Lesson 2

Feeling (un)prepared for university...?

This lesson makes clear some of the very universal concerns that young people around feeling prepared for university, and talks about some solutions / reassurances. In this lesson, we hear from students and staff at university, about how best to prepare for making the transition to university.

Warm-up question

Teachers can pose the following question to pupils to open up the lesson:

> What do you think you can do to best prepare yourself for going to university? (think about specific tasks you could complete / skills you could develop)

Main task 1: skills journal

Using the warm-up discussion as a starting point, pupils fill in a guided skills journal, about the academic skills they've learned throughout high school, reflecting on where their skills are, and where their areas for improvement are. They think about how these existing skills map on to what they might be asked to do at university.

Reflecting on my skills and abilities

Summary of skill	Where I'm currently at with this skill, on a scale of 1-5 (*1 = I'm really unsure about this skill; 5 = I'm really confident about this skill*)	Any ways that I can further develop this skill	How developing this skill might prepare me for university
(e.g. managing my time)			

Main task 2: listening to the views of university students and staff
Summary of Main task 2

Pupils listen to selected short podcast excerpts about the sorts of skills / knowledge and awareness that are useful for achieving success at university.

Relevant podcast excerpts

Chris, secondary teacher, reflects on conversations he has with his pupils about the importance of developing independent learning skills (00:38)

we certainly speak to them about it in terms of the more enhanced independence that comes with higher and further education, but perhaps the reality of not having that year head or pupil support teacher or faculty head, or teacher on your back and, "this is the deadline, it must be in for this, it must be in for that, and here's this and here's that". I suppose not really getting everything handed on a plate which can sometimes happen in secondary education. I think sometimes our learners struggle with what that reality is going to look like for them, now, but we hope obviously as they go through they gain more independence, they gain that confidence as individual learners. Age and stage and maturity definitely helps with that, but I think probably that's certainly the one big thing that sticks out.

Anne-Marie, secondary teacher, agrees that independence is key for her pupils who want to move onto university (01:04)

I think, as we've mentioned before, they're expected to be much more independent at university. They do get a lot of support, they get a lot of encouragement at secondary to meet deadlines, reminders etc, whereas they don't have that so much at university. I think, in terms of the learning environment, as well, and here we tend to be in smaller classrooms and even just the thought of sitting in a big lecture theatre with hundreds of people and working out, "oh where am I going to sit?" and, "no I don't want to get the front in case I come in late". The wee things like that go through your head. I think those sort of things as well. As I mentioned before they did get a wee bit of a shock this week in Top Up when they were- especially some of our people had an EAL[1] class today and I was talking to them we have conversation classes and they were saying, "oh my goodness the reading was so hard", and things like that and I was saying, "well this is what's going to be expected of you when you go to university". So, I think it's just again that next level, jumping up that next level as well for them. It's different, it's change, and any change that comes is always going to be met with a wee bit of being scared at first.

Emily Nordmann, psychology lecturer, believes that young people should focus on a few fundamental skills, and not so much the academic side of things at first! (02:25)

So, I think in terms of thinking about the transition to university, I think a lot of people come in worrying, "Oh, you know, should I do the reading or should I do all this pre-reading and stuff?" And I would say, "Don't worry about the content. We're going to teach you content. We're going to teach you about psychology. We're going to teach you what you need to know". Probably the one- top thing that I would say if you want to do any kind of prep for university is basic computer literacy. So, I think it depends on the school that you're at, but I think there's some of my first years come in and they've only really worked on a tablet or a phone before, like a touchscreen device where you install apps. And obviously these are very user friendly and that's why they're so popular but a lot of university courses will require you to be on a desktop computer or a laptop or, you know, like a full computer and just things about kind of files and folders and how

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[1] EAL stands for "English as an Additional Language"

to install software, there's quite a lot of courses you can do for free online that, you know, only a few hours, but just get you to know the basics of that. Because I think that actually, if you have a- feel reasonably comfortable in that, it kind of helps so much other stuff. When we say, "Go on Moodle and look at this", getting onto Moodle is not an issue. Or like, "Download this file", it's taking away that. So, I would say if anyone wants to do any prep, that's actually the prep I would do, regardless of your course. And oh the other thing about the transition is if you have applied to university and you're going to, it's just to keep an eye on your emails. So, I mean learning how to manage your email is another skill in and of itself. So, just keep an eye, that summer, keep an eye on your emails from August because there will be stuff come through about, so Glasgow does this Transitions to Glasgow course that is incredibly helpful, but many students miss it because they're not checking their student email, so I would say from the moment you register, you don't have to check it hour by hour but maybe just every couple of days during that summer period.

Andrew Struan, head of the Student Learning Development team, talks about T2G, a programme designed to help students adjust to university in the early stages (01:12)
Yep, so it's called T2G, Transition to Glasgow. It's open to all undergraduate students across any subject area coming into the University of Glasgow. It was initially designed and built through the pandemic. So as students were coming into university through the pandemic, we were really aware of the fact that the pandemic had meant that students had missed a lot of contact time with their teachers because of everybody being locked at home. But importantly, it wasn't just around about the kind of subject knowledge, which is part of it. But there was also a kind of an academic acclimatisation, students engaging with one another, all of that was lost through the pandemic. And we also saw a real dip in student confidence. So, students coming into university with confidence in their own abilities, their own knowledge, their own aptitude, all of that dipped through the pandemic. So, we created T2G initially as a response to that, so to try and give students an important confidence boost, so get them working with us and with each other in large and small groups and getting them to see that actually, they can engage with sometimes really complex really sophisticated pieces of research and academic discussion, but do that in this really supportive creative environment.

