

Learning & Teaching @ Newcastle Podcast

Welcome to (back to) Newcastle University – Freshers Week Special

Hello. Welcome to Episode 7 of The Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University. Podcast. My name is Ben Steel and I'll be your host this week. As this week is freshers week. This is an exciting time of year here at Newcastle university as we welcome new students and we welcome back some students who may have been on campus at all or have not been on campus since March 2020. So will be great to see students of all years back here on campus. To look at this period in the academic calendar a bit more. We have two interviews in this episode, firstly with Livia Scott, our student union education officer. Now, Livia's role is vital for all students. She's elected by students and works for all students. All students are her primary concern. We will hear from Livia about her role, the kind of support you can expect and whether an actually where to find her. And that's in real life and digitally. We'll also hear from Emily and Josh, our current students who return to give us their insight into freshers week when they first join the university. So let's get started. Firstly, here's Livia Scott, to explain more about her role at the students union. I'll give some real life examples of how the role has influenced student life.

And so I'm Livia. I'm the education officer at the Student Union. So my role is elected. We got elected each year, there's seven of us. And part of a seven person team of sabbatical officers. And I particularly focus on academic interests. So if there is issues in terms of if students have issues on their course, concerns, queries, things like that, I'm that as a port of call into the impartial, bit of advice and an ear to listen to them, but also to represent wider issues. So one of our big projects at the minute is we are trying to help Decolonise NCL. So Decolonise in the curriculum is something that is really permanent on a lot of students minds. So that's been something that we do on a wider stage.

Yeah, it's a it's a strange role. When I got into it, I was like, well, what do I do on the day to day basis? A lot meetings. But also, we are particular located in the students union. So just up from King's walk, we are on the first floor. If you come up the stairs and go left where on the first floor and the doors always open between I think it's half eight and five. So if you don't want to email Instagram message or anything like that, you can just come in. And whenever one of us should be in that, we'll be in there. Hopefully Monday to Friday now we're all back, which is really exciting. So I've been voted in by students. My role is for students. So, I mean, I haven't actually, I've only had a few queries from students so far. But one example would be safer. Students struggling to find friends on their course, or struggling to, doesn't really know how to cope with maybe their workload or just struggling just in general with settling into uni. Sometimes you don't want to go to a lecturer. Lecturers can be quite scary, even though they know they can be quite scary because they're not like teachers. So I would be there at the SU. You can come in, pop in for a chat. We've got a nice place downstairs where you have a tea, coffee, whatever. Or you can just give me an Instagram DM or email if you want it to be a little bit less formal. And say if you struggling with a particular piece of work and you don't know, maybe you need an extension. We don't know how to apply for that and what that entails. I can help walk you through it all. Or in

more serious cases, you need a bit more money or help them with the help with the Wellbeing Service or something like that. I can point you in the right direction, but I suppose a more specific academic example is in the past, education offices have campaigned to have the library open 24/7. Or a microwave in the library or the SU was a big one. So things like that, if there are things that students want and they might seem like small things, but that is what we do. So, for example, my predecessor Shana, she pushed for a wellbeing week like a week off after January exams and which I don't think a lot of people got to see because of last year, we went into lockdown. So everybody got given automatic extensions for a week. But that will be in place. The exam period will finish. And there'll be a one week gap before the new term starts, which is such a lifesaver because I've had exams before that were on a weekend. And then on the Monday I've been straight into the new term with new modules and I'm like, what is going on? Where am I? So it gives you a week off to celebrate, chill or just get ahead if you're super studious.

So also freshers week on the first few weeks of term. I'm quite excited. And I know as SAB team, we've got big plans to be really on campus a lot in the first week, especially Freshers Week, because we've got our Freshers Week team to help organise things. But we think one thing that people missed out on last year was seeing us. And I think. It's a really good key thing for me and the rest of the team is I want students to know who we are and know that we're approachable. We're not university associated. We're not lecturers. If you need something, even just point. Where's my lecture? We'll be out. We'll be outside and hopefully help out with some of the activities. I think we're all quite excited. But just want you to see that were a face for most serious things, but also just help when you have a fun time at uni. I think that is a priority. So yeah, I'm expecting the first week freshers week anyway to be pretty busy, but I also would quite like to be a visible face there. So if we can be quite overwhelming, I think for some people I find it really overwhelming and in a great way. But I was tired and I was coming into uni and doing these induction week things. And just if somebody needs a little bit of a break goes like, I'm really not sure where I'm going now. I don't want to leave campus and go and sit in my flat on my own, but I also just don't want to go do another activity. I'm tired kind of come into our office. We've got tea, coffee, come and have a chill. Think that's what we really want to ask you to be a hope again for common room vibes. I think that's one thing because downstairs and we've got Luther's bar, but it's not just a bar. We serve coffee and things. That is our primary. It's a Starbucks, really. It's the main thing I think we sell during the day. We don't. Alcohol tends to be a lesser and the lower sales thing. So you can go in that you don't have to buy anything to sit in there. You can go in there and just sit and chill, bring your own pack lunch in. It's not like a restaurant. Why you have to buy something to be allowed to sit in. And there's quite a lot of communal space. So I think we're all looking forward to it being a bit more of a hub and just being visible so that people can see us. And I think I'm also given a few induction talks traditionally SABS get sent on here, there and everywhere to be give all the induction talks, which is great. But I think we did a few virtual ones last year create a video and a lot of schools have preferred that because people can watch either before the lecture or on the lecture, but there's still a few that I'm going to be going to give talks at and I've reached out to quite a few schools and because I'd quite like to go a few weeks into time and just have that five minutes of the beginning of a lecture and just like introduce myself now. I think you just take in so much information in freshers. It's a bit of an overload and just go with him re-iterated.

