Higher Education for the Nation:
Embedding Skills and Employability
December // 2020
Universities have an increasing mandate to develop a highly-skilled graduate workforce with the right knowledge, skills and behaviours to meet the needs of the Welsh, UK and global economies.

They have strengthened the processes for embedding employability strategies within their institutions. These strategies can ensure that all students, regardless of their background or level of study, have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully in the world of work, benefiting themselves, their communities and, of course, the economy.

In particular, the pace of change driven by new and emerging technologies – and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic – means that higher education is constantly evolving to respond to the developing labour market. Indeed, the Public Policy Institute for Wales noted that today’s primary school children might change jobs 12 times during the course of their working life. The lifelong learning ambitions of Wales’s universities build graduate resilience to meet these challenges and changes, contributing to employability and social mobility.

Universities in Wales play a lead role in linking research and innovation to society’s needs, and those of the economy. Through engaging with industry and collaborating with different sectors, they can respond flexibly to current and future skills demands. This has increased opportunities for students to develop their employability, and strengthened the contribution of high value skills as drivers for innovation, productivity and entrepreneurship.

Higher education providers continue to embed employability skills into the higher education experience of all students. Data released through HESA’s inaugural 2017/18 Graduate Outcomes survey highlights that most full-time undergraduates entered high skilled occupations 15 months after graduating. This reflects previous data on graduates’ activity, and shows the value of a degree in leading to highly-skilled employment.

The case studies presented here give a flavour of the range of ways in which universities are doing this, and also highlight the significant benefits to their local community, to the nation, and beyond.

The case studies were collated before the Covid-19 pandemic. As unemployment rises as a result, Wales will need its universities even more than ever to provide people with the education and skills they will need to find and keep work and to contribute to economic regeneration.

David Allen OBE
Chair, HEFCW
2014-2020
GO Wales

GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience is a programme that provides extra support to young people who may need help in securing quality work experience, work tasters, work shadowing and work placements. It encourages employers to become more inclusive and opens up opportunities for students.

The ethos of the programme is one of equality and diversity, with the aim to create opportunities for students facing barriers to employment.

The intensive, customised services offered through GO Wales support the most vulnerable students to achieve positive outcomes at graduation by providing them with bespoke work experience that they would not otherwise succeed in gaining through open competition with their peers.

Eligible students can include students who are disabled, care experienced, estranged from their families, from a Black or minority ethnic group, from a low participation neighbourhood, have childcare or caring responsibilities or have a mental health or physical health condition.

GO Wales is part-financed by the European Social Fund and match-funded by HEFCW and the nine universities in Wales. The project is due to end on 31 October 2022. For further information and case studies, visit www.gowales.co.uk
Providing a variety of interventions and opportunities to promote career management

Understanding the importance of career management skills and engaging in opportunities to develop them can be a game-changer for graduate career success.

Already passionate about conservation and wildlife, K, a zoology undergraduate, was aware that work experience was the key to exploring the wide variety of roles and specialisms in this sector, and to enabling her to confirm her career plans and make all-important contacts.

The Year in Employment Scheme, co-ordinated by the University’s Careers Service, meant that K could consider working for a year between Years 2 and 3, without the complication of breaking her studies or waiting until after graduation. She would be fully supported by the Careers Service throughout, from securing to undertaking a 12-month placement.

Following a successful Year in Employment and final year of academic study, K graduated with a clear next step plan and with confidence and motivation. She continued to create opportunities for herself, mixing voluntary and part-time work in an unrelated non-graduate role while seeking her desired graduate employment.

Six months after graduating, K took advantage of the additional support available to her by taking part in the Careers Service’s AberForward Graduate Scheme, giving her a further four weeks of graduate level work experience. During the Scheme, with the aid of the Careers Service which provided application support and interview practice, she applied to and attended interviews for two ‘dream jobs’. She was the reserve candidate for the first and was offered the second, which she started a month later.

The skills K developed by taking part in short and long periods of work experience, paid and unpaid, as an undergraduate student and as a graduate job-seeker, equipped her with high levels of emotional and career intelligence that will enable her to manage all phases of her future career. She was already resilient, commercially aware and work-ready before starting her final year of undergraduate study, and adopted a goal-led and staged approach to achieving her career aims afterwards. Within a year of graduating, she gained graduate employment in a sector where openings are not frequent or are traditionally offered on an unpaid or short-term basis, having taken responsibility for her own development and accessed the opportunities and support available from her first year onwards.

“AberForward reinforced my confidence and gave me the push I needed towards professionally developing myself. Moreover, it gave me a fulfilling role where I could be creative and work very independently, something which I was proud to mention during my interviews. I also booked a mock interview with the Careers Service, which showed my weaknesses and provided areas to work on before the real interviews.”

K, Aberystwyth University zoology graduate

There is value in the preparation offered by the skills development workshops of the Careers Service, and after 42 years, the Year in Employment Scheme continues to provide valuable opportunities for many students who don’t have the option of an integrated industrial year.

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Regional Collaboration through GO Wales at Bangor University

Working with partners to provide work experience for students facing barriers to employment

The GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience team supports higher education (HE) students who are furthest away from the graduate labour market. Advisers source workplace experience to help them develop a range of employability skills to enable them to compete on a level playing field when applying for graduate jobs.

The GO Wales project provides funding and flexibility to allow students to access opportunities they may not be aware of or be able to do without this support.

By engaging with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board Regional Engagement team network, as well as local authority initiatives such as Fusion at Cyngor Gwynedd Council and the University’s Widening Access Team, Bangor University has sourced a variety of innovative placements with teams who are supportive of the needs of the student.

Students benefit from being in a supportive work environment, which boosts their confidence. They are often surprised at what they learn from organisations they were unaware of or would not have otherwise considered.

Through collaborative working the University has also been able to refer students to other local support initiatives such as ADTRAC, which provides similar support after graduating.

“We are grateful to the support we have had from Fusion, Môn CF, Wild Elements, and many more for supporting our students.” Lis Owen, GO Wales Project Manager, Bangor University

“We are grateful for the opportunity to take part in this valuable programme and help support young students on their journey to future employment.” Rhys Roberts, Project Manager at Môn CF, a charity and company owned by the people of Anglesey

The University hopes to develop further partnerships with new and existing projects to create exciting opportunities for students and ultimately a more diverse graduate workforce in Wales.

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Summer Internship at KGAL Consulting Engineers

“My internship involved me, along with other colleagues, designing and modelling a flood defence gate that will be a part of the Lowestoft Flood Risk Management Project. My main role was to model the smaller parts from drawings, that would be used to make the main gate assembly. I was also tasked with designing a proprietary lifting mechanism to lower and lift the bottom seal of the flood gate. This was an iterative process in order to find the optimal design for the use case.

“Many things attracted me to this internship. The role itself was one that I felt was well suited to me and entailed work that I enjoy doing, such as computer-aided design - CAD - modelling and hand calculations. The work that KGAL undertakes was also a reason for me applying to this internship. Their work in water control is ground-breaking and they strive for the best designs with a keen eye for a sustainable approach.

“My experience at KGAL was extremely enjoyable. The work environment was very friendly, and everyone was always at hand to help when needed. They were very understanding of my religious requirements, allowing to me to go to Friday prayers which was extremely appreciated. Working with my colleagues on the project was a great experience and allowed me to experience what it is like to work as part of a team towards a common goal. Overall, the organisation instills good working practices in its engineers, and it was very beneficial to be a part of that and learn from some of the best.”

Skills Gained:

“I have gained many skills as a result of this internship. One of the key skills that has been enhanced is my computer modelling skills. I had some knowledge of CAD modelling beforehand, but working at KGAL, I was taught the proper practices used in industry. As part of the project I was working on, KGAL taught me the correct method to create drawings. It also gave me the opportunity to develop my interpersonal and team building skills.”

