

# Audio file

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## Transcript

### **INTRO: Shannon**

Hi, everyone. Welcome back to Find Your Uni. Over the next few episodes, we've invited students from different courses to share their stories. What inspired their course choice, why Edinburgh Napier suits them and their tips on how to find the uni that's right for you. Whether you're still exploring options or need that final piece of advice, stay tuned as we guide you on your journey to find your uni.

### **Shannon**

On today's episode, we're diving into Biosciences with Hannah and Liam. My name's Shannon and I'm a fourth year Marketing and Digital Media student that's hosting this podcast. I'm with Hannah and Liam. If you could introduce yourselves.

### **Hannah**

My name is Hannah and I am in my fourth year of studying Animal Conservation Biology.

### **Liam**

And I'm Liam and I am studying Marine and Freshwater Biology, and I'm also in my fourth year.

### **Shannon**

Nice! We're going to start with some warmup questions. How would you explain your degree to a 5 year old?

### **Liam**

So, I go out into the natural world and look at things, usually in the sea, and I write things down about what I see. I take what I write down back into a lab or just a desk and I put what I write down into a computer and then I do some magic with it and get some results. And that tells me things I didn't know about where I went and worked at.

### **Shannon**

Amazing!

### **Liam**

I did my best attempt.

Shannon

That is so fun. What about you, Hannah?

**Hannah**

I would probably have to say I'd look at how animals almost communicate or talk to each other, how they talk to different... I don't really know.

**Shannon**

How animals talk to each other?

**Liam**

That's hard.

**Hannah**

Yeah, I was going to say species, but that's not quite right.

**Shannon**

So, let's take a closer look at why you chose to study a bioscience subject. So, what drew you to your course or the bioscience subject area?

**Liam**

Do you want to start, Hannah?

**Hannah**

Yeah. So, there wasn't really any specific thing that kind of drew me to wanting to study it, but I grew up in quite a rural place and I've always been quite an outdoorsy person, so almost wanting to connect with things and wanting to understand why certain things happen. That's kind of what always drew me to it, and I've always had that kind of interest for the natural world. So yeah.

**Liam**

Yeah. I've also grew up in a rural setting and I really like biology in high school, although I wasn't very good at any other sciences. And yeah, I kind of came back to studying slightly later in life, I was like 25, so technically just about a mature student, which helped me in the financial side of things. But yeah, I did environmental management in my first two years at a college in Edinburgh and I was drawn to that because I knew people that had done it before me and yeah, when I was just sort of looking around and shopping around for different courses, that one kind of stood out to me as a good entry point and yeah. The environmental side of it, the natural side of it really, I was drawn towards that because I just wanted to find work that was, yeah, with nature and enriching.

**Shannon**

That's really cool! I chose marketing and digital media because I studied photography at college and I really loved the creative side of it and how hands on and practical it was. It's really how I learn, but I did a business course in my final year of that and was really interested in that, so I wanted something that kind of moulded the two together, really. Then when I find the course and I saw like, how practical and hands on it was and like, yeah, that sounds really interesting and it combines a lot of my different interests. And yeah, here I am.

**Shannon**

So, following on from that, so not many people might know what your course is or if they have, they might not be 100% sure of it. So, could you tell us something on your course that people listening might not know about it?

**Liam**

It doesn't involve as much lab work as you might think. Although I'm saying that as someone who has only done 3rd and 4th year, Hannah might have found a different experience in the first two years.

**Hannah**

There is a little bit more lab stuff in second year. I wasn't here for the first year, but I think it was quite broad in first year and there was like biomedical type stuff in first year and then it kind of gets a bit more niche as you move up.

**Shannon**

That's cool that you can make it specialised and focus on what interests you.

**Hannah**

But yeah, you can like kind of dip into it and see what it's like and then kind of choose where to go from it. It's quite good.

**Liam**

That might be something that people wouldn't know. Is that like, so our courses are technically different. We'll walk away with different degrees, but the vast majority of our classes are together, so they're kind of like sister courses, Animal Conservation and Marine and Freshwater, you just have sort of one or two different modules per year, right?

**Hannah**

Yeah, just two I think.

**Liam**

And then we also share a bunch of classes with the BioMed students and, well, not a bunch of classes like one per year, I think. With BioMed students and there's like people on a Biological Sciences route that do pretty much what Hannah just described, where they sort of specialise as the years progress. They get basically a choice of all the modules that are available to me and Hannah as Marine and Freshwater, and Animal and Conservation students and all the BioMed stuff as well.

