

A TIME TO THRIVE

Successful Student Transitions

**Series 2 Episode 12
Voices in Transition**

Transcript and Resources

Welcome to Successful Student Transitions – A Time to Thrive

This podcast series is for you if you are:

- A student leaving full-time education and moving into the world of work
- A student moving to university or some form of higher education
- An educator, parent or counsellor supporting students as they take the next steps in their journey from school/college/sixth form into the world of further education or work.

For many students this represents the first big life transition. It can be an exciting and challenging time.

This podcast series provides strategies that develop self-awareness, understanding and the ability to thrive through times of transition.

This episode is part of Series Two: Voices in Transition, where we share peoples personal stories. You will here the voices of students and their reflections on their experience of transition and also of professionals who work to support students in transition.

This is the full transcript with links to associated episodes.

You can also access the show notes, resources and worksheets mentioned in the podcast by registering [HERE](#).

About Your Hosts

Elizabeth Gillies

Elizabeth is an Education Psychologist based in London who has worked in schools as a psychologist at the individual, group and systems level for over 30 years.



She has been fortunate to live, work and raise her family in America, Japan, and Australia so, unsurprisingly, she is interested in the challenges and opportunities of transitions.

Elizabeth is a CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) specialist. She works in schools, on-line and, near her home base in South London, incorporating walking with talking therapy in green spaces.

At the crunch points at the beginning and end of the school year, Elizabeth runs workshops for young people, teachers, and parents to help them understand common patterns of transition and how to use this knowledge to help themselves during this time and future changes.

Together with a great group of professionals in London, Elizabeth is growing a multi professional support service called Special Networks and can be found [HERE](#)

Elizabeth is a member of FIGT (Families in Global Transition) and with Louise and another FIGT member, is a co-chair of the FIGT UK affiliate. Link to FIGT. Connect via LinkedIn [HERE](#)

About Louise Wiles

Louise Wiles is a well-being, change and transition consultant, trainer and coach and the parent of two teens.



Alarmed by the recent explosion of well-being challenges amongst children and teens, especially during exam years and through times of change and transition. Louise believes we should be better preparing young people for life beyond school and university so that they can thrive through the natural highs and lows of life.

Louise combines her professional background in organisational psychology (MSc) and coaching, with her expertise as a wellbeing, positive change and strengths practitioner and her personal experience of life on the move, to develop training courses and coaching programmes that help her clients prepare for, and thrive, through the challenge of change and transition.

You can connect with Louise on LinkedIn [HERE](#)

Website [HERE](#) and contact Louise [HERE](#)

Louise is also the author of ***Thriving Abroad: The Definitive Guide to Professional and Personal Relocation Success***

Transcript

Introduction

Welcome to Successful Student Transitions - a Time to Thrive

Life is full of change and resulting periods of transition.

And some of life's big transitions begin as students as we move through the educational process and then on to the world of work or further education, university, and independent living.

If we can learn as students how to thrive through transitions, we will acquire invaluable skills that will support us through a lifetime of change and transition.

So, if you're facing changes in our life as a student, listen on as we share our insights and suggestions to help you thrive in a world where change is the only constant.

Welcome to episode 12

Welcome to Successful Student Transitions. In this podcast I am excited to be talking to Ben Holmes. Ben shares his experience of two big transitions, the first, a move to university, the second a move to Madrid for his year working abroad.

Listen out as Ben talks about the challenges and issues of transition that you may relate to, such as homesickness and feeling the pressure to make friends. You'll probably also notice the enthusiasm he felt for his course and how having clarity around why he was making this educational choice really helped him to feel engaged, motivated and ultimately helped him to settle.

Ben has quite a bit to share about the value of routine - how do you react to this and what you feel about the importance of routine in your life.

As Ben goes on to talk about his move to Madrid, he reflects on how the university transition experience helped but that the move to Madrid was also a whole new level of transition. As Ben describes the challenges, especially the bureaucratic ones there is a recognition of how difficult it was, but then also a sense of pride in having made it through recognising the life lessons it all has brought.

As you listen to this conversation, note what resonates with you, perhaps ask yourself - what are you learning through your transition experience and how has your experience been similar or different to Ben's?

Louise Wiles 02:50

I'm really pleased to be here today and welcoming Ben to this conversation, Ben. Hi.

Ben Holmes

Hi, Louise.

Louise Wiles 03:00

It's really great that you're here. And I'm really looking forward to this conversation. And Ben is currently a student at University, but he's also currently on his year abroad. So we're going to be talking about two transitions, well perhaps more I don't know Ben. I'm thinking in my mind two transitions, one to university, one to a year abroad. And I'm really interested to hear about your experience in that sense. But would you like to start by introducing yourself, Tell us a little bit about where you're at university, what you're studying, and what you're doing currently in your year abroad?

Ben Holmes 03:35

Yes, absolutely. Well, first of all, thank you, once again, Louise for inviting me to be on the podcast. It really is, you know, a real privilege to be here. So yeah. So I'm Ben. And I'm currently in my third year of studying modern and mediaeval languages at King's College, Cambridge. And as you said, I'm currently on in my third year on my year abroad in Madrid. So I'm currently working as an English language assistant in a bilingual primary school, here in Madrid.

