

ENhance Case Study

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

Department of
Learning & Teaching
Enhancement

Themes presented:

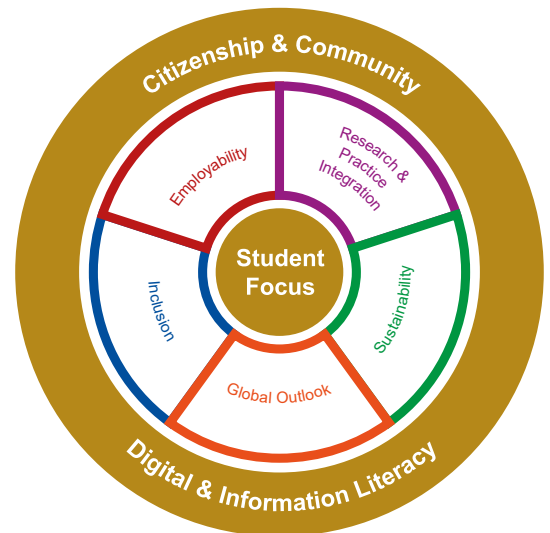
Employability; Sustainability; Inclusion

Programme

Employability Skills

Submission made by

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Case Study

The Edinburgh Napier University strategy 'Shaping our Future: Driving Distinctiveness' influenced the Business School's vision and embedment of our Employability Skills Programme (ESP) which, as the name suggests, supports Employability, Empowerment and Enterprise in our graduates through development of their demonstrable skills. In recognition of the demands of employers and well-documented 'future of work' publications (World Economic Forum, OECD) the ESP focuses on nurturing softer attributes to support personal and professional development for graduates' careers. Stakeholder consultation identified that, irrespective of sector, there are four transversal skills gaps for graduates: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and curiosity (the 4Cs).

This project was initiated in January 2020 through an ESP working group, chaired by the School Lead for Student Experience and internally resourced with members across TBS with academic and professional services staff. A reshaping of the academic calendar provided two teaching weeks per semester in each year of all undergraduate provision over to development and consolidation activities and workshops. Using this space we aimed to enhance the employability of all our graduates, irrespective of degree, by developing these desired attributes through this dedicated programme which provides participants with a personalised skills audit they use as tangible evidence of their progress. This skills audit has been developed in conjunction with colleagues at Student Futures and is delivered through a [bespoke career pulse self-assessment](#).

What makes ESP innovative and inspiring is that it is a non-credit bearing but compulsory part of the UG curriculum which appears each year of the student academic transcript. Furthermore, every student that participates in years 1 and 2 has the opportunity make an impact upon and a contribution to a global

challenge. It looks like a module but is a 'safe space' where skills, in particular the 4Cs, can be developed and further enhanced through self-reflection, with mistakes being made which do not impact on the overarching year results or degree classification. Students are encouraged to develop not only a set of skills, but attitudes and behaviours which will offer value to future employers, customers, investors, teammates or partners.

ESP workshops are delivered over four skills-development weeks across two trimesters. Digital learning is at the forefront of our teaching methods, with Microsoft Teams used to broadcast live sessions and facilitate teamwork collaborations, complemented by the VLE Moodle and a dedicated [YouTube ESP playlist](#). Exposure to online platforms further adds to our students learning experience, empowering them for a post-covid 19 world.

Examples of skills-development employability activities:

- Knowing yourself and others
- Collaboration: working with others
- Understanding stakeholders
- Testing and developing ideas
- Presentation skills
- Project management
- Personal resilience/wellbeing
- Critical thinking and problem solving.
- Research and practice led integration: UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Digital and information literacy; SimVenture Evolution (business simulation); cyber security; digital skills; netiquette.

Sustainability

All student groups are assigned an academic tutor to support their learning. Students at SCQF levels 7-9 are given a challenge generated from the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (Gender Equality for 20/21), framed in their academic discipline. The choice of topic is less prescriptive in levels 8 and 9 where problem formation and greater academic curiosity are encouraged. Students submit a 10-minute group presentation outlining the problem in their subject area, together with a proposed solution. Gibb's (1998) reflective model is used to encourage a continuous improvement mindset for students and forms part of the assessment strategy whereby students must submit a short self-reflective piece on their skills development through their ESP team challenge. For final year students, ESP was built upon two pillars: a business simulation ([SimVenture](#)) and dissertation support linking their degree programme with the 4Cs. This builds upon graduate feedback of increased application to business/management scenarios and additional support for their thesis. Student groups experienced the growth phase of running a business in a complex and dynamic environment and dissertation support came from

additional activity plans and evaluation of stakeholder interactions, including ethical responsibilities towards them. As noted in our programme team reflection section below, delivery of the ESP has evolved for our level 9 and 10 students for academic year 2021/22.

