

Employer-led Interdisciplinary Student Projects: What Actually Works?

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Overview

This poster explores the pedagogical and partnership approaches underpinning the 30 credit, 'Employer led Interdisciplinary Project' module at the University of Aberdeen. The module is offered to penultimate year undergraduates in the School of Social Science and attracts students from non-vocational programmes, including Politics and International Relations, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Philosophy, and Modern Languages (Durkin & Perkins, 2025).

A key module feature is the 12 week experiential learning opportunity delivered through virtual, interdisciplinary group projects set by SMEs, start-ups, and third sector organisations. Students typically work in groups of three to four on real-world briefs, many sourced through Interface, a Scottish Funding Council supported organisation linking universities with external partners. The poster highlights what worked, challenges encountered, and the support that made a difference to delivering this work-integrated learning teaching provision with external partners (Fleming et al., 2023).

What Worked?

- ✓ Empowering students with choice by allowing them to select a group project topic aligned with their interests.
- ✓ Integrating key pedagogical touchpoints to strengthen learning and reinforce module requirements.
- ✓ Engaging with diverse sectors and organisations to source relevant, real-world projects.

What Challenged?

- ✗ Managing project creep by over ambitious project hosts.
- ✗ Navigating schedule issues as the Spring vacation break interrupts project continuity.
- ✗ Overcoming timetabling challenges for diverse degree programmes.

What Made a Difference?

- ✓ Undertaking partnership working with Interface who source the projects.
- ✓ Using formative assessments to identify student or project issues early.
- ✓ Receiving the University Principal's Excellence Award for Outstanding Interdisciplinary Module Team award.

References

Durkin, S., & Perkins, J. (2025). Bridging the gap: The collaborative impact of enterprise education and small businesses on student skills development. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 13(4), 4-19. <https://doi.org/10.56433/6dys8194>

Fleming, J., Ferns, S. J., & Zegwaard, K.E. (2023). Benefits of work-integrated learning for host organizations. In K. Zegwaard & J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook for Work-Integrated Learning* (3rd ed.) pp.113-130. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156420-9>