Louise Wiles 04:00

Fantastic, fantastic. And just to share, I'm so excited that you're in Madrid, because I lived in Madrid, many years ago, that was my first transition abroad. So yeah, that was the first time I'd moved to live abroad. So I'm probably going to relate to quite a bit of what you say. Lovely city, great city, really, really love it. Okay, so Ben, let's start with the first transition or big transition you made, which was from home, I presume? Sixth form? You were at the day school or were you boarding?

Ben Holmes 04:30

Yep. Day School? State Sixth form

Louise Wiles 04:32

So let's start and talk a little bit about that experience if that's okay, with you? Share a bit about what went well, what was good about that transition, perhaps what challenges and struggles were as well,

Ben Holmes 04:40

Absolutely. So I was, you know, I come from Bristol, and very much, one of the motivations behind me going to university was obviously, you know, I loved French and Spanish and wanted to study that more, but equally, I wanted the independence and the personal development that comes from moving away. So I was, you know, when it came to looking at universities, you know, I wanted to go somewhere that was a bit away from home. So that meant that I'd live away from home and obviously, so, when I started my first year, and to give a bit of context, it was October 2020. So you know, in the middle of the pandemic, which I'll talk about in a moment. I remember being generally really, really excited about going to university and, you know, lock down, though, you know, finishing my studies prematurely actually gave me a bit of breathing space to kind of fall back in love with my subjects, and

when I actually arrived at Cambridge, I was really, really excited. I think as well, looking back, you know, I was a little bit naive, obviously, because I'd never moved away from home before. And, you know, I think I underestimated the challenge. I'd been on many school trips before with school, you know, abroad on my own. So I was very much like, you know, I'm used to being away from home, and, you know, I'm used to being independent. But actually, you know, what, I really was a little bit surprised, actually, at how much of an upheaval it was, initially, obviously moving away from home for the very first time. And I remember saying goodbye to my parents on that first weekend was, really, really quite challenging. But generally, what surprised me, and was actually how quickly I did find my feet actually, it was much, you know, as a challenge and upheaval as it was, I very quickly established routines, and, got into the swing of things relatively quickly. So, and I also, you know, surprised myself, how much I pushed myself socially, obviously, this was a massive challenge given the pandemic, you know, there were so many restrictions on socializing and actually, one of the things that I really struggled with in my first term was homesickness and loneliness, but because I was someone who followed the rules, and due to the COVID situation, you could only interact with the people you live with. And, you know, the people I live with, were lovely. And I was so lucky with that, and we did, you know, become very close and things but, you know, in the evenings often and you know, my first term I remember from, you know, being in my room not having much to do because of the COVID situation. But what all of that did was it really for me reinforced the importance of you know, staying in touch with my family and friends and that was something I do think I did very well when I moved to university, you know, I maintain regular contact with new friends and family and that those connections really, really helped me as well. And actually, you're going through that, you know, periods of you know, upheaval and you know, being for the first time on your own really, when I moved to Madrid, for example, the fact that I was on my own didn't faze me as much. So, you know, you have to, you know, by pushing yourself, it increases, you know, your tolerance thresholds, and it means that, you know, you do become more resilient. So, you know, overall, it was challenging at times, but equally, you know, immensely rewarding. And, you know, I will never, ever, ever regret my decision to move away from home, if anything, I think it made me grow, you know, so much as a person. And made me who I am today, really, so,

Louise Wiles 07:54

Fantastic, well, great insights there. And it's really interesting, listening to you speak and thinking back on some of the podcasts we've done so far. And so I just want to get right back to in fact one of the first thing that you said there, which was about, you were excited to read the subject. And also your reason for going to university. And I think this is a really important point that I want to pull out from this conversation, because that's all around the purpose, and having clarity about your why. And I know, from reading and speaking to some students, that's not always the case. So, I just think it's really interesting to underline that and to just say, and ask you, you know, how important was it to you, psychologically, to know, really clearly why you were there and what you wanted to get from the experience?

Ben 08:40

No, it's a really excellent point. And for me, it was so so so important, you know, for me, having that, clarity of the direction that I've chosen, I think that's what's really important. If going to university, going to study French and Spanish at Cambridge was something that I wanted to do, I was the driving force behind that. And I think that meant that when I was there, not only was I, so engaged and motivated,

you know, to to, you know, dive into all the work and things, but it meant I had that clear purpose. So, you know, when things you know, were, you know, a bit challenging getting used to, you know, I think, academically obviously, it was a significant step up. But in terms I really enjoyed engaging with all of my, you know, papers and things right from the get go. And I think that really helped me settle in having that clarity of direction, that purpose, you know, and as I said, thanks to that kind of period of lockdown that didn't six months outside of the mainstream, having a real time to reflect and fall back in love with my subjects, I think was really, really helpful. I arrived at Cambridge, very much with a very clear sense of why I was there. And I was like, you know, I can't wait to explore so much about, you know, French and Spanish culture and language and everything. And that really, it was that purpose. And I think I am someone, you know, one of the things I learned from moving to university is actually, for me, I need, purpose, so you're absolutely right, that kind of that intrinsic motivation that was the driving force behind my decision to go to university really helped me remain grounded. You know, I'm definitely helped the transition,

