

“AdvanceHE

+ Strengthening the student experience: Distilling the 3 Es

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Foreword

In the ever-evolving landscape of UK higher education, the importance of employability, enterprise, and entrepreneurship cannot be overstated. Termed the '3Es' (Norton and Penaluna, 2022¹) they are more than just aspirations; they are fundamental pillars that support the success of our students and the wider community. It is within this context that this publication, drawn from the presentations at the Advance HE 2024 Employability Symposium, provides a platform for reflection, collaboration, and action.

As shown within this collection, higher education providers across the sector are undertaking innovative and impactful work to enhance outcomes for students. These efforts are shaping the future of graduates and equipping them to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive world post-graduation.

While the series focuses on success, there are, of course, inevitable challenges. Most that we face are not unique to individual institutions; they are shared across disciplines, regions, and borders. To make meaningful advancements, we call on discipline advocates and sector leaders to champion the exchange of knowledge within and beyond their institutions. This series helps propagate that exchange, sharing experiences and ideas. The collection therefore serves as both a testament to the ingenuity within the sector and a rallying call for collective learning. Each contribution highlights efforts to enhance employability, enterprise, and/or entrepreneurship. Together, they provide an evidence base to inform practice, inspire innovation, and ultimately enhance student success.

The Employability Symposium has run for several years now and I feel it is more than an event; it is a movement toward a sector-wide commitment to student success. I trust the insights shared here will inspire you to replicate, adapt, and test new approaches, contributing to a shared vision of excellence in employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education provision. Let us embrace the challenges, celebrate the successes, and learn from the setbacks as we work together to create a brighter future for our students and our sector.

With an unprecedented financial climate and a range of external disruptors such as international student numbers, cost of living, sustainability, social justice, technological advances, and regulation impacting higher education it is important to take stock and ensure this valuable work is prioritised and embedded, integration is of course important for aligning provision, it creates a level of connection linking elements so that they can work together and more efficiently. The embedding of practice creates deeper connections, a seamless approach and this 'gold standard' is of ever more importance during these disruptive times. Through the work of Advance HE we emphasise that embedding employability into the culture and curriculum of institutions can significantly enhance graduate employability, positively impacting student success.

1 Norton, S., & Penaluna, A (eds) (2022) 3 Es for Wicked Problems: Employability, Enterprise, and Entrepreneurship: Solving Wicked Problems. York: Advance HE

While categorising this collection does offer a semblance of order, it is the ability of each one of these case studies to truly enhance student success that is the essence of these initiatives. We present a range of dynamic journeys. While each initiative is unique in its focus, together the series echoes the collective pursuit of transformative solutions that address the intricate, interconnected, and often resistant challenges we face. Therefore, each in their own right contributes to the overall strength and resilience of the fabric of the 3Es.

The UK higher education sector has long been recognised for its commitment to excellence and innovation. However, the increasing pressure to meet the expectations of various stakeholders has kept the employability agenda at the fore. This shift is not merely a response to market demands but a strategic move to ensure that graduates are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy.

Students are at the heart of this agenda. With the rise in tuition fees, students are making significant investments in their education and are understandably focused on how their chosen institutions can support their future aspirations, whether through employment, self-employment, further study or alternative aspirations. The emphasis on employability and enterprising attributes ensures that students receive not only academic knowledge but also the practical skills and authentic experiences needed to thrive in the job market or through self-employment. This holistic approach to education is essential in fostering well-rounded graduates who are adaptable, innovative, and ready to tackle the challenges of the modern workforce.

Supportive others, including families, communities, and industries, also play a crucial role in the employability landscape. These stakeholders have a vested interest in the success of students, as the benefits of employability extend beyond individual achievements to broader social and economic impacts. Families and communities invest time, resources, and emotional support in students, while industries rely on a steady stream of skilled graduates to drive innovation and growth. By prioritising the 3E agenda, higher education providers can strengthen these relationships and create a more supportive ecosystem for student success.

Employers are key partners in the employability agenda. They have specific needs in terms of graduate knowledge, skills, and attributes, which should inform the curriculum and employability support provided by higher education institutions. By engaging with employers, institutions can ensure that their programs are aligned with industry requirements and that graduates are equipped with the competencies needed to excel in their chosen fields. This collaboration also provides valuable opportunities for students to gain real-world experience through internships, placements, and industry projects, further enhancing their employability.

For **institutions**, excellence in start-ups, graduate employment and employability is a critical factor in enhancing their reputation and global standing. Improved graduate outcome data rates can attract prospective students, foster alumni engagement, and strengthen partnerships with employers. Moreover, institutions that prioritise employability are better positioned to respond to the evolving needs of the job market and to contribute to the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce. This, in turn, supports the institution's mission of fostering academic excellence and societal impact.

At the national level and beyond, graduate employability is a government priority as it is vital to the **UK economy**. A highly skilled and employable workforce is essential for driving economic growth, innovation, and competitiveness. Employability also supports social and cultural development by enabling graduates to contribute positively to their communities and to address pressing societal challenges, whether at a local, national or global level. By embedding the 3Es into the culture and curriculum of higher education institutions, higher education providers can ensure that its graduates are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of the global economy and to make meaningful contributions to society.

The case studies presented in this collection highlight the diverse and innovative approaches taken by higher education institutions across the UK to enhance employability, enterprise, and entrepreneurship. These initiatives demonstrate the sector's commitment to student success and to addressing the multifaceted challenges of the modern job market. From multidisciplinary collaborations and subject-specific innovations to sustainability initiatives and work-integrated learning, each case study offers valuable insights and practical strategies for enhancing employability.

As we reflect on these case studies, it is important to recognise that the journey toward enhancing employability is ongoing and requires continuous collaboration, innovation, and adaptation. The challenges we face are complex and interconnected, but by working together and sharing our experiences, we can develop transformative solutions that benefit students, institutions, and society as a whole.

The importance of employability, enterprise, and entrepreneurship education in UK higher education cannot be overstated. The 3Es are essential for supporting student success, fostering innovation, and driving economic growth. The insights and strategies shared in this collection provide a valuable resource to enhance employability and to create a brighter future for our students and our sector. Let us embrace the challenges, celebrate the successes, and learn from the setbacks as we continue to advance the 3E agenda and to support the success of our graduates.

Stuart Norton

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Embedding the 3 Es

The role of guest talks within modules on students' learning experience, confidence, and employability: a case study

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Background

The aim of this case study is to investigate the impact of integrating guest speakers into teaching design on students' learning outcomes (pedagogy) and their employability skills as part of a person-centred approach based on constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999). A person-centred approach helps understand and successfully cope with potential weaknesses, needs and desires of the single student, with a clear impact on both learning and employability outcomes.

More specifically, this work is a case study related to the University of East Anglia's (UEA) School of Economics (ECO) undergraduate final year module, The Economics of Alternative Investments. This is a spring term module, optional for all ECO students regardless of their chosen BSc course, so it is likely that this module's population is partly self-selected and not fully representative of the correspondent students' cohort. In other words, students could have a stronger preference for studying and listening about finance. As the topic may be salient for them, it is likely that their attendance and engagement is higher than with other more 'generic' business and economics modules. Nonetheless, analysing this dynamic is outside of the scope of this study.

This study has been carried out because of multiple motivations, which can be summarised as follows:

- + pedagogical motivations
- + employability motivations
- + economic motivations
- + inclusivity motivations.

The four motivations are interlinked. A growing body of the literature (Nortvig et al, 2018) suggests that many factors, such as educator's role, course design and learning community significantly affect the degree of achievement of students' learning outcomes. It is then vital to foster an engaging and inclusive learning environment, leading students to achieve higher learning outcomes. This will inevitably support the development of more sophisticated skills, and clearer job market plans.

The economic theory suggests that students will be more likely to not only find a job, but a better paying job. This will contribute to economic growth through various channels, such as a lower skills-jobs mismatch in the job market (ie, fewer labour market frictions), higher productivity and personal income, determining an overall increase in the economic growth.

While researchers have made some attempts to study the impact of guest talks on teaching practices, the debate is far from being concluded, and is limited to some specific fields, such as accounting (Metrejean et al, 2002), nursing education (Zou et al, 2019), hospitality and tourism (Abdallah, 2016; Lee and Joung, 2017), and English for edtech (Mahadewi and Pudjawan, 2021). To date, there has been little research into the effects of guest speakers in economics and finance, which is the primary focus of the current study.

Considering the rapid growth of apprenticeships (OfS, 2020) and their success factors, such as support from employers – 44% of whom contributed to guest talks in university, according to QAA (Nawaz et al, 2024) – it has become imperative for a university's degree programmes to embed employability in the widest possible way in the teaching practices. This approach is crucial for meeting the growing competition from both apprenticeships and foreign higher education institutions (British Council, 2024).

Approach

This section provides detailed information on the module history and how its provision has changed. After joining ECO in September 2019, I took over the organisation and teaching delivery of ECO-6004B, The Economics of Alternative Investments, in January 2020 from another colleague. It is worth providing detailed information on the module's teaching delivery and assessments before and after my take over.

Until then, this module has been taught over 12 weeks in the spring term, featuring 11 two-hour lectures (including a revision lecture), and eight one-hour IT lab seminars for practicing MS Excel. Assessment consisted of three components: an Excel-based summative assessment (20%), an essay-based summative assessment (20%), and a final exam (60%).

Once I took it over (January 2020), I decided to implement some changes on both the module content and its teaching delivery. More specifically, the full revision entailed the inclusion of two additional topics (ESG and Impact Investments; Crypto assets) and, importantly, the integration of guest talks within the module, which is the pedagogical innovation I was convinced was necessary.

To control for the impact of these several changes, I decided to implement them through some steps: the plan was to revise the teaching material without adding any new topics during the academic year 2019-20 and pilot the integration of guest talks by inviting two guest speakers to join two different roomed lectures (until mid-March 2020 all teaching sessions were in person). One of the two guest speakers provided an insightful talk to my students during a lecture held a couple of weeks before the sudden Covid-19 related lockdown restrictions.

This emergency required universities to quickly adapt to the unknown world of virtual teaching, but also eroded many bureaucratic barriers. I quickly reacted and my students did not lose any teaching for ECO-6004B, and I managed to reschedule the second guest talk so that it occurred in the virtual teaching room. According to students' feedback, this pilot was perceived positively, and this encouraged me to completely embed guest talks in ECO-6004B teaching delivery in the following academic year.

Probably the fact that academic year 2020-21's teaching delivery was completely virtual has become an advantage for organising guest talks. Making use of pre-recorded videos (asynchronous teaching) in certain weeks and weekly live sessions of two hours each in two different days – seminar sessions' time was doubled and kept split in two one-hour slots – I was able to host eight guest speakers for nine guest talks, which covered almost all module topics, providing practitioner's expertise and valuable job market tips and insights.

Embedding guest talks within a module was still an unexplored world for me, as is the case for many colleagues teaching economics or other subjects, so I could not borrow from their experience. To achieve the goal of integrating guest talks meaningfully and smoothly within the teaching delivery while keeping a high quality of teaching, I needed to tackle the potential issues/disadvantages suggested by Mullins (2001). As outlined in Calef (2021), it is worth elaborating them as follows:

- 1 The coordination of these guest talks was not trivial, due to many factors such as the large number of guest speakers I wished to invite, their suitability, availability, expertise in topics relevant for the module and, importantly, students' timetables.
- 2 The most relevant concern was to select the most suitable candidates, ie, potential guest speakers who are expert in their fields, but also able to both provide a sufficient level of commitment to prepare the guest talk and engage¹ with students, instilling curiosity in them.² In this sense, I contacted candidates that are part of my personal network – however, it is worth noticing that this may not necessarily be feasible in all cases.
- 3 Despite not all of them having some previous teaching experience, knowing their expertise and soft skills, I was able to “control” some of the factors above – this approach has been taken to minimise the likelihood of students' dissatisfaction. Thanks to having live teaching events on two different days and online venues and with the help of some asynchronous teaching, I was able to accommodate guest speakers' availability – this task can be rather challenging, due to timetabling constraints and there is the necessity of rescheduling a teaching event, especially if the latter occurs in person – and provide this unique teaching environment, where academic teaching was matched with practical expertise and experience, allowing students to achieve a richer comprehension of topics as well as careers on correspondent sectors.

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- 1 Engagement was a very critical aspect for me in academic year 2020-21. As all teaching events were hosted in virtual rooms, due to Covid-19 restrictions, being able to assure students' engagement, wellbeing and keeping the sense of belonging was an especially hard goal to achieve. Cranfield et al (2021) tried to assess higher education students' perceptions of virtual teaching through a comparative study that included Hungary, South Africa and Wales. While they found some cross-country heterogeneity, results highlight the necessity of significant attention when delivering online teaching.
 - 2 Leor (2015) notes that the outcome of a guest talk depends on “the willingness, motivation and interest that the student presents when it comes to this matter.” Many studies (such as Jackson et al, 2012; Stokoe, 2012) support that curiosity is a great “engine” behind students' willingness to learn.
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- 4 At the same time, I informed guest speakers about the relevant module content and level of teaching. By also providing help to prepare presentation slides, I was sure that the guest talk would have fit well with module outline³ and there was enough time (around 15 minutes) for a final Q&A, during which students asked questions related to the talk and career prospects. Q&As often run longer than the end of the teaching event with some students remaining for up to 20 minutes longer. Having all the teaching events recorded, students who did not manage to follow part or all of the guest talk were able to catch up later with it. Blackboard Collaborate, the platform used by UEA for online teaching, showed evidence of the occurrence of the latter.

While the whole feedback I collected convinced me that this innovation probably worked well, I have been left with two main doubts. First, had the positive outcome been driven by the fact that teaching delivery was uniquely virtual? In other words, teaching delivery could have led to the positive correlation between the presence of guest talks and positive feedback, simply because the virtual teaching would have become different from a traditional approach brought in a virtual venue. Second, what was the actual impact of these guest talks? If this pedagogical choice has an impact, the latter needs to be scientifically quantified, especially in the light of the fact teaching venues would have returned to be in person or hybrid in the medium period. Ergo, to contribute to the educational research field, at least another “test” was needed.

The first issue was overcome in academic year 2021-22, during which teaching delivery was mixed (partly face-to-face and partly online⁴) with a similar split for guest talks (seven guest talks overall, three of them face-to-face, while four were delivered in the online teaching room) and a survey took place, after getting the authorisation from ECO Ethics Committee, to quantify the impact of guest talks on attendance, learning, willingness to learn, job market planning, confidence and summative assessments' preparation.

Outcomes

This study provides some preliminary insights in relation to the pedagogical success of the implementing guest talks within a finance module's teaching delivery.

The feedback (collected through university' survey, emails, and other interactions, etc) was overwhelming positive and, interestingly, although not required, some of concepts of the guest talks appeared in the second summative assessment – an evidence/research-based essay on analysing the case of investing in alternative asset classes (selected by students themselves from a short list).

3 Lang (2008) notices the need for the module organiser to create a clear link between learning outcomes and guest talk.

4 The mixed teaching venues increases the coordination costs and may reduce potential guest speakers' availability, as not all of them are able to come to UEA campus. On the other side, the module organiser develops some economies of learning over time, so the overall cost of replicating the integration of guest talks within the module, in general, may increase, decrease, or remain unchanged. In the case of this author, it decreased.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that one of the motivations behind the continuous class size increase in proportion to the other optional modules (from around 37.0% to 45.6% during the period of study, and the impact continued, as in the academic year 2023-24, in-take ratio reached around 57.9%) was due to the novel teaching format. Students belonging to different cohorts speak each other about future module choice. This is probably facilitated by student-led societies, such as UEA Economics Society and Finance and Investment Society.

The analysis suggests very strong evidence for the increase in confidence (81.0% of the respondents), improvement of the learning (85.9% of the respondents), willingness to learn (86.3%), job market planning (71.3%), learning experience (95.2%). On the contrary, the impact on attendance was not detected.

However, it also presents a few limitations, very typical of survey-based studies, such as the non-perfect representativeness of the survey sample of the whole class as well as that changes in guest speakers' features may affect some of the results. It is likely that the most engaged students filled in the survey. Moreover, this survey does not quantify the degree of the impact but only if there was an impact.

At the same time, it seems that, coherently with the literature, the online venue experiences lower average attendance rates and it turns out that guest talks do not help to improve attendance in virtual venues. On the contrary, there is a non-negligible impact on in-person events' teaching sessions. This is likely to be explained by the fact that having a guest speaker in the same room enhances the likelihood of a post-teaching one-to-one networking activity, which is impossible in the virtual sessions. This finding should be kept in consideration, especially considering that in-person teaching events have been restored in most countries after the end of Covid-19 pandemic. The replies to open-ended questions seem to confirm this finding: they suggest the main drivers behind these outcomes are related to the diversity of voices (not just the lecturer's), the expertise and approachability of the speakers during and after the guest talks – critical risk factors to be considered to successfully implement this pedagogical approach.

As the class is rather heterogeneous, assessing whether there are some specific trends for certain groups, characterised by a certain demographic, may suggest ways to improve inclusivity. However, to address this point, it is key to repeat the experiment in various academic years and assess whether, and if so how, specific patterns evolve over time.

Even if being able to detect a direct impact on students' assessments marks would be ideal, this type of study does not allow us to achieve it. Nonetheless, better summative assessment preparation is likely to be correlated with higher marks, so the study should be able to detect an indirect impact on assessments' marks.

Finally, while external validity cannot be assured yet, it would provide further evidence to extend this pedagogical approach to other business, economics, finance and associated fields modules that are not hosting guest speakers.

It is worth keeping in mind that integrating guest speakers as part of the teaching provision can be problematic and needs to be carefully managed: timetabling and room booking difficulties, budget constraints and potential last minute cancellations present non-trivial risks to the module organiser and the institution.

Nonetheless, as the value of a university's degree is under close monitoring and is affected by higher competition from substitutes (apprenticeships) and foreign institutions, embedding employability via guest talks may represent a low-cost competitive advantage and is worth considering.

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Exploring the interconnectedness of employability, enterprise, and entrepreneurship through a 3E Lens in UK higher education

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Background

In recent years, the focus on employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship has become central to the discourse within UK higher education (HE), especially as institutions aim to enhance student career trajectories. The Covid-19 pandemic has further amplified this focus, highlighting the importance of equipping students with the necessary skills to adapt to a rapidly evolving job market (Norton and Sear, 2021). However, these concepts – often referred to collectively as the 3Es – are frequently approached in silos, leading to disjointed institutional strategies and fragmented student experiences (Walmsley et al, 2022). This division can be problematic as it overlooks the significant overlap in the skills and competencies required for success across these domains (Yorke and Knight, 2002).

The core challenge addressed by this study is the ambiguity surrounding the definitions of employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship and the relationship between them. The study addresses this challenge through the lens of a key stakeholder: the careers professional. The role and responsibilities of careers professionals within HE are of significant and growing importance within a UK context due to their connection to the employability agenda. However, their focus now stretches beyond employability and there is recognition that the term ‘careers professional’ incorporates a range of roles, undertaking a variety of tasks, many of which continue to evolve (Christie, 2016) but include gaining a deeper understanding and interpretation of enterprise and entrepreneurship while synergising these concepts with employability (Green, 2020).

Approach

To explore the interconnectedness of the 3Es, this study adopted a mixed-method approach that combined a review of existing literature with an online survey distributed to careers professionals in HE across the UK through Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK) and Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) newsletters and social media. A total of 95 individuals responded from 46 HE institutions (HEIs), ensuring a diverse representation of UK HEIs. Respondents were drawn from a variety of roles defined as delivering Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG).

The survey focused on two key areas: (1) the definitions of employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship, and (2) the identification of the skills, attributes and competencies most associated with each area. Participants were asked to define each term in their own words and comment on whether they saw a relationship between the three. Additionally, they were presented with a list of 30 skills commonly associated with employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship and asked to rank them in terms of their relevance and importance to each 'E'.

The data was analysed using a combination of thematic analysis for qualitative responses and descriptive statistics for the quantitative data.

Outcomes

Defining the 3Es

The study found that definitions of employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship vary widely among careers professionals. This definitional ambiguity has been noted in previous literature, with many authors highlighting the difficulty in reaching consensus on what each term encompasses (Cranmer, 2006; Sewell and Dacre Pool, 2010). Most respondents provided their own definitions, which reflected a mix of intrinsic (focusing on individual skills and attributes) and extrinsic (focusing on outcomes such as employment or business creation) perspectives.

Employability was predominantly defined in terms of the individual's readiness for the labor market, with respondents emphasising skills, attributes and knowledge as key components (Yorke and Knight, 2002; CBI, 2009). However, enterprise and entrepreneurship were often conflated, with many respondents using the terms interchangeably despite their distinct meanings. This confusion has been highlighted in the literature, where the terms are often merged, creating a "blurry" definition (Trainer, 2000).

One of the key findings was that most careers professionals see employability as an overarching concept that includes both enterprise and entrepreneurship. This aligns with Sewell and Dacre Pool's (2010) assertion that enterprise skills are a subset of employability skills. However, some respondents noted that enterprise and entrepreneurship require distinct attributes, which may not be as critical for traditional employability (Rae, 2007).

The relationship between employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship

The study revealed a general consensus that employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship are interconnected, with 97% of respondents agreeing that there is a relationship between them. However, the nature of this relationship is subject to debate. While some respondents viewed enterprise and entrepreneurship as subsets of employability, others argued that all three areas are equally important and should be treated as complementary rather than hierarchical (Neck and Corbett, 2018).

The literature supports this view, with several authors suggesting that the skills required for employability – such as problem-solving, leadership and adaptability – are equally critical for enterprise and entrepreneurship (Walmsley et al, 2022; Decker-Lange, 2021). This study's findings further reinforce the idea that the 3Es share a common set of competencies, despite the differences in how they are traditionally approached in HE.

Shared skills, attributes and competencies

The most significant finding from the survey was the overlap in the skills, attributes and competencies associated with employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship (see Figure 1). When asked to identify the most important skills for each area, respondents overwhelmingly highlighted problem-solving, creativity, adaptability, leadership and collaboration as critical across all three domains. These skills align with existing models such as the EntreComp framework, which emphasises the importance of creativity and problem-solving in both entrepreneurial and employability contexts (McCallum et al, 2018).

Figure 1. Response to survey question: What on this list are employability, enterprise or entrepreneurship skills, behaviours or competencies?



Problem-solving was ranked as the most critical skill, reflecting its fundamental role across various professional settings. Whether in traditional employment or entrepreneurial ventures, the ability to identify, analyse and resolve challenges is essential for both operational efficiency and innovation (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Morris et al, 2013; Neck and Corbett, 2018; Walmsley et al, 2022). The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) guidelines (2018) also emphasise problem-solving as a key competency that enhances both employability and entrepreneurial capabilities, reinforcing its relevance in higher education curricula. This finding supports existing research that positions problem-solving as a core competency for employability and entrepreneurship (Yorke and Knight, 2002).

Creativity emerged as the second most important skill, particularly relevant to enterprise and entrepreneurship, where innovation is key to success. Creativity allows individuals to generate new ideas, products and services, fostering both business growth and the ability to differentiate in competitive markets (Neck and Corbett, 2018). This aligns with frameworks such as the EntreComp, which emphasises creativity as a vital entrepreneurial skill (McCallum et al, 2018).

Motivation and perseverance ranked third and is crucial for thriving in the ever-changing modern work environment. In both employment and entrepreneurial contexts, the ability to adjust to new situations, market trends, or unforeseen challenges is vital (Walmsley et al, 2022). This skill has gained increasing importance due to the global pandemic and the resulting shifts in the work environment (Beaumont and Gedye, 2018).

Building and using networks ranked fourth, underscoring the importance of working well with others. Whether in employment or entrepreneurial settings, the ability to develop and collaborate with diverse teams, share ideas and contribute to collective goals is crucial for achieving success. This finding is consistent with other research that highlights teamwork as a critical competency for employability and enterprise (Cole and Tibby, 2013; QAA, 2018).

Taking the initiative and tenacity ranked fifth. Research highlights that individuals who take initiative demonstrate higher levels of leadership and are better equipped to drive innovation and project completion (Davis et al, 2016). Tenacity, or persistence, complements this by ensuring that individuals maintain their efforts and adapt strategies when faced with setbacks (Neck and Corbett, 2018). The combination of these traits fosters resilience, which is highly valued by employers and necessary for entrepreneurial success (Walmsley et al, 2022). Furthermore, frameworks such as the European Commission's EntreComp (McCallum et al, 2018) emphasise initiative-taking as a core component of entrepreneurial competencies, underscoring its role in creating value and sustaining momentum in projects.

Implications for higher education

The findings from this study have several important implications for HE institutions. First, they highlight the need for a more integrated approach to the 3Es, particularly in terms of curriculum design, assessment and student support services. Many careers professionals noted that their institutions still treat employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship as separate areas, with little overlap in terms of

training or support (Hook, 2020). This siloed approach can be detrimental to students, who may struggle to see the connections between these areas and how the skills they develop in one domain can be transferred to another (Rae, 2007).

By adopting a more integrated approach to the 3Es, HE institutions can better prepare students for the complexities of the modern workforce. This could involve greater collaboration between careers services, enterprise educators and academic departments, as well as the development of cross-disciplinary programmes that emphasise the shared skills and competencies required for success across all three areas (Neck and Corbett, 2018).

Next steps

This study has laid the groundwork for future research into the relationship between employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship under the banner of the 3Es. The next phase of this research will involve developing practical frameworks that HE institutions can adopt to integrate the 3Es more effectively. This may include piloting new interdisciplinary modules, enhancing the role of enterprise educators in careers services and developing professional development programmes for careers professionals that focus on the interconnectedness of these areas (Bauman and Lucy, 2019).

Future research could also explore how the findings of this study apply across different disciplines and educational levels. While this study focused primarily on careers professionals, it would be valuable to gather perspectives from students, academic staff and employers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the 3Es are perceived and implemented in practice (Beaumont and Gedye, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the relationship between employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship as perceived by careers professionals in UK HE. The findings reveal a significant overlap in the skills and competencies required for success across all three areas, despite the traditional tendency to treat them as separate domains. By adopting a more integrated approach to the 3Es, HE institutions can better prepare students for the challenges of the modern workforce, equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in both traditional employment and entrepreneurial ventures. The study highlights the need for further research and development in this area, particularly in terms of curriculum design and professional development for careers professionals.

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Professional Futures: co-creating a new unit of study for all undergraduate students within Camberwell College of Arts, Chelsea College of Arts and Wimbledon College of Arts

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Background

This case study offers initial evaluative insights on the co-creation of a new employability-led unit of study within a collegiate London-based university. University of the Arts London (UAL) is the largest provider of Art and Design higher education in the world, delivering to approximately 22,000 students, and offering courses in art, design, fashion, communication and performing arts, at further education, higher education and postgraduate level. UAL operates twelve campuses, six colleges, four institutes and five research centres.

The six colleges are Central Saint Martins, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion, Camberwell College of Arts, Chelsea College of Arts and Wimbledon College of Arts, the latter three being the focus of this study.

UAL's strategic commitment is to global reach, widening access and preparing students to have a positive impact on the world around them. Its [three guiding policies](#) are to:

- + give our students the education they need to flourish in a changing world
- + bring a high-quality creative education to more students than ever before
- + change the world through our creative endeavour.

In autumn 2023, a team of academics and students joined together to co-create a new unit of study that addresses the 3Es (employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship). The unit was designed for delivery at undergraduate Stage 3 across all courses within Camberwell College of Arts, Chelsea College of Arts and Wimbledon College of Arts, which share a governance structure and house three schools: Art, Design and Performance.

The unit was developed in the context of continually reflecting and honing our delivery, and ensuring we are genuinely supporting students in a changing world. As such, it formed part of a wider rethink of our professional practice content, prompted by the feedback we received from students coupled with reflections on the wider sector.

We thus surveyed our incoming students prior to their arrival in September 2023 to establish what support they felt they needed and help ensure we were prepared to meet their needs. Along with mental health, academic and financial support, the most common area of support cited was career support, with 59% of students responding (of 1,150 respondents) that this was a service they felt they would need access to in the next year, and 88% stating that they were looking forward to building their careers or networking.

As our institution is focused on the creative industries, we are aware of the increasing challenges of social mobility within our sector. While the creative sector is growing twice as fast as the UK economy as a whole, there are multiple reports evidencing that the proportion of working-class people in core creative employment has shrunk by half from the 1970s to 2022 even though 48% of the UK population identified themselves as working class in 2021 (Brook, 2023). Data within a recent study by Netflix and National Youth Theatre found that “89% of working-class parents, guardians and carers say they wouldn’t want their child to pursue a creative career path” (National Youth Theatre, 2024) due to a perceived fear that a creative career has no real job prospects. This was backed by young people feeling their career was seen as a “waste of an education” and unsupported by their families.

Alongside these provocations, and concurrent with our college-level interventions, a UAL-wide research activity titled Rethinking Employability developed a delivery baseline to:

- + redesign the curriculum, in partnership with staff, students and external specialists, to improve vocational opportunities, and our graduates’ skills/employability
- + develop our students’ creative skills and practices for a wider range of industries and help more students start their own businesses
- + increase our networking, guidance and careers support for alumni and graduates.

With the need to act quickly and, to ensure a baseline was accessed by every student, we felt this baseline called for more course-level intervention, but something that needed a wider sustained approach.

The development of a new unit of study, delivered to every undergraduate student across our three colleges, would enable us to provide investment and momentum to ensure changes were possible, but also created a difficult challenge: the unit would need to be suitable for three colleges and three discrete schools of practice, across more than 20 BA (Hons) programmes, and delivered to approximately 1,500 students simultaneously.

