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

Bekah [00:00:06] Hello and welcome to our BeWell podcast. I'm Bekah Walker your host and I'm joined here by a new panel of guests for today's episode to discuss how to prepare for university and what to expect when you arrive here in Aberdeen. So before we start, can I get both of you to introduce yourself to our listeners telling us who you are and what you do here at Aberdeen.

Jo [00:00:29] Right. So I am Jo. I am well-being coordinator at the University of Aberdeen and I've also worked at the Info Hub for the last two years.

Sophie [00:00:40] Hello. My name is Sophie. I'm a third year psychology student at the Uni.

Bekah [00:00:45] Fantastic. Thank you, guys, and thanks both so much for joining me. I'm really looking forward to our discussion today. So as we know, starting university is a really, really exciting experience. But it can also be a little bit overwhelming, especially if you're an international student and are moving away from home for the first time. And I just wondered Sophie how you felt in the lead up to starting university, and would you be willing to share your experience with us?

Sophie [00:01:12] Yes, I thought it was quite, quite not scary, but I was very nervous about the whole idea of moving from my country to another one, even though I spoke the language really well. But because none of my friends would go to that uni and it was pretty much me just changing town and kind of like leaving everything behind to go somewhere else to have a fresh start. Those that I was a bit nervous simply because obviously I have no friends to rely on. I wouldn't have that like social group I used to fit in and belong to. So it was pretty much my biggest source of anxiety, you know, making new friends or, you know, not knowing who to go to, what to do. But I thought what was really helpful was when they arrived, we had like this welcome box. And within the welcome box we had like this big kind of like notebook leaf, like the uni, like designed and there's like a lot of different like resources and support for us to like, you know, know where to go if we needed any kind of support, whether it was a who to contact for a taxi like, you know, stupid, stupid things you wouldn't consider actually looking into but can actually be really, really important. Say you on a night out, you don't know how to get home. So I thought that was really helpful. But yeah, my, my biggest source of anticipation and what really, really. Yeah. Got me really anxious was just how am I going to make friends? Am I going to make friends? But I feel like this idea of having a freshers week, which is not something that we have in my country really, really helped. So just having that week where you're not studying but you're just getting into you just moving into that new town, getting used to your environment, knowing where campus is, knowing where you live, understanding what's around you, where's the nearest shop? Where, where, where can you get groceries? You know, stuff like that is just it's just really, really nice. And then obviously meeting new faces and new people, that's, I thought, really, really helpful.

Bekah [00:03:12] Yeah. And I think like for a lot of people, it will be that fear of am I going to make any friends? And I think it's really important as well to kind of set that expectation that it is okay to like maybe not get on with all of your flatmates, but as long as you do have someone that you can rely on and talk to you and you're able to have that open communication with with your new flatmates because, you know, you could have people

from various different backgrounds and diverse, diverse cultures all all in one flat. So it's really about having that communication with everyone that that you're living with. And, you know, some people can have the expectation for coming to university and all my flat is going to go out and enjoy freshers together and we're all going to go out wild partying. And and actually everyone that you're sharing a flat with might not even, like want to do that. And that's okay. And just for everyone to to do what they need to do and and to be comfortable. But there will be - universities such a massive place with all the sports clubs and societies and stuff that there is, there is always going to be someone that you can connect with and make friends with. You've obviously got when you first arrive, you won't probably have met anyone from your course and that's okay. You will obviously meet them in a few weeks time, but there's also clubs and societies that are a great way of connecting with people that are like minded, if you know what I mean.

Sophie [00:04:31] Yeah, 100%. I, I remember when I arrived in Aberdeen, I completely neglected the fact there was my mother there and just tried to spend as much time as possible with my flatmates and other people I would meet in uni because I was so - I considered the time that I had during freshers week being the time where it is the only like, yeah, time period I would bond with people and that's where I would make my best friends. But now that I look at the people like, the friends I met during freshers week well, I actually don't speak to them anymore and I'm in third year. And that's when I realized, well, I was actually wrong, the flatmates I had in first year. Well, I don't actually speak to them anymore or the people I met going clubbing or, you know, going on freshers events. Well, I don't speak to them either, but the people I met, like you said, through societies and clubs, which I discovered at the freshers fair, which I highly recommend, by the way, to go to every freshers fair on every day just because the clubs and societies are different every day. That's where I met my group of friends. So I tried underwater hockey and even though I hated the sport, I still came back for the people. So it was kind of a love hate relationship but then I fell in love with the sport. And that was just that was just perfect. So I highly recommend societies and clubs. It's not just in Hillhead you'll meet all your besties and best friends for your entire degree.

