**Podcast transcript: My support (Careers – you’ve got this!, Episode 4)**

**Intro** [00:00:08] You're listening to Steer Your Career, the podcast by LSE Careers to help you navigate your career journey.

**Edith** [00:00:29] So welcome, everybody. Welcome to this new careers podcast episode. This episode is part of our series on student wellbeing. I'm Edith. I'm one of the careers consultants in LSE Careers. And today's episode title is ‘My Support’. And we are hoping today to highlight some of the main resources, support and guidance that you can access at LSE and outside of LSE, and also more specifically with LSE Careers; and also help you get the help you need and more generally also help you by offering practical solutions to alleviate anxiety you might be feeling during your time at LSE. I am really thrilled to be welcoming two guests today: Viki Chinn who is my colleague, so a careers consultant as well in LSE Careers and leading our support for disabled students. And also Molly New, Wellbeing Adviser from the Student Wellbeing Services. So Viki, thank you so much for being with us today. Would you like to introduce yourself?

**Viki** [00:01:43] Okay thanks, Edith. Hi everyone. As Edith said, I'm a careers consultant at LSE Careers. I specialise in disability and employment, and I lead on our services for disabled students. Aside from that, I'm also chair of DAWN, which is the LSE Staff Disability and Wellbeing Network. And I've been working in the fields of disability and employment for about 17/18 years now.

**Edith** [00:02:08] Oh, 17/18 years! So you're a real specialist. Thank you so much, Viki. So now if I put myself in the shoes of a student and I feel anxiety, I'm not sure, really. So how do I know if I need to seek help as a disabled student?

**Viki** [00:02:29] Okay, so if you're saying about feeling anxiety that may or may not mean that you are a disabled student because some people will have anxiety as a long-term condition, but some people may experience anxiety due to something that's happening at a particular time. But regardless of that, if you're feeling anxiety, I'll say you should seek help of some type. What type of help you look for may differ, whether you seek professional help or whether you turn to friends or family. But absolutely, if you're feeling anxiety, don't struggle with that on your own. Speak to someone. Get some help. So the first question I’d say is – if you’re saying how do you know if you need to seek help as a disabled student – the first question I’d say is, do you know that you have a disability? So I see a lot of students that have been newly diagnosed, perhaps who’ve come to university not knowing that they've got a disability but have perhaps been aware that they may struggle with things throughout their lives, that things may just seem a little bit more difficult for them than their peers. And often they will feel that it's them, that they're not trying hard enough, that there's something wrong with them. But I would say that's not normally the case. And if you've managed to get to LSE, you're really bright and capable. So if you are having any kind of struggle like that, there is probably a good reason for that. So I would definitely recommend that you go and speak to the Wellbeing Service and Disability Wellbeing Service, and speak to them about potentially getting assessed or tested for a condition. If you know that you've got a disability, if you've already been diagnosed, then again. It's about listening to yourself. It's about knowing that something isn't right. It's about knowing that you're having to work hard, that you're perhaps maybe not able to do things that your peers can do alongside your studies, like socialising. It might be that you're feeling you're having to work all the time just to keep up when actually that's not normal. I know LSE’s a really, really busy environment but people do get to do other things as well. And, you know, is it impacting on your ability to sleep? Is it impacting on your ability to do things for yourself? If it’s that you’re having to work to the point of that happening, then you probably need and should have support, and why not get it? You know, remove the barriers. Enjoy your time at university.

**Edith** [00:05:02] Thank you, Viki. This is really, really helpful to hear. Could you also say a few words more specifically about support at LSE Careers? So what is that support that I can get from LSE Careers as a disabled student?

