

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

BUBBLING UP: CHANGE

Termly collection of wellbeing stories
shared by staff and students, because we
care

ISSUE 6: DECEMBER 2021





ABOUT US

ISSUE 5 TEAM

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If you'd like to supply feedback, or submit a piece for the upcoming issue, please get in touch via a form at warwick.ac.uk/bubblingup or by emailing chem.experience@warwick.ac.uk

FROM THE EDITOR

**RORY KENRICK
MChem STUDENT**

Hi there! My name is Rory and I'm delighted to have the role as editor on this issue of Bubbling Up. For those of you who don't yet know me, I'm a fourth-year student currently in the final year of my MChem and currently have very little idea as to where I would like to go from here. With regards to taking up the editor position, I wanted to try my hand at something totally new so here I am, and let's hope I do a decent job!

Given that the topic of this issue is change, my reasons for assuming the editor role seem rather pertinent I suppose. Change is something that a lot of people, myself included, can really struggle with; Be it adjusting to a new job or academic position, moving away from home for the first time or most recently, (re-)adjusting to life after the tirade of lockdowns and restrictions we all lived through. It can unfortunately be very scary and daunting, but equally positive change can be rewarding and liberating even if it doesn't initially appear to be.

I still distinctly remember my first run-in with what I would consider to be major change and re-adjustment was when I first moved to secondary school around the age of 11 or so. I come from a little village not too far outside of Leamington Spa (which is where I ended up attending secondary after Year 6). However, everybody in the class bar me attended a different secondary school which is much closer to our primary school in the village I come from. At this age, it was a huge deal for me to be leaving all my close friends behind and starting at a whole new school and I distinctly remember crying to my mum before my first day saying, 'I'm not going to make any friends!'. Being introverted and lacking in self-confidence definitely didn't help me much here, but after a few days of adjustment everything was fine and I never really looked back. To me, this highlights the sheer amount of bravery required by everyone who is willing to take that first step into the unknown and this should never be understated.



Despite re-adjustment back to life after lockdown, it's important to remember that the pandemic is still in full flow and that things can change again in almost an instant. Although it can and will be difficult, it can also be beneficial to embrace new situations with a sense of positivity and see it as an opportunity to learn something new and for personal growth. Some people take longer than others to adapt to a new environment or situation, and that's OK – you should not blame yourself if you feel like the only person who isn't adjusting well to a new setting, because chances are you won't be.



As the nights continue to draw in and we start to layer up for the winter, it's important to keep your mind and body as active and motivated as possible. Self-care is so important! My number one tip here is to make sure you allocate some time during or at the end of the busy workday where you can clear your head and 'switch off' completely; This might be through an evening walk and catch up with friends, a show on Netflix or even your favourite album. Whatever it may be, I find some escapism is so crucial to stop the walls of approaching deadlines and exam pressures closing in on you.

However, if you or somebody you know is struggling in a world of blended learning, teams calls and online lectures, be sure to look out for each other and get the support you need through the university wellbeing system and through the department.
You're not alone.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this term's issue of Bubbling Up; And you can take away a few positives from the words of some of our department's most influential individuals on their experiences surrounding change.

Thanks for reading!



DR BECKY NOTMAN

ROYAL SOCIETY UNIVERSITY RESEARCH FELLOW AND SENIOR TUTOR

While we all experience change from time to time, the global scale of upheaval since the start of the COVID pandemic has been exceptional. During the height of the restrictions, we all had to get used to being confined to our homes and working and studying fully remotely. Now we have entered a new phase where some things have gone back to the way they were, and some things never will. It is an exciting opportunity for a fresh start and doing things differently, but it can be unsettling and confusing at the same time. Here I will share some of my experiences of dealing with change and offer some thoughts on how to thrive in this new, blended world.

