

# 2

## The academic environment



### developmental objectives

By the end of this chapter you should be familiar with:

- the structure of the academic year
- the modular structure
- teaching in Higher Education
- the nature of the academic environment.

### 2.1 The academic year and modular structure

Studying at university will be a new experience for the majority of you who are beginning a Criminology degree. However, studying in general should be familiar to most. While the academic year usually runs from September to June, as it does at school and college, some elements of the academic year may be structured in a different way from what you are familiar with. Increasingly, courses are commencing at different times in the academic year, some vocational courses are taught in blocks and there is an increase in the number of courses available by distance learning making use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs).

It is nevertheless still the case that the academic year in Higher Education is normally divided into either three terms, two semesters or three trimesters. Some universities have retained the traditional three-term year, which



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most of you are probably used to from school or college, while others have adopted a semester structure. Those institutions using terms usually follow a similar pattern to the school year in England and Wales, with each academic period being related to Christmas (December 25) and Easter which can fall at different times during March and April. It is worth noting that in many universities there are no mid-term breaks, although some do incorporate reading, consolidation or academic support weeks; these are when lectures and seminars do not take place to allow you the opportunity to reflect and read the recommended texts that will develop your understanding of the topics you are studying. It may also be the case that tutorials are arranged to deal with specific academic issues or career and personal development.

Semesters, on the other hand, run from September to January and from February to June, cutting across the Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, although there continues to be breaks for both. Trimesters include both semesters in the same way but add a third period of study from June to August; this is used more often for vocational programmes rather than traditional undergraduate degrees. Although we have previously stated that the majority of universities will begin the academic year during September or early October there are increasingly other start dates, for example in February at the start of Semester 2. This is often the case for international students who come from countries where the academic year can be structured differently from that in the UK. Although the academic year normally ends in June, at many universities you will not have any formal contact, such as lectures and seminars, after the end of May as this is when most of the programme administration and examination boards take place. For those courses that start mid-year, the course administration and assessment is more likely to be at the end of August.

## Terms

In universities, when the academic year is divided into terms you will either study modules or units over the course of the full academic year, or the modules will run for the duration of the term.

Terms usually run as follows:

Term 1 September to Christmas

Term 2 Christmas to Easter

Term 3 Easter to May/June.

While in Scotland the school year runs from August to June or July, the academic year in most universities runs from September to May, although usually the start date is a week or two earlier than in universities in England and Wales.

In universities when the academic year is divided into terms, you will either study long modules or units over the course of the full academic year, or short modules that will run for the duration of the term. These modules are intended to complement each other and help you to develop a sound understanding of the discipline of Criminology.

### Semesters

Semesters have been common in many universities since the middle of the 1990s. They commence in September in the same way as terms but are not fixed to the religious festivals mentioned above. There are usually breaks for these festivals with semesters continuing until mid-January or May.

Semesters usually run as follows:

Semester 1 September to January (15 weeks excluding Christmas break)

Semester 2 February to May (15 weeks excluding Easter break).

For those universities that divide the academic year in this way, it is more likely that you will study modules in two blocks of 15 weeks, including assessment, that is time set aside for the submission of course work and taking examinations. For example, you may study three modules in Semester 1 and three in Semester 2, and again it is important to remember that these are related to each other and not individual stages of your degree that are simply to be overcome.

### How is the teaching structured?

Whichever structure is in operation within the university you attend, you will be taught a number of modules (see Box 2a) or units covering specific aspects of the programme throughout the academic year. Throughout this book we will use the term 'module' but this refers to both modules and units. These terms are used interchangeably within Higher Education but many of you will be familiar with modular learning from school or college.

### **box 2a** What are modules?

Modules are courses relating to a specific topic or subject area; as mentioned earlier, they usually last for either one semester, one term or over the full academic year.

Each module will have a credit value and the accumulation of these credits will lead to the award of a degree.

As an example, consider a Level 4 module in Criminology; let us call it Crime, Culture and Representation, with a value of 20 credits. This may run during Semester 1, September to January. You could perhaps have 12 × 1 hour lectures supported by 12 × 1 hour seminars with an assessed essay to be submitted at the end of the semester. You need to gain a pass mark (usually 40% for undergraduate programmes) for the essay to be awarded the appropriate credits.

