Peter

Q: What is your role in the University of Edinburgh?

I'm the Rector of The University of Edinburgh and what that means is that I'm the Chair of the University's governing body which is called the Court. What I aim to do is to work with staff and with students to make sure that their voices are heard at the highest levels in the University and of issues of real importance and what that means is (that is) working with organisations like EUSA and the trade unions or with individual members of staff or students to find out what the issues are and to make sure the University is responding appropriately to those taking action towards making sure that its getting things right.

Q: In 2012 The University of Edinburgh signed up to the Seeme pledge, what has this meant to you?

Seeme is a really important campaign I think one of the real problems that we have had with mental health in the past is that people have been very reluctant to come forward and talk about issues they are having with their mental health and I think that one of the great things about Seeme is that it's really made it much more possible for people to come forwards and much more normal for people to come forward. It is to look at ways to create a positive environment around mental health so that we are removing, where we can, the stressors and the things that cause mental health problems for people.

Q: What advice would you give to current and prospective students with mental health issues?

Edinburgh is a great place to study it's a University that has a lot of facilities it has a lot of opportunities and what that means is that if things do go wrong we’ve got the facilities, the help there but also we are interested in finding out how we can provide these services in a better way in a more appropriate way. So even if there isn’t a problem you can come forward and talk to us about what you think you need. The thing to remember is that it’s a really excellent environment in which to study and we are aiming to be really positive about mental health.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to say?

I think that it is really important that we all work together to create an atmosphere that’s really positive about mental health that really supports people that avoids creating unnecessary stress and that allows people to enjoy happy and fulfilled lives in a way that’s supported.

Nadia

Q: Can you talk about your role here in the University of Edinburgh?

I’m the Vice President for the societies and activities which is an odd role because it also covers welfare, inequality and diversity. I work for the Student’s Association which means I work for all of the students and one of my main priorities is around mental health provision at the University this year.
Q: Can you talk about your mental health?

During my studies, the first three years of University, I suffered, a fair bit, from depression. Sometimes it was mild, sometimes it was moderate, sometimes it was serious. In my third year I started to also suffer from anxiety as well. It was sometimes quite debilitating. I’d just sit around at home feeling rubbish about myself. I’d get into my nice big walk in wardrobe that I had in my second year, and cry in the cupboard, which wasn’t very fun. I found it hard to talk to people about it that was more people I knew, I was happy to tell doctors and counsellors and stuff. And that was actually really helpful. But I think the hardest part was trying to get people I knew and saw every day to understand what I was going through and what they could do to help me because it, all of a sudden, felt like I wasn’t particularly normal.

Q: How has this affected your University life?

I found it mainly quite hard to do all of the assessed work. As long as the lecture wasn’t at 9 or 10am as I found it hard to get out of bed. I was generally able to keep up going to lectures. Mainly keep up with readings. But as soon as it came to something that was assessed. I, kind of, lost all confidence in my abilities and what I was able to do: whether it would be any good, working to deadlines because I couldn’t predict how I would be feeling that day. The University was quite good, in that it would give me, deadline extensions and a few learning adjustments through the Disability Service. But I’m not sure it went far enough because at the end of every assessed piece of work I was always left very frazzled and feeling like I hadn’t done particularly well. But sometimes I did and sometimes I didn’t, so maybe a lot of it was in my head but it did make it quite tricky.

Q: In 2012 the University of Edinburgh signed up to the See me pledge, what has this meant to you?

It meant quite a lot to me because it looked like the University was going to start taking some serious steps to, actually, battle the stigma around mental health and things. And at the same time, or roughly the same time, the Students Association did it as well. So it looked like we were able to go forward in like a partnership between the University and the students and start talking about what mental health meant and how many people suffered from mental health issues at the University. Sort of bettering the provision and the understanding of it, I think there is still quite a long way to go and I’m trying to work on it a bit this year. But I think it is a positive step in the right direction.

Q: What advice would you give to prospective and current students?