Methodology

The methodology used to create the unit involved holding regular meetings with the key stakeholders, including students (Changemakers and Climate Advocates), academics from across the three schools, leads from business and innovation, professional practice, progression and attainment, graduate employability, emerging technologies, academic enhancement and academic support, and mapping developments to an established academic quality schedule.

A guiding principle of the work was that students were involved in the inception of the developments. Student voice was a key driver in developing the unit and was amplified by ensuring that students were represented at all stages of development. Through bringing students to the initial discussions and hearing their direct feedback, we ensured we were developing a co-created unit which spoke to their needs and individual career goals, alongside personal development.

To aid the conversations with academic staff we aligned this work to existing research, evaluation and development, and university structures. By referencing the Rethinking Employability work led by UAL centrally to “redesign our curriculum with staff and students”, we planned to create a delivery model that would ensure a baseline of professional practice content for every undergraduate student at our Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon colleges. This also links to the business as usual of the university, with the need to improve graduate outcomes and address access to the creative sector for all students.

The work builds on a previous project supported by the Higher Education Academy which created a framework (Creative Attributes Framework (University of the Arts London, 2024), supporting employability and enterprise) to explicitly accredit a set of attributes to support students in recognising their readiness for a rewarding professional life. In further development of this framework, an online tool, MYCAF, was created to enable students to access a self-reflection tool, to identify their strengths and areas for further development.

“MyCAF helps to translate the way we work and study into employability skills” –

UAL student, March 2020

The timing of this unit development was supported through institutional quality processes as many of our courses were going through a revalidation process. We felt it was key to ensure this unit was brought into the planning so teams could include the new unit in their documentation, and it would be embedded more effectively. This also added an additional time pressure to the planning process to ensure it was ready ahead of the other planning work.

To enable good conversation and allow modifications to the content, the methodology adopted included a series of meetings to enable an iterative approach to the unit developments. The process was spread over nine months, aligning the development of the content to a recognised revalidation schedule and using a clear communications strategy that ensured the process of development was transparent and broadly shared.

As a shared unit open to all undergraduate students, the unit must speak to all disciplines and all courses, so the content treads a fine line between being specific enough to appeal to students (student voice has been essential in shaping language) and broad enough that all courses can see themselves reflected in the descriptor. Between all the meetings, a shared unit descriptor (including Learning Outcomes and Assessment Formats) was created, and a set of shared delivery approaches, such as a start and end date that was shared across all courses.

The resulting unit descriptor has been shared more widely via senior management meetings, re-approval scrutiny (Design School and Performance) and with the public engagement team.

Outcomes

As this new unit is for Stage 3 of the undergraduate programme, we will not see the change in a measurable way until 2027, and an impact on graduate outcomes even later. As a result, our impact measuring has been more qualitative at this stage and focused on the wider impact of developing a new unit.

One significant outcome has been bringing employability back into the spotlight in our courses and has enabled a re-addressing of what practical skills students develop through their studies. This has been particularly useful to frame the scaffolding of learning, and where delivery happens (in course, through a central team or externally). As such, it has also helped foster a more collaborative approach between our academic staff and wider support services.

All our courses embed principles of climatic, racial and social justice, and when speaking to course teams about the development of this unit, the aspect of actively changing our delivery to more actively support social mobility became a natural focus. There have been practical discussions of how this can be supported through a subject-specific lens and benefit our students to succeed in a changing world.

From having open conversations with academic teams, students and support services, we are now able to reshape our content to align to a new framework of delivery. We are creating a suite of skills packages that will be delivered in course, or by a central team (depending on the content), so that all students will receive a baseline of subject-specific content, but will be enriched by a wider range of workshops, so that students can autonomously select the content best suited to their career goals, giving them ownership over their own path.

The alignment of all courses through a shared unit approach also means the delivery can be simultaneous, which comes with its own challenges (including the capacity of central support teams) but has the advantage of allowing us to create campus-wide activities which can have real meaning to our students as they will feed directly into a live unit.

As this unit is live for our students joining from September 2024, we have time to ensure our content is in line with the new unit. We are spending this time developing this unit with our current students, so they can have the benefit of all new materials produced, and they can help shape the direction for the future students.

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Discipline-specific employability skills and awareness via the virtual learning environment: an innovative and transferable approach

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Background

While students tend to recognise the value of employability skills and training, they are often prevented from engaging with such activities while studying due to competing demands, time constraints and the lack of clarity about the most sought-after employability competencies, among other individual and systemic barriers (Jackson and Tomlinson, 2022). Sub-cohorts reporting such difficulties include online distance learning students, international students and part-time students (Jackson and Tomlinson, 2022). In recent years, online distance education has seen unprecedented expansion and internationalisation (Tran et al, 2023). This demands effective, inclusive and equitable strategies for supporting student professional development across study modes (ie, on-campus, online distance learning, blended learning, full-time and part-time study). Increasing these students' access to employability development resources and opportunities is integral to helping bridge geographical and socio-economic differences in students' social mobility and graduate capital (Delaney and Farren, 2016; Butcher and Rose-Adams, 2015).

Embedding employability skills within the core curriculum (in addition to offering extracurricular and co-curricular activities) has a dual benefit. Students are more likely to engage in activities not perceived as additional workload or optional courses and engage more deeply with learning materials whose employability value is evident (Cachia et al, 2018).

Existing employability guidance has rarely focused on the virtual learning environment – indicating uncertainty about best practice (Clark et al, 2011; Heymann et al, 2022; Rees, 2021). The distinctiveness of this project lies in its systematic identification and creative integration of in-demand discipline-specific competencies *within the core online curriculum*.

The main objectives of the EEVE (Enhancing discipline-specific Employability skills and awareness via the Virtual learning Environment) project were to:

- 1 Develop a discipline-specific employability framework. Discipline-specific competency frameworks serve important functions – from professional accreditation to comprehensive competency-based teaching (von Treuer and Reynolds, 2017)
- 2 Audit and update the online curriculum to enhance its professional orientation
- 3 Enhance students' employability skills and confidence, and sector awareness
- 4 Advance and disseminate best practice in this area

Institutional and disciplinary context

The Global Mental Health MSc programme at the University of Glasgow has attracted learners from a wide range of countries worldwide such as Nigeria, Kenya, Panama, Malta, Romania, China, Lebanon, France, Canada, Ukraine and the UK. The programme offers two study modes: on-campus and distance learning, with a total of 90 students registered in 2022-23, most of whom are international (non-UK-based) students. Notably, the on-campus students have access to the same comprehensive self-directed online learning content as distance learning students. This enables a ‘flipped classroom’ approach (McNaughton and Bhardwaj, 2022). Online teaching is delivered via Rise 360 Articulate (<https://360.articulate.com>) and hosted on Moodle. This makes the online curriculum a cornerstone to the teaching provision.

Global mental health graduates tend to pursue careers across a wide variety of roles and sectors such as psychiatry, psychology, advocacy, policymaking, social work, business management, non-governmental organisations, humanitarian work, and many others. This presents distinct challenges to supporting students’ awareness and acquisition of a comprehensive and versatile range of subject-specific and other employability skills.

Guiding approach

This work was underpinned by Daubney’s (2020) **extracted employability approach**, whereby educators seeking to boost employability “*should not focus on adding content but instead on extracting and surfacing what is already developed in the curriculum*” (p90). As argued by Quinlan and Renninger (2022, 879), the formal curriculum can be harnessed to “[...] *illustrate[d] career applications of the concepts or disciplinary techniques being taught*’. While helpful as a general approach, Daubney’s (2020) extracted employability does not prescribe a concrete implementation plan. Therefore, this project offers an original and transferable step-by-step guide.

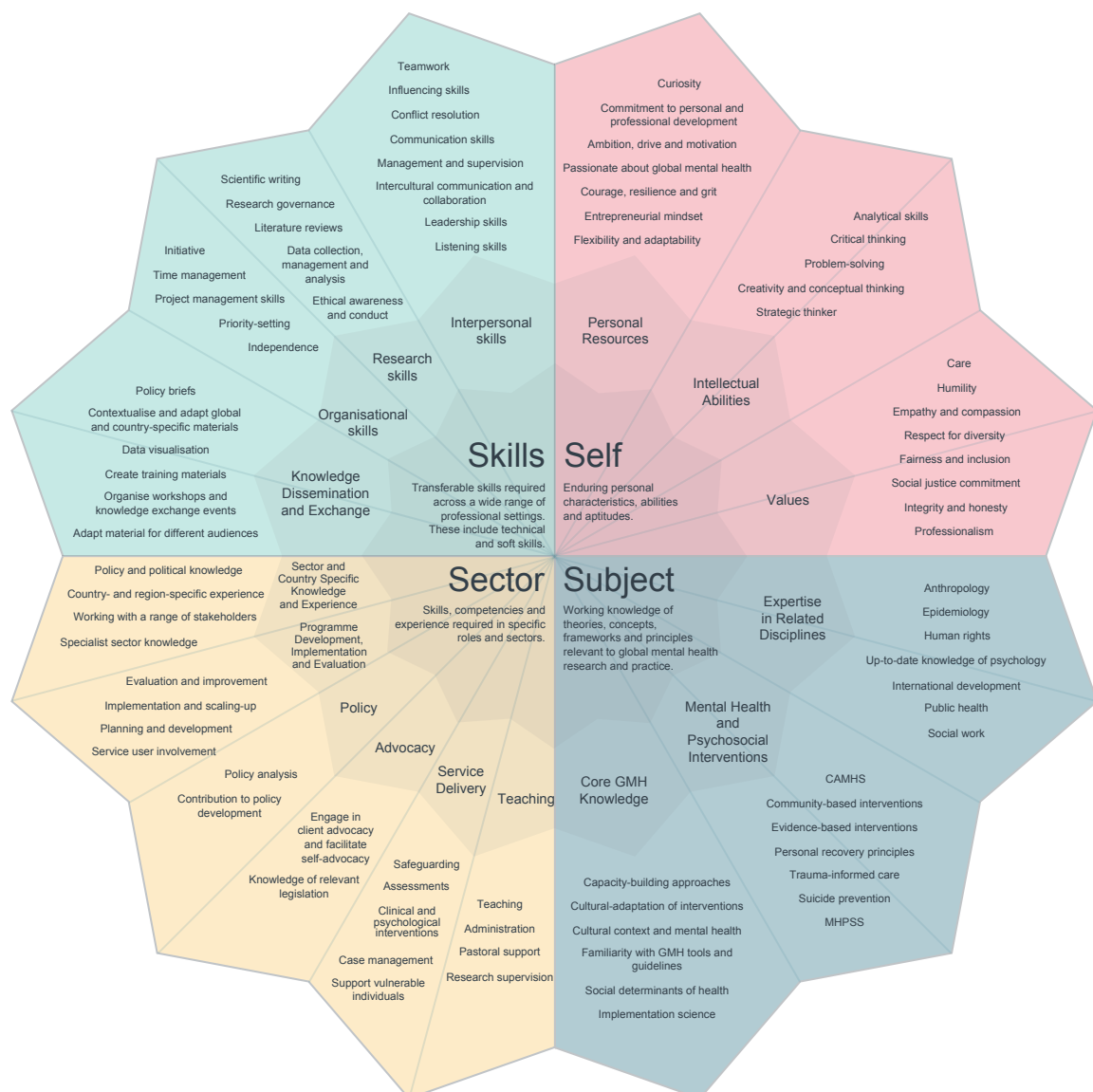
Approach

The project team included the Project Lead (DK – Lecturer), a Graduate Teaching Assistant and MSc alumnus (GH), a Senior Lecturer with expertise in digital learning (LS), a Senior Lecturer and Programme Director (JLM), and a Careers Manager and Team Lead (FS). The team composition ensured an appropriate blend of expertise and perspectives. The project took place between September 2022 and July 2023. A more detailed description of the project is available at Karadzhov et al (2023; 2024a).

Phase one: job market analysis. Job advertisement analysis has been used successfully to map out in-demand skills and competencies and help bridge the divide between curricular provisions and employer expectations (Osmani et al, 2019; McArthur et al, 2017). We purposively selected a sample of 70 recent job descriptions from a wide range of sectors, geographical settings and seniority levels. We then extracted and hierarchically organised the skills and attributes using qualitative content analysis. The procedure is described in more detail in Karadzhov et al (2024b).

Phase two: employability framework development. The extracted skills and attributes were organised thematically and hierarchically. This culminated in the **first-of-its-kind Multi-Sectoral Global Mental Health Employability Framework** (Figure 1). It comprises four meta-dimensions (Self, Subject, Skills, and Sector) and features various components such as organisational skills; cultural sensitivity; stakeholder collaboration; values (for example, social justice; respect); policy knowledge; sector knowledge and experience; subject knowledge; and many others. It covers various job families such as research and teaching; capacity development; clinical work; policy; and advocacy. The framework was purposefully inclusive and intended to foster career exploration and mobility. It can be used as a standalone career development resource by students and professionals alike (see Karadzhov et al, 2024b).

Figure 1. The Novel ‘4S’ Multi-Sectoral Global Mental Health Competency Framework (University of Glasgow, 2023; CC BY-NC 4.0)

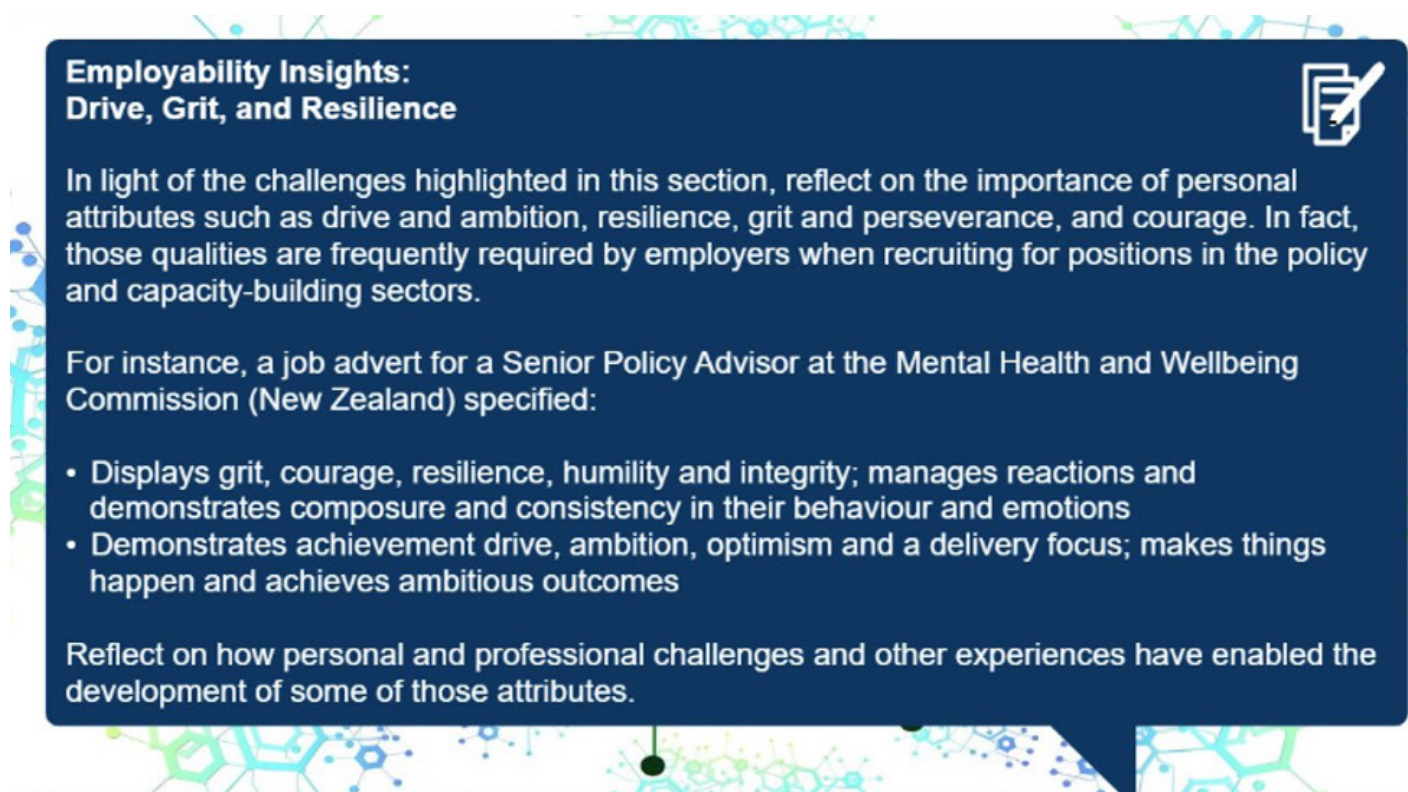


Phase three: curriculum auditing. The Framework was then used as a tool to examine the current learning content and identify areas of good practice as well as developmental areas. This entailed periodic team discussions; it was not a one-off exercise. We used a bespoke auditing tool with several prompts (such as, to what extent are the programme intended learning outcomes, structure and assessments consistent with the Framework? ; How are those skills currently being developed and assessed in the programme?; What opportunities do students currently have to develop their policy/ advocacy/interpersonal skills?; Are students currently being encouraged to reflect on their core values and/or key skills being developed?).

Phase four: employability enhancements. The preceding phases culminated in four distinct types of curricular innovations – embedded across the programme’s core online modules, which are available to both distance learning and on-campus students. Wherever appropriate, excerpts from the sampled job descriptions were cited to demonstrate the employability value of the core subject knowledge and skills being developed. Importantly, we ensured the newly developed activities directly aligned with the core course content, and did not significantly increase students’ workload (Jackson and Tomlinson, 2022).

Employability insights – explicit connections were drawn between core subject material and employability skills and attributes identified in the job market analysis (See Figure 2 and Figure 3). This is extracted employability in action (Daubney, 2020).

Figure 2. Example of embedding employability insights in the online curriculum (1)



**Employability Insights:
Drive, Grit, and Resilience**

In light of the challenges highlighted in this section, reflect on the importance of personal attributes such as drive and ambition, resilience, grit and perseverance, and courage. In fact, those qualities are frequently required by employers when recruiting for positions in the policy and capacity-building sectors.

For instance, a job advert for a Senior Policy Advisor at the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (New Zealand) specified:

- Displays grit, courage, resilience, humility and integrity; manages reactions and demonstrates composure and consistency in their behaviour and emotions
- Demonstrates achievement drive, ambition, optimism and a delivery focus; makes things happen and achieves ambitious outcomes

Reflect on how personal and professional challenges and other experiences have enabled the development of some of those attributes.

Figure 3. Example of embedding employability insights in the online curriculum (2)



**Employability Insights:
Cultural Adaptation**

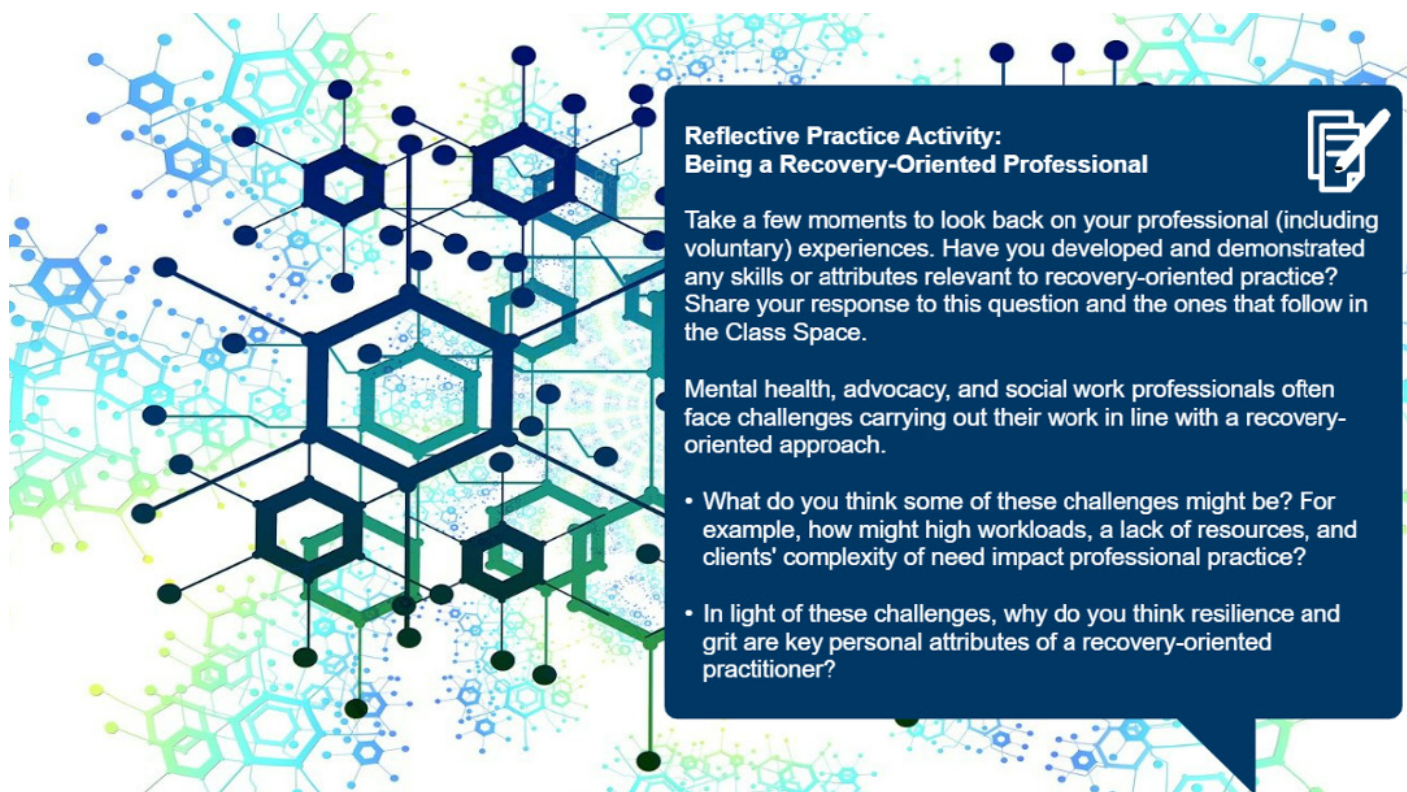
Culturally adapting assessment tools, training packages, and treatment guidelines is an important skill in many professional global mental health roles. Solid knowledge of the principles and techniques of cultural adaptation may boost employability.

A recent advertisement for a MHPSS Technical Advisor post at the International Federation of Red Cross listed in its key tasks and responsibilities:

'Develop, culturally adapt, and disseminate tools for training to enable humanitarians to offer Psychological First Aid and other psychological support to Ukrainian refugees. Adapt existing training packages to the current context and different needs.'

Reflective practice – activities designed to prompt students to explore their “*personal strengths and competence limitations*” and identify “*sources and means for solving existing and future professional activity problems*” (Colomer et al, 2020, 4). Please see Figure 4 for an example.

Figure 4. Example of a reflective practice online learning activity



**Reflective Practice Activity:
Being a Recovery-Oriented Professional**

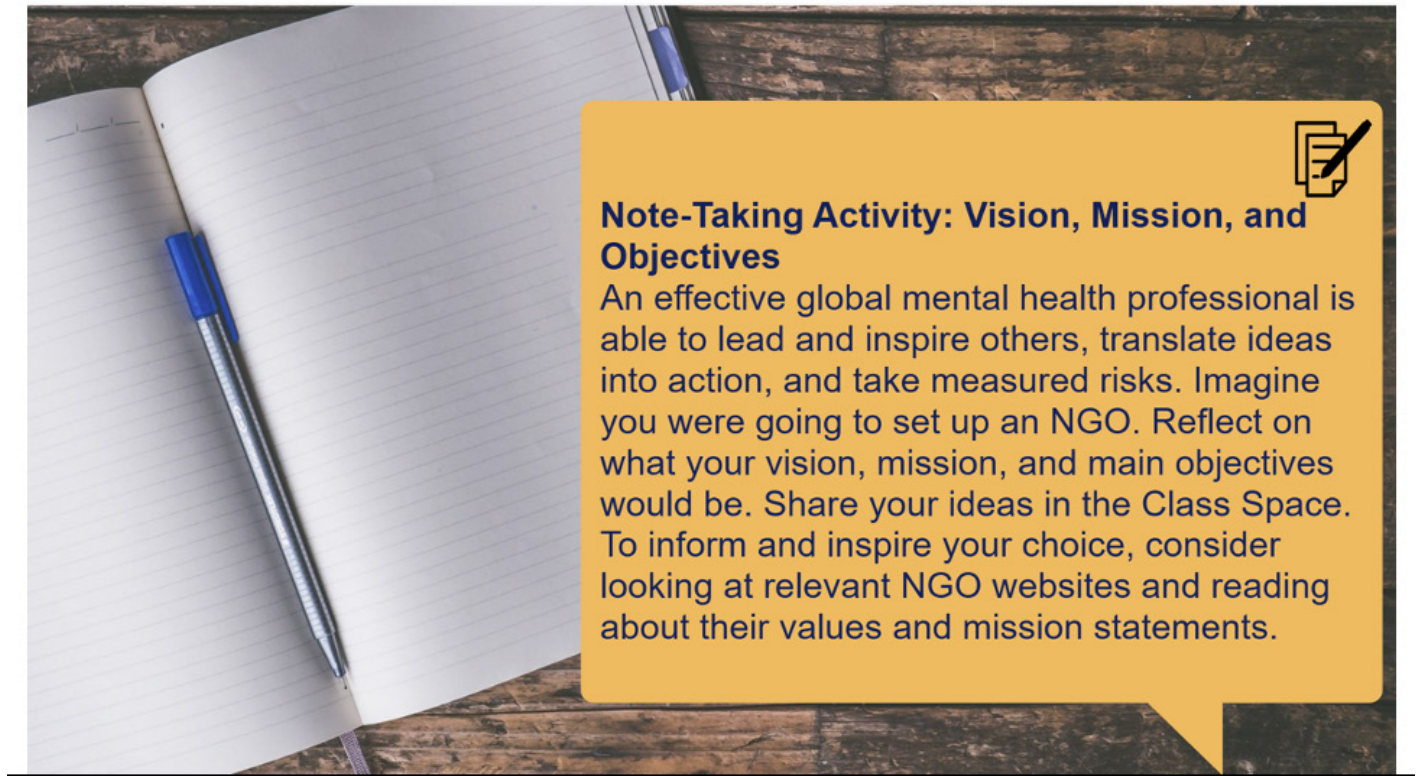
Take a few moments to look back on your professional (including voluntary) experiences. Have you developed and demonstrated any skills or attributes relevant to recovery-oriented practice? Share your response to this question and the ones that follow in the Class Space.

Mental health, advocacy, and social work professionals often face challenges carrying out their work in line with a recovery-oriented approach.

- What do you think some of these challenges might be? For example, how might high workloads, a lack of resources, and clients' complexity of need impact professional practice?
- In light of these challenges, why do you think resilience and grit are key personal attributes of a recovery-oriented practitioner?

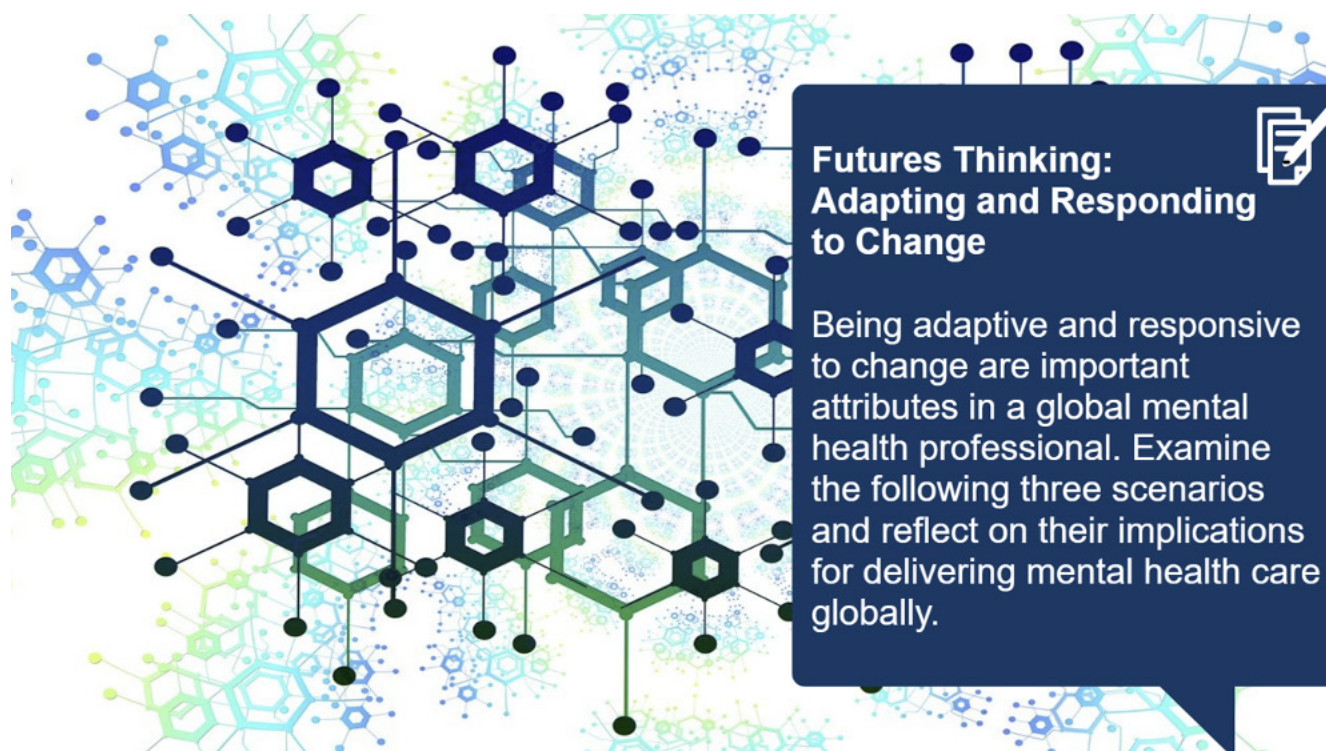
Ideas into action – action-oriented, authentic learning activities that closely resemble real-world roles, procedures or responsibilities. They seek to develop students' entrepreneurial, problem-solving, and creative capabilities, which were all emphasised by employers. Examples include resources on founding and managing an NGO, writing policy briefs and organising policy dialogues (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Example of action-oriented, authentic learning activities ('Ideas into Action' Rubric)



Futures Thinking – learning activities aimed at enhancing students' career adaptability and responsiveness to change (See Figure 6 and Figure 7). Adaptability was frequently required by the sampled employers.

