

## **Pathways Podcast, Season Three, Episode Eight**

### **Jess 00:05**

Hey everyone. I'm Jess Mann and welcome back to another episode of the Pathways Podcast. We hope you all managed to have a really well earned and rested Easter break. Now, I guess for most of you, as you probably look towards what's to come for this term, exams will probably be on the forefront of most of your minds.

Well, in today's episode, I've brought along some current third years who were kind of the Guinea pigs to the whole closed book in-person exams process. We all set our exams last term, so we thought it would be good to give you guys some full, honest, and in-depth insight into our personal exam experiences in the hopes that it'll answer any unanswered questions or fears that you may have about exams coming up.

So, I'll let my two guests introduce themselves to you now.

### **Sam Davis 00:54**

Hi, I'm Sam Davis. I'm a third year studying a master's in chemistry.

### **Sam Weekes 01:00**

Hi, I'm Sam Weekes. I'm also third year studying a master's in chemistry.

### **Jess 01:05**

Thanks, so many guys. Okay, let's get straight to it. So, to give a little bit of context to our listeners, do both of you want to just talk a little bit about you know, how you found the exams and the exams process in general, and I guess also like what your emotions or feelings were leading up to it, and did any of these ease off or change as the process went?

### **Sam 01:26**

I'd say the main thing was changing from closed book where you had all your notes with you to back to in person. Considering we hadn't done that since GCSEs and it just felt kind of weird and like a different kind of stress that we weren't used to, but it just meant where we were all in the same boat.

So, it really helped that we didn't have that, like it's just us. Everyone else could kind of make your stress feel less stressful, if that makes sense.

**Jess 01:55**

Yeah, it does. Definitely. What about you, Sam?

**Sam 01:59**

One of the things I found was in about three weeks beforehand, the stress started building really up. And I was thinking, these are, these are now closed book.

I don't know anything. But as I got closer within a week, couple days, that sort of died down again because for me, I felt, when I was trying to go through past papers, I realised that I knew. Enough, and I felt confident in myself to reduce the stress. But yeah, the, the biggest difference also for me was the fact that going from open book to close book, it was very, disorientating in a sense.

**Jess 02:41**

Yeah, no, I completely agree. I think for me, one of my biggest fears was the transition between, you know, having access to your notes and like lecture notes and the internet and things like that during the exam, compared to just being completely like on your own in the exam. So, for both of you, do you think that the in-person exam experience actually went better than you thought?

**Sam 03:03**

Or was it just completely awful? I think it went better than I expected. You didn't realise, but the exam questions were slightly easier than they would be if they were open book. And there's a lot more that it was a bit of recall and, you just, you didn't have to just like, for your notes wasting like half an hour. Everything you had; it was in your head. So, if you didn't know it, you're, they're like, I can't do anymore.

**Sam 03:29**

Yeah, absolutely agree with that. I think coming into it, I thought it would be horrible, but actually after sitting them, I. It was almost more calm and easier, and I came out of it thinking I'd done, I'd, I'd done all right, rather than in previous years, I'd felt coming out of exams that they'd gone horrendously. And so that was the main difference for me.

### Jess 03:53

Yeah, I agree. I think it was actually quite nice, obviously the, for the first exam it was, more stressful for everyone compared to, you know, like the, the following exams after that. The first one's always going to be the worst one in terms of like stress and emotions, because you don't know what to expect. But I think for a lot of us, we all went in together and we all came out together. So, it was quite nice kind of. All, as Sam Davis said, like we all go in, you know, we're all in the same boat and everything like that. So, that was quite a nice feeling, and quiet, you know, wholesome as well.

What do you guys think the support was like, or did you feel like you were supported at all, from the department or the academic staff, or what sorts of things did you do when you needed help?

### Sam 04:36

I find like they did give us support to an extent. Like I know they gave us mock exams and. Like showed us like how an in-person exam is, but one thing they probably didn't show was like what the like exam front page looks like, that you have the answer booklet and where you're supposed to like answer everything. They probably could have like gone through that more and like the attendance card and all that stuff. Maybe even just make sure you're writing the right thing in the right section as well. Cause like the first exam I didn't know where do I write everything? What do I do?

But I mainly use like my friends to like, help me with the studying because we could kind of bounce off each other.