I think I’d tell people to not wait too long to go and ask for help but also to figure out ways to let your friends know what is going on. That was probably the most difficult part for me, and there’s still people that I lived with, a while back, who probably don’t even know what was going on -because I couldn’t tell them. But as soon as I did start telling people I knew it all got a lot easier. People expected less of me if I told them that I was poorly but then didn’t think less of me, if that makes sense. I just think there are so many ways that you can seek help at this University. Whether it’s through the Disability Service, or the Counselling Service, the Advice Place at EUSA or even some of the campaigns that the Student Association run through the welfare committee or the disability group. You can, sort of, seek out ways to make things better for yourself and that’s what helped me when I started to do it.
Vlad

Q: How has your mental health affected you?

Well, I suffer from depression and it’s been an ongoing situation for the better part of ten years now. Although I, sort of, managed to start fighting against it about two years ago. Before that I didn’t really acknowledge the problem. You avoid people. So you don’t want to meet tutors or even friends, classmates. So going to class is mainly a big thing. And deadlines, they start messing up. And the bad thing is that of course part of you tries to say “You know, well, you should try and do this”. But it’s such a hard struggle that you just don’t manage to do most of it. So even doing a simple thing like attending class becomes a pretty big mountain to get over.

Q: How did you find out about the support available at the University of Edinburgh?

The support was headed my way by my supervisor initially, and also by my GP. When everything happened I was sort of bounced back and forward and I was told that University has a part - I didn’t know about at all, in fact I was quite scared of how I was going to handle my situation with everything - Being as academia is so competitive I was just falling out of the wagon basically. And my tutor told me that there is a support facility available and at the moment. And at that moment, I was really relieved.

Q: What advice would you give to prospective and current students?

The biggest advice would be that even though you don’t really feel it, at the beginning. Ask for help. Be it a friend, be it anybody, even that somebody you don’t really know. Going out and asking for help is the biggest step you can do. Even if it’s just getting in touch with your GP and saying you know you’re going through this. You might feel like you don’t really know that somebody else might understand you, might help you, because it’s all going on inside of you, and to be honest, you’re trying to figure out how could anybody else understand it but the people are there to help. And once you do that one step it’s just a series of small steps that takes you to speaking to the right person and getting it out and trying to understand how you can help yourself, better.

Q: What have you found helpful?

What has helped me personally, other than friends and staff and professional help has been taking each day step by step. Don’t put big projects on your shoulders, don’t think what am I going to do about the assignments next week and stuff like that. Just take it day by day, step by step, even getting out of the house, out of your room, having a schedule, getting up in the morning doing this and that. And even if you don’t manage to follow through with your entire schedule but doing it, every little achievement that you get. It feels so much better and you should be proud of yourself for every little thing that you do, every day. It’s the best thing when you start realising that you, maybe, can start changing what you feel inside. You can help yourself. So yeah, every little by little counts and by the end you’ve done so much. And you’re amazed. I wouldn’t of known how to handle my situation alongside with school because you sort of lose track of things and it’s really important to be able to just know how to handle assignments and getting to class and how to take it day by day and little by little. It really helps.
Jess

Q: How has your mental health affected you?

I have clinical depression and kind of with anxiety as well. Emmm it mainly made getting things, well it generally made things quite difficult. It made, certainly, getting my deadlines, my essays really difficult. Because I had a lot of problems, sort of, I’d get anxious and I wouldn’t, you know, I’d avoid doing my deadlines because I would get anxious about it, and I would get even more anxious because I would think ‘oh my god I’ve got no time do my essays’ which was really horrible for my mental health, it just you know it kept me up at night, it you know it made everything a lot more difficult than it really, doing an essay has any right to be (laughs) from the standpoint of actually getting to lectures I mean a lot of the time it was a struggle just getting out of bed, so, you know, if you are having difficulty even motivating yourself to get out of bed, and, you know get something to eat, the thought of going to lectures, you know, is just impossible so I’d miss lectures, I’d miss deadlines and just generally stress myself out no end.

Q: How did you find out about the support available at the University of Edinburgh?

Em initially I went to the Student Counselling Service, (em), I basically found out about it on one of the websites as I was not really sure what to do with myself (uhm) and I found out that the University had a counselling service so I went to the University Counselling Service to begin with (uhm) and through them I also learned that there was a Disability Service and there was a mental health mentor programme and that if I was needing long term support, because the Counselling Service only does, I think its five or six sessions but if I needed long term support, which I kind of really did at that point then I could go to the Disability Service and look into the mental health mentor programme.