In the example in Box 2a, you would need 120 credits to pass the year and so you would study three modules with a 20 credit weighting each semester; all will have a similar format of delivery and assessment. Other credit ratings awarded are typically 10 credits (12 modules each year) or 15 credits (6 modules each year); at most universities you are required to gain 120 credits at each of the three levels you study.

There is a National Qualifications Framework in which qualifications are organised into academic levels so as you successfully complete your studies at one level you can progress to the next. One of the reasons for this is to ensure all qualifications are equivalent across each level. It is also the case that by grouping together qualifications, it is possible to make comparisons between the qualifications that potential students present as their entry criteria. These various levels in the main carry UCAS tariff points which are the basis of any conditional offer of a place at university. It is increasingly the case that students without the necessary entry requirements will be required to complete their studies at one level before progressing to the next academic level. For entry on to a degree the usual requirement is that you have level 3 qualifications. Table 2.1 indicates the types of qualifications being referred to.

Once at university, you progress through levels 4 to 6, which, in Higher Education, relate broadly to academic years, so the first year of your degree is Level 4 and so on when studying on a full-time basis. For those of you who choose to study on a part-time basis, it is possible that you will be studying different levels at the same time, although when you begin your degree you will take Level 4 modules as the prerequisite for your future study. Table 2.2 indicates the levels equivalent to degrees and postgraduate qualifications.

TABLE 2.1 Qualifications by level across the NQF and QCF to level 3

Level	Examples of NQF qualifications	Examples of QCF qualifications
Entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Entry level certificates</li> <li>– English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)</li> <li>– Skills for Life</li> <li>– Functional Skills at entry level (English, maths and ICT)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Awards, certificates, and diplomas at entry level</li> <li>– Foundation Learning Tier pathways at entry level</li> <li>– Functional Skills at entry level</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– GCSEs grades D-G</li> <li>– BTEC Introductory Diplomas and Certificates</li> <li>– OCR Nationals</li> <li>– Key Skills at level 1</li> <li>– NVQs at level 1</li> <li>– Skills for Life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTEC Awards, certificates, and diplomas at level 1</li> <li>– Functional Skills at level 1</li> <li>– OCR Nationals</li> <li>– Foundation Learning Tier pathways</li> <li>– NVQs at level 1</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– GCSEs grades A*-C</li> <li>– BTEC First Diplomas and Certificates</li> <li>– OCR Nationals</li> <li>– Key Skills level 2</li> <li>– NVQs at level 2</li> <li>– Skills for Life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 2</li> <li>– Functional Skills at level 2</li> <li>– OCR Nationals</li> <li>– NVQs at level 2</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A levels</li> <li>– GCE in applied subjects</li> <li>– International Baccalaureate</li> <li>– Key Skills level 3</li> <li>– NVQs at level 3</li> <li>– BTEC Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> <li>– BTEC Nationals</li> <li>– OCR Nationals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 3</li> <li>– BTEC Nationals</li> <li>– OCR Nationals</li> <li>– NVQs at level 3</li> </ul>

TABLE 2.2

Level	Examples of NQF qualifications	Examples of QCF qualifications
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Certificates of Higher Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTEC Professional Diplomas Certificates and Awards</li> <li>– HNCs</li> <li>– NVQs at level 4</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– HNCs and HNDs</li> <li>– Other higher diplomas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– HNDs</li> <li>– BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> <li>– NVQs at level 5</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– National Diploma in Professional Production Skills</li> <li>– BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Diploma in Translation</li> <li>– BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– specialist awards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Award, Certificate and Diploma in strategic direction</li> </ul>

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Modules that have to cover a lot of material may be double modules carrying a double weighting of credits. So, for example, a Level 4 module covering major themes on Criminal Justice that will be an essential part of your degree may be worth 40 credits; final year dissertations are also likely to carry double credits. Each module is assessed independently using a variety of assignments which could include essays, projects, presentations, case studies and exams; assessment will be discussed in greater detail throughout this book.

The modules you are required to study will usually be two types: core modules and option modules.

