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# **Stress Busting for Students**

**Understanding University, the Ultimate Uni Podcast - Episode 2**

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**Katie:** Welcome to *Understanding University the Ultimate Uni* podcast.

**Karina:** My name is Karina, and I am a Collaborative Outreach Assistant at the University of Essex and I work closely with our *Aspire and Aspire Higher* programmes. I finished my degree in BA in criminology at the University of Essex in 2019.

**Katie:** And my name is Katie and I'm an Outreach Assistant and I also work at the University of Essex with Karina and I have a first class degree in performing arts.

**Karina:** Today we'll be chatting to Catherine and Veronica, who are current undergraduate students at the University of Essex in this episode of *Stress Busting for Students*. If you have any questions about any topics we discussed, please use the #UnderstandingUni on Twitter or you can email [outreach@essex.ac.uk](mailto:outreach@essex.ac.uk). So, Veronica would you like to introduce yourself?

**Veronica:** Hello everyone, my name is Veronica. I'm a Law and Human Rights student and I'm in my final year.

**Karina:** Okay, and Catherine?

**Catherine:** Hi, I'm Catherine. I'm a final year politics student at the University of Essex. This is like my four year sandwich programme of a placement and next year I want to do teacher training post grad.

**Karina:** That's great. Thank you so much. So stress is something that we deal with in our day to day lives. So today we want to focus more specifically on stress throughout your University lives and how you cope and overcome it.

For any of our listeners out there if you want to know any more information about what stresses or how you become more resilient. You can visit the [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk) websites.

So, let's start with a question for Veronica. Do you remember there being a significant change in lifestyle or studying when you started University?

**Veronica:** Yeah, absolutely. Obviously, the change that comes through time. So I moved from Italy to the UK, my first year and throughout my first year I completely changed. I came out of it. I was completely different. When I when I first moved in, first of all, because I was studying. Sorry, I was studying a degree that I chose myself. So I wasn't back in high school, where most of my subjects were forced upon me or imposed by the school. So, I was doing something that I liked and this taught me to kind of like develop a system of revision. I arrange my studies in a better way because I was also more motivated.

I also, I was also going out and I was in a different environment. I was living at Uni, away from home. I had to develop a system which also goes beyond my studies, so not just learn and understand how to arrange my studies at University but also kind of like arrange my time for eating, or doing laundry or exercising and doing chores at home which is something that obviously I didn't have to worry about before because I was living with my parents, so my mum would cook for me. She would help with the laundry, or she... I didn't have to worry about most things, like grocery shopping, well.

And I had, just like free time. I could arrange my time as I wanted so I didn't have to worry about all these things. I could just focus on my studies, whilst at Uni it's different, you have to go to lectures and not because... it's like you could just be staying at home

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or if you don't go to lectures you'll be missing out on things and obviously your grades are not going to be as good and this is something you don't want.

You have to learn how to deal with going out with your friends, going to the bar, going to get coffee, going clubbing and try and not get too involved in it and leave your studies behind. And it's a change that obviously affected my entire personality as well, so not just didn't, it didn't just change the way I arrange my studies, like the way I take notes and I listen to pre-recorded lectures and I listen again to my lectures and all that, which is something I'd never have done, which is nice, cool. Just listen again to a lecture that I didn't listen to in the first place.

But it's not just that, it's also the way I dress because... or the way I eat because you just meet so many people at Essex because it's such a multicultural place, so many people that come from everywhere and talking to these people, becoming friends with someone that comes from Wye for instance or Marrakech or Hong Kong which is where some of my friends are from. This really affects you as a human being in general, so also the way you dress, by the music I listen to. How... what I eat. You discover new things, new people. So yeah of course there's a massive change from when I first started Uni to now, I'm completely different person.

**Karina:** That's amazing. Thank you so much for that Veronica and Catherine, how does University compare to when you're at college or sixth form, is there much difference there?

**Catherine:** In some ways I found it easier. Like I know when I was in sixth form I was stressed quite a lot, mainly because I was dealing with... so I went to a different sixth form than my school for many reasons and I was doing obviously...when you go to sixth form or college you have to pick like the four subjects that will then shape your University. So it's kind of, quite stressful and when I went to college they said you have to do four subjects.

I ended up only doing three because I knew it was best for me. I know who I am and this is best for me and one thing I've realized from sixth form is that at the end of the day I'm the one who's doing this, I'm the one who has to cope, I'm the one who has to manage all of my like responsibilities. So I found my voice like I stood up in a polite way of course, I stood up to my teachers and said, I know who I am, what's best for me.

