed or refresh your memory and workbooks or reading lessons. They can be helpful if you're interested in the subject, but they're not necessary to do. Certainly not for my subjects. They catch you up when you're here. So some people might feel a bit of a need to go through and complete the entire reading list so they don't feel like they're out of depth when they're at university. What you really need to know if everyone's in the same boat. Everyone's thinking, oh, this is a new experience. I don't actually know what it's like. And you think, oh, am I going to be not the smartest one in the room? Am I going to be the bottom of the pack? Everyone feels exactly the same way. They don't know what to expect. So you can just enjoy your summer, enjoy the fact you finish your sixth form, spends the rest of your summer with your friends. You don't you don't have to spend it all buried in books that are probably going to be a bit irrelevant and you can then decide what you actually need to do when you're at university. That's what I'd say.

Thank you, Emily and Josh. That was the first time we'll catch up with those two students. We will hear from them in four weeks time when we get to freshers week. And I'm sure the pop up many times over the next academic year.

The next section of this podcast, however, is going to look at national teaching fellowships. The winners have just been announced. Congratulations to Newcastle University's very own

and friend of the podcast, Dr Paul Fleet, who recently achieved his fellowship. This year, applications for the 2021/22 scheme will be open soon. So if you work here at Newcastle University, follow the fellowship link in the show notes to learn more and keep an eye out for when the scheme goes live, but to gain a bit of an understand about teaching fellowships and what they are and what they do for you. We caught up with Dr Lindsey Ferrie, who achieved her fellowship in 2019.

The first thing I asked her was what was her motivation and an inspiration to apply?

I think for me, it was coming to a point in my career where I was starting to actually think about where I'd been, what I'd done, the kind of impact that I was having. As an academic and my subject area. And also, I guess the support that I was getting from mentors at the university to sort of say, well, actually, Lindsay, have a look at what you doing, look at the influence that that's having on your students on Newcastle University, on the wider subject area. And actually, when you look at it in that kind of story kind of scenario, that's when you start to realise that actually, you know, you probably have had some big impact there. And so that's when I thought, well, actually, I want to do this because I want to explore what I've achieved. What that's meant to me. And you know, why not do that in the context of a of a national competition, because essentially the NTF is a competition, you know, and it's about how you can articulate that story. And I guess for me as a person, that was it was a nice thing to do. It was horrible at the time because, you know, you haven't to really work on the wording. And it feels a bit odd because you feel like you're kind of like, how do I put it? Overselling sometimes your achievements, because as we know and teach in, it's about the team effort. It's not necessarily about the individual, but it's about your input to that team and what that meant and what that's meant to your students and what that's meant to you as an individual teacher and those sorts of things. It just gave me that opportunity to really sit back at a point in my career and go, you know what this is? This is what I've done. And I'm quite proud of that. I'm quite happy with what that's been. So that was that was my motivation.

How did you find the internal and external processes for making her claim?

In terms of the internal process it's quite easy, to be honest. I am. The university ask you to generate. I think it's a very short summary of why you think you're worthy of the institutional nomination. And that's quite short. So it's not like the full applications. I think it's a much shorter amount of time that you have to commit to that and the external application. There are support workshops, as you'd expect for something like this. So I attended one of those workshops and got some insight into what they meant about how you go about writing your claim. And that's a really important thing because it's a very different style of writing that I am used to with coming from a science background. It's very different to how you would express certain things. And I think I found that quite challenging. So the workshops were there to help you was obviously a lot of guidance online, that you can access as well. And I guess again, for me, you know, I was really lucky that internally I was given some great mentors and I had the pick of some outstanding NTFS and in their own right to help me look at my work, reflect on it and help perfect that claim that I wrote. The writing personally, I found quite challenging because I'm not used to writing in that style. So it took me a long time to word things and to rework the wording of it. So obviously with a workload commitment, if you're teaching at the same time, that that could be a big

challenging. And so I guess that would be my only tip for those out there thinking about going for an NTF to give yourself lots of time to get it done. If you're not quite sure how good you are at writing. But yes, what I think, you know, it had its ups and downs as you'd expect most things to be. And I think that's what makes the achievements even more special, is the fact that you've really invested that time in thinking about you as an educator. You've written a summary. You that actually even though it's quite a few thousand words. It is a summary of your career. So to then know that that that summary has been picked out, which really does give you that sense of achievement, not only great educational practice, but the ability to articulate that to other people.

