

## Pathways Podcast Season Three, Episode Nine – Student Support w/ Warwick SU

**00:00 – Tom:** Hello and welcome back to the Pathways podcast. We're really excited to have you with us this month to talk about support for students in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. My name is Tom Ritchie, I'm Director of Student Experience in the department and I'm joined by Jess and Adam if you'd like to introduce yourselves.

**00:31 – Jess:** Hi everyone, I'm Jess, I'm a final year chemistry student comms intern in the department.

**00:38 – Adam:** Hi everyone, my name's Adam. I'm part of the Student Experience team here in the Department of Chemistry.

**00:44 – Tom:** That's great. And we're also joined today by Molly and Charlotte from Warwick Students Union. If you'd like to introduce yourselves and tell us a bit more about your roles.

**00:53 – Mollie:** Hello, I am Mollie. I'm one of the Welfare Advisors at the Advice Centre at the Warwick Students Union. I literally just advise on anything that comes through, to be honest, via the enquiry forms online. But yeah, I've been here since February. Loving it.

**01:11 – Charlotte:** Hi everyone. So, I'm Charlotte. I'm the advice centre manager at the Students Union. So as Molly said, we help students with any issues affecting your student experience, either in person or remotely. So yeah, don't hesitate to get in touch.

**01:24 – Tom:** So, I think we're really interested to speak to you today to learn a little bit more about what support opportunities and kind of bursaries and other things there are to help students through the kind of current cost of living crisis. We know it's affecting a lot of people, and there's a lot of things that we do within Chemistry as well, but we'd be really intrigued to speak to you about it. So yeah, thank you so much for joining us. I thought we'd start with a relatively easy question of just, can you provide an overview of the student support services and resources that are available on campus to help students who might be facing a cost-of-living crisis?

**01:56 – Mollie:** In regard to the hardship funding with students, obviously it's a really difficult time at the moment and not only the SU but I think the university recognises that students especially are going through a really difficult time. Obviously in the advice centre, I've only been here since February, but there's been a lot of students that have come forward and, you know, mentioned their financial hardship.

So, a lot of the times we refer them straight to the student finance team in Warwick. So, they've got two levels of hardship. Fund help like to help students, I guess. So, the first one is the emergency loan. I think it's up to 250 pounds, and that needs to be paid back by the student, but you can sort of arrange, you know, what works best for you.

And the second one is the actual hardship fund. So, the university decide. what level of hardship you're in and you know what level of financial support they can give to you. The application form is quite simple to be honest and you know myself and Charlotte and the team help a lot of students out with that application process but it just involves going to the University and just letting them know that you're in, that you're struggling basically and a lot of the time

I've had really positive experiences helping students out with that and the University are very understanding and students, you know, they benefit from that system and they don't have to pay that money back, which I think is definitely a benefit of that system in place.

**03:08 – Tom:** Yeah, I think that's really important and it's great to hear that the University have got it. Charlotte, are there any others that you know about any other kind of routes that students can access or any resources around kind of cost-of-living support that either the Students Union do or, or that the university have?

**03:22 – Charlotte:** Yep. So as a Students Union, we can provide full parcels. So, we can either provide a full parcel that's here on campus that you can pick up from us for three days' worth of food, or we can provide a voucher for the local community larder. So, if students are struggling sort of in the short term, not to struggle on their own, they can come to us and we can give them one, no questions asked. I think it's also important to mention that things like your rent and your bills are going to be affected if you're struggling with your finances, even in the short term, while you're waiting for that hardship fund to be paid, we can help with that. So, we can help with those obligations here at the SU.

**04:01 – Tom:** That's great. I think that's, it's really useful to hear. It helps to build on a lot of what we're trying to do within Chemistry as part of the We Are Chemistry project, where working with the Students Union, we have got food packages that we collect from you and we can give to our students if, you know, if they come through us. And we also have kind of hardship funds, similar to what you're saying, like very small bursaries, I think up to about £50 for kind of bills and any other kind of unforeseen financial difficulties, I guess, that people can get into.