Figure 6. Example of 'Futures Thinking' online learning activities (1)



**Futures Thinking:
Adapting and Responding
to Change**

Being adaptive and responsive to change are important attributes in a global mental health professional. Examine the following three scenarios and reflect on their implications for delivering mental health care globally.

Figure 7. Example of 'Futures Thinking' online learning activities (2)

SCENARIO ONE: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)	SCENARIO TWO: COVID-19	SCENARIO THREE: THE CLIMATE CRISIS
How will the climate crisis shape the global mental health landscape? Engage with Palinkas and Wong's (2020) analysis to gain a better understanding.		

Outcomes

This work produced several types of impacts:

- a. **Advancing the discipline and building capacity.** This project led to the development of the first multi-sectoral global mental health employability framework (discussed in depth in Karadzhov et al, 2024b). The framework has been disseminated widely – via peer-reviewed publications and professional networks, and has the potential to aid stakeholders’ professional development, including those from low- and middle-income countries.
- b. **Enhancing staff market awareness and creating a common language of skills development.** The project enhanced the Programme Team’s own job market awareness, which increased their confidence in providing career advice to students and designing course content with employability in mind (See Table 1).

“The framework provides an excellent overview of the skills that we need to equip our students with for future careers. I’ve found it incredibly useful to use the framework to reflect on my own course content and skills building.”

(KR)

“I have found the Global Mental Health Employability Framework to be an extremely helpful resource for course development, having recent experience using it to inform the development of new course assessments. The students have commented how much they value the alignment of assessments with career goals and the Framework provided me with clear direction and confidence to design assessments that meet these needs.”

(JM)

“The Global Mental Health Employability Framework has been enormously useful when designing and implementing new scholarship of teaching and learning projects. Knowing which competencies are most valuable for students to develop has informed project direction and activities. This has strengthened my confidence that my work meaningfully benefits students’ employability.”

(MW)

Table 1. Programme staff testimonies on the impact of the Employability Framework on teaching practice

- c. **Strengthening students’ employability awareness and career readiness.** While a direct causal pathway is difficult to establish, since introducing the employability enhancements we have seen overwhelmingly positive student feedback:
 - a. “The course has offered me opportunities to explore potential career paths.” – 80% Strongly Agree/Agree (N = 10)
 - b. “The online learning materials made it clear what professional (employability) skills I was developing.” – 70% Strongly Agree/Agree (N = 10).

d. **Informing good practice in, and policy on, embedding employability in online teaching institutionally** (See Table 2).

“We are continuing to devise an institutional framework [on embedded employability] and believe that [this] project contains many of the elements we are considering adopting.”

(KM)

“This resource gives a lot of food for thought as well as practical suggestions of what can be achieved within the existing confines of the curriculum. I hope to adapt and introduce some of the ideas as I review learning resources for future use.”

(SC)

Table 2. Illustrations of the influence of the project on good academic practice and policy development institutionally

Transferability and key messages

The approach showcased in this work is highly transferable across postgraduate taught and undergraduate degree programmes across academic disciplines and geographies. We have distilled the following key messages to empower colleagues to implement a similar approach (for a more detailed list, please see Karadzhov et al, 2024a).

1 Engage students in career-awareness activities early

Engage students with discussions on careers and employability early. Establish a baseline of students’ career awareness and perceived career readiness and monitor how these change over time.

2 Embrace collaboration

Employability is not the exclusive responsibility of academic staff or careers services. Collaboration is key – both within and beyond the university, including with external stakeholders such as employers, alumni and professionals.

3 Cross disciplinary boundaries to develop transferable skills

Explore how specific competencies can be developed by collaborating with, or borrowing practices from, other disciplines.

4 Validate, refine, revise

We encourage educators to be creative and experiment with various employability enhancement initiatives and resources. These should then be carefully tested and either refined, revised or dropped. Employability is not a one-off intervention but an overarching approach to skills development.

5 Be forward thinking and anticipate change

The employability landscape is ever-changing. Educators should embrace this reality and consider how they can best support students with acquiring skills for the future.

Further developments

Future developments of this work include:

- (a) establishing cross-college collaborations to develop specific competencies (for example, setting up an inter-disciplinary Entrepreneurship module)
- (b) ascertaining if embedded employability increases engagement with online learning
- (c) testing the usefulness of the framework among early-career professionals in different cultural settings
- (d) creating a resource hub connecting students and trainees to skills development opportunities.

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Educator's toolkit for inclusive employability development through the curriculum

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Background

Since the introduction of higher fees for university education, an emphasis on value for money, measured by graduate outcomes, has come to the fore in many higher education (HE) national contexts, especially in England through the inclusion of graduate outcomes data in the Access and Participation Plan, Teaching Excellence Framework, and league tables. This becomes significant when we consider the concurrent increase in the diversity of students accessing and engaging with HE, especially those from historically underrepresented groups, who manage a range of priorities alongside their studies, including financial and caring responsibilities. Thus, traditional means of employability development, such as engaging in extracurricular activities and placements or internships, are not always accessible to them, as many will direct their limited time and energy towards the compulsory aspects of the university experience, namely the core curriculum and summative assessments. Though universities are increasingly recognising the need to incorporate employability development into the curriculum, much of this continues to be ad hoc or optional rather than integrated and structured to support inclusive ongoing development throughout the student lifecycle. It is for this reason that the project team – from University of London, City St George's, and King's College London – sought collaborative funding from the QAA to develop a toolkit that can be used by both academic and careers educators to develop employability inclusively through the curriculum.

Approach

For the project team, it was essential that such a toolkit should recognise inclusive practice in curriculum design and employability development from two key perspectives. The first is a structural perspective, where the curriculum is intentionally developed to be inclusive by design, an approach developed by Manoharan in her practice that brings together the concepts of universal design (Mace et al, 1998), culturally responsive practice (Hammond, 2014) and capability approach (Sen, 1989) to create curricula that all students feel able to access, engage with, contribute to, and benefit from. The second perspective is that of individual agency, where individuals are given the knowledge and tools they need to effectively navigate their learning and working environments.

Taking this into account, the resulting toolkit consists of three main sections:

- **Prepare: the prepare phase** provides guidance on how academic teams can take a programmatic approach to inclusive curriculum design that supports employability development. This section supports educators to address structural inequities in the curriculum by recognising the experiences and needs of a diverse student body through the intentional programmatic design of the course, ensuring that it is accessible, culturally responsive and incorporates a range of high impact pedagogies, assessment methods and learning activities that cultivate skills and capabilities.

- **Deliver: the deliver phase** provides guidance on specific learning activities that educators can incorporate into their teaching and learning practice that enable diverse cohorts to explore and develop strategies to effectively navigate their careers after university.
- **Evaluate: the evaluate phase outlines** how the toolkit's use and impact have been evaluated to date, as well as providing mechanisms for users to evaluate this work themselves.

Each member of the collaborative project team led on a different section of the toolkit. The **Prepare** section was led by Manoharan and includes tools that have been developed and tested through their practice in educational and academic development contexts within both teaching-focused and research-intensive universities. This section aims to provide an initial grounding for what follows, including key principles that can support educators to approach inclusive employability development through the curriculum in their institutional context; a discussion of 'ways of learning' that enable educators to recognise the diversity of learning activities that can support this; and a process for programmatic curriculum design that empowers course teams to design their programmes holistically, which can then be translated into a student development journey that enables both the staff team and students to explicitly recognise the knowledge, skills and experiences gained through the degree programme.

The **Deliver** section required the creation of learning activities that could be readily incorporated into teaching and learning. The development of these tools was led by Kenyon and City St George's Careers Educators who lead the university's embedded employability modules. The rationale for using this group of staff in the project was two-fold: it enabled the project team to tap into their experience of designing and delivering embedded employability education via appropriately piloted tools while also ensuring the appropriate infrastructure and expertise for the tools to be tested and evaluated with students, educators and external professionals.

To support these careers educators, who were a mix of Careers Consultants centrally based in the City St George's Careers and Employability department and School-based Employability Lecturers, the project team initially facilitated a workshop for them to explore the topic of employability development and inclusive curriculum design. This workshop included discussion of challenges they experience when delivering teaching to engage diverse cohorts and the barriers they have identified in students studying employability modules.

From this workshop a list of resource topics was identified by the project team, which would help educators deliver inclusive employability development through the curriculum, and interest was sought from the group of Careers Educators to design these tools. Colleagues used a combination of sector best practice, research and their own experience in creating the draft resources, which initially went out for peer feedback before being tested in autumn 2023 through the suite of embedded employability modules at City.

Outcomes

The evaluation section was led by Amrane-Cooper who developed the evaluation methodology for the project and led on analysis of the data, supported by two student researcher interns. Evaluation has been directly built into the toolkit, with targeted evaluation activities aimed at students and practitioners, and opportunities to evaluate activities during the development and testing phase has allowed the project team to enhance both the individual tools and the coherence of the overall toolkit. In particular, evaluation from student engagement with toolkit activities during the development phase helped the project team to refine the learning activities to increase effectiveness in achieving outcomes. Feedback from students included impetus to “work on my skills and improve them” (respondent A); enhanced approaches to employers by “checking if this company is a good fit for me and my beliefs” (respondent B); enhanced communication skills through “skills to deliver feedback in a professional way that doesn’t hurt others” (respondent C).

The toolkit was launched in April 2024 through an event attended by 35 colleagues from 25 higher education institutions (HEIs) and spanning academic and careers services roles. The webpage where the tool is hosted has received 2,181 visits to the site in four months, from launch to end July 2024. Engagement at the launch event was positive with 100% overall satisfaction reported by those who responded to the event follow-up survey (n=35). 80% of respondents considered the professional development opportunities presented by the event to be excellent or good, and attendees noted the value of “practical ideas for embedding employability”, and “good networking opportunity with colleagues tackling similar challenges at other institutions”. Attendees also identified a range of takeaway ideas, including the business case for embedding employability into the curriculum, using case studies and the need to build a common language.

The toolkit was specifically designed to be universally adaptable within all institutional contexts, subject disciplines and levels of study. As such, we have seen interest from universities across the country to explore how the toolkit, especially the guidance provided in the **Prepare** section, can be configured to support various provider contexts. As part of the toolkit roll-out, Manoharan has provided consultancy to Directors of Careers Services and Academic Development colleagues on how they can use the toolkit within their educational framework. In addition, workshops have also been developed and delivered at different universities, some for careers professionals on how they can better support academic educators, and others directly to academic staff to support them in preparation for portfolio reviews and development. Therefore, there has been proactive and positive engagement with the toolkit, with the principles for inclusive employability development and a programmatic approach to inclusive curriculum design being explored and interpreted by a range of universities. The toolkit is accessible via the University of London website: www.london.ac.uk/about/services/careers-group/inclusive-employability-toolkit

Conclusion

Through the process of developing and disseminating the Educator's Toolkit for Inclusive Employability Development through the Curriculum, we have identified how academic and careers educators are keen to identify meaningful and sustainable ways of doing this work that support subject teaching and learning. While the internal and external drivers for this change to curriculum development is clear, there has been limited practical support and resources available to date for educators to engage with to make institutional objectives to improve graduate outcomes a reality. Therefore, the project team hope the toolkit can play a valuable role in supporting this work moving forward, with tools being used and iterated as necessary.

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EmPLAYability: embedding a playful approach to employability into a Primary Education Studies degree

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Background

Playful approaches to learning are well established when considering young children (for example, Papert, 1980; Piaget, 1951). Papert (1980) described learning through play as “hard fun” in which learning can be enjoyable and challenging. Over recent years, higher education (HE) has begun to use playful approaches to learning to support creativity, multidisciplinary learning and conceptual understanding (Rice, 2009). However, playful approaches to employability are less established (for example, see Benesova, 2023) and represent an area to develop further in teaching practice. Therefore, this case study explores emPLAYability: a playful approach to employability.

A multitude of playful tools are increasingly used in HE from toys to games (Whitton, 2018). Of these playful tools, Lego Serious Play (LSP) is a particularly common playful approach. LSP is a method in which learners use Lego bricks to build models representing their understanding, opinions or reflections. The approach is influenced by constructionism (Papert, 1986), whereby learning occurs through making models, structures and representations meaningful to the creator. LSP enables learners to describe what they know in novel ways and collaborate with others to create new perspectives (Roos and Victor, 2018). McCusker (2014) emphasises the value of LSP is the reflections and discussions shared by participants and the quality of the Lego models built.

Playmobil also has the potential to be used to be used as a playful tool. Building on the success of LSP, Playmobil released Playmobil pro sets in 2020. Just as LSP was initially aimed at businesses to playfully explore corporate challenges, Playmobil pro sets were released to meet this need (Playmobil pro, 2023). Figure 1 shows a Playmobil pro set consisting of unpainted Playmobil figures and accessories such as hats and tools. Playmobil pro has already been used in HE to support understanding and reflections on environmental and sustainability education concepts (Parkin, 2023).

Figure 1. A Playmobil pro starter set



This case study examines the pedagogic use of Playmobil pro and LSP processes to support final-year BA Primary Education Studies undergraduates at Anglia Ruskin University to reflect on their employability after university and critical incidents in schools in which they volunteered.

Approach

Playmobil pro was used as a playful tool to support Primary Education Studies undergraduates to reflect on professional experiences in schools and consider future career plans. This playful approach was integrated into a final-year Level 6 module exploring the professional skills required by primary school teachers. The cohort consisted of seven undergraduates completing the module over a trimester. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the start of the study from the author's University ethics panel.

Students shared Playmobil pro starter kits in small groups of three to four individuals. The first session using Playmobil pro starter kits began with an activity to familiarise participants with the different resources in the kit. They were asked to choose an object which they found interesting. Students then discussed why they had selected the object with peers in their small group. Participants were then challenged to make a link between the object and the experience of being a primary school teacher. After this, learners were invited to make a Playmobil model representing the identity they wanted to nurture as a teacher and their core values in the profession. For example, did they want to be a fun teacher? How did they want to inspire children to learn? Students then had time to reflect on this challenge and built a model. Afterwards they explained their model to peers in small groups and they were then invited to share and reflect on their Playmobil models with the whole group. We then discussed how the ideas discussed could be used to help prepare personal statements and interviews for initial teacher training.

In another lecture, students were asked to make a Playmobil pro model of their current position along their employability journey. They then made a model of a career role they wanted when they left university. Next, students were asked to make a Playmobil representation of themselves in terms of their employability experience when they first joined the course. Students worked in small groups to discuss their career aspirations and journey. I then asked students to reflect on the steps they had taken to reach their current point along their employability journey, for example, volunteering in schools. Then, students were asked to reflect on the steps needed to reach these career goals, for example, the qualifications required and future current or paid work needed.

Another Playmobil pro activity looked at critical incidents experienced by students in schools. The lecture explored students' experiences of difficult conversations in primary schools with parents or colleagues. Students made a representation of the difficult conversations and discussed what happened, what they said and how they felt during the conversations. Groups were asked to reflect on what went well and what they would do differently in a future discussion. Students fed back they found it useful to make a model of the situation as it helped them have distance from the situation and feel comfortable discussing the challenging situation.

Outcomes

A focus group discussion was facilitated at the end of the project to evaluate the use of a playful approach and Playmobil pro. One participant explained how Playmobil pro helped her plan what she wanted to talk about in small group discussions. She said, “I can visualise what I’m trying to say and explain my thoughts” using a playful approach. Another participant explained she could “more deeply” explore issues being discussed. One student commented on the activities supporting her to work in a group and share her experiences with others. She said, “It helped us work in a group better and discuss things with one another we normally wouldn’t.”

While delimited in scope, this case study takes its place alongside other practice experiences of deploying these resources and this approach, and suggests that a playful approach to employability can support student participation in discussions about work-related learning and assist students to reflect on career journeys and the steps they need to take. EmPLAYability is an approach that can be integrated into teaching to embed employability into learning.

This work on embedding playful approaches to employability could be developed further by using Playmobil pro in different disciplines beyond primary education studies as well as at a postgraduate taught level. EmPLAYability could also be trialled in small group and one-to-one career guidance sessions to support students to consider future career pathways. Further research could examine the extent to which playful approaches are accessible for all students, including those with autism.

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mySkills – a framework for embedding employability into the curriculum

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Background

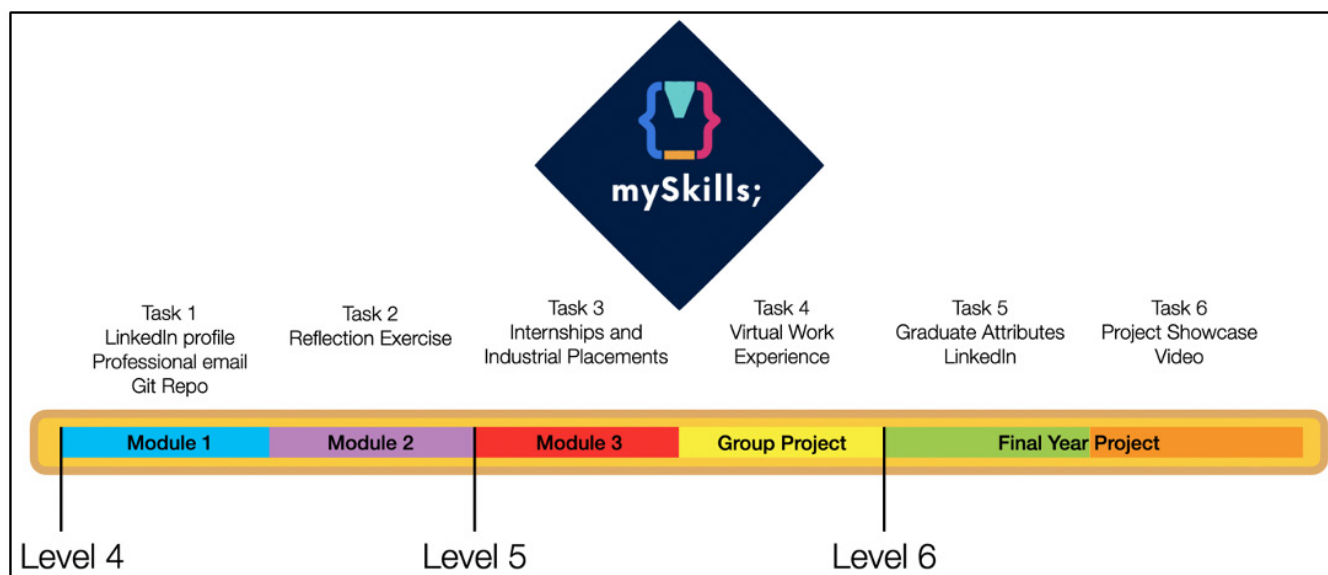
Employability is a key metric for assessing the ‘value’ of higher education institutions and the programmes they offer to learners (Feldmann, 2016; Office for Students, 2020). For example, the Office for Students in the UK evaluates factors such as graduate outcomes to gauge an institution’s performance in teaching and learning (Wong et al, 2022). The continuing emphasis on employability metrics has coincided with the government strategy to increase digital skills in the UK and a rise in learners enrolling in computer science-based programmes (National Academies of Sciences, 2018). While it is recognised that the demand for technical skills has grown, the Shadbolt Review (Shadbolt, 2016) highlighted a concerning trend that showed a high unemployment rate among computer science graduates. One of the underlying factors was the difficulty learners faced when making connections between the skills acquired on a computer science degree and how these were applied in the workplace. In response, the UK government commissioned the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to create the Language Matters report to bridge understanding around key technical skills. This recommended that universities and industry work together to build a common language that assists students in navigating their career choices and the graduate recruitment process (The Tech Partnership, 2018).

It was against this background that the School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) at Queen Mary founded the mySkills initiative. In addition to addressing the Language Matters recommendations, we also wanted to provide a scaffolded framework to aid self-reflection, which is a process that many of our students find challenging. Structured reflective frameworks have been shown to be valuable tools for helping learners assess their personal and professional development (Bull and Whittle, 2014; Alrashidi et al, 2020). By engaging in critical analysis and self-reflection, learners can pinpoint their strengths and identify areas for improvement, leading to greater self-awareness.

Approach

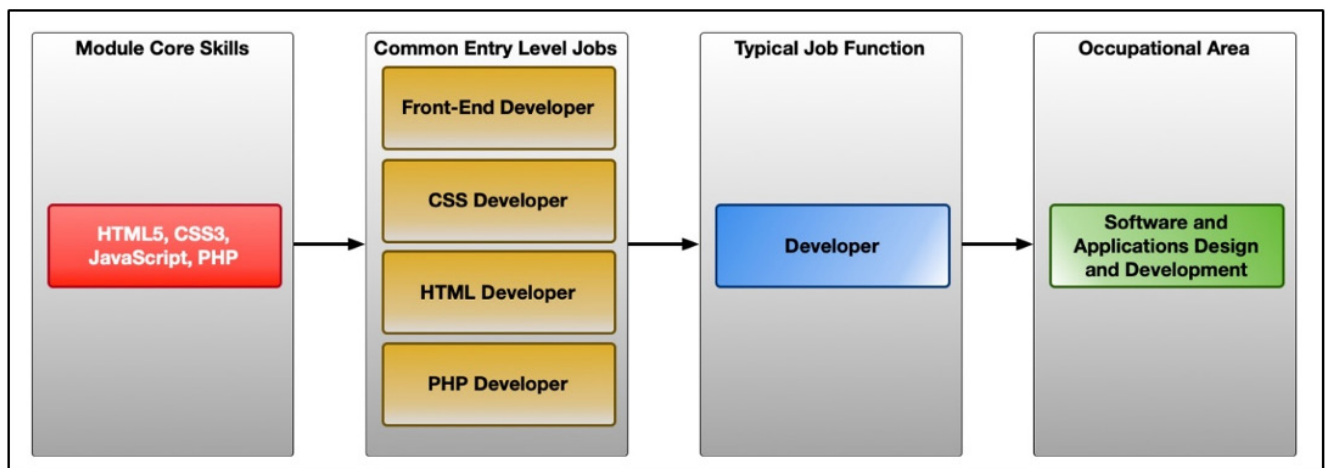
We introduced the mySkills framework in the School of EECS in 2021. The framework allows learners to track and reflect on their skill progression throughout their degree programme. It supports them in creating their personal brand and taking ownership of their development. The framework is underpinned by a series of mySkills tasks (assessments) in various employability anchor modules (Figure 1).

Figure 1. mySkills framework



The mySkills framework also incorporates a comprehensive skills mapping that connects the content of each module with specific job roles and occupational areas. This enables learners to understand how their studies directly apply to real-world professional settings (Figure 2). The mappings use consistent terminology to align academic skills with the requirements of employers, drawing insights from resources such as the Language Matters report (The Tech Partnership, 2018) and the Prospects graduate portal. After the mappings were created, they were shared with the respective module organisers to ensure that all essential module skills were accurately captured. Subsequently, the mappings were published on each module's virtual learning environment (VLE) pages under a dedicated mySkills tab for easy access. Furthermore, the School of EECS Industrial Advisory Board, comprising employers from the technology sector, reviews these mappings to ensure they remain relevant and up to date.

Figure 2. mySkills mapping example



The mySkills tasks were integrated into the curriculum in a series of modules within our undergraduate programmes. Some of the tasks were as follows:

Task 1 – First steps to building your brand

In this task, learners laid the groundwork for developing their personal brand by creating a professional LinkedIn profile, setting up a professional email address, and establishing a GitHub account to showcase their work and skills.

Task 2 – Knowing yourself

In the second task, learners were asked to engage in a reflective writing exercise. They were prompted to identify and document experiences from various aspects of their lives, including academic modules/courses, paid employment, volunteer work and hobbies. This exercise encouraged them to recognise and articulate their unique skills, interests and aspirations. By doing so, learners could better understand their motivations and effectively present themselves to potential employers in any career path they chose to pursue. This task aimed to empower learners to begin creating a comprehensive repository of their experiences, which they could draw from when developing their professional profiles and submitting job applications.

Task 3 – Internships and industrial placements

The third task served as a follow-up to task two, which required the learners to contemplate their experiences from the previous semester and their summer activities. Additionally, the learners were tasked with introspectively evaluating their teamwork skills, considering the numerous team activities they would have participated in by this stage of their academic programme, such as group-based assessments.

Task 4 – Virtual job simulations

For this task, the mySkills framework introduced a range of virtual job simulations provided by Forage (www.theforage.com). These virtual job simulations, developed by leading employers, including Accenture, BCG, JP Morgan, PWC, and others, offer self-paced programmes that typically take learners five to eight hours to complete. On successful completion, learners receive a certificate that can be showcased on their LinkedIn profiles and shared with potential employers.

Outcome

A recent evaluation of the mySkills framework showed promising results regarding learner engagement and preparedness for professional opportunities (ie internships and jobs). This analysis focused on comparing learner engagement with mySkills task 1 between two different cohorts, where Cohort 1 was the first group of Level 4 students in 2021-22 who undertook task 1 as a formative exercise (ie no marks or credit-bearing) and Cohort 2 was the second group of level 4 students in 2022-23, who undertook task 1 as a summative exercise (ie it counted towards their module mark). In the 2021-22 academic year (Cohort 1), out of 581 learners, 529 were engaged, and 289 completed mySkills task 1 (55% submission rate). Conversely, in the 2022-23 academic year (Cohort 2), there were 549 learners, with 531 engaged and 445 completing the task (84% submission rate). These findings suggest a notable increase in engagement following the transition to a summative assessment, which counted towards their module mark.

We also wanted to understand how prepared Cohort 1 (2021-22) learners in their third year and Cohort 2 (2022-23) learners in their second year were for professional opportunities such as internships and jobs. We collected responses from 51 learners in Cohort 1 and 71 in Cohort 2. In Cohort 1, 67% of the respondents had applied for internships/placements/jobs, which seemed to align with their high average grade of 73%. Meanwhile, in Cohort 2, 72% of the respondents had participated in such opportunities, with an average grade of 74%. We also examined how effective our framework was in supporting all learners, especially those with lower grades, in pursuing employment prospects. Our analysis showed that in Cohort 2, six out of nine learners with average grades below 60% had applied for opportunities, whereas only one out of six in Cohort 1 had done so.

A contributing factor could have been the difference in engagement levels for the mySkills tasks between the two cohorts. Cohort 2 showed higher collective engagement, particularly in task 1, which was a summative assessment for Cohort 2. This suggests that more learners from Cohort 2 have embraced the mySkills framework and realised the importance of being proactive in employability initiatives.

The findings demonstrate that the mySkills framework can encourage and motivate learners to engage actively in various employability initiatives. This suggests that institutions can effectively use the mySkills framework to foster and enhance career readiness among their learners.

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Work-integrated learning and employer collaboration

Empowerment through sharing experience: designing peer-led extra-curricular skills sessions

Paraskevi Argyriou and Benjamin Lang, Queen Mary University of London

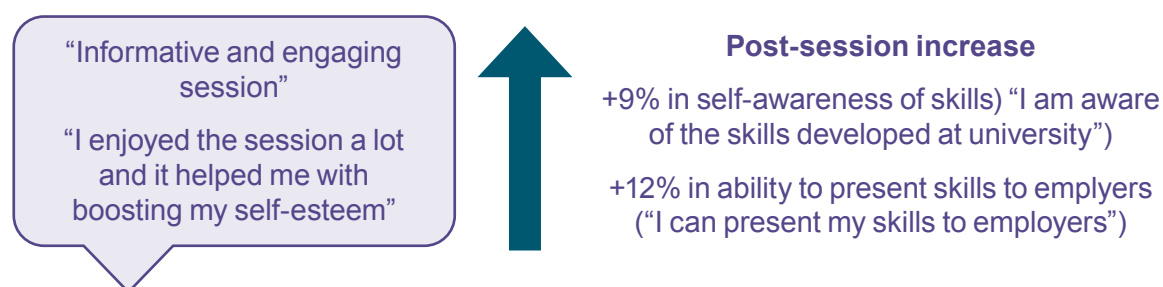
Background

While most of the literature suggests that extracurricular activities (ECAs) (ie, activities that are not directly connected to the academic curriculum) have a positive impact on students' academic experience, achievement and employability rates (Simmons et al, 2018), barriers to student engagement with these activities persist (Dickinson et al, 2021). Furthermore, a recent review by Ribeiro et al (2023) synthesised findings from 39 journal articles and concluded that the reported impact of participation in ECAs can be positive, negative or ambivalent depending on how well-aligned the activities are with students' goals, their capacity to allow students to develop leadership skills and whether they offer opportunities for reflection. As such, the positive impact of ECAs should not be considered a given, and institutions are recommended to plan and explore thoughtfully the best possible ways when implementing ECAs. This case study aims to evaluate the benefits and challenges of an enhanced version of an existing ECAs and employability programme at Queen Mary University of London during 2023-24.