### Core modules

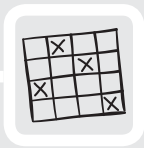
These are compulsory modules that you must study and pass in order to be eligible for a named Criminology degree to be awarded to you; these will be seen as the basis on which your understanding of the discipline is developed. Typically, core modules will focus on criminological and social theory, the criminal justice system, and systems of crime or social control, victimisation, punishment and research methods. Depending on the overall structure of your programme, some institutions may see psychology, politics, social policy or policing as key and there may be core modules in these areas. In your final year you will usually be required to produce a dissertation or research project in order to be eligible for the award of an honours degree and this will also be seen as core. Core modules are usually linked to Criminology subject benchmarks agreed with relevant academic bodies such as the British Society of Criminology. The benchmarks can be found at the following link: [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Criminology07.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Criminology07.asp).

### Option modules

These are modules that you can choose depending on your interests. This will not be a totally free choice as the options offered usually relate to the research interests or specialist knowledge of the lecturing staff that teach you. You will, however, be able to have some choice that allows you to develop an interest in a specific aspect of criminological study and to this end your dissertation or project in your final year can build on this. It is important, therefore, to give some thought to the options you are choosing to study. It is not a good idea to choose something because the assessment seems easy, for example, not having examinations. Most people would prefer not to do examinations but if you have a real interest in a subject you will perform much better in whatever assessment you do rather than in a topic that you don't find stimulating. It is worth noting that in some universities there are is not a great

deal of option choice in the degree; indeed some offer no choice and you follow a programme of study that is all core. The exception here is that you will usually have some choice about the focus of your final year dissertation or research project at all universities.

Activity 2a may be useful when deciding what options or specialist areas to study in your degree.



### activity 2a

Make a list of the different areas you are familiar with in the degree programme you are studying, for example, policing, domestic violence, youth and crime, drugs and crime, gender and criminal justice, race and ethnicity, crime prevention and the criminal justice process.

Once you have written your list, score the topic areas in relation to your enthusiasm for them: score one point for those that you enjoy and feel confident in, two for those you enjoy but find difficult, and three for those you enjoy the least. Where a module relates closely to areas in which you have scored one, you will be making a good choice as this is a module you are likely to enjoy and succeed at. Those scored two may be enjoyable but you will have to make more effort to succeed. However, this would still be a sensible choice. For those scored three, you are not going to enjoy the module and may struggle to produce work of a good standard.

It should be noted that this is a generalised way of choosing options and it may be that you have a career plan that will require you to study modules that you find difficult or less interesting. It is also a fact that some modules may seem less interesting before you begin to study them but the content, when you get into it, is stimulating, so it is important when making your decisions that you speak to staff who can advise you about the module. The golden rule here is not to leave option choices to the last minute; you need to think about them well in advance.

## 2.2 How will the modules be taught?

At university, modules are usually taught by a combination of lectures, seminars, tutorials and workshops that require personal, individual or self-directed

study. Some of these terms are used interchangeably and you will become familiar with the ways in which these terms are used within your own institution very quickly.

Lectures usually take place in a formal teaching setting; normally a lecturer will present material on a specific topic in a lecture theatre to all of the students studying the module and, unless the lecturer specifically invites comment, the normal etiquette here is to remain silent and take notes as the lecturer has to present a certain amount of information in a short space of time. The way in which lectures are presented varies and will be in a style that suits the lecturer. For this reason, it is not likely that you can expect all lectures to be in exactly the same format, or for all lecturers to provide you with the same supporting material. Increasingly, lecturers provide visual aids to support their lectures, using a range of technologies. This could include PowerPoint presentations, links to internet sources of information and podcasts. However, it is worth noting that different lecturers will use these resources in a variety of ways depending on the material they are presenting. It is important that you acquire skills that enable you to listen to the lecture while making note of the important points. While it may be that you are provided with an outline before the lecture or you may be given a handout containing relevant material at the end of the lecture, it is important for you to take notes to remind you of the key points. This will enable you to focus your reading and preparation and allows you to reflect on what was said in the lecture during your independent study time. Usually lecturers will provide you with reading related to the topic either in the lecture or in the module guide which you will have received at the beginning of the module. It is important to follow up the lecture by reading at least the key texts; this helps to develop your understanding of the subject and provides the basis for completing assignments and taking examinations. Reading for academic purposes and undertaking assessments are some of the key points that are discussed at length throughout this book; these are essential tools that will enable you to maximise the grades you get for your assessed work.

