

Pathways Podcast Transcript: Season 4, Episode 4 – Applying to Warwick as an International and Home Student.

00:10 – Tom: So, hello and welcome back to the Pathways Podcast. My name is Dr Tom Ritchie. I'm an Assistant Professor and Director of Student Experience in the department. I'm joined today by my colleague Adam Alcock. Hi Adam.

00:22 – Adam: Hi everyone.

00:23 – Tom: I'm also joined by two students, Aashna Dwyer and Ayra Kaisar, Hi both!

00:30 – Ayra: Hello, my name is Ayra. Hi.

00:32 – Aash: Hi, I am Aash.

00:34 – Tom: Brilliant. Thank you so much. We're really excited today to be able to speak to you a little bit more about the experience of coming to university. And we've invited along, uh, Aash and Ayra for their perspectives as home and international students respectively, to try to give you an idea of the challenges that students face, but actually the similarities that there are between different student experiences, in the process of applying to, coming to, settling at, and thriving at Warwick.

So, let's get started with something simple. Ayra, why did you pick Warwick?

01:08 – Ayra: So basically, I'm a gap year student, so I had applied, I started applying, technically coming to university for the year 2021, and I was, in my brain I was like, okay, I want to go to UK for higher studies. It would be a nice experience and just something I wanted to do. Like, I want to go out and be an international student and just gain that experience. I remember searching up universities for chemistry, and Warwick was the one that really popped up and like had like student satisfaction was very high.

It was one of the universities I ended up applying twice because I withdrew my application when I was coming in 2021. And when I applied again for 2022, I applied to Warwick again and it made me think when I was making the decision, the final decision when I was like during, when I was choosing university, and I was like, there's a reason I've been choosing this university in rounds of my application and it just really stood out to me in the sense, it might sound like very, like it's the, I really liked the campus and like hearing about the department, I heard about chemistry, lots of things even on like normal surveys on the Google had good things to say about it. So it was like an instinct that, okay, let's choose this university. Why not?

02:21 – Tom: Yeah, I think it's really interesting that you mention that instinct and I think that - we will come to Aash in a second to understand her experience - but I think there is a lot about that instinct or that gut feeling you have towards a place. The rest of it's important, league tables are important, and I get all of that, but I think there is, there's a lot to be said about following your gut instincts.

02:48 – Ayra: Definitely. Yeah.

02:51 – Tom: Aash, how about you? Why did you choose Warwick?

02:54 – Aash: So, I have a very different experience, I think when it comes to choosing a university is I kind of went more with throwing a dart, a dartboard approach. Um, I did this with universities, um, just kind of to narrow it down a bit more and I did them within the Russell group, so obviously Warwick, having those like higher student satisfaction and being in those league tables definitely did contribute to me coming here, but then it went more into looking into the courses. Um, Warwick Chemistry specifically does a lot of more, um, does a lot more courses. Um, so it has like chemistry with medicinal chemistry, which is actually the course that I'm currently studying.

And I thought that was quite unique to Warwick Chemistry, and it definitely helped pushing me into applying here. Um, I think as I went further and further into it, and now obviously that I'm studying, I'm really glad that I did because Warwick being. Very different to a lot of universities as in its campus-based, not city-based. Um, one of the things I really love about Warwick is the campus is super, super safe.

Like it's only really students out there, it's out of a city. Um, it feels really warm and inclusive and everywhere you walk is like it's part of the university and I really like that about Warwick.

04:03 – Tom: Yeah. Thank you. Aash. I think it, it's really interesting that everyone has different experiences about how they choose universities and actually. You can read all of the books and the websites and the, the speak to as many people as you want, but you, your reason for choosing a place will be unique to you. Adam, do you have any questions to ask at this point?

04:22 – Adam: Yeah, I've got one for Ayra. Really, really interesting that you chose Warwick, but was it always going to be the UK from the outset, or did you consider any other countries for study?

04:32 – Ayra: Actually, when I thought of like, okay, I spoke to my parents, like eased them into it that, okay, I'm thinking about this. I would like to go abroad to study. So, it was a very, I remember like making a...I want to take this step in life, but honestly, I've been coming to UK since I was young, because my grandparents used to live here. So, it was something, it felt familiar as well, but when I was making obviously like practical decisions and thinking about why I want to study in the UK, I remember even mentioning in this, mentioning this in my personal.

