



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: LEVEL-UP! Student-led Conference

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transitions between any level of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree of any discipline, as well as into the job sector.

Abstract: LEVEL-UP! is a skills development conference organised for the first time in February 2016 at the University of Aberdeen. The main aim of this student-led initiative was to diversify the existing resources for skills development at university by providing a range of practical tools that could be incorporated into a student's day-to-day routine, allowing gradual improvement of a certain skill. The conference was an intensive two-day boot camp, consisting of a panel discussion, talks, networking activities and workshops. Multiple parallel workshops were provided to cover a wider range of topics and to limit the student numbers in each session. The limit on numbers enhanced the interaction between the speaker and the participants, facilitating the delivery of detailed and personalised advice.

Description:

Background

LEVEL-UP! was inspired by the identification, by students who had experienced difficulties in improving specific sets of skills, of a gap in skills development training at the University. Having attended various development events in London during their year-long placement, they were exposed to the different methods that could be used for improving skills. As an example, one of the co-chairs of the committee of organisers had the chance to improve her public speaking skills through voice coaching. In addition to teaching articulation, posture, and confidence, this example showed that there are specific exercises that can be incorporated into daily practice to gradually improve a skill.

This exposure illustrated the differences between the university experience and the opportunities available elsewhere. The university experience was useful because it identified the importance of personal and professional development, as well as the skills that students should aim to develop, however it did not necessarily facilitate the development of these skills. For example, students know that they should develop public speaking skills but are not given specific tools or opportunities to put them into practice. Voice coaching could be used to address this skills gap.

The LEVEL-UP! Conference

The conference was introduced by the organising committee's co-chairs followed by a short presentation from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise about the changing trends in the workplace, concluding that students need to be "agile" in order to succeed. Workshops included Mentoring, Mindfulness, Confidence, Establishing a Business, Written Communication, Preparing a Winning CV and Intercultural Communication.

The second day began with a talk by one of the UK's leading expert on Body Language and Voice Management, followed by workshops covering Mastering Improvised Speech, Problem Solving, Personal Branding through Social Media and Career Development Coaching. The conference closed with a panel session led by three young successful entrepreneurs on "How to Succeed and Execute your Idea". Post-conference evaluation identified an inspirational talk on motivation and goal-setting by Jamie Andrew, the quadruple-amputee mountaineer, as a favourite part of the conference for many.

Networking activities, including one led by ELEVATOR UK, were organised during both lunch breaks to encourage delegates to communicate with each other.

Achievements

Organisation for LEVEL-UP! was completed in a five month timeframe. The conference was designed to be affordable, accessible and have innovative high-quality content. A committee of eleven members was formed to identify and bring twenty experts from across the UK and Europe to the University of Aberdeen. Funding of £5950 was secured through awards and donations enabling a conference fee of £5 per student. Approximately 120 delegates and volunteers attended.

Benefits for students

LEVEL-UP! benefited both the students attending the conference and the students who organised the event itself. The delegates were exposed to many skills and had the opportunity to network with other students and the speakers. This was the first conference or skills development workshop for most delegates and many were inspired to find out about attending or helping with future conferences.

The members of the organising committee benefited by setting and meeting targets to ensure the success of the conference, developing their own skills along the way. Skills developed included: leadership, effective communication, negotiation, estimating costing, finding funding and marketing and promotion, including the use of social media.

Feedback

The event was successful and was enjoyed by delegates who noted in particular how different it was from other events. The conference also received praise from the speakers who were impressed by the programme, its professionalism and the fact that students devoted their weekends to a skills development event. All concerned would recommend the LEVEL-UP! conference with 4.5 out of a possible 5 given as the average overall satisfaction rating. A selection of the qualitative feedback included:

- "It was an excellent conference! The speakers were great, inspiring and funny. Everything worked smoothly. Workshops were really interesting and difficult to choose from."

- “I thought the conference was brilliant combining speakers and networking together to fill in the skills gaps that I have yet to gain or perfect. I would completely advise people to attend and would be excited to see more events as this throughout the year!”
- “Most useful weekend of my life.”

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.