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'We need carrots and sticks': How to enhance student engagement with career learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

Although students and universities are increasingly concerned about employability, student engagement often remains low. The question is why, and what can be done? This reflective paper addresses these questions by sharing recent experience of designing and delivering a credit bearing employability module. It demonstrates that combined rewards and punishments (carrots and sticks) can successfully enhance student engagement. We achieved 98% attendance across all sessions and an overall module satisfaction score of 90%. Our paper benefits academics, career practitioners and higher education institutions (HEIs) by offering practical solutions which can be scaled and transferred across disciplines, institutions and learning contexts.

Keywords: career learning; student engagement; employability; module design; assessment

Introduction

While working at university recruitment events, we have found that students and their parents are increasingly concerned about securing graduate level work after graduation and how universities support this goal. This trend has also been recognised within our

wider university community. Moreover, alongside key factors such as published league tables, geographical proximity and cost, the selection of universities, courses and modules is often informed by employability rankings (Times Higher Education, 2017). As a result, there is increased pressure upon universities to deliver a comprehensive and effective offer assisting students to develop skills, gain work-related experience, and secure desirable jobs. Universities also increasingly target embedding careers and employability into university teaching and learning curricula, with the aim of improving overall graduate outcomes (Bradley et al., 2021), together with an associated increase in performance measures, indicators and metrics related to careers and employability. These measures include the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework, the Graduate Outcomes survey and the tracking of graduate salaries through the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset (HEPI, 2020).

Despite the stated importance of employability by students and a corresponding increase in both profile and provision of career-related supports and services within UK universities, student engagement remains relatively low. Recent research by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) found that 'students are not necessarily prioritising careers and employability engagement as highly as other university commitments and experiences' (2022, p.34). This raises two key questions: why is student engagement low and what can be done to improve engagement levels?

We address these questions by sharing our recent experience of designing and delivering a credit bearing employability module and drawing upon our forty years of combined experience working in higher education. The first author is a career practitioner within the university's central careers service. The second author is an academic who researches the nature of work and academic Employability Lead within their department. Our paper contributes to ongoing debates around embedding employability within university curricula. Its key audience is academics and career professionals seeking ideas to increase student engagement, whilst recognising common constraints and realities. We propose a range of practical and straightforward solutions that can be applied and transferred across disciplines, institutions and learning contexts.

Reflecting upon the design, delivery and assessment of a new and successful credit bearing module called 'The Professional Geographer', the paper makes three key points. Firstly, it argues that students require and indeed welcome, carrots and sticks to enhance motivation and engagement. Secondly, it outlines how carrots and sticks can be effectively incorporated into teaching design, delivery, and assessment. Finally, it demonstrates that the effective use of carrots and sticks can successfully address some key challenges for students and institutions.

Background context: The Big Picture

Employability is increasingly important within higher education, both within the UK and world-wide. The influential Dearing Report (1997) stated the UK Higher Education system needed to 'meet the legitimate aspirations of its citizens to improve their qualifications and employability' (p.263). In 1998, the Blair government introduced student tuition fees to assist funding of UK higher education. The influential Browne Report (2010) subsequently recommended placing more of the financial burden of funding UK higher education on to graduates. Boden & Nedeva (2010) argue that while UK universities have a long

involvement in the production of useful and productive citizens, they traditionally have had a significant degree of discretion, whereas now, employability is a performative function of universities, shaped and directed by the state. Successive UK governments have tasked higher education institutions to fulfil this responsibility, to improve graduate employability and graduate employment levels and meet the expectations of current and prospective students. Employability is also a key component within the Teaching Excellence Framework, a national policy introduced in 2016 aimed at rating and enhancing the student experience. As a result, HEIs have endeavoured to embed employability into their curricula (Fallows & Steven, 2000). In practice, this can be challenging to achieve due to the challenges surrounding the application of knowledge, staff and of resources within institutions (Senior et al., 2018; Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