What did it mean to her to gain her fellowship and even just get that recognition from a colleague who said that she should go for this and apply?

I think it was. A little bit of a self-vindication of the effort that you put into something, you know, as an educator, you come into it for a passion or you come into it with a passion to educate, you know, and you know, that passion is internal to you and you need to validate yourself what that means. And I think to have somebody have a colleague say, you know, I think what you're doing is standing and of quality, like you're saying, gives you that confidence boost, helps you validate that what you do and does have impact also helps you to think about what you're doing in terms of impact, you know, to think, well, actually, how is that, you know, how do I measure that? How do I measure how I am a good educator, you know, and actually sometimes it opens up questions about you as an educator that you've never thought of before to really start to value what you can do, and what is possible. So I'm. I think it would no doubt give me a confidence boost. It made me feel bad that the effort and the energy that I was bring into my job rule was correct and was vindicated. And I am yeah. It was it was a massive boost when I got it. And actually, I remember at the time I got the telephone call to tell me that I had been awarded it. But it's confidential. In the first instance and it was in my office and I remember screaming at the lady out of squeaked and squeals as she said, I'm really pleased to Dr Ferrie that you've been you've been awarded the national teaching fellowship. And I screamed at the top of the voice and my boss was in the office next door. I think she's going to have heard. She's going to think something's gone wrong or fallen over or something like that. So it was it was it was wonderful that that feeling and the lady who rang me said, you know, it's probably one of the nicest things that we can do to fellow educators to hear the joy that they've got from this award. So, yeah, it's a it is a lovely feeling.

Now that she's achieved her fellowship. What has she gained professionally?

I think the NTF. Awards fundamentally audience, you walk to a much wider network of fellow educators, as I think that is the purpose of the NTF award is to connect you with other educators who are working in different subject areas. But are they thinking about innovative educational practice that kind of opens your mind a little bit to different ways to do things. So for me, what's been interest in is using the NTF Association Network to look at other educators, look at their practice. Because I guess you do tend to work within a subject area. And it's quite hard sometimes to pull yourself out of that silo to think about practices that might happen in different subject areas that you could morph into your own. So that's been really useful for me. And certainly in things like the Learner Analytics, that's something that I've dabbled with within my own practice. And because of the NTF I've been able to actually

speak to educators who that has been their sole focus for years. And they've got projects that they've got massive amounts of experience with that. I've been able to drop an email to and just say, can I have a ten minute chat with you to get your ideas on this? So that's been really, really useful to me. Obviously, the NTF scheme hosts conferences. Again, it's another route to get out there and to network with different individuals. So that's been another value.

And finally, we spoke about resilience and coming back to apply again.

So the first time I actually applied for the NTFs, I didn't get it. And the feedback was it almost suggested that I was near, but just a little bit too far away or I hadn't been clear on how I'd written things. So, again, I got great support to not give up and to try again. And I think that experience was also massive for me because I haven't done it twice. Really made me relook at things. And like I said before, re-analyse. Well, what do I think impact is. Why do I think I've made a change or a difference here? So, yeah, so the first time round it was a bit bittersweet because I didn't get the NTF and then given all the work you put into it, it's like most things at a university. If you don't get a grant that moment of looking at the reviewer's comments and going, what? You didn't understand what I meant. And I thought I'd written that. So haven't the kind of accept those comments and then go back and pick yourself up and do it again. So I think when I did get the NTF the year after that's what made it even better is the fact that I knew I'd put extra time and effort into it and I knew it was the best that I could possibly write. And that was one of my mentors said that to me. You know, this has to be a reflection of you, Lindsey. And if you can reflect you, then we'll see whether or not you get the application. So, yes, so I've had I've had both perspectives of not getting an NTF and getting one as well.

