

[TRANSCRIPT: New Student Special Episode 5: Let's Talk About...Connecting with others]

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[INTRO]

Hello. Welcome to UWE Bristol's Let's Talk Now *New Student Special*. As I'm sure you already know, life is full of challenges. And in a new environment, with a new city to explore, new people to meet and new and more difficult subjects to study, these challenges may feel like more than you can overcome. But we promise you, you can.

We've put together this series of podcasts to give you just that little bit of insider information into what we think you need in order to be successful, not only while you're here at UWE Bristol, but later on in your life and your career.

[MUBARAK MOHAMUD (MO), LECTURER, BRISTOL BUSINESS SCHOOL]: Yeah, so I did connect with some lecturers here, but there's a lot of other opportunities that I didn't take advantage of. I do regret that I didn't take up more opportunities. So this video does highlight that connections are more than just one or two things, there's quite a lot there. And I think another word for connect is 'relationships'. And I think that's a huge, huge, huge thing. When you finish university, you do get a degree, but you have...how many students? 30,000 at UWE?...

[SIMON PHILLIPS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES]:
...that's right, yeah...

[MO]: ...so you have a huge network, a family that you can actually pull on to when you finish university here, but you need to connect to them. You need to shake their hand, and get to know them. You never know when a good opportunity might come by because of these connections.

[SIMON]: ...that's right, Mo. The way you describe 'connect' it's about relationships and it is about relationships and relationships are usually they're only as good as the things you put into them. You know, you get back from a relationship, what you can invest in it. So it's making the effort to connect, really. As we've talked throughout all these films, it is about investing in your time at university. So, one thing is being present. We know, there's lots of research Mo, isn't there...that students will say that the two things that stress them out the most are academic pressure - oh yeah, there's pressure - but it's also a concern about being isolated. And I sometimes think that the way to combat both of those things is to be at university every day. Be on campus every day. Go to the lectures, the seminars that are scheduled, because there, that's where you'll connect with others. And if you go to the seminar, you go to the tutorial, you're connecting with others in a kind of safe space. Because I'm not going to a seminar because I want people to like me, Simon Phillips, it's not about me...it's about the thing that we're discussing. But just almost as a by-product of that, you just get into talking with other people, getting to know other people, how other people think. So I think connecting has got to be worked at and it's an everyday thing, it's not a '*I'll connect on Saturday, or Monday*'...it's every day you've got to force yourself to do it. So many times, Mo, with the Wellbeing Service, working with students generally...I've worked with thousands of students over the years...there's this thing that happens every year, and I think it happened to me when I was at university also. You miss things for a short period of time...those first weeks are really chaotic, really busy, you're up late in the night, so then you don't go to that tutorial a couple of times and then suddenly, by the third week - which isn't very long - so many students are like '*I just can't...*', just like in the second video. '*I just can't knock on the door or walk in*'...

[MO]: ...yeah, I feel like I've missed too much now...

[SIMON]: ...and everybody's there, they all know each other...'*I don't know anyone*'. And it's like, you can still walk in...but it's just easier if you start well, if you connect early and don't worry if you bounce off, you just have to keep going back, you have to keep putting yourself in that room.

[MO]: ...absolutely, you just have to put yourself in there, even when you don't want to be there. That's such a huge life lesson as well.

[SIMON]: ...it's a bit like work, Mo, isn't it? You come to work every day...

[MO]: ...yep. You come to work every day. Sometimes you're gonna do things that don't necessarily float your boat...

[SIMON]: ...but the difference, is...you come to work every day and I've been doing it for like years and years...it's because there's no choice, I don't give myself any choice. You know, you've got to go to work...there's no choice. And I sometimes think that if I could go back to my student self, years ago, I shouldn't have given myself that choice of '*oh, maybe I'll skip this lecture, maybe I won't go to that tutorial*'. Just don't allow yourself that choice...

[MO]: ...it's a weird paradox. Just because you have the control not to, doesn't mean you should. You should still go. Don't be silly...you're paying a crazy amount of money, it's in your best interest to engage with things that, perhaps, you don't see the value of immediately. It will come, but the university is a whole three-year degree. Until you finish this degree, don't make any judgements too brashly. There's another thing in the video that I wanted to touch briefly on, it said '*Connect with your peers and connect in teams*'. That's something that I still regret to this day that it took me until about my third year to really have students who would work hard, like study groups, and also peers that I could vent my frustrations on.