Louise Wiles 10:11

Brilliant, so clarity around purpose for the subject, but also around what you hoped to achieve, personally, in terms of developing independence, and that aspect of university experience as well. And so then the next thing you, a bit later on you talked about routines. It's funny, I have a bit of a love hate relationship with routine, because, too much of it, and I think, 'Oh, this is boring.' But equally having spoken to a lot of students, yeah, I begin to realise that routine is important. Can you talk a little bit about what routine gives you

Ben 10:46

Definitely, I think, one of the challenges that I had moved away from home for the first time was decision fatigue, because, you know, you are very much you're making a decision about everything, you know, from how you will because, you know, depending on the structure of your geography, degree you may have a lot of non contact time and things and you're having to, you know, really take control of your own work, but equally, the personal decisions of, you know, doing your shopping, planning your meals, all things like that, you know, socialising as well, you know, money not managing your time. So, for me, routine, you know, through university, you know, I learned that routine, for me is key, one of the reasons is it takes those decisions away, if I know that, you know, I get around this time every day, and, you know, I like to finish work, you know, about this time, and you know, that, that helps me, plan my day, it makes decisions for me. It also gives me stability. And I think, you know, when you're going through an immense pain about people having that stability is really, really important. And I think as well, it gives you a sense of control. For me, you know, being you know, knowing what I'm doing is so, so, so important, and routine was really helped me in that first term, you know, to, you know, be positive and, you know, just to you know, manage my time very effectively. I am someone who, I'm not never constrained by my routine. So there was always flexibility, you know, if, for example, someone's like, oh, you know, do you want to, you know, go out tonight? Well, obviously not during COVID but, you know, do you want to do this tonight, stuff like that, 'Yeah, absolutely, I would love to', I can change my plans, you know, last minute. So with that flexibility built in and things, which is important, but fundamentally, you know, it helped me stay grounded, and just know what I was doing. So yeah, I think routine, finding my own routine. And that's the great thing about university. For me, I like to start work about 10am and finish at five or six, and I'm done for the evening. And, you know, going socialising and

things like that, that's how I work best. And I'm able to do that at university. Equally, there are some people who prefer, you know, work in the evening and overnight, and you can do that. So, I think that, you know, and experimenting with, you know, things as well, I mean, for me, I knew that I don't work well in the evening, so never tried doing that. But University as a time for kind of trying things out, you know, and things but you know, I also think routine, it prevents things from being overwhelming, as I said, linked to decision fatigue, I, you know, got into the habit of you know, when I finished work during the day before, looking ahead to the following day on my calendar, writing down what I had, planning assignments I was going to do and stuff, you know, that that just really helped me, you know, so in the morning, I knew what I was doing, and had that purpose?

Louise Wiles 13:12

I can hear that. And the kind of sense of comfort, I guess that comes from knowing what, and I remember watching during the sort of COVID years watching a discussion about some students who were suffering from a small element of depression, anxiety through that time, you know, and people in their rooms and everything, and one of the guys had just completely lost, all sense of routine. And because he could do anything whenever he wanted to do, he kind of wasn't doing anything, it had flipped completely the other way. So that for me underlines how important, especially when you're living through that COVID experience, but you know, still in normal times how important it is to think about that, and to build the different elements that you want to build into your life. You know, no one is dictating what they must be but just to be conscious about it. And that kind of brings me on to thinking about friendships and relationships, that's one of the big challenges and particularly for you during COVID time, because you couldn't get out and do what you would normally be doing. But I kind of think that because there is this kind of great big relationships fest at the beginning, you know, with Freshers Week in normal times, and you know, 'I need to make friends, I need to be part of this in group and get involved in this', it kind of can take over and your whole being becomes about friendships and doing the social stuff. And then the rest suddenly gets forgotten, lost. And not scheduled in perhaps not so much at Cambridge because there is probably a bit more of a structure to what you're doing. But I think depending on the course, this is an observation I've made from talking to students, you know, some who have very quite structured courses, perhaps because of doing a science degree, and they have labs and there's more structured elements to their week, but then perhaps more on the art side where you, you perhaps have more freedom about what you do and when you do it, it can take over, the social side can take over? I don't know, has that been an observation you've made?

