



CASE STUDY 5

Title: Arts and Humanities - Transition to fourth year and beyond - The Final Year Conference

Three key words: Employability; Conference; Final year

Transition the practice supports –

1. Transition through university ('Being there, Staying there').
2. Transition out of the University ('Moving on from there')

Abstract: This project involved organising a conference for all final year students in the School of Arts & Humanities on the first day of semester. The aim is to focus their minds on the importance of their final year of study and to look ahead to what sort of career they might wish to pursue.

Description:

There were a few challenges to bringing this conference together. Colleagues were sceptical. Nothing had been done across the school on this scale before and many academic colleagues were sceptical about its value. Professor Watt helped to convince them of its merit by speaking passionately about the conference at a Learning and Teaching meeting. The numbers involved were challenging – 400-500 students had to be accommodated, which is beyond the capacity of our largest lecture theatre. Fortunately, University of Stirling has the MacRobert Arts Centre on campus which can hold this number and which has a range of breakout rooms available: this provided a hub for the conference. We wanted students to feel special and acknowledge the importance of the beginning of their final year by taking them out of their usual environment. Resourcing a conference of this size required a large number of speakers to run the programme. Our Careers Service agreed to run several sessions themselves and invited a number of external speakers. Academic staff from each discipline were asked to present a session for their own cohort on academic matters, which were important to final year students; many chose to focus on dissertation preparation. As always, we were running with a very limited budget. We agreed that there would be no catering at the event; we put together a conference pack of “goodies” from donations of items from employers and a few sweeties!

student transitions

adaptation adjustment alteration change conversion development flux gradation jump leap metamorphosis passage progress progression switch shift move evolution changecover transfiguration transformation

The format of the day is set out in the attached timetable. We wanted to start the conference with an inspirational keynote speaker, preferably an alumnus, who had gone far in life and had useful messages to inspire the students. At our first conference, we had John McLelland, ex editor of the Scotsman and in the past year, we invited Lord Jack McConnell.



Both gave very personal but equally inspiring addresses.

The morning is completed with two careers/skills sessions. The students can chose the sessions they wish to attend at the time of booking the conference and a synopsis is made available of each session. The sessions range from basic CV writing and interview skills sessions to developing presentations skills with an external trainer, with a background in drama, who puts the students through their paces.



A small exhibition is available over the lunch break with personnel from Careers Service giving careers advice and postgraduate opportunities.



We have learnt quite a bit from the first conference from our own experience of running the event and from student feedback, which we captured through Survey Monkey, shortly after the event. We made a few adjustments this year. These included incorporating a session on library skills with the whole cohort, as a key skill for success during fourth year. We also encouraged subject areas to be more creative in their own sessions in the afternoon and so we saw Film and Media run a mini-conference of their own, bring together recent alumni with students as a contrast to the “statesman” address earlier in the day. This chimed well with student feedback on the first conference where some students struggled to relate to the keynote speech, from a person old enough to be their father! Students wanted food. As we run the conference on the first day of semester, food outlets are stretched on campus. We noted Domino’s pizzas were handing out free pizza on campus and so invited them down to do so in the conference, at no cost to ourselves. We also abandoned the “goodie” bags which were time consuming to produce and were seen as irrelevant to the students. As the conference runs on the first day of autumn semester encouraging students to book the conference is challenging. We refined our on-line booking process for the conference and opened booking in early summer to capture students before they left campus for vacation, this worked well.

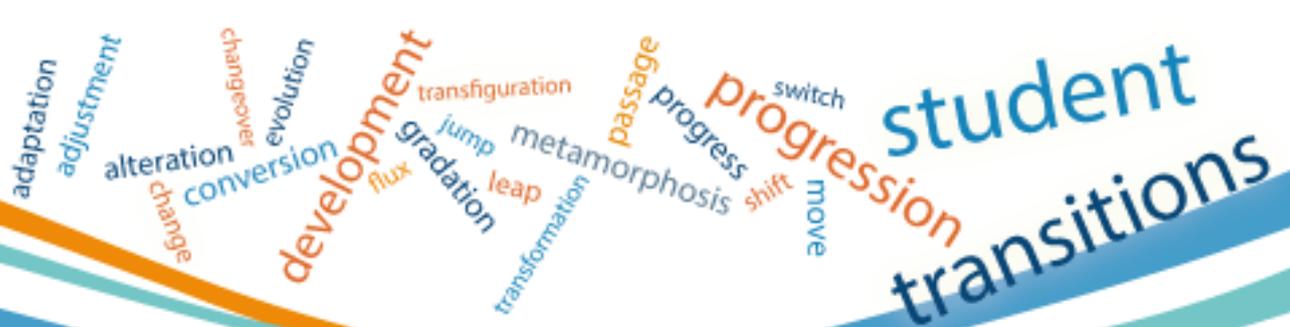
Overall, the conference has been a great success and has helped bring the School together as a body and raised the profile of employability with students and staff alike. It also gives final year students a moment to pause and reflect on the importance of their final year and preparations for life after graduation.

Areas for development include considering accommodating mature students, perhaps in a session considering potentially different paths available to them on graduation and ensuring that not all role models for the keynote speech are white, middle aged and male and maintaining relevance in the employability sessions. As a school we are integrating employability into the curriculum and all our activities to a far greater extent than before and therefore our students are becoming more sophisticated in their needs by the time they reach their final year. I anticipate that basic sessions on CV and interview will no longer be required at the conference in the coming years if the rest of our strategy is working and therefore the possibilities of introduction of more generic skills development will be possible.