**Viki** [00:05:19] Yeah absolutely, there's loads of support you can get. So we've worked hard on developing this over many, many years. So there's different things you can engage in or get support over. So firstly, we have one-to-one appointments, so you can have a disability-focused appointment with either myself or my colleague Edmund. Both of us specialised in disability. Both of those have worked in disability outside of LSE as well. We can talk to you about anything that you need to in those appointments. So they are, as with all our appointments, they are completely confidential and they last up to 45 minutes, so there's not as much time pressure as there might be in some of the non-disability appointments. So that allows us to not feel pressurised, not feel rushed to explore things in more detail because there might be a lot of other factors involved in what you want to discuss. There's two levels of which we could really take these appointments. One is talking about things that are disability and employment related, so that can be talking about disclosure. Whether you want to tell an employer that you have a disability or not, whether that's good for you, a good decision for you or not. And we can talk about reasonable adjustments, so there’s the adjustments that can be put in place to remove barriers when you're going through recruitment processes or when you're actually in the workplace. And it can be talking about, unfortunately, I do see some students who are experiencing negative situations or might have experienced negative situations in the past. So that's something we can talk about. Or we can also talk about things that are related to your job search, because the adjustment in itself is the extra time that you may need to do things like go through your job search, job applications and materials. It might be that we need to talk about practice interviews in a slightly different way than you might do in a non-disability appointment. So those appointments, we will do them in a way that is accessible to you. So I personally deliver all of mine on Zoom because that's the most accessible format for me. Edmond will offer them on either Teams or in person, so it's really for you to work out which one works for you and you can make an appointment with either of us, and we'd be happy to see you. Outside of the appointments, I take it you definitely want me to talk about everything else that we do.

**Edith** [00:07:48] Yes, please go on. Yeah, that's really interesting.

**Viki** [00:07:51] So we also run an annual mentoring scheme, so we've just started our fifth year of that. And that’s an alumni mentoring scheme where all of our mentors are disabled alumni that I have worked personally with in the past, so they've either met me in the disabled students’ appointments or they’ve come to the other events I run, or some of them have actually been mentees themselves in an earlier stage of the scheme. And they come back and you are linked up with a mentor on a one-on-one basis and spend eight months picking their brains and getting support off them as well and developing a really nice relationship. So we normally recruit for that in late Michaelmas Term so do keep an eye out for that in the future. It is an application process, it is very competitive, but you've got every chance of getting a place the same as everybody else. We also work with the Volunteer Centre to provide a summer placement volunteering scheme for disabled students and we will be advertising that throughout Lent Term, and towards the end of Lent Term and in the Summer Term we have panels. So in late February, we'll be having an alumni panel called ‘Breaking Down Barriers’. Well again, we bring an alum who will talk about their experiences of transitioning from education into employment and their experiences in the workplace, and all these panels will take place over Zoom. So for accessibility purposes, all the events that I run are online. And then in March, late March, we'll be running a mental health focused panel with employers speaking on the panel. And aside from that, we also run other events for disabled students that take place throughout the year. So these are online events that are open to disabled students from LSE and from four other universities too. And the kind of things that are covered there are dealing with psychometric tests, talking about disability from an employer perspective and, again, transitioning from university into the workplace with confidence. So there's a lot that we do and we're always developing our services more.

**Edith** [00:09:57] Yeah, this is really a wide range of support. Thanks for detailing each of them, really. Viki, I heard you speak about disclosure, about adjustment, about job search and the recruitment process. So here I'm thinking of one more question to you. How can I identify inclusive employers?

**Viki** [00:10:32] That’s a really good question, Edith, because being very honest, a lot of employers claim to be inclusive when they’re not. They might be checking boxes. However, the good news is there's lots and lots of really, really good inclusive employers out there, and they’re the people that deserve to have you and you deserve to work for. So there's different ways. There's no real list. There are places you can go to look at whether employers are involved, and I'll mention them in a bit. But I would use other methods as well to supplement that, because, as I say, there are some employers that might sign up to things without actually doing anything. So the first thing I'll say is if you feel confident enough to do this, speak to them, ask them. Ask them about what they do to support disabled applicants or disabled employees. Ask them outright. You know, even if you feel a little bit uncomfortable doing that, maybe don't ask about disability. Talk to them about the company culture. You can get a sense of whether a place feels good. You can get a sense for whether you feel a rapport with the people that you're talking to, whether they feel warm, whether they feel approachable, and if there is that culture, it will probably spread across the way they operate and the way they treat all employees. But absolutely, speaking to them. Something I always say to students is get in touch and ask about adjustments in the recruitment process and then judge how they respond to you. Do they respond quickly? Are they helpful? Are they approachable? Do they not respond? Do they respond but do they seem to make you jump through hoops? I'm always on a very personal level, and this is my personal opinion, but I am less impressed by employers who make students provide lots and lots of evidence of disability. That’s really not appropriate. You know, I think give the adjustments and see how someone can perform. You can speak to LSE alum – they find people on LinkedIn. Again, you can ask outright about disability or generally about the culture. But also look, look on their recruitment materials. Do they have disability recruiters? Do they have a contact name of a person or a team that you can get in touch with to talk about adjustments if you want to? Are they actually encouraging you to feel free to share things with them? Are they showing that they want to support you through the process? Have a look at their website. What are they saying? Do they feature anything on the website that indicates that they are looking. And I don't just mean the standard statements about welcoming applications from all protected characteristics. I would say look at do they have staff networks? Do they have profiles of people? What are they actually doing that shows that they are inclusive? Now, one of the things that I mentioned earlier was looking at lists. So there is a business disability forum which lists employers who have signed up to that. There is also the disability confidence symbol which employers can sign up for. However, again, my advice, again, my personal advice would be do not take that as a given that that means that the employer is absolutely inclusive. We would certainly hope they are. But look at the other things as well, just to make sure. And one thing I did forget to say in my last question was we've got a really comprehensive website about disability support at LSE Careers as well. So do take a look at that.