The Queen Mary Students' Union (QMSU) offers a unique [Employability Programme](#) to all students. This programme is designed to enhance students' skills and career readiness through free training sessions and reflection opportunities, with a special recognition system called the Skills Award, which acknowledges students' participation and achievements on their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). The sessions are led by either QMSU staff or external training providers and cover a wide range of skills critical to professional development (for example, time management, teamwork, public speaking, CV and interview presentation design). Since its inception, the programme has received positive feedback from attendees as illustrated in Figure 1, but engagement levels have not been particularly high (in 2023-24, 438 individual session attendances were recorded among 33,000 students across the university). As such, room for enhancement has been identified with the aim to improve registration and attendance rates for a broader reach of students and improve the attendees' experience.

Figure 1, below, shows representative feedback from Skills Award Sessions attendees through open-ended comments and a pre- and post-session rating of 11 skill-related items. Participants (n = 48) reported their perceived skill levels before and after the sessions, providing qualitative insights and quantitative data on skill development.

Figure 1.



Additionally, the institution offers several degrees with the option of completing a year in industry. Students who complete these degrees embark on a placement in a graduate-level role for 10-12 months after completing their second year of studies and return to complete their fourth and final year. The benefits of experiential learning through work placements are well documented and include enhancing students’ employability by providing hands-on experience and practical skills that complement academic learning, contributing to students’ personal and professional development, increasing their readiness for the labour market and improving their career outcomes post-graduation (Jackson, 2017; Wilton, 2016). Such benefits are illustrated in QMUL post-placement students’ reflective work, where it is evident that they develop a whole new range of skills (Figure 2). However, post-placement students often face challenges when returning to university, including a sense of disconnection stemming from the year spent away from campus and academic life. This gap can result in limited opportunities to further showcase and apply their newly developed skills and a diminished sense of belonging within the student community (Auburn, 2007).

Figure 2. Examples of skills development during year in industry taken from QMUL students' reflective poster submissions. Shared anonymously with permission



At the intersection of the reported challenges of these two existing employability agendas at QMUL, a new initiative and our research question emerged.

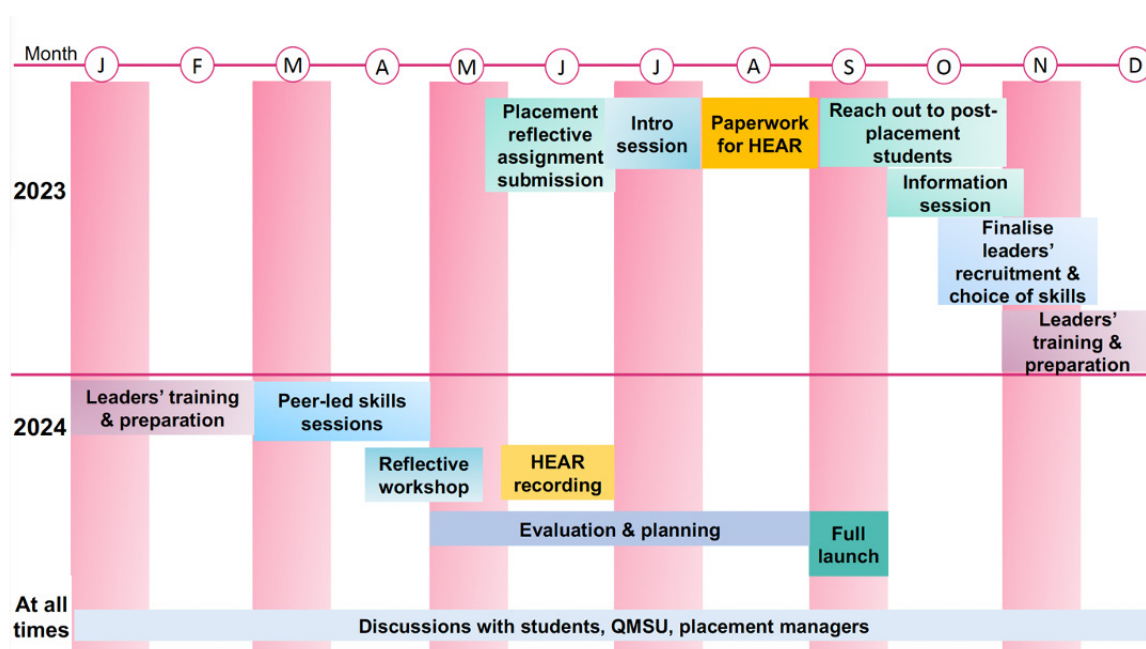
Would the design and implementation of skills sessions in the QMSU led by post-placement students boost attendance rates, cultivate sense of belongingness and enhance skill ownership?

This seems feasible, using the peer-led team learning approach and active learning pedagogy, where students act as facilitators to guide their peers through learning activities. This approach has been shown to foster a supportive learning environment, improve student engagement and retention and enhance the leaders' self-efficacy through experiential learning (Christian et al, 2023). Although typically implemented for course-specific content and study skills support, there is significant potential for post-placement students to guide their peers in professional development activities (Cole et al, 2024; Mahmood, 2014).

Approach

This case study aimed to evaluate the soft launch of a peer-led pillar in the employability programme of the QMSU skills sessions, assessing its effectiveness in increasing student attendance and facilitating the integration of post-placement students into the academic community. The initial timeline for the soft launch in the 2023-24 academic year is illustrated in Figure 3. A critical aspect for the launch was the recruitment of at least three post-placement students to ensure the possibility of pairing up for sessions and to account for contingencies (such as the withdrawal of one participant). This target was successfully met in this study. The students would attend information workshops and training on the design of skills sessions on a topic of their choice to be led by them in Semester B, 2024. The requirements for student leaders included having completed a placement, committing at least 16 hours to training, designing and delivering two skills sessions together with a peer and, finally, attending a reflective workshop. HEAR transcript recognition for leaders' contributions would be awarded highlighting their leadership, organisation, self-value and training skills. Evaluation of those sessions and student feedback from the attendees and post-placement leaders of sessions would inform the launch of the full programme in September 2024. The project gained ethical approval from the Department of Psychology at QMUL. Two staff members contributed to the project on a part-time basis. Their responsibilities focused on recruitment, dissemination of information, organising reflective activities with and preparing materials for the post-placement leaders, and planning the administration and evaluation of the skills sessions.

Figure 3. Initial timeline for the soft launch of the peer-led skills sessions initiative



Outcomes

While the information session and recruitment were successfully completed, the three leaders unexpectedly withdrew from the initiative in January 2024, resulting in the abortion of the soft launch. It was essential to collect insights via exit interviews with the students. These interviews revealed that, despite challenges, such as time constraints, competing commitments and the lack of financial incentives, the initiative was received positively by the post-placement students. For example, students reported that this peer-to-peer interaction would enhance the skills of the attendees but also boost their own confidence and professional growth in relation to the recently acquired skills from their placement (Table 1). These insights were crucial in refining the approach to better meet students' needs and ensure the initiative's success in the future.

Student feedback

"I do think I would be more incentivised if it was a paid opportunity as I don't really see the benefit of HEAR recognition."

(Student 1)

"I had a think about the peer assisted development sessions – while it is a fantastic opportunity, if there is an opportunity to conduct such sessions during a less hectic period, like summer or after exams, I'm very keen to volunteer!"

(Student 2)

"I have been thinking about the peer-led skill session as well. I am very interested in participating, especially in terms of mastering organisational, proactivity, marketing and social media skills. However, I am concerned about how time consuming it might be."

(Student 3)

Table 1. Student quotes explaining the reasons for withdrawal.

Moving forward, the focus will be on refining the training programme, exploring additional incentives (such as stipends from the QMSU), and expanding collaborations to sustain and enhance the initiative's impact. For example, to address the concern of time constraints, the training programme will be scheduled earlier in the year (for example, over the summer and before post-placement students start their final year of studies), with regular check-ins during term-time to support the student leaders. Additionally, targeted recruitment materials will be developed to attract more participants, and collaboration with more academic schools will be explored to broaden the initiative's reach. Finally, as an outcome of our consultation with the students who were recruited and withdrew, the QMSU conducted a budget re-analysis and will aim to offer financial reimbursement to student leaders. Our aim is to proceed with an adapted version of the initiative in 2024-25 and evaluate it in the summer of 2025.

In conclusion, the introduction of peer-led extra-curricular skills sessions at QMSU has shown promising initial response. The initiative leveraged the peer-led learning approach to amplify the impact of the QMSU Employability Programme and Year in Industry programmes. Feedback from students indicated both enthusiasm and concerns regarding time commitment and the lack of financial compensation. We believe that the initiative is a significant step towards empowering students through shared experiences and active learning. By continuously refining the approach based on student feedback and outcomes, we aim to create a sustainable and impactful model for student development and employability. The new adapted peer-led skills sessions initiative will not only enrich the QMSU Employability Programme, but also provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of peer-led learning in fostering skill development and professional growth, which can be easily adapted in other institutions.

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Why work placements might fail

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Background

Work placements have been an established feature of HE programmes for some time, particularly on courses with strong vocational traditions such as engineering and business (St Clair-Thompson and Chivers, 2019). The Office for Students estimated that just short of 27,000 undergraduates would complete a 'sandwich year out' during 2023-24 (Office for Students, 2024).

The benefits of placement have been so widely reported that Wilton (2012, 603) suggests it has "become a received wisdom" that work placements create positive benefits for graduates and their employers. The positive value of work placements is now "seemingly taken for granted" (Inceoglu et al, 2019, 325). However, this positive narrative is not fully supported by the current research. The outcomes from taking a year in work placement are complex and varied and the advantages and risks are often oversimplified (Hughes, Mouratidou and Donald, 2023; Inceoglu et al, 2019). Not all interns have positive learning experiences (Zehr and Korte, 2020) and there are indications of inequity in the size of the impact of taking a placement year on different groups of students (Divan et al, 2022; Pintor and Pereira, 2019). Research is required to explore differences in the placement experiences of students to provide insight into these variable outcomes and how universities and employers can support students through work placements effectively.

Approach

The data reported in this case study was collected as part of a doctoral research project to explore experiences of a year in work placement from a student perspective. This took the form of a qualitative, longitudinal study of 12 undergraduate business students from the University of Derby undertaking a paid work placement of at least 38 weeks during the academic year of 2022-23.

The purposive sample was selected from a pool of volunteers based on information provided in a preliminary participant survey questionnaire. The aim was to create a diverse participant profile to maximise the potential of capturing different accounts of placement experience to offer balance and variety and the greatest opportunity to learn and develop theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Stake, 1995; 2000).

Data was collected by conducting three semi-structured, critical incident interviews with each participant. Critical incidents were defined as those that are judged to be significant by the participant and therefore worthy of attention from their perspective (Tripp, 2012). These were conducted three, six and nine months into the placement. At each interview, participants were first asked how they would describe their placement experience. They were then asked to talk about what incident had the most significant impact on that experience three times at each interview.

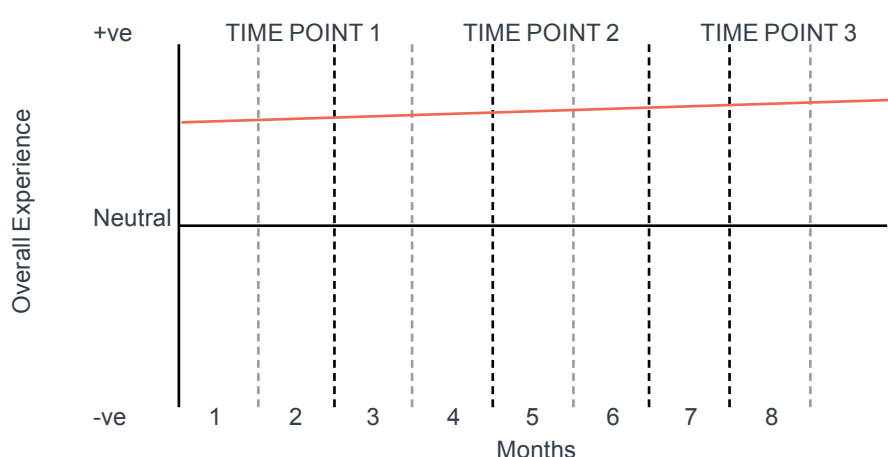
As part of the analysis process, individual case histories were constructed for each participant, drawing together and condensing the large amount of data collected across the multiple data collection points to abstract key events, relationships and processes, explore connections between data collected at different times and trace changes over time (Henderson et al, 2012). A within-case comparison of the placement accounts was used to 'sketch' a pictorial representation of the full placement experience showing fluctuations between positive and negative representations of the experience expressed in the participant accounts over time. The resulting case histories and pictures were presented for participant checking.

Outcomes

The research sample included four male and eight female participants, aged 20-25 with different ethnic and social economic backgrounds. Five participants were the first in their family to attend university and three had a university support plan in place for disability or special education needs. All but one were on track for a first class or 2:1 honours degree by the end of their second year of study. The participants came from a range of business disciplines including Business Management, Marketing, Accounting and Finance, Economics, HRM and Supply Chain and Logistics pathways.

The pictorial representations were divided into two categories, 'Steady State' and 'Shape Shifters', demonstrating diversity in the placement experience. Figure 1 shows an example of a steady state pictorial representation demonstrated by five out of twelve of the research participants. For these participants the description of the placement experience was positive and showed a slow and steady improvement trend over the course of the research period.

Figure 1. Steady State



Some periods of 'stress' were reported by students in this category, largely associated with increased workload and responsibilities. However, these were described as manageable, or even a positive part of the learning experience:

"There have been a few moments where I've been a little bit, somewhat stressed, but then that would kind of pass... It's not a prolonged period of stress. It's just like a day or two where I've got a bit too much on, like you know, I've been able to manage it so far."

(Jack – Interview: three months).

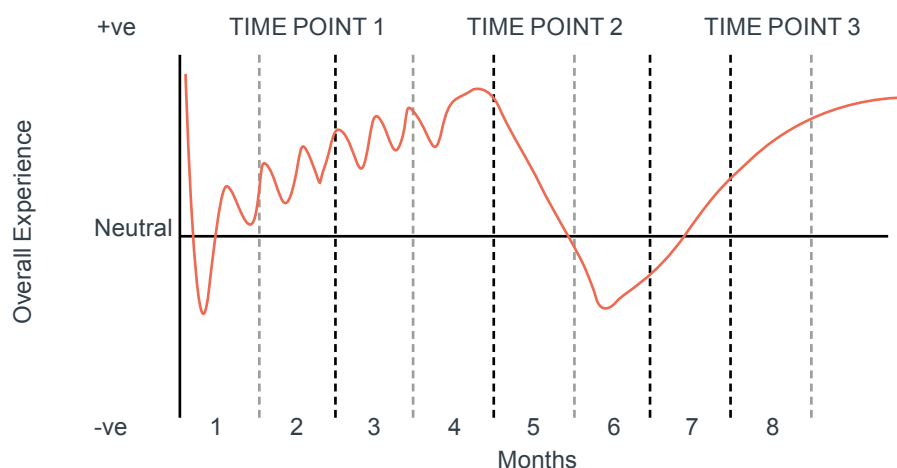
"Pressure makes diamonds [laughing] do you know what I mean."

(Zach – Interview two: six months).

The other seven participants were categorised as shape shifters. All of these fluctuated between describing the overall placement experience in positive and negative terms during the nine-month research period. Rollercoaster (Figure 2), for example, began her placement with idealised anticipation, describing it as "literally my dream job" and "the only company I would ever want to work with". However, after the outgoing intern left, she was plunged into a negative state and described herself as "miserable" and crying when she got home "about 80% of the time". This was followed by a turbulent period of several months where she described the experience alternately as "like the worst job ever but also the best job ever". During her month six interview she indicated a new area of discomfort as she became aware of political games being played within the company. This appeared to be triggered by an organisational announcement about restructuring and redundancies. At this point she described feeling like a "pawn in everyone's end game" and experienced another significant dip into a negative state.

- (a) Participant described herself as having a "romanticised" and "idealised" picture of placement
- (b) Old intern left the organisation, participant reported crying when she got home "about 80% of the time"
- (c) Organisational change announcement, participant described the work environment turning "quite horrible"
- (d) Participant demonstrated growing political awareness describing herself as feeling "like a pawn in people's endgames"
- (e) Participant described herself as 'coming full circle'

Figure 2. Rollercoaster



For Phoenix (Figure 3), another shape shifter, a positive start to her placement year which she hoped would lead to a graduate role with the organisation, deteriorated quickly into an “overwhelming” work experience. She viewed gaining the placement position as a great achievement but as a result felt the need to “prove” herself. She reported that she found making mistakes “embarrassing” and, despite positive feedback from her business mentors, compared herself unfavourably with other placement students who she felt were developing faster than her. She discussed taking work home with her in an attempt to keep up with others. As a result, she struggled to switch off after a long working day and to achieve a positive work life balance. A decline into a negative state ended with a “breaking point”, a significant mental health crisis that required professional intervention. After this she took the decision to leave her placement role after just three months:

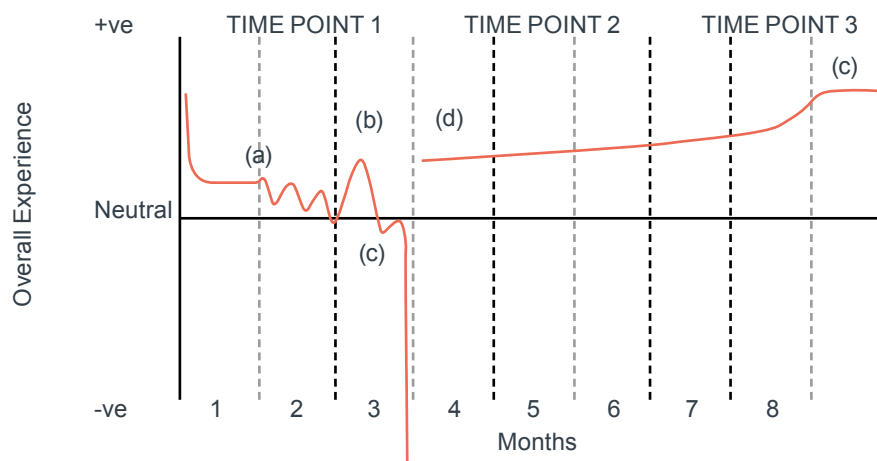
“I didn’t wanna be there at all. I was like I really, this is such an uncomfortable environment for me.”

‘I think I just broke because I couldn’t switch off outside of work.’

(Phoenix - Interview one: three months).

- (a) Participant moved to second work location to start management training
- (b) Participant felt successful after completing a Halloween promotion unsupervised: “I felt quite proud as well because I was left to my own devices”
- (c) Participant moved to third work location and described reaching a “breaking point mentally”
- (d) Participant started a second placement in a different organisation
- (e) Participant was asked to support a culture change programme outside her normal admin duties

Figure 3. Phoenix



Once established in a new placement role in a different organisation her overall experience stabilised and the remaining six months of her placement took on the shape of a steady state student. While she perceived the second job, in the HR department of a public sector organisation, to be “just an admin role” and less prestigious than the first, she explained that “this work environment has enabled me to develop” and described being able to regain power over her life. Even as her responsibilities increased and became more “intense” in this second placement position, she was able to achieve the control demonstrated by the steady state students, describing the overall experience as “comfortable” and “enjoyable”:

“I feel great. I understand that like any job is gonna have the days where you go home and you’re like [phew] but I have that balance of kind of the good days, the bad days, but then not letting the bad days overwhelm me...it feels a lot lighter. I feel like there’s a lot less pressure... I think for my development, it’s been great to have a role that isn’t high pressure because I’ve actually, yeah, because for once I think I’ve put my wellbeing first.”

(Phoenix - Interview two: six months).

The small sample size in this research prevents generalisation from the results to a wider population. Together, however, the diverse accounts of placement experiences from different students which the approach was designed to capture appears to support the call from Hughes et al (2023) for a more tailored and nuanced approach to supporting students during their placement year. The different development needs of students within this cohort suggest more flexible pedagogic content and delivery would have better supported these individuals. This may be better suited to online, asynchronous methods than traditional synchronous, tutor-led input typical of modular approaches. Curated packages of LinkedIn Learning content, for example, can provide access to a wide breadth of content that can be tailored and accessed in a timely manner. The use of coaching approaches may help to further individualise the development approach and support reflexive and experiential learning (Iordanou, Lech and Barnes, 2016). This could be provided face-to-face during site visits or facilitated by the use of technology such as the Loop Me application (Bevitt, 2024).

For these 12 participants, periods of challenge experienced at some point during their placement year emerged as a common theme although this had variable impact depending on the students' ability to access resources to cope. This suggests that access to pastoral and wellbeing services and education would have aided the group. A core focus of pedagogic materials should be to assist students to explore the challenge of securing healthy work life balance practices to minimise exhaustion and prevent burnout. An effective balance can act as a resource that helps to buffer negative impacts of hindrance demands and to enhance work engagement, creativity and performance (Bakker, Demerouti and Sanz-Vergel, 2023) to support positive outcomes from the placement experience.

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Employability for social justice: barriers to fairer graduate outcomes identified among six stakeholder groups

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Background

Inequalities in learning experiences and outcomes for individuals in all educational sectors, including higher education (HE), is a persistent phenomenon and concern. Evidence of differential outcomes is not hard to locate, an illustrative example being the 8% gap between the proportion of white graduates and black or African or Caribbean or black British graduates in full-time highly skilled work following their degree studies (Department for Education, 2024). Addressing these inequalities increasingly involves regulatory interventions. For example, in the UK, higher education institutions (HEIs) are required by our regulator, the Office for Students, to set an Access and Participation Plan to increase the likelihood of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds succeeding in their degree studies and progressing into highly skilled work following university.

Beyond regulatory requirements, there has been increasing focus within educational settings on a social justice agenda within strategic focus. Historically, there have been different accounts of social justice in the context of education. Some key theorists of university access and social justice include John Rawls' (2001) concept of 'justice as fairness' and work, elaborated by Iris Marion Young (2008) on justice and the politics of difference. One difficulty with work on social justice is that it can operate at many different levels, including: philosophical/conceptual, practical, ethnographic/narrative, theoretically specific, or democratically grounded levels of understanding and explanation (Hytten and Bettez, 2011).

Relatively little empirical attention has involved an inductive approach designed to understand stakeholder accounts of inequity in pursuing career-related goals as part of broader experience during studies at an HEI. One recent study, involving interviews with learners and educators of colour at two UK universities, found that learners underscored the need for greater representation of black students within student support services while educator interviewees described a tokenistic attitude towards diversity in HEI settings and the need for further cultural sensitivity training for educators (Rana et al, 2022). There are many stakeholders of equality of educational outcomes including practitioners working in adjacent educational phases, earlier educational sectors (such as further education,

second/primary education), employers and alumni. To the authors' knowledge, no research to date has explored views and experiences of inequality integrating this wider range of stakeholder perspectives. This 'stakeholder-wide' approach holds distinct advantages as a method for piecing together a holistic account of HEI-related injustice relating to careers and employability as experienced by HEI learners, and how institutional and systemic factors are involved.

Accordingly, we sought to gauge multiple stakeholders about social justice in the context of employability and related concepts (such as graduate outcomes). To do this, we developed an empirical study designed to interview learners and educators from varied disciplinary backgrounds. Notably, this research was conducted at London Metropolitan University, an HEI with a high proportion of learners from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. Our research approach was inductive, privileging individual viewpoints and lived experience and as such did not adopt a specific theoretical framework or perspective beyond the first principles of qualitative research design. Our research study was designed to address an overarching research question: How does social justice dovetail with stakeholder talk about employability in higher education settings?

Approach

Institutional ethical research ethics approval was secured, and all participants formally consented prior to interviews. Internal participants were institutional teaching practitioners, current learners at our institution or careers and employability and work-based learning practitioners ('careers educators' hereafter). External participants were institutional alumni, employers from the local community in North London and educators based in different further education settings. Internally, teachers and careers educators were recruited primarily via a survey request for participants, and current learner were recruited via forum posts, email and word-of-mouth. Careers educator stakeholder recruitment involved email requests to relevant departmental colleagues at the university. All interviews were conducted between July 2022 and May 2023. Interviews were on average 46 minutes (range 30 - 67 minutes).

Our sample comprised 37 participants from six stakeholder groups: six teachers, seven careers and work-based learning educators, nine current students, five alumni, five employers and five further education educators.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Microsoft Teams. The interview schedule was developed by the first author and refined with input from co-authors. Schedules were adjusted to suit each stakeholder group (interview schedules are available online as Supplementary Materials 1). Schedules included questions about definitions of employability (for example, 'What does the term 'employability' mean for you?') and questions about how employability is 'embedded' in HEIs (for example, 'How should university teachers approach jobs/employment and careers in learning sessions?'). Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Textual transcript data was subjected to Braun and Clarke's (2006) tradition of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA); a well-established, epistemologically flexible method for exploring patterns and trends to suit specific research requirements. Our epistemological approach to the data was broadly critical realist, in that while our approach to the data was provisional and did not assume single underlying realities, it also retained interest in securing knowledge with wider validity in certain contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2013, 30-31). Data was explored inductively and without, at this stage, attempting to understand data in terms of pre-existing theoretical starting points. Teacher, learner and careers stakeholder transcript content concerning employability and adjacent terms linked to careers (such as graduate outcomes) were subjected to RTA in turn. An initial stage involved data reading and familiarisation. This led to producing a set of appropriate codes of the textual data. Data focused primarily on viewpoints of employability (rather than more distinct issues – for example, how to successfully embed employability in HEI curricula) was separated as a standalone dataset. Initial themes were produced via iterative exploration of relationships between codes, theme titles and the raw data. Themes were determined with attention to capturing an account of the data that held consistent and clear relevance to the research question.

A provisional theme table was produced. Candidate extracts providing clear participant illustrations relating to themes were extracted, collated and edited for clarity. An independent round of analysis on textual data codes was conducted by the second author. This involved familiarisation with the full corpus of coded data, code grouping into themes, and provisional theme development and labelling. Once re-analysis was completed, the first and second authors met to discuss similarity between themes from each round of analysis. There was a high level of convergence between each author's independent thematic structures. Where themes had different titles (for example, with alternative points of emphasis) discussions took place until agreement was reached on the final theme title.

Outcomes

The main findings from this study can be understood as discrete layers of factors, each of which helps to illuminate a different aspect of inequity in relation to graduate careers and employability.

A first layer, which we titled **individual level capital**, included material which concerned inequity of material, networking and self-related capital. Stakeholders identified different barriers associated with insufficient capital relevant to securing work. Some material concerned the importance of capital relevant to pursuing graduate careers. More traditional examples of capital referring to money and time were apparent but capital in terms of networking/social resources and less obvious capital in terms of self-concepts relevant to career planning and employability were also present in the data. Another layer, which we titled **institutional and sector-wide factors**, contained material which concerned inadequate respect for difference, poor integration of age-diverse cohorts, and obstacles faced by international students within HEI settings. A third layer, titled **society and economy-level factors**, concerned social justice in connection with pursuing graduate careers that had a societal or economic dimension. Finally, a fourth layer, which we titled **Critical perspective**, contained material which promoted revisiting of assumptions around employability and served to highlight tensions underlying traditional understandings of embedding employability that raised questions of social justice.

Looking ahead, we hope to explore how findings from our exploratory interview study might be transferred within the sector to help address inequity in its myriad forms. There are some key principles which can be taken from our study for now. First, our findings suggest there should be greater focus on implicit/hidden pathways to graduate work success – such as communities of practice/training sessions on differences in networking capital within learning cohorts. Second, our findings suggest that more emphasis should be placed on better integration of age diverse cohorts and efforts to incorporate this into employability-focused aspects of the curriculum more clearly/inventively. Third, our findings suggest that HEIs should strive to develop more ambitious institutional visions for integrating international students within courses, possibly via targeted interventions. Fourth and finally, our findings from the ‘Critical perspective’ layer of our textual data, affirm the importance of maintaining debate around how educators can keep definitions of employability and pursuing graduate careers plural and complex and aligned with different stakeholder voices.

We hope that our work can be taken forward in future research conducted in other HEIs, involving a wider range of stakeholder voices (most of our interviewees were white British). We suggest that a national strategy exploring ‘injustice in graduate outcomes’ would address some of the concerns identified in our research. Finally, we advocate much wider cross-sector collaboration to explore how careers and employability are dealt with in primary and secondary education settings. This final next step is particularly important to better understand the starting points and educational origins for the persistent disparity in graduate capital and real-world graduate outcomes which persist in 2024 against a wider cultural context of assumed meritocracy and fairness.

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Creating an equitable year in industry programme

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Background

In 2023, the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled graduates was 12.7% (Disabled Students UK, 2023). Research also shows, in 2020 and 2021, the proportion of disabled graduates in full-time employment was lower than the proportion of non-disabled graduates, across all qualification levels (Toogood, 2024). This bleak picture is highlighted further by the Buckland Review of Autism Employment, which states that autistic graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed after 15 months as non-disabled graduates, with only 36% finding full-time work in this period (Buckland, 2024). The poor outcomes for autistic graduates particularly matters within the context of physics in higher education (HE). A recent Institute of Physics (IOP) report states there is a higher percentage of students with social communication disorder/autism studying physics (12%), astronomy (12%) and mathematics (12%) compared to all other subjects (3%) (Institute of Physics, nd).

One of the key university mechanisms to enable students to transition into graduate-level work is the use of professional work placements, such as a year in industry (Delis and Jones, 2023). Undergraduate work placements are recognised as positively influencing graduate outcomes (Smith et al, 2018). However, it is less clear whether all students can access placements equitably. Divan et al (2022) analysed institutional data from 26,506 undergraduates across six years. They found participation rates in 12-month placements are unequal among student groups, with participation lower for mature students and students with a disability.