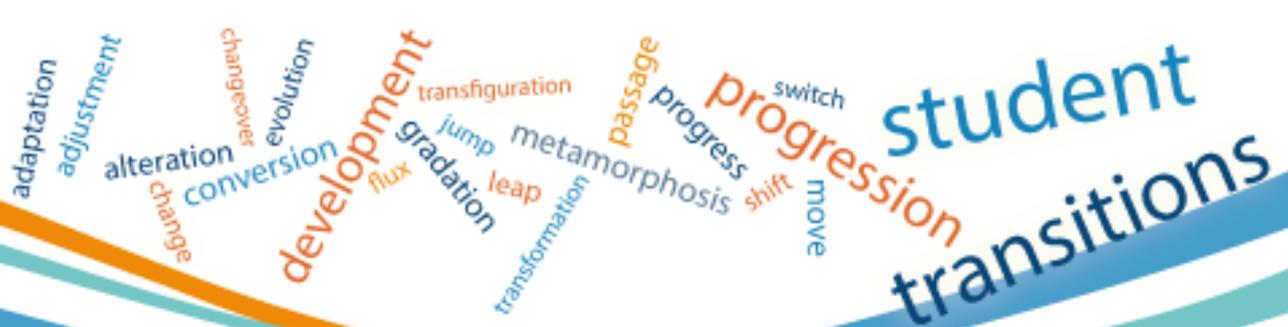
School of Arts and Humanities Final Year Conference

Monday 15 September 2014

MacRobert Arts Centre



09.00–09.20	Registration
09.20–09.30	Welcome & Aims – The year ahead and beyond Ms Alison Green, Director of Learning and Teaching School of Arts and Humanities <i>MacRobert Main Theatre</i>
09.30–10:15	Key Note Speaker The Right Honourable Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale First Minister of Scotland from 2001 to 2007 Alumni of University of Stirling <i>MacRobert Main Theatre</i>
10.15–11.00	Library – Supporting Final Year Success Librarian team <i>MacRobert Main Theatre</i>
11.00–11.15	Break
11.15–12.15	Careers Workshop 1 (see below)
12.15–13.15	Careers Workshop 2 (see below)
13.15–14.00	LUNCH – FREE Pizza (MacRobert Foyer)
14.00–15.45	Subject based workshop Communications, Media & Culture – 2B85 English – Playhouse, MacRobert French and Spanish – Workhouse, MacRobert History – Iris Murdoch Centre Law – Cottrell 3V2 Philosophy – Pathfoot, E26 Politics – Cottrell 2B88 Religious Studies – Pathfoot E9



11.15 – 12.15

Skills – analysing, defining and articulating
Teamwork (including Belbin games)
Interview Technique and Assessment Centres
CVs and Application (including using Social Media)
Postgraduate study and funding
Internships
Vision and Values
Presentations skills
Project Management
Life After an Arts & Humanities Degree

Evaluation –

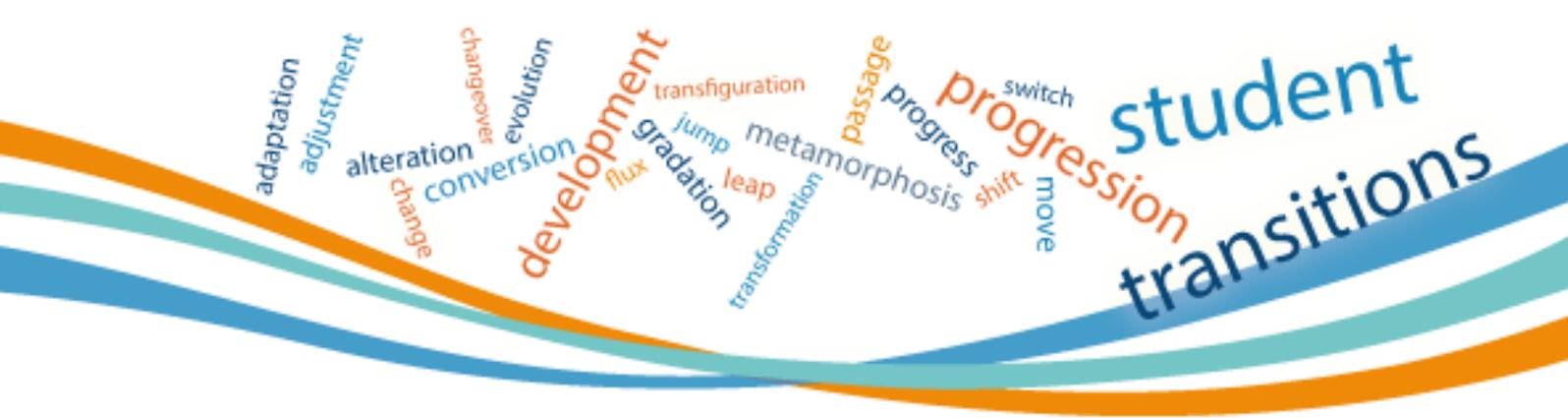
Each year we undertake a student survey shortly after the conference to evaluate the conference. Response is overall positive but responses do reflect the different stages of development some students are at in terms of preparation for employment, so while some students think the event is too basic, others think it is too high level. We are therefore attempting to provide a range of seminars with very clear descriptions to allow students to choose the right sessions for them. Here are some comments from the students themselves on the best aspects of the day:

“It was very well organised and the speakers made you feel very positive about life after uni. I liked how the speaker was a graduate from the University.”

“The workshop on "vision and values" - it was absolutely excellent”

“Focusing on our last year expectation and tips about how to start improving and boosting our working experiences: focusing on our skills and what we can offer to future employers”

“The fact that most of it was held in MacRoberts. Having everyone together to ask questions to directly. Being able to share ideas with peers.”



Recommendations - Plan early to ensure students sign up well in advance, managing numbers is challenging, particularly at the start of semester.

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