

## Closing the Gap

### The Benefits and Challenges of Embedding Work-Related Learning in the Taught Curriculum

Report on the Real WoRLD pilot studies

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## 1. Introduction

This report presents the results of five pilot studies which were conducted in the second phase of the Real WoRLD project <sup>1</sup> in the academic session 2009-2010. The pilots involved four undergraduate modules and one postgraduate programme from three schools (CBS, LSS, SEC). A total number of 386 survey responses was collected from students on those modules. 81 students participated in 15 focus groups. Five academics and five employers took part in semi-structured interviews.

The overall aim of the pilots was to identify and evaluate the perceived impact of integrated work-related learning activities on the students, staff and employers involved. The work-related learning tasks were embedded in the taught curriculum <sup>2</sup>, formally assessed and accredited (see figure 1 for details). The pilots were chosen because they offer students learning opportunities that meet the criteria for work-related learning as stipulated in Real WoRLD's 'Principles of Work-Related Learning'<sup>3</sup>. The 'principles' define work-related learning as activities which

- provide students with learning opportunities to integrate theory and practice
- achieve learning outcomes that state what the students will be able to do in the workplace
- encourage and support students' interest in a wide variety of careers
- require students to take on an active rather than a passive role in the learning process
- accommodate cultural diversity.

It is important to note that not *all* principles need to be embedded in *all* modules of a given programme which claims to engage students in work-related learning. However, it is essential that such programmes can substantiate their claim by providing evidence of visible work-related learning opportunities for students in *all* years and at *all* levels of difficulty. **The aim of the research presented here is to evaluate the 'principles' and their usefulness in shaping work-related learning at Glasgow Caledonian.** Figure 1 presents an overview of the pilots. Further details are provided in appendix 1.

Figure 1: Real WoRLD pilots

School	Subject discipline	Level	Module/ programme title	Work-related learning activity	Number of student survey responses	No of students in focus groups	No of academic staff interviewed	No of employers interviewed
CBS	Fashion, Marketing and Retail	1	"Personal development and self-presentation"	Client-based project	102	12	1	1
SEC	Computing	1	"Integrated Project 1"	Team-based project linked to career paths	159	29	1	n/a
LSS	Law	3	"Innocence Project"	Students work with real-life criminal cases	11	11	1	n/a
CBS	Economic Studies and International Business	4	"International Business Strategy"	Client-based project	97	16	1	1
SEC	Design	PG	Programme: "MA Design Practice and Management"	Internships in industry	17	8	1	3
					<b>386</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

<sup>1</sup> Based in the Caledonian Academy, Real WoRLD is GCU's employability initiative <http://www.academy.gcal.ac.uk/realworld/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> For more details of the pilots, see appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> For details of the principles, reflective questions and references, see appendix 2.

The study aims to

- identify students', academics' and employers' perceptions of essential graduate employability skills
- analyse the reported benefits of work-related learning
- evaluate the challenges involved in embedding work-related learning in the taught curriculum
- make recommendations for embedding work-related learning university-wide.

## 2. Methodology

The data collection process was based on informed consent. Students were asked to fill in an on-line survey questionnaire at the beginning and the end of each pilot. In one case (Law pilot: *Innocence Project*) only one survey was administered at the start. Given the small number of students involved in this pilot, it was considered more appropriate to conduct a second focus group at the end of the module instead.

The questionnaires were divided into three major sections: demographic information (age, programme, gender, practical work-experience), evaluation of their own employability skills and career plans. To help students understand what the term 'employability' means, this section was divided into four sub-sections on different skills sets:

- Commercial skills (e.g. identifying commercial opportunities; developing and presenting an operations/ project plan; dealing with clients)
- Learning skills (e.g. learning without much guidance; reflecting on own performance; evaluating own strengths and weaknesses)
- Transferable skills (e.g. written/ oral communication; problem solving; critical thinking)
- Teamworking skills (e.g. take a lead in group discussions; finding a solution to team conflict; supporting team members)

Students were asked to assess their own skills at the beginning and at the end of each pilot. Since the pilots took place in different subjects and had different learning outcomes, the description of the skills was adjusted to fit in with the specific learning contexts; i.e. the 3<sup>rd</sup> year law students were asked about their case management skills while the first year *Integrated Project 1* students in Computing were required to comment on their project management skills. The wording of the section on teamworking skills was identical in all surveys because they applied equally to all pilots. For examples of the questionnaires, see appendix 3. Links to the survey were sent to the students via e-mail. At the end of the survey they were asked to provide their e-mail address if they wanted to take part in the focus groups.

The five academics interviewed were the module/ programme leaders of the pilots. The interviewed employers had contributed to the teaching and assessment in the modules either by preparing a project brief for the students, hosting them on internships or assessing their performance at the end of the pilots. Four of them came from the private sector (two managing directors and one head of department of small companies in the creative industry, one manager from a medium sized food retailing company), one from the voluntary sector (area business manager for a large national charity).

The data from the surveys was analysed statistically using Kendall's Tau correlations and Pearson's chi square tests. The data from the focus groups and the interviews was recorded, transcribed and analysed by coding the responses and clustering them around key themes which arose from the question frameworks (see appendix 3 and 4 for sample of questionnaires and question frameworks).

### 3. Results

The mixed-method research approach generated a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data. Only a small percentage of it can be presented in this report which focuses on the universal lessons learnt from the pilots. A more detailed analysis will be provided in future Real WoRLD papers.

#### 3.1 Essential graduate employability skills: views from focus groups and interviews

##### 3.1.1 The student view

The students in the focus groups listed a variety of employability skills. Team working and time management skills were cited most often. Other skills deemed important were oral presentation skills, practical experience and confidence. Highly developed written communication skills, so often demanded by employers<sup>4</sup>, were not mentioned spontaneously as an essential employability skill. **First year students in particular did not always recognise the need to put effort into improving their writing skills.** Many of them admitted to finding it difficult to write accurately and fluently but they did not consider it a priority to address that in their studies.

One Fashion Marketing student put it like this:

*Researcher: "Do you think writing skills are important?"*

*Student: "To an extent yes but it's getting pretty phased out because people just communicate, fly emails back and forward and you don't have to be as formal. Obviously you don't sort of write in text talk but you don't have to write formal sentences in an email if you're just sending it to a colleague." (First year, Fashion student)*

The first year Computing students echoed that view. Many of them struggled with writing the reports that are required for the module. They felt that academic credit should be given to their technical skills not their writing ability.

*"I mean, we had 12 weeks to make a website which was less than 10% of our mark, three weeks doing reports was 90% of our mark." (First year Computing student)*

**Fourth year and postgraduate students were more aware of the need to develop their writing skills.** They spoke of the "high standards" expected of graduates when entering employment. The postgraduate students on the MA programme based that view on their experience of working in industry which made them recognise how important writing skills are in the workplace. In fact, one of their main reasons for enrolling on the programme was to improve them. Even at this level some of them struggled with the required writing tasks though.

*"I think the academic essays have been really difficult because coming from a design background we never really had to write. I mean we kind of touched on reports but it was a completely different style and it was slightly difficult to adjust to writing in a marketing style and doing critical analysis." (PG Design and Management student)*

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<sup>4</sup> See CBI reports "Working on the three R's" <http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/functionalskills0906.pdf> and "Fulfilling Potential" [http://highereducation.cbi.org.uk/uploaded/fulfilling\\_potential.pdf](http://highereducation.cbi.org.uk/uploaded/fulfilling_potential.pdf)

It is interesting to note that qualities such as commitment, enthusiasm and a strong work ethic were only touched upon in the focus group discussions. This might be due to the wording of the question which asked for 'skills' rather than 'attitudes'. They also **did not spontaneously make a connection between employability and their learning in the taught curriculum**. Respondents were very aware that placements are important for developing employability skills but apart from that they could only think of extra-curricular activities such as volunteering and part-time work when asked which learning activities would prepare them best for finding a graduate job.