Be like I like this is who we are. This is the SU. I don't know if you've been in it yet, but if you need a hand, anything comes of academic issues. I can point you in the right direction. You don't know who to go to for help. You don't have a one teacher like you do in sixth form of a form to or anything like that. So hopefully I'll be able to do that and get some drop in things going. think the main thing I'm trying to encourage sound silly is to follow the Instagram because I set that up. Last year you didn't used to have one there is an SU one. I want to be a bit more of a hub so people could just emails don't really use email. It feels very corporate and very formal. So just a quick DM on Instagram like hiya I don't where this building is or hiya, I'm really struggling with this piece of work. I don't know who to ask all at an all just a general chat, I can talk for England. I'm happy to talk to people whenever, but then also students might not want to and that's fine. You don't have to talk too. I'm not going to impose myself on anybody, but I want them to know it's that.

Finally, and very importantly, how can you find Livia both in person?

If you were off campus? OK. So if you need to contact me, just give us a shout. You've got the Newcastle SU, which is the Instagram. That's for the whole SU. If you want to contact me more specifically, it's NU_Education officer on Instagram and my email is Education.Union@NCL. If you just type in on your outlook email, if you just type in education officer, I'll come up because of my username and just give it a little search on there. Same with the Instagram if you forget. It's just you just type in education officer or NUSU. To find me you can find me on the first floor of the student union. So it's just come up the stairs past the office and go left straight up the stairs. It's just the office there and the door will be open. If I'm not there, one of the other sabs will be. There's always staff in that if you need a hand with anything. And if you don't want to see me in person, just give me a message and then either arrange a meeting and I can just answer a query that and then I'm happy to do either.

Thank you, Livia. That was great insight into your role and how students can get the best from you. We'll hear from Livia various points of academic year. And you can find those important contact links in the notes for this episode.

Now let's hear from Emily and Josh again. Our current students to find out more about their experiences, freshers week and those initial feelings about leaving home and going to university here in Newcastle.

How did the feel over the summer and that lead up to leaving home?

I didn't really think about going to uni that much over the summer. Once you'd already your accommodation set in stone and you offer firmed and up after getting your place. You kind of just you had a date you were going to arrive when your accommodation was available. I didn't really worry about it until so close to the time. So I had like a few weeks where I just enjoyed the summer with my friends that I was unconsciously aware of the fact that I wasn't going to be seeing them for a few months or maybe longer. So I just had a good summer really and it was probably only the last week, two weeks before I left, I even thought about it. It was mostly like, hang on a second, what do I actually need to buy to survive? Do I need to get airier, or get towels? Can I steal them off my mum? That kind of thing. It was, I didn't really think about it too much then. There's a bit of trepidation about this is me 100 percent going out into the world and looking after myself. But it's just to work out what you needed.

By going to list. And then over the next week or two you bought it all, got you grants buy some of these pennies and then you had it up and then it was like a new feeling. Your heading into Newcastle.

So I was the complete opposite. So I was a big ball of anxiety all summer because I had always had the years out. And then I decided, yeah, I want to go to uni. And I knew like one person here I was going to live with. And then they already had their friends and I was just freaking out like, oh, what if I don't fit in? What if we argue. We end up hating each other, what do I need to buy So I was like bringing up the accommodation, like, hi, what will be provided? What do I need to bring? Do I need to go shopping? But I think towards the last week or so before I moved in, that sort of settled down and I had the support of my family who was going to bring me up in the car and stuff. So alright after that.

And how did the feel about that step up from a level 6 form to university learning?

I mean, it's always it's been drilled into us when we were in college. The step from school to college is bigger and the step from college to uni and that most of the stuff we'll learning was just building upon what we learned at a level. So I suppose I did do a lot of reading anyway. I wasn't too worried about that because obviously I had a friend who studied here, reassured me, Oh, no, it's OK. You'll be absolutely fine as long as you remember a level stuff. There's no worries.

