

“It gives you the chance to dive deeper into a subject, of living independently from your parents and starting to manage your life in a safe environment...”



University
of Glasgow



Graduate
attributes
staff guide

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This guide was created by a team of students undertaking a research project into the development of graduate attributes at the University of Glasgow. All quotations in this booklet are taken from interviews conducted with students and staff as part of the project.

Why do our students come to university?

“General life experience, building friendships, taking part in activities that I wouldn't get to take part in if I'd entered work straight from school...”

What are graduate attributes?

Students apply to university for all sorts of reasons. Some want to study their favourite subject in more detail; others see a degree as a stepping stone into their dream job. For many, it's the ideal time to discover more about themselves – who they are, what they believe in, and what they want out of life.

Students may not always end up pursuing a career or further research in their initial field of study, but you'll know from past experience that their time here hasn't been wasted: they develop a number of transferable skills and abilities that will prove useful to them in the future regardless of where they end up. These are the generic benefits of a Glasgow degree – our 'graduate attributes.'

Graduate attributes are the academic abilities, personal qualities and transferable skills which all students will have the opportunity to develop as part of their University of Glasgow experience.



Why do we need to consider them?

1. More and more graduates are entering the job market every year

A good degree classification is still something of worth, but as the number of graduates continues to rise, employers are increasingly looking for evidence of these broader attributes in their potential employees.

2. Graduates need guidance in presenting themselves effectively

Employers often comment that recent graduates fail to see the wider significance of their university experiences. Focusing in on their attributes helps students to identify their essential skills and abilities and confidently articulate these to potential employers. In fact, individuals who can convincingly demonstrate their potential make for more attractive candidates regardless of their degree classification – good news for graduates who are disappointed with their final result.

3. Graduate attributes help students to engage with their learning

It's not all about what comes after university. In fact, it's not even the greater part of it. Graduate attributes are about helping students to see how all of their experiences connect and complement – academic learning, sport, volunteering, part time employment and more. Independent thinking, communication, working with others: the same skills which make for a good football team captain can be just as useful to a research team leader. Helping students to see this bigger picture can put more abstract learning exercises into context – and enhance their engagement and understanding of their studies as a result.

why do our students come to university?

“It's for learning about yourself, learning about who you want to be, getting a good degree, and becoming a more rounded person”

What are our institutional graduate attributes?

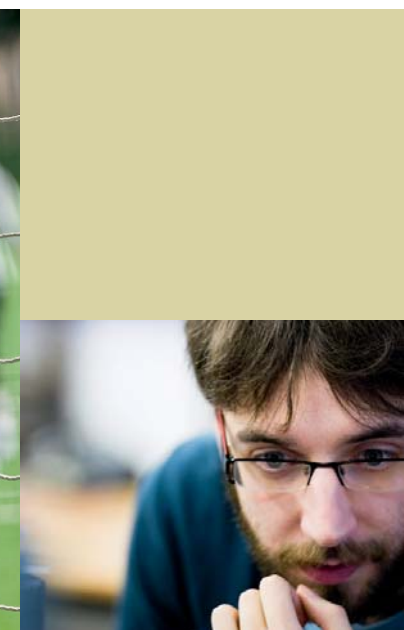
Following extensive consultation with our staff, students and graduate employers, we have created a University of Glasgow graduate attributes matrix. This identifies the core skills, qualities and abilities we wish to instil in our students (overleaf).

Each attribute is conceived of in three 'dimensions': academic instruction, the resulting personal understanding, and its subsequent transferable articulation. These aren't sub-competencies, but rather manifestations of the same attribute in different social situations.

The student experience is itself a sophisticated composite of these academic, personal and transferable social dimensions: as such, we need to make sure our students have the opportunity to experience all three dimensions of each attribute during the course of their time at Glasgow.



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University of Glasgow graduate attributes

The academic abilities, personal qualities and transferable skills which all students will have the opportunity to develop as part of their University of Glasgow experience.

Below is the University of Glasgow's graduate attributes matrix – the result of extensive consultation with staff, students and employers to determine the desirable skills, qualities and abilities of an ideal graduate. Where would you see these attributes featuring within your own programmes and courses?

why do our students come to university?

“I've always liked the sound of student life, that you get to meet a whole lot of different people and that you get to do so many different things...”