**Hannah**

Yeah, there's a nice overlap, but depending on what you're mostly interested in, you can kind of choose where to go with it. So we've just got a slightly different interest in like what organisms we want to study or, you know, get into.

**Shannon**

Yeah. That's really interesting. That's really cool that you can kind of specialise as you go on and you can try out lots of different things. I definitely find that with my course as well. So we have lots of optional modules, but for me, what I didn't realise is how even though it's a very digital forward module, how much practical, like hands on making you do as well, so we've done app design where we had to physically make almost like a flip book or like a picture book type thing with lots of different bits of paper is if you were like collaging or scrapbooking. And I found that was really cool, having to like physically make something. I felt like I was back in like Nat 5 Art, I was having a great time. So I think that was something I didn't really realise would be part of my course, was the physical aspects of it, I suppose. Like when you guys are doing like lab work and stuff like that, it's not just, you don't come to uni just to do like the theory and the essays and reports and things like that, but you actually do a lot of practical elements. Which you may enjoy.

Do you enjoy the practical stuff?

**Hannah**

Yeah, big time. That's kind of one of the things that drew me to this course because I'm, as you said, I'm the same. I'm quite a visual learner. I quite like a hands-on experience and there's been like multiple field trips that we've gone into the field and done like, identification studies or looking at different things in different places and it's so nice to see what you're actually looking at, what you're going to be studying. So yeah, it was a big win for me

**Liam**

I like field work. But I'm not a fan of the lab.

**Shannon**

No, not a lab person?

And kind of following on from that. You said about going on field trips and stuff have either of you had a chance to do a work placement or study abroad or anything like that?

**Liam**

Yeah, I did. I did a placement last year during the summer I did an internship in the northwest, near Oban. Which wasn't through Napier, but obviously like being engaged in the course I was engaged with helped a lot in my successfully applying. Yeah. So that was like a month long residential.

**Shannon**

Nice. Did you enjoy it?

**Liam**

Oh, it's amazing. Yeah, it was super nice.

**Shannon**

And so, Hannah, have you had the chance to do a work placement or any study abroad?

**Hannah**

So yes, in third year we actually get the opportunity to go to the Algarve in Portugal, which is like a 11/12 day trip. And it's a really like, great opportunity cause you get to go with, not just your university friends, but people that are interested in the same sort of things that you are. You get to study and you've got the similarity in study basically and you all share the same interests, and it's as well as being really fun, it's really useful as well. It's just a really good time. We were staying right by the beach and we all had apartments that you could share with your friends and just had a really good time while studying. Just. Yeah. It's a really nice change up from just lectures. It's really good.

**Shannon**

Yes, definitely. It must be nice because at least, even though you're like studying, obviously for reports, assessments, that kind of thing that you still get some down time to relax with your uni friends, yeah, and experience life with them outside of the classroom as well.

**Hannah**

Yeah, yeah, there is a project that was wholly based on that trip, but it kind of meant that you got a bit of downtime before having to go through the submission process and getting writing and everything. So yeah, it's a nice time.

**Shannon**

Oh, nice, that sounds so lovely.

And how have you found studying for this course preparing you for the career you want?

**Liam**

I think it's given us a lot of good experience. The trip that Hannah just mentioned, that was only for the Animal and Conservation Biology students, but we all went to somewhere much more local, to Millport, which is on the Isle of Cumbrae, Great Cumbrae whatever it's called. And that was sort of one example of us going out into the field and sort of making observations, doing a group project, then working, to actually building teamwork skills. You're building skills in data analysis off of real world data, which is exactly the kind thing that employers pretty much look for. Also our payoff for not getting to go to Portugal is that we get to do boat training. So yeah, I mean it costs extra, but it was an affordable rate that the uni sort of negotiated with a provider. So yeah, next month I think we get to do Powerboat level 1 training, which is kind of like a ticket that would potentially open other doors for you.

**Shannon**

Oh, that's exciting! Very cool.

I've definitely found with my course as well because it's so practical and a lot of it is accredited by the Charter Institute for Marketing. It's really helpful careers wise. Like at the moment I'm doing a course in looking at AI in marketing and how beneficial it is, but also how not beneficial to the world is and that's accredited by like the Digital Marketing Institute. And that's really cool to be able to come out of the uni and say I've been accredited by all these places.