“My experience at KGAL was extremely enjoyable. The work environment was very friendly, and everyone was always at hand to help when needed. They were very understanding of my religious requirements, allowing to me to go to Friday prayers which was extremely appreciated. Working with my colleagues on the project was a great experience and allowed me to experience what it is like to work as part of a team towards a common goal. Overall, the organisation instills good working practices in its engineers, and it was very beneficial to be a part of that and learn from some of the best.”

Futures Connect:

“I would recommend completing an internship through the Futures Connect team as they were a great help throughout the whole process. They streamlined the application process by providing lots of useful information about the companies being applied to. For example, prior to my interview at KGAL, I was given lots of interview tips and sent useful articles from KGAL's website that would help me prepare for the interview. The Futures Connect team also organised the time and place of the interviews and provided information about who the interviewers would be with and what to expect.”

“My experience at KGAL was extremely enjoyable. I have gained many skills as a result of this internship.”

Mohammad Zubair Arshad.
MEng Mechanical Engineering
Virtual internships

Opportunities for distance learners to experience placements remotely in an increasingly digital world

In the same way that The Open University’s wide range of courses and degrees allows its students to combine their study with their other commitments, its Virtual Internships programme is offering people the opportunity to take part in paid, experiential learning wherever they are.

While the UK’s Virtual Internships market is relatively small, it is set to grow as technology develops and more people expect to change career more often. Employers are also looking at how they can increase the talent pool available to them and run their businesses more efficiently.

The advantage of Virtual Internships is that students only work when required, and they can be anywhere in the UK. Not only does that open up a much broader range of people and skills for employers, it also opens up almost endless opportunities for students in Wales.

Virtual Internships are a particularly useful proposition for small and medium enterprises, who might not otherwise be able to afford a full-time, on-site intern. Virtual Interns work only the hours required, and through the OU’s partnership with Santander, SMEs can access funding to employ them.

As students, employees, and employers all look for more flexibility, the Virtual Internships programme offers just that, opening up new opportunities for students and enriching employers and businesses with new perspectives.

Elin secured a part-time paid virtual internship work experience opportunity, to work remotely as a social research intern with Disability Wales. This was an opportunity to enhance personal and career development opportunities. She was able to build her knowledge, self-confidence and motivation, and is now able to evidence this with future employers.

“The internship was incredibly rewarding, and I learned so much. One of my main responsibilities was translating elements of the DRILL report into Welsh, which gave me an insight into the work Disability Wales have been doing with other charities and organisations by also opening my eyes to many issues and barriers faced by disabled people and other minority groups.

“One invaluable skill I’ll take away from this experience is the ability to work effectively virtually and remotely. It introduced me to a different way of working which will be invaluable to note on my CV.”

Elin, Virtual Internship participant

The Open University Virtual internship scheme is initially being delivered across all four nations of the UK as a pilot project.

The next stage will be to embed this work experience offer for Open University students across Wales and promote this scheme to the University’s employer partners.

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GO Wales at Swansea University

Supporting a student into work experience

Research has shown that disabled students or students with work limiting health conditions are at greater risk of unemployment than students generally.

Care leavers lack access to work and networks, while those with caring responsibilities require targeted advice as they balance caring responsibilities and employment. The employment prospects for some Black, Asian and minority ethnic students are significantly worse than for their counterparts who are not from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience advisers use an assessment tool to decide if a referred student is eligible and suitable for the project.

An eligible Swansea University student believed she would not gain professional employment after completing her MSc in chemical engineering.

Advisers spent time coaching and encouraging her to step out of her comfort zone by finding suitable work experience in line with her career ideas. She found employment within the chemical engineering sector after her work experience placement.

Over two and a half years, the GO Wales team at Swansea University has worked with 166 students, of whom 109 had undertaken at least one work experience opportunity. Given the importance of this intervention for the wider well-being of individuals and the economy, the University – along with others in Wales – will continue to offer continued support for eligible students.

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“I was very anxious applying for professional jobs but with the help and support I received, it put my worries to rest and I became more confident. The most positive experience was the lab placement with the employer. I gained skills and eventually got a job with them. I would tell other students who feel disadvantaged as I did to definitely apply to GO Wales.”
At the University of South Wales, the GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience programme has helped 235 students to gain invaluable work experience since it launched in 2016.

Having just completed a Foundation Year in biological sciences, one student, Diogo Veloso, did not have any career relevant work experience and lacked industry contacts. He wanted to get a taste of working in a laboratory, where he could apply his strong problem solving and analytical skills. The GO Wales team worked with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board to secure a week’s work experience for him at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital. They worked together to agree a plan for Diogo, who has cerebral palsy, so he could spend time in the Pathology Department. This included ensuring his wheelchair was fully charged each day to help give him independence around the department, and he was accompanied by a support worker.

Diogo spent a day in each of the Microbiology, Haematology, Biochemistry departments as well as the Blood Bank. This helped him to identify which part of pathology he would like to explore in the future. A further three-day work shadowing placement at the bioscience laboratories at Cardiff University helped to confirm what he wanted to do in the future.

Diogo is continuing to study for his degree in biology at USW.

“The work experiences have helped me to become more confident when working in a laboratory, and helped me to realise that microbiology is an area that I would like to concentrate on in the future. Using a wheelchair helped me feel more independent and the support worker also helped me to communicate with the hospital staff. This would not have been possible without the support of GO Wales.” Diogo Veloso, USW biology student.

USW is continuing to support students through the programme, and is considering opportunities to mainstream good practice.

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Wrexham Glyndŵr University Careers and Employability Service works in partnership with FLVC and AVOW, umbrella bodies for third sector support in north east Wales. Simultaneously they deliver the University’s regional Civic Engagement Strategy and Employability Strategy, in line with Public Service Board priorities of lifelong learning and community resilience.

Introducing an integral approach, employability seamlessly becomes a rich part of academic work which informs and is informed by teaching and research. Giving students a real taste and flavour of how volunteering looks, its impact on communities and its potential to enhance learning and career development, the following approach was taken.

Focusing on regional employment growth areas, students integrated into real community settings. They worked with health, policing, community development, youth justice, and youth and play professional and local residents to explore the work-based skills required for their chosen careers and how volunteering could develop skills in a practical and real way. Back in the classroom, sessions were delivered by FLVC enabling them to gain accredited qualifications in Volunteering Skills.

This has enhanced awareness and the sharing of knowledge and resources between partners as they look for new ways to solve community challenges. Students have also improved how they articulate the skills and experiences gained from volunteering to potential employers when securing employment.

During Spring 2020 the University is collaborating on further awareness days in the discipline areas of education, families and childhood studies. The view is that this is now regular activity as part of its focus on enhancing employability and delivering its Civic Mission Strategy.

“Great opportunity to immerse students and organisations in volunteering and encourage them to build relationships”. Partner organisation

“I have gained a job from this course and I feel more confident in my volunteering skills.” Student participant

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GO Wales at Aberystwyth University

Breaking down barriers to employment by enabling work experience for under-represented groups

The collaborative approach taken at Aberystwyth University has allowed the Aber+ initiative, delivered as part of its core provision to students, to dovetail with the GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience programme to ensure a seamless transition for students with specified characteristics to fully engage with all the activities of the Careers Service and work experience provision.

In addition, GO Wales teams from different universities regularly explore collaborative approaches to improve the support provided to students and to deliver a greater range of niche work experience opportunities. GO Wales provision is bilingual and Aberystwyth University arranges work experience with Welsh-speaking employers.

Leandra is an astrophysics student on the autism spectrum and living with several other conditions. She wanted to raise awareness and fight for the rights of those with disabilities.

Leandra learnt a great deal in a 20-day work taster with Disability Wales as a Disability Rights Research Assistant. Disability Wales is now exploring ways to offer her paid employment.