Attribute	Academic Dimension	Personal Dimension	Transferable Dimension
Subject Specialists	Understand and respect the values, principles, methods and limitations of their discipline(s).	Possess a breadth and depth of knowledge within their disciplinary area(s).	Possess discipline-relevant professional skills, knowledge and competencies.
Investigative	Are intellectually curious and engage in the pursuit of new knowledge and understanding.	Are able to locate, analyse and synthesise information from a variety of sources and media.	Are able to investigate problems and provide effective solutions.
Independent and Critical Thinkers	Identify, define and assess complex issues and ideas in a researchable form.	Exercise critical judgement in evaluating sources of information and constructing meaning.	Apply creative, imaginative and innovative thinking and ideas to problem solving.
Resourceful and Responsible	Are experienced in self-directed learning and authentic research-led enquiry.	Are motivated, conscientious and self-sufficient individuals capable of substantial independent work.	Manage their personal performance to meet expectations and demonstrate drive, determination, and accountability.
Effective Communicators	Articulate complex ideas with respect to the needs and abilities of diverse audiences.	Present their ideas clearly and concisely in high quality written and spoken English.	Communicate clearly and confidently, and listen and negotiate effectively with others.
Confident	Defend their ideas in dialogue with peers and challenge disciplinary assumptions.	Possess excellent interpersonal and social skills fostered within an internationalised community.	Demonstrate enthusiasm, leadership and the ability to positively influence others.
Adaptable	Experience multi-disciplinary and/or inter-disciplinary learning in an internationally renowned institution.	Respond flexibly and adapt their skills and knowledge to excel in unfamiliar situations.	Demonstrate resilience, perseverance and positivity in multi-tasking, dealing with change and meeting new challenges.
Experienced Collaborators	Engage with the scholarly community and respect others' views and perspectives.	Are experienced in working in groups and teams of varying sizes and in a variety of roles.	Conduct themselves professionally and contribute positively when working in a team.
Ethically and Socially Aware	Consider and act upon the ethical, social and global responsibilities of their actions.	Welcome exposure to the richness of multi-cultural and international experiences, opportunities and ways of thinking.	Have a practical and contemporary knowledge of relevant professional, ethical and legal frameworks.
Reflective Learners	Use feedback productively to reflect on their work, achievements and self-identity.	Set aspirational goals for continuing personal, professional and career development.	Identify and articulate their skills, knowledge and understanding confidently and in a variety of contexts.

What do our students think staff could do to help them develop their graduate attributes?

Make use of a wide variety of learning and teaching methods including presentations, group work, projects, discussions and interactive elements.

It's no real surprise that different people learn in different ways: some students require nothing more than a book, some learn best from pictures, video and visual aids, and some simply don't know what they think about anything until they've had a chance to talk it through with others.

Varying learning and teaching methods allows your students to play to their strengths and work on their weaknesses. The wider the variety, the more opportunities they'll have to develop a strong and rounded portfolio of skills and attributes. And there can be side benefits too: group project work often brings classes closer together, online materials can enable students to learn at their own pace, and class debates can help individuals refine their ideas for their own coursework and assessment.

"I think working in teams is hugely beneficial, and the same with presentations – you're almost forced to improve your attributes."

"A lot of lecturers just speak at you, and I think for some folk yeah that works, but for others... well personally I'd rather have someone to connect with."



why do our students come to university?

"I've always wanted to become someone who could have some impact on the world and make a change."



"If you are able to debate and hold up an argument with other people... it has a huge influence on graduate attributes and your own formative experience."

"If they maybe had more online self-assessment things... you might not be able to come home at night and sit with a book, you might be knackered, but you can always go online and have a wee click through – put yourself through a quick dummy test and then go 'right well I'll read about that tomorrow' rather than going 'I need to know this' or 'I'm going to be tested on it' and then freaking out."

Actively talk about the graduate attributes being developed on your programmes and courses

The number one message from students is clear: the wider significance of learning and assessment tasks just isn't talked about enough – things like why certain abilities are important beyond study and how they're used by professionals in your discipline or elsewhere. Thankfully, this is also one of the most straightforward concerns to address.

Confidence and awareness of one's abilities is vital to success in any field. But developing these attributes in students doesn't mean you have to give up valuable course time to skills workshops and careers talks: even steps as simple as occasionally pointing out to students the types of skills they're using every day in their laboratories, tutorials and coursework act as hugely positive interventions, raising awareness of the skills they possess and their personal confidence in their abilities.

And there are real benefits for learning outcomes too: increasing awareness of the wider significance of skills and competencies practiced within a course helps students understand the intrinsic value of the work they do every day – enhancing motivation and engagement in their studies.

why do our students come to university?