## Seminars

These are less formal learning areas and usually involve smaller groups. They are more like the classes you may have been familiar with in school and college and allow you the opportunity to discuss the lecture material in some depth. This is when your own preparation for seminars is important because you will be able to contribute much more if you have researched the topic well. A member of academic staff will facilitate the group but there is an emphasis on students making a significant contribution. The preparation you do following your lecture will enable you to make a positive contribution to



the debates; it is important that you do not feel diffident about challenging the views of others, although it is essential that you support your views with evidence from the reading you have done. (The importance of evidence in academic writing is discussed in more depth in Chapter 8.) This is not the place for populist debates as expressed in the media or for engaging in ‘casual’ conversations about the nature or extent of crime; you need to be developing academic arguments about the discipline. Within seminars you may be required to present discussion papers focusing on a specific question or issue; this is intended to be the basis for debate within the group and often helps in the preparation of essays. It is also becoming more usual for groups of students to make presentations within seminars that are assessed, and this helps to develop your skills in gathering and presenting information in a structured way. Presentations are discussed in more depth in Chapter 4, but it is worth emphasising at this point that the skills involved are recognised as key transferable skills by employers. It should be noted that in some universities seminars are referred to as tutorials although the aims and general structure are the same.



### key tip

Check whether there is a set question for the seminar discussion and prepare a plan for your discussion based on your reading.

## Tutorials

These sometimes take the format described as seminars discussed above. However, it is likely that you will also be required to attend individual or small group tutorials for academic support, personal development or pastoral support. This is becoming increasingly important for you as universities are required to provide the opportunity for you to develop a personal development portfolio (see Chapter 12 for a full discussion of this). Most universities will allocate you a personal tutor to support you academically and to help you with any non-academic difficulties that you may encounter during your programme. It is usually expected that you maintain contact with your personal tutor even when you feel that things are going well as this provides you with an opportunity to discuss your progress and reflect on your learning. The personal tutorial system is different in each institution with some allocating a personal tutor for the duration of your programme of study, while others allocate different tutors to each year of your programme. There may also be

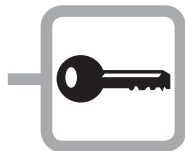
other arrangements depending on the way a programme is structured, for example tutors relating to placements or work experience. The tutorial system will be described in the student handbook, which you should receive at the beginning of your programme and which is often available on the VLE.

## Workshops

These are increasingly used within Higher Education and allow you the opportunity to work in groups dealing with the practical issues related to your degree. These differ from seminars in that there may be several groups working on different projects or case studies and there is unlikely to be a summary of your work at the end of the session. This is because you may be asked to use a workshop to develop a presentation and this could in some cases involve collaborative work. The workshop will provide an opportunity to seek advice in relation to resources, knowledge and research from your module tutor or workshop leader. Workshops can also be used as the forum for discussing and developing research projects. Here, you may have the opportunity to discuss the research methods you want to use and the way in which you can present your proposal and findings. You will also find this is where you may be asked to work on case studies which allow you the opportunity to apply criminological theory to criminal justice and crime control practice (see Chapter 10).

## Personal tutorials

These are often delivered on a one-to-one basis although some sessions may be group-based. This is when you will meet the tutor assigned to support your academic and personal development throughout your degree programme. You may not have many formally scheduled meetings for personal tutorials; rather, you will be able to request an appointment for support when you need it. Most universities ask you to see your personal tutor at least once each term or semester to monitor your progress.



### key tip

Make good use of your personal tutor. They can help you make the most of your time at university and often are required to provide references when you leave. The better they know you, the more useful their reference will be!

It is important that you realise that your personal tutor will not always have answers to your problems, but they will be able to direct you to those people who have experience in dealing with specific issues, such as accommodation, finance or health. These will be arranged so that you can have a one-to-one appointment to discuss your individual circumstances.

## 2.3 How much time will you be expected to spend studying?

The amount of time you are required to study is one of the most difficult things to get used to at university. The actual time you spend as a full-time student in lectures, seminars and tutorials may not be much more than 10–12 hours a week, and indeed, some universities may well require even less contact time. The amount of actual ‘learning’ hours that you are expected to devote to each module, however, will be much higher. This is where you begin to make use of your time-management skills and when you need to develop the ability to be a self-motivated student.