Like, you know how Warwick or most of the UK universities offer the course MChem, like in an integrated masters. That's what really stood out to me because wherever I looked for chemistry courses, even back home or in other countries, it would usually just be the first step would be masters. But in UK your, you have the option of going on an integrated, I would have that opportunity to be in this course, and I'm currently on the MChem courses. That was definitely one of the pushing points, or more like the convincing points for my like family back home. Like, see, I'll be going, but I'll be going for four years and I'll be coming back with a masters.

And it's just like, uh, with Warwick. Um, the UK felt familiar, the course, and it felt like, again, it might sound like I'm repeating myself, but it was really instinct for me, like it felt right in my bones. Like even though when I had withdrawn my application during 2021, I was like, okay, I'm closing that chapter of part of my life. It's fine. I've, I'm moving on. But then when the opportunity rose again, it needed to happen, but just when the time was right, so it was more like, it feels right, I want to do this.

06:30 – Adam: Yeah, I mean, it definitely sounds like the stars aligned for you, and it sounds like you're completely on the right path. Like you said, you're trusting your instinct and you are living out the, the kind of the future that you, you wanted. So, it is really great to hear.

06:41 – Tom: Brilliant. Thank you both. I wonder if we could move to a different aspect now of. Something that people consider when they are, are thinking about universities or studying abroad, and that's around kind of finances. Um, so I, I wonder if you could speak to how you've sort of manage your finances as an international student, whether you thought about applying for scholarships or anything else like that.

07:04 – Ayra: Uh, if I would be perfectly honest, I'm completely supported with my, by my parents for my university education and they support me throughout, um, when it comes to tuition fees or rent or just daily living expenses. So, I'm reliant, like dependent on them. However. It was before. One of the concerns when I was making the decision of coming to university, because obviously everybody knows how overseas students tuition fee is a lot higher than home students.

So it was definitely a big question in my parents' head as well, that, okay, this is a big step, it's going to be difficult, but if you wanted so much and then I did end up getting accepted so, for applying scholarships and I think, I think I did, but even before you apply scholarships, sometimes the university always tells you that, okay, we have, we're going to have very limited spaces or you might not qualify, but like they warn you beforehand.

So, I knew that it's okay and my parents like when I got a bit sad, okay, it might not be possible. They're like, okay, there's no point in applying for scholarship. Let's think about it. So, we had a few months before we made the decision and my parents were like, okay, let's do this. But even though if it's been almost two years since I'm living here, and even though my, I'm dependent on my parents, but even here when I'm alone, I'm like, okay, I have that sense of like, okay, even though it's not my money, it's my parents' money, but it's hard on money.

So, I have to be careful about it. I like trying to do budgeting and just being, being responsible. Because why not? And, and I think university really does instead makes you grow up in a very different way, especially when you're living alone because you have money in your account, but you should know how to use it smartly. So, I think that was a very good experience for me.

09:03 – Tom: Yeah, it's, it's really interesting to hear and I wonder, while you were talking, I was thinking about the kind of sense of pressure you must have felt and probably still feel to succeed and be able to get through this process in a way that justifies kind of, that, that outlay from your parents. I wonder if you've, you may not have done, but if you've reflected on things that you do to help you deal with that pressure because it does sound like there's a lot there for you to succeed and, and you know, it's quite high stakes.

09:30 – Ayra: I agree. The amount of pressure because you are like, you don't want to let them down or even have like, have the opportunity for them to even think that, oh, you know, we made a mistake.

Or like, it's too much. But I try to like do my best, but again, my parents are not like that as well. They were like, we don't, as long as you are happy and you doing, and they know and they, they always have, like since the beginning we had a lot of like I had like problems and like said things to my parents like, why are you letting her move so far away? Because from the culture I belong to, it's very something very different that a girl is moving away. It's just how society is back at home. So, but my parents were like, we trust our daughter and we trust our upbringing and this is we, we know this is what's best for her and you want to make this decision for her. So I feel like their belief also helps with the instilled pressure I have sometimes, you know, like how your brain turns something, even though it's not real, but it's just their belief in me makes me like, okay, I'm, I'm doing okay.

