Hello to a Stress-Free Exam Period_mixdown.mp3

Voice Over [00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Bekah [00:00:09] So hello and welcome back to our BeWell podcast. I'm Bekah Walker your host and I'm joined by a new panel of guests for today's episode where we will be discussing practical ways to reduce exam stress and getting the most out of your revision sessions. So without further ado, can each of our guests introduce themselves to our listeners telling us who you are and what you do here at Aberdeen.

Wendy [00:00:28] Hello, I'm Wendy Lawrenson, one of the Academic Skills Advisors in the Student Learning Service with a particular focus on study skills, including revision exams and so on.

Emily [00:00:42] My name's Emily Biggar I'm a BSC student of Applied Sports Science.

Olivia [00:00:48] Hi everyone. My name is Olivia Théorêt. I'm doing my master's here at the University of Aberdeen. I am from Canada, so I'm an international student and I'm studying Global Health and Management.

Bekah [00:01:00] Great. Thank you, guys, and thanks so much for joining me on today's episode. So revising for exams can be stressful if you're feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information that you're trying to remember. Good time management can help you to feel in control and learn more effectively. How do you guys go about planning your time during exam season to juggle all your deadlines and do you remember to schedule in self care?

Emily [00:01:25] So what I do is actually one of the services from the Student Learning Services online, they have different planners they have a semester planner, a monthly planner and a weekly planner. So at the start of each semester, I do a general plan which goes up on my wall of the semester of each of my courses and most of the main deadlines, but even little ones. But the good thing about that one, it can also have, it has sections for your family and your job, so you can put other things in to make sure you can juggle how much time you need to leave for each one. And then I just do a brief monthly plan because I don't want to overplan because that's the thing I found in school, that I overplan, I plan every little minute so that's where I get more with my weekly planner. I go in a bit more detail but I always make sure to leave room for if stuff goes wrong because you never know what's going to happen and you don't want to stress out with this rigid plan if something goes wrong. One thing I found really important with planning and self-care is I plan in my breaks, I plan when I'm going to have lunch, when I'm going to have dinner, and even when I'm going to do exercise just to make sure that I have that time to reset instead of just grinding at it all day.

Olivia [00:02:47] So first off, that's really interesting that you mention the planner, Emily, because I was not aware that there was that resource with the university so now I'm intrigued about this. That sounds so great that it has all those different sections about family and social life and school. So for myself, I guess I have my own way of like planning things, like obviously I don't use the planner, but I like to do, to-do lists. That's my way of doing things. And I like to adapt it to every single day to try and set realistic goals. And I also just want to say that for anyone listening, they now feel like they need to have a super intense calendar planner, like it's not for everybody, I just want to note that because I've heard recently someone was saying that they have like five different Google calendars and

one for every different little thing. And for me, like for a moment I was like "I now need to have five different Google calendars." And it's like, no, at the end of the day it also needs to be what works best for you. If that is doing a to-do list or if that's having the university planner, that's awesome but also find a way that works best for you to organise your things. And then as for like self-care, I think for sleep, that's a big one for me with trying to make sure that I have enough sleep during exam season because I know that for myself I need sleep. Like I know some people can write an exam with 2 hours sleep. That doesn't work for me, so I need to make sure that I'm getting my minimum amount of sleep. Obviously, I'm going to have less during exam season, but I need to have the bare minimum to be able to function and still do well in my exams. And I guess also juggling self-care, but then also just doing basic activities like sometimes I feel guilty if I'm taking time off to go and buy groceries, but I have to remind myself that I do need to eat and I do need to do groceries and it's okay to take a step away from my studies to go and do that. So also just reminding myself of those things, and that also applies to self-care, of course. So you really need to integrate those so that you can do well throughout your exams.