Thank you very much, Lindsey, for talking to me and being on this episode of the podcast.

In this final session, we hear the first instalment from Doctor Adam Potts. conversation with Newcastle University students and their experiences of learning through the pandemic.

In this first instalment, Adam and the students talk about virtual lectures and seminars, how we can maybe use some of the things we've learned in the future and some things we might want to avoid in the future.

So you're stage three students in stage one.

You know, you had the uninterrupted live experience of lectures and seminars and then it started to change in stage two. This is a big question, but how do you feel the online experience to election in all of those different formats compares to a live lecture. We'll come to seminars in a moment. But just thinking about election, do you think things were gained during this time? And would you know if you had another year ahead? Would you want to see it stay online or do you feel that something fundamental is perhaps being lost and you'd like to see a return to those types of experiences? What do you think Jennifer? Have you found? How did you find out? Which one is it compared?

I think there are definitely is with everything pros and cons, I think. I personally and I know a lot of other people did as well. Missed that time you can't create online in an online lecture

where you have at the start and the end of the lecture, where you speak to other people, you maybe speak to lecturer and that kind of social time that you don't plan, but it's always guaranteed to happen. And that's definitely something you can't create live sorry, not live online. Having said that, on the other hand, something that I definitely benefit from and I actually think I would struggle to and to not have in the future is being into rewind lectures and pause them. And because that was so helpful. I remember in often in live lectures when it wasn't person, you know, really furiously writing or typing things down. And inevitably you're going to miss a little bit if you write what they just said a couple of seconds ago. And whereas online, you can take much more time to it and you can pause and to again, you know, still be there a week or so later. And so, yeah, I think there are pros and cons, but having being able to rewind is such a plus.

How about you Josh.

I think what Jen said about rewinding is really spot on. I think it's really weird with online lectures I actually think you can be a lot more rigorous. There's no real excuse to like miss anything. Like it's always there you can rewind your notes can be perfect. What you miss is the live stuff of the lecture, talking to people right before the lecture starts or if the lecturer is going a bit fast and you miss a thing. No, I go, that's okay. You know, I'm human. It's okay if I miss a little bit, you know? It might be less rigorous, but there is a living stuff is lost in online stuff. So I think I think the shift is it's more about how the fundamental uni experience has changed as opposed to how much you get out of the elections in terms of like learning material, you know.

How about you Izzy.

Yeah, I mean, I think the one the one thing I've really missed is the atmosphere of a life lecture. And even if I don't end up talking to anyone, I've gone to that lecture feeling somehow like I have socialised and didn't feel so isolated. Whereas you're watching it alone in your room, it can be a bit isolating. Spending so much time alone, whereas in the life lecture that's just. Yeah. Just feeling connected to the peers and just feeling like you were doing the same thing together. Even if you're not talking to one another. But I mean equally, I definitely sort of enjoyed the benefits of being able to rewind and do things at my own pace and not be distracted by other people being in the room. Things like that. And I often make lecture notes and then go back to use them when I'm doing an essay or something completely indecipherable. I don't understand what half of them even mean.

This thing about rewinding and being able to kind of revisit material. And Josh mentioned, you know, there's no excuse not to be rigorous. You can kind of have it all there. Is there a danger here? I mean, did you find there's a danger of kind of pirating that you perhaps. I'm not saying this was evident in any of the marks. It actually wasn't. I although the work produced this year was fantastic. But is there perhaps a risk, hypothetically, that we become perhaps a bit more of a passive learner because you've got all that stuff? Or is that is that not quite accurate?

I didn't find that to be the case, so I one thing I kind of the hour long lecture. It would take me, I think, 90 minutes to actually finish it. If I'm pausing rewinding, or getting distracted. It will take if I'm spending more time in the lecture, I'm actively trying to squeeze time out of the lecture. I'm trying to get the most out of it in my lectures. I found the first 45 minutes.