Bekah [00:05:56] Yeah. And in the weeks before you start university and also the first few weeks of the semester as well, you'll be sent like a lot of information from the university, a lot helpful information on the university, but I truly appreciate it can be really hard to process and remember everything. So one of the really helpful things is to create like a checklist, and that's a really good way to help you maybe feel a little bit less overwhelmed. And, you know, because you can check off things that you've done and make sure you've got everything in place for starting university. So I wonder from you guys perspective, what are some of the things that you guys had on your checklist? And are there any things that you wish that you did have on your checklist? And would recommend to any of our listeners.

Sophie [00:06:38] Oh, I was just going to say I'd personally arrive maybe a day before freshers week or your accommodation is available for. So, I remember Hillhead was only available from the 31st of August, but I made sure to arrive on the 30th of August just so that I'd calm down the nerves. And I'm already, you know, like in the area to be able to check in the next day. So just arriving in a couple of days before so it gives you time to check the neighborhood and see what are the vibes and then be able to feel more comfortable to actually move into that environment. Another thing I did, I did check personally was just, what is there to do in Aberdeen? I didn't know anything. I didn't know Aberdeen, I've never been to Aberdeen. So just looking into what there is as entertainment, I mean it's really stupid, but the beach, the beach, I mean I, I actually love

the beach is such a good walk over there. Or like parks like Seaton Park, which is literally where Hillhead is, or Duthie Park, which is really good areas where to go. And then if it's specifically to uni, I feel really reading all these emails that you receive, even though they're quite overwhelming, is really helpful because you know what is expected from you and how to blend into that environment as swiftly and as quickly as possible. So for example, pick your your curriculum. So what courses are you going to pick? Because for firstyear well, at least those that are not in medicine or engineering. You get to pick I think is it two two modules that are not related to a course. So I studied psychology, but I had chemistry and history as my modules in first year. So it's really good to actually see different like courses and how different departments work. But basically look into my curriculum, see what kind of courses they propose in first in first year, because you actually might find something more interesting than your actual degree, which is what happened to me. I came to the you need to study physiology and had psychology as a module and realize actually from a psychology to physiology. So I switched degree within an hour and it was absolutely fine, which is really good. So check the modules and then like select it on my curriculum and then whenever my timetable is open because it's always after my curriculum, then you can pick your timetable and that's just such a really nice and flexible tool that the uni offers. So check the modules, then get into my curriculum, look into my timetable. Looking to what you can do at Aberdeen, check out the campus. I think the campus is what is going to be the highlights of your experience. So check. Well, the three libraries, you've got one on the medicine campus, two on the old Aberdeen campus. Look into the coffee shops, because if you like coffee and tea and cakes, I think you have to try them all and then decide which one is your favorite personally. Kilau is my favorite. We all know Kilau is an absolute killer bomb. So good if you're vegan as well. They've got really good options, so I highly recommend. So trying out also all the coffee shops on campus is just the best experience ever but yes, I think considering these are the highlights of my uni experience and how every year goes for me, I suggest to have this on your checklist as a priority at least.

Jo [00:09:54] Yeah, I 100% agree with Sophie there and I think finding kind of your favorite spots around campus, whether it's your favorite coffee place or a nice park for lunch or things like that, I think it's important and I think also as a part of your preparation on your checklist, it's doing the orientation modules as a new student covers all the support services and typical platforms you will use. Like Sophie mentioned my curriculum and my timetable and and your school induction as well, where the school kind of covers everything relevant to you. And then as Sophie mentioned earlier as well, I think looking over all the societies and sport clubs, we also have lots of forums. So like a mature students forum or LGBTQ plus forum. So anything that's relevant to you really to get involved with and have a look. And again as mentioned, go to. Welcome Week go to Freshers Week and do as much as possible. But then if you don't manage to cover everything, then can always join societies at a later stage as well. Yeah, definitely.