Ben 15:14

I agree with you. That's absolutely, you know, I've seen that. For me, in first year, my degree actually was, I think it was kind of a halfway point, you know, there was you know, a quite a bit of contact time. And there was quite a lot of structure you know, it was very regular, you know, we classes would repeat every week or every fortnight, second year that was different than in first year. But, my timetable was very regular. But I completely agree about that kind of pressure in freshers to kind of you know, make your lifelong friends. I very much, you know, felt that pressure a little bit, you know, it's kind of one of the many, you know, kind of myths that exist about going to university and things that, in Freshers week you know you meet your friends for life. I met some brilliant people it was obviously for me again, it was different with COVID. We didn't have Freshers week. But you know, the people that I met in my first term, you know, we're really really, you know, great people, but to be honest with you my real friends

that I've made at university it took quite a bit of time because, you know, you just, through doing, you know, clubs and joining societies over the course of your degree, you know, you just happen to meet people who know someone who will be similar to you and things like that. So, I made my, you know, the people I'm, you know, regular contact with now from university are people I'd say that I met, you know, towards the end of first year and actually, through my second year, really, you know, I'm still meeting them, like, you know, being on my year abroad people from Cambridge and different colleges who I've never seen before, you know, or might have only had a few classes with something, have message me and said I see you're in Madrid, would you like to meet up? And actually, you know, founds out that, you know, we're actually you know, a really, really good friends. So, I think, you know, friendship is something of a university that things just happen really, you know, you will always, I think, from my experience of having seen the experience of my friends, you will always find people, you know, like, like that, as I said, you know, for me with COVID, you know, first year was a bit of a write off with that, still met some lovely people that I was living with. So you know, really, really grateful for that. But um, you know, it, you know, you may meet you know, in Freshers week, you know, you may meet the people who, you know, you kind of get to spend all your time with, but I think, you know, a lot of the time that doesn't happen, you know, you tend to, you know, it takes a bit of time to meet people, when you discover what you enjoy, and you start doing that, you know, that's when, you know, things like that happen. So, yeah,

Louise Wiles 17:22

I think that's lovely, because that really underlies the importance of a, being open to new friendships and, and making that connection with your interests, because often, that's a source of, you know, like minded people. But also knowing that your friendships evolve over time, and you know, things will change. So it's never a done deal. And I think that's really important for anyone who's listening and feeling perhaps, 'oh, my friendships aren't quite right.' Just keep on making those connections, keep on doing the things you enjoy, and that interest you and through that, as long as you're friendly and chatty and open to friendships, you will make friends, that's for sure. Yeah, yeah, really important point. Thank you for sharing that. Okay, I don't know whether I asked you this question. But what surprised you, aas there anything about your experience that surprised you, obviously COVID, but what else about the university experience taking COVID I suppose?

Ben 18:19

I think there are certain things that surprised me about myself actually, I really positively surprised myself with actually how much I pushed myself socially. You know, at secondary school, I was very much someone who you know, was, you know, a relatively reserved and wouldn't you know, go out of their comfort zone too much. Whereas when I went to university, I was really open with people and my attitude was always was if someone invites me to do something as long as it's not, you know, dangerous you know, I'll you know, I'll say yes. And that really helped actually have an attitude it meant that you know, I met a lot of different people you know, as many as I could really in my first year even my second year, as you said, you know, if you're just in you know, nice open person, you'll get on with people, it may take you a bit longer to find the people who you really really click with, but you know, you'll find people you can spend time with and things, so that really surprised me positively. On the

other hand, I think one thing that surprised me it was actually the scale of upheaval that it was moving to university. I think I very much went in, as everyone probably does, you know, you know, you're not aware of it because you've never gone through, well, I hadn't gone through and that period of upheaval before because you know, you're moving to a completely different you know, place you're in a completely different system. You know, for me, obviously I you know, I wasn't you know, with my family or anything, you know, I didn't know anyone at Cambridge when I started so it was - I remember actually arriving on the first day that we got there with my parents, I remember going into my room and suddenly I felt this real, it really hit me physically like in my stomach, that kind of you know the nerves 'oh my god, like, I'm going to be left here', you know and my parents and that really, I did find that quite overwhelming to be honest with you and I wasn't expecting that and actually prior to going to university I'd never had kind of like physical stress like in my stomach and things like that, like I'd never you know had that before, but to be honest with you again, I was really really surprised by how quickly I did find my feet through you know, maintaining routine or through you know, engaging with you know, university life and things and through maintaining contact with my family and my friends. It certainly made things easier so I didn't have you know, it wasn't overwhelming for the entirety of things. I think that I adapted, actually that's another thing that surprised me how quickly I adapted to life away from home and you know, to things like that, so again you know the first days when I arrived and stuff, you know a little bit you know, rocky, getting used to everything but, very very quickly once term began and once I met people, ended up all being fine.

Louise Wiles 19:12

Brilliant. Thank you for sharing that. Is there anything you would have done differently?