10:38 – Tom: They trust in you. They, they know that you've got this. So, it's kind of like, good luck, you know, you know, we'll, we'll almost, we'll see you at graduation. You know, you, you'll get there. We trust in you and, and that, that's really positive.

10:48 – Ayra: Yeah. So that really helps me sometimes like ok.

10:52 – Tom: Aash, I don't know about you. It's obviously, it's a very different experience coming to university as a UK student because of the student loan system and the bursaries and the maintenance grants and everything else that are available. But I wonder if you could kind of similarly reflect in the way that Ayra has on your experience of kind of planning to come to university.

11:10 – Aash: That's a really good question and um, I definitely can relate to the pressure. So, despite taking student loans. Um, so not directly being funded by, you know, out-of-pocket parent money. You still feel, um, you know, a bit burdened by it, um, at times because you're taking that loan like on yourself. And it is really like you can only pay it back if you end up succeeding in what you're doing. So, I can really relate to that, um, in a different sense. Um, but, you know, on a similar line, I, I definitely feel supported.

By my parents, which is really good. Although there have been moments, um, where they've been like a bit concerned, um, the same kind of struggles with like working, um, alongside uni and doing it for the right reasons. I think that's the main thing that I would take out of what, um, Ayra said that, you know, if you're doing work alongside uni, um, and you're, you know, you're able to, that it is supporting you and you're able to like balance your work alongside it. Um, finances is really hard to balance at uni budgeting; I don't think it's really ever taught as well as it should be, um, at low level, and you do feel kind of thrown into it. But like my biggest advice would be like, utilize, um, the university's resources. Like there are so many things that, um, the SU do on budgeting. Your department may run events on it. They run lots of things to help with the cost-of-living crisis, and so I would really recommend to anyone, um, go to those, engage in those, um, and you'll learn a lot.

12:43 – Tom: Yeah, I think so. And I think that, it is a different experience being, being a home student versus an international student. And I think you, you are right to highlight what the department do. So, in chemistry we do a lot of work around being able to support students as part of that transition, whether that's. Sometimes actually just feeding you and saying, come and get some dinner because actually we

know that that can be quite difficult beyond just finances. Some people come to university and just don't know how to cook. Some people come and don't even know how to look after themselves and it's all a process. A great example of that is when we redeveloped the common room, we had questions from parents saying, well, my kid can't cook, so what do they do? So, we purchased cooking books that we've put in the common room. Really simple, you know, ten-minute meal type things. We're working with the university to get a kind of a community fridge where you'll be able to get ingredients as well. And we are really trying to simplify those nerve-racking things that can come up, whether that's due to finances or due to just lack of experience in that area.

Adam, I don't know. Just going back to scholarships for a second. I don't know if you have anything to add about some of the processes that exist to help support the scholarships.

13:56 – Adam: Yeah, sure. I mean, Aash has, uh, touched on this, but there's a whole host of resources available on the university website. I think anybody Googling will also find information on UCAS and student loan companies. Uh, so there's, there's a whole load of information in terms of scholarships for international students, um, it is worth checking out the university web pages. Um, it's really comprehensive and there's a whole lot of information out there you can filter, um, depending on where you are in the world, uh, your nationality.

There are also things like sports and musical scholarships as well. So, there's lots of things to explore, but I think just looping back to probably what you both said, you both mentioned. Parents and or parents and supporters. And I think that's probably one of the key aspects of when you are thinking of planting university to ensure you're having those honest conversations with the person or the people behind you, uh, supporting you because they'll be there, uh, before the, they'll be hopefully there at the other side as well for you.

So, I think it's really important that you have those conversations with those supporters, um, so that everybody feels kind of reassured. And, uh, kind of go into it with your eyes wide open. But yeah, there's so much information out there. I know we've got information on our link tree on, um, on Instagram, uh, that will direct international students to some of the university resources, but simply look at just, just Google Warwick Finance or Warwick Student Loan. Um, and that'll probably find a lot of answers that you're looking for as well.