So, the next question I wanted to ask really is, is kind of a follow up, which is, you know, how can students best utilise the resources that there are to kind of navigate financial challenges effectively? Because I think there's lots of different, levels of kind of cost-of-living challenge that you can come up against, whether it's, you know, you've mentioned food packages, you've mentioned more of the bursaries. Is there any particular kind of thing that you would recommend students look at first, or is it on a case-by-case basis?

**04:57 – Mollie:** I would just recommend that they get in touch with us, really, because obviously every situation is completely different, and we deal with so many cases on a day to day basis that we couldn't... possibly give you one answer that would fit all but it's not a one size fit all situation so if they get in contact with us we can offer that free and impartial advice and point them in the right direction because there's not only a lot of support from the SU and the university themselves but external support from external agencies as well and we have all of the knowledge here and I think a lot of the time students don't know that we exist so it's great that we're sort of getting the opportunity to you know advocate for the work that we do and a lot of the students we get a lot of positive feedback too so I definitely think get in touch with us using the online inquiry form. One of us will pick it up. We, you know, we respond within 48 hours. We can point students in the right direction and we're always here to help as well.

**05:45 – Tom:** I think that's great, and I think it's really interesting because there are things that you mentioned there that I wasn't sure about. I didn't know about the form that you can fill in and I think we can look at sharing that as part of the bio for this podcast as well as on our social media for students.

**05:58 – Jess:** I just had a quick question about like the buses and this is just an aside. I don't know if Charlotte or Mollie had too much involvement with this, but I know like as a student living in Leamington, there are quite a lot of difficulties with increased bus fares and things like that I'm aware that the SU are trying to action a lot of the things that students have been putting forward about this so I don't know if there was any kind of financial support or options available to students that they could reach out to.

**06:28 – Charlotte:** We can help you apply for the Hardship Fund and that is for everyday living costs and coming onto campus is an essential cost.

So, if you are struggling with that, that's something that we'd help you apply for the Hardship Fund to get support with that.

**06:41 – Mollie:** I think, also it's really important to mention the fact that some students have difficulties with transport due to additional needs or disabilities and stuff like that.

So just again, getting in contact with us and just understanding the support that's available from the uni side. Disability Student Allowance, DSA, is super, super important and not a lot of students know about it. And I feel that if you're being directly affected by your additional need or disability, it's really important to get in touch with one of us or the disability team at the unit just to know what extra financial support is available to you, just in case you feel like you're being hindered or held back by any, by any means from that additional need. So that definitely is an option as well.

**07:20 – Tom:** That's great. Thank you. And I think you've addressed some really important points there. And it kind of leads into the second question I've got, which is. Have you got any specific examples really of how the Students Union collaborates with other kind of campus departments or you've mentioned some external organizations to address kind of the specific needs that students have in relation to cost of living?

I wonder if you could maybe go into a little bit more detail about what those kind of partnerships and collaborations are?

**07:45 – Charlotte:** Yeah, so it's kind of two levels. We aim to collaborate with the university and external stakeholders because at the end of the day, we've all got the same best interest, which is to, you know, give the student the best experience and to help them.

I think in terms of cost of living, the main collaborative we do is with the finance team, the student funding team to make sure those hardship funds are accessible as they can to make sure students know that they can access us that we're separate from the university. We can help them put that application together.

So, they've got a strong. of an argument because we know what they look for in those applications. In terms of external organizations, we are working with local food banks and local housing agencies. We work a lot with landlords and Warwick accommodation to make sure that not just are you able to access food in those immediate

**08:44 – Mollie:** I think just to add to that as well, obviously it's really, it's really important to mention that with any financial difficulty, there's probably a lot of emotional wellbeing issues involved in that as well. And it can cause a lot of students to feel like they don't have anywhere to turn to, or that nobody understands, or that they just, they're just not aware of the support that's available. So, I know the department that we work really closely with is the wellbeing team at Warwick. And like I said, a lot of the time, financial difficulties do come with emotional wellbeing issues as well. So, it's really important for students to know that that team are available to have that emotional support there for them.