The School of Physics, Engineering and Technology (SoPET) is the lead partner in the White Rose Industrial Physics Academy (WRIPA). [WRIPA](#) is a collaboration between technical industries and five university physics departments whose goal is to increase the number of physics students that pursue a graduate-level technical career. One of the main activities of the York WRIPA team is to co-ordinate the SoPET's Physics Year in Industry programme (PYil). The picture outlined above energised us to evaluate whether the PYil is equitable for University of York undergraduate physics students. As a first step, we focused on disability, as over the past five years the mean average of undergraduate York physics students with a disability is 19%.

Analysis of the PYil data (2016-23) shows that the percentage of registered physicists with a disability on the work placement programme (16%) reflects that of the whole student body (19%). However, there is a significant drop in registered PYil students with a disability (6%) who successfully secure a placement. A similar trend is observed for students from ethnicity and lower POLAR 4 backgrounds. Gender is not a barrier to students registering onto the PYil or being successfully placed. Therefore, the SoPET aims to create a physics year in industry programme that leads to equitable placement outcomes.

Approach

Two WRIPA surveys (n = 250) conducted across all student groups highlighted imposter syndrome and lack of confidence as key social-psychological barriers to successfully applying for work experience. Furthermore, a common observation by survey respondents was 'concerns of job

rejection are more of a deterrent than the actual experience of rejection'. Students who received careers support were more likely to accept rejection as part of the recruitment process, whereas students who had not sought help emphasised the fear of rejection as a key barrier. At the same time, most physics students self-select out of extracurricular 'lecture-style' careers sessions. Different students have different, often invisible, barriers to seeking careers support. This means tailored student support that addresses individual need is difficult to address in a classroom-based environment. The complex nature of students' level of career readiness, self-efficacy and personal circumstances prompted us to reflect on how our placement support could evolve.

In 2021-22 the SoPET introduced a different approach and offered one-to-one student-led career guidance meetings. The meetings are compulsory for year in industry candidates and optional for all other undergraduates (such as those looking for summer internships). Typically, one-to-one meetings last one hour. The guidance given reflects the individual's specific (inter-related) needs, concerns, or fears. Students leave the session with a tangible action plan and a clear 'forward look' of what to do next. Often, students are connected to later stage physics students who have completed work experience or early career York physics alumni to offer insights into a specific organisation or job role or for mentoring. (Near) peer relationships between students and between students and the wider world is an important feature of how we now support our physicists to reimagine themselves beyond the degree subject, promote 'connectedness' (Capper and McVitty, 2022) and cultivate a sense of belonging (Bristow, 2024).

Outcomes

One-to-one meetings

During the first year that one-to-one meetings were offered, 104 individual physics students engaged, representing 19% of the student body. In 2022-23, student engagement increased to 23% (122 individual students) with engagement up to 25% in 2023-24 (139 individual students). In 2023-24, 321 one-to-one meetings took place, reflecting the need for some students to receive sustained tailored support. Importantly, the one-to-one meetings are inclusive. In 2023-24, 22% of attendees had a disability, which mirrors the percentage of the physics student body with a disability (22%). This suggests there is not a barrier to students with a disability accessing this careers support. Student feedback reflects the benefits of developing meaningful staff relationships and the 'power' of this approach to promote positive feelings of confidence and the minimisation of imposter syndrome:

"I think her [one-to-one careers coach] help is the main reason why I was able to get offered a place and her help gave me the confidence I needed to believe I could even get a place."
(*Neurodivergent physics year in industry student*)

"Honestly, the encouragement you gave me last year to apply for internships despite me thinking I didn't have the skills really gave me the starting step and the confidence to apply for grad jobs this year."
(*Female physicist, graduate-level technical role*)

Mentor relationships

We drew on a mentor network of approximately 300 undergraduates (ie, later stage students that have completed work experience and early career alumni). Since 2021-22, we have connected 85 physics students to (near) peers. We connect mentors close to the social, professional, or age level of the student and thus are better able to interact with and understand the struggles of students. It also offers students an opportunity to connect with an employer they would otherwise be reluctant to do so. This approach is useful as it supports students to see themselves in a work context, brings clarity to the professional role they are applying to, and helps reduce anxiety around recruitment processes and “being good enough” (Bolton-King, 2022). Student feedback highlighting the importance of meaningful (near) peer relationships is shown below:

“Getting in touch with York alumni really boosted my confidence when applying for [Company X]. It made the prospect of working for a science company like [Company X] feel achievable and showed that York’s Physics undergrads like myself are the kind of people [Company X] employs.” (Male physicist with disabilities)

“The mentoring made me feel much more confident in the YII process as there was someone I could talk to who had first-hand experience of being a YII student and who was happy to answer any questions that I may have been nervous to ask a member of staff.” (Female physicist with a long-term mental health condition)

We have emerging evidence that placing a strong emphasis on building meaningful relationships and sense of community is an equitable way to support students into work. Since 2021-22, we have supported five physics year in industry students with disabilities to secure work placements. A further 22 undergraduate physicists with disabilities have successfully applied for summer internships, graduate-level technical roles or further study.

Key messages and next steps

The dual approach of one-to-one student-led careers support and meaningful (near) peer connection is an equitable way to support students into work. Different students are supported in different ways to minimise their specific barriers. (Near) peer connectivity is also a powerful way of role modelling and breaking down misconceptions around what particular student groups can do. We have observed that this approach minimises procrastination and motivates students to take on a higher level of independence and agency. It also reduces anxiety around the “world of work” and reduces both imposter syndrome and the fear of failure in recruitment processes.

Our approach sits within a broader context of community building to create inclusive work-based learning programmes, a connected curriculum and equitable graduate outcomes. Thus, the work described can be transferred readily to other disciplines or levels of study.

Undergraduate physicists need ongoing support to develop their professional communication skills, so they have the confidence to grow proactively their network of employers, alumni or professional body contacts. This skills training can be embedded within the degree programme. The year in

industry programme can also be integrated better with institutional regional employer engagement initiatives. Our physicists from underrepresented groups have cited several barriers to pursuing a placement, particularly geographical location. Concerns relate to cost of living, which influences how far students are willing to travel from family due to fears of rent prices, travel costs and lack of social networks. To scale the one-to-one support requires deeper partnerships with the physics student body. This could take the form of developing more formalised peer 'career champions' to support work-based learning activities. Later stage physicists could be trained to offer their peers seeking internships or placements help with CV advice, identifying work opportunities or surfacing curricula skills and knowledge relevant to particular technology sectors.

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Enhancing Assessment

Authentic assessment design for hospitality management education

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Background

In recent years, authentic assessment has received increased scholarly interest, with research focusing on various dimensions and applications within academic practice, as well as on advantages in boosting employability, industry readiness and graduate outcomes (Berger and Wild, 2017; Sokhanvar and Sokhanvar, 2021; Sotiriadou et al, 2020). The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools is transforming the landscape of teaching, learning and assessment, with recent studies proposing incorporating 'generative AI redundancy' into authentic assessment frameworks (Khan, Dong and Afsari Manesh, 2023). Consequently, it is crucial for educators to explore the integration of co-creation, experiential and transformative learning elements into their assessment design strategies. In the field of hospitality studies, authentic assessment is necessary for equipping students for successful careers.

This case study provides an overview of the approach taken to enhance and redesign authentic assessment tasks for a Level 4 Hospitality Marketing module, part of the BA (Hons) Hospitality Management Programme.

Issues identified

Student feedback: responses collected through module evaluation questionnaires indicated that the assessment task was perceived as 'too generic' and somewhat unclear, with some students expressing uncertainty about how to approach it.

Informal industry feedback: during informal meetings and employability events, industry employers pointed out that while students and graduates may possess a theoretical understanding of concepts, they often lack practical application skills, which negatively impacts their employability.

Performance outcomes: there were poor results reflected in both the average marks and pass percentages.

Case study: designing authentic assessment tasks for a Level 4 Hospitality Marketing module

An inductive approach was adopted, guided by principles of constructive alignment and two theoretical frameworks: the Equity – Agency – Transparency (EAT) Framework (Evans, 2016) and the Design Thinking Framework (Brown, 2008). The EAT Framework examines the interconnectedness of three fundamental dimensions of practice (assessment literacy, assessment feedback and assessment design) to explore the question "What does student engagement in assessment and feedback look like?". From an assessment design perspective, Evans (2016) outlines four essential elements: (1) robust and transparent processes and procedures, (2) promoting meaningful and focused assessments, (3) ensuring access and equal opportunities, and (4) providing ongoing evaluation to foster sustainable assessment and practice. We used these elements to guide our

development of authentic assessment tasks for the Level 4 Hospitality Marketing module. Design Thinking, developed by Professor David Kelley (cited in Camacho, 2016), is defined as “a human-centred innovation process that emphasises observation, collaboration, rapid learning, visualisation of ideas, quick concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis” (Lockwood, 2011, 25). One of the key benefits of applying Design Thinking to authentic assessment design is its ability to promote interdisciplinary approaches, offering deeper insights into various dimensions of assessment while encouraging creativity thorough exploration of contemporary challenges within the hospitality industry (Benson and Dresdow, 2014). We employed an iterative, non-linear Design Thinking approach to generate ideas, test and implement our proposed authentic assessment strategy.

Methodologically, the Design Thinking Framework is viewed as a process “used to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems, and create innovative solutions to prototype and test” (Interaction Design Foundation, nd, 1). Our approach involved five stages: (1) **empathising** (researching stakeholders’ needs), (2) **defining** (articulating stakeholders’ needs and problems), (3) **ideating** (challenging assumptions and generating ideas), (4) **prototyping** (creating solutions), and (5) **testing** (evaluating solutions).

Stage 1: empathising

In the first stage, we researched stakeholders’ needs by examining learning outcomes outlined in validated module specifications, as well as industry expectations for students’ skills and capabilities, and students’ expectations of the module. Data collected at this stage included internal programme validation documentation, institutional assessment targets, quality standards, and feedback from students and industry professionals regarding previous assessment tasks. This helped establish three primary priorities.

- 1 There was a clear need to redesign a theoretically based coursework task that required students to demonstrate basic understanding of marketing principles, transforming it into tasks that allow for a more complex understanding of how these principles apply in practice.
- 2 The rise of generative AI posed a challenge for ensuring that student submissions met institutional academic integrity standards.
- 3 Student feedback from module evaluation questionnaires indicated that the assessment task was perceived as ‘too generic’ and somewhat unclear, leading to confusion about how to approach it. Informal industry feedback further suggested that while students may understand theoretical concepts, they often lack practical application, resulting in poor employability outcomes.

Stage 2: defining

Data collected during stage one informed a clear identification of stakeholders' needs and was further elaborated in stage two. Here, we established stakeholder needs by considering institutional targets and quality requirements, aligning with learning outcomes at module and programme levels, as well as addressing the needs of students and industry to integrate expert theoretical knowledge with complex practical applications.

Stage 3: ideating

In stage three, we applied the EAT framework (Evans, 2016) to challenge previous assumptions and generate ideas aligned with the four core areas of assessment design. The following questions adapted from Benson and Dresdow (2014) guided this process:

- + How can integrative assessment tasks of value to multiple stakeholders be developed?
- + How can assessment tasks align with employers' needs and expectations?
- + How can emerging disciplinary knowledge be incorporated?
- + How can students demonstrate complex thinking abilities, as well as knowledge and skill transfer?

Answers to these questions facilitated the generation of various ideas, one of which was to redesign the module's assessment structure to include two components instead of one, producing two focused and meaningful assessment tasks. This would ensure more robust and transparent assessment procedures, promote equal access and opportunities, and support ongoing evaluation of assessment practices. The initial proposal involved streamlining written coursework to enhance its focus and incorporate an industry-based case scenario. This included introducing a performance-based, collaborative assessment task where students would create multimedia assets (such as pictures and videos) as they promote a hospitality business based on a real-world, industry-informed campaign brief. We revisited stages one and two to empathise with stakeholders, gather feedback and align assessment tasks and learning outcomes with their needs and expectations.

Stage 4: prototyping

In stage four, we developed prototype versions of the proposed assessment tasks. Prototypes of the written assessment task included a series of industry-informed case studies (ie, promoting the summer drinks range of a coffee shop chain; promoting the new menu of a local restaurant; enhancing brand awareness for an independent hotel, etc). Prototypes of the practical, live assessment task were focused on the development of industry-informed digital marketing campaign briefs and on the inclusion of the creative elements of multimedia content creation (ie, promotional photography and videography). A series of campaign briefs were developed and analysed to ensure they were relevant for the industry and suitable for academic purpose. These included digital and social media marketing campaign briefs for restaurants, hotels, coffee shops etc, targeted towards specific media/social media channels and specific audiences.

Stage 5: testing

During stage five, these prototypes were tested through formative assessment techniques in class. Short questionnaires and informal feedback methods were employed to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions regarding the value and relevance of new assessment tasks. Informal consultations with industry professionals were conducted to ascertain their views on how these assessment tasks could help students develop unique capabilities that would make them stand out in job interviews. This process informed a final revision, leading to transforming prototype assessment tasks into robust summative assessments.

The initial iteration of the newly developed assessment tasks provided a range of positive outcomes. From an institutional and academic progression standpoint, improvements included: increased pass rates (from 87.5% to 100%), increased student engagement with assessment tasks, a significant reduction in non-submission rates (from 39% to 7.1%), improvement in average mark rates (from 54.27 to 63.25), and an improvement in attainment gap. From student satisfaction perspective, feedback collected through module evaluation questionnaires indicated a rise in positive sentiment. In particular, students commented positively on how the assessment challenges students to perform at their best, the relevance and clarity of the assessment tasks, and overall engagement with the assessment. By simulating real-world situations, students gained confidence to excel in their professional careers. From an industry perspective, informal feedback confirmed that assessment tasks enabled students to showcase their skills in action. As one of the industry representatives noted:

“it was good to see practical, skill-based tasks embedded in the assessment. Too often we find it with graduates that they understand theory, but don't have much understanding of how this applies in practice. Knowing how to take and edit photographs and videos, and how to use them to promote a restaurant, is an essential skill”.

Reflecting on the threefold success of this approach, it is evident that transitioning to an authentic assessment strategy has the potential to meet and exceed expectations of multiple stakeholders in the hospitality education sector. The Design Thinking framework served as a successful guiding tool throughout the process, facilitating the generation of creative ideas for authentic assessment tasks. The EAT framework helped ground our approach in established authentic assessment principles, ensuring that equality, agency and transparency remained central to academic development. This methodology can be adapted for other modules to inform the development of a wide variety of authentic assessment tasks.

Outcomes

Authentic assessment in hospitality studies should be used to empower students to question assumptions, while fostering self-reflection and critical examination of their own knowledge, actions and performances. By embracing authenticity in assessments, we enhance the quality of hospitality education and contribute to the development of future professionals who can thrive in the diverse and dynamic hospitality landscape. Creating assessments that align with industry expectations and best practices enables students to cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary for success, while gaining a deeper understanding of the real-world impact of their expertise. Aligning assessments with industry

standards ensures that students acquire skills and competencies that are increasingly sought after in the hospitality industry.

This case study provides guidance and inspiration for educators in designing robust, relevant and authentic assessment tasks. Using Design Thinking and the EAT framework, adopting a tri-dimensional perspective of co-creation as well as scaffolding skills and capabilities from basic to expert levels can aid in the creation of authentic assessment tasks, thereby enhancing employability and improving graduate outcomes.

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Employer collaboration and authentic assessment: “talk to the face, not the hand...”

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Background

University collaboration with employers around authentic assessment design has become a key objective for many UK institutions. Recent research shows that authentic assessment can underpin student professional identity formation, and introduction of the world of work into the curriculum (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

However, a recent qualitative research project conducted via the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) and Swansea University with business and management academics, employers and professional bodies shows that many employers do not feel universities engage with them appropriately in curriculum and assessment collaboration, and that universities should learn how to engage more authentically with employers, breaking down communication barriers and supporting employers when engaging with academics to “talk to the face, not the hand”. This interaction can fail owing to lack of mutual understanding between universities and employers, inadequate university reward structures for external engagement, and insufficient training for academics on effective employer engagement. The importance of “talk to the face, not the hand” approaches in university-employer assessment collaboration is emphasised by Wijayaratna and Cottam (2022):

“Improving one’s ability to speak to people and external networks requires the right mindset. Appreciate you’re playing a long game in which benefits aren’t always immediate. The value of external relationships can be surprising.”

(Wijayaratna and Cottam, 2022, 4)

The research context for this case study was framed by the above sector trends, and by pedagogic research from bodies such as Guild HE (2018), which found that involving employers in assessment such as projects and consultancy can offer students and academics significant gains. Employers add real-world content to assessment, ensuring students gain both subject knowledge and transferable skills. Guild HE (2018) also found that university-employer collaboration enables students to develop business practitioner attributes and pre-professional work identity.

Further benefits to employer assessment collaboration are evident from other pedagogic research including Jackson and Dean (2023), who found that university-employer assessment collaboration results in improved soft skills such as teamwork. This echoes earlier research by O’Leary (2013) on the benefits to students of university-employer assessment collaboration:

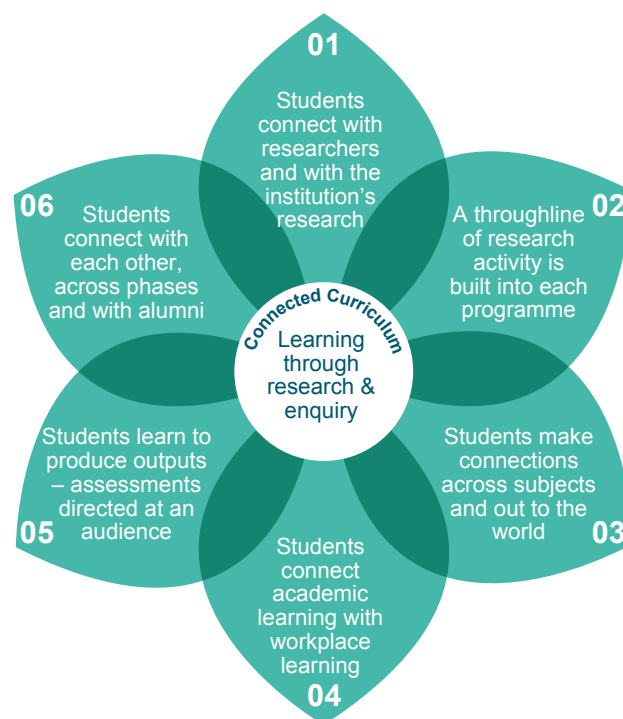
“Collaborations with employers have positive impact on employability prospects of graduates. This can take forms including consultancy projects as an alternative to the academic dissertation...Employer collaborations are important to students and graduates, also to HEIs as they compete for new students.”

(O’Leary, 2013, 41)

Pedagogic research with students also shows curriculum and assessment co-design with employers viewed positively. Students perceive that authentic assessment such as case studies, employer-sponsored competitions and consultancy projects enable employers to disseminate practice wisdom, provide realistic student feedback and open new career opportunities for students (Riebe et al, 2013).

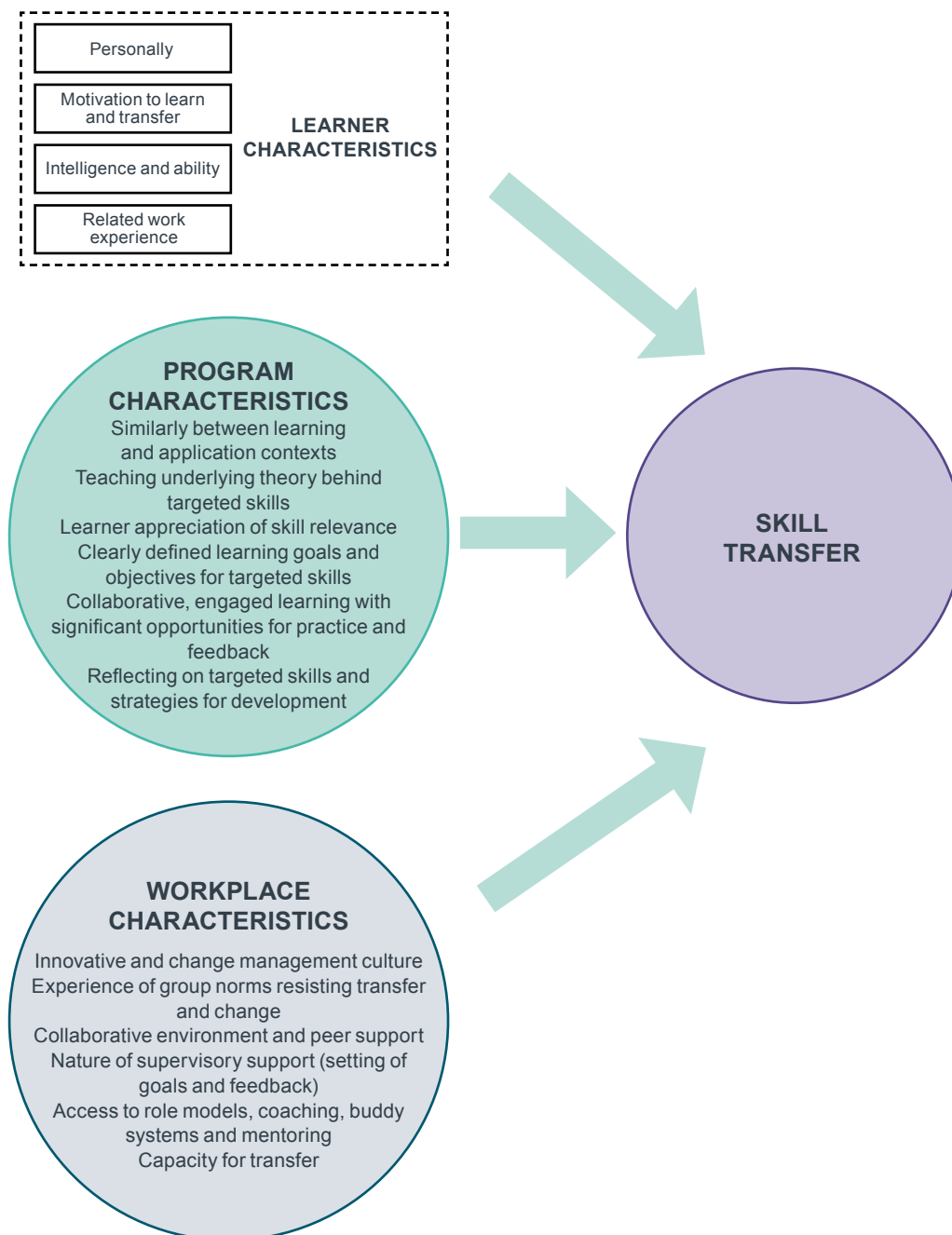
This research project was also framed by models demonstrating the effectiveness of university-employer collaboration in assessment and curriculum design. These include Fung’s Connected Curriculum Framework (2017), asserting that involving employers in curriculum and assessment co-design can effectively mirror the “messy” environment needed for the workplace. Fung’s Connected Curriculum concept advocates a throughline connecting students, employers and academics with skills needed for professional work and social capital.

Figure 1. Connected Curriculum Framework. Source: Fung, 2017



A further influence was Jackson’s Model of Employer-Graduate Skills Transfer (2016), emphasising that graduate skills transfer is key in teaching and assessment, but cannot happen without employer collaboration. This model emphasises employer collaboration across student, programme and workplace characteristics. This ensures that assessment mechanisms embed similarities between workplaces and programmes via authentic assessment, facilitating student transfer of employable skills into the employer environment.

Figure 2. Model of Employer-Graduate Skills Transfer. Source: Jackson, 2016



The central challenge for this project was therefore to look for new approaches to avoid assessment collaboration failure, with the aim of enabling academics and employers to collaborate successfully around authentic assessment, for positive employability skills and graduate outcomes for students, academics and employers. The research objectives also sought to create a best-practice framework in university-employer curriculum and assessment collaboration.

Approach

In terms of research methodology, as the project aimed to explore the experience of employers and universities in curriculum and authentic assessment collaboration, an interpretivist epistemological approach was adopted (Jegede, 2021). This enabled findings to evolve from perceived meaning created by individuals through their experience of curriculum and assessment collaboration.

The data collection method chosen was semi-structured in-depth interviews, with the rationale of facilitating follow-up questions, enabling interviewers to probe answers and participants to clarify responses. This provided a detailed understanding of participant collaborative behaviour drivers (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). Purposive sampling provided a credible means of selecting research participants with meaningful experience of the collaboration phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

The three key UK stakeholder groups involved in the 32 research interviews comprised eight employers, four Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), and 20 academics involved in curriculum and assessment design. Interview questions focused on drivers and barriers around curriculum and assessment collaboration, and aspects of collaboration which worked well or required improvement. Interview transcripts were generated, and NVivo software was used to group frequency and intensity of participant themes, resulting in five superordinate themes each with three to five subordinate themes and 31 sub themes. Thematic analysis as advocated by Clarke and Braun (2017) was used to analyse interview data, facilitating an organic approach to coding and theme generation.

The research timeframe incorporated ethics approval and literature review between March-December 2022, followed by qualitative discussion guide creation, participant recruitment and interviews between January–May 2023. The research followed university and industry protocol approved by UWTSD ethics boards. Analysis and reporting of the findings took place between June-December 2023, with presentation of results during January-April 2024.

Outcomes

The research findings showed that, although UK academics frequently invite employers into basic collaborative assessment, for example by providing work placements or live case studies, employers often feel that universities do not encourage employers to collaborate on assessment more strategically in the curriculum. Employers can therefore find themselves superficially talking to the academic’s “hand” rather than the “face”, with academics sometimes unwilling to engage in authentic communication with employers around curriculum collaboration. Reasons for this include universities not regarding the role of employers as being involved in assessment, or perceived lack of employer knowledge of teaching and quality standards.

This can result in employers feeling disconnected and unequal as partners in university collaboration, with focus on the viewpoints of academics, rather than appropriate communication and engagement with employers. The impact of these findings, according to the employers interviewed, is extensive, as academics can fail to engage employers in embedding authentic assessment, resulting in graduate employability skills deficits.

The research findings from academics also found insufficient training, resources and workload hours to collaborate effectively with employers on assessment and curriculum development. Universities were often found to provide insufficient incentives, resources or recognition for academics to engage in employer assessment collaboration. Other academic challenges included university metrics and rankings criteria incentivising single subject knowledge rather than broader skills and experience required for external collaboration. Academics also faced disaggregation and lack of connectedness in university structures and processes between academics, careers teams, business development teams and senior management:

“At my university a company was brought in via the team engaging with employers. He said, ‘You’re the first academic I’ve known who can meet deadlines’. They expected prevarication. That they wouldn’t get what they wanted in their timeframe. I’d want universities to think critically about what is mutually beneficial. If anything cheeses employers off about working with universities, it’s paperwork, ‘this is how we do it, you fit in’. Universities don’t get that.”

(University academic, South-East England)

“In my university there were people focused on creating relationships and partnerships with businesses. Academics were not involved until something had been established, that introduced masses of bureaucracy, which employers did not like.”

(University academic, South-West England)

Key messages from the work undertaken were therefore that:

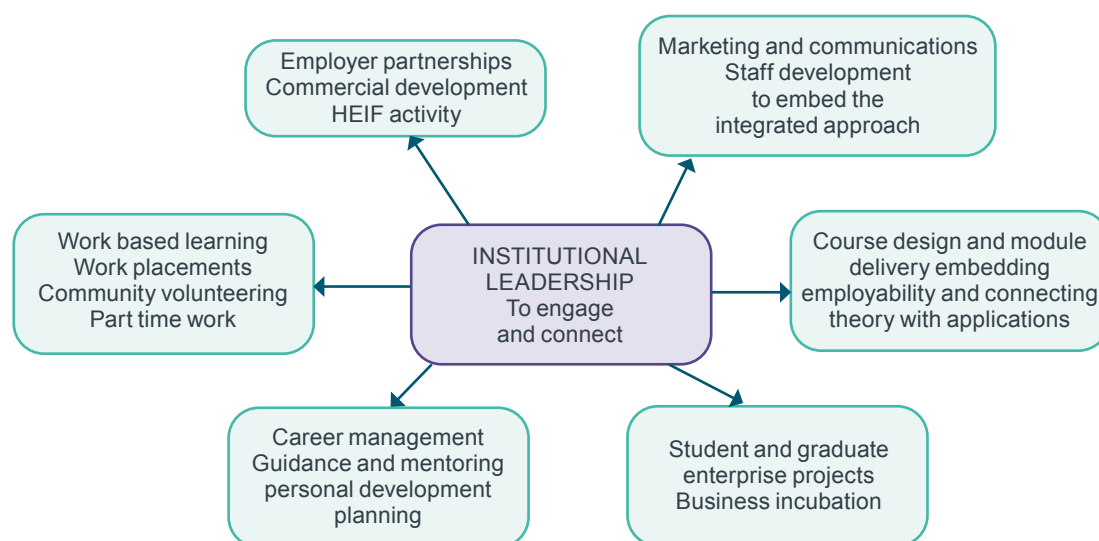
- + employers appreciate engagement in collaborative assessment and curriculum design with academics, but feel that academics sometimes lack confidence, bandwidth and communication skills to support employers to “talk to the face, not the hand”
- + academics often want to collaborate on assessment with employers, but experience lack of training, workload hours, senior level support and effective organisational structures to support them
- + fresh thinking and a new collaborative framework approach are therefore needed to facilitate authentic assessment and curriculum collaboration between academics and employers.