Using the Sustainable Development Goals - Sustainability & Employability approach

The Employability Skills project is designed as a virtual real-life problem based on one of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Depending on the subject discipline, the project can vary from being about delivering a project, developing a campaign, or creating an enterprising social business in relation to the selected SDG. The United Nation's SDGs "are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice" (United Nations, 2021). As part of The Business School's commitment to the United Nation's SDGs, it is imperative that all students should be aware of and learn how to address these SDG problems within their respective disciplines. Employers and leading industries are looking for socially responsible graduates with experiences in problem-solving workplace skills. This necessitates the purpose to base these real-life business problems on SDGs and a different goal is selected each year. The student project is conducted in groups to ensure that they practice the collaboration and communication elements of ESP's 4 Cs. Furthermore, by working in groups curiosity and critical thinking can be developed through peer learning by the undertaking of the following tasks:

- Introduction to the challenge
- Understanding the problem (collecting and interpreting data)
- Finding solutions (understanding the research, brainstorming, choosing the idea)
- Testing the idea (Gather feedback on idea with relevant stakeholders)
- Pitching and presenting
- Reflective diary

Inclusivity

The ESP is designed to help students develop employability skills which includes communication (both written and oral), curiosity (self-awareness and interest in the wider world), collaboration (ability to work well in a team) and Critical Thinking (ability to analyse and evaluate information to form a judgement). We deliver live sessions which are supported with recorded materials, slides and transcripts to facilitate asynchronous student learning. Materials are stored on Moodle pages which allow students to access them throughout their degree programme. As part of group assessment, students have to submit individual reflective report based on Gibb's reflective learning cycle to underpin the process which students learning develops withing the ESP. Gibb's Reflective Cycle (1998) is applied to support students to analytically reflect on incidences and occurrences and learn from experiences regardless of their

personal stage of development.

Programme Learning Outcomes

4Cs	SCQF Characteristics	Learning Outcomes
Curiosity.	Generic cognitive skills.	Demonstrate an original and creative approach to analysing a complex problem or issue.
Critical thinking.	Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate a critical understanding of the major theories and concepts relevant to the research topic. Demonstrate a critical approach to analysing both primary and secondary sources of information.
Communication.	Communication, ICT and literacy skills.	Use a range of appropriate forms of oral and written communication in order to gather, interpret and evaluate data for presentation to an informed audience
Collaboration.	Autonomy, accountability and working with others.	Demonstrate personal responsibility in working with others to create and maintain an engaged stakeholder network.

Impact of the ESP

While still in its relative infancy there is evidence to draw on the positive impact the ESP has had on our stakeholders.

Students were strongly focused on self-reflection and self-development throughout the programme. Through four activities, approximately 2,400 students were able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and to build the skills necessary to work in a team. Creativity and achievement were rewarded with prizes for high-achieving teams, inclusion on the Dean’s List and recorded on their academic transcript. By engaging with critical self-reflection, students have been able to analyse, plan, evaluate, act and learn from this programme, which helped enhance their CV. Positive feedback revolved around the opportunity to work in preallocated groups mirroring the real-life working environment. The inclusion groupwork enabled students to co-create and meet new people, to collaborate and socialise during the pandemic which was especially welcomed by new students. “I have been able to learn so many new things about myself and how to apply all my newfound skills to my studies. ... ESP has been

such a confidence booster and ... will help in my future."

Academic staff were able to "think it would be useful to find more ways of bringing selfreflection into the curriculum" and redefined their relationships with students as they encouraged them to lead and influence others through mentoring, delegating, facilitating and coordinating discussions.

The outcome of the ESP programme within ENU and its impact on the wider community was evidenced by Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills was "delighted to see ENU scaling up opportunities for students to be able to acquire the skillset that employers across Scotland ... so they get the chance to not only get into the labour market but get ahead in the world of work." In addition, student group video submissions were judged by the Dean and external panel members to get the industry perspective, reinforcing the wider context and what industry are looking forward, as commented favourably by Graeme Butler from Enterprise indicating that ESP is an initiative they will "continue to support in the coming years 100%."