Ben 20:53

I yeah, there is actually, I think not putting so much pressure on myself I think because you often you know hear these kinds of you know, myths about you meet all your friends in freshers week, that fear of missing out I think, you know, I am a very self-critical person, but I think if I were to do the university transition again, the one thing that I would have done differently is not being so harsh on myself, you know, obviously with COVID and things it was really, really difficult to meet people and as I said, you know, looking back, I did struggle with loneliness in that first term, which was a product COVID had it not been for it, I probably may not have been that. And I remember at times being quite critical of myself thinking oh, you know, I should be making more of an effort, you know, I should be, you know, doing, you know, all those sorts of things. I think I wish I hadn't been that critical of myself, because, you know, looking back now, you know, I've made some brilliant friends over the course of the past, you know, two and a half years, and those have just happened, you know, so I think just knowing that, you know, things will all fall into place, and everything will all be fine. I think it would have helped me, you know, not put so much pressure on myself to kind of live the experience that everyone expected, you know, like, kind of glorified experience of, you know, when actually the reality, you know, there are immense highs, but equally, there are challenging points, I think. So not being not being if I, you know, if I wasn't feeling great, you know, one day or something, like not being harsh on myself, you know, that's normal, you know, we all go, you know, ups and downs in life and things. And as long as it's not a sustained period of, you know, depression or something like that. Actually, that's normal, not to be feeling, if you are just feeling one evening feeling a bit down, that's fine. You know, you're not doing anything wrong, that's absolutely fine. So, yeah, just being less critical about things like that. Really.

Louise Wiles 22:37

Yeah, I can relate to having spoken to many students about the FOMO, the fear of missing out. And I think that it's particularly in that first term, that the real sense, isn't that, oh, no, perhaps you're not feeling brilliant, and actually what you really would like to do in the evening, on your own in your bedroom, watching a rubbish film, or a comforting type of film, but you feel you've got to get out there because you might miss something, the reality is you probably won't miss anything important and if that's what you feel like doing then great. Sometimes it's about just being, rather than pushing all the time,

Ben 23:10

I think completely agree with that. I think it's really important. Like to just listen to yourself and to what you want to do. And I think, you know, obviously, it is important to push yourself, and you know, you know, to meet people and things like that, but equally, so listen to yourself. And you know, if you're not feeling you know, up for it, you know, don't feel pressured to do it. You're absolutely right.

Louise Wiles 23:38

Yeah. Yeah. Brilliant. Well, thank you for that walk through your transition to university. So let's move on then to now you've moved for your year abroad. Are you in Madrid for a year? Or?

Ben 23:41

Yes? For the whole year, yes

Louise Wiles 23:43

Okay, so tell us about that experience, in terms of just explain what you're doing in Madrid and the work you're doing. But then also, let's start with some of the similarities. What, from what you've learned in terms of your transition to university, has been helpful and similar in the transition to this new experience in Madrid?

Ben 24:06

I'm currently working as an English language assistant through the British Council. And the reason why I chose that path was because I want to, you know, be a teacher wants to work in education, the future, I could not bear another year of studying, I wanted a break. And, also, again, I felt that with the British Council, it was a more structured approach in the sense that, you know, you'd get, you know, more support things like that with the bureaucracy. And, you know, I have to be honest with you, my university transition has really helped my year abroad. The year abroad has been a whole new level of transition, you know, being in a completely different country. But there have been, the knowledge, you know, kind of having had the experience of going to university and actually, you know, knowing that I settled in, well, it took a little bit of time to get used to things, but it was all fine in the end, and I met people and, you know, I had a good time, I think having that knowledge really reduced, you know, some of the worries that I had in it before going to university. When I arrived here, I wasn't worried about, you know, meeting people, you know, I wasn't worried about, you know, finding my feet really, I knew, having had that university transition, I was under no illusions as to what a period of upheaval it would be moving to a different country. And certainly, in the first couple of weeks or so, I remember, as I said,

feeling that kind of, you know, like that physical anxiety in my stomach and things like that, which I hadn't experienced since going to university for the first time. The differences obviously were that I was in complete different country. Following Brexit, you know, things are much more challenging when it comes to bureaucracy and things, and very much the attitude of, you know, the, you know, all the different parties involved in the place of the British Council, you know, the Madrid educational authorities is like, you're not our responsibility, you know. So it was very much, it felt like, whereas at university, you do have that support network, you know, it felt at times here, maybe that's just my own experience, but that it was very much I was on my own, you know, in terms of navigating this quite intimidating, you know, bureaucratic, you know, system. I've been really, really lucky in the sense that, you know, the people that I'm living with, and, you know, my landlady and her family have been really, really supportive, and that has really, really helped. So I have had that support network. And since I started the school, the teachers have been really, really lovely. I'm actually one of six assistants in the school, which is great. So it means that we have that little community as well. So, everyone has been really, really supportive and you know, things like that. So, in terms of the decision fatigue, and again, a challenge like going to university, that has also been, you know, a case here, more in the sense that at university, I'm used to, we have this brilliant dining hall, I'm used just to everyday, you know, whenever I want to just rocking down there getting my food and coming back to my room not not really having to be thinking about oh, yeah, you know, what do I need to buy, things like that, I've had to do that this time. And also just, you know, I'm not living in university accommodation, so you know, having to, you know, make sure that, you know, I'm following you know, the terms and I'm having a rental agreement, which I've never had, you know, had before, and just, you know, things like that, and also just being an employment really. You know, I've done a lot of volunteering in secondary schools before, but it is, you know, it's a different dynamic when you are receiving a salary, you know, for your work, and, you know, you know, learning to kind of, you know, behave, you know, well act in that kind of professional setting, as well as a difference from going to university and things but something that, you know, I have really, really enjoyed. I think, at times, the stresses here have been different at university. University, I would argue the stresses are more obviously academic, and sometimes, you know, a bit more personal and things like that. The personal challenges exist here. But also you know, at times when I first arrived, and you know, I needed to get a Spanish SIM card, because, you know, my phone contract, you know, wouldn't work from the UK, I needed to get a Spanish bank account, otherwise, I wouldn't get paid. You know, the stakes, for basic things here were a lot higher in terms of like survival and things, than they were in the UK, so that kind of, it took a little bit of time to feel properly safe here, you know, not in terms of, you know, danger of my life or anything, but just in terms of the, you know, the bureaucracy and everything, you know, kind of, you know, getting everything I needed to to function as a citizen, you know, in Spain. Obviously, I didn't have to do that, you know at university and things. And so that was a new kind of level of challenge. And again, having to deal with all yourself, you know, you are the person who has to go to his appointment, you are the person who has to, you know, speak to you know, all these people and get things sorted. You know, that's yes, there is a certain degree of that a university, but you know, equally you know, is your country and there are people at University who can help, your family and stuff, whereas here, that hasn't been the case. But when you do, you know, rise to the challenges, and it all goes fine. It is a really, really rewarding experience. And I've only been here two months, but when you know, when I return to the UK in a few days time, I'm really looking forward to kind of feeling that sense of achievement that I've managed to do all of these things by myself really.