So, we work really closely with them, and we do a lot of referrals to the wellbeing team too.

**09:22 – Tom:** I wonder if, if there are any other kind of examples of routes that students can go down to get that extra support that maybe you wanted to flag or to be able to share?

**09:30 – Mollie:** Um, I was just going to mention mitigating circumstances as well. Obviously, as a department, we offer a lot of advice when students are struggling with their workload. And obviously. The cost-of-living crisis and the emotional wellbeing issues that come from that and just practical everyday difficulties, it might mean that students got the chance to apply for mitigating circumstances with their work.

So, we do work really closely with other departments as well and we encourage communication with students and their personal tutors as well, and just help them to build that case for the mitigating circumstances just in case, you know. They're feeling like their work is directly being affected by what they're going through as well.

I don't know if you had anything else to add to that.

**10:07 – Charlotte:** Yeah, I think often it's the tip of the iceberg, isn't it? So, you're struggling with your mental health and then there's things underneath that or above that that, you know, are impacted. So, your academics are going to be impacted. It might be that your housing and your finances are causing you to struggle with your mental health.

So, I think the biggest thing I'd say is just get in touch with someone. So just, you know, you're paying for these services as part of paying for the university. They're open to you and they're all confidential so don't be afraid to access them and get help whether that's accessing us so we can help with kind of everything that the mental health is impacting on, or whether that's accessing wellbeing or the health centre to get that expert wellbeing support, just don't be afraid to take that first step out.

**10:51 – Tom:** Fantastic, thank you. So, the next question I wanted to ask, are there any initiatives or campaigns led by the SU to help raise awareness about financial literacy? So, we're talking a lot about kind of reactive stuff, but do you have any kind of proactive work that the SU does or that, you know, the university does to help support students make more informed decisions about budgeting and managing finances?

**11:13 – Charlotte:** So, we have a range of self-help resources on our website, to help students with budgeting and managing their money, especially because a lot of the time when students come to university, it's the first time they're managing money on their own, and they're managing bills and rent and living costs on their own, and it can be quite overwhelming and bewildering, so we try to just break that down on our website of what you would need to budget for, how to budget, that sort of thing. Obviously, if they do get in touch with us with an advisor, we can then give more specific advice that's more relevant to them, how to manage their finances and how to deal with that.

**11:48 – Tom:** So, I guess the next question is, you've mentioned a lot about kind of the different aspects of what the Students Union are doing in terms of, supporting students with cost-of-living crisis.

You, you also touched on as well about support programs and partnerships with local organizations and, vouchers for community ladders and things. I wonder if you wanted to maybe speak a little bit more about those and, and give a little bit more detail about where students can access them and sign up and, and, and just generally, you know, we have a lot of students who come to us and they just don't know that these things are out there. So, I wonder if you could speak a bit more to those and, and then maybe we can share a little bit about what we're trying to do in Chemistry as well to support with this.

**12:28 – Mollie:** Yeah, I mean, like I said before, it's just really important that students get in touch with us because everyone's situation is completely different and not one size fits all, like I said earlier.

So, I think if students did get in touch with us, and we did sort of issue them with that food bank voucher, we would then sort of give them ongoing support as and when they need it after that as well. Obviously, we understand that giving a food bank voucher might not solve everything, and it probably doesn't solve everything.

So just being that ongoing support for them, and just... you know, outlining the other methods of support that are out there for students is really, really important. In order to access those vouchers, again, just like plug in the website, just fill out the online inquiry form and just get in touch with one of us.

And once that online inquiry form comes through, then it comes to one of us in the team who's on the inbox for that day. We'll pick it up. We'll probably respond within a day, to be honest, arranged within 48 hours. And we'll just get back to you and you can either come in face to face or have a teams meeting or over the phone or even email if you want to, you know, it's completely tailored to whatever the student needs at that time. And then we can obviously give, give advice based on that specific situation, really. But the way that the food bank vouchers work. We just ask you to answer a couple of questions that are needed for the voucher. Then we sort of sort that out ourselves and then send it to them in a PDF form and they can then go and take it to their nearest food bank.

