Graduate Attributes Spotlight
Reflection in the Curriculum

One of the most common complaints from employers regarding the quality of Glasgow's graduates is that while they are technically very capable and possess excellent interpersonal and soft skills, their self-awareness of what they have to offer is very limited: they do not fully recognise the impact that university education has had on their personal development and so do not present themselves as effectively as they could. Our graduate attributes matrix is designed to raise staff and students' awareness of how skills developed in an academic setting are readily transferable to other situations: as such, graduate attributes serve as a useful framing device to effectively embed reflection in the curriculum.	**Overview**

Good practice in embedding reflection involves a three part process: 1. [Raise awareness of the graduate attributes developed by your course](#) 2. [Signpost the relevant developmental opportunities throughout](#) 3. [Formalise the reflective process within core learning and teaching time](#) **Raise awareness of the graduate attributes developed by your course** Alumni often tell us that they didn't appreciate the value of their degree for their future employment until a couple of years after graduation - it takes time to draw links between the skills developed within university and those required in the workplace. Part of the problem is that we're prone to take these for granted ourselves: we feel confident that our courses are developing useful transferable skills, but we rarely take the time to pin down exactly what these might be. The first step in making our students more aware of their attributes is to be clear ourselves as to what attributes they should be developing through our programmes and courses. The best way to determine this is to do an audit with your colleagues. Map out where your programme or course provides opportunities for students to develop graduate attributes. A simple mapping model is illustrated in the resources section. Attribute mapping can also be a useful way of thinking about curriculum design – it will quickly become apparent which attributes are well developed within your course and which ones you might want to focus on more fully in future. Once you've identified the attributes that students should be developing within your courses, you can use the map to create student-friendly resources demonstrating what they can expect to develop. One way you might do this is to publish a mini-map in your course handbook. You'll find an example of this for the Management MSc in the resources section. **Signpost the relevant developmental opportunities throughout** Setting clear expectations about how graduate attributes will be developed within your course handbook is a good start, but students will generally only refer to these	**Approach**

very occasionally once the course is underway: we have to reinforce these initial messages with regular prompts to reflect upon the value of learning experiences.

There's no need to talk about attributes during every lecture, lab or tutorial. The attributes developed by core activities don't change greatly from week to week. But all courses have some standout elements – unusual one-off learning experiences with particular developmental significance that students can easily overlook, such as:

- Fieldwork
- Group assignments
- Presentations
- Portfolio assessments
- Role-play scenarios
- Extended projects / dissertations

For example, many students dislike group work because they feel achievements occur despite the involvement of their peers, not because of it. It's unsurprising that they fail to spot the developmental significance of having to work together in this context. But group work is an effective way of developing many important attributes such as effective communication, negotiation, time management, organisation and professional behaviours.

Signposting the developmental significance of learning and assessment doesn't have to be terribly sophisticated – you just need to leave a little time to explore with your students what they feel they got out of the exercise beyond the immediate learning. Our research shows that simply highlighting to students the sorts of skills that they have been practising is one of the most effective prompts for them to mark and reflect upon their personal development.

Formalise the reflective process within core learning and teaching time

The sort of signposting exercises outlined above, are useful for raising students' awareness of where attribute development has occurred throughout the curriculum: providing further time for reflection towards the end of a course builds upon this by enabling students to reflect upon the value of these experiences as a whole.

You may wish to try a combined approach to feedback and reflection:

I. Divide your cohort into small groups and use course tutors as facilitators (multiple groups in a large venue works best as it generates a good buzz of discussion and masks awkward silences).

II. Start the group discussions with basic 'feedback' questions – learning facilities, what worked well, what didn't etc.

III. As the groups warm up, move into more complex 'reflection' questions – "What challenged you?" "What skills did you develop?" "How might you approach similar situations differently in future?"

IV. Summarise the group discussions.

V. (Optional) build upon the discussion by issuing students with personal reflection exercises to take away and complete / links to Mahara templates.

The resources given below may give your other ideas for effectively embedding reflection in the curriculum – experiment and see what works best for you.

An introduction to reflection and Mahara https://portfolio.gla.ac.uk/ Resources to inspire approaches to embedded reflection http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/learning-at-university/independent-learning/critical-reflection-forms/	**Resources**