Wendy [00:04:40] I think that both Olivia and Emily, have said some fantastic things there. One of the key things about planning and organising is it's highly individual. It really does depend on the person as to how organised they want to be. Sometimes the more organised we are that could actually be counterproductive and especially if we've not factored in what I call wiggle room, that, you know, things that we thought we could do don't get done and that can then lead into stress and anxiety. We're actually quite bad at judging how long a task will actually take or how much we can get done in a certain period of time. So plans are really good if they fit us, and by that they must be realistic and they must be achievable. So we're interested in, you know, giving our goals and challenges a home that allow us to see ourselves completing those and being able to move on nicely. Sleep and looking after ourselves is really important that gives us a really strong foundation on which any other studying that we do can be based. The five basic things that sort of it's worthwhile thinking about, number one, and the most important is sleep because it's while we sleep, we learn. If we don't sleep well, it means all the stuff that we've been spending so much time on the day before doesn't actually consolidate. And also it affects our focus and concentration the next day. So it has this sort of double whammy effect. So sleep is our number one priority. And quite often under the stress of exam time, it can go out the window, but actually it's trying to pare it back. The other thing are food and fluids. Again, it's eating good quality food because of all the nutrients and the fluids to keep ourselves hydrated and also to transport all those good things around to keep our brain optimum. And then other things that have been mentioned, it's about exercise, getting some exercise and some rest and relaxation. So exercise, I think sometimes people think it's about, again, it's about quantity, you know, having to go to the gym for hours on end. But it's actually, a short ten minute walk, power walk round the block is as beneficial. And studies seem to be indicating things such as, you know, exercise after study session seems to help that information go in and stay in a bit better. So, look, definitely looking after ourselves, it's really important. But particularly around exam time when we feel those extra stresses and strains that can just sort of knock us off the track a bit.

Bekah [00:07:25] Yeah, I would definitely agree with what you guys are saying and it's really interesting to hear you guys talking about planning because for me, I'm definitely a planner and it's something that if I can feel super stressed one day that I've got so much things to do, but if I haven't written down a to-do list, I can like log onto my computer the next day and think I have nothing to do if I don't have it written in front of me. But I liked what you said as well, Olivia, around making that, like, realistic and it doesn't work for everyone because I have also been guilty of over planning and like you've said, Wendy,

not having that catch-up time in there. So I think "Oh that's going to take me your 2 hours to do this." And then I scheduled my whole day almost hour by hour. And then that can become overwhelming too, because you can feel like you haven't achieved anything or you just don't have time for, you know, "I have not scheduled my lunch break" and I've just thought "I can do this, this and this so I can eat as I do that." And that's not a healthy way to do that. So planning 100% is key, but it really is important to plan in dinner time, lunch time, yeah going out for a run, a walk or anything. It's so important in terms of optimum motivation as well. You know, if you sit at your computer for 13/14 hours a day, your productivity is going to be reduced as well. And I know it can be so hard during exams when you think "I've got that deadline", but actually taking out, taking like a walk for half an hour. You might not think that you have "Oh I don't have half an hour to do that." I've certainly been guilty of feeling that in the past. I don't have half an hour to go for a walk, but actually when I have forced myself out, I'm generally still thinking about it. You know, when I'm in about, you know, I'm thinking about "what am I going to write in the essay?" And I come back and suddenly I'm able to write more words again something around just taking a break and getting away from your computer as well can be so, so helpful as well as having that time management as well. I know when I spent X amount of time on this assignment, I now need to spend some time on the other assignment and it doesn't matter if you haven't finished the other one, especially if you have conflicting deadlines. If they're both due on the same day, you want to be able to work on them both at the same time.

Emily [00:09:51] I just wanted to go back about one thing Wendy said about that catch-up time. Something one of my mum's colleagues, she said, I think it's at the end of the day, I think she puts it like 4pm to 5pm. And she has this slot and she put "note-time", I think is what she calls it and it's literally just time to do, it doesn't matter if it's like writing up a report or even checking her calendar, doing emails. It's to get that time of stuff she hasn't quite managed to get to or have taken longer than she thought originally would take and just get it done. Instead of stressing out and like you said, not moving on to the next task because they haven't quite finished the previous task. And I think that's quite a crucial thing to have.

Olivia [00:10:41] I just had a few things that I wanted to add. First off, Emily, that's so interesting about your friend's mum allocating one hour. I feel like I might try to do that just to touch up a few things that I don't get done throughout the day. But then just to touch on two other things that I guess Wendy was saying, and building off of Bekah. So one was the scheduling again, like for me, I wasted time before trying to make like a really pretty calendar and schedule. I colour-coded it and it was so nice but I wasted so much time. I ended up realising like that's not the priority. Like I could have done a different way of doing that and just gotten the same product and then could have worked on my assignments. So like, I don't want people to get too caught up in that because I was "pretty colours and all of this and make it nice and to look at" and all these things. And then also for exercise, that's a big one I think that I always try to incorporate because obviously you're like so busy and you don't want to go. But at the same time I find that if I can actually go to, like you said, a walk or go to a dance class, I find that helps my mind because I'm still thinking about the project. But then I do have moments where it's forced me to think about something else and it allows me to get rid of some of that stress and energy that's all built up inside of me. So it helps release some of that energy so that when I come back, I'm like a little, not relaxed, but I feel like a little bit more collected. So then I can think better once I'm back and my mind's had a bit of a break as well. And then, like you said, Bekah like you actually take a step away from your screen, which I find sometimes my eyes are going to fall out of my head because you're looking at your screen

for hours all day. So I definitely think that exercise is a big one to incorporate to study schedule during exams.

