

Chapter 9

Becoming My Future Self: Student Engagement With Curriculum Live Brief Assignments to Scaffold Employability Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Fostering a sense of becoming to frame student transition through the implementation of an ambitious university-wide Live Briefs programme is the subject of this case study. The model involves the development of assignment briefs created through partnerships with employers and other professionals. The brief sets out a current problem or opportunity based on an actual real-world situation forming a challenge that requires the student to apply relevant knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. Example briefs are included incorporating feedback from students and employers. The Live Brief scaffolds the individual learner to transition from the singular academic framework through the curriculum and situate themselves in their professional context as they transfer and utilise their knowledge and skills, thereby forming a strong connection between the academic and professional environments.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a case study of a university-wide curriculum enhancement approach known as Live Briefs. It discusses student transition as an outcome of a vibrant curriculum experience in which academic boundaries are disrupted to ensure students gain sight of their ‘future self’ during their engage-

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ment with challenges created through partnerships with employers and other professionals. These Live Brief challenges safely situate student learning in professional practices.

The chapter considers how the Live Brief model helps to establish a sense of learner transition, learner agency, and employability while developing a student's learning and professional identities. While 'live projects' have been used as curriculum interventions across the sector, this case study considers how live brief modules have been developed and supported at scale across levels 4 and 5 at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU). Transition, in this case, is an outcome of a coherent and supported approach in which academic developers, based within a central professional services context, lead curriculum enhancement.

Using examples of Live Brief interventions, the chapter describes why and how this collaboration between central services and faculties was developed, and how it has managed to extend both the reach and the credibility of the initiative with faculty academics.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

First fully implemented in 2020, ARU committed to developing Live Briefs as mandated modules for all students at Levels 4 and 5. This ambitious curriculum-based commitment has enhanced the whole undergraduate portfolio. In this chapter we reflect on how the introduction of Live Briefs has affected the authentic experiential curriculum as a transitional space.

ARU is a UK university based in Cambridge and Chelmsford. Part of the University Alliance group of universities, it is intent on creating a leading learning and innovation ecosystem in which "our students are at the heart of our university: their educational experience engages, challenges and empowers them to reach their full potential" (ARU Designing our Future Strategy, 2017 – 2026).

The Live Briefs programme responds to ARU's strategic vision and the Active Curriculum Framework that underpins it. The publication of ARU's Active Curriculum Framework in 2019 set a design challenge: the need for academics to enhance their students' curriculum experience in ways that ensure learning is student-centred. Simply, learning is not a matter of transactional delivery, but of interaction, transition, breadth, and depth.

Considerable investment was made to redesign the whole undergraduate curriculum (Middleton et al., 2021a) with an important development focus being the integration of employability to develop the 'whole person' (Middleton et al., 2021b; Boz et al., 2021). The design programme required academics to agree what a student-centred learning experience meant in their disciplinary context. Design conversations frequently gravitated to how learning could be characterised as agentic and authentic, both in the curriculum and in a student's life wide experience while at university. This shift in discourse highlighted how fragmented the curriculum experience had been at course level as well as its lack of connection to a student's wider experience.

The completion of work placements by undergraduate students is recognised as positively influencing graduate employment outcomes. (Divan et al., 2022) However, not all students can access placements equitably with factors affecting uptake including, but not being limited to, gender, age, and disability status. (ibid) Other factors that preclude student placement uptake include the other responsibilities that students have including part-time work and caring, and rules governing international students holding visas. The cost for commuting students in attending placements can also be prohibitive.

ARU's commitment to widening access to participation requires that curriculum-based challenges must be accessible. The University has a significant intake of undergraduate students from disadvantaged

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