For me, ChemEng, it's obviously not a subject that you do, it's a level, so it's not like I did maths A-level and as a maths at university, it is a different subject. See, you've got people coming in at different points. Everyone had to have chemistry. But there are some people that didn't do A-level maths, although you don't need it, but you had some people do chemistry, economics, biology, etc. So you aware that everyone was coming in at different points so they weren't going to require you to have excesses of knowledge from a level. It's more of the soft skills that you already had. So you knew they were going to have a little period of time where they'd take the modules in first year, kind of build you up to the same level. And it meant that for some people there was a big jump in some modules and for some people a small jup. But prior to going to university, you didn't really know what to expect because although you've been to open days and post application days and you can kind of look at the titles of the module, you don't really know what to expect. Like I wasn't even 100 percent sure how the teaching would work while I was aware lectures were thinkable like tutorials, seminars, labs, computer labs, assignments, tests. I have no idea how it works. I just cross my fingers and hope for the best. Yeah. So it was I kind of knew that I didn't have to do a lot, but I kind of was aware that once you got to uni there was a lot of work to do. So I kind of just trusted that once she got there and you could speak to people in the year above you and your friends and the lecturers, you could then work out what you need to do when you were there. Whereas when you're at summer, it's really hard to work out what you need to do because you could just go down a rabbit hole or something that might not actually help.

What was it like packing up, ready for travel and how did that first day go?

I mean, I'm one of them people who leaves everything to a last minute. It's a really bad habit, but I can't I just can't help it. So it was the night before and I was actually just embarrassing but I was actually just starting to like realise, oh, yeah, I get my stuff packed.

Even though I was stressing so much the summer before and it got to the night. Like I have to pack now. And so I was packing anxiously as I do. And then I got to the next day and my mum was just reassuring me. We were in the car and we drove at about 45 minutes from Teesside and we got lost on the way. So I actually had to ring the accommodation, ask where they were, which is ridiculous because it was i.q accommodations. You can actually see the building from the Tyne Bridge. Obviously we didn't know and I didn't see it. And then we got there and there were designated parking spaces that were for people who arrive and we completely missed them. We went to the staff car park and he had to come out and tell us off and tell us to move. It was a nightmare. But once we were in, it was sorted and there were people there to help us and it turned out okay.

I was similar. I packed all my stuff the day before I was aware of what I needed to bring, but it all just kind of went into the landing. That evening, the night before and you just got it all in bags, suitcases, and then chucked it all in the back of the van and ready to go in the next day. So yeah, I woke up in the morning. Anything that was needed that morning is go in the van, got chucked in, and then we set off and it's a fair whack from where I'm from to Newcastle. So we were preparing for just a a three hour drive. And this the motorway is not great. So it's mostly a roads. So you just kind of drove up. Had a chat with me, my mum, my dad and I just kind of enjoyed the scenery because it is some beautiful view. You have to go through some national parks en route. But you do get a bit nervous because you've just you've just really got postcode. When I applied for the accommodation, like the virtual tours weren't as much of a thing. So I applied for Castle leazers based on like a spreadsheet with some ticks and crosses rather than actually seeing the accommodation. Is that how many people are in? Oh, that looks good. It cost a lot of good distance from uni. You didn't. I didn't, actually. My visualisation of what my room was going to look like could have been absolutely anything. I wasn't really sure and I had no idea what the accommodation was going to look like. So I was happy with that. Now I'm just hoping that the postcode to take is the right place. Otherwise, it's a bit a bit of a problem. But it did. We rocked up. You had a wander around trying to work out where the reception was because it wasn't the easiest to find. But once you had found the reception with the entrance, you could walk through all the other ones had smart card access if you hadn't got your smart card then. Yeah, but once you found the entrance, it all went smoothly. They just shared your name. They helped you move all your stuff in. And it was it was really easy. From then on and then you just like bumped into your flatmates, one or two of them at a time. So I arrived quite early and then you got to know where they were from. Courses they were doing you and got a smart card for the University. And I think the most worrying part is the in trepidation of not knowing what's going on. Like who am I living with? There wasn't there like apps. Facebook groups, you can speak to people, but I didn't have that. So my accommodation was just there was a load of blank faces with like crosses over authority, question marks. No idea who's going to be there and no idea what you're looking at. But once you arrived and you kind of you've seen this is my room. These are my flatmates. This is my accommodation. Welcome to Newcastle. Just settled you all down and got ready to have a good time during freshers week.

So during their freshers week, did they enjoy the actual week and the activities that they took part in?