### Sam 05:17

Yeah, I, I think the mock was definitely helpful, just alleviating any of this, the added stress of not knowing what to do. And for me that really helps because I don't really like going into it not knowing where I'm meant to be, what I'm going to do. Although, yeah, I agree. The, the attendance card I think we had in the mock, but the front page, the separate exam book, all that is just completely different to anything else I've had to do in the past. And that would've been nice to almost have a run through of go of someone saying, this is what you're going to put here, this is what you're going to put here.

Although by the end of it, I kind of got to the point where if I made a mistake on something like that, it, it's not going to be the end of the world. They'll, as long as they got my name and the details, it was.

### **Jess 06:05**

Yeah, no, I completely agree, with literally everything you guys said, particularly the like attendance form and like the front page of the exam booklet and the answer booklet and things like that for our listeners out there, because they wouldn't have gone through the exams like by the time they listened to the podcast.

Do you guys just want to give a brief explanation of what you guys mean about the attendance form and the, like the front page of the exam booklet and stuff like that?

### **Sam 06:30**

Why you have to put on, obviously like your name. Like your course and all that, you know, the basic stuff, what exam it is, what, the exam code is and then you also have to put in like what room you were in.

And in the first one I just kind of. Forgot what room I was in, so I just wrote Junction Hall and just hoped that it was right, probably isn't anything important, but it was mainly the parts where it says like, answer, put what sections you're answering in. I just remember reading it. I'm just like not really reading it properly because it just didn't make as, it just wasn't clear and if the examiner said at the start, it would've been nicer, on just where to answer the questions. But just make sure like you read the front page, it tells you more than you realise is what I found out.

### **Sam 07:19**

Yeah, I mean we had one ex, one example of it where we had four different house booklets for four different questions. And I don't think at the start they gave us, they told us and that, and that was just added stress because I personally spent five minutes trying to read. It and properly understand what I was meant to do in each bit. And that was, that was just unneeded.

### **Jess 07:40**

Yeah. Just going off of what you both have said, like I could not emphasise that enough.

Like actually take the time in your first exam to read the front, of the exam booklet, because I didn't actually make that decision to read the front page for the example clerk. Like the end of my last exam, which obviously in hindsight now looking back, was a really silly thing to do, because like on the front of the exam booklet, it tells you how they want you to lay out your answers in the exam booklet.

So, what they say is, like a, they want you to start a new page for each new question, but obviously, By the point that by the time I read it, I obviously hadn't done any of that. So yeah, just try and read everything before you, like get started. And what I'd also suggest is like just get to the example early, and you can just start writing, like the, and filling in the exam booklet before the exam starts. Like you won't get penalised all that because I think a lot of. We're worried about writing before the exam started, so yeah, don't waste time during the exam filling in the attendance b form or the front of the exam booklet because you know, like time is very precious in the in-person exams for sure.

### **Sam 08:53**

Yeah. Adding to that, it's like not just read what's on the answer booklet, but the question booklet because they don't always agree, because some, like they, the people who wrote the questions want them to be different, laid out to the standard answer booklet.

### **Jess 09:08**

Yeah, for sure, how did you both actually find the exam day, because I think what a lot of people, and, and the students are probably wondering is what the structure of the day is like and you know, what they do when they first go in, where can they leave their bags? So can you both maybe just walk everyone through, what they can expect on the day, you know, from arriving to going into the exam hall and you know, the rules and regulations and things.

### **Sam 09:31**

Yeah, well we would like, obviously some of my friends, we'd meet up beforehand, and just do a bit more studying or relieving stress in each other, and then we'd just walk in and there was a baggage area. We put our bags down. We stayed there probably, it depends how early we got there, but usually about like 5-10 minutes before we got called into the exam hall where

we got to bring our foam, but it had to be switched off, which then gets put in a plastic bag underneath your chair and I'd say just make sure you know your seat before going in as well because it just makes it quicker and gives you more time to like, fill in all the work on the booklet and then you just watch the clock tick until you can start the exam.

### **Sam 10:16**

Yeah. I mean, I, I consistently got there half an hour before, normally almost to make sure that I wasn't late for any reason, because one of the things, there was loads of bus strikes around and, and it was the week of snow and. It was, it just, I didn't want to add any more stress into trying to get there early. And then we were normally let in 15 minutes early, which is plenty of time to write all the information on the front covers and actually take a minute to breathe. And, and one of the things I realised a bit later on was that you actually, you could just take everything that was in your pockets and you, and you just put it under your chair rather than just leaving it in your bag, stressing that someone might take it.

