



## Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

**Title:** The Principal's Go Abroad Challenge – Supporting Students through short-term International Experiences, University of Edinburgh

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

**Abstract:** The Principal's Go Abroad Challenge aims to empower more students than ever before to successfully participate in an international experience. Students are carefully guided through the full process, which includes;

- A range of publicity methods to attract as broad a cross-section of students as possible.
- Clear cultural and practical pre-departure guidance to prepare them for their experience.
- On programme support including reflective exercises to help them gain maximum benefit from their experience.
- Homecoming events to help them reflect on their experience and share it with others.

**Description:** The Principal's Go Abroad Challenge has been designed to enable more students at the University of Edinburgh to successfully transition through an international experience, combining funding opportunities for student led initiatives, such as the Principal's Go Abroad Fund, and bespoke programmes aimed at key student groups like the Widening Horizons Programme. All the programmes which jointly comprise the initiative are all carefully designed to guide students through 4 key transitions:

### 1) Transition onto a Programme

We use a range of methods to attract as diverse a range of students for our programmes as possible. This frequently involves finding ways of bypassing mental barriers to participation such as the thought that an international experience is 'not for someone like me'.

EXAMPLE: The Widening Horizons Programme carefully targets students who entered the University through a particular Widening Participation access programme. By identifying a key group of students, and contacting them individually to invite them to a range of information sessions we can send a very clear message that the programme is for someone like them,



enhancement  
themes

and thus open access to programmes they previously would not have thought possible.

## 2) Pre-departure – Preparing to Leave Edinburgh

Our compulsory pre-departure sessions, available both in online and face-to-face formats, and associated materials, such as our Go Abroad handbook, ensure that all participants are fully prepared for their experience. Preparation largely falls into three categories:

**PRACTICAL:** Ensuring that students are fully aware of all arrangements they need to make, from organising a visa and insurance, to what they can expect on the programme including any assessments they will be expected to complete.

**CULTURAL:** Ensuring that students are as prepared as possible for what their programme will be like, from simple things like the kinds of clothes they need to pack, through to more detailed information about local laws and customs.

**DEVELOPMENTAL:** All our Go Abroad programmes involve a compulsory reflective element to help students gain the maximum benefit from their experience. Prior to departure they're asked to think about the different skills and attributes they hope to develop during their programme, often using the Graduate Attributes Framework as a starting point.

Experience has clearly proven that the more prepared a student is for their international experience, the more they will get out of it and the easier they'll find dealing with any issues which do occur. Furthermore having explicit developmental goals helps their preparation go beyond simple experiential factors and ensures they derive maximum benefit.

## 3) Support While Abroad

All students receive dedicated support while abroad, and even those who go individually have access to a range of support services from a 24 hour emergency phone number, to online support and networking via email and social media.

**EXAMPLE:** Connect to India – this programme sent a group of 12 students with disabilities to India for 10 days, in partnership with Delhi University. Two group leaders from Edinburgh accompanied the group and the programme was very carefully planned and researched, with appropriate hospitals and emergency procedures planned for every part of the programme.

## 4) Homecoming

Often the transition easiest to overlook, it is very important to guide students through their return to the University and give them the tools and opportunity to reflect on their experience. We achieve this in a number of ways, from reflective assignments getting students to contemplate whether they achieved the goals they set themselves, to large homecoming events where they can share their experience with students who travelled on other programmes and the wider University community.

**EXAMPLE:** The Go Abroad Homecoming Reception was held in October 2014 for all students who had either participated in the Principal's Go Abroad fund or had been away on another short-term international experience through the International Office that year. This was attended by the Principal, staff, and students. Students shared their experiences in the form of PowerPoint presentations, photo exhibitions and videos.

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