

Taking stock (3): achieving your goal

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1. Introduction

The Taking Stock workbooks are part of SWAP's Preparation for Higher Education and are designed to help you make the right decisions about your future, particularly your educational future.

There are three taking stock booklets:

- ❖ Part one: my skills
- ❖ Part two: making progress
- ❖ Part three: achieving your goal

You may have used Part One to help you reflect on the skills and qualities you already have and you should have used Part Two to help you make decisions about which higher education route to take. It is now up to you. This booklet, Part Three, will help you bridge the gap between college and university. Each university is different so many of the exercises in this booklet will be 'signposting' exercises. It will be up to you to find out the answers either by contacting the University or getting information from the prospectus or website. Remember that each university has an association which provides a wide range of services for its students, and many universities have a special association for mature students or adult returners. Do not hesitate to contact them – they can be of great help, especially in the early days.

2. The beginning

By making sure all is well at the beginning you can get off to a good start and be more able to cope with any difficulties should they arise. You should have organised the following (if applicable):

- ❖ Where you are going to study
- ❖ Your chosen course
- ❖ Childcare
- ❖ Other care arrangements
- ❖ Finance
- ❖ Travel or accommodation

Once these are in place, you can concentrate on and enjoy the academic work you will have to do.

3. The summer

There will be a tremendous sense of relief when you finish your SWAP programme. Some of those in your class may be joining you at university, but it is unlikely they will all be doing the same degree unless you are enrolling on the Primary Education degree for example. If you have gone through all the booklets in your Preparation for HE programme as well as been on some university visits, you will have a good idea about what will happen once you reach university. Even so, it may be worthwhile refreshing your memory.

4. The first week

The first week of first year (sometimes referred to as freshers' week or induction week) is your chance to find out about everything the university has to offer, from sports facilities, IT suites, the library and places to eat to welfare and information services. But there is a lot you can do to prepare yourself before the first week of term. Start by doing the exercise below.

Exercise 1

Lecture

Tutorial

Seminar

Matriculation

Director of studies

Tutor

Faculty

Registry

Semester/term

Lecture

A presentation to a large number of students (note the word 'large'!) by an academic member of staff. This is one of the changes you will have to become used to – the far greater number of students in your class.

Tutorial

A small group of students work through a subject with a tutor. Students are required to do the readings beforehand and should be able to express opinions. This is a way of helping students to have greater understanding of a subject. The TUTOR who leads the group is sometimes a post-graduate student.

Seminar

Again, this is a smaller group of students and is much more interactive than a lecture. Usually one or two students will be asked to make a presentation and to lead the discussion.

Matriculation

This is the process by which you enrol at the University. Your chosen University will provide you with information on how to do this.

Director of studies

Some members of staff take on the additional responsibility of being available to students as a neutral source of advice for any academic problems that occur. There is usually a separate advisory service for personal problems. Make sure you find out the name of your Adviser or Director and also where the other student services are available. You may not require them but it is always better to be prepared.

Faculty

This is the name given to a group of similar departments. So, for example, the 'Arts Faculty' will include departments ranging from Modern Languages to Archaeology.

Registry

This is the office in the University which maintains all the student records.

Semester/term

The university year is usually about thirty weeks long. Some Universities divide the year into three 'terms' of ten weeks each ('trimesters'), others have two semesters of around fifteen weeks each with a long break at Christmas. Increasingly, universities are opting for semesters.

5. Skills for HE

The university year is a mix of various kinds of learning opportunities. If you are to succeed, you must work hard at becoming an independent learner. The skills you have been developing on your SWAP programme will assist you and, by now, you should be aware of what these skills are. Being

accepted for a place on your chosen course is only the beginning. You must work hard to ensure you complete your degree.

Exercise 2

Make a list below of some of the skills you will need to succeed at university.

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Some suggestions

The list below is not exhaustive but should give you some pointers about what you personally need to do to ensure success. As you go through the list below, mark with a cross those where you think you have some difficulty. For example, if you have problems managing your time, you must start now to get into the habit of drawing up a timetable for yourself and keeping to it. Much depends on your chosen course, but you will be expected to develop skills in:

- ❖ Analytical reading
- ❖ Producing written work on time
- ❖ Communicating effectively
- ❖ Note-taking at lectures
- ❖ Presentation skills (seminars)
- ❖ Effective research
- ❖ General time management
- ❖ Problem solving
- ❖ IT
- ❖ Numeracy (even in some arts subjects)

Some of the above will be familiar to you as you will have had the opportunity to develop your core skills at college.

6. Other things to consider when you are at university

What should I do if the work starts piling up?

Many universities run classes to help students manage their time and cope with the level of academic work required. The trick is to work slowly and steadily and not leave everything till the last minute. If you wait until the last minute there is always a chance that something unforeseen may occur that will intervene with your ability to get the work done.

What should I do if I can't meet the deadline for a piece of work?

This should be the exception rather than the rule unless you are unfortunate enough to have a serious illness. Don't just ask for an extension – explain why you need an extension and agree an alternative date to submit your work. But you must keep to this alternative date, so make it a realistic one. Be aware that if you are taking extra time on this piece of work you may be falling behind with others.

Once you have weighed up all the facts you may decide that you want to go to university but have too many commitments at the moment. Talk this over with your College tutor: there are many other options such as part-time degrees. Whatever you choose, having as clear an idea as possible about what to expect will ensure you have a successful, enjoyable first year.

7. University: the bigger picture

'All work and no play make Jack a dull boy' goes the old saying. You will want to work hard but you must allow yourself some time for relaxation. You may think this is impossible because as a mature student you have many other commitments, but if you can find time to experience some of the university's extra-curricular activities, you're likely to get a lot out of it.

Each university has a range of clubs and societies: you could try to join at least one. This is all part of the university experience and some clubs are specially geared to adult returners.

The Student Association and the Student Representative Council provide a range of valuable services from discounts on holidays to expert advice on a wide variety of subjects.

Some run Job Clubs where you may be able to find part-time work. Be careful – do not take on too much work to the detriment of your studies.

Most universities have good sports facilities. As a student, you will be eligible to join at a much-discounted rate and keeping fit will help you combat any stress you may be suffering from.

Make sure you also find out about the other academic support services such as the university library. With so many students now in higher education, pressure on such facilities can be great. This is a good opportunity to develop your skills in planning ahead.

And don't forget the Careers Service. As a mature student it's never too early to think about what you want to do at the end of your degree.

8. Planning ahead

During the summer, you may have taken on a job or be working extra hours to help with your finances. However you should also be preparing yourself for the year ahead at University. This will

largely be about familiarising yourself with how the university works, the layout of the campus and the various things you need to do before you start. For example, you may have been sent a reading list from your department or suggested reading material may be posted on its web pages. You could get started on some of the key textbooks while you have time over the summer. Have a look for some of your course books in second-hand shops. (Having said all this, don't worry if you don't have a reading list or won't be given more detailed information until the start of term. With good time-management skills, you'll fit everything in.)

Read carefully any information you are sent from your chosen university or college, action any items as required and make sure you pay at least one visit to the campus to familiarise yourself with the layout. There will be enough students wandering around lost on the first day of term – make sure you aren't one of them!

We are sure you will have an inspiring, life-changing time at university. Enjoy yourself, work hard but don't forget to relax too – with good time-management and preparation, you will fit everything in, and have time to really appreciate being a student. And don't forget to let us know how you're getting on. We always appreciate hearing from former SWAP East students.