Yeah, like not all uni's get to do that. So, I think that's really cool. How did you end up at Edinburgh Napier anyway?

**Liam**

I started studying again when I was 24 with the Open University. I actually, haha funny story. I was interested in two of their access courses. There was one that was social sciences orientated. I was always interested in history and sociology and that sort of thing. And there was also a life science or STEM. It was a science, technology, engineering and math access module and I was really interested in both of them, and I couldn't decide. And I was walking to work one day, and I thought, I'm just going to flip a coin.

**Shannon**

Sometimes that's the best way to make a decision!

**Liam**

Yeah. So, I did, and it landed on the STEM course. So, I did the STEM course. It was very good. And then COVID happened, so I was looking for a way to survive and I decided that I wanted to go back to education. I applied for a course called Environmental Management with a college in Edinburgh, and did two years with them. It was very, very intense. I actually found coming to uni a massive step down in workload, believe it or not.

**Shannon**

Yeah, I completely agree.

**Liam**

Yeah, was that your experience also? HNDs are very, very demanding.

**Shannon**

Yeah they're rough.

**Hannah**

Yeah.

**Liam**

Yeah, I went from 14 modules a year at college, down to six at uni. Yeah, 6.

**Shannon**

Oh, my goodness. Yeah. Now that I think about it, it probably was something like that. I was at NESCOL in Aberdeen and yeah, we were probably something similar. Oh, my goodness.

**Liam**

It's a lot of work.

**Liam**

So then yeah, I did my two years there. And then I worked with the Student Association for one year. And at the end of it, I decided that I was kind of, I'd had my fill of the college I was at, and I wanted to move on to somewhere that had more resources. And yeah, I just needed a new place, basically. So I went through clearing, and I found this course at Napier and it kind of did a lot of what my previous course did, because I could have carried on, like I could have turned my HND into a degree. And I found that the course offered, it did much of the same of what I would have received at my last college, but better. It just looked like the resources were better, the teaching was better and the course was like up to date and yeah.

**Shannon**

So, Hannah, how did you end up at Napier?

**Hannah**

So I, yeah, I've probably got quite a similar story. So, I started out at college, and I set out to do a four year degree and I got about 2 1/2 years in and it got like, heavily disrupted by COVID, and it just wasn't very enjoyable. I wasn't really enjoying the material. I wasn't really finding it very simple like. Yeah, as Liam said, like the workload, it's quite a lot and it was a bit daunting at times. I wasn't quite understanding like the relevance of a lot of it and it was not quite fully suited to what I wanted to learn about. I'm quite animal focused, whereas it was a bit of a broader environmental focus. And yeah, after COVID I just wanted a bit of a change

Shannon

Yeah, that's fair.

**Hannah**

Yeah, the online system wasn't for me at all.

**Shannon**

Completely understandable, it was really hard.

**Shannon**

I was quite similar so I did a HND in photography at college in Aberdeen, and then like I was saying before, I really enjoyed the practical elements of it, but I also really enjoyed the business side of it and so ended up coming to Napier after I found the Marketing and Digital Media course, I felt like it really aligned with what I was interested in.

**Shannon**

But with that, how did you find adjusting coming from college to university?

**Hannah**

I found it pretty manageable. I mean, I think that the workload at college was probably more challenging for me. I found it a slight breath of fresh air as well just because of the difference in learning. I think like the teaching styles and techniques were quite different. Obviously, uni is quite like self-learnt, self-lead, but for me it was almost simplified, but I think maybe that because I was learning something I was really enjoying, I was really intrigued in and interested in. I wanted to learn more about the subject because before I felt like I wasn't fully committed to something. I don't think so. Yeah, I think being interested in something makes a huge difference. Yeah.

**Liam**



I think as well in my experience coming from college to uni, particular with this course is I like that we're not a big class. There's like 35 people in our classes and it means that you get a lot of the attention of your teachers, of your tutors. So, I think in that case you know coupled with this drop in workload, yeah, it was actually like really, really nice. Like you said, it was quite a breath of fresh to come to somewhere that's well-equipped and all the teachers at Napier, as far as I remember, are obliged to go through a diploma in teaching methods, so like pedagogy, you know, so they're all like, whereas at other places that I've experienced, it's academics that have to teach. And there is still a little bit of that at every university, like some PhD students just have to teach even if they have no interest in doing so and they're absolutely rubbish at.

Sorry I'm not supposed to say that!

