



University
of Glasgow



Embedding Graduate Attributes (GAs) within Placement Courses

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Embedding GAs within the Placement Courses

Students select some of the graduate attributes from the matrix to create personal learning goals to accomplish while on placement. When goals are achieved, new ones are set.

Context

Interdisciplinary Studies

College of Social Sciences

BSc Environmental Science and Sustainability

Level 3

Subject: Environmental Science and
Sustainability

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Key features



Small group size (<25).

Focus on raising general awareness.

A mix of in-class and out-of-class sessions; regularly occurring as part of the placement courses at the campus.

GAs are discussed during a workshop in semester 1 before the students go out on placement in semester 2.

Only paper materials, slides and the projector are required. Moodle is used too.

Only basic technology competency required.

Full integration into the curriculum, which requires full alignment of ILOs, L&T activities and assessments. This results in the PIP form having to be revised and syllabus redesigned.

Considerable impact on staff workload in form of extra preparation and follow-up, e.g. organising the placements and checking insurance, progress reports, workshops, and marking.



Activity description

Rationale

Although the placement courses had been running for many years, they were not explicitly linked to the University GAs matrix. Therefore, once the matrix was available, it made sense to have the students write their personal learning goals for their placement which would be aligned with GAs. This would then enable students to link these skills and attributes to their professional and academic development over the course of their degree, and include the evidence in their CVs.

Implementation

Although GAs are mentioned in advising appointments and, more generally, on levels 1 and 2 courses, it is in level 3, semester 2 when the students go out on placement that there is an ideal opportunity for students to use the GAs matrix to design their personal learning goals. This is a 60-credit course that is optional against a Dissertation for the whole semester.



Implementation continued

In the first workshop in semester 1 of level 3 the GAs matrix is discussed during the session.

The students are then shown a variety of personal learning goals set by previous students and these are discussed and linked to the GAs matrix.

Students then write their own personal learning goals (about 4 on average with the opportunity to introduce new ones once any of the four gets achieved during the course of the placement) for their initial report to be submitted before the placement in semester 2. These goals are then addressed on a weekly basis, in a work-based journal, over the 8 weeks of the placement to assess progress.

The personal learning goals are assessed in the initial report (15%) and the work-based journal (30%) - this includes reflecting on progress in the end-of-week summary.

Occasionally, a student will consider the personal learning goals in the dissertation (55%). The students also submit the first week of their journal for formative feedback and this includes feedback on their personal learning goals and measurement of progress.



Reactions

Relating the personal learning goals to the GAs matrix gave a clearer guideline to students as to what is required in terms of the goals and how they can benefit from goal-setting in the future. In the past, students had made their goals overly complex or simple. Since the introduction of the matrix, the goals are clearer and specific to the student's aspirations while on placement.

From student evaluations the following evidence has been found:

A student commenting on their communication skills (Effective Communicator) stated: *I have learnt that I have the ability to motivate people to achieve new abilities and attitudes.*

Another remarked on how their confidence had improved (Confident) and the importance of flexibility (Adaptable) within the workplace: *I have improved my confidence, self-esteem and feel more able to advance further. Learnt that theory and reality don't always coincide ... I learnt that flexibility is essential.*

Students also felt they could make a contribution to the placement provider (Experienced Collaborators) using knowledge gained from their university courses (Subject Specialists): *Good to see how theories work in practice in the workplace ... the placement has helped put theories in perspective.*

Many students recognised the interdisciplinary nature of their placement work and how reflecting on what they had learned on their programme enhanced their understanding of interdisciplinarity (Reflective Learners): *Work-based learning which enhanced interdisciplinary understanding.*

Numerous students over the years have identified, and focused on, the employability aspects of undertaking a placement in their evaluations: *...enhanced my CV.*

Analysis & evaluation

The workshops before the placement used to be offered in the first two weeks of semester 2 before the students went out on placement in week 3. The feedback from the students was that these workshops were too late and they wanted them much earlier. So from 2015/2016 these workshops were offered in semester 1 in week 3. This now works much better and the students have the information they require for their placements 4 months in advance of them starting the placement.

For 2018/2019 I will have the class write some personal learning goals, aligned to the GAs matrix during the first workshop in September 2018. The main issue with this may be that some of the students attending the workshop do not end up undertaking a placement but rather opt for the dissertation course instead. Nevertheless, this will be seen as an opportunity to familiarise all students attending the workshop with the GAs matrix and how it can be linked to personal learning goals and ways to emphasise their skills on their CVs.

From some of the CVs I have seen from students who have undertaken placements, there does seem to be evidence of better expression of the GAs the students can offer an employer. Certainly, a number of the placement organisations have offered work (full-time, part-time, voluntary and permanent) to some of the students following completion of the placement and/or degree programme.

It is quite easy to embed GAs into courses and make content more appropriate to the students in terms of their employability.





Recommendations

The Scottish undergraduate degree is unique in the UK in that it is generally a 4-year programme rather than the traditional 3-year programme. Couple this with Scotland's retention of the centralised funding system and its willingness to integrate systems to create and utilise skills and you have the potential to offer graduates with the skills necessary for the workplace. Our degrees facilitate the inclusion of a semester for a work-related opportunity in the form of a credit-bearing placement course. This prospect can enable a student to gain experience within a sector they hope to enter and equip them with the GAs to articulate this to future employers.

While a placement course may not be an option for a colleague, there is the opportunity to link aims and ILOs on courses to GAs. Once this is done, linking to the related GAs the various formative and summative assessments is fairly straightforward.

References

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This resource is part of the 'Graduate Attributes – Roadmap for Staff' resource:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/goodpractice/graduateattributes>

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