“The most satisfying part of the work experience was looking at the statistical evidence. The most challenging was the physical aspect of getting to the office. However, this was valuable for me to learn, as it will help me look at future jobs and housing critically. This experience has been invaluable for me and I would like to thank GO Wales for their help and support, as this would not have been possible for me to do on my own.” Leandra, astrophysics student

Chris was looking to find a career related to geotechnical engineering. He comes from a deprived area and with few opportunities. The University sourced a work placement with Terra Firma (Wales). Chris was involved in producing geo-environmental desk studies, attending site visits and writing up reports. The placement led to a job offer.

“I started off expecting to gain a week-long experience with a company that I could use in my CV. However, thanks to GO Wales, I managed to undertake a month-long placement with Terra Firma, where an offer to work full-time was made and accepted. My future career in geotechnical engineering has been solidified by the GO Wales team.” Chris, geotechnical engineering student

For many students, one work experience opportunity is not enough for them to feel confident that they have sufficiently increased their employability. The service GO Wales provides is one of continuing support until they reach a stage where an individual feels ready for the workplace.

Employers in Wales also benefit from engaging with a work experience scheme that has diversity at its heart:

“GO Wales is a very worthwhile programme and its aims of supporting individuals at university that may face barriers to work fits closely with our values. We are happy to provide work experience opportunities for GO Wales and prioritise placements that help to create a level playing field in terms of access to opportunities for students from all backgrounds.”

Ceredigion County Council

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University departments compete to host a student internship. The projects with the best employability outcomes are selected to provide a diverse range of paid internships. By removing prior experience as a selection criterion, the scheme allows talented but inexperienced students to gain exciting graduate level work experience within a supportive environment.

The scheme has increased over the years from a starting point of 35 to 137 internship projects funded across the University for 2020. Only the most interesting and employability-enriching projects are funded to ensure high quality outcomes for students. By removing prior experience as a selection criterion, the University is nurturing its students’ talents and giving them confidence-boosting new experiences. The projects produce exciting outcomes with real world impact in areas such as conservation, applied research, community cohesion, Welsh language and heritage, and social justice.

The University monitors the demographics of its applicants to ensure all student groups are proportionally represented in application and successful appointment. The feedback from students year on year demonstrates the quality of the opportunities and the support they receive: last year 100% of students said they felt more confident applying for jobs because of their internship experience.

The value to the hosting department is immense as they benefit from the ideas and skills of talented students: last year 100% of staff hosts said they would recommend the scheme to colleagues.

“[The three internships linked to Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates (and partners)] added considerable value. It was great to share and develop our objectives with such enthusiastic interns; they all contributed to significant projects which have helped to develop our profile and sector engagement. They have actively helped strengthen collaboration with partners, within and external to the university.” Dr. Shaun Evans, Director of ISWE

Bangor University will be continuing to grow the number of internship project offered so that the maximum number of students and hosting departments can benefit.

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Sourcing placements with our alumni

Partnership working between the Careers and Employability Service and the Development and Alumni Relations (DEVAR) department to engage alumni in providing work experience placements for students.

Cardiff University is committed to supporting its students to develop the skills and attributes they need to secure the graduate level employment to which they aspire, and work placements are central to this commitment. Cardiff University alumni are often keen to give back to their institution and the University works with DEVAR to create opportunities for them to inspire students and offer work experience opportunities.

The scheme funds two of the University’s placements team, Futures Connect. This team arranged 930 placements in the last academic year. Momentum is building in engaging alumni to commit to hosting a student placement. As a result of referrals from DEVAR, 64 opportunities have been identified, resulting in 42 students being placed.

Placements provided by alumni include:

- **HHJ Robert Linford**, a Truro-based circuit judge who offered students the opportunity to shadow him for a week to gain an insight into the work of the judiciary. This opportunity was very popular with many applications. Five students have so far been to Truro for a week-long insight and the alumnus is keen to host more.
- **Moorhouse Group Limited** specialises in insuring tens of thousands of UK SMEs with business insurance products online. The Careers Service’s collaboration with DEVAR has resulted in three paid intern positions so far, with promise of more. These opportunities were in diverse areas of the business including HR, Software Development and SQL Development. The students placed included an English language undergraduate and postgraduates in data science and analytics, and in advanced computer science.
- **Marie Curie** is a registered charity that provides care and support to people with terminal illnesses and their families. In 2017-18 the University placed a history student in a Corporate Partnerships insight placement with a graduate in London. Since then the Careers Service has developed a further relationship with the Cardiff Marie Curie branch, placing a further eight students in a range of short insights and longer internship opportunities.

"As feedback on the process of finding the candidate and offering a job to M we have only positive things to say. It was an easy process. The CVs sent through were all relevant and impressive in their way and in terms of the accuracy of the CVs, M’s was spot on. We have discussed interns with a few universities and this process was by far the easiest and most productive. 10/10 for Cardiff. Whatever you are doing just keep on doing it. It worked for us at KGAL. If at the end of M’s degree, he wants to pursue a career in this type of engineering he need only knock on our door, it is always open.” Andy McGhee – Associate Director KGAL, Cardiff Alumnus

“This project has been a great example of collaborative partnership working. So many people from multiple teams in and external to the University have worked hard to make this a success. I’ve been most impressed by our approach to continuous improvement. The ability to be constructively critical of process, identify keys to success, and adapt to improve, so that we’re meeting the needs of our students and alumni.” Barry Sullivan – Deputy Director and Head of Alumni and Supporter Relations, Cardiff University

The University hopes to continue to grow this, using interesting case studies to encourage increased uptake from alumni.

Sourced by the Director of Development and Alumni Relations, a member of the University’s Executive Board, the partnership was established four years ago. The scheme enables two areas of focus – creating opportunities for placement-learning and engaging alumni to inspire students.

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Developing high-skilled graduate employment in south east Wales

A new graduate scheme is aiming to provide high-skilled work experience, enhance productivity, innovation and economic growth among businesses in south east Wales, and promote the region as a destination for talented graduates.

The Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Regional Cabinet has welcomed its first graduates to a new scheme to promote graduate employment and provide targeted support for businesses.

The scheme is partnering highly skilled graduates from the four universities in the region (University of South Wales (USW), Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University and the Open University) with local businesses that are looking to enhance their workforce.

USW represents the universities on the CCR skills board and has worked with business groups to develop the pilot scheme in response to the low graduate retention rates in the region. Not only does the scheme offer a six-month placement to the graduates, it provides them with an induction, various networking events, and the opportunity to achieve a qualification to instil a commitment to continuing professional development early in their careers.

USW is delivering an Institute of Leadership and Management qualification to the cohort, covering all aspects of problem-solving, managing projects, change and improving resilience.

The pilot scheme is supported by all of the partners who sit on the CCR Regional Cabinet, and received £175,000 for its first year (2019/20). To date 22 graduate placements have been created and filled in local businesses, with some now going on to secure full-time permanent employment with their host companies.

"I applied for the graduate scheme as it seemed like a great opportunity to be able to stay locally, while also getting an extra qualification that will go hand-in-hand with my degree. The scheme has helped me meet other graduates and provided me with an opportunity to gain experiences in a sector I've never worked in before. I am hoping to stay on with the company and gain further experience in this sector." Gabrielle Dulskyte USW business management graduate, and Sales and Training Coordinator at Excellence IT

The project has been extended for at least a further 12 months from April 2020, with funding from the Cardiff Capital Region and continued support from the four universities in the region.

More information about the graduate scheme, including how businesses can get involved, can be found on the Cardiff Capital Region website www.ccrgraduatescheme.wales/

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GO Wales

Employability support at Wrexham Glyndŵr University

A dedicated team supports students on a one-to-one basis to develop their employability so that they can secure meaningful paid employment when they graduate.

