

Art of coping with change workshop: finishing university



Introduction

After years of study and hard work, the change that comes with leaving university can feel overwhelming for many. It seems like the end of an era which can raise many questions about the next steps as we transition into professional life.



It's important to know that feeling a little lost after university is a common experience. Up until this point, the next steps in life have seemed so clear with a solid structure to follow, and now you have so many possibilities and this can be challenging for many.



Taking time to reflect on what leaving university means to you, what you are saying goodbye to, and what this next transition in your life represents can be beneficial. Giving this space and time can help you feel more prepared to adapt to what lies ahead.

Understanding the difference between change and transition is also beneficial. Change is the new external event or situation that occurs (leaving university) which calls for moving from the familiar to the new and unfamiliar. Transition is what happens in people's minds as they go through change. It is the internal psychological process we experience as we internalize and come to terms with change.

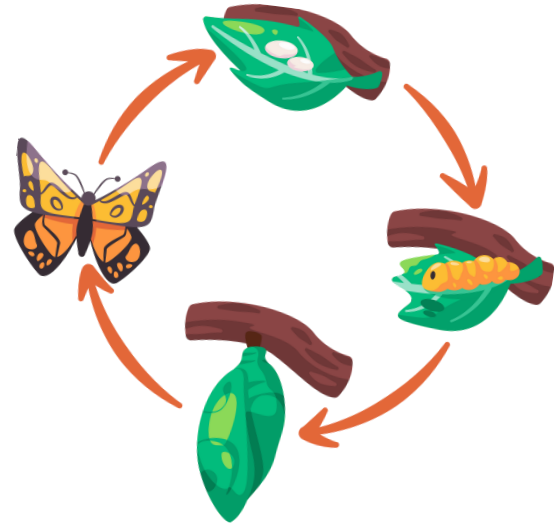
Another beneficial method is to reflect on previous transitions and learn from experience, and to consider changes and transitions you have already encountered. At the time you may have felt overwhelmed, but you not only survived but gained and learned from the experience. Take some comfort and confidence from knowing that you've dealt with change before and that you can do it again.

Here is an art activity that has been devised to enable you to consider self-care methods, think about what leaving university means to you and offer an opportunity to reflect on previous transitions and how this can help you now.



Create a diorama

A diorama is an artistic, three-dimensional representation or model of a particular scene. Our scene for this art activity will be the life cycle of the butterfly. The dramatic metamorphosis of the caterpillar to butterfly is often used as a metaphor for periods of change. The cycle starts when a female butterfly lays her eggs, then the eggs hatch into caterpillars or larvae. The larvae eat a lot before turning into a pupa. Inside the pupa the caterpillars turn into a butterfly and after a while the butterfly comes out and flies away and starts the cycle once more.



Materials needed:

- *Cardboard to create a ring shaped container or use an old cheese box*
- *Small pieces of scrap cardboard*
- *Glue and sticky tape*
- *Scissors*
- *Watercolour paint or any colouring materials of your choice*
- *Images from magazines or print the ones provided at the back of this booklet*
- *Plain white paper and some coloured paper to decorate*
- *Pencil and black pen*
- *Small round shiny stickers or sequins*

Kind note

Maybe you haven't made a work of art for some time, and you feel a little nervous before starting to create. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to create this artwork. The purpose of the activity is to give you a chance to reflect and express yourself. Give yourself permission to enjoy the process and don't worry about how the work looks or the opinions of others.





Here is an example of a finished diorama. This was created using images from magazines and pictures found elsewhere to create a collage in relief form. Working in this way allows us to create without having to worry about creating our own images if we are not confident when drawing. It also enables those who are more comfortable with drawing to add their own illustrations to their composition if they wish.

This model diorama was created by Gwawr Wyn Roberts, an Art Therapist at Bangor University's Wellbeing Service, to reflect the end of her time studying for a master's degree.

During the process of creating this artwork Gwawr had the opportunity to reflect on her time at university, what she was saying goodbye to, how she dealt with change during her period of study and what self-care measures benefit her. Here are some of her impressions.

Gwawr's background collage includes images and symbols to represent a new era of learning and discovery near the eggs and caterpillars - pictures to represent drawing, a desk and inspiration material. She enjoyed revisiting her creative practice during this time at university as well as being introduced to new theories and ideas. Similar to the caterpillars that eat and grow, when creating this part of the collage Gwawr was reminded of how exciting starting something new can be and how new things enable us to grow and develop.

As the circle turns she has added books and symbols to represent studying near the pupa - a period of intensive learning and increasing knowledge. While working on this part she reflected on the period of going on various clinical placements and how she adapted and coped with these periods of change, despite many challenges. She also thought about her research work and how difficult it was to find participants to interview and how she had to adapt and be flexible to get the job done.