Bekah [00:11:10] Yeah. And I think like as well from maybe like more of a personal well-being perspective as well. One of the things that I would recommend adding to your arrival's checklist is registering with a local GP. It's one of the things that we try and encourage our students to do within the first 2 to 3 weeks of arriving in Aberdeen and not waiting until you get sick and maybe do need some medical assistance. And especially important if you have prescriptions that you need to pick up if you've registered for the GP, we don't. If you haven't registered the GP, sorry, you wouldn't be able to get your prescriptions without having a GP in Aberdeen. So I would highly recommend that you do that as soon as you arrive in Aberdeen if you can, and we have information on our website, so it's really easy for students to register with their local GP practice. And another

thing that I would definitely say is making sure that you have like an online banking app as well, which is really, really helpful for in terms of budgeting, this might be the very first time that you're away from home and potentially managing your own finances and maybe really having to watch your money if you have you have your rent to pay. And, you know, you want to be able to have some spare money to socialize with your friends. So I would definitely recommend having an online banking app to keep on top of your your finances and just knowing what your income, your outcome, your outgoings are and your income is. And again, that can help ease, ease any pressure as well. And we do have some sessions at the university which can talk about planning your budget and stuff if that was helpful. So if you are like the first time, you're going to be in charge of your finances and you know, the food shop and stuff because I know that that can be quite expensive as well sometimes if you've not been buying shopping. I remember the first time that I went to buy shopping and I was so surprised at the price of cheese. I did not realize how expensive cheese was. And I was like, I think it was like £5.50 or something for like a block of cheese. And I was like, okay, maybe I don't buy this cheese. I maybe buy a different one. So yeah, it's like, it's really funny. I say fun should be a fun experience, like trying to like see what you, what you do need and what maybe you don't need and things that you can potentially like change branding and stuff because that's also not important. But I digress a little bit. Another thing that I would definitely recommend adding to a checklist is to follow our student life social media channels. That's where you can stay up to date with all of the information that and events and activities that the university run for you. So we are on Instagram and we're on Facebook and Twitter, so follow them all or follow just one whatever platform you use. I highly recommend following, so making sure that you are up to date with all the information that we have. And finally, one of the other great things that we have is the UoA Student Guide app. So you can download that on any smartphone. And really it's packed with information resources, even like an actual checklist with events and activities that you can take part in throughout the whole of the academic year. And it's also got like a really cool feature where you can like find events and activities and add them to your personal calendar on your phone, which I find really helpful because then I can set reminders.

Sophie [00:14:34] I just want to add, I sincerely hope this year freshers week will look just like pre-COVID times, because that's where I actually found my GP having the NHS actually on campus and having the ability to actually register with one on campus without having to go to the NHS with the hospital was actually so convenient and I think making it as visible as possible for also incoming students would be really, really helpful.

Bekah [00:15:00] Yeah, absolutely. I think Welcome Week will definitely look a lot more pre-COVID this year, which is very exciting.

Jo [00:15:09] I also wanted to mention by my personal experience from working at the Info Hub. And this is specifically for my mostly international students. And one of the absolute most common questions we get at the start of term is how to open a bank account. And when you start as part of your online registration, you fill in your address details. And as long as you have an Aberdeen address on your student hub, you will automatically receive a bank letter to your university email address. And if this doesn't, if you don't have an address during registration or if it changes or anything like that, you can just contact info hub and they will provide you with the bank letter. You'll just need this to open an account. So I just want to mention it because it's such a common question we get.

Bekah [00:16:00] Thanks, Jo. That's really helpful. And I'm sure there'll be a lot of international students that are listening to this episode, so I'm sure that's going to be really

helpful for them. And I think like starting university is obviously a really exciting time and there's loads and loads of different things to look forward to. And it's also a great time to take the opportunity to decide like who you want to be without any previous expectations being on you. So you can be like who you want to be, but obviously also remembering to be true to yourself. I just wondered if you guys have have any experiences or any highlights I know we've spoken a little bit about coffee, but anything else that our student should definitely be like looking forward to and be excited about their university journey.