### **Jess 10:55**

Yeah, thank you both. I think just picking on points of both of what you were saying, I think it might seem insensitive to say now because obviously, you know, our viewers out there and listeners are probably stressing to the max like we were, but actually it is quite chill, like the vibes and everything. Like when you go into the room, you, you just need to get yourself, like in the, in your kind of zone, in the focus zone and what Sam Weekes was saying is just take a moment to breathe before, you know, going full steam ahead into the exam. Yeah. As, as Sam said, you can literally take everything anything that you want into the exam as long as you, you know, your pockets and put it into the like, clear plastic bag under your desk.

Definitely something which both of you touched on was the preparation before, like going into the exam. So, for example, I think we all took different strategies into what we did before the exam. So, Sam Davis and I, we would go with like a group of our friends to the library and we'd kind of. As she was saying, we would kind of work together, revise it a bit, and then just kind of calm the nerves down.

So, we just completely just stopped revising maybe 20 minutes before the exam and just chill and kind of chat to each other about random things to kind of take our minds off it. And then I remember seeing Sam Weekes also in the library, and I think you took a slightly different approach where you just kind of were on your own, likes to take everything on in your stride. Kind of be your own person before the exam. So yeah, I think if, you know, you just establish your own way of working. Yeah, I'm building up. A good like mentality before heading into the exam I think's really, really important for everyone out there.

For many of our listeners, they probably would've just been used to doing online exams at uni, which was kind of similar to us and we touched on a bit earlier on in the podcast. So, what do you both think were the biggest differences between in-person and online exams?

### **Sam 12:47**

Definitely the memorising and the recall questions because you needed, you didn't, like when I was revising the first years, I was like, oh, well I don't really need to memorise this whole mechanism.

I don't need to know how A gets to B. I just need to recognise it. But this time I was like, I actually do need to know how to make the molecule or the product without referring to my notes and just checking them as well, just to get those extra marks and extra reassurance. And then also the, in the exam hall, you see everyone around you working and you're there like, I have to do this, or, I was just there like, oh, I can use the internet.

Oh, I feel like I'm just like in my room. I could just like sit somewhere else now and like, even though I wouldn't, but there's just, there's more distractions around I found.

### **Sam 13:38**

One of the things I found was actually the online ones, because we had our notes and we were spending so much time on them, I found that it was getting to a point where I was almost rushing through exams and I wouldn't have any time at the end to almost check my answers and go through and properly reread it. But for these exams, I normally had 15 minutes to the end where I hadn't rushed through the, the exam, but I'd, I'd gone through it at my own pace and I'd have 15 minutes to properly go back and reread it, which probably comes down to the, the fact that I didn't have my notes there.

But that was, that was the main thing, because just being able to check and feel comfortable that I've just done my best and I've answered everything to the best that that I can was something that made me come out of the exams also feeling fairly pleased.

### Jess 14:27

Yeah, no, I couldn't, couldn't agree more. I think the thing that I would say is probably the biggest difference is obviously you have access to your notes when you are doing, you know, online exams away from everyone else. And that in itself just wastes a lot of time because if you are just completely reliant on your lecture notes or being able to look online for online resources and on the internet, Yeah, I think you don't realise in the moment how much time that wastes. Whereas, as Sam was saying just then when you are in person, A, you are around other people who you can literally see frantically like writing so quickly beside you. And that all just in itself is motivating and pushes you to also work as quickly as you can. But also, you don't have access to notes. You don't have time to be looking through your, your iPad or through the internet or through your, you know, folders and things like that. So, you just have to go off of what you know, and then if you don't know it, just move on to the next question.

I think that was kind of a benefit for me because kind of what the other two were saying is I actually managed to finish all of my papers within the time that they gave, and also kind of had a bit of time to check through as well at the end, which was quite reassuring. Whereas for the online exams, it was just kind of like, oh, you have the 45-minute upload time. Oh, I can just go into that a little bit and then, you know, then upload. But you don't have that with the in-person exams. So, I think with the in-person exams, it just pushed you a lot more because it was just, you know, you had that cut off point and you didn't have, you know, any notes and things around you.

So yeah, that's definitely something that I'd say, but related to, you know, online exams, in-person exams, did your revision strategies change and did your approach to cater for in-person exams, change depending on the fact of in-person versus online exams?