I'm like super into it. And then they get to the end. I kind of revert. That's like a 15 year old secondary school brain of like you can get the clock, like I'm going to add and then I'm going to have to leave. You know, you're kind of trapped in time in a way. And I'm not trying to squeeze out the lecture by waiting for it to end, which isn't the fault of any of the lectures. It's my own kind of a brain problems. But I found that she was more active in the online setting.

This might be quite a challenge might it. If we do go back to live lectures, especially a stage one, students who've experienced this fully online flexible thing to then have to potentially be in a room for an hour and like you say, be focused for that time. That's going to be quite a shift. Coming back to so we talked about the live lectures, thinking about the seminars for a moment.

So for the past year, as philosophy went online, you had an asynchronous lectures and then all of the seminars and a dissertation project modules were zoom synchronous sessions. And again, just reminding anyone who's listening that you've experienced the live setting of a seminar on those dissertation project sessions as stage three students. How do you feel? The seminars on zoom compared to a live setting. Do you think they can replicate what happens in a seminar? Is something perhaps lost there. Izzy what do you think?

I mean, I found seminar's to be more frightening but also more freeing as I feel I feel more able to contribute and talk in a seminar than I ever had before just because I am in my own space and I'm just not so sort of aware of everyone around me. I don't have to look at the cameras. I don't want to. Half the people are turned off anyway. It gives you a bit more confidence to just contribute and actually just say in thinking. I've always found the awkward silences in an online seminar seem somehow a lot louder than the ones in person. So you just feel more pressure to just say what you're thinking and not hold yourself back as much. Something I liked about the online one's a bit more. Interesting.

How are you Jennifer? Do you find it?

Yeah. I'm not sure if I would agree with Izzy. I much prefer in-person seminars. Because I think. And I think I found this in in the first lockdown where you're having to socialise online as well into the private realm. And it's difficult to get the same kind of conversation at the same kind of conversation and flow of conversation in zoom. Compared to what you type in person and I think the best seminars or the kind of seminars where that very sort of natural flow of conversation and I'm not entirely sure you can recreate the zoom. So, yeah, I think interesting for me. I think out of the lectures, the seminars and actually the dissertation meetings to the seminars that suffered the most just because it's so difficult to recreate that natural conversation, for instance, things like I don't know like you know it's quite difficult to because when you speak name you do. It's just they have to hold court. You can't justify holding court to go. Mm hmm. So I think it's kind of it's kind of interrupts that normal flow.

And really like the hmmm point a very good point, and I do think you some of those like natural moments, but at the risk of sounding a heretic. I think I enjoy the online seminar a bit more.

I didn't actually find that live seminars were slow in conversation. I think a lot of life seminars I went through at first it felt quite awkward and sometimes like leaving a stone.

You know, like a bunch hungover students at 10:00 a.m. kind of being forced to talk about Khan. You have to see the visible fatigue and disinterest suck the fun out of it. But something about it being online. I think it was easy to like summon like you said, even more than courage, but just like energy, because it's not you're not extending yourself that much to be at the seminar. Depending how extroverted you feel on the day can be very physically taxing to be around other people physically and it was it was nice of option to do that all the time.

Interesting points because I sometime wonder you know if there's a there's a kind of cognitive overload with Zoom as well, because you can't we don't have those, you know, social cues that would become so familiar with. So which can really be certainly picked up in person. But on screen, you have to kind of overly nod when you agree with something so they can see that you're with them. But that's interesting that you hear perhaps there is something about the comfort of a private space to be able to do, just like you say, say your points.

Thank you, Adam, for that first instalment. We'll hear from him a few more times over the next semester and academic year. We're now at the end of our first magazine, bite-size show.

So thank you for listening. We hope you enjoy this new format. We'll be using it more, more over the next academic year. But we also will have a longer form conversations. We have two guests who we get into a specific subject.

So until next time, take care and see you soon.