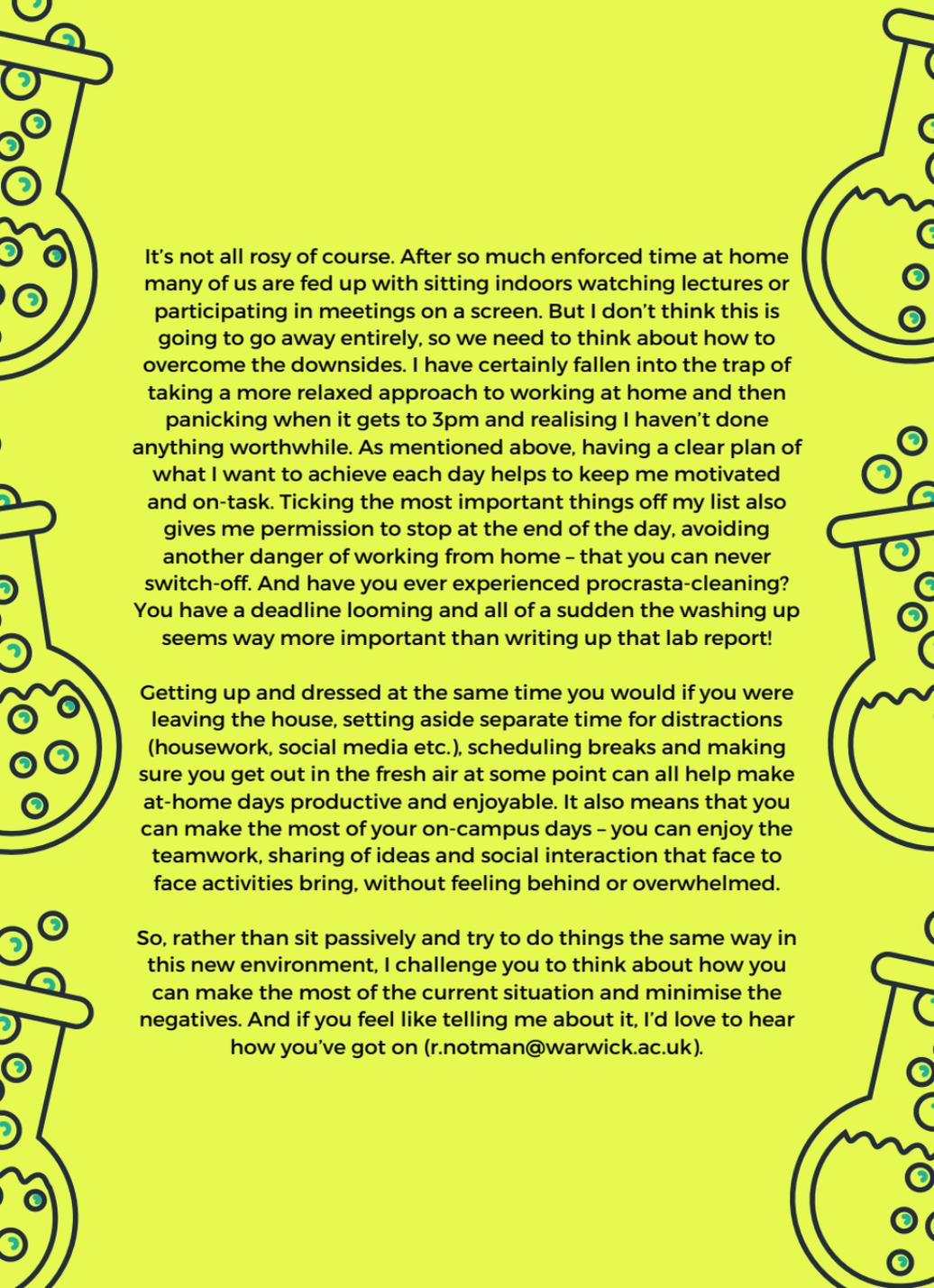
When confronted with change and uncertainty it can be helpful to remind ourselves that we have all navigated difficult circumstances before and that however bad things seem right now, there will be a time in the future when we are on the other side of it. In the last ten years, starting an academic job and becoming a parent for the first time were both extremely challenging and life-altering events for me. Despite being very different experiences, I drew upon similar strategies to help me through. These included supporting and being supported by others who were going through the same thing, taking time to plan my week, walking outside on my own, and prioritising sleep (I really struggle with this one!). You will have coped with your own changes in your own way, but it is worth taking a moment to think about what you have done in the past and if it can be applied to the situations you are currently facing.



My experience of the pandemic was a bit different from most as I was already on maternity leave with my second child when the first lockdown happened. While I was lucky not to have the pressure of juggling work and childcare, being stuck indoors home-schooling my 5-year-old while trying to look after a newborn was not exactly how I had envisioned my year off. I returned from maternity leave last November to a very different working environment from the one I had left behind. Most people were still working from home, all meetings were now online and I had to deliver my lectures over MS Teams. Since then, as restrictions have eased, I have transitioned to a hybrid way of working. I spend some days in my office on campus and others working from home. I have to admit that this works very well for me, but it has taken some careful thought to make the most of the opportunities and avoid some of the pitfalls.

One thing I have found helpful in navigating the blended world is to plan my week in advance. At the weekend I write down all the things I would like to get done in the week ahead. At the same time, I consider where would be the ideal place to do them – at home, in the office or somewhere else. Then I look at my calendar and note what else I've got on: for example, I might have some face to face teaching on two days and an MS Teams meeting that runs until 5pm on another. The face to face teaching obviously dictates which days will be my on-campus days; whereas if I have an online meeting that runs until 5pm then I am best off making that an at-home day as I won't have to battle with rush-hour traffic to pick up my kids on time. Once I have figured out my location, I plan my other tasks accordingly.