A UK Commission for Employment and Skills report, 'The Employability Challenge' (2009) highlighted that developing employability skills is not complicated but is challenging. It requires a properly resourced environment, leadership, funding and incentive structures for staff. Barriers to student participation in employability enhancing activities include work/study commitments, financial/health pressures and a variable lack of student confidence and awareness (Jackson et al., 2024). A recent article reported that more than half of UK students are working long hours in paid work due to a lack of funding and the cost-of-living crisis (The Guardian, 2024). Beyond 'not having the time', common inhibitors to engagement with non-core career learning activities include students viewing these as optional; an anxiety in engaging with their future (especially since the Covid-19 pandemic); as something to do 'later'; and importantly, that such activities are not rewarded with academic credit (Donald et al., 2019). Indeed, Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver (2017) found that students often find graduate learning outcomes too generic to be meaningful and that they are most likely to engage with learning outcomes which are contextualised and assessed. Research by Tymon (2013) has shown that when students were asked why employability matters to them, it did so in instrumental terms (for example better job security or pay, or increased choice of jobs), rather than improving the quality of employment.

Background context: Our experience

Since 2014 we have worked closely together, as career practitioner and academic, to deliver a variety of career-related learning opportunities to our undergraduate geography and environmental science students across year groups. We have engaged in a range of activities commonly found across the UK, but student engagement was a constant challenge. For example, a central component of our offer has been joint delivery of career-related talks to year-based student cohorts (first year, second year etc) to raise student awareness of career pathways and available supports and resources. Although these talks were timetabled and students were provided with a clear rationale of the benefits and encouraged to attend, engagement was usually low averaging between 30% and 50% of the specific cohort. When asked why, students viewed these sessions as 'separate' and disconnected from their academic studies, and importantly, attendance and participation did not result in academic credit. Another common activity involved bringing in employers/industry experts to talk about their career sector, specific roles and career paths. Again, despite active promotion of these sessions, student engagement was typically low, averaging 30% of the total department cohort.

Attempts were also made to provide dedicated 'career days' or 'employability weeks' backed by widespread promotional campaigns. These efforts also failed to attract high numbers of students, with reports from students of feeling overwhelmed, afraid to 'face their future' or that the time would be better spent working on graded assessments. Indeed, the creation of designated 'employability weeks', where traditional academic teaching was suspended to create space for employability activities, were in practice, often regarded as 'reading weeks' by students or as time to rest or visit family.

When we asked students formally and informally for feedback and suggestions to improve the low employability engagement levels, we repeatedly heard that there was a willingness to engage, however, engagement would be much more attractive if it was rewarded with academic credit. Therefore, we believe that enhancing student engagement requires understanding and working with individual preferences, constraints, and complex realities.

At university level, despite increased provision and promotion of career tools and supports available through the university's centralised careers service (e.g. workshops, online resources and one-to-one appointments) overall engagement has been disappointingly low. For example, a CV workshop bookable by all the university's students with capacity for 20 students, may average between two to six students. Moreover, those who engage tend to be either students characterised as 'careerists' (Tomlinson, 2012) or those referred by their personal tutor (an academic responsible for a student's overall academic and personal welfare). Therefore, student engagement was not consistent and equitable across the student population.

After many years of frustration with low student engagement and mounting pressure to enhance the employability offer within the department, a pragmatic decision was taken through the programme revalidation process, (which takes place every five years), to develop a new dedicated and credit bearing employability module. This was greatly assisted by this paper's second author also being academic programme lead at the time, meaning they could advocate strongly for change. A dedicated module was viewed as a more achievable option, as previous attempts to spread employability across modules had been diluted by competing demands upon academic colleagues. Indeed, some academics opposed supporting employability initiatives in their modules because it was 'not their responsibility'. 'The Professional Geographer' was promoted as an optional third-year undergraduate module, to be delivered in the first semester and capped at thirty students. This number was chosen based on our combined previous teaching experience to ensure high quality small group experiential learning. As we outline below, the module was an important opportunity to deliver scalable impact in employability and career learning by engaging and benefiting students taking the module. Importantly, it also generated increased engagement across the wider department, by delivering student-led career events accessible to all departmental students.

Module design: Concept

We aimed for the module to develop students' awareness of their skills and values; increase their confidence and self-advocacy; raise their awareness of the changing world of work and their future within a rapidly changing world; and improve their application of learning in practical contexts.

