

**Bo:** Hello and welcome back. It's 2022 and we are ready to get season two out there and share it with you. And in this episode zero Matt I just wanted to reflect on season one and kind of share a little bit of an insight into what we've got planned for you for season two.

Matt, how you doing? Did you have a good holiday?

**Matt:** Yeah. Yeah, really good. Really lovely holiday. Who doesn't love the Christmas season.

**Bo:** I know, but it's so tough to be back.

**Matt:** Yeah, definitely just getting back into the rhythm of things. Right.

**Bo:** Absolutely. What's the one thing that you would share about kind of getting your head back in the game? Is there, is there a secret recipe that you use?

**Matt:** Um, I think, I think the thing is always just making those first steps, right? Like you kind of get back from the Christmas holidays and you're like 'ugh'. Taking that first step to just sit down at your desk again, is I think the hardest. So literally just try your best to start. Even if you sit down and stare at the screen, I think it's absolutely fine.

**Bo:** Better than nothing. Right? Well, I was reading atomic habits over the holidays and so many students it's great, isn't it? So many students recommended it to me and I was like, oh my goodness, this is like, I need to read it now. And, um, the best lesson I've taken from it is this two minute rule. Um, you know, that if you're developing your habits or trying to do something that maybe is a little bit scarier or like a big project or whatever, start with working on it just for two minutes.

**Matt:** Yeah. yeah.

I do that a lot of the time. I think. Um, I think the interesting one for me was, um, chaining. Uh, so like getting up starting your day with something after the, after that first thing, or like associating your morning coffee with your work? Um, I think that really helped me and it depends. I think, I think it's a really good book and I think a lot of the resources are online.

**Bo:** Mm, he's got quite a lot of, sort of downloadables and things like that. Yeah.

**Matt:** yeah. But Yeah. it's certainly a good way to get back into the rhythm of things and kind of, uh, rebuild those habits or gradually lost over the Christmas break.

**Bo:** Absolutely. But I guess the secret is, you know, one step at a time.

So listen, how did you find season one? Did you enjoy it? What did you learn from it?

**Matt:** Yeah, absolutely. I think It was really great. Um, I think we started off with, uh, was it Mike Ward?

**Bo:** It was Mike. Mike was the first guest

**Matt:** um, and it had really interesting things. I think, uh, his insight into the discovery process. His journey through Sheffield, coming to Warwick and, um, and talking about his research strategies really interesting.

And then, Ann talking about her journey through it all, um, and, and kind of like very varied experiences. I think, you know, even going over to Fox as well. That somehow all three experiences were very different, but all three, uh, of the guests were just had such interesting views on how to do research. Admittedly I think a big part of it was the fact that the research areas are slightly different. I feel like my views are always biased towards the med chem stuff, so it's nice to get some perspective from the other fields of chemistry.

**Bo:** Yeah, absolutely. You know what I really loved that were also in common between the, you know, such different research careers and such different profiles and areas of work is all three of them spoke, um, to different extents about community. And I think ultimately this is what pathways is, right?

It's like bringing the diverse chemistry community closer together and to learn from each other. And it was just so great to hear Mike talking about learning from students and how research happens with diverse people in his research group and students having that impact on what he does.

And then Ann was talking about, you know, listening and talking to each other and sharing these different experiences, particularly in the context of imposter syndrome and maybe not feeling like we always belong in the department and kind of gently holding that space for each other, which I thought was amazing and really stuck with me.

And of course, Fox, you know, spoke about how you maintain that sense of individuality. At least that's what I took from his episode. You know, you kind of not necessarily follow the crowd in what you want to achieve and who you want to be in a sort of impact and almost legacy that you want to leave in.

I just think that was so refreshing to me. A lot of the time we follow the role models and kind of, we go, 'oh, this person has done that. So I must follow the same route'. And I just love that Fox was so candid about saying, do you know what actually, that's not what everyone does, but this is me.