Working with a target audience of students who meet eligibility criteria, the Wrexham Glyndŵr delivery team, with the help of funding unique to Wales, have supported proportionally more disabled students than any other Welsh university. Recognising that every student is unique and requires person-centred support ranging from a ‘light touch’ to ‘intensive support’, students develop the skills and confidence they need as independent, valued members of communities.

To date, 87 students in 34 subject areas have been supported through working jointly with academic and professional colleagues to meet the needs of students, with further support from employers across all industry sectors.

Students and graduates can experience discrimination when trying to enter the employment market. Some find this challenging, which can impact adversely on their mental and physical health.

Advisers recognise this and adjust the pace of the journey to suit the individual. This is crucial to the long-term well-being of students and the success of the programme. Progression is crucial, so partnering with organisations including The Prince’s Trust, Scope, and Leonard Cheshire ensures that graduates are supported.

Wrexham Glyndŵr University is ensuring that this good practice is embedded into core delivery when current funding finishes. This model has the potential to provide much broader support to all students throughout their HE journey.

“Amazing opportunity to get experience with Dynamic which has guided me to pursue a career in a SEN school. ... Great opportunity to spend my time towards future job prospects through this experience. The support from my adviser was amazing, she believed that I could accomplish and enjoy this work experience when I had doubted myself [and she was] extremely passionate to help us get contacts, meetings and gain insight in experience we need. [This] made the whole experience more worthwhile and it is extremely valuable.” GO Wales placement student

“Really high quality, the work placements you are finding the students are excellent - best in the sector! Especially given the quality of support the students are getting.”

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GO Wales at the Open University in Wales

Boosting employability through work experience

This case study looks at the impact of the GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience programme on an individual student studying law with the Open University. This is an example of how work experience, together with mentoring and coaching, can help students overcome barriers. It illustrates how such interventions can improve general employability, increase self-confidence, encourage greater motivation and transform aspirations.

Rosie lives in rural Wales. She feared she was destined for a lifetime of low pay and insecure employment so enrolled with the Open University to study law. Residing in a low HE participation neighbourhood, under twenty-five years old, and identifying as being of mixed race heritage, she was eligible for GO Wales. She scored low on the GO Wales Employability Assessment, and had encountered barriers associated with living in a rural area, so was also suitable for support. The GO Wales Adviser brokered a short placement with a small family firm of solicitors. Rosie learnt about conveyancing, family law, probate and criminal law but felt there was a disconnect between her studies and the actual work undertaken by the firm.

Rosie’s second placement was with a large international law firm which had an office in Cardiff, employing more than 400 people. Rosie shadowed trainee solicitors and reviewed real cases involving commercial, contract and employment law.

“\textit{This time I was able to apply the research skills I learnt through my degree to the real-life job of a solicitor. The most challenging aspect ...was adapting to the environment: the office was huge with hundreds of staff; the atmosphere was extremely busy. Not only am I more confident about my future but I am more motivated about my studies...nothing will stop me now.}” Rosemary Kumar-Taylor, OU student and GO Wales participant

For Rosie, participation in the GO Wales programme was transformational, and with newfound confidence she began applying for solicitor traineeships. She scored highly on her new Employability Assessment and had the confidence to organise her own work experience. She worked on a Street Law Workshop to devise an interactive activity in a designate school and she is providing online legal advice through the Rawtenstall Project (a partnership between The Open Justice Centre, Lancaster University’s law clinic, the local MP and the Social Justice Centre in Rawtenstall).

The Open University in Wales is considering opportunities to create a legacy project tailored to the needs of its students who are engaged in distance learning after the current GO Wales programme ends.

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Lifelong Learning
Career Confident programme

Supporting widening access students with tailored careers support

Career Confident sessions enable widening access students to access careers support and overcome barriers that they may face in securing graduate employment.

The aim is to provide guidance and practical support while building confidence and enhancing students' networks. Effective career guidance in higher education can contribute significantly to realising more equal outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, including through improved retention, attainment and progression to employment.

A dedicated Careers Adviser with a remit to support widening access students has been appointed.

As students value dedicated and ‘packaged’ support, Career Confident sessions combine a number of elements:

- Introduction to Careers and Employability
- Careers guidance with a dedicated adviser
- CV building session
- LinkedIn session and professional photograph
- Support to find work experience

The sessions are practical so students work on their CV and LinkedIn profile in the sessions while support staff provide help and advice.

This programme embeds good practice from the GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience team and bridges the gap between that programme and ‘mainstream’ provision.

The University is also linking with UK-wide networks and higher education providers to ensure it delivers best practice. Every session is evaluated and the University will continue to develop the support based on feedback.

Career Confident sessions started in the 2019/20 academic year, with 18 students having participated by the beginning of 2020. All students said they felt more confident about the steps they needed to take to improve their employability skills and they rated the day either 9, or 10 out of 10.

“I found the step-by-step format very helpful and the tips insightful.” Career Confident participant

“The right combination of programme, LinkedIn session, along with a discussion with a careers adviser made it rich and very useful.” Career Confident participant

Based on student feedback and best practice in the sector, the University plans to continue to grow and develop its programme to include more interactive and innovative sessions.

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OpenLearn – The Open University’s free online learning platform

Informal learning opportunities for all ages, in all subjects

OpenLearn is a platform which comprises thousands of short, bite-sized, badged courses to assist with personal and professional development. In accessing OpenLearn, participants can use free materials to assist with their learning journey, supporting them with knowledge to boost their confidence or fill skills gaps. OpenLearn is free and there’s no catch.

It gives everyone access to a wealth of excellent educational resources that they can study whenever and wherever they want. In The Open University’s experience, some of the most significant barriers to education are a lack of confidence, a student’s location, the cost of education, and a lack of previous qualifications. They aim to remove these barriers through providing its free – badged with a Certificate of Participation and easy to access – OpenLearn resources.

OpenLearn is an innovative encyclopedia of materials that is tailored towards different levels - beginner, intermediate and advanced - and a vast range of lengths of courses to suit every need. Clearly signposted to further accredited courses to work towards undergraduate study, the OU’s OpenLearn students can follow the pathway to part-time distance learning or they can dip into specific subjects to assist with their learning and confidence building. Whether they want to study for their own wellbeing or develop skills for the workplace, there is something for everyone.

Launched in spring 2020, the new OpenLearn Wales hub has new bilingual resources to include Essential Skills in English and mathematics, and a bilingual school governors’ course. It is the home of free educational content about Welsh and Wales-related content. The OU in Wales is further developing OpenLearn champions in the community, providing local expertise to support informal to formal learning – champions of lifelong learning.

“I did quite a few of the psychology-based OpenLearn courses before I started my course, because I thought I might as well go in knowing something about psychology. I really found them useful.” Heledd Campbell, student

The newly expanded OpenLearn Wales and OpenLearn Cymru gateways will be helpful for a multitude of uses - individuals; business and employers; communities; schools and colleges across Wales – and will signpost to Welsh or Wales-related content.

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Free, online Everyday Skills resources have been developed to support the delivery of the Essential Skills curriculum in Wales. This work is aimed at upskilling adults through flexible learning opportunities, filling knowledge gaps in learners’ portfolio of essential skills, and offering flexible progression pathways through FE and work-based learning to HE. As a piece of work focused on lifelong learning, it enables Adult Learning Wales, FE colleges and other community-based groups to reach new learners on a huge scale.

These courses are delivered in or outside of the classroom, and learners have 24/7 access on The Open University’s existing and successful mass-reach open access platform, OpenLearn.

It also builds capacity in the FE sector for developing and delivering flexible learning models. This piece of work addresses:

- **Equality and diversity** through developing and providing flexible, online learning resources that provide 24/7 access to courses on an existing mass-reach open access platform.
- **Welsh medium** provision as the OU in Wales has produced two Everyday Maths courses that are fully bilingual.
- **Collaboration** as the Open University in Wales as worked with four FE partners: Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales, Coleg Cambria, Coleg Gwent and the NPTC Group of Colleges.