For me, things that require quiet, focused time such as grant and paper writing and preparing lectures are best done at home. As a computational chemist, most of my research can be done remotely and I can do this equally well at home or in the office. On the other hand, I prefer to check in with my research team face to face so I schedule those meetings for my on-campus days. So, while some aspects of your schedule such as online lectures and in-person labs are fixed, I recommend taking a few minutes each week to consider what else you need to do and decide where you would like to do it.



It's not all rosy of course. After so much enforced time at home many of us are fed up with sitting indoors watching lectures or participating in meetings on a screen. But I don't think this is going to go away entirely, so we need to think about how to overcome the downsides. I have certainly fallen into the trap of taking a more relaxed approach to working at home and then panicking when it gets to 3pm and realising I haven't done anything worthwhile. As mentioned above, having a clear plan of what I want to achieve each day helps to keep me motivated and on-task. Ticking the most important things off my list also gives me permission to stop at the end of the day, avoiding another danger of working from home – that you can never switch-off. And have you ever experienced procrasta-cleaning? You have a deadline looming and all of a sudden the washing up seems way more important than writing up that lab report!

Getting up and dressed at the same time you would if you were leaving the house, setting aside separate time for distractions (housework, social media etc.), scheduling breaks and making sure you get out in the fresh air at some point can all help make at-home days productive and enjoyable. It also means that you can make the most of your on-campus days – you can enjoy the teamwork, sharing of ideas and social interaction that face to face activities bring, without feeling behind or overwhelmed.

So, rather than sit passively and try to do things the same way in this new environment, I challenge you to think about how you can make the most of the current situation and minimise the negatives. And if you feel like telling me about it, I'd love to hear how you've got on (r.notman@warwick.ac.uk).