Programme team reflection and evolution

Having gathered data on the impact of ESP through our stakeholders which included feedback from our student staff liaison committee and the programme team away day we have been able to make some notable changes to the ESP programme 2021/22, in particular for our level 9 and 10 students. Many of our level 9 students in TBS undertake either the Live Project or Work Based Learning modules in their respective degree programme, which could potentially have caused an overlap in delivery objectives. To mitigate this we decided to use ESP to support these students' preparation for their chosen pathway, keeping ESP as skill preparatory workshops and a safe space to reflect on personal development. Those students at level 9 not on either of these pathways are given organisational experience through participation in the business simulation, SimVenture. While our level 10 students appreciated the opportunity to participate in SimVenture the demands on their time were judged to have been onerous. Thus, the decision was made to offer the whole of level 10 ESP to focus on the employment skills required, developed and applied through a large personal research project such as an undergraduate dissertation. This importantly still allows all our UG students to partake in self-reflection and meet the learning outcomes of ESP.

Testimonials

Students voice

"I thought I should write a quick email to share my experience of the ESP reflective essay. It was the first time I wrote a reflective essay at university, and I found it to be incredibly useful. I think you cannot get the deep insights of reflection by just thinking about experiences mentally. When you start writing you retrieve so many more things from your memory. I did not realise this before. Also, I thought the Gibbs Cycle was also quite useful. It provided a good framework to structure the reflection. I think it was

a very useful exercise, I learnt a lot.

Thank You so much for arranging this activity!" (Qalbe, BA Business Management)

"This experience enhanced my employability skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking, teamwork, presentation, communication and leadership. All of these are highly sought-after attributes in candidates in hiring processes. I just had very recently some digital interviews with companies, and I was required to present situations where I used these skills, how I used them, what was the outcome of the situation and what I learned from it. I think this simulation has given me valuable experience I can rely on in future interviews." (Alexandra, BA Accounting)

Anonymised Business Management students' comments:

- "One of the best aspects is that we are working in groups, which will help us a lot in the future (e.g. university, job). Also, communication is a crucial factor when you are in a team. The skills that we develop during this module will be beneficial for us. For example, communication, leadership, planning ahead and time-management. I feel working in teams really benefits group work and communication skills which are essential in the world of work!"
- "It was the first time I wrote a reflective essay at university, and I found it to be incredibly useful. I think you cannot get the deep insights of reflection by just thinking about experiences mentally. When you start writing you retrieve so many more things from your memory. I did not realise this before. I think it was a very useful exercise, I learnt a lot."
- "I thought the Gibbs Cycle was useful. It provided a good framework to structure the reflection."
- "I have really enjoyed taking on the challenges that the ESP module has provided. Learning how to communicate and develop team skills has been fantastic."
- "I got to understand the mind and attitude required to be an effective worker."
- "Clearly identified problem and solution. Well-structured presentation and content, highly creative and well communicated. We could see the passion and energy of the group and overall, this is a perfect example of the power of effective and engaging presentation."
- "This experience enhanced my employability skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking, teamwork, presentation, communication and leadership. All of these are highly sought-after attributes in candidates in hiring processes. I just had very recently some digital interviews with companies, and I was required to present situations where I used these skills, how I used them, what was the outcome of the situation and what I learned from it. I think this has given me valuable experience I can rely on in future interviews."

Anonymised Law students' comments:

- Challenging at the outset but so great to work with people in an otherwise quite isolated year
- Learned not to be afraid of teamwork
- It's good to know that sometimes you have to depend on others
- On reflection it was really beneficial to be pushed out of comfort zone – even though I wouldn't have said this at the start
- Feel more confident for interview exercises and for going into professional employment situation
- Learned about how I react to other people – those who contribute too much, and those who don't contribute enough!
- Realised that in lots of situations I won't know or understand everything, but I will have to get the job done to the best of my ability
- Enjoyed something different from law and academic work
- Enjoyed taking safe risks

Employers

Graeme Butler, Recruitment Marketing – Scotland, Enterprise

At Enterprise we often use the phrase “our business can term on a dime.” In essence, we can go from having a quiet day to being pulled in many directions due to our many customer types, and last-minute business that can arise. Students who have enhanced critical thinking, linked with the ability to collaborate with their peers are a highly attractive proposition to Enterprise due to this. We see so much value as a graduate employer when students have undertaken activities as part of Napier's Employability Skills Programme. Being a global organisation, high level communication skills are essential to Enterprise, to which Napier students consistently demonstrate. This is an initiative we will continue to support in the coming years 100%.

