

# Employability in Practice: Making Sense of Employability Through an Active Blended Curriculum

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The Employability in Practice initiative at Anglia Ruskin University aimed to develop employability in the curriculum as one dimension of the university's strategic commitment to active learning. A team of academic leads for employability (ALEs) was appointed to advocate applied and authentic learning, with responsibility for supporting all undergraduate course teams to redesign their programmes. The team became a key part of the wider development group supporting the rollout of the active curriculum framework through a programme of course design intensives (CDIs). To articulate employability as*

*a dimension of active learning, the ALEs developed a design framework reflecting a set of graduate capitals. Using this, the ALE team produced a diverse range of tools for engaging academics, personal development tutors, and students. The chapter reflects on the 'symmetry' and the compatibilities found in the active learning and employability agendas.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This case study describes an ambitious University-wide initiative known as *Employability in Practice*. Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) sought to place student employability at the heart of its educational offer to improve graduate outcomes; specifically, making it a priority for all courses through the redesign of their curriculum and co-curricular experience. The initiative ran for 18 months from January 2019 to July 2020. Its aim was to enhance student employability through student-centred, social, real-world inquiry and practice-based learning experiences, integrated into the curriculum (Rule, 2006). This was achieved through the adaptation of Tomlinson's conception of graduate capitals (Tomlinson, 2017). A capitals-based approach accommodates a broader learning perspective; one that connects with and draws upon experience within and beyond the formal curriculum (Redecker, 2014). This student-centred, connective view of learning has wider implications for understanding the reach and value of Active Blended Learning (ABL).

The focus of this study is the benefits found in promoting employability as an outcome of authentic learning (Rule, 2006; Herrington & Oliver, 2000) within a broader discourse of active learning.

A team of Academic Leads for Employability (ALEs) was appointed to develop employability in the curriculum. The case study describes how the team began by redefining and resituating employability as an outcome of the whole learning experience and how it used this definition to develop tools to challenge and inspire every undergraduate course team to make employability more visible and relevant to their students. Key to achieving this, the ALEs adapted the concept of graduate capitals in which Tomlinson lists human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capitals as being desirable indicators of graduate employability (Tomlinson, 2017). By developing these, the ALEs created the Anglia Ruskin Graduate Capitals as a framework to support design thinking (Nicol, 2012). This will be introduced in the chapter along with some of the tools, methods and pedagogies developed by the ALE team.

The chapter begins by describing the context for Employability in Practice (EiP) and the formation of the ALE team. It discusses how the team took 'an appreciative approach' to enhance the ways students experience employability in the curriculum and within the wider student experience. It will then define employability in the context of this work and discuss the value of the Graduate Capitals-based approach and how this was used in the Course Design Intensive (Dempster et al., 2012) curriculum development programme and supporting resources. Some example pedagogical models are presented before significant impactful, but unexpected, models are discussed and reflected upon.

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