### 3.1.2 The employer view

In sharp contrast to the students the **employers were most interested in discussing a graduate's general attitude**. Three of them had worked with the postgraduate students on their placement modules and all of them felt that the **students needed to improve their level of commitment to the job** and the task in hand if they wanted to be successful in their chosen career. The students often came across as too *"laid back"* and somewhat reluctant to work harder than they worked for their academic studies. They did not always understand the need for making an extra effort or working overtime at short notice because a particular client brief required it or an important deadline had to be met. When asked what he felt the students lacked, one employer put it like this:

*"It's just that sense of urgency, just a desire, it's not just a project, you know, this is real life, guys."*

Another respondent felt that only one of the students who had worked in his company had *"the fire to do really well"*. She *"took the bull by the horn"* and excelled at the task she had been given. The others lacked the necessary drive and enthusiasm to live up to his expectations.

**Another important quality the employers were looking for in the students was the ability to work and think independently without too much guidance** from their managers. They want them to *"find things out for themselves"* to take the initiative, be confident in the value of their ideas and learn from the mistakes they might make in the process.

*"I think you need somebody who is going to take the initiative, somebody who's got the confidence in their thought, the confidence to get things wrong and not be scared of getting something wrong...It's a whole series of little jumps into the unknown... a project is just purely down to them. There is no key, there is no secret... unless you trust your own thoughts you'll never get beyond the starting point."*

All employers took a graduate's technical skills and subject knowledge for granted. If a specialist skills set was required for a particular job, they would provide the appropriate training. **What they could not teach a graduate though was the "desire to succeed", an entrepreneurial, dynamic attitude that gives them the confidence to take on new challenges. The employers felt that it was the university's responsibility to produce graduates with such high ambitions.** A keen interest in learning as much as possible was what the employers are looking for in their new recruits. One interviewee explained that he would only employ graduates who are *"hungry, hungry, hungry"* for knowledge. All employers felt that a university education needs to stretch students sufficiently and give them an insight into real-life working practices so that they are prepared for the pressures and

high demands of the real-life workplace. *“They will sink or swim and the right ones will grab that and run with it.”*

### **3.1.3 The academic view**

The academics who participated in the pilots had similar views. **They also considered it most important for university graduates to bring a dynamic, energetic attitude to the workplace.** They said that the ability to think on your feet, to develop independent ideas, to manage uncertainty and learn from feedback was what they wanted their students to learn in their modules and programmes. It was their ambition as teachers to achieve that through their teaching.

*“... they need that, the ability to be pro-active, the ability to get off their chair, the ability to think, do something, take a knock, get back up, do it again, learn from that and move on.”*

All of the academics interviewed were very passionate about their work with the students. They had designed their modules and programmes to help them develop such an entrepreneurial attitude while they are still at university. Giving students an insight into working and learning in the ‘real world’ was their motivation for involving employers and other external stakeholders in their teaching such as GCU alumni and, in the case of the Law pilot, real clients. That way students would learn that real life problems can be ‘messy’ and unstructured.

*“It’s not about seeking some holy grail of one best answer but being able to play the what-if game. So you are showing the sort of flexibility of mind...dealing with uncertainty, not wanting everything to be absolutely clear...”*

When asked whether they felt that GCU students were ready for that challenge, there was a mixed response. Two of the five respondents were very positive. They felt that the university’s ‘practical’ approach to teaching which encourages students to apply theory to practice produced some *“outstanding”* graduates. One academic was proud of the fact that his students do not *“just learn a knowledge of the subject...it goes beyond that...they can go into clinical settings...a lot better than perhaps other students (from other universities).”*

The remaining three academics were more cautious. **They reported some resistance from students to engage with real-world tasks that put them out of their comfort zones.** The Computing lecturer recalled that each year some first year computing students complained about having to work in teams with their peers. They asked to be ‘allowed’ to work on their own because *“they don’t want to rely on somebody else...”*. They had to be reminded that teamworking skills are essential for future success in the workplace. Most of the interviewed academics felt that even fourth year and PG **students** do not always realise that *“they need to have their eyes open to the horizon”*, that they **need to stretch themselves to achieve the graduate skills employers are looking for.**

*“...from the students I have seen, some of them have got it naturally, too many of them don’t have it and are scared of it, bored by it, nervous of it...”*

Given that these academics have spent an average of ten years each teaching at GCU, their concerns certainly provide food for thought. They based their judgements on *all* the students they have taught over the years rather than just the comparatively small numbers of students in the pilots. It

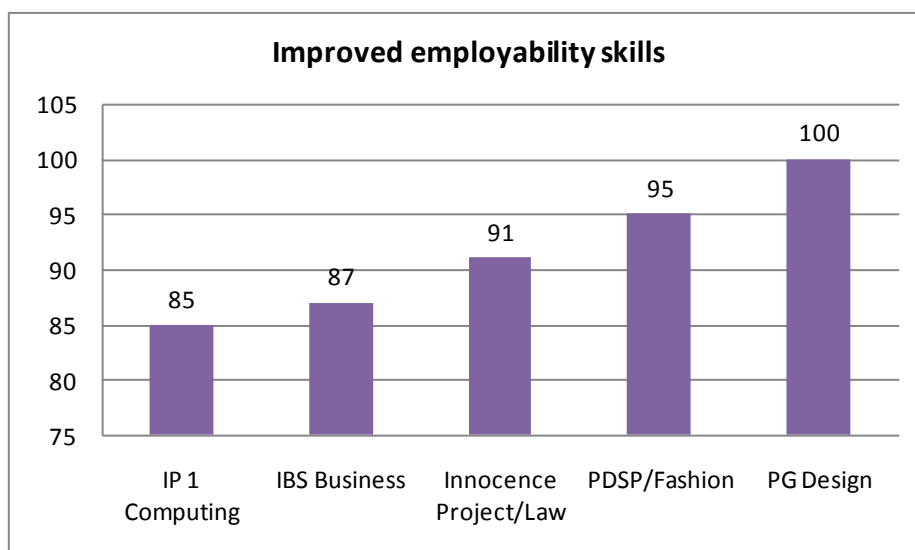
raises the question whether the university makes it sufficiently clear to the students what is expected of them as professionals in a graduate career and how they need to approach their studies to prepare for it.

### 3.2. The benefits of work-related learning: improved employability skills

#### 3.2.1 The student view

The results from the one-line surveys reveal that **89 % of students felt** that their learning on the piloted modules/ programmes **had improved their employability skills.**

Figure 2: Students’ perceptions of improved employability skills per pilot



Note: IP=Integrated Project 1 (year1) ; IBS= International Business Strategy (year 4); Law= Innocence Project (year 3); PDSP/ Fashion= Personal Development and Self-Presentation (year 1); PG Design=MA Design Practice and Management

During the focus group discussions and in their responses to the open questions in the surveys students pointed out that they considered their practical experiences of working on work-related learning projects in the pilots particularly useful for future job interviews because it provides them with evidence that they have the employability skills employers are looking for. Fourth year students in particular showed themselves very aware of the need to prepare professional CV’s for graduate job applications.

*“ I liked the skills it (the module) provides you with as I am currently filling in various graduate job applications and this module is a great example of working in a team, solving complex problems...and also analysis and interpretation of information. Therefore, as a result of this I would conclude that this module has most definitely improved my employability skills.” (4th year Business student)*

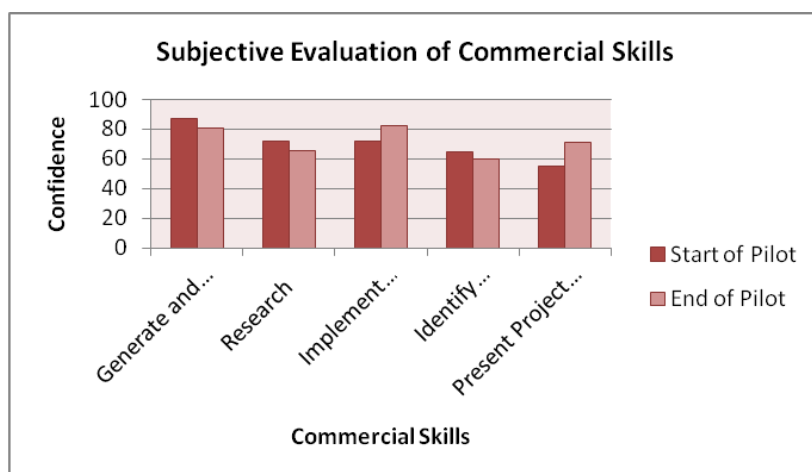
The following section on the students’ skills evaluation will focus on the results from the two pilots that had the most complete set of student responses, the first year *Integrated Project 1* (IP 1) module in Computing and the MA *Design Practice and Management* (DPM). They will act as case studies. Results from the other pilots will be added as and when relevant.

