

A TIME TO THRIVE

Successful Student Transitions

**Series 2 Episode 20
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 people's personal stories. You will hear the voices of students and their reflections on their experience of transition and of professionals who work to support students in transition in both the school and university setting.

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*

About Our Guest – Alexa Cutteridge

Alexa Cutteridge is a PE specialist and Head of Student Induction and Transition in a London school. She is extremely passionate about student wellbeing and is part of the Pastoral Team who welcome new students into the school and also support all students transitioning throughout the school, through the key stages.



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 they move through the educational process and then on to the world of work or further education, university, and independent living.

If students can learn how to thrive through these transitions, they will acquire invaluable skills that will support them through a lifetime of change and transition.

If you're a student facing some life transitions, or educators or parents supporting students through times of change then this podcast is for you.

We share insights and suggestions to help students thrive in a world where change is the only constant.

This content is also for you if you are an educator or parent supporting students through times of change and transition.

Welcome to this Episode – Alexa Cutteridge

In this episode we are going to be discussing school strategies for supporting transitions with Alexa Cutteridge, who is a PE specialist and Head of Student Induction and Transition in a London school.

Alexa is passionate about supporting student wellbeing and is part of a pastoral team that welcomes new children and teens into the school and also supports their internal transition experiences.

Alexa believes that acknowledging the times of transition as periods of adjustment means that schools can put in place activities to support student wellbeing that help to smooth transitions and enable students to settle well and be happy in their new environment.

Listen as Alexa describes her work. It is really interesting to hear about the strategy that her school employs to help new year seven students feel welcome and then integrate into their new school community and life. But her work does not stop there and Alexa describes how they support students at different stages of the education process and why she believes a good transition experience provides great benefits for students.

Finally, listen out for Alexa's questions at the end, they will be useful in helping you to reflect on how well your school is supporting students through their transition experiences.

Transcript

Elizabeth Gillies 00:03

Today on our Successful Students in Transition podcast, we're delighted to invite Alexa Cutteridge. And Alexa is a member of the PE department in her school. However, she has a really important role as Head of Student Induction and Transition. And you know, this is quite a new kind of thing, isn't it? Alexa, you know, there's not many, can I call them mainstream schools in the UK that we know, that have these kind of roles. So I'm really excited to talk with you today. So welcome, Alexa.

Alexa Cutteridge 03:29

Thank you.

Elizabeth Gillies 03:30

So let's just kind of have a dive right in there and sort of say, what do you do then in school? What's your transition role? And can you tell me a little bit about how it came about?

Alexa Cutteridge 03:43

Yeah, so my role is to support students as they transition into the senior school. So there's a focus, of course on a step up from junior school to senior school, and from year six to year seven. But I also supports students joining throughout the school, and also in the sixth form. And as you mentioned, I'm a member of the Pastoral team. So I look after, with the team, the provision for new students entering Wimbledon High School. So, I ultimately ensure that every student is known, supported, and able to shine as they step in to our school. And I think it's important to mention as well, like, traditionally, induction involves the joining of new students. But my role actually includes also looking at how we build a holistic, supportive pastoral programme for all the pupils as they transition through the key stages of school. So we've divided our school this year into lower, middle and upper school. So lower being your seventh and eighth, middle being 9,10, and 11, and upper being the Sixth Form. So looking at how we cater for year seven, as they step into year eight, particular looking at, obviously, the social dynamics, and then looking perhaps at year 11, who step in from GCSE up to A level. Yeah, and it sort of came about, I suppose, because we really pride ourselves on our pastoral care and our approach to whole school well-being. And we're always looking at what's next to support our students. And we recognise that as we all know, in times of change, and transition, students are vulnerable. And they really do need a well thought out and bespoke care plan, and the strategy you need to support them. And so by creating a role, where my sole focus can be on student induction and transition would mean we can really ensure that as people step into our school, and move through the key stages, we can ensure there's a dedicated and supportive programme there for thir each and every need.

Elizabeth Gillies 05:47

Makes me want to come to your school, I'm thinking you know, what's it like being a new student in there and having somebody there, like you were saying, dedicated to helping this stepping into, this new school? Why did you do this? Alexa, why is it important?