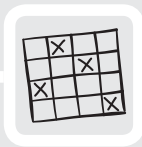
### key tip

Typically, for each hour of contact time with academic staff you will be expected to add at least two hours of self-directed study, reading, writing notes, preparing essays and preparing for examinations.

This is becoming one of the most difficult areas for students as they try to juggle a number of competing demands at the same time. As suggested earlier, it is the case that in many universities it is being reported that students who are considered to be full-time students are in fact balancing work as well as family roles with their studies. Increasingly, a significant proportion of you will be balancing paid employment with your academic studies, whether this is full-time or part-time work. This variety of competing commitments requires the development of disciplined and high-quality time-management skills. This means that you really do need to keep a diary either in paper form (an academic diary that covers the academic year rather than one covering the calendar year is ideal) or as an online calendar. There are of course many devices that allow you to maintain a record of your personal schedule; this ensures that you are able to keep a close check on your commitments. It is necessary that you begin to diarise your social, working and academic life to

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ensure that all of your targets and deadlines are met; if you do not do this, you will find yourself falling behind with your work. It is important to remember that the time spent outside lectures and seminars or tutorials can be as stimulating academically as the time spent in these more formal aspects of study. It is therefore a good idea to build into your schedule the opportunity to meet socially with your student colleagues. It is often in these situations that some of the best ideas are developed and the debate is at its most exciting. The opportunity to develop your understanding of the topics is immense and you can test out some of the perspectives you are learning about. Meeting with your fellow students in a social environment can often be the ideal situation for a lively discussion on the criminal justice system or on theoretical perspectives on crime and criminality.



### activity 2b

Using the grid below as an example, draw up a schedule of your weekly commitments. You need to be including those for academic study, lectures, seminars and tutorials, work and family. Also include your social or leisure activities. This effectively becomes your personal timetable.

TABLE 2.3

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9–10					
10–11					
11–12					
12–1					
1–2					
2–3					
3–4					
4–5					
5–6					
6–7					
7–8					

You may need to amend this grid slightly to fit with your own circumstances. It is worth noting that this is especially important for part-time students and those students returning to study after a number of years. Time management is one of the most important skills you will develop at university

as you will have periods of time during the academic year when there appears to be little or no pressure to complete work. You are unlikely to be asked to produce 'homework' in the way that you might have been at school or college. It is also important to note that the academic staff may be less freely available than your teaching staff at school or college might have been. This is because of the wide range of additional roles that they often have, such as administration, research, and contractual work outside the university.

## 2.4 Who are your lecturers?

At the majority of universities it is probably the case that your lecturers will contribute to the academic discipline. Indeed, in some instances your lecturers will be those people who are producing the academic texts you are using. Wherever you study, it is likely that many of your lecturers will have published research papers, research reports and conference papers. Most academics are actively involved in research and publications that contribute to the understanding of crime and criminal justice. It is important to remember that this activity is not in addition to the work that lecturers do in the university but is seen as an integral part of their role. This mixture of research and teaching is particularly important in Higher Education as the issues that are discussed in lectures and seminars can be informed by current research and are therefore based on the most up-to-date information available.

It should also be noted that as part of the quality process in Higher Education all institutions employ lecturers from other universities as external examiners. This often involves academics being out of university for a few days on occasions, which means that they may be less accessible to you at these times than they are throughout the course of the year. In addition, lecturing staff attend and contribute to conferences and engage in a variety of scholarly activities that mean their availability is not always open access on demand. It is worth noting that academics will respond positively to your enthusiasm for the discipline and will be keen to discuss the topic with you if you are informed and well read. It is good practice to make appointments and keep them, to communicate effectively and to ensure that, at an early stage, you inform the university and appropriate tutors or programme leaders of any problems that you are having. This ensures that staff can support you in your progress at university.

## 2.5 How should you study?

Adapting your learning style to meet the greater flexibility and freedom of Higher Education is one of the more difficult adjustments that new students

have to make. This is particularly the case when you have been used to a very structured style of learning. The construction of a personal timetable (Activity 2b) is important in providing yourself with the discipline necessary to study effectively and successfully. It will also allow you to prepare for your assessment in an ordered way as we discuss in Chapter 3.