Louise Wiles 28:51

Fantastic. Yeah, I think that's, for me, that's one really important point. And that is taking time to recognise the achievement, whether it's a transition to university, or now transition to a year abroad. So taking time to look back and think yeah, Where was I? Where am I now, and what have I achieved through these months? because it is a massive change, either, obviously, you have all the bureaucracy with a move to Spain, as well. So being aware of that, and recognising that as a set of major achievements, and I'm really interested in what you say about the bureaucracy, and I'm just wondering if there's a learning point there for other people who are listening who are going to go work abroad somewhere? How much support did you get before you left in terms of understanding the bureaucratic steps and what you needed to do?

Ben 29:37

It's really excellent question. In the context of Spain, it was very challenging. So the British Council did give, for the visa, which was, you know, one massive month long headache. But again, the visa, the British Council did compile guidance for that, which was very useful. But when I arrived here, I didn't really, the advice that I got, I got no advice from them about, you know, opening a phone, you know, getting a phone number, or, you know, getting a bank account, or the child protection is difficult, I needed to get myself so it was very much on my own for that. Luckily, through being one of six assistants, you know, the assistants, you know, we had a group chat before, you know, I came out here, and they were all really helpful, you know, sharing advice and things. So, you know, I think, you know, that's why it's really important to, you know, make contacts, you know, when you get here. For example, one of my, one of my friends, you know, at the school was like, 'oh, yeah, here's this really good website, you know, City Life in Madrid, go there', and, you know, all your questions will be answered. So, you know, I think support, you know, is there. I think it depends, I've got, you know, friends who've gone through a year abroad in France, and, you know, the French government's website for visas is, you know, so much more comprehensive and helpful than the Spanish equivalent. So, I do think, maybe the bureaucratic thing is just, you know, well, I mean, no countries bureaucracy is perfect, but, you know, especially the lack of standardisation is potentially, you know, something, just, you know, Spain is notorious for. But in general, I think, you know, just to make one thing that really was so important was, you know, being prepared. You know, and again, in the context of the Spanish thing, it was incredibly frustrating, you know, I spent months trying to get the relevant documents and things as you know, it often you know, looking back on just you know, the several months long process to get a visa and things you know, it was you know, just kind of one headache after another, but I did it. And you know, I learned I made mistakes at times, but you know, equally, you know, I got all sorts of, I got a visa again, and I got out here, and I've not had, you know, issues with that, touch word. So that's been really rewarding. So I think, and again, that's was really useful, because it was all on me to do that. And I think actually looking back on that, in a way, it was challenging at the time, but really good for me to actually force me to take control of this process myself, you know, it's all on me, and I, sorted it all out and things and I think that's, you know, a really important lesson for life. There's not always going to be someone holding your hand, there's not always going to be someone saying, right, this is what you need to do, you know, for here. Obviously, you know, the stakes are higher, and the stress when you are moving to a different country, but the you know, the learned the lesson is still the same. You know, when I return to the UK, you know, I think having had that experience of knowing that I can organise it sorted out myself, and piece together very conflicting and confusing and unclear strands information

together. But I was able to do that, you know, it gives me the confidence to know that actually, when I have to deal with, you know, things back home in the UK, or you know, any other time in my life, I've done it, here in Spain, so I can do that. So I do think, in a weird way, I am grateful for the challenge, like it, you know, and also it made me, it makes me realise whenever you go through that challenge, it really makes you appreciate when things are all sorted and things so you know, I do? I'm, you know, I certainly you know, it was stressful at the time, but I don't regret it. And there's nothing I would have done differently. I'm thrilled to be in Spain, and you know, I'm really enjoying my time. So I would never, you know, it was never a reason to put someone off going to Spain, you know, I fully recommend coming, if you want to.