“**A few dyslexic learners who had little or no confidence prior to enrolling on the English 1 course reported that they have seen noticeable improvements in their English skills. Perhaps more significantly, they have also gained in confidence to the point where they’re planning to enrol on other OU and AOC/ALW courses.**” Clive Morgan, Essential Skills and ESOL Manager at AOC/ALW

“One ESOL learner has progressed to University as a result of completing the Level 2 Everyday English and Level 1 Maths.” Melyn Jones, Project Coordinator/Tutor at Coleg Gwent

“The course material is of an exceptionally high standard and exemplifies the quality and standards at Cambria and also the OU skills and expertise in designing online and distance learning courses.” Amanda Morgan, Deputy Director Basic-Essential Skills at Coleg Cambria

“This provision is a useful tool to reinforce learning for the ESW qualifications and for Access learners to reinforce their skills.” Andrea Davies, ESW Cross College Co-ordinator at NPTC Group of Colleges.

Following the pilot phase of the project, the University will formally launch the courses and promote to a wider audience, to include:

- A high-profile launch event with senior stake holders including HEFCW and extended FE colleagues across Wales.
- Video case studies and related collateral to promote the courses.
- Promotion in the Welsh medium press to highlight the Welsh language Everyday Maths 1 and 2 courses.
- Workshops with existing partners and other FE colleges across Wales to promote the Everyday Skills content and the benefits of blended learning.

As part of HEFCW’s Enhancing HE-FE Collaboration in Innovation and Engagement Activity funding, the courses had reached more than 2,500 learners by January 2020.

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BrightSparks uses performing arts to raise aspirations and challenge gender specific roles in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) among key stage 2 students living in areas of deprivation across north and mid Wales.

The students complete various tasks and games that involve team working, listening, problem solving, experimenting and designing. These are all essential employability skills which employers want their employees to have.

By using bilingual actors and role-play, the students are learning about STEM and employability skills in a fun and innovative way. They are being encouraged to challenge, research and evidence their findings. As the students are trying to help ‘Eric’ become a Professor like his Aunty Sparky they empathise with the characters and they instantly want to support the characters in helping them achieve their goals and dreams.

The students present back to the actors the following week what they have researched in their teams. This reinforces their own employability goals and study skills.

The impact of the programme is that it:

- Raises awareness of STEM among students, teachers and parents
- Raises awareness of FE and HE opportunities and pathways
- Raises awareness of employment opportunities
- Uses interactive fun to engage young people with STEM, skills and employers
- Helps students learn through self-discovery
- Explores STEM and its application in day-to-day living
- Encourages long term aspiration to careers in STEM

Before their involvement, 39% of students could answer what STEM stood for, which increased to 95% after taking part in BrightSparks. 52% of students wanted to go to university before taking part, which increased to 76% after the “BrightSparks” programme.

The programme is a collaboration between Bangor University, ScottishPower Foundation, Theatr Clwyd and Reaching Wider North and Mid Wales Partnership.

“The interaction between the actors and themselves really engaged the children. There was also a great mix of activities encouraging them to work collaboratively and use thinking skills. The children loved this ‘hands on’ approach. The fun element involved in the whole process was a real hit – they really wanted to help Eric succeed. Students have said they feel they have learnt a lot throughout the sessions”. Michelle Jones, Ysgol Santes Fair Ynys Môn

Scottish Power Foundation confirmed that it would like to contribute £79,000 towards the “BrightSparks” programme in 2019/20. The team is looking to expand the programme to more schools and cohorts through the medium of Welsh.

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Embedding employability into the curriculum and extra-curricular activity
The eMentoring Scheme at Aberystwyth University offers students the opportunity to receive career-related mentoring from graduates via an online platform.

Students can receive support ranging from feedback on a CV, insight into a job field and workplace, and advice on job search and recruitment techniques, to opportunities to visit a mentor’s workplace or to do some work experience.

The eMentoring scheme was established for the University to stay connected with its graduates as they embark on their careers. Graduates who register with the scheme create a profile and decide which of the various mentor services available they feel they can offer students. Due to Aberystwyth’s geographical location, the online nature of the scheme is ideal and the fact that students know the graduates have volunteered willingly to be mentors makes them more approachable and accessible than using more traditional ‘networking’ techniques such as LinkedIn.

The Development and Alumni Office (DARO) funds the scheme and set up the partnership with the external platform holders Aluminati. The Careers Office collaborates closely with DARO on this project and is responsible for promoting eMentoring in all academic departments across the university and in engaging students with mentors. There are currently 703 members, 219 of whom are students. Mentors will have an impact on the career planning and development of students, increasing motivation, reinforcing existing goals and helping to set new goals.

“Jim would help me with career options, what types of Masters to do, his wider network influence and with dissertation interviewees. Jim helped me get in touch with the government for an interview and work on my methodological skills where my degree had not.

“That’s something I would really stress, your degree won’t teach you everything, and the mentoring system helps to plug some of those gaps. Being mentored made me realise what routes of entry there are to career paths in policy.

“I am now a Research Analyst at RUSI and my understanding of research and analysis has been shaped by the mentoring system and the help Jim gave me.” Sneha Dawda, Aberystwyth University graduate

Diversifying the mentor base to include a more representative reflection of the student body, focusing on increasing the number of mentors from Black, Asian and minority ethnic and widening access backgrounds, is an important aim.

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Enterprise by Design

An innovative course where teams of students solve problems for industry partners using design-led thinking

Enterprise by Design is a 10-week multidisciplinary course which brings together students from four different disciplines (business, science, arts, and engineering) to form teams and create innovative ideas that will help enhance the local economy and develop students’ enterprise and employability skills.

Bangor University has cut through traditional academic boundaries to bring students from different subjects together to compete in multi-disciplinary teams for an ‘Enterprise by Design’ challenge with a winning prize of £2,500. 48 undergraduate students studying psychology, electronic engineering and computer science, product design, business, music and media, and sports and exercise science, are challenged to design a new product, service or experience to briefs set by local businesses. The teams are supported by 12 postgraduate facilitators, and academic staff and expert business consultants input into their learning throughout the course.

Enterprise by Design is a unique course because of the way students from different academic backgrounds work from the ground up to make teams, develop novel ideas, and present real world products or designs. The students get the chance to work together as most modern companies do every day, with a team of innovators with an array of strengths and talents.

Partner companies have included Rib Ride and Zip World, and this year the students will be working on two briefs provided by Halen Môn and DMM.

“I think it is essential that academics and entrepreneurs promote multidisciplinary based working. The problem we have in higher education is that we don’t work outside of our disciplines, and this doesn’t reflect how companies actually function.” Dr Andy Goodman, Academic Lead for Enterprise by Design

“The 10 week process has helped me to become the employee that I want to be today. I also learnt what type of employer I wanted to be. The learning I gained from mentors and students across the different disciplines at Enterprise by Design was a large stepping stone to my growing career.”

Daniel Taylor, psychology graduate and business owner in Swindon

“Taking part in Enterprise by Design as an undergraduate helped me achieve my role at Unilever by showing the value of multi-disciplinary collaboration and clarity of communication.”

Matt Kennedy, programme alumnus and Senior Design Engineer at Unilever

While the course has been run on an extra-curricular basis, it has now been validated in the Business School, and further plans are underway to include the programme in the curriculum of other subject disciplines.

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Careers and Employability has collaborated with Academic Schools in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) to produce employability modules with a compulsory placement.

An optional second-year undergraduate module is available in both the School of English, Communication and Philosophy (ENCAP) and the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC). A postgraduate taught module for the MA in translation studies has been developed with the School of Modern Languages (MLANG).

