

Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience

Case Study 1: Improving Equity Through Virtual Project Learning

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What was the issue?

The University of Aberdeen offers an undergraduate 30-credit course, Working Together: Employability for Arts and Social Sciences, which combines employability workshops with work-based learning hosted by a local start-up business, SME or third sector charity. The course builds consultancy-style projects into the curriculum, providing students with real-world tasks and the opportunities to apply their transferable skills, in different contexts. A distinctive feature of this course is its equity pedagogy, as irrespective of a student's prior employment history, social capital or educational achievements: all can extend their professional network and have meaningful workplace interactions with employers. The challenge necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic was how we should re-vision the course, so these valuable student-employer interactions continue in an online environment.

How was it solved?

The traditional form of collaborative learning for this course has been face-to-face student teams working together. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we adapted the teaching into an online model of delivery including implementing a 'virtual project'. To help build effective teams for remote learning, the teaching team offered additional academic support at the start of the course to help students understand how effective virtual teams operate, and to emphasise the importance of inclusive teamwork.

Given the virtual nature of the project, we were also able to extend the geographical reach of the sourced projects beyond Aberdeen City and Shire to a range of new locations across Scotland including Nairn, Lerwick and Wester Ross. This approach enabled a more equitable engagement with businesses and charities across Scotland and extended our community connections.



What comes next?

Comments and feedback gathered from students during the virtual project course have been overwhelmingly positive, as illustrated by the following quotes from the 2021–22 cohort.



The project with the host institution was just amazing, I would do it again and again if I could. It was very refreshing to have this opportunity at uni. I also found that the interactive workshops along the semester were great. I have learnt so many new skills and many of these I did not even know existed.



I found the formative assessments a wonderful idea as they really helped us throughout the course and also prepared us for the summative assessments.



Going forward in this award-winning course, the teaching team plans to retain the virtual project element in the course, as it is better aligned with more equitable teaching and learning practices, and re-introduce the in-person taught elements for the employability skills workshops.



Find out more

This case study is one of nine published as part of the 2021–22 Student-led Project from the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme.

The project in year 2 explored equity and inclusivity in the context of a more blended learning environment and how we can best develop representative systems and student/class representative skills to effectively support all the students they serve.

You can find further case studies and resources on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

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