Bekah [00:12:18] Yeah, definitely. I think sometimes as well, if you get stuck in that rut of sitting at your desk all day, you can quite often be procrastinating anyway. Like I've certainly caught myself like, you know, flicking through my, my phone or something and I'm like, no point of me sitting here doing that if I'm not going to be doing my assignment I'd be as well get up and go out to be productive in some other way. Whether it is go for shopping, go for a walk and prepare myself to study later on that day. And I know we've spoken about it a little bit already, but sleep is so, so important when we're studying. Getting a good night's sleep will help us to learn at our best and improve our state of mind and hopefully help you feel a bit happier and less stressed too. So I just wondered, in your view, do you think your stress levels affect your ability to sleep or do you think you're more stressed because you haven't had enough sleep? What do you guys think?

Wendy [00:13:16] Right. I think it's probably both, to be honest. There's definitely sort of like a bit of a feedback loop there and what happens is it just feeds into each other and exacerbates and therefore everything just gets worse. So you stress because you can't sleep, you can't sleep because you're stressed, and it just goes on. I think there's quite a few reasons why we get stressed around exams. One of them is learnt habit is that we think of it as being stressful. So the next time we have an exam, our brain already thinks this is a stressful situation and ramps it up, and it can, that's how we build up exam anxiety is that it gradually just gets worse and worse and worse. Often, it's about fundamental things that we need to be thinking about. Sometimes it's just the word revision can trigger things and just changing it. I had a colleague who called them quizzes instead of exams and I said, don't use revision I tend to use the word revisiting. We're revisiting for various things. We're revisiting to see what we know now, we're revisiting to see "are there some things I didn't manage to get done." I'm revisiting to see actually now I've got towards the end of the course, those things are fallen into place and I actually understand those now. We're revisiting and that sometimes is a, is a help, you know, to get away from this this word revision, which can build up a lot of connotation as a time of stress and anxiety where we're trying to shovel as much information in our brains as we possibly can. So there are some things that, you know, to consider, and that is we can be revising and studying well in advance. I think sometimes there's a perception that it's about spending hours and hours. That's what we need. But I'll often say to students, actually, it's not the length of time, it's the quality of your technique so it's about having short sessions which have a specific focus, a particular task. This is much better for goals and challenges is where the brain knows what it's supposed to be doing. It's not too big, not too woolly. It's got, you've got a specific task and if you've got several of them organised it then means if you don't fancy doing one, you were thinking about doing that. Normally you just give up. You can say, "well, what else have I got here? Which one do I fancy doing a bit of? I'll do a bit bit of that." And that's what when we're dealing with planners, is to build in this flexibility of options and choices of things. Another big factor is actually doing things at the right time. We've all got times of the day when our brains are more receptive to study than others. If we try and do it at the wrong time of day, it takes about four times longer to do exactly the same material, and we get frustrated. So it's always worthwhile doing a bit of a check and trying, and you probably have got an idea yourselves when you are able to focus and concentrate better. It could be you find you can really get going after about 10am until about lunchtime. Then maybe you've got a bit of time later on in the afternoon and then you've got maybe a bit of time in the evening. And we've got these, what I call optimum times, and that's when the more challenging things we can tackle those better at those times. Our slump times that's when we need to step away and the longer we go on

trying to work, we go past our peak and we drift down onto what I call our low level or passive level that we can keep doing for hours. But actually, we're getting very little from it. Whereas a break. Trying again. Seeing if we can up our concentration a bit and having that awareness, metacognition, as to what's going on makes it then that we're managing it much better.