An Academic Lead and a Careers Lead work in partnership in each School to develop and deliver the modules. This level of collaboration is also having a positive impact on the profile of employability within the Schools.

Each School would deliver academic content related to employability alongside the fundamentals of career building. For example, in ENCAP the lectures examine issues of work and the workplace through linguistic, literary and philosophical lenses. The MLANG module uses materials adapted from the project on crafting employability strategies for HE students of languages in Europe, funded by the European Union’s Erasmus+ programme from 2015 to 2017.

Students independently source, secure and complete a work placement, while in MLANG translation placements are sourced by the module leader.

Delivering employability in the curriculum widens access to knowledge and opportunity, which benefits students from a widening participation background. Students have the full support of Careers and Employability in sourcing a placement, including the GO Wales team who support widening participation opportunities.

In 2018/19, student satisfaction with the modules was high. In JOMEC 100% of students were satisfied with the quality of the module and 93% considered that it had ‘provided me with opportunities to explore ideas, practices or concepts in depth’.

"Thank you for your teaching throughout the semester. I have more confidence in getting in the workforce after gaining the knowledge about employability. This is a really good module that should be kept in the future." JOMEC student, 2018/19

"I’m now working in the Communications and Campaigns team as an intern alongside my studies. The opportunity which ENCAP, the employability module and the Careers team has provided has given me invaluable experience and confidence, which I am sure will benefit my future career as an ENCAP graduate." ENCAP student, 18/19

Careers and Employability approached these projects with a view to developing a ‘toolkit’ that can be adapted to other subject areas. A new core undergraduate fieldwork module is being developed with the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences for 2020/21, and two postgraduate taught module teams in JOMEC are interested in a similar collaboration.

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Practice-focused learning, innovative engagement

Using facilities for the benefit of students and the community

Innovative sports-based learning in collaboration with the community can create happier people and happier places, unlocking the potential of Cardiff's citizens.

The Open Campus project places practice-based employability skills at the centre of an innovative new approach to the sports participation curriculum. Participants of all abilities engage in sporting activities, encouraged by their peers, inspired by the elite, and nurtured by Cardiff Met's students.

The Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences senior team, led by Dr Katie Thirlaway, champions this approach to teaching students, providing employability-based training that is accessible and core to all students learning.

Collaboration with the local authority, the wider city region, and schools – all of whom are partners – enhance this new practice-focused approach to teaching physical activity, giving the institution the confidence to embed the initiative into accredited courses and civic offerings. Sport is used as a catalyst for the well-being goals of the Future Generations Act (2015), providing participants of all abilities with the self-motivating tools to prosper, become resilient and healthier.

More than 6,000 young people are expected to engage with the project this year and it is quickly becoming a model for best practice across the region. Students gain practice-focused experience, using the power of sport to enhance learning and unleash the potential in everyone.

Practice-focused learning, with on-campus placements, provides an opportunity for students to engage in real-world scenarios. This physical activity example could easily be transferred to a number of disciplines with a numerous participants.

“We are pleased to support the Open Campus programme located in Cardiff Met’s world-leading facilities. This initiative has gone from strength-to-strength in recent years, thanks to the commitment from staff and students at Cardiff Met. It is quickly becoming a cornerstone of many schools’ physical activity and fitness programmes.”

Karen Trigg, Cardiff Healthy Schools

It is anticipated that Cardiff Met will look for wider engagement with schools, increase the scope and impact of teacher/leader learning through CPD, and increase engagement with community-based groups and non-traditional learners.

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Embedding employability at the heart of the creative industry curriculum

The creative industry curriculum at the University of South Wales is designed around employability, embedding the skills and creativity that students need to be successful in their chosen industry from their very first day.

Courses in the Faculty of Creative Industries are built around creativity, skills and professionalism to help students enter their chosen careers when they graduate.

With many students not having any links to their chosen industry, the curriculum is designed to not only instil transferable skills but to give students the confidence and experience to help them achieve their goals.

On the advertising and graphic communication course, students are taken to a design and advertising agency on their very first day. It sets the standard for what will follow over the next three years and puts the students in a professional mindset.

The projects on the course are live briefs, written and delivered by industry in line with the curriculum. Students are tasked with producing high quality work to tight deadlines, using their creativity and technical skills, mirroring the working environment they will face when they enter graduate employment. They learn to pitch, critique, and work in teams, as well as softer skills, such as interview techniques, and understand more about their own personalities and how to work well with others.

They are exposed to local, regional, national and international projects, designed to strengthen a student’s understanding of the different considerations they will need to give to each.

The skills and confidence that the students learn on the course have led to them working in their chosen career after graduating, including with leading creative agencies FCB Inferno and Wunderman, as well as in-house roles with leading brands.

“We view employability as being core to our curriculum and we believe it is the responsibility of the students to be ready for the working world. As well as teaching skills that are appropriate to the course area, we are focused on developing students’ transferrable skills that they can take into any economic sector.”

“Coupled with offering students lots of practical work experience, networking opportunities and emulating professional working environments and scenarios, we are already seeing the how this approach is helping our graduates enter the profession of their choice.”

Mark Jackson, Director of Design and Digital in the Faculty of Creative Industries

“"The course celebrated students’ different creative goals. We had students who wanted to be designers, copywriters, directors, all of which made for a great group dynamic and mixture of ideas. The course gave me a great foundation of skills in a lot of different creative areas which proved valuable for finding opportunities after university."

“I was able to secure summer placements in Cardiff and Bristol following the end of the degree and had secured a full-time junior position at a design agency by September.”

Sam Foote, USW Advertising Design graduate and Senior Digital Designer at Crowdfunder.co.uk

All courses in the faculty embed employability into the curriculum. The different courses are sharing best practice with each other with increasing collaboration opportunities for students across subject areas.

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Business, social enterprise and mutuals and co-operatives
Countdown to launch

*Using knowledge to innovate start-ups*

Countdown to launch is a practice-focused incubation programme, nurturing entrepreneurial drive and encouraging innovation. Students can visualise freelance, start-up or scale-up scenarios that in turn provide them with new approaches to help them to succeed.

Unlike traditional incubator programmes that focus on business growth, countdown to launch focuses on employability skills at the heart of an entrepreneur’s thinking. The main goal is to nurture an individual’s employability skills, using their entrepreneurial spirit as a catalyst for learning.

The programme embeds employability traits throughout, from talks to workshops, providing the skills to support confident, well-rounded individuals.

The programme has grown year-on-year since it began in 2012 and has now become a key element of the University’s entrepreneurship development offering. Focused interventions such as this have propelled Cardiff Met to become one of the top 15 institutions in the UK for start-up business success.

In 2019, 40 students participated in the scheme, competing for a slice of £20,000 investment provided by partner Santander.

Embedding employability skills provides participants with transferable skills, and could be adopted by any ambition-driven programme, with the focus being on the individual’s core skills.

“*Embedding employability into participants’ thinking gives countdown to launch an innovative edge. The confidence shown by entrepreneurs at the end of the programme is encouraging to see. We’ve seen some innovative business bear fruit, but more importantly, we’ve seen individuals flourish.*” Steve Aicheler, Entrepreneurship Engagement Manager

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Enhancing higher education provision and improving industrial processes through collaborative research projects

Collaboration between UWTSD and Aston Martin yields substantial productivity improvements and provides the business with new skills. The project was undertaken as Aston Martin commissioned a new manufacturing site in south Wales.

Students benefitted from the project through having the opportunity to apply theory to ‘real-world’ industrial applications.

UWTSD and Aston Martin collaborated through a SMART Partnership - a 12 month initiative between a company and university looking at a project which focuses on increasing capability within a business. The UWTSD team worked with Aston Martin to develop the project looking at the development and optimisation of their bonding processes. Two Research Associates were appointed supported by academics, and two company supervisors.