Alexa Cutteridge 06:06

Well, I think as I said before, you know, transition is a time of in-between. And it's really important as educators, we want pupils to be able to flourish and thrive. And so, you know, if their well-being isn't, I guess, cared for and nurtured due to the disruption of transition, then they won't be able to perform in the many areas of their school life at their best. So as a school, if we can lend a helping hand at these times of change year six stepping into year seven, or, yes, year 11 into the sixth form, or even actually thinking about how the sixth form stride out of our school, maybe into university or gap years or year in industry, then there's a far greater sort of likelihood, they'll be able to really achieve, I guess, and meet their needs. And also, it's just so important that we get to know the students true self, both before and during their transitions. So getting to know like, what are their passions? What are they curious about? What motivates them? Perhaps what doesn't motivate them as well? And really looking at what life was like before they stepped into our community. You know, for 11 Plus, we have a vast range of schools coming to our school, and so it's really important we get to know pupil's as individuals within a whole year cohort to support them.

Elizabeth Gillies 07:24

Yeah. I mean, the whole idea of that disruption of normal patterns is really important and, and I think you'd likely say to, that, you know, change is part of life and how we can cope, help children and students cope with this is really important. So thanks for that. And so, can you think about then some key points or activities, other things that you do as your transition plan throughout the year, what kind of things are you focused on, Alexa?

Alexa Cutteridge 08:00

I think first of all, it's really important to highlight that it's a complete community team effort to welcome and support the new students, as well as those moving through the key stages. And getting to know them, as I said, is a really crucial part of the induction process. So we obviously have a highly experienced staff on the pastoral team, and the teaching team, but also the student leaders and buddies. So current Wimbledon High School students look after pupil's coming in, either in their year or the year below, if they're looking after the year seven, they also play a really active role in that process. So we have a series of induction events that happen both in the summer term, and at the start of the autumn term, to ensure all new students are supported to have a positive and confident start. So it's probably helpful if I explain the year seven one is a sort of more detailed example. So in the summer term, the students have an afternoon visiting the school in smaller groups of their whole cohort. And they come in and they just play some fun games with some of the senior school pupils, while either the head of year, the assistant head of the year, or myself have a little one to one with them individually, and just go through a pre computed questionnaire that they've done at home. And it's, we just call it 'getting to know you afternoon'. So the questions involved and things like you know, what's your favourite hobby? And one of my favourite actually was to ask, 'How do you like to learn?', because I think that's so revealing about the individuals. And then following this, there's an another little afternoon where the whole cohort year seven attend. So they meet their form, they get to know their form teachers. Some of the student leaders are there as well. And again, there's lots of like fun games they play. And it's just again, by the time they come in the autumn term, they'll have been to our school twice already, if not more, with the open days. And then at the start of the autumn term, they have a whole day dedicated to their induction. So more time in their forms, also mixed up with their year groups. We

do a really fun treasure hunt, because often their biggest worry is getting their way around school, not getting lost. And we also have a study skills session, like helping them with organisation and things like that, and also induct them into the clubs because we have over 100 clubs for the girls to be involved in. And then additionally, the new year seven and year 12 have a night under the stars. So that's a night away at the start of the term. And although that could be I imagine it will be daunting at first. You know, once they've been away for that night away, they just make such strong connections, because we all know that actually, team bonding, getting muddy, being out in nature is a really great way to help get to new friends. And then if sort of looking a bit wider in terms of talking about whole school transition, at the start of the autumn term, all year groups actually had a study skills Day this year. So they were taught the skills to prepare them for the year ahead, as well as having a pastoral meeting as a year group. So sort of setting out the year ahead, the term ahead for them, and their new stage of school. And then looking at sort of pupils that come in new throughout the school in different year groups, they have a buddy, which I think is just so valuable. And actually I sort of increased to having more than just one buddy this year. So they can be inducted with their buddies get to know girls in their year, ask them questions. And they have an induction day as well in the summer term, but also if they're moving from abroad, and they aren't able to come in the summer term to visit, then we just set up a Team's call. So again, they've had a point of call, they've met their buddy, they can exchange email addresses. And maybe in the summer when they're coming over, they can have a little catch up before they step in. And then I think another sort of key activity to highlight is that we really value our relationship with our parents, and helping them also settling into the school community is a really big part. So we have welcome evenings in the summer term for new parents. And we also run a Grobe parent programme. So that's open to all parents. It includes talks from specialist speakers in either evenings, or for example, this week, we had a Heads breakfast with Fenella Kennedy, where she was talking to parents on getting the best from tech and education, socially and parenting. So lots on offer.