Based on our experience, and following many discussions with students, we recognised for this module to be successful, we needed to deploy a mixture of 'carrots and sticks'. Carrots are positive rewards which encourage students to engage. Intrinsically, students would be motivated to engage, learn and complete a range of tasks because they find developing and enhancing their skills, experience, knowledge and confidence, enjoyable and satisfying. Extrinsic motivation would derive from tangible rewards including academic credit for engagement, completion, performance, plus practical benefits such as CVs, personal statements, interview skills, benefitting them in both the graduate recruitment process and subsequent career.

Sticks, or negative penalties, are also powerful motivators working on two levels. Intrinsically, students were required to complete weekly self-directed homework tasks, such as readings, preparing documents such as cover letters, or self-reflections or assessments. A psychological contract formed between class members as students did not want to let themselves or other class members down during subsequent discussions of completed homework tasks in class. Extrinsically, students prepared, attended, engaged, and performed to avoid losing marks awarded in small amounts for each task and session. From an individual student perspective, all module elements had some form of value which encouraged consistent and enthusiastic engagement. A combination of carrots and sticks proved highly effective across the entire cohort as this mixed approach appealed to each student regardless of individual personalities, goals, motivations, or reward preferences.

When designing teaching sessions, curating content was a challenging task. We wanted to strike a balance between covering the most important topics, whilst drawing upon our skills and experience, together with providing academic and practical content. We believe that the elements which make our module different from many other higher education employability modules, are the creation of student ambassadors (discussed below), together with a high degree of variation in assessment methods aligned to the world of work, for example the delivery of student-led employer events, report writing and producing recorded book review videos. The module timetable featured three sessions of fifty minutes per week for twelve weeks. We incorporated research-led teaching conducted by the second author, including topics on the spatial dynamics of work, aesthetic labour and entrepreneurship. We wanted to broaden discussions to not just the jobs themselves, but also their geographical and spatial considerations (for example, working for a large firm versus a small or medium sized firm or home working versus hybrid working environments).

A concern when conceptualising the module, and one often expressed within higher education, was that the introduction of an optional employability module within our curricula would not benefit the wider student body (Taylor & Hooley, 2014). Moreover, it would be those 'careerist' students (Tomlinson, 2012) who would study it, and that these students would have achieved their immediate career goals regardless. Importantly, we wanted our module to have wider impact upon the whole departmental student cohort. We aimed to deliver this impact by creating and promoting student-led career learning opportunities through the module, accessible to all departmental students. A common constraint upon many university career services and departments is a lack of available resource to deliver programmes of targeted career events and activities. Our solution to this problem was our module students acting as student 'ambassadors' for their peers within the wider department. These ambassadors would undertake activities which would

develop key areas of their own individual personal employability (for example, teamwork, organisation skills) plus facilitate wider career learning opportunities (exposure to people working in different career roles). Importantly, module students themselves would have significant input into the activity design and delivery. This enabled us to capture and channel the student voice to create a scalable peer-driven programme of career learning activities open to and beneficial to all the department's students.

We designed the module to cater to different learning preferences, based on the VARK model (Fleming & Mills, 1992) and featured experience-based learning, equipping students with key theoretical knowledge and practical skills which they could take forward into graduate work. As outlined in Figure 1, the module features a mixture of lectures, workshops and student ambassador meetings. Ultimately, the co-design and co-delivery of the module proved valuable to students based on post module feedback:

> 'I loved having two perspectives (Author 1 and author 2)' and
>
> 'Really nice to have two lecturers.'

Figure 1: Weekly Schedule

LECTURES	WORKSHOPS
Introduction to the module	Assessing career readiness
The history of work in the UK	Values, motivations, personality, and skills
The changing world of work	What is possible with my geography degree?
Meaningful and rewarding work	Tips for networking
The spatial dynamics of work	Tips for preparing cover letters
Aesthetic labour and self-branding	Tips for preparing personal statements
	Tips for assessment centres
	Tips for job interviews
AMBASSADOR MEETINGS	Tips for 'getting things done'
Weekly student meetings, student led.	Tips for personal productivity systems
Capturing team progress and agreeing	Tips for effective writing
actions.	Tips for effective speaking
	Tips for wellbeing and work-life balance
	Create your labour market entry plan
	Careers help session

Module design: Delivery

When operationalising our module concept, we incorporated some core educational principles. We wanted students to be clear on the logic of the module's sequencing, and its delivery to be an active, experiential process, involving academic and practical material. There was clear constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) within and between individual topics, and regular provision of individual reflection and group activities.