Aston Martin benefitted from an annual saving of more than £500,000, and streamlined a process that had previously taken three months down to 30 minutes. Both Associates were offered full-time jobs at the company and students benefited from the project and the relationship it developed.

Further discussions have taken place regarding opportunities for follow-up SMART Partnership projects looking at product development, engineering and sensory perceived quality. As a result, cross-discipline discussions have taken place at the University between staff from engineering, product design and psychology.

The SMART project resulted in two industrial projects for undergraduate engineering students and spin-out projects that led to paid internship opportunities for students.

"It has had a brilliant effect on the business. We've gained a full-time employee and a huge amount of experience and knowledge. Because of the partnership, we have made our processes more efficient – and even started using processes that we hadn't used before. I don't think we thought this would be as good as it has been" Guy Stanley, Aston Martin

Aston Martin has selected UWTSD as the provider for undergraduate training in the area of manufacturing engineering and related disciplines, and seven Aston Martin employees are enrolled on Bachelor of Engineering programmes at UWTSD.

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In line with its Student Ambassador Scheme (SAS) and a desire for it to become a ‘community of communities’, Swansea University introduced Charity Engagement in 2018 to empower Student Ambassadors to Seek the Cause, Grow the Impact and Be the Change.

The Senior Student Ambassadors are challenged and stretched in order to understand the bigger picture and to identify the greatest needs within the local community of Swansea. This has enabled the University to build relationships with local businesses and social enterprises, collaborating with Crisis, Swansea Mind and Swansea Foodbank for 2018-2021.

In 2018-2019, the SAS held a number of fundraising events including a ‘Clothes Drive’ for Crisis and a ‘March to Mumbles’ for Swansea Mind. They raised more than £1,000 for the chosen charities, and engaged with businesses across south Wales and Swansea University stakeholders, including senior management and the local community.

The impact of Charity Engagement includes the lifelong employability skills gained by the Student Ambassadors, and the impact on their wider well-being and sense of belonging.

The Charity Engagement practices have become embedded, and students are committed to growing the positive impact of the Student Ambassador Scheme. The environment in which students are able to thrive and develop, both individually and as a team of Student Ambassadors, remains innovative within the higher education sector.

“The rise of Charity Engagement within the Student Ambassador Scheme has awarded me the opportunity to expand on my skillset and express my enthusiasm and dedication to our three chosen charities. I have been able to work both independently and as part of a team to organise charity events that look to raise money and spread awareness of the important work each charity does for the local community. These events require great organisation and communication abilities in order to succeed, and through close connections, a willingness to learn and an understanding of what each charity needs in order to provide the best support, I believe the relationships formed between the scheme and charities will continue to grow from strength to strength.”

Louise Lynch, Senior Student Ambassador and Fundraising Officer (2019-2020)

The Charity Engagement has become embedded in the SAS, with each charity chosen by the students, receiving three terms worth of support, allowing for meaningful relationships and ensuring that this activity is sustainable.

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Charity Showcase video: https://youtu.be/AIc1LGmP7bA
UWTSD's Swansea College of Art brought students from different disciplines, with different experiences and skillsets, together to demonstrate how working collaboratively with others could enhance outcomes.

The project grew from the EU-funded Arts and Humanities Entrepreneurship Hub (AHEH), which brings together an alliance of 14 partners from seven European countries to implement entrepreneurial training for arts and humanities staff and students. The project goal is to improve the long-term prospects of graduates and to equip them with the tools and confidence they need to succeed, and the entrepreneurship outcomes could be social, cultural or commercial.

By sharing innovative entrepreneurial practices, the aim is to develop creative enterprise and entrepreneurial thinking skills that enhance graduate employability.

UWTSD students worked alongside representatives from local businesses and community organisations, as well as AHEH partners, to explore creative workplace skills to identify strategies to enhance their career potential.

The project is part of an academic module that focuses on the sustainable development of entrepreneurial skills. It provided a highly motivating learning experience, enhancing students’ skills and raising awareness of possible creative opportunities in a wider industry context while also providing creative solutions to the challenges posed by external partners.

This unique approach of bringing students, academics and businesses together enables them to explore ideas and create opportunities to develop new sustainable businesses, products and services.

Collaborative learning encourages art, design, and media students to use their creative skills in a business and social enterprise context. Mixed discipline student groups engage with social challenges in workshops designed to enhance shared skills and individual confidence.

This week has helped me gain skills and information that I didn’t know or have.”

“I have learnt so much through this module. I will take copyright tips and costing strategies with me to develop my Facebook business.”

“The lecture on pitching an idea was really useful and built up my self-confidence”.

“A great chance to meet new people, network and widen knowledge”.

The University plans to build on momentum by increasing external links and engaging with the wider University subjects.

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Entrepreneurship and enterprise skills
Running a practical module in enterprise for postgraduate students

Linking entrepreneurial and enterprise initiatives to the academic curriculum

This module aimed to introduce students to thinking more enterprisingly about their skills, abilities and research interests. It also led them to engage with activities that they would be unlikely to opt into, given that a limited number of students engage in extra-curricular entrepreneurial activities offered across the University throughout the academic year.

Offering a mix of background knowledge, sharing experience and practical work, this module culminates in extra-curricular entrepreneurial activities. These activities require students to draft a business proposal and participate in a ‘Dragons’ Den’ type event, arranged in collaboration with, and using the expertise of, Aberystwyth alumni.

With a core component taught as the basis of the module, the students are required to take full advantage of the extra-curricular workshops and training sessions offered by the University’s Business Start-Up Week each year.

The module covers:
- Intellectual property rights
- Business types
- Attitude towards risk
- Attributes of entrepreneurs
- Funding a start-up business
- Start-up support from the University (and beyond)
- Ideas generation for a new business or social enterprise
- Business planning
- Financial forecasting and financial control
- Market research
- Marketing and selling of products and services

The module leads the students towards the final event that is run in the style of Dragons’ Den. This is arranged and delivered in close collaboration with the University’s Department of Development and Alumni Relations (DARO) and uses the expertise of the University’s alumni as the judging panel.

Through DARO and their excellent links with alumni, the final event also offers the successful participant a most generous financial reward to support them in progressing with their entrepreneurial ideas.

“Each year we attract a small group of particularly pro-active, entrepreneurially-minded students, who have actual business or social enterprise ideas they are looking to develop, typically related to their area of research.” Tony Orme, Module Co-ordinator

This module is now well-established as part of a suite of postgraduate modules.

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YMLAEN (Welsh for ONWARDS) is a scheme that gives students and graduates the opportunity to work on their own business as an equal experience to a paid work placement. The YMLAEN scheme was successfully piloted in 2017. It was a direct response to the typical journey of student entrepreneurs growing their businesses by working in their bedrooms or at their kitchen tables. The scheme has been extended to 2021 by grant funding from Welsh Government’s Big Ideas Wales.

Students on the scheme receive desk space in one of Cardiff’s co-working communities, a buddy system within the space, structured support from a Business Mentor, and a small monthly financial stipend, either to invest in their business or to help cover personal costs. As a pilot, YMLAEN was a collaboration between the Cardiff University Enterprise and Start-up Team, Creative Cardiff and Rabble Studio. The scheme placed student entrepreneurs and freelancers within the Rabble Studio co-working space in Cardiff to develop their businesses alongside a professional community of likeminded mentors.

The scheme has been expanded to enable more student entrepreneurs to access co-working communities across the Cardiff Capital Region. The scheme now collaborates with Rabble Studio, Welsh ICE, Tramshed Tech, and Cardiff Business Technology Centre.

In 2019, nine students and graduates were placed in professional workspaces to help develop and grow their businesses. This included SmallSpark Space Systems, founded by an MSc physics graduate and which subsequently secured £100k investment from SPRINT.ac.uk; and Route Konnect, founded by a Doctor of Philosophy (engineering) student who has secured a £30k investment from the Department of Transport.