So going to uni, I found it easier because like I was doing a subject that I chose to do. Yeah, there's some things I didn't understand or some modules I found harder, but at least it was like one subject, it was just politics. It wasn't politics, history, media, you know, it was all within one like blanket subject so I could be more focused and also the University makes you feel like not alone, like I moved from London to Essex, so not very far. But I know that you know I as one of many people who'd also moved from down the road in Clacton or another country. You know, we're all here, new and the University did a lot of stuff to make you feel better and I got involved with the societies quite quickly because that's how I... with my friends or my flatmates, I think it was all about having an environment where everyone wants to make the best of it, everyone wants to have the best experience so it... I felt more settled than I did in college.

**Karina:** That's really helpful. Thank you so much, and just to mention to our listeners as well, all of these things that we're talking about can be really stressful and the NHS website actually offers some useful tips, including some stress busters for you to sort of understand how to relax and take the situation as it is as Catherine mentioned she knew

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it was best for her to sort of stick to three subjects rather than four so doing those sort of things will really help to reduce stress in your life.

Prospects.co.uk also provide resources for students to read about why mental health is important, to keep in mind while you're studying at University, so our listeners can have a look there too.

Now a question for Veronica. Can you remember a time at university where you felt stressed?

**Veronica:** Oh yeah of course, many. Um, So I feel like one of the time I was the most stressed was in my first year. Um, when, so obviously Law is a very, very hard subject like it's very intense. And in first year, you start quite easy. So you don't have deadlines in the first couple of months and I was very relaxed, oh this is easy, this is nice, until I was, I had like four deadlines in one week and I was also a EU student so it wasn't... I obviously... my English wasn't as good. I was coming from a different country. And I, I didn't think I was up to the standards for instance, my writing skills were not as good and I was trying to organize my studies and stress because I didn't think my work was good enough. And I didn't know what to do.

And so the way I've dealt with it. Which I'm pretty proud of actually just, I just asked for help, which I think it's something that, like if you...doing asking for help... takes courage and but it's also the easiest and most efficient way to solve your issues. So you're not alone. There are so many other students that are in your position.

So what I did, for instance, with asking my...my friends that were from the UK or people that spoke English as a first language, that helped me out with my essay structure, reread my essays and just asking like just... just asking for where I made a mistake and fix my mistakes and understanding from it and I feel like by always asking someone else to maybe proofread my essays, or the Uni also offer support, support on it so you can go and ask, and there's also like the tutors or your lecture that are available for you.

There's methods that there's also like some kind of... there's programs where you can go and they help you improve your writing skills, speaking skills. So I guess. Yeah. That really helped me out. So I would maybe be... if I was stressed like, I'd just be like sitting down five hours before my deadline I'd be standing up... I'd be going up to your friend or someone that you know barely knew, I knew that was doing my same course. I'd be like, excuse me: can you please help me out and read my essay or maybe have a chat and discuss things. But by having this person reading my, my work and like saying, yeah, this is good, this is bad.

Even like even if there was a lot of criticism I knew that by fixing all of this, my work was good enough. And I felt more confident and I felt like I was improving and that helps me relax and helped me feel more confident in what I was submitting and also when you feel like you've done... Even if your work isn't good enough. If you're pleased with yourself, like, oh yeah, I've done everything I could. I've worked enough. I worked hard enough, even if you're don't get the grade that you're expecting, you're satisfied with, you know, you know that you put all the effort that you could fit in that you're satisfied with yourself. So that's how I cope with it.

**Karina:** I think that's great and I also think that you pointed out something very, very good there, which is the common myth that comes around about students not getting any support at universities and I feel like everyone keeps sort of trying to say that there's not much help that you can get. But as you mentioned, there is a lot of help from friend's, tutor's, professors, everyone really.

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**Veronica:** Yeah, absolutely. I remember my teacher helped me and not just with my, like my essays or anything but also for instance applying with National Insurance, things like this.

**Katie:** Absolutely.

**Veronica:** So there is a lot of support.

**Katie:** Yeah. Thank you. I was, I was just gonna say that as well, reiterate how there is so much support there, um, that's available and for our listeners now as well. Just remember that your schools and colleges are there to support you as well. So if you're currently experiencing some worries or stresses reach out to your teachers or a trusted adult because it's really important to, to speak about those issues.

I was just going to sort of mention sort of exercises that we could do to, to support ourselves in these sorts of times and because it's, it's great that we can talk to people, but there might be some sort of some tips that you guys have for dealing with stresses in your own time and I've come across this this activity called the *Circle of Control and Influence* and it's taken from *Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and it basically helps you to address the concerns in your life; but helps you to put it into perspective what maybe you, you shouldn't necessarily be worrying about because there are, there will be concerns in your life that you have absolutely no control over and, and so there's no point in worrying about them basically because you can't do anything about them.