Sophie [00:16:42] I'd say two things. First of all, societies and clubs. I really believe this is where you are going to make the friends you'll probably keep for life. Like I said, I actually I still speak to those I met during freshers and my friends like from my course mates. But it's just it's not the same, you know, whereas societies and clubs, you actually bond beyond that university experience. That is, you bond as human beings, which is not what you get from course mates or flatmates is it's just a completely different atmosphere and it's, it's, yeah, it's a lot of fun. So I highly recommend you try societies and clubs and it doesn't mean you have to stick to one you can do two you can do as many as you'd like. But personally, if you're all or nothing kind of person like me then i might suggest just one is more than enough to commit to for me. And second, I think with COVID is kind of it's a bit hard because we haven't actually had that campus experience in two years. Like I've only had an hour on on campus per week this year, even second semester, which is a bit of a shame. So I spent my life in the library quite literally. The Sir Duncan Rice Library library. So if, if you like, if you need an environment that looks like it can be productive, highly recommend the libraries that just the best Sir Duncan Rice is more more of a sociable sociable kind of like environment so you can speak and not be told off. But if you want to be really silent, quiet place Taylor library. So the law library is just the place for you. So I highly recommend you make the most out of the study spaces you have because they just make it so much more fun for for students.

Jo [00:18:24] I think also for new students, it's about kind of finding their routine and what works for them. So I think when you kind of when you started a year, you done all the introduction stuff and then it's more about finding your kind of flow, your style, maybe to go and, you know, pick up that good coffee in the morning before you go into the lecture theater or maybe find like your favorite spot in the library to read up on things. And yeah, joining the societies you like. So you have like that weekly kind of event happening and stuff like that. And yeah, just, you know, you're kind of off to a fresh start at university, so you'll just make it whatever works for you, make it the best time.

Sophie [00:19:07] And I guess staying true to yourself, like you said, Bekah, is, is really important. I felt from my well before my first couple of weeks of uni I felt that massive social pressure to go out every Tuesday nights because that's when Underground would be open. And for some reason everyone just loved Underground, which is a club, by the way. And I guess I do regret it to some extent, because when I look at myself now, I probably go clubbing once every five months and that's probably just says enough. I'm not as much of a clubbing person as I thought I'd be. And yeah, stay true to yourself and do things that make you happy. And I think if you stick to that kind of vibe and atmosphere, it will lead you to the to your true friends rather than people that you're with for the sake of feeling like you belong somewhere and that you fit somewhere. I'd rather actually fit, you know, be be in a group of friends that I know are actual, you know, people I can rely on for support or whatever than people I'm just with for the sake of feeling like I've I belong somewhere, you know? So make sure you stay true to yourself and do what actually makes you happy and not what makes others happy.

Bekah [00:20:18] Yeah. That's so like, so true. I couldn't of put it better myself. Like, that's like, for me. Like, I would definitely be, like, the main thing. And there can be a lot of social pressure, especially during like Freshers Week. And of course it's super important to be going out and socializing and stuff as well. But remember that like you don't always have to drink alcohol as well. You don't have to have alcohol to have fun. And if you want to have alcohol, then that's great. But if you don't want to have alcohol, then that's also great. I like remember to be respectful of people and if someone is choosing that, they don't want to drink and like respect that don't don't like not invite them on a night out because they're maybe not drinking alcohol because they'll have a lot of fun. Definitely just like staying true to yourself. And definitely like that's definitely something that I would like take home from this and talk to everyone about at university as well. And one of the things that I guess is not really about like what to look forward to, but it's just something that I found like really, really helpful in terms of like my, my own studying is to just take each semester at a time, especially when you're starting your first year like this is four years, if not more, which can in itself feel quite overwhelming. So really just focus on each semester or each year at a time and then before you know it, like this year, for example, I'm studying as well, and that's exactly what I've done. I was like, let's get to December, let's get to Christmas. And yeah, I managed to get there and that was like my sole focus. And obviously we've now just finished second semester and I almost can't quite believe that I'm finished second semester already, I think because I have taken that mindset and have broken it down. So that's been my focus. Like the next six months or however long the semester is, is what I've been focusing on. And now suddenly I'm like, Oh, I'm almost halfway through and I actually feel so much more within my reach and so much more achievable than I guess it did when I started in September. So I would try and like just focus on each semester and reevaluate your options. I know that there is scope to change as well if you were if you weren't happy.