Olivia [00:17:16] So I guess same thing for me, like when you said "or is it both?" I like shouted to my screen, "it's both!" Because it is both. It's this vicious cycle. It's also like you're stressed, you can't sleep. It's like if you're going to the airport or something next morning, you know, and you're waking up early and you keep waking up and look at the clock and then you're counting down "how many more hours of sleep can I get?" The little hamster wheel in your head just never stops talking. So definitely both. And Wendy, I really like that word that you said of revisiting instead of like revising, because I guess it doesn't carry that same weight of like initially, makes you sweat when you hear it. But then it also in a really nice way, acknowledges the fact that it's building off of what you've already learnt throughout the semester, because sometimes when exams start I get stressed out because I'm like, "oh no, I have to like learn everything and put everything into my brain together and mush it all together." But it's like, no, you've already learnt some things, you remember some things. We just need to revisit the concepts and then build off of that and add in what the little parts that you're missing or forgot. So I really like that because it doesn't give that feeling of starting from scratch during the exam period. And just listening to you talk Wendy just makes me feel like, I mean, I'm doing my master's now, so I've already learnt some skills and know how I function during exams, like through my undergrad. But I feel like I would have, I would have really benefited from hearing you speak before exams. Especially my first semester at university. I think that would have been so useful to hear someone say like, "look, you can't study for hours all day, like it's just not feasible, it's not productive" because some people are somehow able to do it but I feel like I would have really benefited and like appreciated hearing from you. So I appreciate hearing from you now saying these things, it makes me feel better.

Wendy [00:18:55] Thank you very much, that's very nice of you to say that. But it's never too late, I mean, we do a lot of work with postgraduates, so we're here for both the postgraduates and the undergraduates. And just linking back to what Emily was saying about, we have Achieve and Achieve Plus in MyAberdeen in the organisations area where a lot of our handouts are placed that you can just go and look at. So we've got one on creating and using planners that give you a bit of a background how to use the different types of planners and we've got things such as 20 top tips for motivation and studying, we've got 30 top tips for revising, one of them is called revision pitfalls and sabotage techniques, 10 tips how to deal with all those things, such as panicking and procrastination and so on. So it's worthwhile going having a look at the sites in MyAberdeen and just seeing what's there if there's anything to help.

Emily [00:19:54] I've always been quite lucky in the respect that I sleep like a baby through just about everything. But before an exam. I get the thing, like Olivia said of, you go to sleep fine, but you wake up constantly. So I actually found I have a borderline strange obsession with The Big Bang Theory and Brooklyn Nine-Nine. They just calm me down if I watched them on repeat. So one thing I found was just watching one of them even just an episode or two before I went to bed. I slept so much more soundly. I was so much more relaxed. And even though I wasn't studying to the point I went to bed, I could remember so much more. And I've always, as my mum, is an educational psychologist, I've always had it drilled into me of sleep, sleep, sleep. So that's what I found. And Wendy said something about find your optimum zone for studying. I actually had a switch that in

my first year of uni I studied really well, at really unsociable times at night, but recently I found it so much more practical that if I get up about half six and start studying at seven I get so much more done and then I've got an evening to relax. And then I sleep better and then I remember more. But previously, I got that extra sleep in the morning. So even if you find one way it can always switch. So you always kind of got to keep that, keep checking and it's not just "that's my thing, that is me set." Just keep checking and find that zone. So I rechecked mine when I was getting a real slump at night and I'm like, I'm not getting anything done I'm just wanting to sleep. So I just switched it, I just tried early morning and I got it done so much quicker, procrastinated less and remembered more.

Olivia [00:21:55] That's so interesting, Emily, that you talked about switching your schedule because I'm more of a person staying up late at night doing my work, and I'm always like, "would I be more productive in the morning?" I don't really know because I can't wake up in the morning. But I'm glad that you're able to successfully flip your schedule around. But that's interesting you mentioned about Big Bang Theory and Brooklyn Nine-Nine because I have a friend who she does the same thing with watching Friends. So she'll watch Friends before she goes to sleep and she'll also do it right before an exam she'll take the time before, some people like myself - I'm guilty of this, like cram everything to, like, the minute you walk into the room. But for her, the way that she works is she'll watch a Friend's episode, like a 20-minute episode right before. So that she calms down and that helps her go into the exam. And I guess that just really falls down to everybody is different with how they prepare for exams, because I also have friends who stay up even later than me, and then they only have 2 hours of sleep and somehow they're able to function. But I know that wouldn't work for me, so I can't put myself through that either. So it really comes down to like, how does everybody work on what works best for you? And I'm glad that you're able to sleep like a baby Emily, but like, for me, like, I can't fall asleep. I have such a hard time with that. I wake up, I have nightmares. So it's just like everybody's different.