But there are other areas that we can influence. For example, what time we get up in the morning, obviously we have complete control over that. And it's important to sort of focus on those much smaller things to make us feel more...to feel happier less stressed less overwhelmed and at times we can find ourselves focusing on all the bigger things that we simply can't do anything about. And so by doing this activity it can really help with that. And if you wanted to.

If listeners want to do this activity. There's loads of resources online, but will also be making the resources available on our website. And if you are a registered listener so if you've completed the online registration form we will be sending all of these sort of resources that we mentioned and links to websites in our follow up emails.

But yeah, I just wanted to reach out to you, Catherine and ask whether you have any sort of activities or self-help things for when you're feeling overwhelmed and you've already reached out to someone, but perhaps there's like an activity or something that helps to keep you back on that pathway.

**Catherine:** I'm quite stressed at the moment. What with the current situation, as well as having essays due, starting a new term, having to like stay up to date with my reading and going to class on time like and making, making sure you're prepared for your classes.

Before we recorded this actually I spoke to one of my professors about it. And, you know, just like Veronica was saying, they're always there to help you which is very good. One thing I've done to like manage what I need to do is I've got post-it notes all around me where I've basically written down everything I need to do but broken down. So say, for my lectures, I need to... um, I've got two readings. I've got three videos to watch. I've made a little targets for my essay I've got to do, I've put okay read the slides, do a basic plan like, it's more achievable, rather than saying target: write essay, you know, um, because for me if I've got it planned front of me, if I've got my sources in front of me, or

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information in front of me I can sit down in like a few hours and get it done. Even if it's like 1000 words or 3000 words like it's definitely helped and also it's the satisfaction of grabbing your pen and just crossing off things you've done. You feel like you've done something.

**Katie:** Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I would definitely agree with that. I love writing a list, it helps you feel productive. It keeps you on task and yeah, ticking off those things that you've done just fills you with that satisfaction. And you know what, I can move on to the next thing, and a little top tip here when you're writing a list, put on the top of your list to write a list so that as soon as you've written that list. You've got at least one thing you can tick off.

So yeah, thank you for that Catherine, um Veronica, have you got any sort of top tips or anything that you use to help you keep focused, when you're feeling a bit overwhelmed?

**Veronica:** Well, of course. Well, I do kind of when I whenever I feel really, really stressed. I usually just take a break, because there is no point in just like trying to force yourself to focus when you're just overwhelmed, all you can think of is oh I don't think I'll make it, I don't have enough time. The work I've done is not good enough.

So, I would usually just take a break. If there's someone in the house with me, my housemates. I'm going to speak to them on go outside for short walk or go grab a coffee. Just having a chat with my housemate for like 10 minutes will calm me down, or if I'm alone I play the guitar a bit, if you have any hobbies I'd suggest something like, I don't know, drawing, just sit down, listen to music, draw. Play an instrument, listen to a song, take a shower, taking a shower really helps me out and then you back to work, you know, more relaxed, a lot more focused, you see things clearly as well. So, just establish okay, right. I've got this done and this what I can do. I'm going to do it.

Also, I believe establishing a goal in the long term and the short term really helps, so for instance in the long term, why am I studying? What do I want to do when I finish University? I want to get a location scheme, I want to get an internship. So I focus on getting a location scheme and in the short term, it's okay, I've got an essay due in a week, here's what I'm, going to do. I'm going to study everyday but on Wednesdays for instance, I'm gonna go out with my friends, I'm gonna allow one night off where I can relax and take a break. So I look forward to that night so if I study and I know that I'm going to have that break on that day and I carry on revising and I carry on doing my work and I submit my work and I allow myself for one day off. And then I carry on working again after that. So, I guess this kind of method can help you out, if you're feeling really overwhelmed or stressed. Yeah, it can give you a way out and escape.

**Katie:** Yeah, definitely. I think it's important to remember that university life isn't just studying and the same for school and college. You don't just study, there are times to speak to friends and do other activities that you're interested in whether that's sports, or what other clubs and things and it's the same for university life as well. There are opportunities for you to just do what you enjoy and you should and perhaps having those rewards, I guess we could call them rewards that you look forward to. Once you have completed a bit of work.

I like that you mentioned colouring or having a shower and I guess you could sort of relate that to mindfulness and just taking those...you might not realise that you're being doing sort of mindfulness practice, but you are your, sort of, you're thinking about something else other than your work and you're just taking that time away to reframe your mind and help you to think clearly before you carry on with your studies. And so, yeah, that was really helpful.

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Thank you. Thank you to both of you actually for those tips and that kind of links on to what I was going to ask you next which was about motivation. So, we've just mentioned about the sort of rewards and goals and things to look forward to but is there anything else, perhaps, Katherine. What...what keeps you motivated when you're at university?