## Commercial skills

Student confidence in a range of commercial skills was subjectively assessed at the beginning and the end of the pilots to establish whether there was a difference between the respondents' evaluations.

For *Integrated Project 1* the assessments at the end showed a change in the distribution of confidence levels. Respondents were **more confident in implementing project plans (82%)**, and **presenting them (71%)** at the end of the module. Statistically the most significant difference was found for respondents' assessment of their presentation skills. Students felt that they were better presenters at the end than they had been at the start (see figure 3

Figure 3: Commercial skills evaluation in Integrated Project 1



Note: generate= I can generate and prioritise new ideas; research= I can research commercial opportunities; implement= I can implement a project; identify= I can identify commercial opportunities in the marketplace; present= I can present a project plan.

It is interesting to note here that **students felt less confident in three of the five skills at the end of the module**. Given that they are first year students who are almost exclusively school leavers they might have had very little experience of these skills before they started the module. Their confidence in their own abilities might therefore have been unrealistic and unsubstantiated. It was not until they had actually experienced how much effort and commitment was involved in developing these skills that they were in a position to assess their own abilities more realistically. The data from the focus groups supports that point. **The respondents felt that their learning experience in first year had provided them with a more realistic starting point for their future studies.**

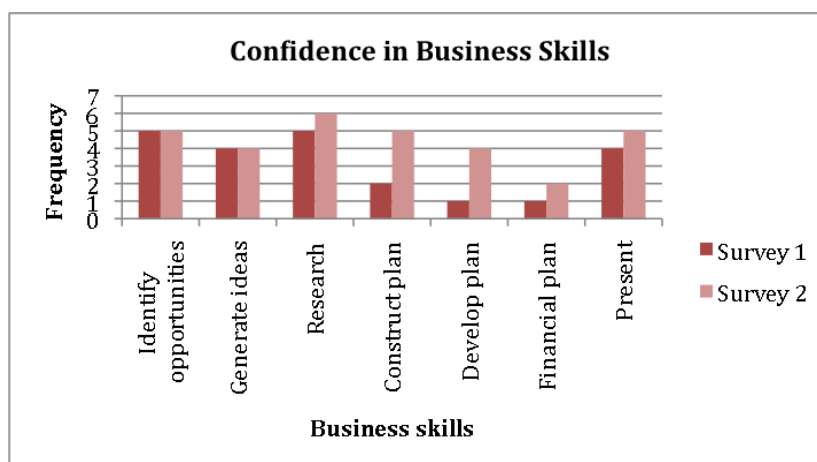
*“Well, I think it (the module) sort of prepared the groundwork. Obviously there’s a lot further to go, at least two years to go, but you’re starting to learn some things that you can’t do. Like you can’t leave things to the last minute, like you could maybe do in school.”(First year Computing student)*

Students from the second first year pilot in the Business School agreed:

*“ Yeah, I think they’ve kind of opened a door and they’ve taught us all these things and it’s now we can really go forward in second year and see what’s ahead and maybe try and develop on the skills.They’ve maybe identified to us that we’ve maybe not got them.” (First year Fashion student)*

In the **MA Design Practice and Management pilot** all eight respondents, who represent the total cohort for the programme, **reported that their business skills had improved as a result of the programme**. 71 % felt they had improved a great deal, 29% reported they had improved to some extent (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Commercial skills evaluation in MA Design Practice and Management



Note: construct= I can construct a marketing plan; develop= I can develop an operations plan; financial plan= I can build a financial plan; present= I can present a business plan.

In their answers to the open questions in the surveys, these PG students emphasised how valuable the real-life industry experience on the programme had been for developing their commercial skills:

*“I would say the most important element of the placements was being able to see how the companies functioned on a day to day basis and gaining an insight into the structure of the organisation, the different roles that people carried out and how the employees worked with each other and the clients.”(PG student, DPM programme)*

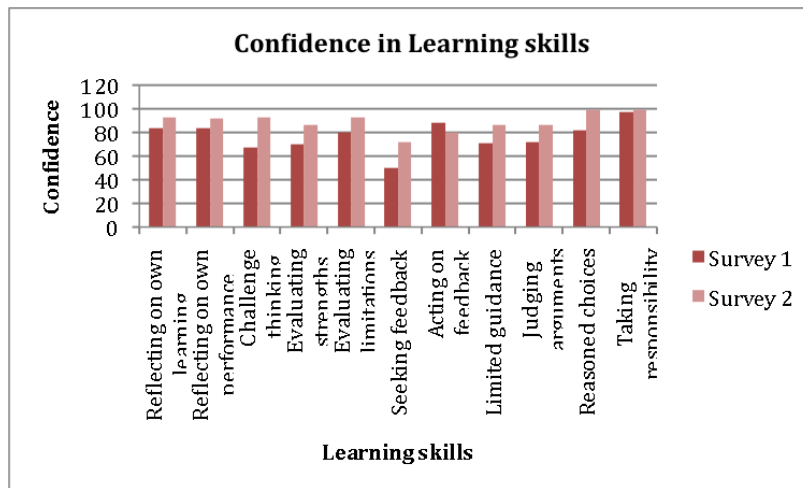
Similarly a fourth year Business student pointed out how the involvement of a real-life employer motivated him to give his very best to the assessed task. For him it was not just another academic assignment but a realistic challenge to solve a real business problem.

*“The fact that it was a real life project. Knowing that a company representative was coming to watch our presentation made it feel worth while. It was much better than doing a case study. It was a really great opportunity... for me to deploy all my effort, energy and experience.” (4<sup>th</sup> year Business student)*

### Independent learning skills

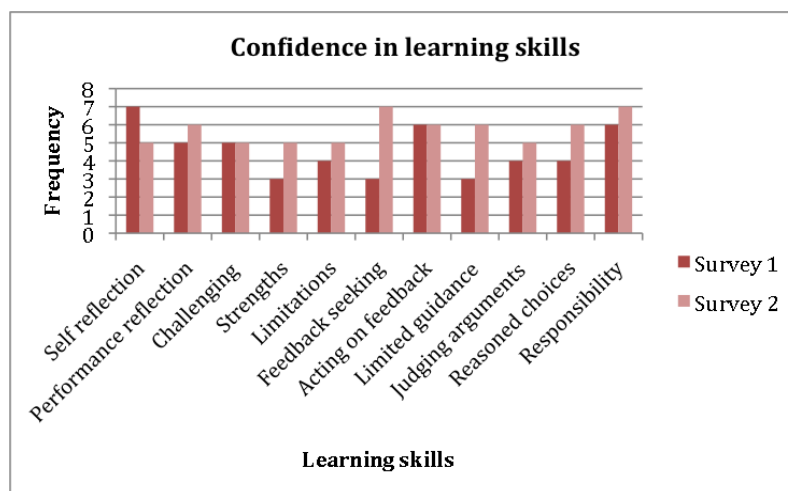
The results from the on-line surveys and the focus groups reveal that students viewed the development of their independent learning skills as a result of their work on practical projects most positively. In three out of the five pilots they were asked to assess their confidence in “learning without much guidance” at the beginning and the end of the module/ programme. As figures 5 and 6 show, in two of the pilots, the first year module “Personal development and self-presentation” and the PG programme “MA Design Practice and Management”, the **reported confidence levels were considerably higher at the end**.