Near the butterfly, pictures of doors have been added to convey a number of options and possible new paths to follow into the future. She also includes recurring images of the natural world in the collage to convey the importance of nature as an essential part of self-care while studying. She thought about the things she had to say goodbye to like the support of her peers and less enjoyable things like the heavy workload.

In the middle of her collage she has placed a symbol of the sun and the moon to remind her that, despite significant changes when finishing university, other things remain constant and reliable and the importance of remembering these.

Before starting to create your personal diorama take a moment to consider the following questions:

- *What are the things I will say goodbye to when I leave university?*
- *What changes and transitions have I already encountered and overcome?*
- *What things do I need to put in place to support my well-being during this next period of change?*



Stage 1: Create a round container as in the photograph with your cardboard or use an old cheese box. Use images from magazines or those included in this pack to create a collage as a background. Use images to convey your thoughts in response to the questions above.



Stage 2: Cover the entire background with your chosen images. Add images to convey the life cycle of the butterfly around the edges as shown in the picture opposite. Give thought to where to place the different pictures in relation to the life cycle of the butterfly.



Stage 3: You can draw and create your own images and add them to the container, or if it's easier cut images out of this pack as in the example. Glue them onto a cardboard background to strengthen them and to create a 'relief' effect.



Stage 4: Once the background and the butterfly life cycle images are in place use watercolour paint or colouring materials of your choice to add colour to the diorama and decorate it as you like. In the example small coloured stickers have been used to convey the eggs and gold paper has been added to decorate the centre of the work.

Reflect

When you have completed your diorama spend time studying it and reflecting on your artwork. Use the space below to write down any useful themes or points you discovered while creating. You may wish to identify some action points that will support you during this period of change.

Two blank, lined, cream-colored notepaper sheets with perforated edges, intended for reflection. Each sheet has approximately 15 horizontal lines and a small tab at the top.

Advice: coping with change

Commit to your health and well-being through regular self-care. As you work through the 'loss' of what you are giving up and what you are about to start, prioritize self-care as this will help you manage stress, difficult emotions, and new experiences more effectively.

Work on managing overwhelming feelings. Invest time in experimenting with techniques that help you manage stress, calming your body and mind.

Stay anchored in the present. Practice meditation or breathing techniques to calm your busy mind and tune into your body. Be aware of the impact of negative thinking and practice gently challenging these thoughts or letting them go.

Adjust your expectations and keep things in perspective. Let go of expectations that no longer match what is happening right now. Stay consistent when your mind is swept away by thoughts of the worst-case scenarios and turn to the best case or the most realistic scenarios. Appreciate that your first job will not be your last and it could be a steppingstone. Even if it doesn't tick all your boxes, treat it as a learning experience.

Have a support system. Don't feel like you have to go through this alone. Be brave and talk to friends and family. Try to be open about how you feel and ask for emotional support. If this is difficult to do, there are many local and national organizations that provide free help and advice.

Don't compare yourself to others. This is a time of reflection, of listening to yourself, and of working out your personal values and priorities. Don't worry if there are obstacles on the way - keep trying, and persevere.

Five Ways to Wellbeing



Bod yn sylwgar
Take notice



Cysylltu
Connect



Bod yn fywiog
Be active



Dal ati i ddysgu
Keep learning



Rhoi
Give



Pum ffordd at les
Five ways to wellbeing

Seeking balance is extra important in a period of transition. Remember the Five Ways to Wellbeing and try to be mindful, connect with others, be active, keep learning and give to others. More information about the importance of maintaining the Five Ways to Wellbeing is available on the Health Service for Wales website by following this link:

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-advice/five-ways-to-wellbeing-invisible-folder/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>



I hope you found this art activity useful. Art can help during challenging times in life. Why not continue to use art to process your feelings and thoughts? Many find keeping an art journal or sketchbook helpful. Try to create in a reflective way to support your wellbeing.

If this activity evoked difficult emotions that you would like to explore please contact us. Individual art therapy is available to students at Bangor University. Art therapy, a type of psychotherapy, offers emotional and psychological support during the most difficult periods of life. Working with a qualified art therapist helps people use art materials, discover the creative process and support them as they explore their thoughts and feelings through the images they create.

Email us if you would like support or individual art therapy.

Contact details:

Wellbeing Service
Neuadd Rathbone
College Road
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2DF
01248 388520

wellbeingservice@bangor.ac.uk

<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/studentservices/wellbeing/index.php.en>

Or mental health support is available in Wales by calling 111 and following option 2. More information is available at the following link:

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-advice/mental-health-hub/111-press-2/>

Images

Here is a selection of images for your background collage. Feel free to print these out for use, or you can use images from old magazines and personal drawings. The pictures are black and white so you can colour them as you wish. Examples of the life cycle of a coloured butterfly are available here for you to use also.