Q: What advice would you give to prospective and current students?

It can be difficult to look for help particularly if you feel like you don’t deserve it, or, feel like, oh well maybe it not all that bad, but if you have gotten to the point where you are thinking what can I do, you really need to just speak to someone and you know keep an open mind as to the fact they might not go, oh no there’s nothing wrong, the people that I’ve spoken to have always been really compassionate and really willing to help regardless of whether your problems might be really small, or might be really big (uhm) it runs the full spectrum, mental health can affect you in goodness knows how many ways I think just being able to kind of have a little courage, and (kind of) go to people and say look I need some help, I mean that’s the hardest thing, the hardest step I think if you can do that then you are well on your way.

Q: What has been your experience of talking about mental health?

I never really had much of a problem with my friends, my friends were usually pretty understanding em in fact it was generally my friends who were kind of (you know) chivvying me along (you know) saying look you should probably go see the Counselling Service or you should follow this up and I know sometimes I didn’t believe them my friends did help a lot and I think, I think I am quite fortunate in that as some people don’t have friends that understand quite as much staff tend to vary, I mean I dealt with a lot of very different lecturers a lot of different tutors and some people were very much, sort of, very eager to help and sometimes people would be a bit (mmm), it’s hard to describe you kind of get the sense
that they are a bit more cautious around you, like they are worried that they are going to say 
or you know you start getting treated like a landmine which is a little awkward to say the 
least, I’ve never had any outright negative experiences certainly (uhm) I have just felt like 
sometimes that depending on who the tutor was who the lecturer was I’ve felt like 
ocasionally they did quite know what to do with me, if that makes sense. But certainly for 
the most part if you know may be they didn’t always understand but they were always willing 
to help, which I think is the most important thing.

**Q: What have you found helpful?**

I think the person who really helped was my mental health mentor, just because, I mean I 
saw her once a week and it helps to have someone constantly checking in on me because I 
felt very isolated (em) I didn’t have a huge number of friends in my classes so I felt quite out 
of synch and I felt I didn’t really have someone to explain my worries to very much, because 
none of my close friends were in the course I was in, didn’t really know exactly where I was 
coming from so it was nice to have someone I could go to every week and sort of, who knew 
what I was doing and was able to stop me from panicking too much and say, kind of say 
right it’s not the end of the world, we can break things down and get things sorted, and then 
when I started getting the support I found it a lot easier to (eh) just to deal with things, I found 
it a lot easier to look at the workload I had and go ok it’s not the end of the world I can go to 
my mental health mentor and I can get things sorted basically, I can kind of work out a plan 
and figure out how I am going to do it step by step rather than, kind of, ignoring all the 
deadlines I had and kind of, putting them to one side and hoping they would go away, which 
unfortunately they never do. And it was really obvious to me at least how my ability to deal 
with my work changed from my first two years at University to my last two years at University 
I just generally felt, although I was still stressed, because that’s kind of the nature of 
University I felt I was able to manage it whereas before I felt there was no way I was going to 
cope and there was no way I was going to be able to get through my essays and my exams I 
just felt a lot more on top of things.

**Q: What advice do you have for current and prospective students at the University of 
Edinburgh?**

I guess just that it’s kind of like what I said before it takes a lot of courage to actually go to 
anyone and say, look I am struggling I’m really having a difficult time and even if you maybe 
think my problem isn’t a big deal or there are people who have it worse than me or any 
number of things that might put you off you should probably go anyway, because if you have 
got to the point that you are thinking what am I going to do or you know, I can’t cope, the 
chances are you probably need some help anyway and there is nothing wrong with that I 
mean I think if I hadn’t sought help when I did I may well not have graduated but you know 
the support helped me graduate and it helped me get through what otherwise would 
probably have prevented me from actually doing what I wanted to do and passing my exams 
and generally going to University to do what I planned to in the first place a little bit of 
embarrassment is not a big deal compared to actually managing to get your degree at the 
end I am actually really glad that I asked for help because if you have any kind of mental 
health difficulty its so many magnitudes more difficult to do it alone and it’s not worth it to 
have to do it alone, you are far better off with just a little bit of help, even if it’s just a few 
counselling sessions it matters.
Lucy

Q: How did you find out about the support available in the University of Edinburgh?