And I think that that still brings us back to that sense of community where you are a part of this, this bigger department, but actually you have to find your own way through, your own pathway, right, into kind of getting to be what you want to be. I love that.

**Matt:** Yeah, absolutely. Just seeing how community played a role, I think it was really important. And I think, I mean, going back to the atomic habits thing. James Clear talks about the importance of community. You can move with the tide of people and the tide of people can help you move as well. Um, I think it's really useful for that. And I think that's why it's really important that we have this community within Warwick chemistry and, um, where everyone's kind of spurring on everyone else. People kind of, you know, grinding through the degree together or that just grinding through the research at the post-grad level as well.

**Bo:** And it's definitely a grind, especially right now. Isn't it?

**Matt:** Yeah. Yeah. Slowly like grinding back up to speed. Yeah.

**Bo:** If you're listening to this episode and you've no idea what we're talking about, definitely go ahead and check out the previous episodes and what we spoke about in season one. It's given Matt and I, a lot more ideas about what we wanted to do with season two and I guess building on that diversity, but at the same time, stringing the different stories together to again, kind of show what's common and what's very human between us.

Like, what are you looking forward to in season two, Matt?

**Matt:** I think, I think we've got some fun things lined up. There's a lot of things with communities, especially shared experiences that are really important. Right. And, uh, one of those shared experiences is the actual education and lab components of the Warwick degree. For season two we're planning on talking a

bit more about teaching innovation and just lab experiences and, and lab advice really. And hopefully it can help ease some people into, into some of these things if they're going through themselves, be it within the department or outside of the department.

I think a lot of these experiences can be quite generic. In it entering new scenarios and having to learn new skills on the job, kind of. There's only one way to learn how to do practical chemistry. And that is by doing it. Um, and that can be scary for some people. Um, and I think it's going to be really interesting to hear people's views from the teaching side, especially cause I think a lot of students talk amongst themselves about how they went to lab and they'll like, you know, filling their condensers the wrong way around or the burst off or.

**Bo:** Hiding broken glass somewhere.

**Matt:** Yeah. Or them throwing away the wrong fraction. But it will be interesting to see what the demonstrators and teachers think. What about you? What are you looking forward to?

**Bo:** Yeah. Um, I'm excited about it. You know obviously not being a chemist as well. Like that world to me is a bit of a mystery and I always think of that meme with a dog, surrounded by chemistry equipment, you know, wearing sort of protective goggles and you know, like having no idea what's going on.

Even though I can't fully empathize with that experience, not really being in the lab, but I try to always think about what that might feel like. And, you know, we obviously always hear about these questions either through open days or offer holder's days or at the beginning of the year, you know, both returning and new students kind of have that anxiety about being back in the lab.

And also, you know, this is one of the things that really surprised me when I started at chemistry. Is there are, there are chemists who hate labs, you know, that was just my ignorance. But now of course, I understand that a lot more. And so, yeah, I agree with you. I think it would be amazing to be able to sort of lift the curtain a little bit perhaps, and really reassure people that, that support is there and everyone feels exactly the same going into that environment, you know, whether that's returning or whether it's starting completely from scratch.

The assumption that the team within the lab makes is that everyone sort of starts from the beginning and there's something really poetic about that. When it's kind of like, you're all equal here, you're all the same, you're all treated in

the same way, and you're all kind of assumed to bring the same things into the space. Um, and, and you grow from there. Right? Um, I think there's something really interesting about that and I hope we will get to explore some of those things with the staff. And like you said, to hear that point of view, which is really interesting. And I guess because lab is such an intensive experience in itself, perhaps those voices aren't always heard and we don't know the people and the personalities behind the colleagues that teach in those environments. So I'm quite excited to be making their stories more visible.