And yeah, but all the sort of permanent teaching staff with Napier, they're all very good, they all make the teaching materials, all the vast majority of teaching materials are really good. And the Moodle pages are well laid out and you know the actual learning is well facilitated.

**Shannon**

Yeah, I 100% agree. I just can't believe it when we kind of figured out how many modules we were doing at college versus when you come to uni and you've got 3 a semester and you have so much more time and I think that's what's really enjoyable about it. Because you have all this time, you learn a lot about how you learn and what motivates you and what kind of study techniques work best for you with, as I felt in college, I was just kind of like constantly doing assignments.

**Liam**

Treading water, yeah.

**Shannon**

And yeah. It was really interesting and obviously kind of gave that base knowledge to figure out where I wanted to go. Yeah. Uni was definitely a big breath of fresh air.

**Liam**

Colleges like a whistle stop tour of like all of the context in which you might then zoom in to actually like your interests and then coming to uni was much more like yeah, it's much more like you've chosen more specific.

**Hannah**

Yeah, I think it's more specialised, isn't it? And then you're delving into that topic, you learn more about that singular thing that's actually more interesting to you rather than like zooming out and learning about something that has got 20 different elements.

**Liam**

Definitely.

**Shannon**

Yeah.

**Liam**

There's more freedom in the assignments as well, right? Because at college it was like, OK, here's the assignment. It's very specific. Everyone's doing the same thing., but don't talk to each other about it. Whereas at Uni I've found that it's a lot more free. You need to make a presentation that's going to last 10 minutes about a subject of your choice, and it's just like total freedom.

**Shannon**

Yeah, it's a lot more flexible. And that, yes, like for a lot of our ones, we get to. It's like pick a company, pick a brand, pick an advertising campaign, it's very much a case of you pick what interests you and that ultimately gets you a better grade because you're writing about something that you're passionate about and that motivates you.

**Shannon**

And that segues on very well to the next question. So what does keep you motivated in your coursework?

**Liam**

It's a hard question.

**Hannah**

So I think for me it's kind of...OK, maybe I don't have an answer

**Shannon**

Haha you can think about it. Liam if you want to go first if that's easier.

**Liam**

I have always struggled with being remaining motivated for studying. I think that, yeah it's tricky because like, I think we're still, we're the people that are still studying and would have been studying during COVID. I think there's still a bouncing back element, like there's still like a return to normality thing going on.

**Shannon**

Yeah.

**Liam**

In my experience, maybe it's because I've moved around a lot, but I don't tend to study with other people. I tend to study alone a lot, and actually when I've made a point of being like hey, like, even if it's with someone like a friend who's not studying, who does like freelance work or whatever and just like, just going and working together. Even if you're not working on anything to do with each other, it really helps to yeah, to keep yourself accountable. I also use a thing called Pomodoro, which helps. lot.

**Shannon**

Oh yeah!

**Liam**

It's basically just like a timer, that's like a little web extension that you press it and it's counting down from 50 minutes, I'm going to work for those 50 minutes. And then after 50 minutes, you get a 10 minute break. And like that helps a lot.

**Shannon**

It is very handy.

**Hannah**

I think I might have to get that.

**Shannon**

In terms of like apps and things like that that I use, the Pomodoro technique is really good. I use this little app, I think it's called Forest and essentially it's like Pomodoro and but every time you complete those 25 minutes or 15 minutes, you get a tiny little tree.

**Hannah**

Oh I've used that!

**Shannon**

And you build a little forest. It's adorable and honestly, there's nothing worse than having a break on your phone to go on Instagram and realising you've killed your tree. It's very sad.

But in terms of like motivation to be continuing my course and staying in uni and doing my course, like at the stage, graduation. We're all in fourth year and knowing that I can walk along that stage and I'm the first in my family to go to uni, I don't have family support or fancy connections or anything like that. And so being able to walk along the stage and say that I did this myself, I think is something that does really keep me going.

**Hannah**

Yeah, I mean, I just, I'd like a job.

**Shannon**

Yeah.

**Hannah**

The motivation to keep going and get a job that I enjoy, that's probably my biggest motivation. Just getting to that point, yeah.

**Shannon**

Yeah.

**Shannon**

So let's give our listeners some advice. What would you say to someone who isn't sure about picking a degree in your subject area?