David Cochrane, CEO at HIT Scotland

The Napier University Business School developed a great series of industry led sessions during their Opportunity week. The subject matter and the industry speakers covered a number of key topics that will help their students' progress into industry in the future. With this sort of current development, it will enable students to become better informed of the job opportunities available and this type of initiative should be part of the suite of support engagements ongoing. Well done to all involved.

University Principal

Principal Edinburgh Napier University, Professor Andrea Nolan

The ESP is a bold initiative supporting this university's drive for distinctiveness in our educational offer to our students and is a great model for rolling out our academic signature and commitment to graduate employability across the entire university.

Panel Feedback

Gail Boag, Dean, The Business School.

Lynne Cadenhead, Chair of Women's Enterprise Scotland (WES)

Year One Winner

Clearly identified problem and solution, although high level. However well-structured presentation and content, highly creative and well communicated. Overall, the most engaging presentation of the pack and while it could be argued the academic content was weaker than some others, when it comes to evidencing the skills required this group were far stronger. Audience was engaged, could see the passion and energy of the group and overall, this is a perfect example of the power of effective and engaging presentation.

Year Two Winner

Very professional and well research. Again, good structure from problem statement through to solution and implementation. We thought it was very relevant and current, taking the pandemic into account and a viable solution. Their subject knowledge came through - interesting use of colours, statements, social media etc.

Year Three Winner

Good structure, problem identification and detailed, well thought out solution. Shows good level of research and analysis, all clearly presented.

External Stakeholders

Links to recorded testimonials:

[Jamie Hepburn \(Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills\)](#)

James Douglas Hepburn (born 21 May 1979) is a Scottish politician serving as Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills since 26 June 2018. He had previously been the Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health from 2014 to 2016 and Minister for Employability and Training from 2016 to 2018

[Professor Christine Bamford \(CEO, Women's Coin\)](#)

Christine Bamford Founder and CEO of Women's Coin Christine has been voted top ten global Fintech women leaders and recognised in the Times Crypto-currency supplement as one of 4 Top women in the UK driving crypto-currencies.

[Gary Kildare \(Chief HR Officer, IBM\)](#)

Gary is an experienced global business executive in the technology and professional services industry.

He has lived and worked around the world, leading teams and working with clients. Gary is a Non-executive Director for the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (Ministry of Defence) and Chair of its People Committee; a Non-executive Director at the UK Insolvency Service; a Lay Member of the Legal Services Board (Ministry of Justice) and a Board Member of the British Quality Foundation.

Further resources and supporting material

YouTube ESP playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2tfJQI8fU-jN6XbE1ZhKHCns3vbbKYL6>

Conferences:

Fonseca, A.P., Saddler, S. B., Rezai, K., Harte P., Melvin G., McLatchie J., Fannin, N., Richardson, S., Swanton, K. (2021). The implementation of the employability skills programme in a global pandemic: delights and pitfalls. Teaching and Learning Conference 2021 - The future for enterprise and employability in the curricula. Conference Proceeding Journal

Fonseca, A.P., Saddler, S. B., Rezai, K., Harte P., Melvin G., McLatchie J., Fannin, N., Richardson, S., Swanton, K. (2021). Developing enterprising, ethical, and work-ready graduates: the story of the ESP. CABS – LTSE 2021. Digital Pre-Record.

Invited talks:

- 15/09/2021 – 'Grand challenge: How can OR help beyond COP26 in the transition to a net-zero carbon future?' Operational Research Society Conference 2021 – international impact.

Business School UG Open Day Presentation: ESP Mind the Skills Gap

Employability Skills Programme (ESP)

- Compulsory employability programme across all 4 UG years (delivered virtually)
- Real-life teamwork experience
- Opportunity to solve a problem currently impacting on the world (SDG, COP26 etc.)
- Allows you to put your skills into practice
- Improve your data literacy
- Enable you to stand out to employers



Poster Presentation – Teaching and Learning Conference, 2021

The Implementation of the Employability Skills Programme in a Global Pandemic: delights & pitfalls



Dr Sarah Borthwick; Nick Fannin; Dr Ana Paula Fonseca; Dr Kathryn Rezai; Serena Richardson
Visuals by Katrina Swanton

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