Bekah [00:23:06] I think it's so interesting what you're all saying and how, back to the original question, does lack of sleep make you stressed or are you stressed because you haven't slept and is so right what you were saying. I 100% agree that it's like a vicious, vicious circle. I'm studying a master's part-time, as well as working full-time. So like for me, time management is really, really important in terms of my optimum brain functioning for certainly doing assessments. So I normally do all of my coursework in the evening because I'm working during the day. But when I have a lot of assessments and stuff coming up, then I take time off work so that I can do that during the day because I know that I can get my words out better certainly if I'm writing an essay during the day then I can in the evening. It can sometimes be really, really difficult and thinking, "Oh, I want to get this finished before I go to bed." And then before I know I've been working till like 11:30 or 12:00 at night and then I go to bed. I'm really tired. I'm like, "I can't do anymore. I'm so tired." And I go to bed and I just lie and stare at the roof for ages because I can't switch off. That's really been a lesson for me sometimes if I'm like, "Oh, I've got uni work to do tonight." And then I was like, "do you know what you're going to do better if you don't do that uni work tonight and just go to bed." So then you know I can get a head start the next day. I really like what you were saying Emily, about getting up earlier as well. I do personally find that's helpful for me, like I like to get up and exercise and I find that that gives me motivation and energy. I'm more switched on first thing in the morning, so then I can get all my priorities done in the morning. And later on in the afternoon when my brain's maybe a little bit more tired, I can do less taxing things. It's so interesting that like, "Oh, I don't have enough time to sleep, I want to get this finished." But I remember I was just finishing my thesis in my undergrad degree and I think I had about maybe 600 words left to

write and I was like, "I really want to get it done tonight so I can read it in the morning and then submit it" because it was kind of close to the deadline and I was like really stressed, really stressed and trying to finish. It was basically just my conclusion I was doing and it took me like so long I couldn't get these last 600 words out. My brain was working so slowly and then I decided, "right, I need to go to sleep and I'll set my alarm and I'll get up at 05:30 in the morning and finish." You know, I was cautious of like the time deadline that needed to be submitted I thought if I stay up all night, I've got 18 hours to get this done but if I go to sleep, I then lost 9 hours and then I'll be more stressed. Anyway, I went to sleep, got up at half-past five in the morning, and then I had I blasted those last 600 words out in honestly, about an hour. Whereas last night it was taking me so long. So that really struck home to me that - go to sleep, your brain will work so much fresher in the morning. I was just, like, disappointed that it was like my final thing at university that I was doing that finally hit home to me, stop trying to stay up late. So I've certainly learnt that with doing my masters now that, actually it's fine to switch off, go to sleep and do it in the morning. Definitely, I've found it so much more helpful.

Wendy [00:26:25] Somebody once described it to me that we have a stress bucket and that during the day we fill it with all the things that are going on and during the night, during sleep, the brain sorts through it and empties it or reduces it, and then in the morning we can start filling it up again. It allows us to cope. If we don't sleep very well, we don't empty the stress bucket. So we wake up in the morning and everything is already overflowing before we've even started doing anything else. And I think that was quite a nice explanation of the importance of sleep, in helping us to actually empty and deal with things, cause things in the middle of the night seem so immense. And then in the morning I think "why was I bothered about that?" So somebody else once said to me, write things down, write things on a notepad, just have that by the bed and if your brain's ticking over about things, just jot it down it allows the brain to park it. And then you look at it in the morning and you go, "what was I bothered about with that?" The other thing are those distractors that you were saying about watching television programmes, we need to help the brain calm down and it's so wound up in itself with what we're thinking about. But just by trying to help it think about something else, it helps to calm that side down and then allows us to move on. I mean, there is a problem with, as everybody is aware of now, of the light emitted from all phones and devices and the blue light that is affecting our sleep. And they're saying that even those people who are saying, "oh, I fall asleep has no effect on me." When they've done studies, they're finding that the part of the sleep cycle where we learn and we create memory is particularly affected by the blue lights, the lights from the screen. So even though we might feel we're sleeping, it's actually having this effect on our memory. So that's why a lot of people talk about sleep hygiene, about having a good sleep routine, whether it's a breathing routine to try and calm ourselves down. I tend to use that, it works about nine times out of ten. Just breathing, and then I find I drift off because I'm focussing on something else. I'm focussed on counting and breathing. Now, it doesn't work for everybody, but it's trying to find something that helps us for the majority of the time and to calm the brain down a little bit.

Emily [00:29:06] That's an interesting thing you said about getting to sleep, because another one that I've been made aware of is, I believe it is called a body scan it gets called. And you just lie in bed and you slowly go through each point, relaxing each part of your body. And most people see they actually get to sleep before they even get to their feet, because it's just that relaxing down. I personally never tried it but I hear it gets really, really good results.