I mean, when I first thought about going to freshies, it was a bit of a uming and arring, sort of thing. I think it was about 50, 60 quid for the response now. And I actually only ended up doing it because I felt well, so once in a lifetime experience, I'm not going to get to go freshies next week, next year. So you know what? I'll do it. I didn't expect it to be like that great! I like going out. But if I'm with a bunch of strangers and I can't really come out of my shell very much. But once you actually get there and you get the wristband and you see actually what was on. I mean, we'd like day events so we could go, quad biking and kayak in. We had like axe throw in cocktail making classes and they took you out to see all of the restaurants and like student discount places as well as all of the like, night stuff, night out stuff. I think I genuinely enjoyed the day stuff more. And it was great for me because I actually met my two best friends on the first well, first and second day of freshers. One of them who I'm actually living with now, Mia, she's on the course. That's great. Such a coincidence. But. Yeah, you definitely meet some friends for life. And it's an experience you won't forget. So I advise everyone to do it.

As Emily said, it was a decision whether to get the wristband or not. Like, I didn't look too much at all of the other of the e-mails or whatever the university it sends out before, so most of the freshies learning was kind of done once I was already at uni, either on my iPad or chatting to my friends in my accommodation. And I had arrived on Friday. So I don't think a freshers start until the sun set a bit time to decide. He'd already been on in like a night out or two. And you're kind of thinking, is it worth the money. You're going to get your value from it. Should you just go out and do it on your own like what we've done last two nights since? In the end, as a group, we decided we're either all in or all out. We went all in and we all got our response. And you even necessarily showed what was on these wristbands like you bought throughout the week, kind of worked out and you had a look at the day by day guides and they put out and we were mainly concerned with the Night-Time events. So they have like gigs on and sometimes like open air concerts. And they had one thing. What was the Metro Radio Arena which they've renamed now, and they had like nights where they had a free entry to certain clubs and then they booked out the whole of the gate and had all of the whole student lock in kind of thing. Yeah. So we kind of just our initial outlook on it was by the wrist band. Check out what they're doing every single night and make sure that every single night you've checked off the evening event so you're not missing one of them. That was our value for money idea. But they had other things on the wrist band too, until the freshies events he did and didn't need the wristband for. So they had daytime's things. So they had this one that was quite good. Called food wars which they had like a load of food trucks and stalls set off by people that sell food in the city. So it was like fat hippo Acropolis, that kind of thing. And they had like you could buy everything for 50p or £1 that was normally like three to ten pounds and it was great and probably ate too much. And they had loads of events and as Emily said, cocktail making was pretty goods and went out to the beach and I did, I did three of those daytime things and on one of the days as a flat we also did the freshest fayre, which is where you go when they have two sports halls full of clubs and societies go around to speak to them. And it's really worth doing because it's a great place to meet people with mutual interests, get to know people that are outside your flat and not on your course and maybe find a new interest that you're interested in. Like there are over 200 societies and 60 clubs or something like that. And there's so much variety that

you wouldn't have experienced because they're just not set up at high school, six forms, local area. So there's some good stuff going on that you should look up.

In our next episode we'll probably look at this a bit more detail. How did they navigate the campus on those first few days and navigate Newcastle as a city?

Okay. So the campus, they do give you campus map, but it is still very hard to navigate using the campus map. So I didn't actually realise at the time that all of the buildings have specific names like the Armstrong building, etc. And if you put them into Google Maps, they actually shows you where they outline. No clue at this time. Google Maps advice for people who are going to do this in regards to the City that's a bit easier because I suppose you've got more of the locals around and you can always ask questions like you shouldn't be scared to ask people in Newcastle where things are because they are all like generally really friendly. And that's how I got around most of the time. I mean, like I said, I already had a friend here who was able to show me around. But for people who don't know, I suggest you go in the students union website because they have loads of recommendations of where to go, where the best places are like pubs, cafes and just day activities. And they'll show you the locations of those as well.

So the first year I mostly found places and this is a great place to wait to find places, speak to people in the year above you. So whether it's be personal tutor on your course, any of the people you've met or if it's people you've met, these societies, ask them for recommendations, whether it be clubs, bars, pubs, restaurants, whatever or when you're wandering around Newcastle, just keep your eye open. Don't look down your phone, just look left, look right. See if there's anywhere that peaks your interest. Or just Google it on TripAdvisor or Google Maps. Best places to go in Newcastle for X things that you want to do. And they'll come up and you can have a look at reviews. That's always a shout for the first couple of weeks for me were a bit of a struggle trying to find lots of new places because I had to pre-emptively search for them. I couldn't do it on the go because my phone didn't work. So I just a lot of my flatmate for the most part, but Newcastle's a relatively small city with a lot going on inside it. So, you know, I'm never too far away from where you want to be.

Thank you, Emily and Josh, and Livia. So your time will no doubt be hearing from you all again soon. Thank you for downloading and listening to this week's episode. I hope you enjoyed it.

Remember to, like, subscribe and get your friends to download as well. We'll see you again in two weeks time.

Bye