Key outcomes from the research were therefore:

- + a review of existing pedagogical models and frameworks to test for more effective collaborative assessment and curriculum relationships between academics and employers, supported by senior leadership
- + development of a new more connective curriculum collaboration framework to enable more effective collaborative assessment and curriculum relationships between academics and employers.

Regarding the first outcome above, the most appropriate existing model to test with academics and employers was found to be Rae’s Model of Institutional Connectivity of Curriculum, Employability and Enterprise (2007), which models integrated organisational connectivity led by senior leaders for curriculum and assessment collaboration with employer engagement.

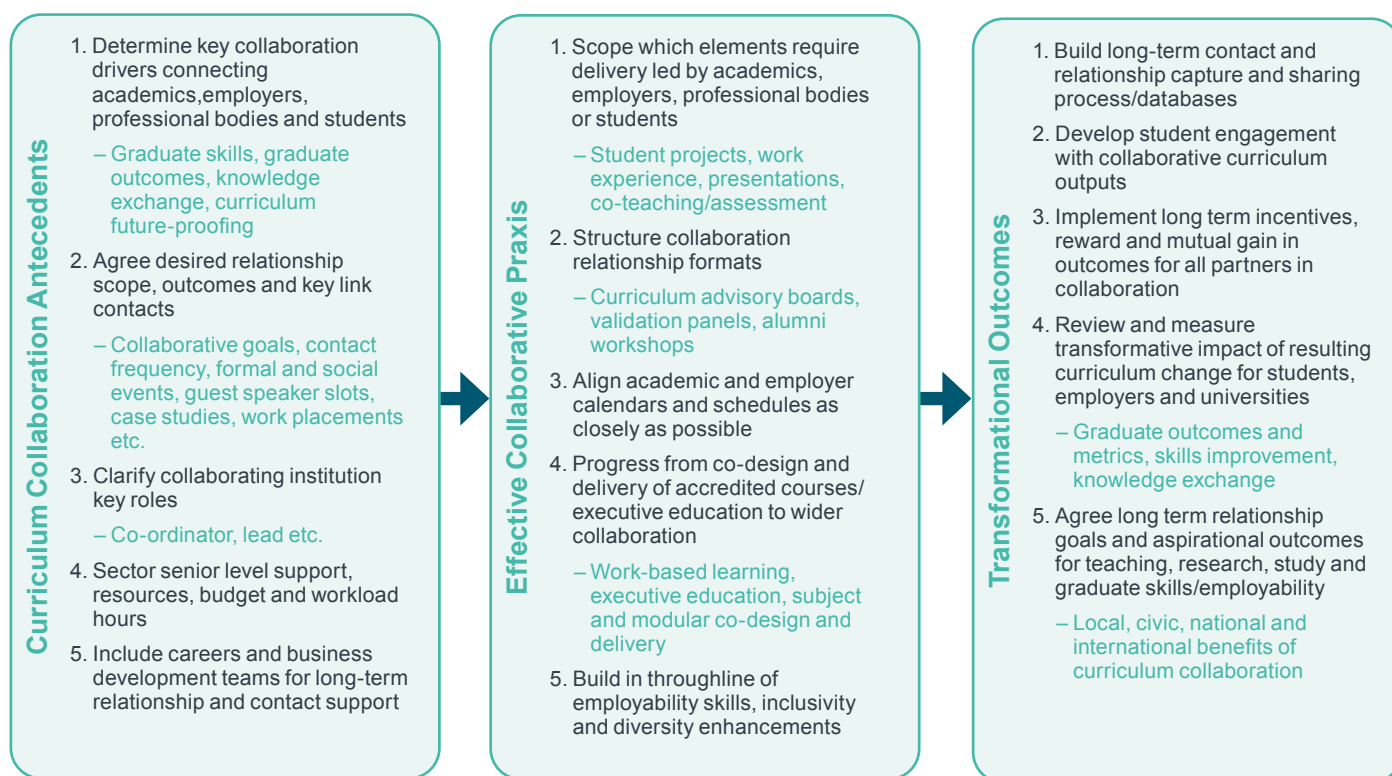
Figure 3. Model of Institutional Connectivity of Curriculum, Employability and Enterprise.
Source: Rae, 2007



As Rae’s model is not particularly current, another research outcome was to create a new more connective curriculum and assessment collaboration framework shown at Figure 4 below, to ensure that:

- + academics are supported to adopt an engaging tone and approach, recognising that employers cannot always accommodate lengthy academic term structures and administrative procedures, for example programme validation cycles
- + assessment collaboration is discussed as a mutual benefit around authentic assessment, for example enabling employer access to excellent student talent
- + university-employer assessment collaboration can transform the curriculum via effective co-creation, advisory boards and validation workshops
- + academics and employers can work together with students on authentic live projects, case studies and consultancy briefs, to simulate real-life work-based adaptability.

Figure 4. New Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework. Source: Dalrymple, 2024



In terms of transferability, these areas of best practice and new connective framework for assessment collaboration, including antecedent steps, real-world praxis and transformational outcomes, are transferable to other contexts and disciplines, including subject areas such as hospitality, tourism, law and healthcare.

This work could be developed further by testing out the frameworks in this section with any university and a sample of its employers and academics, to ascertain where interventions at antecedent, praxis and outcome stages would be most beneficial.

Next steps currently being actioned include a joint research study with two universities in Ireland to test how the new connective collaboration framework above works in bringing employers into shared learning spaces on university campuses.

Overall, this case study demonstrates the issues facing assessment and curriculum collaboration between academics and employers, and how universities can work more effectively with employers to co-create and reimagine curriculum and authentic assessment which bring mutual benefit and connectivity. This will enable universities to enable employers to effectively ‘talk to the face, not the hand’ in assessment collaboration for students.

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Authentic assessment to enhance employability at Greenwich Business School

Katherine Leopold, Faculty Senior Tutor, Senior Teaching Fellow in Employability, Greenwich Business School; Raluca Marinciu, Teaching Fellow, Greenwich Business School

Background

This case study discusses three elements of our Greenwich Business School (GBS) employability provision, working with The Forage.Com, Shortlist.Me and Prodigy Learning for Microsoft Office Specialist Certifications to deliver authentic assessment in undergraduate taught courses.

Business schools promise their students employer-informed, relevant courses that respond to real-world contemporary themes. Employability is an essential part of the undergraduate and postgraduate experience within the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and the Office for Students (OfS) considers it a core responsibility of institutions, expressed in the OfS's Regulatory Framework Condition B3: Student Outcomes:

“The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study.”

(Office for Students, 2020, 1)

There is some interesting discussion about the Graduate Outcomes survey needing to capture a wider range of success metrics for graduates (Nathwani, 2023). However, the key principles will remain: students need to develop an understanding of possible career paths and how to progress along them (Kosine and Lewis, 2008; Jiang et al, 2019; Kleine et al, 2021).

To achieve this, Advance HE's Embedding Employability Framework is very useful. It combines reflective practice within a well-structured approach for meaningful embedding of employability.

A stumbling block is often the thorny problem of academic workloads and their impact on staff wellbeing and productivity (Douglas et al, 2024). Within a business school, a broad range of experts come from a mixture of academic and professional backgrounds. This creates an engaging environment, but the integration of employability is often seen as fitting better with 'pracademics', making it difficult to integrate fully into credit-bearing academic modules led by those with a stronger academic research interest (Hollweck et al, 2022). In the context of employability, this is further complicated by the ongoing conversations about the purpose of a degree – there is an unresolved tension which stimulates much discussion in both theory and practice (Tight, 2023).

On large programmes, this also creates challenges around consistency of experience. Some colleagues have commercial backgrounds that give them a confident framework to support the development of interview skills, for example, but application processes vary widely. Innovations in recruitment mean that the experiences of students and staff are different, creating a sense of a gap between the teacher and the student.

Working with external platforms is a way to improve this. However, these are often implemented as 'should do' for students rather than 'must do' as part of the assessment, impacting uptake from hard-to-reach groups. Finding ways to ensure that uptake is woven into core student experience is therefore essential and integrating into authentic assessment offers one way to do this. This builds on the Advance HE Framework, integrating authentic assessment and career development learning with the confidence, adaptability, agency and self-awareness goals of the student dimension (Tibby and Norton, 2020).

We have various curriculum-based activities within our core teaching at GBS to address those challenges. We have a growing community of pedagogic researchers and our contribution to the achievement of TEF Gold in 2024 demonstrates our commitment to authentically assessed, contemporary learning.

Approach

The Forage

Forage (www.theforage.com) was the first external supplier we built into assessment with an employability focus. This supplier offers self-guided experiences created by employers with a range of authentic content and tasks for students to complete. In 2020 we piloted a Forage Virtual Internship on a compulsory L5 Personal Development module for Economics and International Business Students (Leopold and Gorgoni, 2021). Next, we built it into a compulsory, non-credit-bearing L5 module, taught to all 1,500 L5 students on all degree programmes.

Feedback on Forage has been consistently positive; students like the opportunity to consider roles with job titles they have heard but do not always understand. It also offers a safe space for students to test the waters of careers they are considering. Sometimes, this leads to a change of direction; one Economics student commented that they chose to study Economics because they wanted to be an investment banker, but having done a virtual internship in investment banking, they were now confident that it wasn't for them as a career. This leads to students considering a wider range of career options.

It is currently difficult to measure the impact of the change; we implemented career registration in the 2023-24 academic year, enabling us to survey those students in future to see whether their career plan at the start of the degree changes. Data from the platform showed that students were accessing a wide range of different options, demonstrating a curiosity about different roles and career paths.

This embedding has been an effective way of getting students to explore, with 61% of University of Greenwich Forage enrolments and completions coming from Business and Finance degree programmes. The platform has been actively promoted across other faculties, including within Law, which is particularly well represented on the platform.

Figure 1. Advance HE Employability Symposium Workshop Workbook

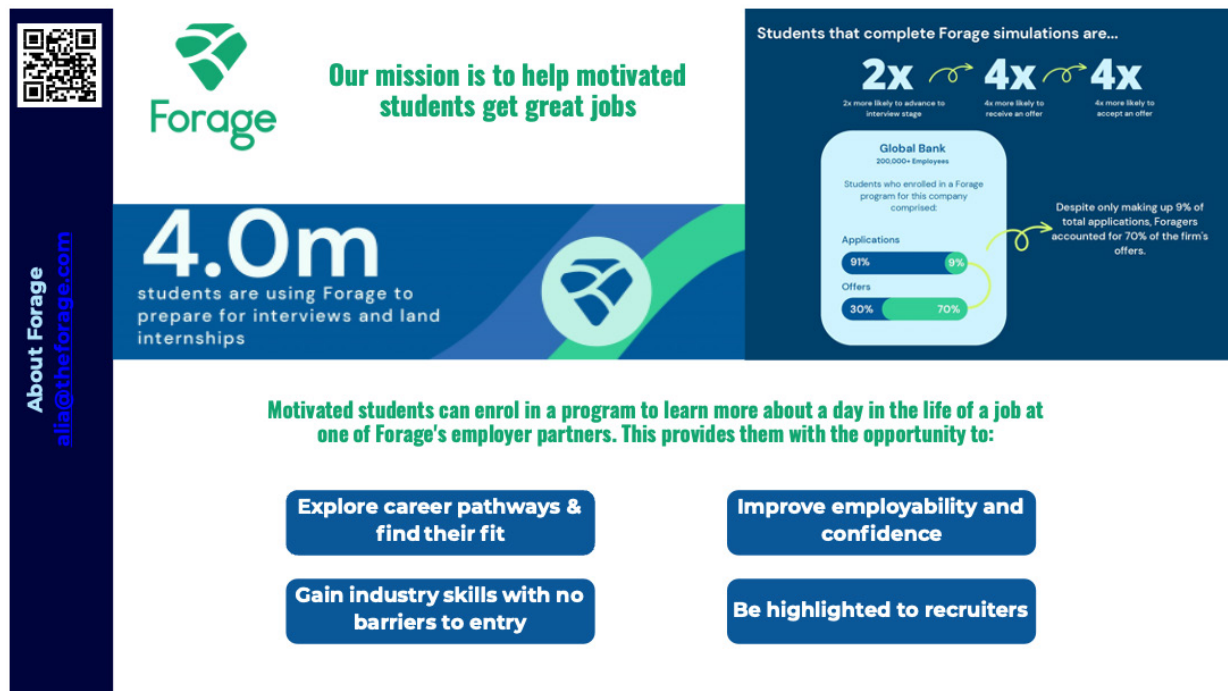


Figure 1 shows four million students completing Forage Job Simulations. This makes them twice as likely to advance to interview stage, four times more likely to receive an offer and four times more likely to accept an offer. For example, 9% of applications to a global bank with 200,000+ employees had completed a job simulation, they accounted for 70% of the job offers made. The simulations enable students to explore career pathways and find their fit, improve employability and confidence, gain industry skills with no barriers to entry, and be highlighted to recruiters.

Prodigy Learning and Microsoft Office Specialist Certifications

This case study intervention involved embedding MoS Office Certifications ([Microsoft Credentials](#)) as a reward for the Level 5 Future Paths 0 credit module. They are globally recognised certifications in Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. These core digital skills are increasingly being assumed to be held by students, but experience shows that the level of competence varies hugely. Many lack confidence in using basic tools, combined with a lack of confidence to ask for help. We have many modules in GBS that rely on using these packages, but we realised that students often struggle to use these tools to their full potential. It is also the case that they struggle to evidence competence in application processes and interviews. Many learners find that working towards a credential supports them in exploring the packages, and the structured approach develops an understanding of the shortcuts, approaches and tools that will support them in long-term careers. In the academic year 2023-24, we moved a core piece of the L4 Accounting and Finance assessment onto the Gmetrix platform, and in the year 2024-25, we plan to offer the full certification in Excel through the L4 compulsory module.

Figure 2. Advance HE Employability Symposium Workshop Workbook

96% of professionals used Microsoft Office at work with Microsoft Excel listed as top software skill requested by employers. One in twelve jobs request proof of Microsoft Office proficiency, particularly Excel. Top job titles requiring evidence of Excel include:

Job title	Number of job postings
Account Assistant	121
Management Accountant	109
Finance Assistant	77
Credit Controller	67
Finance Manager	62

Shortlist.Me

The third element of the case study has its roots in 2018 when we introduced the Mock Job Application as a compulsory assessment element for first-year students. We based this on an application format used widely across different industries: word-length-constrained answers to typical questions, such as ‘Why are you suitable for this role? Give an example of when you worked as part of a team, what was your role, and what did you achieve?’ And ‘Talk about a time when you didn’t achieve the outcome you wanted. How did you handle it and what did you learn from it?’. This was a successful assignment with around 1,500 students a year completing it. We developed a rigorous rubric and invested time in training colleagues on how to mark these, which had the additional benefit of demonstrating how hard these 150-word answers were to structure and deliver. This assignment also facilitated a greater understanding of our students as they wrote about their part-time jobs, hobbies and interests.

The advent of ChatGPT meant that these answers as assessments were not academically robust, and that the assignment needed to evolve to match the contemporary recruitment space. We identified in March 2023 that we needed to develop an alternative to be ready to teach and assess in September 2023. Shortlist.Me offered an opportunity to move this mock application onto a live platform, used by many employers globally. We designed a rapid pivot onto the platform, replacing the short-form written answers with two-minute recorded video answers to questions voiced by recorded speakers.

Students reported feeling very anxious about the prospect of this assignment; in the lecture and tutorials that supported this assessment, many of the questions were focused on things going wrong – students wanted to know whether they could re-record, how to handle drying up or panicking. Despite this, overall performance was strong, and feedback afterwards was positive. There were, inevitably, students who did not engage in the supporting classes or take on board the tips and decided that they could simply ‘wing it’ – they, therefore, performed badly.

It is the nature of authentic assessment that not all students will perform as well as they want to, but the students who did poorly have commented that it was better to do badly as part of an L4 module they could learn from rather than do poorly in an interview for a job that they really wanted to have.

Outcomes

Embedding these three interventions within GBS was complex and challenging. Making a sound pedagogical case was relatively straightforward as the widespread interest in authentic assessment means that there is a strong community of practice to support the creation of effective marking rubrics and classroom support. The challenge was on the technical front; the platforms needed to be evaluated for privacy impact, and the practical integrations into our VLEs required working closely with specialist University teams.

The student response to all three platforms has been positive. Students welcome the insight into roles and the practical tasks with The Forage, which they can then self-evaluate. Moving the Excel assessment onto the Microsoft Certification platforms considerably reduced the marking load, as around 450 students were marked automatically by the platform rather than needing staff to run a test and then mark the outputs. As it takes place in a live Excel environment, students also reported learning more about the programme's application. This led to reported increases in confidence; we shall see in the academic year 2024-25 whether this has a positive impact on the L6 Excel skills in other modules. Using LinkedIn Learning to deliver the taught content created an asynchronous, self-paced learning environment.

Shortlist.Me also reduced marking time. We had always marked the mock job applications closely, which was time-consuming. Responding to two-minute recorded answers with meaningful feedback was faster and more enjoyable for colleagues who reported feeling a stronger connection with students. It had the additional benefit of 55 academic colleagues being given an insight into what graduate recruiters experience – eye-opening for many. We are also exploring the authenticity of responses with Shortlist.Me as some students appeared to be reading answers generated by AI Chatbots. They are developing additional tools on their platform, and for the 2024-25 year, we have adapted the teaching to include a discussion about the importance of authentic voice and the ethics of using generative AI to complete job applications and interviews.

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Trials and tribulations in perfecting student collaboration and teamwork

Nigel Page, Kingston University London

Background

Collaboration and teamwork are essential skills for students to develop to succeed in the modern workplace (Bateman et al, 2022). These competencies are consistently highlighted as key graduate attributes and are emphasised by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). However, effectively teaching, perfecting and assessing these skills, giving weight and wider context, can be challenging (Riebe et al, 2016). Moreover, persuading students of their importance and relevance is often complicated by factors such as reliance on peers, mutual trust and respect, collective ownership and balancing individual and group efforts. To navigate these dynamics, students must demonstrate strong communication, clear decision-making and conflict resolution skills, all of which are vital for the success of the team.

Having coordinated a Level 6 bioscience team project annually since 2013, I have observed a wide range of student anxiety and reactions. About half the students found it a positive experience, noting that “interactive activities such as group projects make learning more enjoyable and effective”, “I liked having less independent time and more time working in a team”, and “developing new skills that I can use in social settings”. However, for many others, it is a negative experience: “I am not great at working with other people and group work puts pressure on me”, “I don’t like having 10% of my grade rely on other people”, and “group work never plays out correctly and there needs to be a better way, if possible”. Compounding this issue, over a decade ago, our original teamwork strategy was primarily seen as an efficient way for every student to deliver an oral presentation in a large module, often resulting in a shared team mark with students. There was little time or thought given to preparing students on how to work effectively as a team.

Over the past 10 years, we have refined our approach to student collaboration and teamwork through a series of trials and alternative strategies. Initially, we focused on team allocation methods, peer marking systems, and the impact of teamwork on awarding gaps (Hill et al, 2016; Page et al, 2018). Our current strategy involves continuously reviewing and optimising our delivery to provide an authentic, skills-based team experience that is transparent, fair and supportive. This strategy aims to accurately reflect individual contributions and learning while recognising the collective and accountable team effort. Moreover, the creation of a comprehensive Future Skills strand at Kingston University, spanning Levels 4 to 6 across our courses, has afforded us the opportunity to reassess and enhance the way we facilitate teamwork in a structured and progressive fashion.

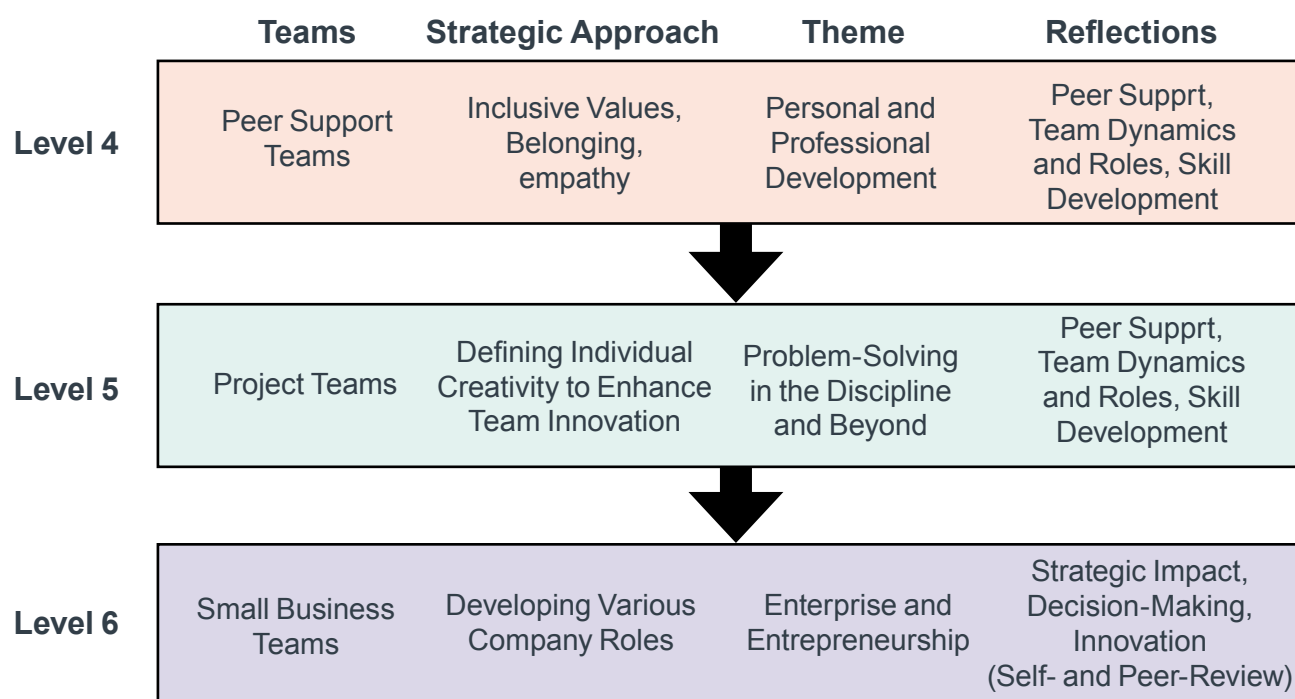
Our approach to teamwork is grounded in the Katzenbach and Smith Model (2015) and Tuckman’s Theory (1965). The Katzenbach and Smith Model emphasises the importance of teams being committed, possessing the appropriate skills, and being personally and mutually accountable for completing tasks. Tuckman’s Theory highlights that effective teams need time to develop through various stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

Approach

We have adopted a comprehensive approach to review and better understand long-standing concerns about teamwork and the student experience. Using a design thinking methodology, we brainstormed and generated ideas to gain a clearer understanding of the main issues from the different stakeholder perspectives. Key areas identified included developing scaffolded approaches, enhancing shared values and inclusivity, and implementing transparent methods to manage freeloading, boost engagement and monitor progress and conflict.

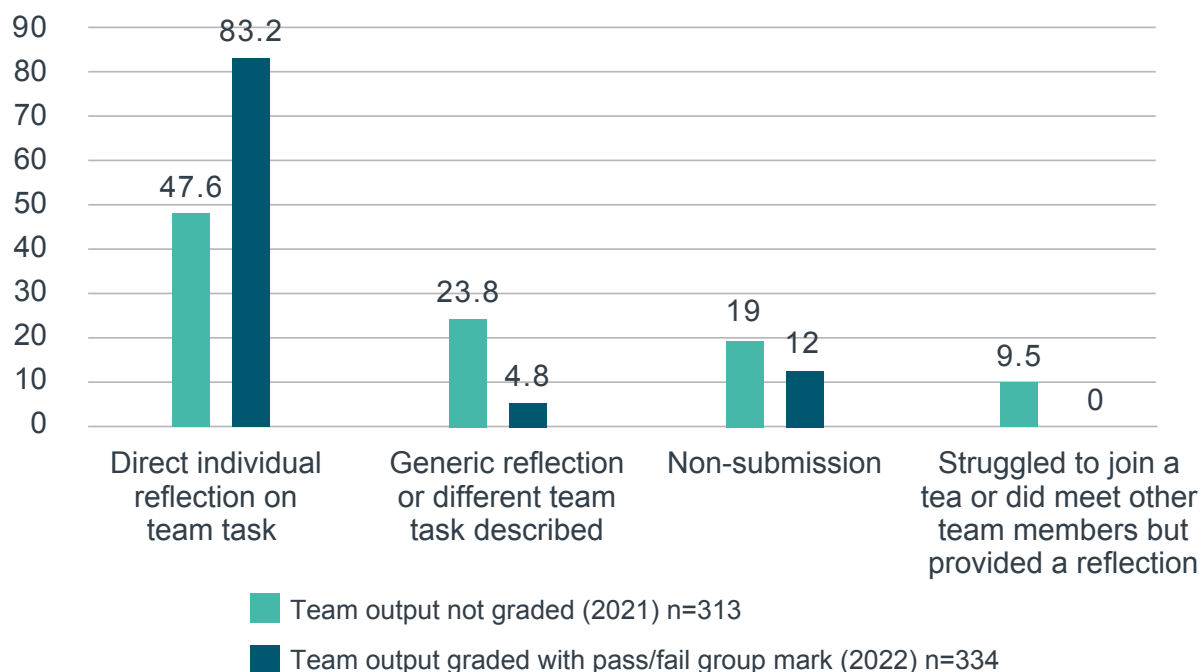
One key part of our approach aims to enhance students' inclusive and shared values, sense of belonging and empathy. Since 2021, our empathetic learning initiatives at Level 4 have equipped students with tools for self-awareness, understanding others and navigating their environment. This approach has been facilitated by introducing a peer learning network comprising small teams within our personal tutor scheme, complemented by interactive curriculum-embedded workshops and a bespoke online learning resource. This network enables tutees to connect in teams, discuss their professional development, and undertake small, credit-bearing tasks throughout the year. Additionally, tutees collaborate on a single team project (either a short video or poster) to reflect on their teamwork experiences, aspirations and evolving skills. The Level 4 team project offers a safe, low stakes setting, evaluated on a simple pass/fail basis for 7.5% of a module, based on confirmed authorship of the team's output. This approach fosters positive feelings about teamwork and provides a scaffolded pathway to higher-stakes teamwork assessments at subsequent levels (Figure 1). Using the tutor scheme allows tutors to be arbitrators, if necessary.

Figure 1. A flow diagram illustrating the scaffolded approach to teamwork and collaboration from Level 4 to 6.



During the initial year, we ran the peer teams, allowing students to reflect on their teamwork experience without assigning a group grade to the team output. The following year, we introduced a collective pass/fail grade for the output, constituting 7.5% of the module's marks, based on confirmed authorship. Comparative analysis of both years revealed significant differences in the substance of reflective accounts and the extent of student engagement (Figure 2). These findings suggest that assigning a group responsibility mark based on an output enhanced cooperation and incentivised active participation among team members.

Figure 2. Graph illustrating the differences (%) in the substance of individual reflective accounts and the extent of student engagement, based on whether a group mark or not was applied to the team output



At Level 5, we focus on developing problem-solving both within the discipline and beyond, as part of project teamwork. This approach involves students participating in industrial-relevant learning through live briefs. Our teamwork strategy is two-fold: first, encouraging individual ingenuity to identify and understand problems, and then fostering team creativity to develop innovative solutions (Figure 1). Students begin by independently investigating a potential problem's context, writing a 1000-word report and problem statement. This ensures each student is well-prepared with their own insights before engaging in team efforts, creating a balanced starting point and minimising any disadvantage. This mirrors practices in research labs and industry, where each member's preparedness adds value to the team. Additionally, students reflect on team dynamics and personal competencies in forming their solutions, engage in self-evaluation through quizzes, and articulate their contributions in an author statement. This statement, like those used by many international journals, acknowledges individual efforts, minimises authorship disputes and promotes effective teamwork.

Observing and understanding team dynamics is crucial for creating a positive and productive work environment. Our team projects at Levels 5 and 6 span at least a semester, providing students with an in-depth teamwork experience. This allows students to navigate the different stages of group development (Tuckman, 1965), ensuring they receive support throughout, engage with complex tasks, resolve conflicts, take responsibility and share diverse viewpoints. Nonetheless, capturing the essence of team dynamics can be challenging, especially when it comes to resolving conflicts and alleviating anxieties.

To address this, starting in 2023, we implemented a teamwork evaluation checklist two weeks into the Level 6 project. This facilitates self-reporting on member engagement, communication strategies, role allocation and goal setting. Crucially, it offers a confidential free-text space for students to voice any teamwork-related concerns, ensuring they feel heard and receive constructive feedback and guidance. Students also complete a series of self and peer evaluations, where team members confidentially assess each other's contributions and performance. These processes allow for the quick identification of potential issues, provide greater transparency and can be used to produce heatmaps highlighting team dynamics.

The collaborative project at Level 6 is based on a bioscience enterprise experience offering students a unique opportunity to apply their scientific knowledge to societal challenges while exploring business enterprise opportunities. This approach bridges the gap between primary research and translational innovation. By meeting and interacting with pharmaceutical industry employees and using the empathetic stage of design thinking, students learn to collaboratively role play different stakeholders (such as patients, healthcare professionals) to understand their needs and challenges. The team is then formed with students assuming various company roles, such as research scientist, product development scientist, and regulatory affairs specialist to formulate a business challenge.

Outcomes

We have implemented a scaffolded approach to teamwork from Levels 4 to 6 (Figure 1), beginning with the introduction of students to teamwork through an empathetic peer support network. This approach aims to prepare students for more complex teamwork at higher levels without causing undue stress and sensitisation. A key outcome has been the development of more empathetic learners who are more attuned to the emotions and perspectives of their teammates.