**Edith** [00:13:58] Thank you. Thank you so much, Viki. This is extremely insightful and helpful, and thanks also for sharing your personal experience and advice. That's really, I think, very, very precious for students here. So thank you very much for your time. And yes, I know I think students know much more how to find help. Yeah. Thank you.

**Viki** [00:14:22] Not at all, Edith, absolute pleasure. And I'd just like to say, a parting word would be I'd really, really encourage any of you that feel you want to talk to us, get in touch with me, get in touch with Edmund. We have a disability careers email, which is careers.disability@lse.ac.uk. Drop me a line. I'll get back to you as quick as possible and also come along to the panels and hear what our alumni have got to say. And you never know, they might be happy for you to contact them after too.

**Edith** [00:14:50] Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Viki.

**Viki** [00:14:53] Bye.

**Edith** [00:14:54] Bye.

*[Intermission]*

**Edith** [00:15:05] Now Molly, I would like to turn you and thank you so much again for being with us. You are a wellbeing adviser in the Student Wellbeing Services. Would you like to introduce yourself?

**Molly** [00:15:18] Yes, of course. So thank you for having me to start with. It's lovely to be here and recording this podcast today. And yeah, my name is Molly. I'm one of the Wellbeing advisers. I work at Student Wellbeing Services as part of the Wellbeing team.

**Edith** [00:15:31] Great. Thank you. Can you please tell us what sort of help I can get in the Student Wellbeing Services and how can I seek this help?

**Molly** [00:15:41] Yeah, so there are a range of different support options for students accessing Student Wellbeing Services for a number of different things. We have support specifically for wellbeing, for my adjustments, and we also have a counselling service. So the main sort of access point for Student Wellbeing Services is through our disability and mental health service and this is for my adjustments. So if you have a diagnosed condition, mental health illness, disability, you are able to access adjustments to support your study, teaching and learning and those are applied by our disability and mental health advisers. You will need to evidence your condition, usually from your GP or mental health or medical professional detailing your condition and how it may impact your study. You will then meet with one of our advisers and we will put adjustments in place for you to your teaching, learning and study. And this may include flexibility around deadlines, extra time in exams, external mentoring, assistive technology. There's lots of different options for adjustments. Secondly is via the Wellbeing team, so part of my team and my service. So we are a team of wellbeing advisers where you would have a 30-minute appointment with us to talk about some issues that may be facing at the moment and how we can support you – how it's affecting your study, how it's affecting your day to day life, and then we'll talk through strategies and suggestions for support. And here that's what we can refer you into our counselling service. We can signpost and share services across LSE and external partners, and sharing our wellbeing resources and thinking about how we can think about self-care and what you're currently doing that looks after your mental health and wellbeing. And finally, as I mentioned, the counselling service. We have a very good team of counsellors where you can access short term counselling or therapy, so all students have access to up to six counselling appointments with our counselling service and that referral is done through the Wellbeing team. So all of the forms that you would need to fill to request those appointments can be found listed on the main page of our Wellbeing website. And then yeah, so you can apply for adjustments through the access to service form and to meet one of our disability advisers or mental health advisers and for the wellbeing advisers through the wellbeing form. And then it's through the Wellbeing Service and wellbeing appointment that we can then arrange that appointment for counselling for you.