“It really improves you...it gives you an amazing experience, the happiest years of your life, you meet new people and you notice yourself changing.”

“They need to be a bit more obvious about why they're asking people to do things.”

“Maybe more focus on making it clear which attributes you're obtaining – at the moment there's none of that, and therefore the students have no idea what they're gaining from the course outwith the technical knowledge that they're learning in the lectures.”

“Be very clear with the students about what you're aiming for.”

“Maybe a recap at the end of the lecture or the end of the course or the end of any bit of coursework – what the student should have learnt, what you think they've learnt and maybe have some kind of discussion, some kind of interaction with them to make them clear about what they've actually achieved from it.”

“Sometimes you can't see it yourself - you need someone else to sort of point it out to you. I didn't even think about these skills until this interview.”

“My lecturer doesn't just say 'oh, this is how to write an essay,' she says, 'this is how it's going to help you in the future'. So I don't know, just talk about it more.”

“When they're teaching you something they could point out where this could take you, why they're teaching you it – not just 'here's all the information'. Maybe they could just drop in 'this is a such-and-such graph and this is what it's for... and it's important that you know this because...’”



Ask your own students for course-specific ideas

Ultimately, the students interviewed had one piece of overarching advice: talk to your own students and find out what works for them. Show them the table of the University's graduate attributes from this booklet and talk about how these might be best developed within your programme. Engaging your students in programme and course design will not only ensure a steady flow of ideas from the people who know your course best, but allow you to tailor your course to their needs, increasing student satisfaction.

While talking to student representatives in staff-student liaison committees is a great start, consider supporting this with more innovative approaches: Keep a 'sticky' discussion topic in your class Moodle at all times so that students can add in ideas as and when they occur; hold informal end of course/ programme receptions to exchange ideas over refreshments; and don't forget to harness the experience of your recent alumni too – graduates who have been in the workplace for a couple of years often have some really interesting insights into what learning exercises have stuck with them over the years.

"I think it's really important that you use the students in later years who have gone through some of your courses, and maybe sit down with them and have an ideas session. They've been through the course – they're the best people to ask."

"Make use of the student mind especially because it's kind of like... still a bit raw and it's full of great ideas, and that's not used enough."

"I think the focus is often on the lecturer when it comes to the lecturer/student relationship... I don't think the students get as much say. We have class reps but we only have like 2 or 3 for 300 students, and I don't think the voice of the students comes across as strongly as it could."

why do our students come to university?

"I looked at jobs first, walked backwards and this seemed to be the course that would fit."

"I think they have to engage with their student population and they have to actively ask for feedback and also take what they say in student feedback kind of importantly."

"Just listen to your students! I don't know, I think students really want to take part in deciding their future and influencing their future and if they decided to come to university that's a big part of what that holds."



Where Do I Start?

There are a number of resources and services on offer to aid you in thinking about incorporating graduate attributes development within your programmes and courses:

- **Guidelines for programme/course design and review**
Guidance from the Learning and Teaching Centre is regularly updated to reflect best practice and now includes extensive guidance on graduate attributes, including an auditing toolkit:
www.glasgow.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/goodpracticeresources/designingprogrammesandcourses/
- **Learning and Teaching Centre School/College Contacts**
In addition to the above, each school/college is allocated a designated staff contact who can provide more specific advice to supplement the general guidelines:
www.glasgow.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/allocatedcollegecontacts/
- **The University Careers Service**
Work-related learning and placement opportunities rank among the most useful and desirable ways of enhancing graduate attributes development. Speak to the Careers Service for advice on the most appropriate way to tackle this for your disciplinary needs.
www.glasgow.ac.uk/services/careers/academicstaff/membersofstaff/
- **The Students' Representative Council**
The SRC represent students at all university levels and promote the engagement of students in learning and teaching enhancement. The SRC are happy to advise on effective techniques for consultation with students and will help to facilitate sessions where possible.
www.glasgowstudent.net
- **QAA Scotland Enhancement Graduates for the 21st Century Theme Outcomes and Publications**
The QAA Scotland website acts as a repository for best practice information on incorporating graduate attributes into programme and course design from across the sector.
www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/21stCGraduates/outcomes.asp

To find out more, see www.glasgow.ac.uk/attributes

why do our students come to university?

“I think that university is a good place to go to reach your potential, or at least one of the possible places.”



www.glasgow.ac.uk/attributes