However, concerns remain, particularly regarding unequal contributions among team members, especially freeloaders, and the potential impact on conflict and individual grades due to the performance and reliability of peers. The use of confidential pre- and post-evaluation checklists has allowed students to report genuine concerns about working in their teams. Just over 10% of students (from a total of 76 last year) took advantage of this opportunity to report issues and receive individual feedback and support to help resolve them. An additional outcome of the checklists has been the identification of students at different stages of team development. The post-evaluation also revealed that 15% of students reported having a team member they felt did not fully contribute to all aspects of the team, and 4% reported disagreements with at least two members. However, between the pre- and post-team evaluations, there was a significant increase in the number of students who felt 'very confident' in working in a team in the future, rising from 30% to 61%.

A core dilemma of teamwork lies in balancing individual and group accountability, which often seem conflicting. Traditionally, a student's course grade is expected to accurately represent their own work, without being influenced by the performance of their peers. While individual grades on group assignments can theoretically ensure personal accountability, relying solely on them risks undermining the importance of the collective effort. Effective teamwork typically requires the team to produce an output for which they are collectively accountable. This shared responsibility fosters collaboration, ensures that all team members contribute towards a common goal, and promotes a sense of unity and commitment to the team's success. Without an accountable output, our evidence (Figure 2) suggests that the purpose and motivation behind teamwork can be diminished, potentially leading to non-functional, non-task-orientated teams.

Overall, we have trialled various learning environments, assessments and criteria to refine individual learning during teamwork, aiming to ensure learning outcomes are not adversely influenced by the performance of others. These assessments have included individual reflections, self and peer evaluations, quizzes, logs, and hybrid individual and group-marked portfolios. Linking student teamwork to authentic experiences has been essential for preparing them for their future careers, from developing work ethics to understanding business dynamics to role-playing specific roles within a team to tackle a project or problem. Starting next year, we plan to incorporate feedback based on directly observed group activities across the university at assessment centres to support students in developing their teamwork skills.

Despite this progress, we recognise that authentic teamwork and its assessment remain inherently challenging, and there is still room for improvement.

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Students as co-creators

The E of experience

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Background

Employability is a complex and often contested concept (Römgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020). Nevertheless, Cheng, Adekola, Albia and Cai (2022) recognise there are three prevalent understandings of employability. They include:

- 1 A notion that employability involves a person's ability to fulfil employers' requirements.
- 2 Employability involves a relationship between the individual and the labour market.
- 3 Employability encompasses a combination of both individual ability and interactions with the labour market.

The connection between employability and individual ability has encouraged links between employability and personal resource accumulation (Peeters et al, 2019). Because employability resources include knowledge and skills, employability encompasses learning and universities are associated with the concept (Trought, 2012). Social policy has reinforced links between employability and higher education. In connection to an understanding that employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the labour market, universities have been tasked with upskilling their learners in order to meet the demands of highly skilled jobs (Augar, 2019). Indeed, universities are monitored on their graduate employment outcomes (Office for Students, 2022).

A connection between employability and higher education has influenced higher education teaching. The embedding of employability skills within the curriculum has been advocated (York and Knight, 2006; Valero et al, 2020) and put into practice (Riebe et al, 2010). In my own workplace, I was charged with the leadership of Personal Professional Development modules. These modules possess an emphasis on employability. The Personal Professional Development modules focus on employability because they foster the development of employability skills and prepare students for work placement. Module leadership of the Personal, Professional Development modules motivated my research regarding the student perspective on employability. Reflecting the multifaceted nature of employability plus variation in employability interpretations (Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018), employability characteristics had been shared with my learners but no one employability definition had been agreed. I desired greater insight into how students viewed employability, including their emphasis. My hope was that greater understanding of the student perspective would develop my capacity to facilitate students' employability. The qualitative nature of my research necessitated a theoretical framework. Given the significance of knowledge and skills to employability, Dewey's ideas regarding learning were considered applicable. The importance of resource acquisition to employability encouraged the use of Bourdieu's theories of capital.

Approach

Underpinned by my wish for an enhanced understanding of the student viewpoint, the aim of my study was to explore the student experiences of employability in higher education. My research aim influenced my main research question: What are the student experiences of employability within higher education?

In order to address my research question, a case study was preferred. My case study was collective because it involved several cases. In reflection of my assumption that students' experiences would alter over time, each case represented a year group of an undergraduate degree.

Table 1. Illustrating case study membership

Case 1 membership	Case 2 membership	Case 3 membership
n=4 first year undergraduate students (two of these participants subsequently left the university)	n=3 second year undergraduate students	n=4 final year undergraduate students
All were volunteers	All were volunteers	All were volunteers

The study took place over one academic year. Because my research was underpinned by a desire to develop my own teaching, all participants were engaged in the Children, Young People and Families cluster of programmes which received my professional input. My study received ethical approval. Data collection methods included each student's participation in two semi-structured interviews. The first interviews were conducted at the beginning of the academic year and the second took place towards the end. Students provided an employability related story during their interviews. Students' written work placement reflections plus mentor feedback documents were also examined. Data for the collective case study was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Each case was analysed in turn and then a cross-case analysis was performed. Findings were similar across all cases; therefore, the data analysis is presented in relation to the collective case study.

Outcomes

Data analysis

Students perceived employability as mainly about a fit between a worker and their work. Table 2 features examples of student responses from each case concerning the nature of employability.

Table 2. Student interpretations of employability

Case	Student responses regarding their interpretation of employability
1	"Well, for me it's sort of everything I learn and build on. All my skills that make me suitable to be employed in certain situations."
2	"It is just having the skills that match the job."
3	"My passion is with, or for children, so, I am starting a place to work with less privileged children."

Even though students emphasised that employability primarily concerns a fit between worker and their work, they recognised experience as an influential element of employability. Considering students' interpretation of employability, this piece of writing concentrates on their views regarding the contribution of experience. I also share how students' insights about experience affected my teaching. According to my study, experience makes several contributions to employability. These include: experiential learning is valuable; relevant experiences enhance employability; work experience helps determine employability. Furthermore, the past is impactful.

Experiential learning is valuable

As demonstrated in Table 3, students identified work experience/work placement as their main form of employability related learning

Table 3. Main form of employability related learning

Case	Main form of employability related learning
1	"Yes, well, I took a gap year after sixth form and I volunteered in pre-school for a whole year and I absolutely loved it"
2	"So that would be placements obviously, that was obviously a big time period, quite a significant thing in itself and yes, that's sort of what's going to be the most useful"
3	"I would say the placements, so, we had a six-week placement in the first year and the second year and I think in term of employability they gave me really good experience"

One explanation evident for the value of work placement was that the experiential learning gained in the workplace complemented the formal learning taking place at the university. Experiential learning caused students to identify and fill gaps in their knowledge. Table 4 offers an extract of a case study two student's written placement reflections.

Table 4. Extract from a case study two student's written placement reflections

Case	Written placement reflections
2	"I learnt that the students' routine can determine students' behaviour. If the staff were aware that the routine was changing, the students needed prior warning, so they could adapt to the idea. The psychology module allowed me to know how children learn. I could then form understanding that the students learnt best in a routine timetable."

Developments in comprehension resulting from the blending of learning occurring in different areas of students' lives supports Dewey's social constructivist views on learning (1938). According to Dewey, learning is not compartmentalised, it is holistic. Every part of an individual's life provides learning opportunities which can combine to enhance understandings.

Relevant experiences enhance employability.

As mentioned, I had anticipated some difference of opinion between year groups or some change in students' viewpoints over time. There was one noticeable alteration in students' opinions. The change occurred in all three cases and it concerned the contribution of relevant experience to employability. Participant responses in the second semi-structured interview showed an increased appreciation in the ability of relevant experience to enhance employability. This alteration in viewpoint involved the contribution of relevant experience to job acquisition and it appeared to be influenced by experience itself. Table 5 provides a student's account of a job interview.

Table 5. Student's account of a job interview

Case	Student's account of a job interview
3	"It was very clear that I did not have enough experience. They were asking for a lot of experience. They are not asking for a degree. They are asking for experience. All candidates on that day did have degrees"

An understanding demonstrated by students that the gathering of relevant experience promotes employability reinforces a connection between employability and personal resource accumulation (Peeters et al, 2019). The significance of personal resource accumulation to employability also supports Bourdieu's theories of capital. According to Bourdieu, acquisition of capital empowers individuals (Moore, 2012) In this case, power centres on the ability to be employable.

Work experience helps determine work which is a fit for an individual

As illustrated in Table 6, students' insights demonstrated that they used experiences in the workplace to ascertain if a form of employment was a match for them. Given students defined employability as principally involving a fit between a worker and their work, the contribution of work experience to establishing a match is important.

Table 6. Student insights regarding the determination of work which is a fit

Case	Student insights regarding the determination of work which is a fit
1	"I think I mentioned last time, I had already done the voluntary in pre-school which was age like two to four. I wanted to... rather than go to the same age... I wanted to go maybe a bit older and experience that and see which one I preferred. I want to go into a primary school rather than like a pre-school or nursery."
3	"My long-term plan for employment is to employ mothers...especially young mothers with children who also need help. The experience on my last placement is that they are mothers who also need help for their children."

Having illustrated work experience is significant to the determination of a match between individuals and their work, responses from all three cases revealed work experience can be off putting. Tension between pre-conceived ideas regarding professional behaviour plus perceptions of injustice deterred students from embracing forms of employment they had previously considered attractive. See Table 7.

Table 7. Student quotes demonstrating tensions between pre-conceived ideas and actual experience plus perceptions of injustice

Case	Student quotes regarding pre-conceived ideas and perceptions of injustice
1	"I realise I have to start standing my ground with some managers as well as there are some managers aren't very nice."
2	"I worked with teachers before, I really looked up to teachers, I realise now, they are not all great."
3	"I wanted more, I was working and I was struggling, it was draining. I felt I had the same qualifications as everyone else but, at times I was not treated well even though I was doing so much."

The ability of work experiences to illuminate matches for individuals alongside the potential negative outcomes of work experience highlights the importance of effective support for students engaging in work experience.

The past affects employability

Past experiences alternative to work experience also helped students identify potential employment which may present a match for them. See table 8.

Table 8. The contribution of past experience to the identification of work which is a match

Case	The contribution of past experience to the identification of work which is a match
2	“Even when I was at school, I used to baby sit. I was like the neighbourhood babysitter so; I’d babysit at weekends. I have younger siblings. I have younger cousins that I used to play with and look after when I was younger. So, it always felt very natural for me to be with children, to look after children”
3	“Looking at disadvantaged children and how difficult life can be for them ...having those experiences myself when I was younger...I feel if I could work in educational support, I could do something to help these children as they go through education if they are struggling.”

Because students interpreted employability as mainly about a fit between worker and their work, additional past experience beyond prior work experience affects employability, according to my study.

Impact

Effects on my teaching

As Small et al (2018) acknowledged, multiple definitions of employability exist and they vary. Given the relevance of employability to higher education, it is valuable to gain insights into the student perspective on employability. My study’s findings concerning the contribution of experience to employability had impact. The significance of experience to employability has reinforced my support for work placement. More specifically, my understanding of the importance of work placement preparation has been enhanced. A theme in all three cases within my collective case study was that disappointments during work experiences discourage students in pursuing a previously favoured occupation. Given disappointments concerned professional behaviour plus perceptions of injustice, I viewed exploration of collegiate working as important. Team working was covered in the Personal, Professional Development modules, however, by coincidence, I was tasked with re-developing a module focused on Multiagency Working. Given multiagency working involves people working together, I perceived leadership of this module as a chance to prepare students for working with others in more depth. During the design of the module, I created sessions about power struggles in the workplace, conflict resolution and the presentation of an argument. These sessions ran alongside more traditional lectures covering the nature of multiagency working and its various forms. Embedding employability within the curriculum is not new. However, my particular endeavours in this example were in direct response to my own research and students’ insights. Significantly, my approach can be repeated by others in different environments. In addition to impacting my teaching practice, my study affected my interpretation of employability.

Understanding employability

My research illustrated that a fit between a worker and their work was fundamental to employability according to students. The contribution of experience to employability was also highlighted. These research findings impact upon employability's temporality. As stated by Cheng et al (2022), employability commonly concerns a person's ability. The significance of individual ability to employability has fostered links between employability and individual resource accumulation (Peeters et al, 2019). These features of employability suggest the concept pertains to times ahead, for example, a person commences a degree to obtain knowledge which will increase their ability to obtain future employment. However, my study illustrates work experience is used to determine if a form of employment is a match for an individual. As a result, employability can occur in the present. Employability occurs in the present when a person is engaged in work which is a fit for them.

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Championing student knowledge-exchange: co-creation of international postgraduate student employability

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Background

This case study presents a project created to meet the needs of International postgraduate taught students at the University of Manchester's School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED). The project developed through the work of members of the SEED Employability and Professional Learning (E&PL) teaching and learning committee. We outline the emergence of the Student Employability Champions role and the contribution they made to wider institutional change and organisational learning.

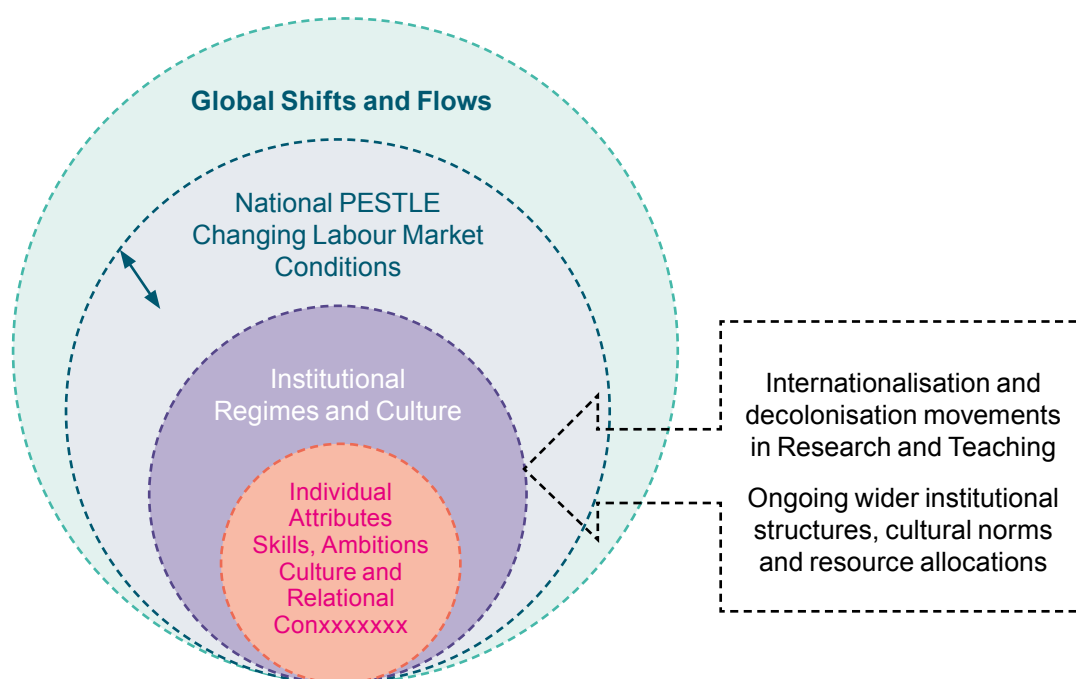
Four issues lay behind this project:

- 1 Recent years of growth in international student numbers enrolling onto UK higher education institutions (HEIs) in the midst of work and post-study visa uncertainties (Ilieva, 2024)
- 2 The need to develop suitable policy and practice to support international students' employability (Fakunle, 2021). We were interested in how existing services supported international students' career needs and aspirations. HEPI (2021) has noted careers support is understudied in relation to international students.
- 3 Debates around internationalising the curriculum in higher education (HE) were stimulating questions about the need for consideration of potential barriers students may face (Huang and Turner, 2018; Mittelmeier et al, 2022; Hillman, 2023).
- 4 Within the institution, senior managers felt a lack of adequate in-depth data about international postgraduate student expectations, aspirations and outcomes regarding careers (Jenner, 2021, 2023) and service engagement (Bradley et al, 2021).

The institutional context for the study is the high proportion of international postgraduates in SEED. The chosen department for the project was the [Global Development Institute](#) (GDI) which frequently enrolls around 550-600 full-time postgraduate taught (PGT) students from diverse contexts including China, India, Nigeria, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Nigeria and Europe.

The analytical framework for the study draws on a selected range of theoretical and conceptual resources that help frame the journey. These includes systems thinking, socio-cultural approaches to occupational psychology (Jenner, 2000; McMahon and Patton, 2019) and transformative pedagogies, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Key dimensions of postgraduate international student employability



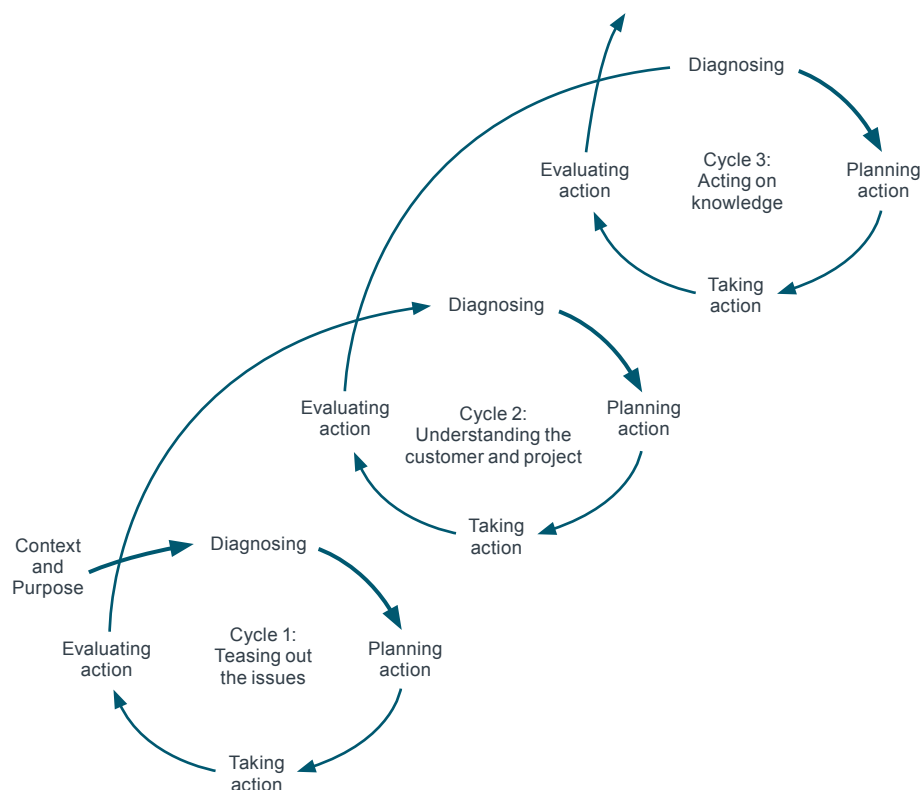
Adapted from McMahon and Patton (2019) and Jenner, 2000

The analytical framework conceptualises international student employability in a multi-levelled and interconnected way. Wider **global shifts and flows** associated with increased interconnectivity of economic, financial and social systems include the internationalisation of higher education and the rise of internationally mobile students (Clifford and Montgomery, 2014). These are linked to and influenced by PESTLE (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental) dimensions. However, it can take time for policy change and **institutional regimes and culture** to reflect the external shifts in the external environment. Here we adopted a Freirean (1970) approach, noting everyday norms favour some groups and create barriers to other groups (Young, 1990). The central subjects in the system framework are the students themselves; their **individual attributes** are represented with regard to their skills, ambitions and cultural and relational capital.

Approach

We adopted an action-research approach (Figure 2), with three cycles in our first pilot year (2023) and a further three, slightly more compressed, cycles in 2024.

Figure 2. Three cycles of the employability champion project action-research approach



Source: Saunders et al (2016)

The project timeline is shown below.

Figure 3. Employability Champion timeline 2021- 2024

Timeline	Activities	Action learning cycle
UK two-year post-study work visa announced 11 Sept 2019	Changes to visa regulatory environment for IPGTs	Pre-project research and auditing
March 2020 – Sept 2020	Covid response – employability support online and focus on belonging and building community	
Sept 2020 – Aug 2021	Navigating ongoing pandemic conditions for T&L and employability	
May 2021 – Sept 2021	Internal audit of employability support and IPGT discussion groups	Cycle 1. Teasing out the Issues
Oct 2021	HEPI and Kaplan report, <i>Paying more for Less</i>	
Nov 2021 – April 2022	Further UoM School levels discussions	
May 2022 – Nov 2022	Survey design, literature review and E&PL working group formed	Cycle 2. Understanding the customer and the project
Dec 2022 – Jan 2023	SEED student consultation survey and analysis	
Feb 2023 – March 2023	Findings published and Student Champion Project agreed in principle	
April 2023 – July 2023	First Student Employability Champion Pilot Project GDI co-creation and Open Space	Cycle 3. Acting on knowledge
August 2023 – Oct 2023	Review and evaluation of pilot at department level	
Nov 2023 – Dec 2023	Internal discussions and agreements to extend pilot across SEED	Cycle 4. More issues
Jan 2023	Revised project agreed – with stronger emphasis on student voice – SEED-wide recruitment	Cycle 5. Better understanding the PGT
Feb – June 2024	SEED Pilot with 12 Champions	Cycle 6. Acting on new knowledge
July – August 2024	Review and multi-stakeholder evaluations	
Sept 2024 – and ongoing	SEED Employability Champion Project established as school-wide initiative	

Our first full cycle was to tease out the issues, especially the four themes outlined earlier. We began with a review of the academic and practitioner literature (HEPI, 2021), discussions with the career service and consultations with international PGT students. This led to further SEED reviews in the academic year 2021-22, and the start of Cycle 2, understanding the customer and the project. We committed to survey all PGTs across the whole of SEED. The SEED Employability Survey was designed in consultation with staff and students to better understand their past work experience, future plans and if they were (or were not) were engaging with employability support. Data was collected from all full-time PGTs across SEED between Dec 2022 to Jan 2023.

The findings published in Feb 2023 gave us the first clear picture of our IPGT and home student community experiences. Selected findings relating to work experiences and interest in support activities are shown in the Appendix.

The SEED employability survey findings were hugely important revealing:

- + many students bring relevant prior experience of work, internships or volunteering and 86% of PGTs expressed a strong interest in sharing these career insights with other students
- + students studying different programmes have similar career aspirations by type of employer and preferred country location. We saw the opportunity to create mechanisms for knowledge-sharing between students who may otherwise never meet
- + we also found relatively low IPGT engagement with main UoM employability platforms – with average registration at 33% but lower levels among those seeking to return overseas, or enter non-business occupations (such as global development) compared to those seeking traditional graduate employment
- + IPGT patterns of support and activity were different from those of UK domicile students – for example, in use of careers service, reliance on external supports and networks and indicated some institutional barriers might be limiting engagement.

The results were published to students, the students' union, careers and staff with further consultation about suitable responses. This led us to Cycle 3, acting on knowledge, which ran from April 2023 to October 2023. This phase involved the formation of a multi-stakeholder task group which explored how to enable knowledge sharing between postgraduate students.

The project was referred to as the SEED PGT Employability Network – and combined three inter-linked elements: (i) a newly created community platform/VLE, (ii) new career support content and activities and (3) a new volunteer/leadership role for postgraduates we called Student Employability Champions. We located the pilot within the Global Development Institute (GDI) due to its high concentration of international PGTS and strong indications of student interest and engagement from the survey responses.

The community platform provided a space where all 650+ PGTs (enrolled on 20 different Global Development related programmes/pathways) could connect, share their knowledge and use the newly created resources. Postgraduate Student Employability Champions contributed to co-creation of the Employability Network. The three-fold purpose of the role was to:

- 1 Help develop a learning community by promoting knowledge exchange between students interested in a similar occupational sphere, trajectory or theme
- 2 Enhance understanding work and employment conditions in global development
- 3 Help to review and monitor the growth and impact of the Employability Network

In March 2023 we received 10 expressions of interest in the role of PGT Employability Champion and six students accepted the role. Champions were provided with training and support in Open Space facilitation. They also engaged with the career service platform so they were more familiar with its resources. All 600 + student members of the GDI Employability Network were invited to sign up for one of several knowledge-sharing discussions. Themes for discussion at this event included:

How can I secure work when I return home to (a) China, (b) Hong Kong

How can I secure work in the UK in (a) business (b) global development (c) World Bank/IMF?

This Open Space event was badged as an opportunity for Career Boosting Conversations and was attended by more than 50 GDI postgraduates hosted and co-facilitated by the Employability Champions and supported by academic staff. The model used was an adaptation of Force-field Analysis – participants identified factors they felt were hindering their progress and well as possible enablers. The Champions followed up the Open Space in a number of ways: face to face, or through the VLE network, sharing ways of reducing barriers and accessing resources and support. In response to the felt needs identified, the Champions and SEED working group co-created follow-on events for network members and focus groups to further understand student perceptions of institutional barriers to engagement.

The first pilot stage ran March – July 2023 with a review, in which we evaluated the impact and lessons learnt. Our assessment of learning from the first GDI pilot showed the benefits of the community network, the value of shared work experiences and the positive impacts on student member and Employability Champion confidence. However, we also learnt there was higher demand for career support for international students seeking employment in the UK than those offering peer support. However, this led to the career service adding further events and support for this group. Another key learning came from the student champions, which was to add student voice to their role description. Champions became a conduit between the student body and the careers service and promoted significant improvements in understanding, then in service delivery. The project findings were reported to departmental and SEED senior managers. It was decided to run a second full action-research cycle across all four departments of SEED with 12 Employability Champions appointed across all four SEED Departments, of whom seven were located in GDI during 2023-24. The main change to the Champions job specification was to widen the career pathways to suit Geography, Planning and Education. We summarise the outcomes of the overall two-year project and outline next steps below.

Outcomes

The SEED Employability Network proposal included an evaluation process which recognised the need to assess how well it met the overall aims of the project (Bridgestock and Jackson, 2019). Our second-year pilot included extensive post-event evaluations, surveyed the Employability Champions and held stakeholder reviews with the careers service, students' union and academics. Here we highlight outcomes related to our two focal systems – Individual Attributes and Institutional Change.

Our evaluation across the two years at GDI suggests that the creation of a networking platform generated possibility for students to meet and connect, mostly through the Open Space events and online follow ups. This led to a significant improvement in engagement. The proportion of students who registered for and then attended Champion-led events was significantly higher than typical ratio for events run by the UoM careers service. Post-event evaluation feedback showed high satisfaction and increased career confidence. Overall, participants reported increased positive cultural and relational capital to help them navigate UK job selection processes.

Student Champions were effective in testing out career services resources and reporting back to their peers, sharing what had worked well and improving wider PGT engagement. The Student Employability Champions also reported significant benefits from the role themselves – increased understanding of employers, labour markets, networking skills and improved CV's. All 10 Champions agreed we should continue to develop the Student Employability Champion role within SEED. Self-reports of these outcomes can be found in examples of the GDI Employability Champions Blogs:

- + Xinyue Zhao: [Career navigation and preparation as an international student in the UK](#)
- + Raju Sarkar: [How to approach the job hunt in the Indian development sector](#)
- + Vinka Maharani: [How to navigate your career journey as an international student returning home](#)

The project has also led to some important Institutional Changes to reduce the barriers to engagement with careers resources for IPGTs. Specific changes included a recognition of different IPGT timings of career planning and more support to navigate visa regulations and adjust to UK employer recruitment practices. Career consultants also benefited from the deep context-rich insights from Employability Champions – including collaboration on updating website materials, for example related to specific country or occupational contexts.

Overall, the key messages from the work undertaken are that international postgraduates bring context-rich knowledge of global labour markets and employer practices. They are full of latent potential for co-creating and enhancing the career development of their peer communities. The university experience can be enriched by their cultural and relational capacities and willingness to support other students.

We are aware that further refinements are needed, but we think these co-creation principles and practices can be transferable to other groups of students, providing diverse stakeholders with opportunities to participate in personal and system change.

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Appendix: UoM SEED Employability Survey: selected results

The online survey was opened to all SEED full-time campus-based PGTs and selected part-time PGT campus programmes and ran 11 Oct 2022 – 31 Oct 2022. We had n =617 surveys completed drawn from the population of 1,835 for SEED PGT (overall 33.% of SEED PGT), as shown below in Table A1, which also highlights the response frequencies.