And get, I think it's a food parcel for three days, isn't it? So, it's an emergency food parcel that lasts for three days and then like I said, any ongoing support after that, we can definitely help with that and signpost to the relevant agencies.

**14:01 – Tom:** I think it's so good to hear it because I think, as I say, a lot of the time we have students come to us and, and they're not sure about kind of where to go, what to do, what they can expect, and, and you've really laid it out very clearly about kind of how to access it, what you get, the three day packages and things. I know something that we're excited as well, to talk about is that we are currently awaiting, we might not get it, but we're awaiting feedback on a funding bid that we've put in, with students from across four different departments in the SEM faculty to create kind of a community larder on campus of sorts, working with fair share and with Tesco's and a few other supermarkets to basically, for want of a better term, like repurpose food.

So, food that's nearing the end of its life, you can purchase through charities very, very cheaply, or if there's any kind of excess, you can use that as well. And the plan is if we do get the funding, and we will update you, via social media and via newsletters, you will be able to come and get essentially free food on a Wednesday, you can come along, you just have to give your name and your email just so we can, you know, make sure that we're reaching the right people, whether it's staff or student. And with the plan is, if all goes to plan, we'll be able to give away a kind of 100 kilograms a week of, kind of, dry and, fresh food that will last as well, that you'll be able to take away with you. Because this is, we're very aware, come from students and we're really keen on kind of responding to what you're telling us. So yeah, I think, I think that was an idea actually we originally had through a discussion with the Students Union. So, it's lovely to be able to kind of share it with you, kind of where we've got to with that.

So, I think it's really important as well that, you know, we've spoken a lot about stress related to cost of living, but we're aware that at this time of year we have exam stress as well. So, I wonder if there's anything, kind of any reflections you have on that or tips and advice for our students.

**15:47 – Mollie:** Yeah, I mean, again, it's just, it's just about stopping the stigma of, like, around mental health and exams and stuff like that, and I think it sort of goes hand in hand with the cost of living as well, like, we have to make sure that, you know, the SU and the, you know, the Advice Centre in particular are working really closely with departments to, you know, raise awareness about these issues because it is affecting all students in some way or other, even if it's somebody that the student knows, you know, everybody's being affected by it.

Right. The time that we're living in at the moment, but in regard to exam stress, obviously, again, they can get in touch with us, and we can give general advice. You know, we can speak about our personal experiences ourselves and just encourage more conversation around mental health and, you know, exam anxiety.

I know that. You know, it's exam season at the moment and we've got a lot of stressed students, understandably, but it's just about encouraging that communication, not only with us, but with the university as well, you know.

Speaking with your personal tutor if you've got concerns, speaking with the wellbeing team if it's getting out of hand and it's getting in the way of your day-to-day life.

That's sort of the general consensus that we use, I guess if it's getting in the way of your day to day life, then you really do need to seek support and it's encouraged as well, but yeah, we completely get that it's a stressful time at the moment and we just encourage conversation and you know, come and speak to us. We're really friendly. You know, we can offer help and support and just be somebody to listen at the end of the day. You might not even want to take any action, but problem shared is a problem halved, right?

**17:09 – Tom:** So, I think it's really great to hear about kind of the support you can offer students in relation to exams and food security and kind of cost-of-living crisis. I wonder if there's any other aspects of the Students Union maybe that you wanted to speak about either that students can access to get support or to get involved and meet others and kind of build those networks that really help you through these kinds of challenging times.

**17:31 – Charlotte:** Yeah, of course. So, the Students Union, we're completely independent and our purpose is just to make sure that you're getting the most out of your student experience. That's why we exist, to make sure that you have a good time at university, and you enjoy that experience. Obviously, there's the Advice Centre, so we can help you personally and individually with any issues that's affecting you. Completely confidential service, and we're not part of the university, so we can help you with any concerns without that conflict of interest.