Reading for a degree is a central feature of university study and you must support all of the taught content from lectures and seminars with your own independent study based on the recommended material presented by lecturers and tutors. Although your lecturers will direct you to key reading, over time you should expand this as your own interest and understanding of the subject material increases. As a minimum you need to read the recommended literature, but the more you read, the greater depth and breadth you can include in your assessed work. There is a skill to reading for academic purposes and this involves note-taking while you read. If you simply read an academic text in the same way as you would read a novel, you may fail to grasp many of the key issues included in the discussion. If done correctly, your reading will raise questions in your mind and you need to write these down so that you can expand your thinking as your understanding of the topic develops. This is a key part of the process by which you begin to practise analytical skills, which improves the quality of your assignments. This enables you to engage in the debates, while demonstrating your understanding of various perspectives and discussions in depth.

## 2.6 What will your time at university be like?

You should find your time at university enjoyable and if you apply yourself to your studies in an organised way you will make this an exciting and pleasurable time of your life. Those who structure their work can build in the various additional activities that help you to have fun while working hard. It is when you come under pressure that you feel you cannot control that the greatest problems occur. Students often claim to work 'better under pressure'; however, this does not mean leaving everything until the last minute! You should build into your schedule opportunities to mix with other students, join student groups and societies and engage in activities outside your degree programme. Some universities now have links with local groups that allow you the opportunity to do voluntary work; this can be a benefit when you begin to look for work as it is here that you begin to develop skills to add to your CV (see Chapter 12). Other examples include sports clubs and groups that share an interest in drama, music, debating and other specialist activities.

## 2.7 Coping with anxiety

Throughout the course of your degree programme there may be times when you feel anxious about your progress, your workload or about situations outside university. This may be related to assessment and in some cases to personal situations. While it is not the intention that we tell you how to resolve anxiety, or attempt to provide some form of counselling, using some of the advice given in this book can help you to deal with and prevent some of the situations that contribute to anxiety. This will help you to have a positive learning experience during your time in Higher Education. For most people there are times when they feel anxious because of circumstances that may or may not be of their own making. Even when the source of the anxiety feels beyond your control, there are many sources of information and support available within most universities. Many will have websites that give useful advice. One such site is sponsored by the National Health Service. This site can be found at: [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/studenthealth/Pages/Copingwithstress.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/studenthealth/Pages/Copingwithstress.aspx) and Box 2b lists some of the topics covered.

### box 2b Dealing with anxiety

The first signs of stress are:

- irritability
- sleep problems
- headaches
- dizziness
- loss of appetite.

Too much stress can lead to physical and psychological problems, such as:

- anxiety (feelings ranging from uneasiness to severe and paralysing panic)
- dry mouth
- churning stomach
- palpitations (pounding heart)
- sweating
- shortness of breath
- depression.

It would be nice to think that students when they come to university could spend three years full time studying and making friendships and relationships without any worries. Although some of you may suffer only minimal disruption, it is likely that there will be unforeseen circumstances that will

disrupt even the most well-structured routines. Your personal tutor is one of the first people you need to contact when any kind of problem occurs, whether you anticipate that this might happen or when it happens unexpectedly.

## 2.8 Summary

This chapter has sought to demystify the world of Higher Education and the key themes covered have been:

- the structure of the academic year
- how teaching and learning takes place
- adjusting to the demands of university culture
- identifying support networks.

Finally, considering some of the 'dos and don'ts' of university life listed in Box 2c below may help you to reduce any initial apprehension.

### box 2c University life – dos and don'ts

- Don't think you are the only person who is confused or misunderstands what is going on. Especially in the first few weeks at university, remember that others will be experiencing the same uncertainty and nervousness.
- Do be bold and speak to people, express your concerns and when you are confused ask for help!
- Do organise your time. As we have discussed earlier in this chapter, university is very different from school or college. In relation to work, you will be left to your own devices, so you will need to motivate yourself.
- Don't hand work in late – late submissions can receive zero grades.
- Do speak to someone if you have a genuine problem about meeting deadlines for submission of assignments; most universities will have a formal system to deal with this.
- Don't allow yourself to become isolated. The wide range of interests that are catered for means that there will be groups and societies for people with the same interests, for example, sports, leisure interests and special interest groups.
- Do approach your student union to set up a group if your interests are not represented. There are likely to be other students who will be happy to join.