The mental health support was recommended to me when I had my first disability introductory meeting. We were talking about, it was mainly then about extra time for exams and a small exam room which would help me get less anxious during exams. It was recommended and it has been a huge help.

Q: What advice do you have for current and prospective students at the University of Edinburgh?

I think the advice I would give to other students, who are in a similar position, would be to get all the help you can get and don’t be embarrassed about asking for help or going to the Disability Service. Because there are lots of things that I didn’t know that are available to me that have definitely helped me here at the University. I would also say that support from friends and family is important so don’t be embarrassed about sharing it with them either, because they definitely have helped me in the past couple of years.

Q: What have you found helpful?

I think the thing that has helped me the most has been mental health mentoring and I couldn’t pinpoint what it is that was so good about it. But I think it was having someone to talk to. I think it has made a big difference, although I am a very organised person anyway, it’s definitely helped me continue being organised and getting structure to my University routine. As well as, I’ve got access to a disabled study room at the King’s Building library which I’ve found very useful. Because going into University with so many people studying and looking over your shoulder and seeing someone else working away. That can be, well, I find it very intimidating. So that is something that has definitely helped me. And given me space in the library knowing that I can study and know that I’ve got that space. I can just go and work by myself without having anyone else distract me.

Ellie

Q: How did you find out about the support available in the University of Edinburgh?

First of all, I spoke to the student support officers. That was after an exam in first year when I hadn’t managed to revise because of my health. Yeah she was. The student support officer was very, very, helpful. She guided me to the Counselling Service and said I should speak to my personal tutor about things. It wasn’t until my final year that I found out about the Disability Service. I knew it was there, but I had a tendency to think, with my depression, that it wasn’t for me or it was for people who had more serious things than I did. That I didn’t deserve that kind of help. It wasn’t designed for people like me. Well I found out about the Counselling Service through from the student support officer who was really helpful. And then, it was only asking somebody who had been to the Disability Service about it. They said that I should send an email and just ask about whether there was anything I could do to get help.
Q: What has been your experience of talking about mental health?

My personal tutor and all of the lecturing staff have been really great with helping me out as much as possible. They have helped me get the lecture material if I needed help with understanding anything and talking about deadlines and basically reassuring me that I am capable of doing it.

Q: What have you found helpful?

I found the mental health mentor at the Disability Service especially helpful as well. Mostly in planning my studies and making sure I do have a schedule and try and keep to it. It has made a massive difference. Like, as I say, I wish that I had gone to the Disability Service sooner. It’s made like accessing lectures and planning my time, just, just most things that I was struggling with. It’s made a massive amount of difference with.

Matt

Q: How has your mental health affected you at University?

I have had some problems with depression and anxiety for a number of years now I’ve had sort of two serious episodes where it was quite bad for a number of months and during the second, second time this happened I was recommended to go and speak with the Student Disability Service and get a mental health mentor by one of my friends had done the same thing and found it very useful. So I did and now I am here now talking to you (laughs).

I’ve struggled to concentrate on work I am trying to do whether it’s reading or, I’m doing a maths degree so its questions and problems that I am trying to work on and struggling to concentrate on its made it very difficult really. But now I’m in my fourth year, I’ve made it through and it’s all going much better.

Q: What have you found helpful?

Well for me it’s been a long process of getting various different kinds of help from different people throughout it all whenever I have spoken to my friends or family about the problems I have been having they have been very, very helpful and I have had mixed experiences with counselling and stuff like that from people, things that did work and things that didn’t work for me I wouldn’t say there is any one thing that has helped the most except for just talking to people just being honest and saying look I am having a tough time and I need to do something to try and make it better.

You’ll end up in a room like this, oh you can’t really see the room (laughs) speaking with some quite nice people and they will give you advice and offer you some different ways to improve your University experience improve your life. And it’s up to you what you do what you don’t do how much time you spend on any particular thing it’s just about trying to find what works for you, I suppose.