IAN SCRASE

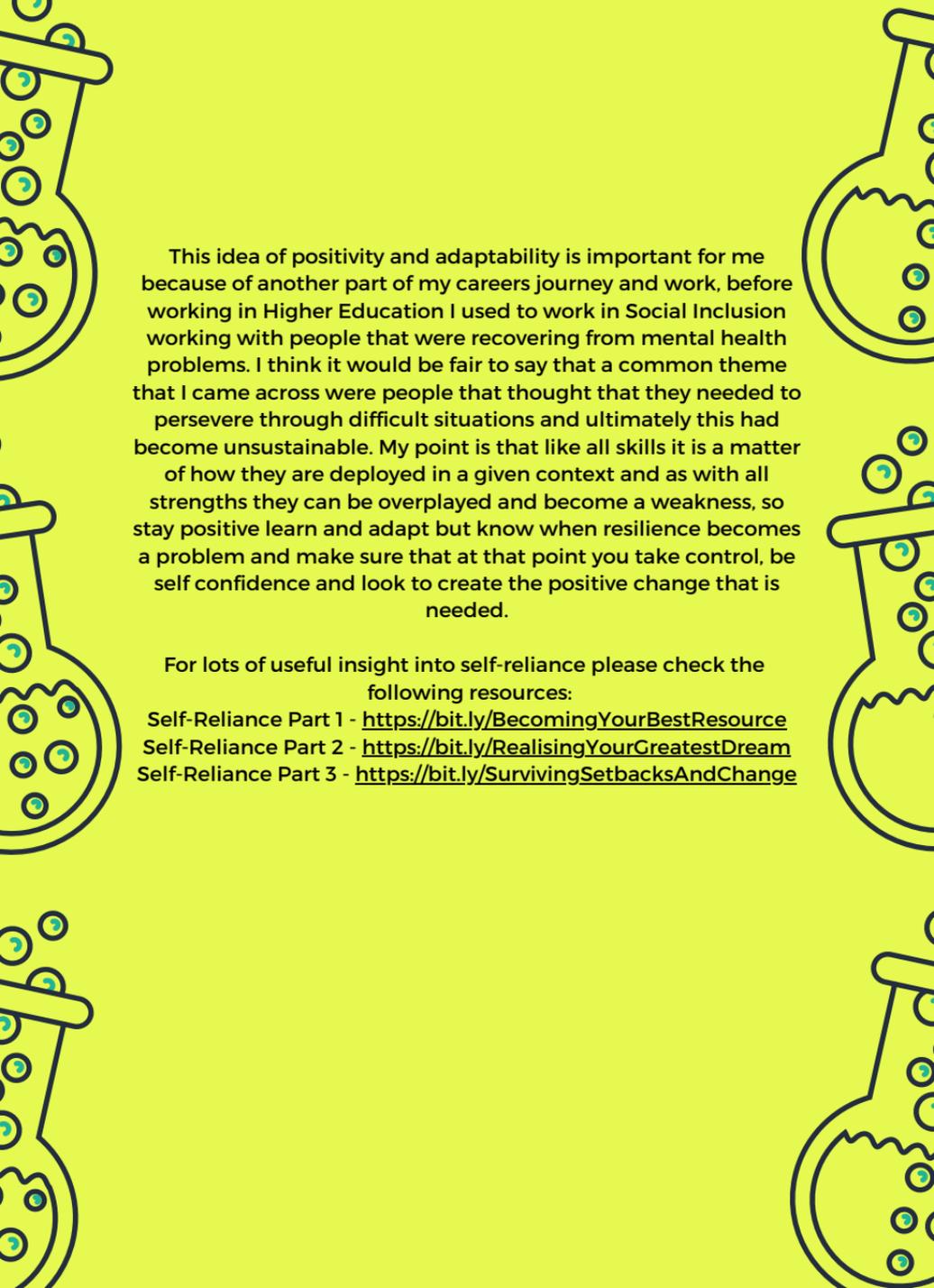
CAREERS PROJECT OFFICER

The idea of resilience is a tricky one, within my work in the careers field it is something that is often mentioned in many different terms: resilience, grit, the strength -bouncebackability, that last one is a bit of a mouthful but it is the one that I like the most as I think that the essence of what it says is not about persevering no matter what but rather about how we deal with difficult situations and come back from this in a positive way.

This time of year can be a particularly difficult time when it comes your careers with many having put in applications for placements or graduate schemes and starting to hear back and not always the positive responses that we hope for, if this is you then please read my other blog:

<https://bit.ly/BeenRejectedWhatNow>

So why is resilience so highly prized by employers? Odd as it sounds it is about positivity and bringing a positive mindset to the workplace, looking for ways for things to be better in the good times as well as the bad. Being adaptable when things change and if the last period has taught us anything it is that things change and can change quickly. Resilient individuals are thought to be able to prioritise strategically, and to keep striving towards the long-term goals even if there are short-term challenges that need to be faced because of this positivity and adaptability.



This idea of positivity and adaptability is important for me because of another part of my careers journey and work, before working in Higher Education I used to work in Social Inclusion working with people that were recovering from mental health problems. I think it would be fair to say that a common theme that I came across were people that thought that they needed to persevere through difficult situations and ultimately this had become unsustainable. My point is that like all skills it is a matter of how they are deployed in a given context and as with all strengths they can be overplayed and become a weakness, so stay positive learn and adapt but know when resilience becomes a problem and make sure that at that point you take control, be self confidence and look to create the positive change that is needed.

For lots of useful insight into self-reliance please check the following resources:

- Self-Reliance Part 1 - <https://bit.ly/BecomingYourBestResource>
- Self-Reliance Part 2 - <https://bit.ly/RealisingYourGreatestDream>
- Self-Reliance Part 3 - <https://bit.ly/SurvivingSetbacksAndChange>

ADAM ALCOCK

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

This is an interesting topic and one that has many angles and perspectives: we're living in a confusing, new, blended world that we're all still trying to make sense of. The pandemic has undoubtedly tested our ability to change and adapt and we have all done so amazingly well, but it is important to recognise that coping with change is an important life skill and one that we must continually deploy to move forward in life. It's not something reserved for global events but is something that we must master in everyday life too. Instead of looking at the negatives - because we can all rant about all the bad things - it's important to recognise that there are also positives.

We've developed resilience and our ability to cope with large scale change (often at very short notice) helps us to handle the unfamiliar, something that we can take forward to our future selves. We've become more efficient and have found new ways of working... we've been pushed out of our comfort zone and have embraced new technology and methods of learning. We've learned to think creatively and explore ideas and new ways of working together... how many of us have started working online, using collaboration tools that bring us together when we're apart? I think most importantly, we've developed a greater sense of community and care: we recognise that everyone is working incredibly hard to achieve the best results for all.

These are all such important skills - both personally and professionally. You may have realised these skills pre-pandemic too, after all we're faced with challenges throughout life: transitions to university and then to work, relationships, bereavements, and life milestones. You're all doing amazingly well and will continue to do so. As the end of term approaches and we (hopefully) have some more time to ourselves over the holidays, I recommend writing a letter to your future self - it's a great way to reflect and measure how far you've come. As tough as change is, this will be a great way to measure your progress and see what you've achieved. Write your letter here: <https://www.futureme.org/>

NEXT ISSUE: SUSTAINABILITY

COMING IN TERM 2 2021/22

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**If you have been affected by this issue, please
find out more about the support available on
warwick.ac.uk/bubblingup or by speaking to your
Personal or Senior Tutor in the department.**