Pearl, undergraduate student, talks about her realisation that there's no need to be intimidated by all the changes that university brings (01:52)
I think the whole experience, maybe not so much my experience of second year, it's felt a lot more sort of calm, but first year is very intense because I mean, you know you're from Prestwick it's not that far but, like, a lot of people go to a completely different city for university, new city, new friends, new school, new way of studying and it's, like, if it seems like all these different parts of your life you've suddenly got to change and become used to. And I'd say probably the main thing that just made me, like, realize, I don't know, that helped me to sort of take a step back in first year was just starting studying and realising it wasn't this sort of, like, super high academia I wasn't prepared for and everybody else was. I mean it's the typical myth you think everybody else is going to be, like, so much more intelligent than you, and everybody's on the same level, everybody's intelligent but, you know, you're- you've just come out of being the oldest at your school, you're now the youngest in another form of education, and it's really comforting to realise that, and really comforting to realise that, you know, everybody will have similar, you know, ways of working, similar ways of thinking, and it's, that's a big relief. And I feel, like, it's not, I mean, people tell you it, but I think before you get to university, you can't

realise that's actually the case. And also, even just like, the learning spaces. Like, you go into a lecture hall and it can be really sort of big and scary and intimidating and then the lecture starts and you realise that nobody's going to, at least in my experience of, like, English, I think maybe in some subjects like Law, this is slightly different, but nobody's going to point at you and put you on the spot and ask you to, you know, summarise or like analyse something, you know. It's not, like, nobody's fighting against you or working with you. I think that's the main thing that I didn't really understand before I got here.

Emily Nordmann again, this time talking about the idea of "distributed practice", which is a specific approach to effective studying and retaining information (02:05)
So, in terms of distributed practice, distributed practice basically just means spacing stuff out, okay. And the idea is it's not about studying more, it's about using the time more efficiently. So, there is a huge amount of psychological research on memory and learning that informs this and it's a very, very robust effect. Some things in psychology don't replicate. This does. This is really quite strong. So, the idea is that if you were to study for 10 hours, if you were to do one hour a week, you would learn more than if you did two five-hour days. And spreading it out helps and it reinforces it. One of the studies that I show in that lecture, it's by Peter et al., anyway, you don't need to know, but it was a really interesting study. So, they got people to do, they were learning something, I can't remember, and they either did all of their practice sessions on the same day, they then did them one day apart, or they did them a month apart. And they tested them in between the practice sessions and then also 30 days after their last practice session. And what they found was that the ones who were doing it all on the same day, they scored better when you tested them immediately afterwards. Whereas the ones who were doing it 30 days apart did worse if you tested them immediately afterwards. But when you then tested them 30 days after their final session, the results completely reversed. So, the ones who did it all on the same day did much worse. And it's that, there's this thing about a kind of meta cognition, which is our thinking about our own thinking. And we often don't, we often don't recognise what's working. So, we will read the same thing over and over again thinking it's helping and it's not. So, and I think the thing about university is you have to take this long-term view that you need it. It's not just about doing it in the exam because the knowledge you get in first year is the foundation of your second year, which is the foundation of your third year.

Andrew Struan again, this time talking about how he helps students to develop time management skills (02:01)
So oftentimes when we talk about things like time management actually what we're talking about is project management instead and I think that's a much much easier way to kind of flip this discussion into saying okay- chunking up your time is this kind of fake weird way that is actually really difficult to control right so if we have a piece of work and we've said Okay, I've got four hours to do this piece of work, how do you know that at the start? Versus if we have a project that we're working on, break the project down into smaller tasks, use a whole variety of different project management tools, there's loads of software for this - my team talk a lot about all the different software options, all the ways in which you can kind of almost pass over responsibility for running the project to a whole variety of different apps. That makes it much, much easier to do. So, in terms of things that we do at Glasgow for this, for example, there's a brand-new course that we're developing for students at the moment, which is all around project management. Every student at Glasgow will be enrolled onto this. It takes them through different project management styles, so the recognition that we all approach projects in different ways, getting students to think about if they have a project which can just be a lab

report or an essay. Can they treat that as a project and then break it down into the different types of approaches that suit your project management style? So, we draw on lots of research for this, lots of research from the big place looking at this is the Harvard Business School, as you would imagine, because they want to try and maximize profit out of everybody. So, there's lots of evidence here as to how different people work in different ways to- in order to get maximum success. So, every student at Glasgow will be enrolled onto that course as a tool to give them the ability to kind of approach their studies as a project. And the reason why we're so keen on that is, firstly, it will allow students to be more successful, hopefully. If they're better able to plan and project manage, then great.

Main task 3: returning to the skills journal

Pupils then return to their skills journal to make any adjustments (e.g. to add more skills, or to add further ideas about ways their skills can be developed / how they might be useful).

Summary points from Lesson 2

- Being prepared for university is about being prepared to learn independently
- Think about the general life skills / mindsets that are relevant for university success
- Universities do a lot to help students develop their preparedness (e.g. T2G programme at Glasgow – make the most of these opportunities!)