Figure 5: Learning skills evaluation in PDSP module (Fashion)



Note: Limited guidance= I can learn without much guidance; judging arguments= I can critically judge the merits of arguments; reasoned choices= I can present and choose between alternate solutions; taking responsibility= I can take responsibility for my own part in events

Figure 6: Learning skills evaluation in MA Design Practice and Management



The qualitative data confirms that the **students attribute their increased confidence levels to the work-related learning experience**. Working on an authentic task in a real-life environment helped them understand how professional success depends on their own initiative and their ability to learn without much guidance from their lecturers or the employers involved in the projects. The demands of the task they had been given required them to take responsibility for their own progress and their own learning. **The students felt that they had become better students and better learners** as a result. One first year Computing student put it like this:

*“I liked the practical aspect of there is the project, go and do it and I think that was good from the point of view of teaching you independent learning. I think the only way you’re ever going to learn that is by being basically thrown in at the deep end and I particularly enjoyed the independence of being able to just go and do rather than just being told go and do what you do, rather than just being spoon fed.”(First year Computing student)*

The fourth year students agreed. They too appreciated the opportunity to think for themselves and find their own solutions to a problem rather than just learning textbook material in preparation for an exam.

*“Because you’re not going to get everything handed onto your plate, you’ve got to use your initiative and just, like, think out of the box what will work well and it’s definitely good how it’s putting your theory into practice.” (4<sup>th</sup> year Business student)*

While the **first year students found their work-related learning experience particularly beneficial for their future studies at university, the PG students who worked on placement in a real company appreciated the introduction to the real-life demands in the workplace.**

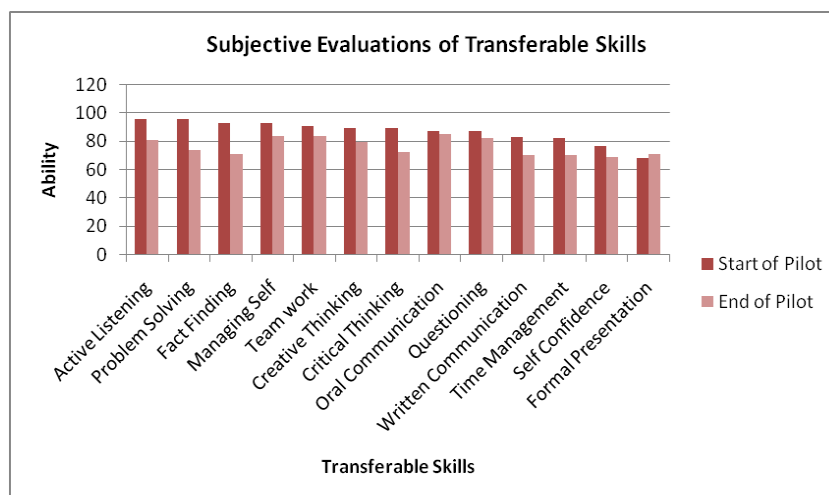
*“It shows you a side you can’t get in the uni because you have to communicate with the professionals and this is kind of learning to communicate on their level and asking the right questions and make sure you’re meeting what they’re expecting of you.”(PG, DPM student)*

In the light of these student testimonies **work-related learning tasks seem to achieve what GCU’s Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy stipulates** in goal 1; i.e. that all teaching and learning should “equip students with the knowledge, skills and attributes to operate as flexible, *independent* lifelong learners”<sup>5</sup>.

### Transferable skills

As figure 7 shows, the survey results for the transferable skills section reveal **that first year students rated themselves less capable at the end of the module compared to the start.**

Figure 7: Transferable skills evaluation in Integrated Project 1 module



These results are similar to the findings from the commercial skills section. Again it seems most likely that **first year students do not always have a very realistic idea of what these transferable skills involve when they start at university.** Only once they have experienced how challenging it can be to

<sup>5</sup> See GCU LTAS 2008-2015 <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/quality/strategy/ltas.html>

put them into practice can they judge their own strengths and weaknesses realistically and, as a result, focus on improving them in their remaining years at university.

The **postgraduate students** on the other hand all **reported that they had improved their transferable skills through the industry experience**. 57% felt that had improved them a great deal; 43% to some extent. Presenting their work to real-life employers and their clients who were more critical and outspoken than the teaching staff helped build the students' confidence in their own ability. One respondent who considered herself to be shy and "very quiet at the start" commented:

*"They (the employer) told us; they said: 'Go back and do it again.' It was good actually getting that... You have to make the deadlines as well so if you've got it wrong you've only got a certain amount of time to finish it and they have to say 'change this'... Yeah, it was tough but it was good. It kind of helped build confidence." (PG, DPM student)*

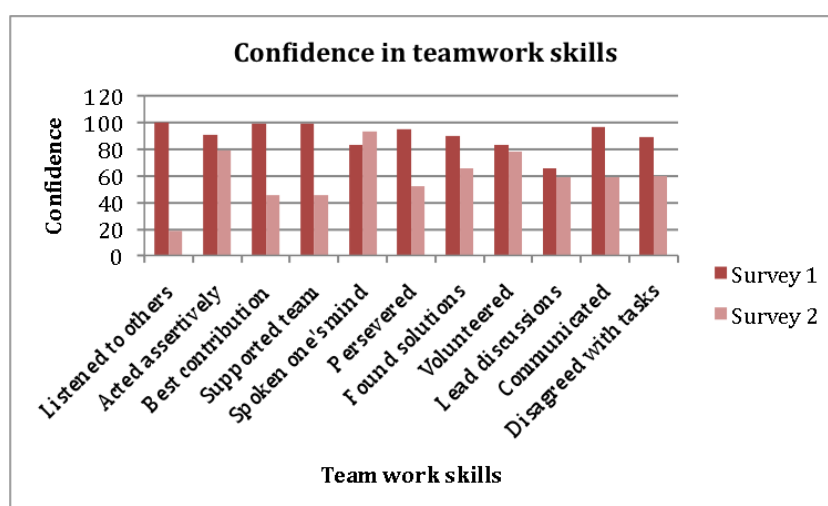
These PG students also reported that their undergraduate degree which they had undertaken at GCU as well as other institutions had not made them very aware of their transferable skills levels. They had been unsure what contribution they could make to the workplace until they were given very explicit feedback from real clients on their placements.

*"We actually had to present to a live client and ended up getting really good feedback from that... Yes it was just a good experience getting the chance to actually speak to someone in a kind of business project instead of it being an assignment..., trying to meet the client needs and getting feedback on that, it was good." (PG, DPM student)*

### Teamworking skills

Given the importance of teamworking skills in the workplace, students were asked to assess their confidence levels in a separate section of the surveys. While the third year Law and the fourth year Business students felt that the module had improved their teamworking skills, **the first years and the PG students felt less confident at the end than at the beginning**. The results from the first year "Personal development and self-presentation" module in figure 8 are an example:

Figure 8: Teamworking skills evaluation in PDSP (Fashion) module



Note: Listen = I listen to the views of others; Tough = I keep going even when it gets tough; Solution = I find a solution even during team conflict; Volunteer = I volunteer for special tasks; Lead discussions = I take the lead in group discussions; Communicated = I communicate well with team members; Disagreed with tasks = I undertake tasks even if I disagree with them

The other first year pilot in Computing (*Integrated Project 1*) produced similar results. Students reported lower confidence levels at the end. Pearson chi square tests showed a significant difference in most teamworking skills which can most likely be explained with their unrealistic confidence levels at the beginning of first year (see also section on commercial skills above).

It is important to note here that students in the *Integrated Project 1* module were divided into two groups. One group, the Computer Games students who constituted 35% of the whole cohort for this module, were allocated to a group by the lecturer. All other students were allowed to select classmates to work with. The findings show that the students who were allocated to a group rather than choosing their teams themselves felt more confident in taking the lead during group discussions (27% as opposed to 17%). In their qualitative responses to the open survey questions they explained that **they found it more difficult but also more worthwhile and useful to work in a team of 'strangers' because it is a more realistic simulation of a real-life workplace situation.**

*"It has shown me exactly what it will be like working in a team in the industry."*

*"I believe more projects like the Integrated Project would help (with teamworking skills), as it gives you genuine experience working with the type of people you will be (working with) once you graduate." (First year Computing students)*

Responses from the focus groups with fourth year students confirmed that **students preferred to be allocated to a team rather than be allowed to choose their team members themselves** because it would be harder to enforce professional ways of working with friends. They noted that working with friends can make it more difficult to ensure that everybody pulls their weight.