There are also... opportunities available through the SU to meet other students, extracurricular activities, which particularly can help with that mental health aspect and feeling quite lonely at university, meeting like-minded peers, so societies and sports, even volunteering and campaigns that work.

So, if there's something that you are quite passionate about, you can join that cause and you can meet like-minded people, meet other students and just get out there a little bit more. There's also opportunities through student voice, so if there's an issue that's affecting a lot of students on a specific course, raising it through there from their course reps, and then they can target that and make sure that that's resolved.

**18:43 – Mollie:** I think just like being aware that the Student Union wouldn't exist without the students, you know, like, it's a massive community here, not even just with the students, but with the staff as well, you know, we're all really friendly. That's what we're here to be friendly, so, you know, just come and join in with stuff and, you know, be encouraged to join societies and make friends and, you know, you get out what you put in.

Somebody said to me when I was at uni once. And yeah, I completely stand by that quote. I feel like the more you get involved, the more that you're going to get out of your experience. And like Charlotte said, a lot of that goes hand in hand with mental health as well. And with the sense of community, not just in the SU as a building, but societies as well.

It's just great for students to get involved and feel like they're a part of something when maybe they don't feel. to be included at the moment, or they feel like their mental health's getting the better of them. Just having that place that feels like a community when you're away from home, like a lot of students are. Yeah, I would just encourage them to get as involved as they can.

**19:37 – Tom:** Yeah, thank you. And I think that's a really similar kind of ethos that we have with what we're trying to do in chemistry, which is you have all these support mechanisms outside the department, but we've really, we've really tried to build opportunities in the department for you to kind of come and check in and let us know how you're doing and access support and come to activities and just meet other people as well.

So, I think it's great that the student union are doing, are doing that sort of work as well. And I think it really kind of supports that wider student experience. Thank you. So, I think sometimes a challenge that students can have is that this idea of, like, the advice centre, it can feel really broad and not very clear about, kind of, what sort of thing you can go for.

And I know a lot of people make the mistake of thinking, oh, it's counselling, which it isn't. So, I wonder if you wanted to maybe give some examples of the types of things that students can get in touch with advice to talk about.

**20:25 – Mollie:** Literally anything. I feel like that's a very, very broad answer. I'll narrow it down slightly. We, because we offer impartial and confidential advice, like Charlotte said earlier, we're not, we're not directly part of the university, so I think a lot of students don't realise that they can come to us about university processes, disciplinaries, fitness to practice meetings, mitigating circumstances.

Literally anything to do with the university or anything that's sort of getting in the way of your student experience. You can get in contact with us about student accommodation within the campus or private renting outside of the campus. So, we do a lot of tenancy agreement checks. So, if you're unsure on what your contract means or you feel like something's not right, you can always send it to us.

That's very, very quick and easy. Just send it over to us. We'll have a look and send you some feedback. So, you can sort of negotiate with your landlord or letting agent if you feel like there's an issue. But yeah, so, so, so many things, anything at all. If we don't know, then we'll try and find out the answer for you, whether that be with the uni or signposting you to an external agency.

Obviously, like you said, we're not, we're not counsellors, but if you did feel like you're wanting to talk to us about mental health, we can always direct you to professionally trained people who can help you with that.

**21:36 – Charlotte:** I think also we're a representative body, so we're here to represent you and at the advice centre that's on an individual level. So if you are going through a complaint, a disciplinary, fitness practice or even with housing, we can contact landlords on your behalf, we can represent you through those more complex processes that are really hard to navigate as a student and it can be quite intimidating to do that as a student, so we can act on your behalf with your consent and help you navigate that.

**22:06 – Mollie:** I feel like we like to advise students and sort of empower them to be able to make decisions for themselves and deal with things that come up in adult life when you've moved out and, you know, you might not know how to deal with something but we can always point you in the right direction. And, you know, a lot of our students who get in contact always leave better off because they know what to do in that situation again or, you know, if their friends in that situation they can advise their friend on how to deal with that. So, I feel like... you know, if ever you've got anything at all, just get in contact with us and we can, we can point you in the right direction.