**Catherine:** Definitely goals that Veronica was talking about, is definitely one of the things I do. I say, right, okay, I'm working till, I don't know, five? And then at five I have this to do. I do a lot of society work so on a Monday, for example, I'll have loads and loads of lectures and then I've got my society at 6:30 to look forward to. Another thing I do is write down small targets and motivate myself by ticking them off. That's a good skill, but also I feel like I'm just repeating the same thoughts, but like think about the long term goal, you know, why are you here, why are you doing this?

I've been doing quite well with my degree, but I know that in order to be able to complete my training next year I need to complete my degree. So even if I'm feeling so unmotivated and I'm thinking, right, in a few months' time this will be done. Like, I will be submitting all my essays. I'll be having a nice, you know summer, and I'll be planning my next steps, like that does help a lot. And even having people around you to support you, say my partner, my housemates, that are all like come on, even like a little message every now and then saying come on, like today my housemate, you know was struggling, sent me a little gift of like a rabbit or something, saying that you can do it and like little stupid things like that make you feel okay, it'll get better.

**Katie:** Yeah, it was really nice that you've got people around you like that as well. And yeah, that's great to think about your, your short term and your long term goals, goals like Veronica mentioned earlier as well. And you can do that in terms of like short term goals for the day. So what do you want to achieve today. What do you want to achieve in a week, is in short term. It can be anything. Recent and your long term goals can be sort of next month, or even next year or what you want to achieve in a few years' time and that can sort of help you as well as address what you need to get done now and maybe make you feel a little bit less stressed because you've addressed those things that you need to overcome or need to do. Veronica is there anything else you would add to... helping you to keep motivated and perhaps advice for current students as well.

**Veronica:** All I'd say is a lot of times when you're working you have like two, three deadlines, two, three essays or assignments and obviously you're not going to log all of them. So my system to try and keep myself motivated is I try and split like, what I like doing with what I don't like doing. I try not to, so what most people do is like, I'm going to start doing I like so at least that's a start but for me that doesn't really work because once I've done doing everything I like, I've left everything I don't like doing and it's really, really hard to keep myself focused and motivated when I'm doing something I really don't enjoy so I try and do maybe a little bit of what I don't like and then I look forward in doing... try doing what I like and try and alternate between the two of them and I feel like this system helps me staying focused on my work because when I try and do the assignment I'm not very keen on doing and then when I feel like I've had too much of it I move on to what I like and I'll be more focused and more productive and then once I've done that I'll go back to the 'ugly assignment' as they say and then do the same thing and that helped me do all my work regardless and I feel like I'm way more productive like that.

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**Karina:** That's a really, really good point. I think that method might work for actually quite a few people to try and split the good things and the things that you don't really look forward to doing rather than leaving yourself stranded with just the things that you know you might not be motivated to do so, yeah, definitely. Thank you guys so much for all of those little tips and tricks.

There are some good resources for our listeners as well that are available on places such as [mindfulnessforstudents.co.uk](http://mindfulnessforstudents.co.uk) or even apps such as headspace which provide activities for mindfulness and meditation.

But yeah, thank you so much to our guest today Veronica and Catherine. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us. It was really useful to hear all of your experiences as well as how you deal with it and it really shows that there are so many different ways to cope and combat stress. I definitely use some of these tips myself as Veronica mentioned, just walking away from a piece of work for five, ten minutes when you're not being productive. That's something that really helps me too. So I find that super, super helpful.

**Katie:** Yeah definitely like Karina said, I also love a good list that really helps make me feel productive and so it just shows that there are many ways that we can use these sort of strategies to help us deal with stressful times and that can be at any point in your life. And if you're a student now at school or college you can use these sort of tips to help you through that part of your education and obviously, prepare yourself for if you decide to go to university or anywhere else for that matter. And so yeah, this is, it's been really, really helpful. Thank you, and I hope that it will help other people and other students as well.

**Karina:** Definitely as Katie mentioned previously, all of our resources that we sign posted to and more in this episode will be emailed to everyone who has registered to receive updates about the podcast but it will also be available on our website. So, if you haven't completed an online form you can either email [Outreach@Essex.ac.uk](mailto:Outreach@Essex.ac.uk) and we'll send it to you or you can find it on the sixth form resources page on the university's website

**Katie:** And that means that you will also, you won't miss out on any of our other episodes that will be recording for this podcast as well, which is great.

**Karina:** So that's it. That brings us to the end of our first episode of *Understanding University, the ultimate Uni podcast*. Thank you so much to all of our listeners If anything, discussed today has affected you there are services available on the NHS website which provides 24 hour advice and support as well as help to speak to a mental health professional. And this can all be found by Googling NHS where to get urgent help for mental health, please feel free to email us if you do need any further support. Thank you and goodbye.