*"I think that can get in the way sometimes, that we do know each other well and we are friendly because it's less easy to say hang on a minute like that wasn't done... Because it's your friends and you don't want them to take it personally." (4<sup>th</sup> year Business student)*

It must be acknowledged that despite the reported difficulties with teamwork, the majority of the students enjoyed the experience. When asked in an open survey question what they liked best about the module/ programme the vast majority chose the teamworking experience even though they found it most challenging and they did not always get the best mark for it. They clearly understand the value of tackling demanding tasks and learning from it.

*"Even though I have not done brilliantly, it has been a learning experience which I appreciate a lot." (Computing student)*

The only **criticism of assessed teamworking** came from a small group of fourth year Business students who preferred being assessed individually rather than as a group. They explained that **they wanted to have more control over each mark that contributed to their final degree classification.** An atmosphere of competition, anxiety and exam stress in the run-up to their finals seemed to take its toll here. All that mattered to them at that stage in their studies was the grade for their individual achievement. Preparing for the demands of the labour market beyond graduation seemed less important. The response of the academic who taught these

students was quite straightforward: “ So if we strip out the team work , how are we actually preparing them for employment?”

### **Impact on students’ personal development**

When asked what they considered to be particularly valuable about work-related learning, the students mentioned more than the employability skills they had learnt. They also referred to the wider benefits for their own personal development and their view of the world around them. **It was rewarding for them to gain an insight into real-world problems and engage with them at a deeper level. Many students felt that they had widened their horizons** as a result of being able to apply the theoretical knowledge they had gained at university to current practice far away from the campus. Law students commented on their improved understanding of the criminal justice system because they worked with live cases on the Innocence Project.

*“I think I’m a better person, I feel more knowledgeable, I feel like I pay more attention to current affairs in relation to this, like I read up on the subject outside of my textbooks and my journal articles.” (3<sup>rd</sup> year Law student)*

Students in the other pilots also felt that their eyes had been opened to real-life issues they were not aware of before. One of the fourth year Business students commented on how rewarding they found the learning experience:

*“It was very interesting being able to work on a project that actually existed. I mean it was an actual company with a real range of products who were genuinely faced with the problem for our assignment. It allowed you to feel you were trying to help them and that the work that was being put in might actually be useful rather than just marked.”(4<sup>th</sup> year Business student)*

Students also felt that **their own work ethic had improved** as a result of their work for the pilots. They compared the amount of effort and commitment demanded of them for a work-related learning task to their experience with other modules on their programme and pointed out that they had to work much harder than they had done before to achieve a good mark.

*“It’s certainly the most work I have ever done for any module in uni... you really have to put other stuff on hold...”(4<sup>th</sup> year Business Studies student)*

*“ At undergraduate (level) you would have months of very little and then you would blast it for a month for the exams whereas this has been quite a constantly intense workload ...you haven’t been able to turn off for a couple of months and then go again. It’s been continual.” (PG DPM student)*

While the high workload was mentioned as a major ‘issue’ in all focus group discussions, a considerable number of students acknowledged that coping with it helped them reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses as learners and future employees. **They cited their ability to manage their workload as one of the most valuable learning experiences** on the pilot.

*“ I have learnt about not overreaching my goals and ...you need to set realistic tasks and set realistic time lines for them.” (First year Computing student)*

*“ ..next year I will definitely try to go above and beyond to learn what I need before the project starts ...” (First year Computing student)*

### **3.2. 2 The employer view**

The five employers interviewed agreed with each other on the benefits of their collaboration with the university on work-related learning projects. They saw their work with the students as a **potential recruitment tool** or a *“twelve week interview”* as one of them put it. They view the students as potential employees for their company, can assess their strengths and weaknesses in real time and on a real-life task. One employer explained that he was looking for *“really good graduates that we can kind of grow...”*. A short interview with an applicant in the conventional recruitment process would make it more difficult for him to establish how well the candidate would perform in the future. Working with students on a project before they have even applied for a job reduces the risk of making the wrong decision on his part and on the part of the student:

*“And if they really do want to do it, what kind of role do they think suits them and what more do they need to do to get that job and to thrive in it. So rather than just getting some graduate who wants a job, hopefully they’re like, I want to do that.”*

Good students with new ideas can help employers update their own thinking and inform their daily practice. One interviewee felt that such students can challenge him because *“they’re coming up with things that you hadn’t.”* He felt that **investing time in a student project is a “win-win” situation** for everybody involved. It gives students and academic staff access to contacts and networks in the industry and provides the company with free consultancy work.

*“My view is... that a really good motivated student or group of students can do a job that might be a bit rough around the edges, might have a few gaps in it but has almost as much value as you would get from giving it to a professional team.”*

The employers also emphasised that they **appreciated the opportunity to make a contribution to the university curriculum** through giving lectures to the students, hosting them on placements, preparing a brief for them or listening to their presentations. All of them were keen to work more closely with the academics on programme design and development to make academic teaching more relevant for the labour market and shape the quality of the graduates they might recruit at a later stage.

*“ It’s got to be the way forward. I mean I am keen...it’s good for us to be able to influence what’s going on in the university and have contact with the students that are coming through. So it’s all to the good.”*

### **3.2.3 The academic view**

When asked what they considered particularly beneficial about work-related learning, the academics agreed with the employers. They emphasised that **keeping in touch with developments in industry and the labour market keeps them informed of the latest thinking and current practice in their field**. Collaborating with employers on curriculum design makes their own work as teachers and researchers more interesting and stimulating. It stops them from being stuck in a rut, from teaching the same contents year after year. One of the respondents explained that he welcomed the *“window onto the real world”* which a client based assignment brief provided for him. Another

academic who teaches third year Law undergraduates pointed out that he enjoyed his role as a teacher who is learning alongside his students rather than just providing them with ready-made answers.

*“I am on the journey with them. So I can’t nudge them in the right direction, as I would with a simulated exercise.”*

Another respondent compared his teaching approach to putting students through “a wind tunnel of real-life experience” which puts their knowledge and skills to the test and reveals “how they stand up to the pressures of the challenges ahead of them...”.

The academics also mentioned the **wider networking opportunities** that often arise from their work with external contacts. They can lead to further collaboration between the university and employers through Knowledge Transfer Projects or joint applications for funded research. When asked how the university as a whole would benefit from collaboration on work-related learning, all respondents mentioned GCU’s mission as a university that works for the ‘common weal’ and our brand as an institution that focusses on “learning for the real world”.<sup>6</sup>

*“It fits into the notion of thinking of our university ...as a wider social space in the community where our doors are open...”*

Another academic added to this point. He felt that **engaging employers in teaching and learning “shows us in a modern, dynamic, operational mode”** which was noticed by his industry contacts who had chosen to work with GCU rather than their own alma maters.

Other **benefits** cited by academics include **enhanced opportunities for interdisciplinary working across schools** (e.g. on the PG and the Law pilots) and a **positive impact on GCU’s relationship with alumni** who want to give something back to the staff who taught them (IBS, PDSP, IP1 modules).

When asked what they found most rewarding about embedding work-related learning in their teaching all academics commented on the **satisfaction they gain from seeing their students rise to a challenge that they perceive as difficult**, overcome their own anxiety and succeed in the task they are given.

*“Actually this sounds very Hollywood but it’s always good to see people develop, it’s great to see them flourish and really move on...it’s brilliant.”*

### **3.3 The challenges of embedding work-related learning: still the odd one out?**

Students, staff and employers were asked what they perceived to be most challenging or ‘difficult’ aspects of embedding work-related learning in the taught curriculum.