Olivia [00:29:41] That's really interesting Emily, I have tried the body scan. It helps me calm down a bit, but, or like get sleepy. I find that another one that also helps me is the like sleep stories. Those ones, I don't make it to the end of them I fall asleep like I start paying attention up to, like, 5 minutes and then I actually fall asleep. So I find for me those help a little bit more than the body scan. But I find that if you find some good sleep stories, some of them actually incorporate that in the beginning of the sleep story. And they'll tell you like, okay, before we start walking down this path, we're just going to take some deep breaths and then it already sets you off on that path. So I find that that also helps if you're trying to fall asleep.

Bekah [00:30:23] Yeah. I can definitely recommend a sleep podcast or something with like white noise really helps me fall asleep. I don't know it's something around stops my brain from thinking. I don't know what's in the sleep podcast that makes it work, but I've yet to get to the end of one of them. Actually, I don't even know how long they are, so that would be really interesting to go and look back to see how long an episode is, to see how quickly that I've fallen asleep. I think I can guess the answer to this already, but we all know it can be hard to feel on top of things and in control of our self when we're learning all the time but there obviously is things that we can do and we've kind of discussed a little bit already, but what is the one piece of advice that you would give to another student who is a little bit anxious or nervous around about their exam season?

Emily [00:31:11] Make sure you get sleep. And I don't know if it counts as one bit or two advice but plan but don't overplan.

Wendy [00:31:18] I know this may not seem particularly helpful, but I would say it's only an exam. It is not life threatening. It is not. And that if you can actually demystify the exam, and put it in perspective then actually that lowers the stress. Often what's associated with this is our expectations of the exam. We set ourselves something like, I won't be satisfied unless I get an A1. And so our expectations, I call it self-fulfilling prophecy. I know I was rubbish so I'm going to set myself a target that is so high that there's no way I'm going to reach it so therefore that will prove that I'm rubbish. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Whereas yes, we want targets and challenges, but they're often the wrong ones. Somebody once explained to me, it's like Goldilocks - called it the Goldilocks, the sweet spot, that when we're setting ourselves goals and challenges, they shouldn't be too easy, but they shouldn't be too hard. They should be just right. And that's how we want to be thinking about how we're tackling the exam and the exam itself is we have to have this right perspective of it so that we can actually see ourselves achieving and success and that leads to happiness and that leads to perseverance, so we're more likely to do some more. So it's about setting the right perspective. There was a book, I can't remember where it came from now and they had it saying that it's not rubbish and zero and 100% perfection. It's actually not a straight line, it's more like a circle. And what we want to do is set ourselves the challenges of what's good enough, and good enough is where we will have some satisfaction but it's not superhuman. You know, I wouldn't try for the Olympic high jump, I'd be starting off something that's maybe six inches off the ground and then seeing how I manage, and then I would build up and gradually build up until I got to the point where I know what's right and therefore I need to put a little bit more effort to improve so that I'm gradually improving and not starting off with something that's perhaps, you know, just not the right thing at this particular time. So, you know, that's why I go back to it's only an exam, you know, it's it's not the end of the world. De-stress it and you're then more likely to do better. If you set yourself the right challenge, you will overshoot because it's in the right place. If you set it right at the very top, you've got 1% of getting that 99% chance of not getting it, the odds are against you. So that then causes it to be more stressful.

Olivia [00:34:05] So I think I'll end up saying a few things as well. But I will, I'm trying to think of the best way to like encompass so many things in one, but I think the best way for me to, I guess for my piece of advice would be to know yourself. And then to break that down into two things of one, knowing and knowing yourself, know your limits. Know how much sleep you need to function because everybody's going to be different and it's okay if you need more sleep because I find sometimes it's like, "Oh, I only had 2 hours of sleep and I still pulled off this exam." And then I feel like, well, I need 6 hours of sleep to pull off an exam, you know what I mean? So know yourself, know your limits, know how much sleep you need. And then also knowing like that, Bekah you said so with your example of knowing, I need to go to bed and then tomorrow morning I will finish this conclusion. That's another example of knowing your limit and then redoing it in the morning and reassessing in the morning. And then same thing with like you need to eat. So again, that comes down to knowing your limit of you need to still eat throughout the day. And then that also knowing yourself that also comes down to doing your best, which I think most people end up trying to do their best doing exams and that's really all you can do. Again, knowing yourself and sometimes that's just what I all I can do to remind myself is like, I'm going to do my best and I know I can do a good job. It's me, I trust myself, I'm going to do my best. I know it's like a lot, but I'm trying to encompass it as like knowing yourself is probably the best way going into this because you're the one that's going through it. And then I also just want, as a side, to say to Wendy like, thank you for saying that it's just an exam because, I know it is but at the same time, it's always hard because our grades and exams are like the only way that students get actual validation for what we're spending so much time and work and energy and effort on. So it's hard to not think that the grade is a reflection of yourself. So I always find that even though I know this, it's always nice to have that reminder of like, it's okay like that your grade does not define you. And it's true our grades don't define us, but it's very hard to remind ourselves of that when you're in the thick of it. So thanks.