15:25 – Tom:

Yeah. Thank you. And I think it's a really good point about kind of the parents and supporters and I. Um, if you are someone who's in a position where maybe you don't have those parents or supporters, you can always reach out to the department, um, via Chem.Experience@Warwick.ac.uk, and we will do our best. It'll be Adam and I that you reach and we'll do our best to give you kind of a, an unvarnished opinion of what we think. Um, neither of us are chemists, so we can't necessarily help out with chemical knowledge. Uh, but we can give you a sense of what it's like to study at Warwick, what support there is available to really support you, particularly with going to university and succeeding.

I think the next biggest thing that comes up when we speak to students when they're preparing to come to university is around accommodation. And this, again, is a universal challenge, whether you are at home or international. I wonder, Aash, if we could start with you...thinking back to your first year and before you came, what type of accommodation did you choose on campus and why was that?

16:24 – Aash:

So, I ended up going for an ensuite accommodation. Um, this was kind of very advised, uh, by as many people as I could, um, because they were like, well, you, you know, you don't know what kind of people you'd be living with. You don't know, um, who you'd be sharing with. And so, I went for an ensuite accommodation; those were my top three options. A lot of that happens a lot though. Loads of students want it and it's quite often that students don't get it. I was really fortunate actually to get an ensuite accommodation I was really grateful for. But I remember talking to my friends who ended up, um, in accommodations that weren't ensuites and they got on just fine. You, you do hear some horror stories. Those exist as well.

In my second year, so I moved out of campus. I don't live on campus. Um, still, I share bathrooms in my second year with the people that I'd met in the first year. So had we had shared bathrooms, I think it would've been fine. Um, I ended up going for Sherbourne, so that is where I lived mainly because of its colour scheme. I'm not going to lie. I was like, it looks pretty. And I was, and it was a modern build, so I knew that it would be more on the newer side. The main, the main thing about it though was the kitchen. I really, really got on with my flatmates in first year and all of our dinners and lunches, like you'd run into people all the time.

And that was really, really important to me because it just gave me like such a vibrant social life. Um, when I was coming back from lectures in the morning, going to lectures, walking to lectures with people. Um, and that was really, really impactful for me.

17:57 – Tom: Yeah. Thank you. Aash. I think it's, it's always really interesting to understand why people chose the accommodation. Ayra, I wonder about you. What accommodation did you pick in your first year and, and why?

18:07 – Ayra: Speaking from Aash, I think we had very, very similar experience because I was also advised that, oh, go for on-Suite because again, it was also like. You don't know what you're like, what you're going to get or what kind of people you're going to live with. So, it was like, okay, yeah, I'll go for on suite. And it was like I, and even for religious regions, I was like, I want my own space to share.

Uh, I did go for Cryfield Townhouse. I had my main three options were obviously ensuites, and I was fortunate enough to get my first choice. I really like Cryfield Townhouse because again, it was very colourful as well, and it like, it was, right. It's one of the accommodations that very close to central campus. But the thing is, when I was even looking at it on the map, it doesn't seem as close, it's, but I think it was in the most prime location because it was almost, it had a five-minute walk to anything I, uh, anywhere I wanted to go to on campus, but it wasn't even central enough that it would be very busy.

So it had that quiet element you would go with a bit, uh, further accommodations, but also everything close by. But yeah, uh, definitely kitchen was also my favourite part because I made my closest friends who I'm living with right now. We would spend, we would play video games, bake together, just spend our whole time. I used to study in the kitchen because it so quiet.

I got very close to my flatmates really fast. Like everybody like just teased us like this. You got, you all got attached really quickly. Just be careful. But we're like, we we're fortunate enough and we're still living together. And now that I'm moving next year, everybody's like really sad that I'm leaving them.

So, they're like, there's a joke going around the house that she's betraying us. She's moving away. So that's a bit bittersweet moment. But yeah, accommodation was one of the scary parts because I was scared that, okay, I'm going to move away, but I'm going to be living with people I never even met in my life. But in my experience, I was very fortunate enough because these, they, these people are one of my closest friends now and kind of a second family here. So, which was very nice.

20:21 – Tom: I was going to ask about how did you both manage, I guess, and Ayra we'll start with you because obviously it's, it's a slightly bigger culture shock for you to kind of live overseas, but, but how did you manage living, first of all in a different country, but living with people that you'd not met before, who themselves had very different kind of cultural norms and expectations?