Louise Wiles 32:58

You know, the thing was moving abroad, having done it a number of times myself, it's, you don't, often you don't know the questions to ask until you're actually there in the situation. So it's all very well saying be better prepared, but actually, I mean, yeah, you can be better prepared, perhaps by asking other people, having made contacts as you said, talking to people, and there is always someone who's gone before you. So you can ask them – 'What are the relevant things I need to think about?' So it's really, I would say to anyone who's planning a year abroad, do take that time before you go talk to people, to learn about the place that you're going to and as much as you can about the bureaucracy, and all the challenges in that respect, but equally go with an open mind, because you're going to find some additional things that no one's thought to tell you or have changed, and therefore, you know,

Ben 33:46

You're totally right. And I think, you know, once I got myself quite, you know, stressed, you know, overthinking everything when I was in the UK. Thinking, 'Oh my God, will I find, like a gym here?' or, you know, what will the shops be like, you know, just like silly things like that, and actually, you know, it's when you're actually in that place, that you're in a position to, you know, sort those things out and things and I, you know, part of me wishes that I'd have just, well, obviously, it's very difficult, but you know, I wouldn't have changed anything differently in my preparation, apart from maybe just being like, you know, what, you know, everything will be sorted and there are always people who can help you, you know, when I've had to go into the banks, I've had to go into places, people have been really helpful, which has been great, you know, like I have, you know, whenever I've had anything that needed to be sorted out. So actually, learning, just have the confidence to ask for help, has been a really important lesson. And you know, something that, you know, that I've taken away from that. So, you know, I completely agree.

Louise Wiles 34:34

Yeah, brilliant, and we have a podcast episode on asking for help, just because often, we forget to ask for help and actually, people generally around the world are very, very happy to help. And I think the important thing also to say, you're talking about achievement, and I think once you have done this, and you've moved abroad, and you have that template in your mind about what it is like to move, it is such a valuable life lesson, something that you will take and carry forward, So, do you know what helps you through change? So these are massive change experiences, are there are three or four things that you can identify that have helped you through these two massive changes in your life?

Ben 35:16

Absolutely, definitely. I think the first thing as I've talked about, for me, the importance of routine. I mean, as soon as I arrived at Cambridge, and also in Madrid, I very quickly got myself into a routine again, that really helps as you know, I've talked about you know, reduce decision fatigue, and given that sense of comfort and control of the time when things are very much up in the air. I think the second thing is knowing what makes you happy, what keeps you physically or mentally fit. For me, you know, I really enjoy running at the gym, that's something that is really a really important outlet for me when I'm feeling stressed and things, so when I got here, it was one of my priorities was you know, finding a gym and getting enrolled there and just knowing that I have that place to you know, go just, to you know, help myself, you know, and maintain that mental stability. So, I think just knowing you know what is important to you and what makes you happy, and finding that is the second thing that I recommend. The third thing that has helped me it's maintaining contact with people back home friends and family, you know, it really, really helped, you know, throughout my transition to University and also here, just, you know, being in regular contact with, you know, my parents, you know, family members and friends, and you know, it's not a, it's not a sign of weakness, you know, I maintain that regular contact, you know, it's, you know, it's really helped, you know, just having someone who you can, you know, talk to, you know, about your experience, and to kind of, you know, let off steam and sharing any challenges you're having, but equally sharing successes, and, you know, the achievements is really, really rewarding. So, you know, it can especially, you know, it can often seem a lot of things that are going on where, you know, you move away and things, but actually, you know, making the, you know, the time to, you know, keep in contact with people, um, you know, that is really, really valuable. So I think that would be the third thing. Yeah, maintain that regular contact.

Louise Wiles 37:02

Fantastic, brilliant. That's one thing that we had a session on relationships. And one of the points that we also made was that you know, you're focusing on developing new relationships in your new location, but don't forget the value of the things you already have, and maintain those and build those connections as well. Okay, so I kind of think my next question was going to be what advice would you share for students, I think, you know, those three, three things that you've identified there. So have a routine, know, what makes you happy, maintain your contacts, anything else, any other bits of advice in terms of summary that you would offer?

Ben 37:42

I think I remember, when I went to Cambridge, we have this like college parent system, where basically, when you're a first year, you have two students in your second year, who, you know, like, you know, are people you can ask, you know, any questions, and my college dad's advice to me, was just be you and do what you want to do. And I think, you know, that was something that really helped me and I'd like to pass on, I think, you know, there are often a lot of pressures, you know, you know, unwritten expectations for, you know, university, a year abroad. That, you have to be, at university, going out every night, and doing all that sort of things, and, you know, year abroad has to be having the best time all the time. These are unrealistic expectations. And actually, you know, it's really important to know, what you want to do, and to do that. It is important, you know, not to be stubborn, and, you know, to, you know, push it, you know, to meet people and, you know, maybe go out of your comfort zone a little bit, absolutely, but not to change who you are, you know. So it's important to, you know, try new things

and stuff. But if you know, that actually, you know, what someone's invited you to do, is, you know, that's completely something you don't want to do, there's nothing wrong with not doing that. So I think just being true to yourself, and doing you know, what you feel comfortable with. And, you know, yeah, push yourself a little bit, but not, you know, thrusting yourself out of your comfort zone, I think is really important. So just being you.