**Liam**

So I would say if you're interested in Biosciences, if you're interested in biology, then there's a sort of range of degrees out there within that, and there are degrees that are much more focused on the microbiology, the chemistry, the sort of even verging into the physics of how life interacts with each other and how cells work and how biology works in creatures and in plants. And then there's sort of the ecology side of things, which is much more focused on systems, how everything interacts on like local and national and global scales. and then within that, there's like, there's like conservation. And this course is definitely more the latter. It's more about the ecosystem.

It's more about the conservation, it's more about field work and how to do field work and what to do with the data that you produce in the field and it's very skills orientated rather than academic orientated and actually my opinion that makes it much more employable. The skills are a lot more employable if you want to into academia then absolutely. If you want to get really into the science of things, it will progress, your career will go in that direction. And but yeah, if you if this course is much more suited to someone who's into practical science, than academics. And it's not saying that you couldn't go into academia from this, but it's definitely gearing you up for industry as well as that as well as academia.

**Hannah**

Yeah, very quite similar. Like I'm at the at the stage now where I'm starting to look at jobs and things and kind of scary time, but I'm at the end and I've kind of been looking at field ecologist roles, and applying for a field ecologist role from a similar environmental consultancies and things like that. A lot of that is very much in the field, hands on like sampling techniques, surveying techniques that we've used - we've been using for the,

for me, for three years. And each year we've gone out into the field and done stuff and actually having these hands-on skills is so good. I just think it will be so useful for the future and for getting a job.

**Shannon**

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I agree a lot of Napier's courses are very practical. That's why I chose mine. But the kind of practical things that you get to do are so industry specific. And all your lectures are very industry led and so that really allows you to, when you're going into the job field, you know these skills. You've learned these techniques.

**Shannon**

What would be your top tip on how to choose the right course for you?

**Liam**

I think you won't know it's right for you until you try it truthfully, but I think your best bet for informing yourself is to visit the place and really push to meet the people that are going to teach you. Because that is, that's like 80% of a course is like, who's delivering it? So yeah, go to the open days and find out who your tutors will be throughout the years and, even like, just try to pin down like hey, can I see what modules are you teaching this year for first year, second year, third year, whatever. At whatever point you're entering and see if it actually reflects your interests. So I guess maybe the top tip is to know what you're interested in/

**Shannon**

Yeah. And I think you learn that along the way.

**Liam**

You do! Yeah. It's hard to know before you, before you actually do it. Really. Yeah.

**Shannon**

I mean, you don't know until you'll try.

**Hannah**

With the open days they are super willing to show you like a little chunk of what you'll be doing, they'll happily show you some of the software that you might be using or some of like the lab techniques or infield techniques that you. So you can kind of get a bit of a grasp for it and ask yourself, is this something I'd like to do? And just like doing the research, I mean, I've found it really helpful looking on online just at the at the general Uni website having to see what was on show and what I could do so and then. Yeah, what sparks your interests.

**Shannon**

So, my top tip like looking back to when I was choosing where I wanted to go for uni and what I wanted to study, is to draw up a pros and cons list. So, I did this with all the courses that I was interested in and also the universities I was interested in. And you've got to look at not just the course, but like what is the Uni giving you? Whether that's what support is on offer, what societies and sports are there to join? What are the study facilities like? And things like that.

**Liam**

The Mental health support.

**Shannon**

Mental health support, that's a really big one. Yeah. What kind of things is going on in the city? Like, if you're choosing to move to a different city, I think there's so much to uni outside of just the actual course that you're doing. But when you're looking at the actual course, what are the modules, what kind of things are you interested in? Like you were saying, and do they align with your interests? But also what other kind of things do you get to do, like placements, work experience, trips, things like that? You've got to look at the full picture, I think. And it's not just what you'll get out of the uni, but what the uni can give you as well.

**Liam**

And one other tiny thing, like you can always pivot, or even if you're like 'I like this course, but I'd prefer this other bit that someone else is doing but looks really good'. I'm going to try asking, you know you can. Ask people about what they're learning. You need Napier is very accommodating when it comes to changing courses or modules.

**Shannon**

Yeah. Like I'm literally in fourth year and I emailed to change one of my optional modules like last week. I got to change it because I was like, I don't think I'm actually really interested in this one. Like even when you get to 4<sup>th</sup> year, you'll still be changing your mind, that's fine.

**OUTRO: Shannon**

Thank you to Liam and Hannah for joining me and chatting all about Biosciences. Best of luck with your 4th year and make sure to check out all our other episodes of the Find Your Uni podcast.