**Matt:** Yeah, absolutely. I think from my experience, it was, um, occasionally hard to know what other people want to see. I think students are used to it always with the exams. I remember my biology exam at A level, just being like, just memorize the, the mark scheme and just copy all the answers. That really frustrated me, and suddenly you get to uni and, uh, you get the opposite thing. You get hit with you can write as much as you want about what you want. Um, but they still do want to see specific things and, uh, I remember my experience, I absolutely love the lab despite now being based on a computer,

**Bo:** you loved it and you left it.

**Matt:** Unfortunately! I still love it. I still miss it. But, um, uh, I used to do way too much. I used to try to work too hard in the lab, but it was always good fun, like, uh, my experiences in the lab, just like, you know, humming away, like imagine like the Mickey Mouse steam boat thing, just like whistling along whilst doing my chemistry.

I used to write way too much in my reports, um, and go into unnecessary detail. Often you can feel like overworked. And I think a lot of people, uh, worry about labs and they, they push a bit too hard when they don't necessarily need to.

I think one of the lessons that I learned really well from one of the demonstrators is you've only got so much time in your day. It's like chasing marks isn't, isn't how you make the most of labs and education experience. You need to focus on the kind of things that you actually will be relevant in it. For me, it was like don't spend like the whole week focused on the lab report, you know, do do your revision at the same time. Do things that you want to do as well? Um, but Yeah, I learnt so much. I think the lab is a really nice place to not only learn practical skills, but learn life skills. Like you have to work as a team with your lab mate, and you have to communicate with your demonstrator and follow procedures.

**Bo:** And I think that's so unique about a chemistry degree as well. You don't really have that practical element in many other disciplines in many other courses. So I think that's amazing. And I think one of the highlights for me, and again, I hope people will appreciate that as well, is um, just seeing how much innovation goes into what goes on within your teaching and learning experience in the lab.

You know, sometimes we go through a lecture or a session or a lab thinking, you know, this must have existed for 20 years, or this must be how it's always been taught. And then suddenly, you know, you hear someone going, oh, this is a brand new experiment, or we've changed this, we've created this and we've added that.

And the amount of research that goes in to create that experience, and amount of diverse thinking and creative thinking and collaboration and fresh ideas. All of those things that create innovation. How much actually goes behind the scenes and as students and as learners, we don't necessarily see it, understand it, or appreciate it. And I hope that through the season we'll also be able to, like I said, lift that curtain and reveal how much actual thinking and amazing-ness that goes on behind what makes our lab experience.

**Matt:** Yeah, exactly. No, that's exactly it. And it'll be really exciting to show. I've helped carve a little bit of it in the past

**Bo:** Yeah. Tell us more! You are a book author, excuse me for a second. And tell us more about that. Like, what were you working on? Because that must've come from partly some of the lab experiences that you've had

**Matt:** Oh, yeah.

**Bo:** successful and unsuccessful as well.

**Matt:** yeah. So during my undergrad, I spent a summer working with, uh, one of the guests that you'll hear about pretty soon. We wrote a book on, uh, stereochemistry together with a few other co-authors, um, and did some really fun things like focusing on pedagogy and trying to work out what the best way to communicate these very abstract ideas was, and that kind of sits within the education realm. And, um, it was really interesting putting that book together, like learning the content. Delivering the content. It was a very different experience in that I had to sit in the library for, I think total writing time was like two years, despite that they're not being like, it's obviously not like a, not writing like a whole new version of Clayton. So the main organic chemistry

textbook, but it's quite a small field, but trying to find the best way to communicate these ideas was really good.

**Bo:** Amazing. Well, I hope we got to get you excited about season two and whet the appetite a little bit. Definitely check it out. We've recorded the episodes in a way where you don't necessarily have to listen to anything prior or after. You can dip in and out of the podcast itself.

But hopefully it will get you to learn about people that we work with every single day, learn about them in a different light. And it'll give you an insight into how the department works, and how this community works within the lab environment.

And of course, don't forget to let us know how you finding the podcast so far. You can do that through the in the moment Padlet where you can leave some of the feedback or just by messaging us, just let us know. Are there any topics or people or conversations that you'd like to hear as part of this podcast. Have a great term! Look after yourself and stay safe.

**Matt:** Good luck with the new year wind up, see you in season two.