



## Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

**Title:** Edinburgh Exchange Event, University of Edinburgh

**Transition(s) the practice supports:** Out

**Abstract:** The Edinburgh Exchange is a new type of event, first held in December 2014, designed to provide a forum for businesses and the University to:

- Discuss areas of common interest relating to graduates' transition into the workplace
- Exchange ideas and learn from each other about supporting the development of the attributes which make the strongest students and also the most effective graduate employees.

The outcomes will inform and shape the University's strategies in this area and influence graduate development programmes.

### **Description: Background**

The Edinburgh Exchange is a new initiative, conceived to stimulate dialogue and ideas exchange between businesses and the University, with a view to defining and developing the attributes and mind-set that characterise capable students and effective [graduate] employees and influencing development strategies for both parties. Adaptability was chosen as the overarching theme for the first Exchange forum, specifically encompassing resilience, confidence and curiosity. Academics and employers were encouraged to consider the importance of adaptability as an indicator of academic and career success and share how they currently encourage its development throughout the University experience and in the transition into the workplace. The outcomes will inform University strategies in these areas and influence graduate development programmes.

### **Research**

There is a rich and evolving field of research exploring associations between adaptability and employability, and some of the key findings were summarised in a concept map (and short presentation) to situate the event - and ensuing discussion - in a wider context. See [Appendix 1](#) for a brief synopsis of current research.

### **Audience**

Invites were sent to senior University staff, including: Assistant Principals, Directors of



Teaching, College Deans (with a learning and teaching remit) and Senior Tutors, representatives from Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA), as well as leading graduate employers and the Centre for Recording Achievement (HEAR). Participants were issued with a brief inviting them to consider the issues from their perspective, i.e. institutional, employer or CRA.

### **Format**

The format was composite in nature, to allow for scene-setting, context and active discussion. There were some adjustment to timings, but the programme ran as follows:

3.00 - 3.10	Introduction and context (Professor Sue Rigby, VP Learning & Teaching)
3.10 - 3.20	Summary of recent research on theme of adaptability (Agata Wotjkowska, Educational Developer, Employability & Graduate Attributes)
3.20 - 3.30	Student view of University experiences which have strengthened resilience and confidence (Briana Pegado, EUSA President)
3.30 - 3.50	Employer perspectives (Standard Life & RBS)
3.50 – 4.00	How the HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report) can be used to evidence graduates' adaptability (Centre for Recording Achievement)
4.00 – 5.00	Mixed round table discussions

### **Emerging themes**

The following summarises the group discussions and emerging themes:

- Students struggle to translate their experiences into a meaningful, coherent narrative.
- How to challenge (students') perceptions of failure and re-calibrate meaning of success.
- Students should be aspirational but realistic – inflated expectations are career limiting (and may perpetuate feelings of failure and inadequacy).
- Alumni and early career graduates are the best messengers and offer meaningful, valuable insights that resonate with students. How do we mobilise our alumni network?
- What does it mean to be 'work ready' and where does the responsibility lay?
- Mentoring initiatives can foster adaptability and flexibility (Stanford 2020 model cited as good practice).
- The culture of positive reinforcement militates against risk-taking and compromises (students') ability to bounce-back from failure.
- Tension between exam/assignment rubrics (what is required to succeed) and self-directed learning.
- Benefits in creating and supporting co-curricular experiences and challenging dichotomy (where it exists) between academic endeavour and extra/co -curricular pursuits

### **Outcome and evaluation**

A full evaluation is underway and a paper will be developed from this as the Careers Service's contribution to the developing vision for learning and teaching. The subsequent report will then be circulated to interested parties.

### **Appendix 1**

Holmes, L. (2013) Competing perspectives on graduate employability: possession, position or process?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 38:4, 538-554.

Koen, J. Klehe, U., Van Vianen A. (2012) Training career adaptability to facilitate a successful school-to-work transition. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Vol. 81, December

2012, pp. 395–408. Available from:  
(<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000187911200139X#>)

O’Connell, D., McNeely, E., Hall, D (2008) Unpacking Personal Adaptability At Work. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*. vol. 14 no. 3 248-259. Available from:  
[http://www.uk.sagepub.com/greenhaus4e/study/chapters/articles/Chapter02\\_Article01.pdf](http://www.uk.sagepub.com/greenhaus4e/study/chapters/articles/Chapter02_Article01.pdf))

Walker, C., Gleaves, A., Grey, J. (2006) Can students within higher education learn to be resilient and, educationally speaking, does it matter?, *Educational Studies*, 32:3, 251-264. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03055690600631184>

The Future For Work: The Student Voice’, Employability Conference 2013 (Premier Sponsor: Higher Education Academy). Available from  
<http://www.agcas.org.uk/assets/download?file=3970&parent=1521>

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