

Employer-led Interdisciplinary Student Projects: What Actually Works?



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Conference Sub-Theme: External Partnerships

Poster Description

This poster outlines the pedagogical and practical partnership approaches underpinning the 30-credit module, 'Employer-led Interdisciplinary Project'. This 12 week module is offered to penultimate year undergraduate students in the School of Social Science at the University of Aberdeen. It attracts students from non-vocational degrees such as Politics and International Relations, Sociology, and Anthropology, as well as from other degree subjects beyond the School, including Economics, Philosophy and Modern Languages.

A central component of the module is an experiential learning opportunity delivered through a virtual, interdisciplinary group project provided by a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME), start-up business, or third-sector charity. Typically, students work in a group of three to four when undertaking their project. These external projects are often sourced through Interface, funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC.) This external partnership has facilitated a diverse range of geographically dispersed, project opportunities for our students. Examples include the development of a business social media strategy, a not-for-profit initiative with a social enterprise, both are illustrated on the poster.

Since the module's inception, a key element of the teaching approach has been supporting students in undertaking their externally hosted project through weekly, on-campus workshops. Workshop topics are varied and include Belbin's Team Roles, Consultancy Skills, and Using Social Media in Research. These interactive sessions are important to facilitate students' interdisciplinary learning and skills development, as well as exposing them to applied learning (Milligan et al, 2020). Many of these workshop topics are also designed and delivered by employers and help to support the development of students' future-ready skills (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Formative assessments in the module support students' skills development through a group project summary, 10-minute progress video, and a Padlet meet-and-greet activity. A required group contract reinforces commitment. Together, these scaffold learning, promote authentic tasks, and build confidence, preparing students for summative assessments while enhancing engagement with their employer-led project in a real-world context setting (Perkins & Durkin, 2025).

For educators interested in introducing or enhancing employer sourced interdisciplinary, virtual project-based learning within their own context, the focus of the poster is to share **what worked**, the **challenges encountered**, and the **forms of support that made a difference** to delivering this provision with external partners. The poster is likely to be of interest to degree programme directors, educational developers, and academics interested in employer partnership working.

References

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