

University of Oxford Counselling Service

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Adjusting to Oxford

Identifying and Overcoming the
Psychological Challenges of Transition
(Change) and The Expectations involved in
Graduate Study

Expectations

- Expectations are normal to have of future experiences (often they help us cope with the unknown and uncertainty)
- Important they are realistic rather than unrealistic
- The dangers of rigid expectations
- If reality does not meet our expectation it can feel like a major problem or failure, rather than just being different
- The danger of expecting to be 'happy' all the time

Transitions

- Any transition or 'change' presents us with both a loss and a gain – we lose something familiar but gain something new
- Leaving familiar/secure things can be exciting but also unsettling and uncomfortable

Helping Transition

- Mobilise your resources of support
- Internal resources – how have I coped before?
- Social resources – keep in touch
- Structural resources – develop routines
- Allow yourself to feel sad about the things you miss
- However, you are also allowed to enjoy yourself

Helping Transition

- Be realistic about what to expect from student life and from yourself
- Establish a balance between work and leisure: you are NOT expected to work ALL the time - you would soon burn out. Work, Rest and Play...
- However, do enough work to satisfy the REALISTIC expectations of yourself and others

Helping Transition

- Prepare yourself for frustrations, disappointments and things going wrong, (as they do in life). Learn the skills and resilience to manage these situations, rather than let them overwhelm you
- Give yourself time to adjust: you don't have to get everything right straight away. Don't make any hasty decisions which could affect your long term future
- Get academic, welfare or psychological support when needed – no crime to ask for help

Graduate Emotional Resilience

- The 'Oxford Bubble' - The pressure to be perfect
- All or nothing thinking - Undermining satisfaction and self esteem
- Perfectionism
- Maintaining a work / life balance
- Self Agency - Need to take some degree of control
Learn to become your own 'Life Coach' and talk to yourself (in an affirming way)
- The perspective of time helps

Independent Living and Learning

- Not feeling pressure to immediately get things 'right'.
- Learning new knowledge and life skills is a challenging process often involving struggle and application
- Less external structure therefore needing more internal structure
- Real Learning is 'getting things wrong, being confused, struggling, feeling unsettled until new knowledge emerges'.

Imposter Syndrome

- Fear of being a fraud
- Previous achievements are accidental, easy, lucky, etc, etc. This time I will finally be 'found out'
- Important to recognise we all do this: see great Youtube clip:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqhUHyVpAwE&feature=youtu.be>
- Have some compassion towards self

Counselling Service - Aims:

- Free, confidential service for any student who experiences psychological and emotional difficulty (2,500 stus see us each year and rising)
- Enabling students to achieve their academic and personal goals
- Promoting mental health, self agency and emotional resilience
- Average waiting time to an appt = 8 working days

Range of provision

- Predominantly short term individual counselling
- Group programme offering: support groups, psycho-educational groups, and workshops (perfectionism, managing anxiety, sleep difficulties etc)
- Range of online self-help materials – podcasts, books, links to other good websites
- <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling?wssl=1>

Videos

Student accounts of counselling:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling/individual?wssl=1>

Staff in Service talk about what's on offer:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling?wssl=1>