20:40 – Ayra: So before coming to uni, I was a very shy person. Like I was a full introvert, wouldn't really talk to people and like my friends really teased me how they met me on the first day. They were like, you were so quiet and innocent, not talking much, and now look at you because like, it has really, they have really brought me out of the shell and I think in my experience I was lucky enough to meet people who I connected with and we had same interests like during the first week, I think I bonded over with my friends over our love on Harry Potter because it was conversation starter and we like started talking about theories and it's just brought, and then we found out we had, we all like the same video games.

We have same movie interest and like wanted to share. Like everything together. So, it was good. It was a nice experience. But as culturally, if I say the whole of my accommodation, we were like a mixture, but majority of the one where people who were from here, like home students. And my friend group, if I had to say, are all local students.

So, I'm like the only one who's an international student. So that was a bit like in, in the like beginning, I would feel like, okay, but they've never made me feel that way. It just felt like, okay. We all say like it was like a missing piece kind of thing because we all bonded over so much, and I feel, in my experience not getting like having a great connection with people.

22:12 – Aash: Ayra, so I'm really interested considering like your cultural background and where you come from back home, whether you picked a mixed sex or a same-sex flat and what the challenges might have been around that decision.

22:26 – Ayra: As long as I had my own space, that was not my priority. I didn't mind living with a mixed group.

22:31 – Aash: I think one of the big concerns, um, when living with people is that maybe you don't have that own same, like your own space. Um, but the great thing about all the uni rooms is that your room is your room and you always have your space to come back into. And, you know, that's only opened up if you open it up. I'm pretty sure in all accommodations your room itself is always lockable, both inside and out. So, that space is always yours no matter what, and the only people who can enter it are the ones that you let in. So, I think that's a really good thing about Warwick Accommodation.

23:03 – Adam: So, moving on and past accommodation, um, can I ask you what surprised you most about the social life at university when you first got here?

23:12 – Aash: What surprised me most at social life at university is how diverse it is. Um. You can find anything here. Um, there's so many societies so, so, so, so, so many societies. Um, and they will have if you have an interest, there's a society for it. Like I promised you pretty sure there's a cheese and chocolate society and they just eat cheese and chocolate. Like you, you think of it, it's there. Um, the other thing is like, we touched on this earlier, there is no cultural divides. There is no, um, like clicky groups. Like everyone is just so included. Like, I don't even know. Some of my friends, like last week turned around, they're like, oh yeah, I'm going home.

And I'm like, oh, you know, like, how far is it? And they're like, Aash, I'm an international student and I hadn't even clocked it. You know, it's not even something that. Kind of crosses my mind. Um, sometimes like, uh, certain events make it quite apparent, but like, those make it like, really, those are really fun.

So, for example, in my first year, flat, um, we had a. Um, international student from Hong Kong and we did Lunar New Year with him, and we did like a Chinese hot pot and it was an amazing thing to do and I think that's really amazing because you just get so many blends of cultures. We had, uh, two Bulgarians in the flat as well, so they did Baba Marta a pronunciation, which I'm probably butchering.

I'm really sorry to all, but it's the celebration of this coming of spring. Uh, I think if I'm remembering it correctly, um, sorry to my Alex's from my first year flat, if I'm not, um, and you wear these red and white bracelets, um, I think it's just amazing. There's so much. Um, I got involved with eSports that has a whole community. My best advice is go to the freshest events, get involved. I promise you there is someone into. Some of your interests, there always will be someone.

25:18 – Adam: I think that's really, really interesting. And one thing that we speak to potential applicants about the open days and off offer holder events is just how broad the societies are at Warwick. There is literally a society for everything, and if you find there's something missing, it's fairly straightforward to actually set up a society. You just need to get a group of people together who are like-minded into the same interests. Um, there is a process. You have to get a, a certain amount of people involved, but yeah, if there's not a society for something that you're into, then, then why not create it? I mean, there should be no barriers really. But it sounds like you've had an amazing experience, uh, so far. So, it's really great to hear. What surprised you most? Ayra, do you have anything to add?

26:00 – Ayra: I agree. Honestly, as Aash has said, she's hit the hit nail on the head, honestly. But yeah, it was very interesting going to the society's event and finding all the different unique, like you would think. And the societies. I remember like there was Bubble Tea Society and I'm like. That's good. They're like, yeah, we go around and like going to different bubble tea cafes to drive different, it's like, okay, that's interesting.

