

## **Making that transition from school or college to university . . . .**

Welcome freshers! And I mean that sincerely (everyone here does, of course!) because it's one of the highlights of the academic year for us: meeting all of you for the first time and introducing you to what is for many students not just a new way of working, but even a new way of life. Education at university is different from what most of you have experienced so far, and your first year is above all else focused on helping you make a swift and successful transition to learning at this level.

What do I mean? What makes learning at university so different from what you've experienced while studying during your a-levels or access courses? First, studying at this level has a deeper purpose. At school or college, all of the effort you put into your academic work was focused on getting good grades at the end. This is true of university work up to a point; yes, getting a good degree will enhance your employability, but higher education is about more than just scores. It's about spending a sustained period of time immersed in a subject you enjoy; as such, your attendance at Cardiff Met provides you with what may be a once in a lifetime opportunity. Make the most of it! Furthermore, through your essays and dissertation (if applicable), and the research involved in writing each of them, you are actually adding to the body of knowledge and understanding in your field. This is an exciting privilege: again, enjoy it, and make as much of it as you can.

Second, there is a much greater emphasis at university on independent learning. This means that you need to be proactive and take the initiative in your academic development if you want to fulfil your potential. Tutors, for instance, will provide you with reading lists; it is largely up to you to discover which items are more important for a particular essay or seminar by looking at them in the library or online. It's up to you to get as much out of these three (or however long your programme is) years as possible. *Carpe diem*, as the Romans used to say: 'seize the day'!

Third, criticality is an essential feature of university-level work. What do I mean by 'criticality'? I'm referring to the importance of moving beyond knowledge gathering and description into the realm of analysis and evaluation. One of the university's purposes in the field of learning and teaching is to encourage you to think critically about the sources and evidence you are using. These powers will be developed over the course of your degree programme. But it's important to state at the outset: don't be afraid of questioning your sources. Look for weaknesses or flaws. Nothing is perfect, even if it is in print. Greater criticality equals higher marks. If you'd like to know more, have a look at the academic skills pages under the 'Learning' tab of 'The Student Room'.

And this brings round to my final point, which is about the skills needed for success. If you look at the academic skills pages noted above, you will find each skill dealt with separately. Some of the most important include critical thinking (and reading), reflective practice (look this up; it's important), academic writing and language (it is different) and writing essays or reports. But there are also more practical skills required at university: note-making and time-management, for example, or presentation skills. If you're still reading, chances are you've probably already realised that these skills are transferable: i.e. they are skills looked for by employers. And this is, of course, another important feature of university education: it is intended to prepare you for the workplace. Once again, therefore, *carpe diem*. You are about to embark on the first stage of your professional life!

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