

[TRANSCRIPT: New Student Special Episode 2: Let's Talk About...Engaging with your course]

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[INTRO]

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

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

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[MUBARAK MOHAMUD (MO), LECTURER, BRISTOL BUSINESS SCHOOL]: I think that video really depicts the anxieties of all students.

[MILES THOMPSON, LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY]: ...exactly.

[MO]: ...I think this video also says, you're not alone in what you're thinking.

[MILES]: ...totally

[MO]: ...and I really like the way they did a little wink...that other lady looked at her and she goes '*it's ok*'. And sometimes, actually, from both perspectives, students might find themselves as either the person who is anxious and saying '*how can i come in to this social space here*' or you may be on the other side '*oh, there's a person that's quite lonely, perhaps if I bring them closer, that might be helpful*'. So I think it allows students to see both sides there.

[MILES]: ...exactly.

[MO]: ...and I think it's really important for students to have a go in terms of trying it out. Number 1, understanding that all students are going through exactly what you're going through. And that they're feeling the same feelings of anxiousness and *'am I gonna be accepted'* or *'what type of identity, what type of social groups will I fall into'*. So everyone else is thinking that, so acknowledge that. And secondly to own it...it's ok, this feeling in your stomach of being anxious is absolutely fine. I was saying to Simon before, even as lecturers, we get nervous...

[MILES]: ...completely...

[MO]: ...I get nervous, first week of the term, you're not familiar, you don't know how it's gonna go down and you get a bit anxious. And within about two minutes into my lecture, I'm absolutely in the zone...because I really do want to get across what I'm gonna teach. And I just love to see students' eyes...*'bling'*. So I think it's the phrase that's used at the end there, *engage*. I think it's a call to action for students to say it's ok to feel those things, but not to allow them to cripple you.

[MILES]: What I really love about what you say, and I think this is really important, is that this happens for everyone. Sometimes when we think about things like anxiety, or worry or stress and then when we move down that continuum towards mental ill-health, people think *'oh, that applies to other people, that doesn't apply to me'* but it applies to all students, it applies to us as lecturers. We get these feelings, we get these concerns, we get these worries all the time. The trick is not to try to avoid having these, but when they come up to kind of go *'ok, what am I gonna do in response to this. How am I gonna relate to this?'*...

[MO]: ...and I think that is so key, I think. Because we've seen students who haven't come to the first couple of workshops and just don't ever turn up again. Or they miss one or two weeks and they feel they've missed out and totally can't come back. And it's as if, people are in psychological prisons, they're imprisoning themselves away from the good they can do. Of course, if you're behind, it's not gonna feel that great and you have to fight that. Of course if it's a brand new set of people, it's gonna be a nervous time. So I think what we're trying to say here is - it's ok. And roll with it.

[MILES]: More than it being ok. It's normal. And actually the skills you can learn by kind of going '*ok, this is a bit tricky, how am I gonna deal with this, how am I gonna respond*'. We talk about Graduate Attributes...

[MO]: ...actually, can I ask you Miles, how do you deal with your anxiety. Like if you...when you get nervous, how do you react, how do you try to overcome?

[MILES]: Oh, well, so..one of the strange things about me dealing with my anxiety is...because I'm a clinical psychologist as well as being a psychology lecturer...

[MO]: ...so you're always psychoanalysing yourself...

[MILES]: [laughter]...it doesn't mean I have the right answers in any way, shape or form, but what it does mean is that I'm going '*oh, ok, I'm having to apply the stuff that I tell other people about*', but also it's just like '*oh, there is no difference between me doing this job or me working with patients or me looking at myself. It's the same thing*'. But what I try and do, very simply, is '*ok, what's going on here?*' What am I noticing...what are my thoughts telling me...what is my mind telling me...what are my feelings like. '*What is the most normal and natural thing for me to do?*' Here's the funny thing, because of evolution, the most normal and natural thing for us to do when we're feeling anxious and worried is to run away. It's flight or fight. It's to avoid. And that makes a lot of sense...in the short term...but actually when we apply that kind of strategy in the real world, and when we apply it to university or to work or to friends or stuff like that, if we apply that strategy, it shrinks down our life, rather than expanding it. And weirdly, what the data says on things like this, is that the more we try and avoid anxiety or worry or stress the bigger those worries and stresses become.

[MO]: ...they turn into monsters...

[MILES]: EXACTLY. If we can go '*oh, I'm feeling a little anxious about this lecture*', but we can still go into that room, or deliver that lecture, what we often find is, the anxiety passes. And it's all because of our relationship with our mind. In many ways, what our mind is is a kind of '*watch out*' machine. As we move through the world, our head is kind of going '*oh, be a bit careful about that*'... '*oh, you don't know what's gonna happen there*' or '*oh, that could be tough and tricky*'. That's what our mind is there to do. It's there to look out for worries...

[MO]: ...but once you're now conscious of that...

[MILES]: ...yes. Once you can notice that we can decide how much we're gonna pay attention to that...then we're in control. But if our mind goes '*oh, don't do that it'll be scary*' and we go '*ok, I can't do that*' then we shrink down our life and shrink down our life. So it's about doing exactly as you say. It's about noticing, it's about being aware and still moving towards stuff that's important to us. Moving towards stuff that matters to us. And there are so many different things that can be important and matter to us at university, so taking that opportunity to go '*oh, I'm a bit nervous, but I'm still gonna go there, I'm still gonna move towards it*'. What do you think, do you agree?

[MO]: ...I'm absolutely with you, man. I get anxious all the time, but I still do it anyway. I just do it regardless of that anxiety. Just because you're feeling that doesn't mean it's gonna last forever. So I think I've learned over a long period of time of success from failing in this, actually most of these fears are perceived fears...are self-manufactured. And it's just a case of rolling through it and gritting your teeth through that first phase...and actually it was never as bad as I ever thought it was.

[MILES]: There's a quote that's been attributed to Mark Twain, but he didn't actually say it and the quote is '*I am an old man and in my life I've seen a great many worries. But most of them, never happened*'. And basically what it's saying, as he walks through life, his mind, like what we were just talking about, is going '*oh, watch out, this is gonna be awful*', but what our mind is telling us doesn't always come to pass - in fact it rarely comes to pass. And weirdly, going back to what you were saying about anxiety. If we're worried about stuff, it's probably because it matters in some way. It's probably because it's important to us in some way. You worry about a lecture...

[MO]: ...so actually being anxious is a good thing?...

[MILES]: ...yeah, yeah. It's an indication that this matters, this is important.

[MO]: ...which is a good thing and good way of rethinking anxiety there. Number one, if you're anxious about something it's near and dear to you. Number two, it's not as bad as you may perceive and also number three, if they notice an anxious student, it's really important that they show a welcoming face and try to bring them into, in any way shape and form, because obviously they could be in that position as well...

[MILES]: ...and they will be. Because we have and we are constantly playing around with that kind of stuff. I just think that for some people it can feel like quite a lonely experience. Like, *'I'm feeling this and noone else is feeling this'*..and actually...

[MO]: ...far from it. As soon as you know everyone else is feeling it, it's really good.

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