Elizabeth Gillies 12:27

I'm just, my jaws dropping here, Alexa all that planning and stuff. I know you're part of the PE department and part of you know this induction and transition team. Do you know how much time you spend on each is it even or is it hugely more weighted to the transition stuff?

Alexa Cutteridge 12:48

Oh, that's a really good question, actually, think it's quite hard to answer. All I would say is there's peaks. So obviously at the start of the term, with the induction, certainly, extremely busy having lots of fun welcoming pupils. And then definitely a peak again, towards the end of the summer term onwards. But always because we're looking at the key transition stages through the school as well. It's always, you know, very busy and exciting. And there's never a dull moment.

Elizabeth Gillies 13:16

So that maybe, maybe that's something for other schools to think about. There's, you need a lot of resources at key times don't you. Well perhaps come on to talk about that. Alexa, what do you enjoy in your role? I mean, I can feel your enthusiasm and your busyness and everything. Why did you take this job? What are you enjoying about it?

Alexa Cutteridge 13:38

Um I love so many parts about it, I think there's nothing more rewarding than welcoming students to our wonderful school, and watching them forge their own path. And fortunately, they're different paths. As I said, we have over 100 different clubs. And that idea is that there's something for everyone here. So it's really amazing to see students really embrace being their authentic, true self, and finding something for them here that they can really get stuck into. And again, just seeing the transformation of new students stepping in and settling in and finding their feet. I mean, I think often, some pupils that have voiced their sort of worries at the start, are actually blown away themselves by how quickly they do settle. And that's just so rewarding to help them on their way. And then I suppose in my job role, it's just amazing that I get to work with such a range of people. So you know, that can be obviously working with the students, working with our amazing pastoral team, I get to work with other leads in the schools, such as the admissions team, and then with our head of neurodiversity, heads of department. And also, I work quite closely with the junior school as well. So looking at the transition from six to seven, but also I help lead on the junior peer counselling programme, where our senior school girls in year 12, go and help peer council, the junior school. And I suppose it's just really pleasing to see like the whole school community, as I mentioned earlier, supporting the new students. So we have the buddy system. But we also have a really robust house system. So it's highlighting the vertical connections through the school. And there's house assemblies and house competitions, we recently had the Christmas tree decoration competition, got house singing next week. And we have house forms every other week, where they're in a form with all different year groups. So just giving opportunities for students to connect vertically, I think is really valuable. And also just amazing to see how kind the students are to each other.

Elizabeth Gillies 15:52

And it sounds like Alexa, that it's, you know, these busy times of transition points are there. But it's also the things that go on throughout the year to help kids be connected to each other, and with this wider community that's important, it is an important part of this transition. It's not just those key points, is it?

Alexa Cutteridge 16:10

Absolutely, yeah.

Elizabeth Gillies 16:13

If you were, if you know, someone from a school was going to come to you and say, Alexa, we're thinking of having a post like this. What would you say was a critical thing? Maybe we've already talked about some of it? What advice would you give them?

Alexa Cutteridge 16:31

I'd say fantastic news to hear you're considering the position in your school, and really, for them to embrace and celebrate, you know, the idea of change and transition. Obviously, it can be really daunting transition and change. But it's really important you help students and the school know that it's a time where you can actually feel most alive. And also that it's a really key part, a normal part of our life. And I guess we're always in transition to some extent, you know, day to day, week by week. And, you know, school is a microcosm of society where students can be taught some helpful and powerful tools when in transition, and actually use them in life beyond school. So I think definitely, yes, bringing it to the centre, or within a pastoral programme is really important. I think advice wise, I'd probably just