A key pedagogical design feature was the inclusion of a flipped learning approach, (Bergmann & Sams, 2012), with students assigned pre-session homework to complete. For example, students were asked to pre-record themselves delivering interview question answers, using an Artificial Intelligence Interview Simulator tool. The purpose was to enable students a safe space to practice and to illustrate the importance of effective preparation and rehearsal of answers. They subsequently discussed their experience of completing this task in class. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Weekly Homework

Complete the 'motivations for taking the module survey'	Join Slack platform and review Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard) materials
Complete vales and preferences survey and reflect upon the results	Develop personal elevator pitch
Create/update LinkedIn profile and evaluate using online resources	Create/update CV and receive feedback using Artificial Intelligence CV360 tool
Create/update cover letter and personal statement and evaluate using online resources	Use Artificial Intelligence Interview Simulator tool to simulate an online recorded interview. Record some reflections.
Write a list of tools and strategies you currently use to assist your productivity and reflect on how you use them	Identify areas you would like to improve (e.g. time management) for class discussion
Complete the 'effective writing' survey and reflect upon the results	Complete the 'effective speaking' survey and reflect upon results
Complete the 'stress and wellbeing' survey and reflect upon the results	Prepare questions and concerns about future career for discussion

Flipped learning was supplemented by an activity learning approach (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) throughout the module, where students interacted with the learning process and co-constructed their own meaning, drawing upon their individual experiences.

Flipped learning ensured students were at a similar level of knowledge and experience prior to taught content delivery, increasing confidence and performance during in-class exercises. There was some prior concern that students may not engage in the pre-session homework, as this had been experienced in teaching elsewhere. Encouragingly, the module achieved consistently high levels of student engagement (98% attendance across all sessions) and performance (81% average grade across workshops). The authors conclude from student observation and feedback that this was due to engaging content where students could clearly recognise the relevance and importance of the topic. Again, carrots and sticks proved to be powerful motivators. Weekly engagement (homework and sessions) was worth 15% of the module marks and while some students saw it as earning credit for doing valuable work (reward), others feared losing marks (penalty). Students were encouraged to discuss their homework together, making it transparent if they had not completed it. Students also completed a self-reporting sheet about their engagement with the homework which was passed around and visible to everyone in each session. We explained the purpose, logic and benefit of this process upfront, and no student concerns were raised.

The module ran weekly across a semester meaning homework was completed weekly, assisting students to manage their time effectively and maintain motivation. This was a deliberate design feature, supporting students to make consistent progress rather than one formal assessment at the end. Indeed, this 'slow and steady' approach to employability was actively encouraged. Overall, with the right mix of alignment and incentives, student feedback indicated that they valued and enjoyed the regular homework:

> 'The weekly homework tasks were manageable and useful.'
>
> 'The weekly homework forced you to think about your employability/life after university which was beneficial.'

Student feedback showed that they particularly valued the module's emphasis on practical activities (e.g. CVs and personal statements). Many reported they were receiving credit for activities they knew they ought to be doing anyway. In contrast, if students attended a central careers service workshop, this was optional, non-credit bearing and perceived as less tailored to their individual circumstances. Frequent interaction within the module also generated trust between students and the teaching team. Once students felt comfortable, many requested subsequent one-to-one appointments to discuss their individual career and future. Moreover, there was an associated increase in subject peers who had not studied the module asking if they could have career discussion appointments, based on the positive experience of module students. This resulted in a 28% increase in geography careers-related individual appointments across the academic year.

As educators, a key part of our role throughout, was to model and explicitly reference professional behaviours in real time. This included providing formal and informal feedback to the students, which we characterised as constructive and supportively challenging. This modelling assisted participants to build upon and adapt their style to subsequently deliver effective feedback to peers in class, through both practical engagement and observation of their fellow classmates and us. We explicitly addressed areas where students felt less confident (for example, speaking in teams or in class) and highlighted that within in the world of work this was a key skill often required. We stressed the module was a safe space to practice and develop such skills. Most participants responded well to this approach, reporting

> 'The size of the classroom and intimacy [created a] comfortable environment to speak and share ideas' and
>
> 'The community spirit of the seminars allowed for a friendly space to voice opinions.'