#### **3.3.1 The student view**

In four of the five pilots students felt that **the work-related learning tasks** they had been given were **substantially more demanding than the tasks in other classes**. There was agreement that the **pilots were the ‘odd ones out’ in the programme**, that other lecturers did not expect the same level of effort and commitment from them. As a result students’ expectations of what constituted a ‘normal’ workload for a university student in any given year seemed to be at odds with the demands made on them by staff in the pilots. While the first year students based their judgment on just one semester of university teaching, the fourth year students had had three years’ experience of learning and teaching at GCU. If they consider the high standards expected of them in work-related learning tasks

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<sup>6</sup> See 2011 prospectus [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/GCU%20Undergrad%20Prospectus%202011\\_reduced.pdf](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/GCU%20Undergrad%20Prospectus%202011_reduced.pdf)

as excessive and unusual, **programme teams might need to discuss whether they speak with one voice in shaping students' expectations.** Some of the fourth year students reported high levels of stress and anxiety because they had difficulty coping with the unexpectedly high workloads:

*"...at first we were all a bit unsure of where we heading and what we were doing ... when you start looking into the information we do think this is overwhelming, how are we ever going to get the right information, know where to look and it's completely different from anything we've ever done before." (4<sup>th</sup> year Business student)*

When asked to explain the difference, another student said:

*"I think (in) this one (the pilot module) we've had stuff to do like every week whereas in other modules it's like you'll just get maybe two things to do throughout the semester whereas this one you've got something every week..." (4<sup>th</sup> year Business student)*

The results from the survey confirm that the students perceived the IBS module as very demanding. Only 7% stated that they coped easily, 71% stated that they coped well but experienced some difficulties whereas 23% admitted to experiencing great difficulties. This particular question on perceptions of difficulty was not explicitly asked in the other pilots but the qualitative comments reveal a similar picture. Students felt that the workload was unusually high.

*"I feel there's a big difference between this module and any we've done before because this one was work from week 1 to week 12 whereas you have to work in the other modules but it's more of a studying than working. From week 1 to 4 in most modules you are just learning and then week 4 they'll go here is your coursework, your test is coming up, like go away and revise or do your coursework. As opposed to this one... it's just very different. It was a 12 week module that we just weren't used to, that we had to work from the start, as opposed to just the 2 week block at the end." (First year Computing student)*

While that perception might be dismissed as the personal views of very few of GCU's total number of students, it nevertheless points to a **potential issue of concern**. Students' views of higher education reflect the university's expectations of them. **If lecturers disagree substantially amongst themselves what constitutes an appropriate workload and an appropriately demanding task, it is not surprising that the students are confused.**

Students also raised a second issue related to their readiness for tackling real-life tasks. **They felt stressed and unprepared for a teaching approach that expects them to find, analyse and evaluate information themselves rather than absorb large amounts of 'facts' passively.** First year students in particular complained about what they perceived to be insufficient input from their lecturers.

*"In other modules you kind of get taught and you get tested and this one you were maybe just given a wee tiny bit of stuff and thrown into do it, so you didn't actually know, well you weren't actually given the answers, if you know what I mean, like in all the other classes you were given the answer somewhere and you just had to sort of learn them but in this one you weren't really given it." (First year Computing student)*

It must be noted here that the students did not demand a lower workload. Instead they **expressed a sense of pride at having achieved what was expected** of them despite their initial 'shock' at the scale of the task.

### 3.3.2 The academic view

Like the students, **the academics felt that there is a lack of consistency in defining academic standards and expectations across programmes**. They also had the impression that the demands made on the students vary significantly from module to module. All of them **felt that their teaching approach was the exception rather than the rule** on their programmes. Four of them spoke about the higher stress and anxiety levels they saw in their students when they were first given the work-related learning task and attributed that to the very different learning experience the students had been used to elsewhere. One interviewee was surprised when fourth year students claimed that they had not been given so much independence and responsibility before.

*"...it's a little disturbing because by the time they come to the wind tunnel I would have expected them to have been tested a bit... and so students get a little anxious, they don't feel at all comfortable..."*

As a result of their students' anxiety all the pilot academics considered it **necessary to provide additional support** for them which can be very time consuming for very large classes of over 100 students.

The interviews with the academics revealed that **real-life student projects can add to the pressures of their own working lives**. If students are not used to work-related learning, they might complain about the 'unusual' teaching approach or assessment. Fourth year students complaining about the allocation of marks to teamwork rather than individual contributions (see above) is such an example. When asked for their response to such complaints, one of the respondents put it like this:

*"Now you could say that's fair enough because students are our customers but I think we've got to be careful about confusing what students like with academic judgement and design."*

Another challenge that was mentioned in the interviews was the **added responsibility academics felt for the quality of their students' work because it is judged by external contacts**; i.e. employers and industry representatives rather than 'just' their colleagues on the programme and external *academic* assessors. If the students' performance was poor, some employers might feel they have wasted their time and effort. It was therefore considered essential for academics to make sure the students are prepared sufficiently because the stakes are higher.

*"It's got additional pressures because it reflects on the university, it reflects on the department, it reflects on the school, it reflects on me as an academic; there is more at stake."*

When asked what made it more difficult to pursue a work-related learning approach in their teaching, **all of the academics mentioned a lack of departmental support** for the increased administrative tasks (e.g. corresponding with employers and alumni, organising events and visiting lecturers, booking rooms, adjusting timetables to accommodate visitors). They felt that they had to do everything themselves. Otherwise it would not happen at all. Their commitment to their work was impressive.

*“...if there were five of us doing it, it would be much easier... well, it didn't even occur to me (to ask for support), it's just what you do if you want it to happen.”*

One of the respondents felt that he would have to apply for external funding to pay for administrative support. He did not even consider asking his department.

Other **difficulties** mentioned included **insufficient marketing of innovative programmes** and **potential conflicts with colleagues who** have been allocated to the teaching team for a module or programme but **did not share the pilot academics' passion for the work-related learning approach**.

### 3.3.3 The employer view

The **employers did not see any obstacles in their collaboration with the staff, students and the university** as a whole. They spoke very highly of their academic contacts and were pleased to be able to make a contribution to the design and delivery of the curriculum at GCU. The employers who had hosted students on placements felt that they would have benefitted from knowing more about their specific backgrounds and skills before they arrived in their companies to be able to match the task or the brief they give them more closely with the students' strengths. Apart from that **they had nothing but praise for the university and its focus on learning for the workplace**.

*“It's got to be the way forward, I mean I'm keen. We've obviously been lucky enough to employ several local graduates and we want to continue to be able to do that and so it's good for us to be able to influence what's going on in the university and have contact with the graduates that are coming through. So it's all to the good.”*

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

The pilot studies provide an **evidence base on the value of engaging students in work-related learning activities** that are integrated in the subject specific teaching rather than just bolted on in extra-curricular provision. The pilots developed different models of embedding Real WoRLD's 'principles'. They reflect GCU's pedagogic approach to employability which is aimed at developing higher level competencies such as leadership, self-regulation, creativity, problem solving, analytical skills and cross-cultural skills that cannot be taught in isolation from the disciplinary curriculum. In the pilots the principles were embedded in a way that was appropriate for the student cohorts and the learning outcomes of the modules or the programme.<sup>7</sup> **Students, academics and employers**

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<sup>7</sup>None of the pilots addressed the principle of 'accommodating cultural diversity' directly. This particular aspect would need to be piloted in future work.

agreed that real-life, authentic tasks<sup>8</sup> that give students the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge to practice, motivate them to work hard, solve problems independently and increase their self-confidence and self-awareness. These tasks required students to reflect on their own skills as current learners in the university and future learners in the workplace. 89% of them reported that they had improved their employability skills through work-related learning.

The results of the different skills evaluations show variations over the years of study. *First year students* gained a realistic insight into their own weaknesses and realised that they might have been too confident in assessing their own abilities. They seem to have learnt what they do not yet know and as a result can structure their own learning in their remaining years at university more purposefully. Students in the *third and fourth year* reported an increased awareness of the world at large and the challenging demands of a graduate career. They felt they had widened their horizons and rose to the challenge of overcoming their own anxiety at the 'daunting' task they were given. The *postgraduate* students were the most positive about work-related learning. Having worked in industry after their undergraduate degree, they realised that they needed to improve their employability skills if they are to stand a good chance of finding rewarding graduate jobs. They particularly appreciated the internships which gave them the opportunity to make a real contribution to a real-life company.

