

Mature Students

Your hopes and expectations

Coming to university as a mature student can be exhilarating, challenging and sometimes unsettling. Your reasons for coming may be both personal and professional, including:

- picking up your education from where you left off
- extending your qualifications, to improve your employment or promotion prospects or to prepare for making a career change
- following an interest for its own sake

Despite a wealth of life experience from work, home or prior training you may feel unsure of what is expected of you in the unfamiliar environment at University. The challenges and dilemmas you face will be different to those of younger students.

Adjusting to University life

It can take time to adjust, both to being in an educational institution and to the learning experience itself. You may feel that a lot is expected of you when you start your course. In your first weeks you will find that you have to:

- adjust to being in a large institution, get used to being with your fellow students
- begin an intense programme of study
- keep to timetables and deadlines
- learn how to access resources
- take responsibility for your own learning, managing your own programme of study and revision

As well as all this, you may have to balance the demands of running a home, perhaps working part-time, with your course requirements.

Feelings that may come up

Mature students often work very hard – and make considerable sacrifices – to get to university. Often they find themselves questioning whether they have made the right decision – an understandable reaction to the changes. You may feel any or all of the following:

- I'm overwhelmed by the amount of work
- I'm out of practice – I don't have the skills
- I don't have enough confidence – I didn't know I'd feel like this – I feel so lost
- everyone else seems so young!
- time is running out – this is my last chance
- I've set my standards too high – there's too much pressure on me to succeed
- I'm worried that when I do get my degree it won't be worth it
- I'm not getting the support I need from partner/children/friends
- because of my other commitments I'm missing out on aspects of student life

What might help

- learning to manage your time and work
- updating your skills as necessary
- understanding the pressures you face
- making time for yourself
- making use of all the help available

Learning to manage your time and work Gaining a degree as a mature student can require all your organisational skills. It will need a radical reassessment of priorities.

Ask yourself whether you can scale down the housework or arrange your finances so that you don't have to work too hard during the term. Can you ask more from friends, family and partners? If you find this difficult, it may help to remind them, and yourself, that you'll be able to help and support them once the deadline has been met, or the exams are over. As far as your academic work is concerned, you'll find it will help to divide tasks into immediate and less urgent, and prioritise ruthlessly. The more you break down your work into small tasks the more you're likely to find the time to do them. You may find that it helps to set aside a special place and time for working.

This will help to create the right mood for working. If you have small children, probably the only time available to read and complete coursework will be when they're in bed. As time goes on, you'll find you get used to making the most of all the time available.

Ask your tutors for help if you feel you need extra help in managing your time and work.

Updating your skills as necessary

Help is available at Middlesex for students who lack confidence about their academic and study skills.

- if you find that you need help with research or essay writing skills, information and guidance can be obtained from **LET** (Learning Enhancement Team) offers academic support with workshops, courses, one-to-ones, and online advice in areas including the ability to write essays and reports, give presentations and participate in academic discussions. They also offer extra support for students to whom English is a foreign language, and to students with dyslexia. Help with numeracy for those who need it is also available.
- look out for occasional groups on revising for and taking exams, these are usually run by **LET** (Learning Enhancement Team) together with the Counselling Service:
<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/let>
- if you are dyslexic, or think you might be, see the Disability and Dyslexia service website or telephone 020 8411 2502.

Understanding the pressures you face

It may help to recognise that being a mature student does bring special pressures. This may particularly be the case if you are also attending to the demands of a family and children. You also may not be giving yourself enough credit for non-academic skills that you have acquired. Try not to put extra pressure on yourself by being perfectionist – acknowledge it will take time to get back into the rhythm of studying and it will all seem unfamiliar and perhaps frightening at first. Talking to others – whether students in the same situation or one of your tutors – may help to put things in perspective.

If you feel overwhelmed and troubled by conflicting demands to the extent that it is affecting your work and enjoyment of life, it may help to talk to a counsellor (see below).

Making time for yourself

It is important to allow some space for yourself, however impossible or unrealistic this seems at times. Try to spend some time doing things that make you feel better, whether by being with friends or relaxing on your own. Take time to recharge your batteries.

Making use of all the help available

For example, the Student Welfare and Advice Team provides information and help with many of the practical issues that affect mature students, such as benefits or financial help. The University provides nurseries at the main campuses. The Employability Service can help you prepare for the future, helping you think about work or other opportunities. Information on these services is available on UniHub.

How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

Please see website for up-to-date service details:

<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:

cmh@mdx.ac.uk

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Abuse
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Anxiety and Panic
Bereavement and loss
Bullying
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
Coming to Britain to study
Coping with trauma
Depression
Eating disorders
Exam anxiety
Helping someone you are concerned about
Insomnia
Managing stress
Mature Students
Mental health
Mindfulness
Presentation skills
Relaxation
Self-harm
Work difficulties and study blocks
Working in groups

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