And I remember like really going to like the Harry Potter stall, uh, and like Taylor Swift Society. I'm like, it's, there would be something like you would think of it and it's in that society fair, which was really fun as well. Coming back, uh, like with flyers and like, okay, like everybody's just sitting down with their computers and, okay, let's sign up for this.

I remember my friends joined the, uh, astrology Society and they would like go on walks and like when, especially when the guy was, so,

26:50 – Aash: I need to get on this.

26:56 – Ayra: I know. It was, it was amazing. And with the blending of cultures, like when I would have like anything, like for example, when Eid came last year or we celebrated it a bit earlier because I was celebrating it, my uh, family in UK, like my distant relatives, so my friends and I, we all just had a nice dinner, spent some time together. When Christmas came around, we all did a whole Christmas lunch, did Secret Santa, went to the Christmas markets together. So, I agree, like I would say, I did have the fears before coming to uni, but coming here was a very good surprise that, as I said, everybody is past that nobody's really thinking about in being you're talking respectfully, you're having fun, you're cracking jokes. Everyone will be friends with you. There's, nobody's going to make friends and based who, where you're from, if that makes sense. Like as long as you're a good human being.

27:53 – Adam: So do you think, so we spoke about accommodation and you've both said that you've made some amazing friends through the people you live with. Do you think societies are another way of making friends, uh, when you, when you get to university?

28:04 – Aash: Oh, absolutely. So, there are many, many ways that people make friends, and you might end up not gelling with the people that you live with. Um, honestly, I do think it's kind of rare. Like the one thing you want to remember is when you come to university is that everybody's looking for friends.

Everyone's in the same position. Everyone's a fish out of water. Um, and. Genuinely people really, really are just lovely. It's just a really like heartwarming experience to be around people who are all in the same boat because you know, you're going through it together. Um, societies you have, again, freshers who will be in societies. You're in the same boat, but then you also have second and third years. You can kind of like really guide you through. You also have your course mates, so there's. Loads of places where you can make friends.

I know for me in eSports, I've made some second and third year friends who've really given me some great advice, um, on like navigating through first year and really like taking me in under their wings and, you know, when I was going out to like parties and I was like drinking and stuff like advice and taking care of me, um, and things like that. And making sure like I knew what buses to get on to get home safe. Um, so that was really, really beneficial because you know, they've done it. They, they know all the routes. Um, and then, you know, making friends on my course as well, you know, people who are also interested in chemistry just like me. And we could, you know, study together.

We made study groups. It's the only way I got through first year exams, honestly. Um, and, you know, it makes a, it's a, it's a really good place to just meet people literally everywhere, like everywhere.

29:37 – Adam: No, it sounds really good. And I think the thing about societies is that I think some people come to university and they say, I play football, so I'll go to the football society.

But it's not just about, um, I suppose it's not just about sticking with what, you know, it's about experimenting, about trying new societies. Maybe there's something that you've never even thought about and you're like, you know what, I'll go and give that a go. I know lots of societies in the first few weeks of term, um, in the first term, and again in the second term. Quite often offer like taster sessions and stuff. So even if you don't think you're into something, then maybe just give it a go. I think it's probably a really, really great way of kind of pushing the boundaries, get to know yourself more, and probably more importantly, getting to know other people, uh, within the university and on your course as well.

30:20 – Tom: So, thank you all for, uh, joining us today and as part of this kind of initial conversation about the, the non-academic parts of coming to university and, and for sharing your perspectives, Aash and I, as, as a home and an international student respectively. I think it's been really useful as a starting point and we'll definitely be back with a part two, I think very soon to pick up more of the academic side of it, about how you, uh, transition to studying at university, how you get through your kind of, um, average week of being a chemistry student.

If you have any further questions, you can get in touch with us at Chem.experience@warwick.ac.uk. Otherwise, you can also find us on Instagram and other places @WarwickChem as well, but yeah, thank you so much to the three of you, um, and look forward to you again soon. Thanks so much. Bye.

31:08 – Aash: Bye guys.

31:09 – Ayra: Thank you. Bye-Bye.

31:12 – Adam: See you next time. Bye.