## Recommendations

1. In the true spirit of the university's mission and its ambition to be a "university for the professions", work-related learning should become its 'signature pedagogy' that can be marketed as GCU's unique selling point.
2. Given that not all academics might have the skills and attitudes required for adopting this pedagogy, professional development opportunities should be offered to support them.
3. The university needs to make it explicit to students that their employability skills are improved through their engagement with their academic work in the first instance. Extra-curricular activities will enhance them further but they do not replace the academic commitment. Employability is therefore an academic learning and teaching issue.
4. Students in their first year at GCU need to be made aware of the generic graduate attributes employers are looking for. They need to understand that they can acquire them through setting themselves ambitious academic targets. If GCU wants to prepare students for the real world, we must produce graduates that are "*hungry for knowledge*", as one employer put it.

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<sup>8</sup> Authentic activities are defined as learning tasks that "match as nearly as possible the real-world tasks of professionals in practice in a given discipline; problems inherent in the activities are ill-defined and open to multiple interpretations rather than easily solved by the application of existing algorithms". For details see Reeves, T.C., Herrington, J., & Oliver, R. (2002). *Authentic activities and online learning*. <http://elrond.scam.ecu.edu.au/oliver/2002/Reeves.pdf>

5. Students need be exposed to real-life problems that do not have one textbook-answer and they need to experience real-life working practices (e.g. teamwork in allocated rather than chosen teams; independent learning rather than spoonfeeding) from their first year at GCU onwards. They should expect to be challenged and not be surprised or stressed when they are.
6. All programmes should provide clearly recognisable work-related learning activities at all levels of study, providing more support and guidance in the early years and gradually withdrawing it later on. They should be spread evenly rather than appearing as the 'odd-one out' in an otherwise 'conventional' programme. A work-related learning programme audit could be the first step towards curriculum reform. Real WoRLD has developed such an audit tool (see appendix 5) which can be used in all subject disciplines.
7. The enthusiasm, commitment and expertise of the academic 'trailblazers', some of whom took part in this study, need to be rewarded and acknowledged as a quality mark of best practice that should be emulated by academics in *all* schools.

Glasgow Caledonian University's 2015 vision pledges to "develop graduates with the appropriate attributes to meet the complex demands of the modern workplace, and to take their place as independent lifelong learners in a knowledge-based, global economy."<sup>9</sup> The Real WoRLD pilots show that engaging students in work-related learning has the potential to achieve these goals. Successful collaboration between the Real WoRLD team in the Caledonian Academy and the academic staff in the schools has undoubtedly laid the basis for the "distinctive student journey at GCU" that will allow all students to "fulfil their maximum potential"<sup>10</sup>.

The author would like to thank all students, staff and employers who have contributed to the pilot study and the production of this report.

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<sup>9</sup> See Quality Office website <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/quality/strategy/ltas.html>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## 5. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Real WoRLD pilots

<b>School</b>	<b>Caledonian Business School</b>
<b>Module Title</b>	<b>Personal Development and Self-Presentation (1<sup>st</sup> year)</b>
<b>Teaching and Learning Strategy</b>	<p>This module aims to enhance students' employability skills through developing a personal development plan and undertaking a group project for an external company.</p> <p>Students negotiate the parameters of the project and set appropriate project objectives, monitor progress, achieve targets and submit a final group report as part of the module assessment. They develop an awareness of career opportunities and identify specific skills required for particular roles in employment.</p>
<b>Assessment</b>	100% Coursework: Reflective personal development plan (50%) Group report on a client-based project (50%)

<b>School</b>	<b>Engineering and Computing</b>
<b>Module Title</b>	<b>Integrated Project 1 (1<sup>st</sup> year)</b>
<b>Teaching and learning strategy</b>	<p>In this module students follow a project plan within a team to carry out the development of a practical and realistic computer based engineering problem. They demonstrate technical skills as well as generic professional skills such as commercial awareness, communication and team working skills. Career profiles within the Computing/ IT industries are introduced to help students reflect upon their own career planning skills.</p>
<b>Assessment</b>	100% coursework: Group Presentation (10%); Individual Reflective Report (20%); Group Project report (70%)

<b>School</b>	<b>Law and Social Sciences</b>
<b>Module Title</b>	<b>Innocence Project (3<sup>rd</sup> year)</b>
<b>Teaching and Learning Strategy</b>	<p>This module aims to promote student learning in a criminal appeal setting. Students work on live cases of potentially innocent victims of wrongful convictions. It provides a context which enables them to understand the relevance of their theoretical studies and research training to practical legal issues. Students deal with real-life clients acting like professional lawyers, communicate with legal experts and manage the work in their team.</p>
<b>Assessment</b>	100% coursework: Literature review (25%); Portfolio (75%): exemplars of practical skills acquired through casework (letters and documents); reflective essay on the experiential learning process

<b>School</b>	<b>Caledonian Business School</b>
<b>Module Title</b>	<b>International Business Strategy ( 4<sup>th</sup> year)</b>
<b>Teaching and learning Strategy</b>	The module focuses on the international dimensions of strategy, and specifically to the development of business in international markets. Students research, prepare and present the key elements of an international strategic plan for a company wishing to expand their international business activities. The assignment is normally carried out for senior management of a European company. It involves writing an international business development plan, and delivering a 30 minute group presentation to representatives of the company. In sum, following research on international markets, students are required to recommend a realistic strategy to support internationalization of the firm.
<b>Assessment</b>	Examination: 50% Coursework : 50%: Client-based group report and presentation

<b>School</b>	<b>Engineering and Computing</b>
<b>Programme Title</b>	<b>MA Design Practice and Management</b>
<b>Teaching and learning strategy</b>	This programme gives students the opportunity to work as interns in small creative companies and receive academic credit for their work. The two main modules that provide them with a practical, real-time industry experience are managed under a learning contract methodology. This allows students to define and negotiate their learning in alignment with the practicalities of the real-life workplace. Students work in teams on live projects and present their results to the company.
<b>Assessment</b>	100% coursework: Examples include written reports, oral and visual presentations, peer assessment, portfolio and logbook, learning contracts, discursive open-ended problem solving scenarios.

## Appendix 2: Real WoRLD's principles of work-related learning

**Principles of work-related learning**  
**Sabine McKinnon and Anoush Margaryan**  
**Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University**

**Work-related learning activities should be designed so that they:**

**1. provide students with learning opportunities to integrate theory and practice**

- Are students involved in authentic activities<sup>11</sup> that match as nearly as possible the real-world tasks of professional practices in a given discipline? (Bereiter, 2002; Merrill, 2002; Edelson and Reiser, 2006)
- Do the activities enable students to experience both good and bad examples of work they are expected to produce, processes they are expected to employ or behaviours they are expected to demonstrate in the workplace? (Jonassen, 2002)
- Are the activities designed in such a way that students can only carry them out in collaboration with others?<sup>12</sup> (Glaser, 1991; Nielsen, 2009; Cormier, 2008; Engestroem and Middleton, 1996)

**2. achieve learning outcomes that state what the students will be able to do in the workplace**

- Do the outcomes identify the standard of the expected performance rather than what the students will 'know about', 'understand' or 'describe'? (Collis and Moonen, 2001; Oliver and Herington, 2001)
- Are learning outcomes assessed authentically, i.e. through methods that resemble as closely as possible the ways in which performance is assessed in the workplace? (Gulikers, 2006)

**3. encourage and support students' interest in a wide variety of careers**

- Do the activities enable students to build upon, relate or apply knowledge and skills from relevant past experiences? (Andre, 1997; Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000)
- Does the learning process demand the application and transfer of knowledge into a new professional context or setting, beyond the ones they worked on during the course? (Tuomi-Groehn and Engestroem, 2003)

**4. require students to take on an active rather than a passive role in the learning process<sup>13</sup>**

- Does the task require that students demonstrate critical, independent thinking? (Pintrich and Zusho, 2002)<sup>14</sup>
- Are students involved in risk-taking associated with new behaviours? (Bates, 2008)
- Are they supported in coping with resulting levels of anxiety? (Bates, 2008)

**5. accommodate cultural diversity**

- Are students offered a range of national and international work related learning opportunities? (Fielden et al, 2007; Archer & Davison, 2008; Crossman and Clarke, 2009))
- Do learning activities accommodate culturally diverse value systems, learning styles and modes of communication and interaction? (Collis, 1999; Palfreyman and McBride, 2007; Arya et al, 2003)
- Have students acquired a level of cross-cultural competence that allows them to function effectively in a multi-cultural work environment? (Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars, 1993; Guirdham, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> Authentic activities are defined as learning tasks that "match as nearly as possible the real-world tasks of professionals in practice in a given discipline; problems inherent in the activities are ill-defined and open to multiple interpretations rather than easily solved by the application of existing algorithms". For details see Reeves, T.C., Herrington, J., & Oliver, R. (2002). *Authentic activities and online learning*. <http://elrond.scam.ecu.edu.au/oliver/2002/Reeves.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Others include fellow students as well as mentors, supervisors, practice trainers in the workplace.