**22:37 – Tom:** Yeah, I think that's great. And I think that's a really kind of comprehensive look at what the SU offer, because I know a lot of students aren't always clear about kind of what they can expect and how to engage with, with you and what you do.

I wonder, I guess really as a kind of last question. What would be the best way to get in touch with the advice team, if a student has any of these issues, what would you recommend be the best way?

**22:59 – Charlotte:** So, we have an online enquiry form, so if you go to our website, under help and support, there's an advice service enquiry form. It just asks for your name, your student ID. How you want to be contacted and a summary of your query and then an advisor will get back to you. If you prefer an in-person appointment, you can

also book an in-person appointment on there. We would just say to be wary that if you submit an inquiry form, you'll get an answer much quicker than if you book that face-to-face appointment. And we can still offer a face-to-face appointment via the inquiry form, but you're going to get a much quicker answer.

**23:34 – Tom:** Are there any kind of social media accounts that you have that our students should be following, like Warwick SU Official and those sorts of things?

**23:40 – Charlotte:** So, the SU have their own accounts on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, where you can find a lot of updates about the events that are running, so particularly with the exam stress and cost of living events that the SU are putting on, you can find updates about those, when those are and how to go to them.

So, we definitely recommend following them, especially just in case there is anything important, if there's any press initials, something comes up, you're keeping up to date and hearing it straight, straight away.

**24:08 – Mollie:** You might, you might spot us around campus as well sometimes at some of the events. You can't miss us, bright yellow hoodies. But yeah, it's really important for us to just get, like, get the word out there really. So, hopefully you'll be seeing us at events around campus.

**24:23 – Tom:** Good to know who you are, rather than just people who are in bright yellow hoodies. Adam or Jess, I don't know if you have any questions or comments you'd like to add just before we wrap up.

**24:33 – Adam:** I think the only thing that I'd add is that it's really obvious of just how much support is available through the University, through the Students Union, which is absolutely fantastic. But I also understand that that can, in itself, can feel overwhelming. So, if you are overwhelmed, if you don't know where to start, the door is always open, we're always happy to listen, we're always happy to help, and we can help signpost you and get you the right support that's needed, within the department as well. You can contact us at any time, the student experience team, Tom and I, we're available in person, via email, Teams, whichever method is best for you really. But I guess just don't suffer in silence. If there's anything really that you're unsure of or unhappy about, something that you feel like you need to talk about or perhaps need guidance, come and find us and we can help you signpost you to kind of the right, right support that's offered within the university.

**25:27 – Jess:** Yeah, I haven't actually got any more questions. I think everything's been pretty much answered really well. But what I did want to just add off the back of a really important point that Charlotte and Molly and actually everyone's spoken about is really the emphasis on reaching out and spreading the word around because at the end of the day, you know. You're a student, you're paying to be here. You're not only just paying to get an education and get a degree at the end of your time at uni, but you're also paying for all of the services that are available to you. And there's obviously a lot out there that's been discussed in the podcast so far. So, I would just kind of suggest, like, do your research, look into what help is available to you, and just make the most of it, I guess. And kind of what Adam said, don't suffer in silence and don't suffer alone. Speak out and, you know, just don't be afraid to get in touch with the SU or your department to see what support you can get.

**26:17 – Tom:** Yeah, I think that's a great point, Jess, as well. And I think what we'll do when we upload this, I mentioned earlier, is... We will make sure that we will get as many links as we can to the kind of support routes that we've discussed and put those in the description of the episode so people can click on them.



Well thank you all so much for joining us today, for this episode of the Pathways podcast. We look forward to seeing yellow hoodies around campus and hopefully for our students to come to you to ask for more help. But thank you for all your help and all that you do on the campus and hopefully see you all soon. Thanks so much.

**26:49 – Charlotte:** Thanks for having us.

**26:50 – Mollie:** Thank you.

**26:51 – Adam:** Thanks everyone.

**26:52 – Jess:** Thank you. Bye.