Finally, module delivery contained a mixture of traditional academic lectures, practical workshops, and group discussions (Zepke & Leach, 2010). This variety assisted student engagement levels by catering to different learning preferences. Students formally fed back that they enjoyed the 'combination of workshops and lectures' and the 'interactive elements of lectures and workshops.'

Assessment design

In designing assessment methods, we did not want to default to more established methods of assessment, such as essays and groupwork projects (Clouder et al., 2012). We wanted the module to look and feel different and to link assessment methods to those that students were likely to typically experience within graduate employment. This approach was informed by the work of Osborne et al. (2013). We included multiple assessment methods; the production of work focused on varied audiences, for example, a report for a prospective employer, or a recorded book review for fellow peers; we also encouraged collaborative work; and a 'light structure' including guidance which does not go into exhaustive detail; and opportunities for both peer and self-review.

Pedagogical principles of 'backwards design' (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) were adopted and sessional content constructively aligned (Biggs, 1996). Constructive alignment draws on two areas of learning: constructivism (Piaget, 1952), the concept of learners constructing their knowledge through learning activities, and alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2007) with intended

learning outcomes (ILOs). Backward design has three stages: It begins with educators considering the learning goals of the module. Having determined the desired results, the second stage is to determine the acceptable evidence, asking 'how will we know that the learning experience is making a difference?'. The third stage considers what content, activities and experiences will lead to the desired results. We had a clear picture in our minds of student participants completing the module with increased self-awareness and knowledge of themselves and the graduate labour market; having developed key skills; gained relevant experience; generated tangible outputs such CVs and personal statements; as well as increased confidence and ability to transition successfully into the world of work (see Figure 3).

We used six different types of assessment and employed a 'slow and steady' approach, which supported students throughout the module. We ensured guidance was provided at key points, that each assessment covered a range of skills, and that they were constructively aligned to module content and delivery. To overcome anticipated concern from students about the relatively high number of assessments, we delivered a detailed introduction to the whole module in the first class, taking time to explain the logic and value of our approach to assessment. We explained each of the six assessments in turn, providing rationale, benefits, and details. Importantly, we indicated how each assessment would allow them to deploy the range of skills developed throughout the module, including opportunities to write in new and different ways. These included report writing and reflective logs which would be useful in many of the professional career options. We allocated time for questions as these assessments were new to most students and we

Figure 3: Assessment Overview

	1. Workshop Engagement	2. Employability Ambassador Engagement	3. Mid-Module Review	4. Recorded Book Review	5. Labour Market Entry Plan	6. Planned Employability Event
Description	Preparation, attendance and participation in discussions and activities	Contributions to sub-team (tasks) and weekly meetings	Report reflecting on career readiness and progress during module plus developing initial career objective and SMART action plan	Choose and read book from list. Produce a 5 minute recorded video review.	Report assessing range of skills (networking etc) plus reflections on progress during the module and developing action plan toward graduation and beyond	Planning, promoting and delivering a specific employer event for the department
Value	15%	15%	20%	10%	30%	10%
Sequencing	Weekly	Weekly	Early in Semester	Middle of Semester	End of Semester	End of Semester
Assessed Skills						
Team Work	*	*				*
Oral Communication	*	*		*		
Written Communication	*	*	*		*	
Reflection	*		*		*	
Planning/Organising	*	*	*		*	*
Time Management	*	*	*	*	*	*
Marketing		*				
Project Management		*				
Networking/Digital Presence		*				*
Research		*	*		*	
Strategic Thinking		*				
Evaluation			*	*	*	
Applying Knowledge			*	*	*	
Distilling Information			*	*	*	

spread assessments across the semester, reducing stress levels commonly associated with deadlines. One student commented,

> 'I liked the set up and timeline for the assignments as I never felt I was rushing to get them done.'

Overall, our approach worked well, with students adapting quickly and producing thoughtful, high-quality work.