The knowledge, experience and demand this scheme will generate can be directly transferred to a new student co-working space in Cardiff University’s Innovation Central building, a major capital build due to open in 2021. Positive relationships with local businesses across the Cardiff Capital Region will be maintained beyond 2021, potentially enabling in-kind support to continue the scheme beyond the funding period.

"I've achieved more in a month of being on YMLAEN than I have in six months of working in my bedroom. I've been able to get business advice and speak to other start-ups who are going through similar stages to setting up a business as myself." Sebastian Walker, BMus music graduate based in TramshedTech

The scheme will continue to grow over the remaining funding period, after which the activity can be transferred to a new student co-working space in Cardiff University’s Innovation Central, due to open in 2021.

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https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/studentlifecu/free-co-working-space-with-ymlaen/
Creative and collaborative enterprise innovation

Interdisciplinary project teams create innovative prototypes, Tech Start-Ups and solutions for industry and community projects.

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David has introduced the Enterprise and Innovation Group Project module and the Innovation Competition to support interdisciplinary teams of students to develop their enterprise, innovation and employability skills. They enable students to work with industry or community partners to create prototypes and solutions to problems.

The Group Project enables students from eight computing and electronics HND and degree programmes to collaborate with each other and with external industry and community organisations, to enhance their technical and employability skills through industry support and collaboration, and to work on real-world challenges. Students discover what motivates them and develop innovative solutions supported by industry partners.

This is a valuable learning opportunity that enhances their engagement.

Students form inter-disciplinary teams around their interests and decide to either progress with these ideas or choose an industry or community project. The students are supported to learn essential and core topics. Talks from experienced industry representatives and dynamic role models provide inspiring knowledge and expertise throughout the module as do relevant industry events, hackathons and visits to external organisations. Industry partners are keen to support innovative initiatives, provide collaborative projects, work experience opportunities and employ new graduates.

The end-of-year Innovation Competition allows students to pitch their innovative prototypes, tech start-up plans and industry or community project solutions to industry representatives who provide further support and opportunities. Past winners have received seed funding to develop their prototypes, created tech start-up companies, employed local graduates and enhanced the prosperity, economic regeneration and sustainability of the region.

All students who complete the module receive an Enterprise and Innovation Certificate of Achievement at the end of year Innovation Competition, to enhance their CPD CV and employability prospects. Winning Teams receive trophy awards and prizes from industry sponsors.

“We recognise the value of innovation in academia and were delighted to sponsor the 2019 Enterprise and Innovation Competition. James Williams and his team have supported a fantastic group of students from a variety of disciplines to create some cutting-edge technical innovation.” Guy Wendon, Alacrity Foundation

“All of the teams presented innovative business opportunities as well as some really viable products that could be taken forward into real businesses.” Anne Swift, Welsh Government Enterprise Manager

“This is a really important piece of work in the tech market today. Being able to pitch and raise money is up there with one of the most important skills for entrepreneurs”. Paul Harwood, Techhub

The Alacrity Foundation will be providing additional workshops for students to learn from their experienced team, and the Wales Co-op will provide a number of community projects.

Tutor James Williams received the National Enterprise Catalyst Award in 2019 from Enterprise Educators UK. He has created a working group with relevant and senior colleagues from other subject areas to create additional learning opportunities to facilitate cross-functional student teams to work on further innovative solutions and real-world challenges.

Innovation Competition:
- Competition webpage: uwtsd.ac.uk/wisa/competition/
- Video: https://tinyurl.com/s9gqwbk/
- Courses: www.uwtsd.ac.uk/computing/

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The University of South Wales’s Startup Stiwdio is the first standalone university-based business incubator in Wales. It aims to encourage and support entrepreneurship among USW’s graduate and alumni population, and provides a safe haven in which they can test and develop enterprising ideas.

The Startup Stiwdio offers support and office space to graduate-led SMEs. Those based at the Startup Stiwdio are supported through USW’s entrepreneurship strategy, which is part funded by the Welsh Government. This includes access to programmes such as Start-Up Days and business networking events.

All entrepreneurs also attend a weekly business development bootcamp, an intensive programme of start-up support, which includes elements of the Nesta Creative toolkit and the ‘Innovation Drill’ ideation toolkit from MIT.

Startup Stiwdio focuses on supporting creative and digital businesses to make the most of the links with the USW Faculty of Creative Industries, which is also based at the Cardiff Campus.

A number of organisations - including Bridgend-based United Worldwide Logistics - are offering enterprise scholarships to cover the first six months’ membership costs for graduate entrepreneurs. A range of other businesses are also offering free professional advice, including Capital Law, Mazuma accountancy, and UDL Intellectual Property.

Graham Morrison, an alumnus who graduated with a computer science degree from one of USW’s predecessors, the University of Glamorgan, is based at the Stiwdio as he develops his business COADE 3.

“Startup Stiwdio is the fact that it’s part of USW. In other places I have been based, there has been a network of small businesses working together, but that never seemed to benefit me, or be linked to bigger businesses. What I am finding with Startup Stiwdio is the name of USW opens doors, it gets other big businesses involved, some major names, and has people available who can do what I can’t with my business - finance and business planning for starters.

“That’s what I need. I have plans to make my business grow and employ people, and that will only be possible with the sort of support I am getting here. I’m just really glad that I’m part of it from the outset.” Graham Morrison

“The Startup Stiwdio is already demonstrating that entrepreneurship is at the heart of what we do at USW. Although only open for a few months, major links have already been created with others operating in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem to help boost enterprise within the University.

Add to this the support we have already received from businesses such as NatWest and OrangeBox, we have been able to focus our resources on supporting those young people who want to become the entrepreneurs of the future.” Professor Dylan Jones-Evans, Assistant Pro Vice–Chancellor of Entrepreneurship at USW

With financial support from HEFCW’s Civic Engagement Fund, the Stiwdio is providing pre-commercial incubation facilities to graduate-led SMEs over the next five years through the provision of 18 desks, three offices, and hotdesking space for up to 20 individuals.

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Rethinking business for a changing world

Putting sustainability at the core of UWTSD’s business provision

UWTSD’s ‘Rethinking Business for a Changing World’ initiative is changing the nature of business studies through undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that are underpinned by sustainable, ethical and responsible thinking, and drawing on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

UWTSD’s Carmarthen Business School recognises that business has to adapt and become part of the solution rather than the problem by taking responsibility for people and place. It has therefore designed a portfolio of programmes that has sustainable and ethical thinking at its core.

In 2018, the ‘Rethinking Business for a Changing World’ initiative won the prestigious EAUC Green Gown Award in the ‘Tomorrow’s Employees’ category in recognition of best practice within the further and higher education sector. Learners are empowered to investigate and challenge existing business models and debate business solutions, which prepare them for employment in the rapidly changing local and global context.

In addition to an undergraduate business programme that is underpinned by an ethical and sustainable approach, Carmarthen Business School has developed an MBA in sustainability leadership. The programme, which is fully online, has attracted students from around the world who are working to become sustainability leaders for their organisations.

UWTSD is also working in partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council’s Economic Development Division linking students with Carmarthenshire based organisations through placement learning. Both organisations are working together to help enhance the interaction between the business sector and higher education within the county. The ‘Llwybr Sir Gâr: Rethinking Carmarthenshire’s Economy’ strategy has initially focused on providing opportunities for students to undertake task and finish placements of a minimum of 20 days within an organisation.

“At UWTSD we strive to ensure that our graduates are equipped with the understanding, empathy and creativity to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of both Wales and other nations. Our graduates will become part of the shaping of business thinking in the world for our next generations," Dr Louise Emanuel, Institute of Management and Health, Carmarthen.

The University has embedded sustainability at the core of its curriculum and will continue to develop its offer liked to the goals of the Welsh Government’s Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

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