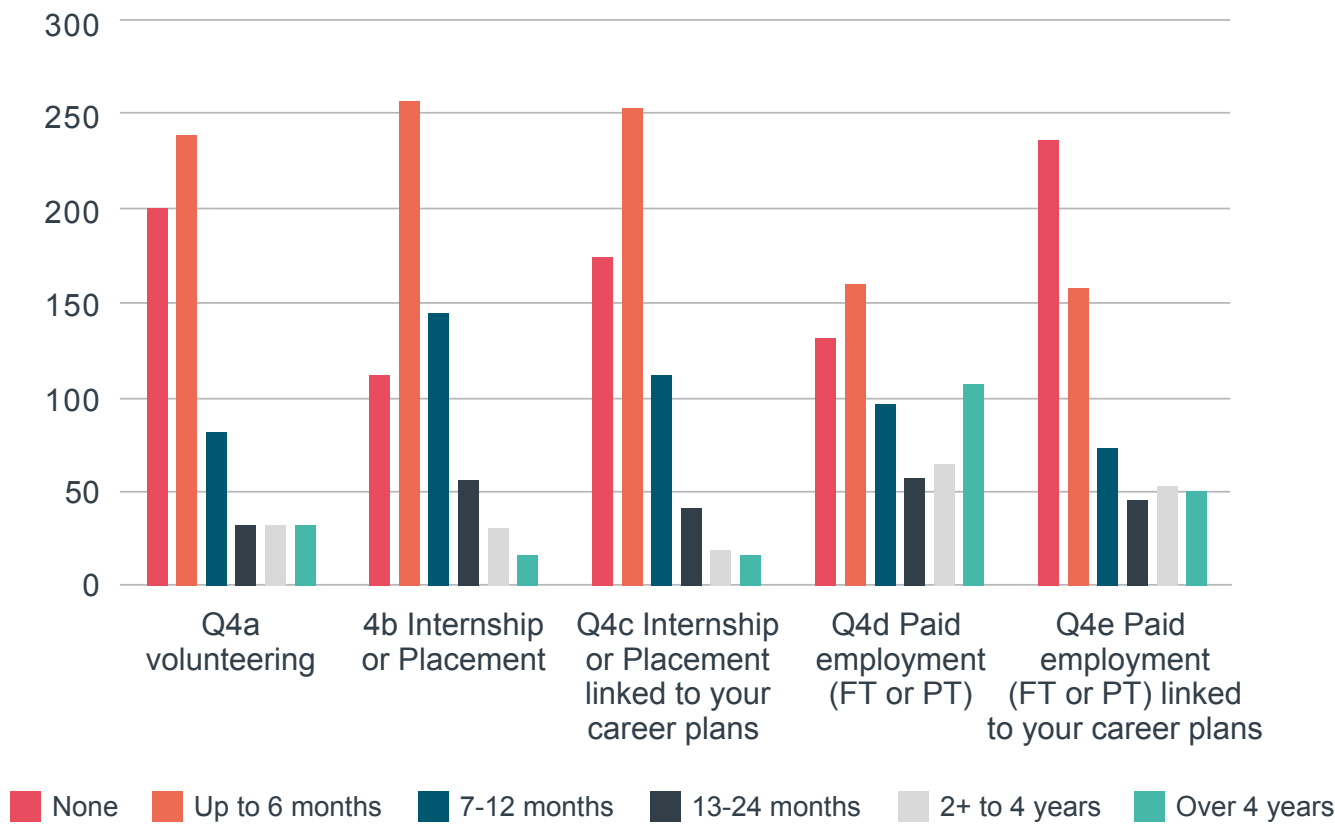
Table A1. Department of study – responses by PGT

Survey Response by Department of Study			
	PGT Population	Number of responses	Response rate
Geography	125	42	6.8%
Global Development Institute (GDI)	552	254	41.2%
Manchester Institute of Education (MIE)	809	192	31.1%
Planning and Environmental Management (PEM)	349	129	20.9%
SEED School Total	1835	617	33.6%

The respondent profile by domicile was predominantly with 521 overseas students (84.4%) – with 96 UK students (15.5%)

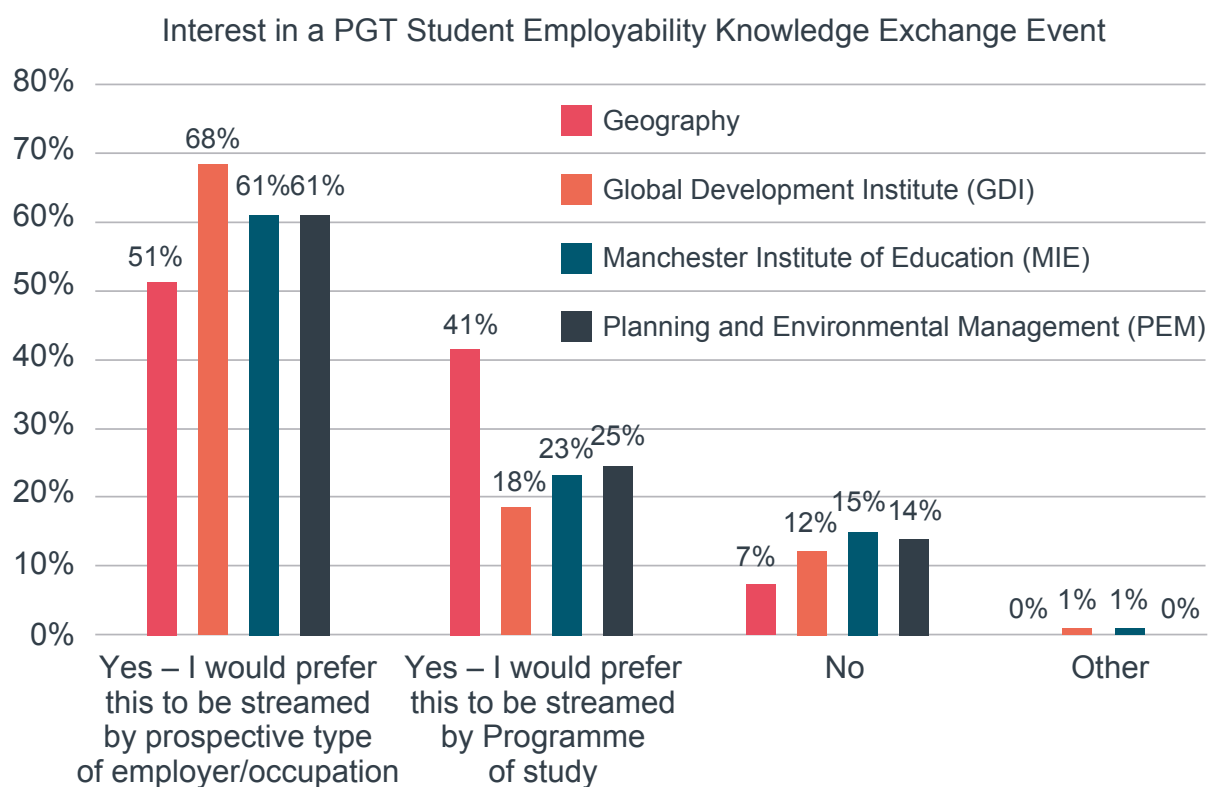
Figure A1. SEED indicators of PGT student prior work experience

The PGT Employability survey (Q4a to 4e) asked about five aspects of prior experience. The results are shown at the SEED level of analysis, since there were no significant differences by department on those items.



There were significant differences between UK and overseas students across all five dimensions of work experience. UK domiciled students have more volunteering experience and less internship or placement experience than overseas students. However, overseas students' internships and placements seem more strongly aligned to future career intentions (Q4c).

Figure A2. Would you be interested in attending an employability event where students exchange career knowledge, insights and experiences with one another?



Humanities Expo 2024 – an employability event created by students for students

“We heard, we listened, we acted.”

The student voice – the driving force behind a Humanities Expo

Danielle McFawns, Erin MacInnes, Nicola Tully; University of Dundee

Background

Degrees in the humanities have been a great subject of debate in UK media. Particularly, their value compared to more vocational degrees with a specific intended career outcome, such as medicine, education, or law. A recent example of this comes from gov.uk (Department for Education, 2023); former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s vow to crack down on “rip-off degrees” that “don’t lead to good jobs and leave young people with poor pay and high debts.” While not explicitly stated, in practice, this would be an attack on the arts and humanities, with jobs in these sectors yielding lower pay than their science and technology-based counterparts, as argued by the *New Humanist* (2022).

This ongoing narrative has led to feelings of worthlessness and insecurity for students and graduates in the humanities, according to Khatri (2023). While research has dispelled these myths many times over the years (the difference between graduate employment for arts, humanities, and social sciences compared to STEM was merely 1% in a study from University of Bristol Careers Service (2023)), the idea that humanities degrees are less valuable has absolutely permeated our society, and as the *New Humanist* argues, this has likely led to a drop in acceptance rates for humanities degrees.

The University has been working closely with our academic community to facilitate and support ways of enhancing the employability offering of our students, with the longer-term aim of embedding employability into the curriculum. Our focus was on ensuring students are aware of skills being developed, ensuring they can articulate these skills, and are aware of possible and alternative career pathways. This is certainly something that cannot be done in isolation, requiring considerable collaboration with our academic community, careers and employer engagement teams, alumni and advancement teams, and above all, our student community.

In academic year 2023-24, students of the School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law at the University of Dundee elected two School Presidents, one based in the humanities and one based in law. This meant that, with insights from both ends of the perceived spectrum of graduate employability, we were well placed to work together as student representatives and staff to develop a bespoke event that tackled these concerns head-on and demonstrated the real-world relevance of humanities degrees.

Approach

We recognised the importance of the student voice in developing this event, as argued by Matthews and Dollinger (2023):

“Ultimately, a culture of student voice is more likely to be realised when students see that they can actively shape and participate in their everyday educational experiences and that elected student representatives are taken seriously in formalised governance structures of the institution.”

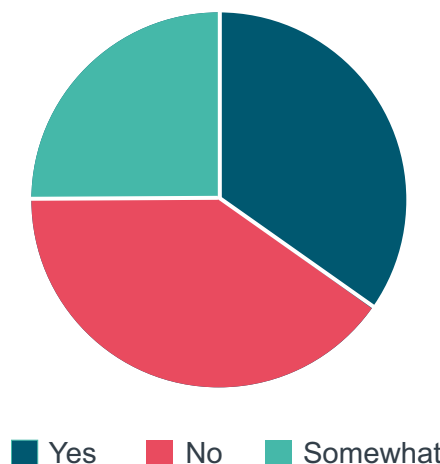
Alison Cook-Sather (2002) asserted in her seminal piece, *Authorising Students’ Perspectives* that the commitment to student voice involves a change in mindset to

“count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education, to reconfigure power dynamics and discourse practices within existing realms of conversation about education, and to create new forums” – spaces where students speak for themselves.

To begin, we thought it best to speak to humanities students and related student societies directly, about their thoughts on outcomes for humanities graduates and what they would like to see in terms of provisions that we, as the University, could offer. Through three focus groups including humanities students generally, student representatives in the humanities, and student leaders, and a survey sent to all humanities students, although only answered by 20 participants, we found that:

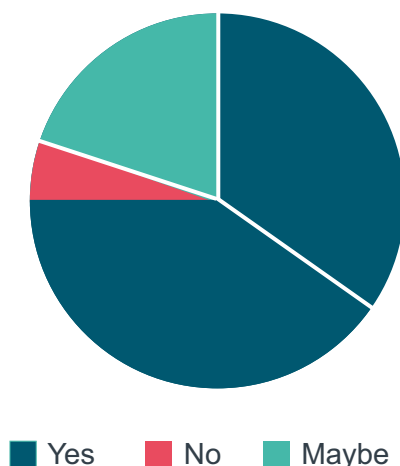
- + The majority of participants (65%) were either unaware of, or had limited knowledge of, our University’s Careers Service and its offerings.

Do you know about our Careers Service?



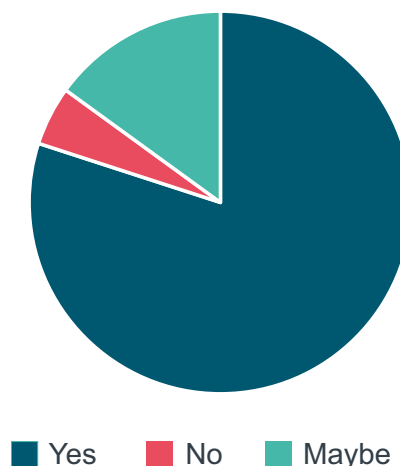
A majority of respondents (75%) definitely wanted to see careers and employability advice embedded into their programme.

Would you like to see careers and employability advice integrated into your studies?



+ An overwhelming majority of respondents were interested in a bespoke Humanities Expo.¹

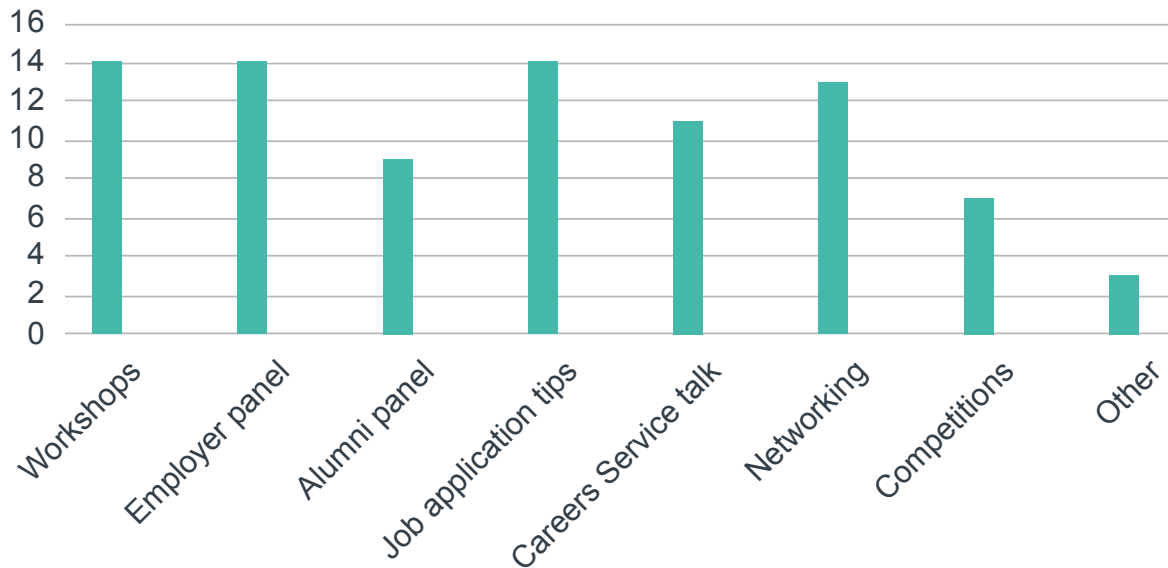
Would you be interested in a Humanities Expo?



+ Respondents were particularly interested in an event that could offer workshops, employer panels, job application tips, and networking opportunities.

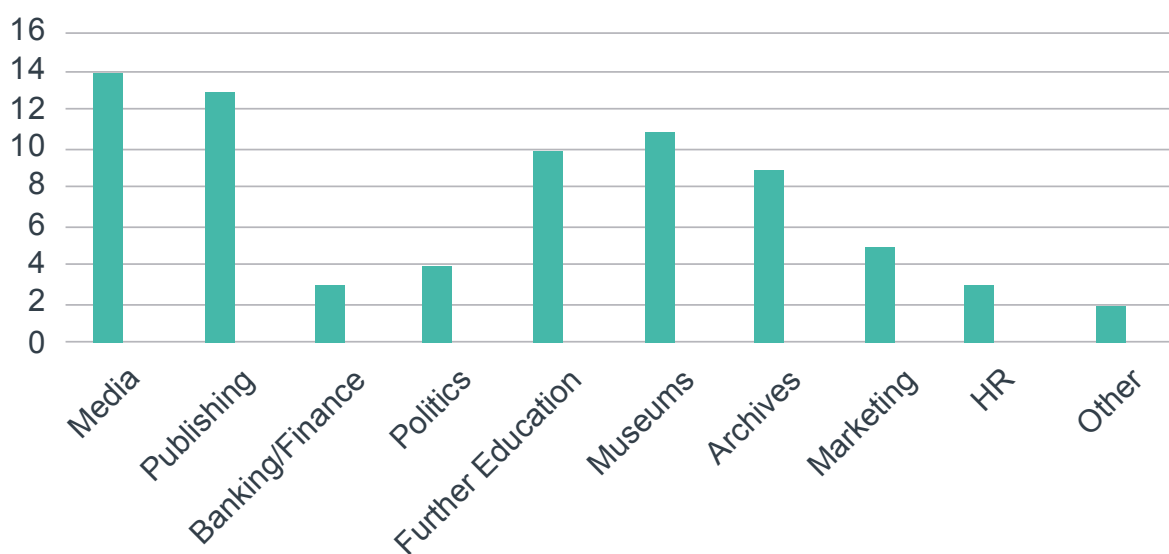
1 Dictionary definitions (such as Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/expo>) refer to an Expo as an 'exposition' – that is an event, exhibition or show. We refer to our Humanities Expo as an event designed to promote discussion and share employability insights to boost employability, where we had a range of sessions on career pathways and opportunities, skills development, postgraduate study, as well as an opportunity for networking.

What kinds of sessions would you like to see at a Humanities Expo?



- + Respondents particularly wanted to see employers from fields such as media, publishing, higher education and museums.

What kinds of sessions would you like to see at a Humanities Expo?



These results informed us of some key focus points:

- + increasing humanities students' knowledge of the services offered through the Careers Service
- + developing a bespoke event for humanities students was crucial, paying attention specifically to employers they felt were relevant to their skills and interests
- + ensuring that employability and careers advice was embedded into the curriculum of a humanities degree.

Based on the consultations we had with students and staff in the humanities, we decided on the theme of Transitions and Career Pathways for the Expo overall, titling the event 'What can you do with a Humanities degree?' Our programme was developed with the student self at the centre, featuring panels titled 'Showcasing Yourself,' 'Positioning Yourself,' 'Looking After Yourself,' and two panels titled 'What's Next?' relating to postgraduate study and potential career pathways after graduation. The survey results directly influenced the panellists who were invited to the event, ranging from fields such as news reporting, law, marketing, museums, media, local authorities, and alumni staff from within the University, who were also all humanities graduates.

We were limited to a timeframe of only one semester to develop the event and have it running in the second semester. In addition to 11 weeks of learning, teaching and other work and study-related commitments, we needed to allocate around 26 hours for brainstorming, planning and discussions with students, academic staff, Careers, Employer Engagement, and Alumni teams. This also included reaching out to and following up with potential panellists, recruiting student helpers, and handling logistics like event and room bookings, risk assessments, setting up spaces, and IT support. This presented its challenges, but through effective collaboration between students and staff, we were able to overcome all the hurdles we faced to make the event a success.

An additional challenge we faced was that, historically, humanities students had low engagement rates with University-wide initiatives. Therefore, it was crucial to mobilise not only the student voice in general, but the specific humanities student voice, to enact something both student-centred and student-led, based on student feedback.

Outcome

The Humanities Expo became the second most attended student-led event in the School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law across the entire academic year, which is outstanding for an event aimed only at one of the School's five divisions. Attendees rated the event 8.11 out of 10 on a numerical scale, and notably every single student who was surveyed said they would like to see more events like this.

Our survey indicated that highlights of the event included the informal nature of the event, a large range of panellists from different employers, the talk specifically on resilience and mental health while job-seeking, and the opportunity to network. Constructive feedback indicated that students would like to see an even larger variety of panellists (noting specifically those in STEM and in arts), further structure within panels themselves, and excitingly, multiple respondents requested that the event be longer next time.

A notable part of the event highlighted several times was our ‘snowball Q&A’, in which attendees wrote their questions down on paper, crumpled them up into a ball, and threw them down for the panellists to shape the rest of the sessions throughout the day. We used this to promote accessibility for students who may be unable to talk in front of large panel audiences for any reason. This specific section was rated numerically the highest across all the panels, at 8.72 against an average rating per session of 7.48.

Student testimonials included:

“Please bring it back next year!”

“This was a great opportunity! So happy to see humanities events. Would love more humanities focused events if possible!”

“I thought there was a great spread of panellists, I found it reassuring that they all had non-straightforward career paths.”

“It was well organised. Great that it was divided into different sessions.”

“The talks were all very informative and relevant to my concerns. I also loved the snowball idea for those who don’t feel comfortable speaking up in a crowded environment.”

This positive feedback indicates its effectiveness in enhancing student engagement and valuing the student voice, with benefits of broader institutional goals – enhancing outcomes data and institutional practices. The Humanities Expo has now been used as an example of good practice across the University, with other disciplines adopting and adapting the idea. It has also helped to foster interdisciplinary curriculum conversations, as well as helping to bridge any gaps in University offerings. Additionally, it has shown how the student voice, and students themselves, can play a pivotal role in reshaping perceptions.

As organisers of the event, we were also each individually awarded for outstanding contributions to the University and Students’ Association:

- + Nicola Tully was awarded the Employability Award at the Student-Led Teaching Awards
- + Danielle McFawns and Erin MacInnes were jointly awarded the School President of the Year Award at the President’s Dinner
- + Danielle McFawns was awarded the Wimberley Award.

In terms of longer-term impact, in the University's most recent National Student Survey (NSS) results from 2024, the Humanities Expo was specifically cited: "If it wasn't for the Humanities Expo, I wouldn't have known much about further study...". As a University, this has provided us with detail on precisely how we can improve internal recruitment for Humanities students.

The Expo achieved what we set out to do by having a collaborative approach of improving student engagement, raising awareness of transitions and pathways, and articulation of skills, all to enhance employability and graduate prospects. With the student voice as a driving force behind it, the first ever Humanities Expo has cemented itself within the annual employability offerings at the University of Dundee.

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Engaging music students with the 3Es – developing professional practice for careers in music and the creative sector

Jane Nolan, Newcastle University

Background

Engaging music students with the 3Es is particularly important because, in music and the creative sector, there is a high likelihood that graduates will have self-managed careers, or be self-employed, freelance or have portfolios of work (Bridgstock, 2013; Bartleet et al, 2019; Edwards, 2023). In music, enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability are closely connected – entrepreneurial competences, such as marketing, promotion, opportunity creation, networking and generating an income are vital for musicians, and have historically been part of musicians' professional practice (Weber, 2004; Coulson, 2012; Haynes and Marshall, 2018, Gee and Yeow, 2021).

Yet enterprise and entrepreneurship can feel uncomfortable to musicians and be perceived as primarily motivated by economic gain and commercialism, whereas musicians have a strong sense of identity and values as members of a collaborative community of practice (Coulson, 2012; Haynes and Marshall, 2018). These negative perceptions are largely due to uncomfortable stereotypes, which come from popular discourse, reality TV, lionised individuals such as Alan Sugar and Elon Musk, and programmes such as *The Apprentice*, as well as neoliberal government narratives. Given these more sceptical perceptions of entrepreneurship, there can be challenges to engaging students because, in many cases, their primary motivation is to be musicians and creators as meaningful identities in their own right. However, ultimately “all creators must find an audience” (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, 98), and launching, sharing and enabling artistic production and managing music careers requires entrepreneurial skills (Bridgstock, 2013; Hatt, Nolan and Watts, 2024). Furthermore, in times of rapid disruptive change – from the ongoing development of the digital world to changing industry structures – a broad range of skills and knowledge are needed to enable graduates to thrive.

Research has shown that students are more willing to engage with enterprise and entrepreneurship when they are contextualised in professions and aligned with personal values (Nolan and Weatherston, 2016; Lackéus, 2020; Hatt et al, 2024). This value-creation approach, together with the conceptual framework of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) are helpful in contextualising entrepreneurship in music and the creative sector, and in understanding learning as a social and experiential activity, developing identity and involving collaboration.

It is thus important to reframe enterprise and entrepreneurship as value-creation – at an individual, disciplinary and societal level – as competences which enable students to make a difference in the world and create value for themselves and audiences, contextualised in their future communities of practice, and to offer opportunities to engage meaningfully with those communities during their higher education (HE) studies.

Approach

My pedagogical approach is as an enterprise educator. Enterprise and entrepreneurship education has a much broader scope than simply economic and business outcomes – and it also develops employability (Gibb, 2005; QAA, 2018). My aim is to enable students to gain key knowledge and competences, including the ability for lifelong learning and “a connection to how things are done” (Gibb, 2005, 5). This involves experiential learning, creating value through action, within the academic curriculum and through engaging with practitioners and communities of practice.

To evaluate the impact of my modules and interventions over time, and understand what works, I have been conducting practitioner research. While this research has limitations, because it looks at one institution only, I have been able to gather rich qualitative data and longitudinal perspectives from alumni, applicable across subsequent cohorts, which I will consider further in the outcomes section of this case study.

Within the curriculum

In the module MUS2195 Professional Practice for Music, students respond to an authentic challenge – they form teams to devise, present, evaluate and reflect on music-related events. In Semester 1, students learn about key theories and business frameworks, engage with scholarship, hear from music industry practitioners, develop their events, branding and business model. They gain knowledge to inform their professional practice and support their event project.

It is important to carefully scaffold the learning because experiential learning can disrupt students' comfort zones and create uncertainty (Boler, 1999; Belluigi, 2013). I mentor and support the teams throughout the module. Students engage with networks, artists, venues and publics, presenting their events to audiences during semester 2. They evaluate and reflect on the experience through a team presentation and an individual reflective report. This reflective element is important in gaining new levels of understanding and self-efficacy, deepening their learning by applying their knowledge in an authentic context (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Gibbs, 1998).

The event management task involves many aspects of professional practice for future careers in music and the creative sector, including:

- + creative problem-solving and idea generation
- + team working
- + marketing, branding, digital marketing, social media
- + PR and working with the media
- + networking and negotiating
- + generating income, managing budgets
- + risk assessments
- + essentials of self-employment
- + contracts and legal aspects of the music business
- + royalty collection systems, copyright and intellectual property.

I have developed extensive industry and alumni networks which enable me to connect students into the music industry communities of practice, from event organisers to sound and production engineers, artists, PRS for Music, music PR and marketing, podcasters, promoters and music festival organisers.

Students put on a wide variety of events at venues across the city; recently these have included a musical teddy bears' picnic for two- to six-year-olds at Seven Stories, the national centre for children's literature, charity DJ nights, a night of Latin music, a night of rock music and a mini music festival.

During the final year module MUS3197 Music and the Creative Industries Placement, students work a 70-hour placement with a music and creative sector organisation. They engage with scholarship to develop a critical awareness of the creative industries; and the capacity for analysis using theory and concepts. They also learn about practical aspects such as marketing, planning and project management. They engage with the music industry ecosystem (Behr et al, 2016) and hear from practitioners. Reflection is embedded throughout the process through a blog and a final reflective report.

During the initial weeks of the module, placement students also undertake live authentic research projects set by external partners, exploring contemporary issues and doing marketing research. Examples of the research projects have included:

- + the influence of TikTok and other new social media platforms on music discovery among students 18-25 years
- + research into changing expectations and buying habits re festivals among students (18-25 years) following Covid-19 and in a cost-of-living crisis.

Extracurricular events and projects

As Academic Lead for Enterprise and Employability for the Music Department, I consistently strive to create effective extracurricular events and projects to engage students with the 3Es, again linked to professional practice and creating value for students. At *What Next?*, inspirational recent alumni share experience and career journeys. I run engaging projects such as *Choral Excellence*, which focused on choral leadership and performance working with a professional singer and ending with a public concert. Along with a small team of colleagues, I set up and run SACS Futures, an online community which disseminates opportunities, jobs, internships, day in the life profiles, funding and artist development opportunities which are relevant to students by their disciplines and interests, across the School of Arts and Cultures.

Outcomes

I have been researching and evaluating the impact of these modules and interventions over more than 10 years of practice with some outcomes to date disseminated elsewhere (Nolan, 2021).

In the case of the Professional Practice for Music module, for example, the impact evaluation has evidenced that working on the event as an event manager (rather than as a performer) brought new understanding of the range of careers in music and the steps involved. Students gained valuable

knowledge and experience and a new understanding of the importance of building networks for the future. Students described how, by moving out of their comfort zone to tackle something new, they had experienced transformational learning and threshold concepts – often using the formulation – “It opened my eyes to...” They gained greater confidence through applying skills and knowledge in practice. They had aligned their values as a musician with using entrepreneurial skills and business frameworks as enablers and tools to support creativity:

“Music is full of soft skills...but it is a business and if you don’t know anything about business then it is going to be harder to manage.”

(Graduate A, 2020-21 cohort)

One of the founders of a successful events company provided evidence of the value of the learning experience:

“I was able to improve my entrepreneurial skills in order to successfully navigate the music industry – which was vital in developing my business....[the] concept actually came directly from [the]....MUS2195 module, so I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to improve my gaining theoretical knowledge of the creative industries while simultaneously establishing a successful business model to focus on outside of university.”

(Graduate B, 2020-21 cohort)

Key themes from the placement module research were that placements were deemed to have provided real and valuable experience, a sense of professional identity and the space to explore potential careers and portfolios. Students considered that they had become part of a community of practice, were increasingly able to recognise and articulate tacit knowledge, and had gained access to networks and opportunities. They felt more confident in their competence and gained new understandings of the music industry and creative sector through working on demanding projects. Several people were kept on by their hosts. There were no illusions about the challenges – but all were feeling better prepared for a music career and working in the creative sector. A recent graduate now employed as a PR executive provides insight into the value created:

“The enriching experiences embedded within the Music Enterprise and Creative Industries Placement modules were the most enjoyable part of my music degree. Engaging in diverse work-related projects, such as my placement at music and events PR company, XYZ Media, was not only fulfilling but also instrumental in shaping my professional journey. These experiences enhanced my CV, which gave me confidence when applying for my current role and provided invaluable networking opportunities.”

(Graduate C, 2021-22 cohort)

My research and evaluative practice thus suggest that experiential learning, contextualised in music and connected into its communities of practice, in ways which are aligned with students’ values as musicians, helps to engage students. This embedded value-based pedagogical approach enables students to gain theoretically informed knowledge and skills for their professional practice, and provides transformational, authentic learning experiences. This creates the foundations for launching

and managing sustainable careers in music, the creative sector and beyond, whether in self-employment, freelancing or in employment. It helps develop confidence, provides evidence of capability and a sense of professional identity as a musician and an employable graduate. Furthermore, as explored in recent research with colleagues (Hatt et al, 2024), this value-creation, enterprise education pedagogical approach to engaging students with the 3Es has potential for a diverse range of disciplines in higher education contexts.

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