get them to reflect on a few questions. So maybe they want to ask themselves, how are they managing the transition currently of their students? Is there a person in charge of the induction programme and strategies? You know, as we know, it really does deserve the attention and care as it makes such a difference to the student experience at school. And then they might want to look at what does the voice of the students tell you? Are you actually involving your students in the strategic decision making and planning of your transition through your school. So I think observing any feedback from the parents and teachers also can be really, really valuable in that, and then how are you educating the staff about transition and change? So as we know, the pastoral programme in schools is becoming so important, you know, as important as the academic side of things. And so as we educate staff on perhaps how to help children manage anxiety, are you considering how you're educating your staff on supporting the students through change as well? And I think also looking at, are you supporting, not just new pupils coming to the school, but looking at the transition through the school, as I sort of already mentioned, and then also reviewing, like, how inclusive is your school? And is that considered within your transition and induction strategy. We're looking at ways to allow students to find a sense of belonging to the self, and the community. And that does include also like, considering pupils with neurodiversity needs, who actually may find transition really difficult at that time. I think, above all, it's just having flexibility in your approach. So just because you did something one way last time, like being able to be flexible and quite forward thinking.

Elizabeth Gillies 19:08

Cool. You know, I'm sure your phone's gonna be ringing. There are some nice key themes that you've brought up today, we're just kind of do a little bit of a summary, kind of the end here. You know, I really like your idea about this community. And I have this vision of, I don't know if it feels right or not, but you as the kind of hub in the middle about transition, and these kind of spokes coming out, like supporting everybody you know, in this kind of world of change and transition. So you're not just helping the students, you're helping teachers in the school, think about what transition is, and parents and maybe the wider school about where they're going to, or where they've come from. So it's like a nice image that I've got there. And I also, so it's that community factor. But also I'm thinking about, you know, these skills for your young people about, they can help them in the school now, and likely, you know, beyond that. So there were those sort of two summary. So communities really important, skills is really important for me. Anything else, um, any other words that you would use to kind of summarise the things you were saying?

Alexa Cutteridge 20:35

I think that idea of just like, embracing it, and really seeing it, I guess, does repeat slightly what you've just said, but that it is a key part of life and allowing students to learn how to manage transition in a safe environment as it were, because it's within school, with people around you to support. I think that's really important. And also, I just say that in all our pastoral care, creating a really positive relationship. And between the child, the school and the parents is really crucial. So again, that does lean on slightly the whole effort from everyone really?

Elizabeth Gillies 21:11

Yeah. Because as we know, anxiety is contagious. So if a parent's anxious about their child moving to somewhere, then that's going to be there. So it's that holistic approach to it, which is really lovely.

Alexa, I can't thank you enough for today, because I think you've raised some really important questions. I like your questions about for schools to be thinking about, are they doing things in this way? what are they doing about transitions? How are we doing? It's a nice kind of learning and reflective stance, isn't it? And that's certainly something you've given us today. So I want to thank you very much for your time and your thought and all that you're doing to help young people and the community when they're in times of transition.

Alexa Cutteridge 22:00

Thank you for having me.

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](#)

When you register for our newsletter you will receive access to the Think Sheet created for Episode One for free.

We hope you have enjoyed this interview with Alexa.

You might want to listen to all the previous podcasts in the series but especially:

Podcast One – Beat the Transition Blues - where we talk in depth about the nature of change, transition, and adjustment and why struggle can be part of the journey to grow knowledge and resilience.

Podcast Two – Successfully Riding the Waves of Change – Any change comes with highs and lows, in this episode we share strategies and approaches to help you ride the waves of change with confidence.

Podcast 10 – Supporting Parent Transitions – Empty Nests. This episode is especially for parents where we share ideas about how they can support transition in their child and frameworks to help them manage their own change and adjustment experience.

Podcast 18 – Voices in Transition – Fabienne Stories of Student Well-being. In this episode we discuss with Fabienne how and why students struggle with University transitions and what we can do to better support them.

Podcast 19 – Voices in Transition – Gayle. Gayle is an experienced teacher and Assistant Head. In this episode she shares a whole school approach to supporting transitions and why she believes this is such important work.

Please check out all the podcasts, transcripts and Think Sheets that you can purchase to dig deeper into the topics of transition and where we share more resources. For all these resources go [HERE](#)

Thanks for listening.

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