

SEP: Transitions in Higher Education

Background

This is a summary of the discussions from the first Student Education Panel meeting of 2023/24. The meeting took place in November 2023 and was attended by 59 students from various departments and levels of study at LSE. After the meeting, 8 student volunteers from the panel manually conducted a thematic content analysis to identify the main themes from panellists' discussions and prepared the following summary. Parts of this summary were written in collaboration with Chat GPT, but the final outputs were determined by the panellists.

What does 'Transitions in Higher Education' mean to members of the Student Education Panel?

Transitions in higher education refer to the processes of change we experience as we navigate through different stages of education, and onwards to future stages of our lives. The causes of these transitions can vary, stemming from individual factors such as educational progression, life circumstances, and career aspirations, as well as institutional factors such as systems / processes, curricula, and the general LSE offer. Therefore the types and timing of these transitions can vary greatly between individuals.

The outcomes of these transitions influence our personal and academic growth. These transitions serve as pivotal moments for fostering our sense of responsibility, our development of resilience and our ability to adapt to new challenges and environments. As we navigate these changes, we encounter opportunities for self-discovery, enhanced independence, and the cultivation of self-expression.

In essence, transitions in higher education are transformative experiences that not only mark changes in academic settings but also play a fundamental role in shaping our holistic development as individuals.

How are current LSE students experiencing transitions?

Academic

A transition in the academic setting inculcates three aspects of transitions: planning and organisation, learning styles and testing styles.

The first phase includes an increased responsibility of planning and organising our schedule, improving time management and learning to balance academic, social and personal transitions.

The second phase, learning styles, includes adapting to changes in teaching techniques. We must also transition into strategizing our notetaking, critical thinking and opinion-forming process during readings to maximise our learning before finals. It is also essential to adjust to the logistical changes in exam preparation.

The final phase, testing styles, includes learning, or even unlearning, aspects of dissertation and essay writing, with an emphasis on gaining research and citation skills. This phase also involves a shift from a continuous testing process to a more focused form of assessments. These assessments are typically more detailed but less frequent, thereby fostering a greater sense of flexibility and accountability.

Cultural and environmental

Transitioning to higher education often involves navigating a new geographical space, adapting to different living styles, transportation, and food, along with considerations of local weather and appropriate clothing. Although exciting, this can constitute a significant environmental adjustment. For some international students, there is an especially marked cultural shift, wherein the people, work and study cultures, food, and even the weather is a huge change. For all students, becoming part of a highly international student community can mean learning or unlearning cultural attitudes.

Extra-Curricular

Societies and career fairs can be fairly new experiences for students entering higher education, being a great opportunity to meet new people and further our interests. However, the increased competition in higher education may lead to a shift in some of us feeling pressured to take advantage of opportunities that arise, even if they do not necessarily align with our personal wants.

Financial

Paying rent represents the biggest financial concern for many. This marks a transition, for some of us, between living at our parents' house to living on our own. Moreover, some of us have to take on part-time jobs or make cuts to their budget to afford living in London, which represents transitions around time management and developing life skills.

Personal, logistical and social

Social transitions make up a large part of our shifts into higher education. Transitions into higher education means that many of us must take care of ourselves and manage our own affairs, including flat hunting and cooking. This increased independence at university means that balancing a social life with personal responsibilities, academic commitments, and handling one's own schedule can be a challenge.

We also think about the quality of our home life and how to build a support system in a new place. This can be challenging when there being limited social opportunities to meet new people.

Furthermore, there are multiple new identities we could align with: the LSE identity, our department, and our specific degree area.

Some international students are also challenged by having to navigate external processes of visa requirements, accommodation arrangements and technology access.

Professional

This was widely expressed as the pressure of applying for and securing an internship or job and the challenges of making the most of our LSE opportunity, and balancing part-time work with a busy academic schedule. The professional transition puts spotlight on our aspirations for their journey from student to professional. By keeping an open eye to job postings, participating in networking events, and building new skills, we actively pursue a potential entry point to the job market (and their transition). Notably, this is not just a transition that shapes us as an employee or an entrepreneur in the real world, but also a valuable alumnus, inspiring and supporting the transition of the next batch of students and contributing to the institutions' credibility and legacy.

What are some of the impacts of these transitions on current LSE students?

Health and Psychological

Transitions can impact our mental and physical health as we navigate higher education. These can stem from various changes in the physical, academic and personal environments that require us to adapt. Examples could be a change in our support network, academic expectations and even simpler aspects such as the weather and the physical environment.