**Edith** [00:18:17] Okay, thank you. That's really great to see that there is this range of services. It's quite reassuring actually. Exploring your website, I also saw that as a student I can attend workshops also. Could you say a few words about these workshops?

**Molly** [00:18:32] Yeah. So we run a number of different workshops and groups, so that’s between the Wellbeing team and the Counselling team, and they offer support, again, your mental health and wellbeing. So a workshop is a 45-minute to a one hour event with a focus on building psychological wellbeing skills to help you navigate life at LSE. It's a chance to meet other people in a safe space and share your experience and your tips, and you can come along to as many as you like, so they both run online and in person. So workshops we currently have running this term are a ‘Stress Less’ workshop, goal-setting, reflective journaling, understanding procrastination, and ‘Sleep Well’. And again, you can book yourself onto a workshop via our website. The difference, I'd say, between groups and workshops: groups are a sort of a longer-term intervention and provide a more in-depth focus on the emotional wellbeing in a supportive and confidential environment. So they run over three consecutive weeks and each session is around two hours long. Groups are closed, so you meet with the same counsellor and the same group of students for those three weeks and they are all in person. So this term, they are currently all running and, again, will be running again next term. But a loss and bereavement group, a stress management group, and a developing healthy relationships group. So all quite varied, and very relative to your mental health and wellbeing.

**Edith** [00:19:52] Mhm thank you, thank you. How interesting. Thanks, Molly. Maybe final question here: so how can I get help outside of LSE? Or maybe during weekends or at least outside of office hours?

**Molly** [00:20:06] So we spawned a support service called Spectrum.Life. And again, this can be accessed via our website. But Spectrum.Life supports us with the Student Assistance Program, which is a 24-hour mental health support program, which is available 365 days a year. So if you're wanting to talk to someone, if you're feeling particularly stressed or overwhelmed or worried about something, you can log into Spectrum.Life via their website just creating an account with your LSE log in details. There's a chat function on there where you could be immediately connected with a counsellor. There are telephone numbers immediately which will display on screen for you to contact. They've got a fantastic app which we recommend all students download as well to be connected with the Spectrum.Life counselling team. However, if you are feeling suicidal or feeling at risk to yourself, it's very important that you do seek support. So as always you can go to your nearest A&E department or call 999. Or if you're unsure if it's an emergency, you can call 111, the NHS service, and they will advise on the best appropriate support. However, if you do kind of, you know, come back into LSE and you're wanting to speak to someone, but perhaps you're not sure what option is best for you, we do have a drop-in service which runs daily between 11am and 12pm in our offices and they can support, you know, status of special exams adjustments, if you wanted to apply for those, to check and confirm if medical evidence is sufficient, to get a brief outline of support available and how to get it set up. We can contact a department for you if you have an issue with something. Again, signposting services, signposting you to other services such as LSE LIFE, the Students’ Union, etc. We can explain the Disabled Students’ Allowance form and even book an appointment for you with a disability or mental health adviser. So if you do get to thinking about accessing support over a weekend or out-of-hours option or you're not sure what to access, our drop-in service is available for those conversations too.

**Edith** [00:22:03] Thank you, Molly. Thank you. Maybe just to add to this as a collaboration between LSE Careers and the Wellbeing Services, we are regularly running sessions together to cover questions around managing your job search and your interview anxiety. So it's about helping students who feel they’re really anxious about, overall, their career options or job search, more in particular, or interviews, more in particular. And also we are planning a session now on work and wellbeing. So ‘Wellbeing in the Workplace’. So these are really good ways to cover those kind of questions that you can ask, that you might ask yourself as well.

**Molly** [00:22:53] Yes, absolutely.

**Edith** [00:22:55] Thank you very much again for your time, for being with us today. And hopefully this will help students a lot on everything related to wellbeing and disability adjustments at LSE.

**Molly** [00:23:09] Thank you. Pleasure. Thank you.

**Edith** [00:23:11] Bye.

**Molly** [00:23:12] Bye.

**Outro** [00:23:13] You've been listening to Steer Your Career, the podcast by LSE Careers. Find out more about LSE Careers at www.lse.ac.uk/careers.