<sup>13</sup> This principle is implicit in the notion of authentic activity (see principle 1) but it is so central to work-related learning that an explicit statement is required. It is based on definitions of 'self-regulated learning' and 'learner autonomy' (see footnote 4).

<sup>14</sup> " Self-regulated learning is an active constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual format of the environment." (Pintrich and Zusho, 2002, p. 64)

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### **Appendix 3:** Examples of on-line survey questionnaires for students

See separate PDF document

### **Appendix 4:** Examples of question frameworks

#### 4.1 Questions for *Integrated Project 1* student focus groups:

##### **Employability skills**

1. Employers regularly publish what skills and attitudes they are looking for when recruiting graduates. Do you know what they are? Please write down the three most important ones.
2. In your view, what kind of learning activities at university will prepare you for a graduate career?
3. Looking back over your first year, how well have your studies at GCU so far prepared you for a future career?

##### **Your experience with the *Integrated Project* module**

1. What have you learnt from this module?
2. Have you learnt what you expected? If yes: Give details and examples. If not, why not?
3. What has been the most challenging/ difficult aspect of your work for this module so far? Give details and reasons.
4. What have you done to address it?
5. Has this module challenged you in a manner to which you have not been accustomed on other modules? If so, how....?
6. *If they don't mention team work as a challenge:* What has been your experience with the team work for the module? What has gone well, what has not?
7. Have you experienced a difficult situation in working as a team member? If yes, what have you done to manage it? If not, why not?
8. What has been the most useful / most valuable / enjoyable learning experience on the module?
9. In your view, how will your experience with this module help you in developing your employability skills while you are still at university?
10. Do you think *how* you have learnt in this module will have an impact on your future studies and your career after graduation? If yes, how? If not, why not?

##### **Your career plans**

1. What are your career plans?
2. Have they changed as a result of what you learnt in this module?
3. In your view, when is the best time to start career planning?
4. How can the university support you in planning your career?

## 4.2 Questions for interviews with academics

### **Employability**

1. In your view, what makes graduates employable? (What qualities should they have when they leave university?)
2. Judging from your experience with GCU students, in your view, how well prepared are they for the real-life workplace?

### **The pilot module/ programme**

3. Could you give me a few details about your module/ programme? (level, numbers of students from which programmes, optional/ core, new or re-designed/ assessment?)
4. Why did you decide to offer this module/ programme?
5. What are you trying to achieve with it?
6. Do you think this module/ programme is innovative? Give reasons. If yes, in what way?
7. What, in your view, are the *benefits* of this approach
  - ...for the students?
  - ...for academic staff?
  - ... for the employers/ industry contacts involved?
  - ...for the university as a whole?
8. Looking back over the time you have been teaching this module/ programme, how have your *students* responded to it? What kind of feedback have you received from them? (positive/ negative?)
9. How have you supported them?
10. What have you *enjoyed* most about teaching this module/ programme?
11. What have you found most *challenging* ?

### **Integration in the department/ school/ university**

12. In your view, how does your module/ programme fit into the overall curriculum in your school?
13. In your view, how does it fit into/ support the university's LTAS?
14. Is there anything the university / department can do to support you? If yes, what?
15. What advice would you give to colleagues who would like to offer a similar module/ programme?

### 4.3. Questions for interviews with MA Design Practice and Management Employers

#### **1. Info about interviewee's role and general views on employing graduates**

1. Could you give me a few details about your company? (e.g. industry sector, size, no. of staff; how old?)
2. What is your position in the company?
3. In your view, what makes a business in your industry successful?
4. What qualities are you looking for in your staff?
5. How many graduates do you recruit every year?
6. In what positions are they employed? Give examples.
7. What, in your view, are the benefits of employing graduates?
8. What skills and attributes should they have when they leave university?
9. What are the reasons for your involvement with GCU's MA DPM programme?
10. Do you have any other links with the university? If yes, give details.

#### **2. Views on the MA DPM programme and the students' employability skills**

11. How many students from the programme worked for your company?
12. How do you rate their performance during their time with you? ; i.e. their strengths and weaknesses
13. Would you employ them? Why? Why not?
14. What advice would you give them?
15. What do you think of the MA DPM programme as a whole?
16. What advice do you have for the programme team? What are they doing well? What could be improved?

#### **3. Views on GCU**

17. What is your impression of GCU if you compare it with other universities? What, in your view, are the university's characteristics/ strengths?
18. Would you be interested in future collaboration with the university? If yes, in what way?

**Reflective questions for employability audit**

**Sabine McKinnon, Real WoRLD Project , Caledonian Academy**

(Adapted from UK Centre for Biosciences [www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/audit.aspx](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/audit.aspx))

**1. Does your programme provide students with information on graduate employment and career-path development?**

- Do you know specifically what employers are looking for and value highly in graduates?
- Is your programme on the list of favoured institutions with important employers?
- Do employers have opportunities to contribute directly to the production, assessment and teaching of work-related learning activities on your programme?
- Do current students and staff know who employs graduates from this programme?
- Are students aware at an early stage of the programme what employment opportunities will be open to them?
- Are students explicitly taught career management skills?

**2. Does your curriculum provide work-related learning opportunities ?**

- Do staff and students know what work related learning is and what its benefits are?
- Are the learning objectives for work-related learning activities known and available to students and staff?
- Do the learning objectives relate to students' attitudes as well as knowledge and skills where appropriate?
- Do students have a choice of work-related learning opportunities within a programme?
- Is there sufficient capacity to allow all students who wish to participate in work-related learning activities to do so? If no, are the methods used to select students explicit and fair?
- Is the assessed performance in work related learning activities identified?
- Are goals, criteria and standards for each activity clarified?
- Is detailed, appropriate, written and timely feedback provided on the students' performance ?
- Is there ample opportunity for students to self-assess their development prior to formal assessment?
- Are employers involved in the provision of feedback?

**3. Does your programme provide support for students and staff ?**

- Are appropriate learning resources available and accessible to students and staff?
- Are employers/ alumni used as mentors/ teachers/ contributors for work-related learning activities?
- Is there sufficient staff training to allow staff to help students learn appropriately?
- Is it clear to students what support and/ or guidance is available and how it can be accessed?

**Auditing work-related learning in the curriculum**

Sabine McKinnon, Real WoRLD Project Caledonian Academy

Please indicate where and how your programme offers the following activities. Please fill in for each year.

Name of programme:

Year:

Activity	Where in the curriculum does this activity take place? Title of module/s	What do students do? Please give a short summary.	Core or optional?	Credit bearing? Yes/no
Work placement with an employer				
Work shadowing in the workplace				
Project work for an employer				
Participation in industry or alumni mentoring scheme				
Work- related case studies				
Voluntary work opportunities				
Role plays and / or simulations				
Talks delivered by an employer representative				
Designated professional skills/ employability module				
Field trips / visits to employers				
Explicit skills training (e.g. presentation/ team working/ time management skills)				
Enterprise activities; e.g. advice on business start-up,				

commercialisation of knowledge, new venture creation				
Participation in ERASMUS exchange programme or other international exchanges				
Employer involvement in programme planning/ teaching / assessment				
Assessed teamwork				
Other Please give details.				