Louise Wiles 39:00

I think unrealistic expectations for any transition, whether it's to university or living abroad. That was one of the big ones for me, when I moved abroad, I realised very quickly that you can build in your mind these amazing expectations. But of course, it's life. Life has ups and downs, some days are good, some days are bad. And that follows you wherever you are in the world. So remembering that and being open to that is important I think, so thank you for that. Okay, so final question, then, I think we have to join the conversation, it's been really interesting. Thank you for sharing so much. But just looking back on this period, what have been the key benefits for you, do you think?

Ben 39:50

Absolutely, um, when I look back at both University, and moving away on my year abroad, I've, you know, talked about the challenges, but I never once regretted my decision to do these things. And, you know, I look back and I see the personal growth that, you know, I've kind of gone through. You know, when I look at the, you know, the 18 year olds who arrived at, you know, Cambridge, October 2020, compared to, you know, me now. Outwardly, there's not been much of a transition, but internally, so much has evolved and grown. And, you know, I'm so much you know, of a different person, you know, which I, you know, I'm really, really grateful for, I'm so much more resilient, my resilience has, you know, been really, really strengthened, you know, and tested by both of these experiences, but that's, you know, gonna serve me well, you know, for the rest of my life, hopefully. And I think as well, I've really surprised myself that, you know, I am a capable person in terms of, you know, when I have to deal with, you know, scary bureaucratic situations or things that yeah, I can deal with that. And, you know, it's absolutely fine. I can rely on myself to get things sorted. I think that's a really rewarding, a really rewarding experience. And, you know, I've learned a lot about myself as well. And I think that's a brilliant thing about, you know, going away, you know, moving away, to university or, you know, abroad. I think, you know, I've really learned you know, what is important to me, I mean, what I want in my life and actually, you know, how, you know how I want to lead you know, my life and I think those are really really, you know, valuable lessons. So, as well as the personal development, the resilience that you know, that I've grown and everything, and just the general strategies for dealing within a challenging life situations, I think just you know, learning more about myself. And you know, what makes me happy. And you know, what is important for me in life, has been a really valuable lesson. I don't think I would have, you know, gained through having such you know, momentous only periods of upheaval. Yeah.

Louise Wiles 41:33

Well, and I suppose what come through to me listening to all that you shared today is that you obviously have quite a high level of personal awareness and, and willingness to reflect on on the experience and what's worked for you and what you've learned from it. And I think that's another thing to really highlight for people. Yeah. Do take time to do that and to recognize your accomplishments and what has been the positive outcome of sometimes challenging experiences. Because they're always

positive. So, fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing your experience. And I wish you all the best for the rest of your year in Madrid. Enjoy. Sure you will. But it's been a real pleasure talking to you today. Thank you very much Ben.

Ben 42:17

Well, thank you. It's been a real privilege to be invited. I've really enjoyed that conversation. So thank you, Louise. It's been a real privilege. Thank you.

Further listening:

To learn about all the other episodes, access transcripts for free and buy the Think Sheets associated with episodes 1 – 10 go [HERE](#)

We hope you have enjoyed this podcast. Ben shows a high level of self-awareness and demonstrates the benefit of self-reflection and taking the time to recognise achievements and accomplishments.

You may find it helpful to go back to Series one, episode 1 – 10 but in particular you may find the following episodes helpful as they cover similar themes to the ones discussed in this episode:

Podcast One and Two, Beat the Transition Blues and Riding the Waves of Change are great in helping us to think through the experience of change and transition, The ups and the downs, the stretch and learning that can arise and in particular in podcast two, the value of routines.

Ben talked about the value of knowing WHY he had made the choices he made and **Episode 4 What Matters to You**, will help you to identify your why for your next or current transition and what is most important to you about that experience.

Ben talked about how at times he recognised he was being a bit tough and harsh on himself, if you have a tendency to do the same then **Episode 5 Nurturing Self-Compassion** may be helpful to you.

In negotiating all the bureaucratic challenges, Ben realised it really helped to ask for help and that people were very keen to provide help when asked, **Episode 6 Why it Helps to Ask** talks about exactly this.

Finally, if developing friendships is a current interest of yours, **Episode Nine, Nurturing Supportive Relationships** will be a worthwhile listen.

All episodes in series one, have an accompanying Think Sheet which is designed to help you think through the content of the podcast episode and apply it to your situation. You can buy the full set of ten Think Sheets by going to LouiseWiles.com/successful-student-transitions and clicking on the THINK SHEET tab.

Content Disclaimer: *The information contained above is provided for information purposes only. The contents of this podcast episode and transcript are not intended to amount to advice and you should not rely on any of the contents of this podcast and notes. Professional advice should be obtained before taking or refraining from taking any action as a result of the content of this podcast. Elizabeth Gillies, Louise Wiles and guests, disclaim all liability and responsibility arising from any reliance placed on any of the contents of this Podcast and transcript*