### **Sam 16:17**

Yeah, I'd say they definitely had to change. With my revision for online, it was more like I know where all my work is and it was like I would get recognise the keywords and know which section to find it in because I like had my notes in paper then, and I would like have it all like tabbed on the side to where each thing was. So, I just like flicked that page, look at the answer and almost copy it down.

Whereas for this I was there like beforehand, I was doing a bit of memorising. Some of the key words or like stuff we had to know. I would like to try and recall like each mechanism or definition, especially like for physical chemistry, because it's just a lot of content there. And I was literally like the day before, like memorising as much as I could as well just to get the stuff that I didn't understand in my head.

### **Sam 17:07**

So, for me, the only thing that really changed was to do with definitions. I don't think in the past my revision changed all that much and that may be one reason that I struggled, or I was more stressed about online exams, in the past. So, I still followed the same sort of go through the notes and then questions with the notes and stuff and then questions about them. But the definitions were certainly one that I had to try re-employ flashcards and just ways to remember them without actually seeing them in a book.

### **Jess 17:42**

Yeah. Would you both say it's. Really beneficial to do a whole bunch of past papers or do you think it's better just to kind of go through all the lecture notes again or, or anything else?

### **Sam 17:53**

I'd say go through all the lecture notes again, that's what I did. I went through all the lectures, especially the bits that I didn't understand, made sure I really understood it, answered questions as I went along. And then I would see which parts you had to memorise, and then I'd memorise those parts and then do like exam papers.

And so that meant I could like kind of, I don't how to say it, but apply what I'd learned into it, which is kind of what you're supposed to do for exams.

#### **Sam 18:24**

So, I'd say it probably depends on the person. For me, I did a bit of both, but past papers are what actually cements the knowledge in my brain. But with some topics, there's only so much you can learn from past papers when it could be more content based rather than mechanisms.

And so, a bit of both, but primarily just what whoever wants to do, what works for them and just stick to it because trying to change to what works for someone else. It's something that I've tried to do in the past and it's just not worked.

#### **Jess 18:59**

Yeah, I think ultimately the thing with closed book in-person exams compared to online exams is you actually do need to have that kind of foundation of knowledge and that understanding of the module.

Whereas with the online exams, I guess you can kind of bypass some of the things because you can just rely on, you know, previous past paper answers or your notes and things like that. So, I would definitely, obviously recommend trying to understand, you know, the module to a pretty good amount of detail.

But also, do you think that the past, like the previous past papers were kind of a good reflection of the exams that we sat this year.

#### **Sam 19:40**

I'd say some of them were like organic. It was very similar to the past, but one of like my optional modules, bioorganic. It was like I'd done loads of past papers and they seemed to have on some of the questions on there.

It seemed to be what they asked on in person, online exams and not in person, like they hadn't fully changed over, which made it a lot harder and it was just completely unexpected and I just didn't know as much as I knew for the module, and I didn't think it was a good reflection.

#### **Sam 20:11**

I think it completely depends on the module. Like it, the content modules, they were a little bit different and they went back to a bit more content based, but

more content where it was less about applying the content and more about knowing it, which is less ideal for in some senses, but in terms of just remembering it better, but those modules such as organic, fairly similar paper, I didn't, I didn't see much if any, change in terms of structure and layout of it between this year, the previous years, and then even before Covid happened.

### **Jess 20:50**

Yeah. I think with doing. Past papers. I think it would be beneficial to everyone at least to kind of get a vibe of the, the structure of how they lay out the exams because as both of you have said, organic has literally been the same for, you know, God knows how many years now. It's, it's basically been the same since, I don't know, 2006 or something.

I don't know, whereas maybe some other modules have. The way that they lay out the structure and the kind of questions that they ask. So definitely have a look at the past papers and see if you can figure out any patterns and stuff, because that'll be really helpful with like for sourcing out your exam prep and things like that.

### **Sam 21:31**

One thing I would say though, sorry, one thing I would say relating to patterns is don't stick to it because in previous years, I've tried to stick to pattern. And they haven't necessarily come up all the time. So have, knowing the under basic understanding of, of those patterns is definitely ideal and beneficial. But just being aware that they can change and, and they, they may well change. Is also just something to take into account.

### **Jess 22:00**

Yeah, that's actually a really good point because also obviously the online exams transition towards in-person exams is massive and that in itself will change the way that exams are also formatted and laid out.

