# Case Study

## Embedding employability in the curriculum with *Skills and Attributes for Career Success*
### University of West London



## Motivation

For Kay Stewart, the Head of Careers and Volunteering at the University of West London, a key factor in the success of delivering career planning and employability lies in developing a bespoke approach that reflects the dynamics of your institution: "you have to work out what works for your student body".

In Kay's case, this meant addressing the needs of a "very diverse" student population, with a high proportion of mature students, commuters, and students who are the first in their family to enter higher education.

Through "careers readiness" surveys, Kay and her colleagues uncovered "a lack of understanding about what might be needed to get into the graduate job market" – a situation compounded by the fact that "a lot of our students, having battled to get here, see it as very important that they focus on getting the best degree they possibly can, so will leave their career planning until they've completed", unaware that they may be placing themselves at a disadvantage by putting their longer term career planning on hold.

> "All these career planning skills and abilities need to be embedded, to make sure that **all students have the opportunity to benefit**"

## Implementation

The decision was therefore made to embed employability skills into the curriculum, using Epigeum's *Skills and Attributes for Career Success: Developing an Enterprising Mindset* programme as part of a blended, "toolkit" approach.

Kay chooses to "unpick" the programme, selecting modules that best complement particular academic courses, and delivering that content via face-to-face workshop sessions, "in a group context". The variety afforded by this approach keeps students "involved and interested", and invites the sharing of personal experiences and insights, so that "no matter where you are on your career journey, there are things you can take away". Kay also uses the programme to generate greater reflection and self-awareness: by being "thought-provoking on a personal level, it gives the opportunity for students to reflect on their own situation".

Key to the success of Kay's approach has been to communicate "an immediate payback" to students, by linking the content from *Skills and Attributes for Career Success* to upcoming assessments, as "focusing on something that's for long-term gain can be quite difficult". The programme's module on 'Negotiation Skills', for example, can work well prior to assessed group work.

The response from the faculties involved has been positive: "I think academics are quite surprised by the breadth", explains Kay, "and also I think they're a little bit surprised that it does fit so well in the curriculum", complementing course content whilst also developing transferable employability skills, so that it's a "win-win situation" for both staff and students. "I think it's a good programme to have conversations with academics about actually", adds Kay, "to get them to understand a little better what 'careers' is".

## Communication

Kay also refers to the programme when talking to employers about the university's careers provision, explaining that "the fact that we are talking about enterprising mindsets is interesting to employers, because that's what they need". Moreover, the skills and attributes that form the basis of its modules, such as commercial awareness, problem-solving and creative thinking, "are the things that are very difficult to replace" by emerging technologies – "future-proofing" and "reassuring" students in an unpredictable and ever-changing global work environment.



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