Emily [00:36:17] I know I've already said my point but there's one that I've got highlighted that hasn't actually been mentioned yet. And it's one of the things that I've been told in the past, its one of the things that Wendy has mentioned at her workshops is that you need to find a study space that suits you. Whether it's at home or the library. I know some people study better at the library. I used to be one of those people, but I've actually found that when I'm at home I can have my post-it notes on one side, my pens, my highlighters for if it comes and I can have stuff in front of me. And you can also create a zone that is relaxing as well as productive. So I have fairy lights up because I find what really helps you is a room that gets lots of natural light because, bar my fairy lights I generally don't like artificial light, and it's warm but has a breeze at the same time. So it's all the optimum things for me that means I will study the best. And I feel that, that is important for stress because if you can't find your study zone, you're stressed that you can't study. And that just adds to the stress that you already have. Whereas if you got your zone, you can study and you feel like you're doing something productive, which I certainly found lowers my stress levels.

Bekah [00:37:37] Thank you guys for sharing those amazing tips, like there's some tips in there as well that I'm going to go away and try, I think it's so helpful. And I really did like what you said, Wendy, about putting things into perspective. And I think for me as well, like when I first started at the University of Aberdeen, obviously we have a few assessments for each course as such whereas my previous university, it was all or nothing based on that one assessment. So I really like that, you know, part of the University of Aberdeen, if I maybe don't do so well in an essay but I excel in a presentation - you've got strengths in different areas, so I really like that. And another thing as well, my advice to our student

would be is look at the percentage of this assessment that you're doing towards your grade for that course. I spent such a long time stressing over one of my exams I had and ultimately it was 10% of my final grade. So I should have been pushing that stress towards something that actually had more weighting. And it was something that I was like, I do well with this 10% it'll help, and you know it was good for my confidence to then say, "Oh, I can do, I've managed to pass, I've got a good grade." But actually, it was almost - it wasn't a waste of time because I got the grade I wanted, but I could have been better using my time on something that was a little bit more important. Obviously, that 10% is important but ultimately, if you've got something that's 60% and 10%, you should be spending more time on something that's weighted 60%. So I guess that would be my piece of advice is try to keep it into perspective and if I don't do so well on something that's 10%, then that's okay. And I really do like that we've got different ways of assessing students at the university as well. So we can hopefully draw on, out of all your assessments that you've got something hopefully there's one that you're stronger in as well so try and focus on, this is what I can do really well in. And I guess, yeah, like that was the biggest thing for me that - yeah, I should have been focussing my energy on something that was worth a little bit more in the grand scheme of things. And I think like our students at the University of Aberdeen are so lucky, I'm not just biased, but are so lucky to have access to a wide range of support services to support their learning needs. And we're really lucky to have Wendy with us here today. So I wonder, Wendy, if you can just tell us a little bit more about what you and your team can do to support our students who are maybe struggling. I know we've touched out a little bit today already, but it would be good just to get a little bit more of an insight on when we should go to you for support.

Wendy [00:40:21] Yes. Well, the Student Learning Service is here for all students from first-year right the way through to PHD. So we work with everybody, it doesn't matter what discipline you're in either so whether your from Archaeology to Zoology, we work with all the students. We have workshops which are just about coming to an end at the moment for this semester, which cover both aspects of study skills and academic writing and also maths. So we've got those. We are doing session for the PGT's over the summer, starting in May through to June, covering things like reading, note-taking, academic writing and so on. So Olivia, you might be interested in those, we also have our online resources, which I've mentioned in Achieve for undergraduates and Achieve Plus for taught postgraduates, they're in the organisation section of MyAberdeen. And then we also have one-to-one study advice sessions where you can meet with the most appropriate advisor for your request to try and tailor things to you. So if you wanted to look at studying or revision exams, time management, presentations, things like that it would probably be me but it could be one of our academic writing specialists. If you are looking at maybe going over a piece of written work that you've had marked and have got feedback so we can look at particular aspects of your written work that may give you some help and advice. And we've also got a maths advisor so if your course has got any aspect of maths in it then we can help with that. And we also have our specific learning differences staff as well who work with students who've got dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD, autism. So we have a wide range of resources for students. So I don't think there's any student we don't touch with, some way or another. I hope that's, that's okay Bekah.