Sophie [00:22:33] Yeah, I hundred percent agree with that. I actually realized when I started first year, I think like I was not looking at everything like I take one day at a time. It was quite literally take your degree at a time. So I was already planning what I was going to do by the time I graduate. And I realized putting that much pressure on myself and thinking it would go as planned as well really was to the detriment of my mental health. Because if it didn't go as planned like it did, then I like I just did not meet my expectations and then I'd feel down and then it's just a vicious cycle. So yeah, I 100% agree with you know, take one semester at a time. I mean, the these the easier way I made it for myself is by having I guess I you could do like monthly goals. So like, say what you expect to achieve by the end of September. So like, say you've got three deadlines. Well, submit my three essays, three presentations, whatever, by the end of September, you know, and then it just looks so much more achievable. And by the time you get to the end of the semester, you would not even realize you would have done all that, which seems, you know, actually enormous if you were to put if you were to do yearly or like a degree plan like I did, that was a really big mistake. So take every day as they are take every minute, you know, as they are, just take it easy. As I feel university is going to be the highlight of your life as well. That to some extent that's the only time you get to like have a full summer for three months. Because when you're going to graduate, you're not going to have a three month holiday, you're not going to have that three weeks or seven or five weeks during Christmas. You're not gonna have these three weeks in the Easter break, so make the most out of it and take your life as easy as possible.

Bekah [00:24:19] Yeah, definitely. And one of the things to remember is that at the university, you're you're never alone either. We have so much student services that are here to help you and support you through every step of the way in your university journey.

For whatever support you need, there's always someone here to help. And one of the many great things about the University of Aberdeen is our peer support program that offers opportunity to get support, advice and help with your studies as a student from students who have been in the experience that you've been in. And I wonder, Jo, if you'd be able to tell us a little bit more about the Student for Student Mentor program and how it works.

Jo [00:24:58] Of course. So for new undergraduate students who enter the university, you have the chance to sign up to the Students for Students Peer Support program. And so basically how it works is some of our current students who's in their second to fourth or fifth year, and they've signed up to become mentors and they go through a nice training and they're super keen on meeting you and show you around and offer their best tips and advice based on their own experience. And so you as a student a new student, you can sign up and you will usually get matched with a mentor within the same school as you, just to kind of be able to share that experience as well. And in addition, you can also pick from a list of typical experiences you would like to share with your mentor. So maybe that would be, you know, having that background as an international student or being a mature student is a popular one um being part of that LGBTQ plus community and maybe studying at the university with a disability or having experience using the disability services and things like that. So that's quite a popular option. And yes, so you basically just get matched up and then you meet up with your mentor. You can choose if it's in person or just by email and they'll take you around campus, share their own experiences, and they'll be kind of that friendly face on campus. A good point of contact if you're not sure where to go and they have the training to then point you in the right direction if they think you need even more help than what they can offer. So it's a pretty nice program actually for new students to join. If we have any postgraduate students listening. There's lots of other options as well. And obviously for everyone we've mentioned the societies, we have some of the forums and we have the International Center runs, language groups and other events that are quite popular. And yeah, so I would just recommend everyone to kind of have a look online at the university web pages, the new students and student life channels, and also AUSA has a list of all the societies available. So yes, basically just to browse and find what kind of intrigues you, what's interesting for you and join it.

Bekah [00:27:19] Definitely. That's where our students are really lucky to have that opportunity. Like, I know when I, when I first went to the university, that wasn't such a thing when I when I was there and I think, I guess I'm quite an anxious person, even if I'm thinking about things that are out with my control and just having someone to have a similar experience with who has maybe done my degree and just like you say, like we said earlier on in the episode to kind of ask the silly questions like, oh, like where's the best coffee or like the best place to go and study? Like asking a student like who's been in the same school or maybe doing the same course as you and, and has that experience like I think that's really, really nice and a really welcoming environment. So I would definitely recommend that people tap into that resource if they can. I would just really like to thank you guys both for joining the episode. It's been great to hear your own personal experiences and perspectives of starting university. I really enjoyed the episode and I hope that our discussions have been particularly helpful for anyone who is starting university and if anyone is joining the University of Aberdeen this year, I would definitely recommend checking out our new student website, which I'll link in the post show notes there. So easy access for people to get as well. To our listeners, thank you for tuning in and good luck for starting university in September. I'm sure you'll be amazing. I hope you enjoyed the episode. Take care. I'll see you next time.

Outro [00:28:53] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