So yeah, that's a really good point. Whilst it's good to. Have a, you know, an idea of the patterns and the sort of structure and things don't obviously rely on those. Just rely, try and rely on the foundations and the understanding of knowledge that you will hopefully have gained over the past few years or the year that you've had at uni so far.

So, to round everything off, I wondered if both of you could say, a little bit or a quick message about your opinions going back in person, and also if you had any tips for students going into the same process in the coming weeks.

### **Sam 22:45**

For me, I'm probably opposite to a lot of people's opinions, but I thought it was actually the right thing to do to go back to in-person because it had to happen at some point, because Covid has now ended, and we can't keep living like we're in lockdown. And it just for us a lot of the work we had to learn. It's like it stays in your head if you know it's in person, because when it was online, I just, I didn't know enough last year. But then again, because it was online last year, it made this year harder I think, because if I'd had in-person last year, I would be able to, I would still have a lot of that in the back of my memory and be able to like apply that into this year. But because I just didn't know some of the basics for this. So, I think other years should be at a better place and it'll be a lot calmer because you did do say exams more recently, especially for the Freshers and the second years, because I didn't think the first-year exams were as bad as second year.

### **Sam 23:49**

So, I, my opinion on it, going back in person is probably, I didn't mind it. I would've pro, I would have liked a little bit more explanation as to why, but I understood that's kind of, it's not my decision to whether the exams are in person or online, but I...all I could do was prepare the best I could. And to be fair, I did start advising probably way too early and burnt out quite early on. So, it's just about finding that sweet spot of revision. But a tip I'd say is certainly just for the day, just taking that time to get there early and not having to stress, because even if you were there early, it means you don't have to worry about getting there because you can just walk to wherever it is in campus.

Whereas I know that, that if, if I was rushing to get there, I wouldn't be in the right mind space to take the exam. I would've, I would've very much struggled in the early half an hour or so. And so, I think that's just one of the main things that I'm, I'm glad I did it, even if it took extra time out of my day.

### **Sam 24:57**

Also, like five, sorry, like five mi, like not five minutes, but for me it was like, you know, the half hour, hour before the exam, there was people that like,

wanted to like read their notes and make sure they knew as much as they did. But it's not for everyone, but for me, I think it's very good to get your mind in the right place and don't look at all the work, because if you don't know it 10 minutes before, you're not going to know it 10 minutes later. Just like stay calm and just breathe and think this exam will be over. I'm just going to do the best I can.

### Sam 25:27

Yeah, I mean, when I, when I went into that, bag room, just speaking to friends and speaking to other people, rather than, there were some people that sat and read their notes and I was just thinking, you can't like that. You're not going to be able to learn anymore now. And so, watching most people speak to other people, I think that's the best approach.

### Jess 25:49

Yeah. Thanks guys. I agree with what both of you were saying, and just to take points of both, I'd say for me, I was, I think like a lot of, the cohort, I was quite anti going back in person because I think it was just a fear of it being our final year and we'd never had the experience before, and just not having that confidence in my own like ability and my own knowledge, but actually going back in person made me really try and consolidate my understanding. And, you know, all of the knowledge that I've accumulated over the past three years and you without, you know, actually doing, going back in person, you wouldn't realise how, just how much you've learned.

And I think it's, it's quite rewarding actually being back in person and just thinking, oh wow. Like I've actually learned a lot in three years, whereas I think. It was still online. I wouldn't have consolidated as much understanding and learning that I, you know, if, if we didn't go back in person and also what Sam Weekes was saying about, you know, getting there early, preparing and just yeah, preparing in, in advance and actually sourcing out, you know, good time management I think is really, really key during the exam period because you know, the last thing you want on top of the actual stress of.

The exam is to be late to the exam or to, you know, just turn up, you know, on time, while the exam's just about to start. So definitely preparing in advance, like your travel, any issues with snow, which hopefully none of you will go through cause your exams are in the summer, but yeah, just factoring in any sort of anomalous issue that could have like happened on the day, bypassing

that by, you know, just being prepared and organised is something that I would just recommend for every. So that's great. Thank you both so much for sharing all of your views. I'm sure our listeners will find it very helpful. And that's it for today. But if any of you still have questions or fears lingering about your upcoming exams, please remember to reach out to the department or any of our third years Exam season is really tough, but we are here to help.

Okay guys, thank you so much for listening and we'll catch you in the next episode. Bye.