[SIMON]: ...but it isn't about working on your own and being on your own. In fact, I can say you should never be on your own with anything, really, at university. Because when you go into the world of work, no one person has this great idea and then everybody goes and does it...ideas are always formed by two or three people round the table just talking about something and then two ideas together become another idea, which isn't the same as either of them, but is actually much, much better. That's how it happens. Students need to have good dialogue about their course and about what they're doing and share and challenge each other about those things.

[MO]: ...all of this is just great practice. How many times have I tried to make friends and...perhaps I didn't do it so well...it was only in my third year did I venture off into different blocks...

[MILES THOMPSON, LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY]: Really?

[MO]: It was weird...different areas of the university. And it was surprising how beautiful they were and how interesting they were. And I ended up talking to students in architecture and I'm like *'I'm a business student. This is cool, maybe we should start our own business! OK cool'*. It's really these serendipitous occasions of people just bumping into each other. I think that's the beauty of being at a university...the cross-section of knowledge...and students are...here to make that knowledge their own.

[MILES]: Completely. I think what you say is absolutely bang-on. I think there's a risk these days that students are busy people...students are busier people than when I was at university. When I was at university, I worked a lot, I didn't have a huge amount of money behind me, so I did a lot of different jobs, but, but...that's the norm now. Students are at university maybe for their lectures and then it's like *'ah, I've got family commitments, or job commitments, or I have these other commitments'*...and of course they do, these are real and realistic concerns for today's students. But a lot of the things that we've been talking about in these videos, and you were just talking about that there is this wider ability to tap into other things at university. And part of that, as you say, is relationships, it's making friends that you will keep for the rest of your life. That's a really impressive resource that you get to tap into. And I think one of the funny things that students probably don't realise until they get out of the other side of university and get into workplaces, is that university really does contain just a huge number of relatively like-minded people. This massive resource of like-minded people from which you can pick friends, and peers, and people to share hobbies with and share interests with...or maybe just go out drinking with and have fun with. And when you get out into the world of work and you're working in an organisation which has a certain hierarchy and a spread of ages you're like *'wow, this pool is not as rich'*, so take advantage of the opportunity that university gives you to connect to peers and as you were saying earlier, to lecturers and to staff...

[MO]: ...that's what makes life really rich...having these relationships of all sorts. I mean I really do look forward to having coffee with my mentors. I see them twice a year and it's an occasion. It's a real occasion because I got to tell them what I've been doing these last six months. And it's having that relationship of where I'm at or whatever and it's a form of accountability, but it's more a friendship. And I think students really need to acknowledge that they're not the complete

product. But how to get there?! You can only get there through having loads of different networks...and let's not even talk about the business value of having a huge network. That's a whole different thing! I'm just talking about the richness that your life can be if it's shared amongst a group of friends that you can lean on, and they can also lean on you. So much satisfaction is gained by being able to there for somebody else...I can't stress that enough. And university life, particularly, students know they're gonna have a night where they're staying up 24 hours and those mates that they've stayed up with...that's an experience that'll be with them for life. I think that if this is our final remarks and stuff, students should really look forward to the process of what is called the university program that they're going through. Three or four years of your life that you'll never get back, but will be a springboard to a future self of yours that you are yet to author. And I just...man, I feel like I'm gonna cry. Because it's such an exciting time for these guys. So, jealous? I guess. We can't go through that Miles, we've done that...

[MILES]: ...but notice how we've said on a number of occasions...*'oh, if I had the opportunity to do that again'* or *'I'd do this thing a bit different'* or *'I'd tweak this just a tiny bit'*...and I think on each time we've said that, it's just about being broader, exploring more, being more open, connecting more...because sometimes we just get into little narrow blind alleys where *'it's got to be about this'* or *'I've got to do that'* or *'I'm in competition with this or..'*. And if we could just loosen up our relationship with that kind of talk and just go *'let's just explore lots of different things...let's just be open...'* That's in terms of peers, of social opportunities, that's in terms of really engaging with our lecturers, and just making sure that we live it to the full. But as we said way back in that first video, that's not just about getting wrecked...yeah, you'll get wrecked once or twice, of course you are, but it's about living it to the full in the full richness that university life offers..

[MO]: ...the full range. All its glory and pain...

[MILES]: yeah, yeah, yeah. Again, just noting it will include those bumps in the road. There will be a certain amount of suffering. There will be a certain amount of struggle. That's part of the journey. Not just at university, but after university as well.

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