Bekah [00:42:37] Yeah, thank you Wendy. It's really great to hear all the support available for people and I could certainly speak out for the fantastic disability team, they've been so great. I'm dyslexic and they've been so great at supporting me and making sure that I have the reasonable adjustments in place for my assessments, which has ultimately helped reduce my stress levels coming up to exams, because I know that I've got the support there, which is so, so helpful. And I wonder just kind of before we close the session, but

Emily or Olivia or both of you, have either of you used any of the services at the university relating to studying or support, and would you recommend them?

Emily [00:43:18] I have to second your point, Bekah, about being a dyslexic student. I have used both the normal one-to-one sessions as well as the specific ones, and I found both of them actually help because it gives me a wider idea. And then pairing those with the workshops really helped me because I go to one of Wendy's sessions. I think the last one I went to was about memory tricks, and then I use that one and then paired it with what I learned from my one-to-one and came up with an idea that suits me perfectly and allows me to get the most out of everything. So I'm in my third year, obviously the sixth semester of my third year, and I have tried for now almost six semesters to find a technique that works for me. And for my lectures I've always struggled with getting notes down, as I'm sure Bekah, you can second me on when the lecturers are flying to the lectures and you couldn't even get just the slightest note and they're already on the next slide. Especially with online lectures now I found that just printing out my slides, putting them in and then making notes as the recording goes along, it then helps me with stress and revision afterwards because I can just go back and add little bits in around the slides and use my notes to revise while looking at the slides instead of having to swap over from a notebook my laptop. And it was because of the workshops and my one-to-one session that I came to that conclusion.

Olivia [00:44:56] So for myself, I can't say that I've attended the workshops, unfortunately, but Wendy, I will look into the ones that you mentioned for the PGT starting in May. I am familiar with Achieve Plus and I guess for me for the student services at the university were more along the lines of like mental health services. So counselling and I know through the chaplaincy they have like pet therapy where you can have a session with a dog, which I've used to help because that's another thing at least for me, I mean anxiety, mental health, just in general, but then especially during exam season, that can make them worse. And so it's important to remember to seek help if you need. I also found that for myself in December, during the exam period, my homesickness got even worse than it already was because I'm an international student and I'm here on my own. So remembering those things like the counselling sessions or also, like I said, the pet therapy sessions at the chaplaincy or even they have a little room where you can go in and just get like free tea and coffee. And I was able to just like sit down and they had like little stress balls and they're like - oh no, we have this, you guys can come in and stuff, and I was like I had no idea, they were just like, breathe, take a moment, take like 10 minutes, drink your tea and then go again. I needed that to like settle down and stuff. So that's probably more my point of view as to university services. But I must say that I have been like very impressed coming here with the amount of services and care that the university does have for the students.

Bekah [00:46:22] Thank you, guys. Yeah, I can definitely agree with the chaplaincy. We call it like the safe haven on campus, just somewhere to go if you're feeling stressed, somewhere just to relax and like you say, you can talk to someone there, you don't have to talk to someone there. You can just take a minute. And it's definitely somewhere that I recommend for people to go if they are just feeling a little bit overwhelmed and just and just need a minute to chill out, you know, it's definitely one of the places to go on campus. So thank you so much for highlighting that. I would just like to thank you guys for coming. It's been a fantastic episode. I have learnt so much from you guys and I'm really excited to put that into practise. Hopefully get a little bit better work-life balance and reduce stress around exam time. So I really hope that through our discussion we are able to help some of our listeners who are maybe struggling, giving them some tips to try to help them feel a

little bit more in control and reduce their stress levels throughout the exam period. And if any of our listeners would like more information on any of the services at the university. If you just go on to the University of Aberdeen website and search study well, you'll find all the support available there and we'll be sharing all the links in the episode description as well. So thank you guys so much for tuning in, I hope you've enjoyed the episode. Take care and I will see you next time.

Voice Over [00:47:40] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.