Assessment methods: Reports

Two of the six assessments involved students individually reflecting using a report-writing format. They were required to create action plans containing SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), outlining how they proposed to develop through the module and beyond. The first report, the mid-module review, was 1500 words in length and worth 20%. It encouraged students to reflect on their 1) motivations and values 2) skills and experiences 3) preferences related to types of work and 4) preferences related to the spatial dynamics of work. The report helped students increase their self-understanding early in the module, providing a foundation for the second report at the module's conclusion. The Labour Market Entry Plan was 2000 words and worth 30%. This included assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses of networking skills, self-branding, online presence, and ability to communicate their skills and experiences to potential employers. They also prepared an action plan for moving towards their career-related goals between module completion and graduation. Student feedback revealed that more than three quarters had not critically reflected upon their progress prior to studying this module, used models of reflection, or had previously written SMART goals. These methods of assessment were designed to develop core skills (UCAS, 2024) long required in the world of work, namely, report-writing, critical reflection and action planning.

To enable module students to self-evaluate and document their development we had them complete the university's Career Readiness Test, a psychometrically validated tool, known externally as the Graduate Capital Scale (Tomlinson et al., 2021), at the beginning and end of the module. This produced aggregated data which also enabled us to evaluate whether there was any significant growth in the students' employability capital due to completion of the module. To analyse the data, a Paired Samples t test was conducted using SPSS V.30 and measurements were taken using a Likert six-point scale within the Career Readiness Test which measured overall capital development plus the subscales of human, social, cultural, identity and psychological capital. The data was downloaded and cleaned and any duplicate or missing data was removed. The data was also checked for normalcy and outliers.

The results showed a significant average increase in overall capital development prior to the module start ($M = 3.637$, $SD = .706$) to module completion ($M = 4.733$, $SD = .537$), $t(55) = 11.582$, $p < .001$. The mean increase in scores was 1.09 (95% confidence interval, ranging from .907 to 1.286). The effect size was noted as medium to large (Cohen's $d = .708$) and the largest effect sizes were noted for social and identity capital. Students individually found completion of the Career Readiness Test helpful for them to reflect upon their progress, plus it provided us with data and evidence to demonstrate real impact in student confidence and knowledge.

Figure 4: Graduate Capital Scale analysis - A Paired Samples t test using SPSS V.30

Paired Samples Statistics		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	OverallPost	4.7332	56	.53745	.07182
	OverallPre	3.6368	56	.70559	.09429
Pair 2	HCPost	4.880	56	.5568	.0744
	HCPre	3.705	56	.6686	.0893
Pair 3	SCost	4.5318	56	.78653	.10510
	SCPre	3.1964	56	.91145	.12180
Pair 4	CCPost	4.8688	56	.62070	.08294
	CCPre	3.7816	56	.82872	.11074
Pair 5	ICPost	4.6675	56	.60527	.08088
	ICPre	3.5471	56	.75564	.10098
Pair 6	PCPost	4.7018	56	.63708	.08513
	PCPre	4.0670	56	.83874	.11208

Paired Samples Test		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Significance	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	OverallPost-OverallPre	1.09643	1.09643	0.09467	0.90671	1.28615	11.582	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 2	HCPost-HCPre	1.1750	1.1750	0.0995	0.9756	1.3744	11.807	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 3	SCost-SCPre	1.33536	1.33536	0.13737	1.06005	1.61066	9.721	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 4	CCPost-CCPre	1.08714	1.08714	0.10056	0.88563	1.28866	10.811	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 5	ICPost-ICPre	1.12036	1.12036	0.10794	0.90404	1.33667	10.379	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 6	PCPost-PCPre	0.63482	0.63482	0.07571	0.48309	0.78655	8.385	55	<.001	<.001

Paired Samples Effect Sizes					95% Confidence Interval	
			Standardizer a	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	OverallPost - OverallPre	Cohen's d	.70845	1.548	1.155	1.934
		Hedges' correction	.71829	1.526	1.139	1.907
Pair 2	HCPost - HCPre	Cohen's d	.7447	1.578	1.181	1.968
		Hedges' correction	.7551	1.556	1.164	1.941
Pair 3	SCost - SCPre	Cohen's d	1.02801	1.299	.939	1.652
		Hedges' correction	1.04230	1.281	.926	1.630
Pair 4	CCPost - CCPre	Cohen's d	.75249	1.445	1.066	1.817
		Hedges' correction	.76295	1.425	1.051	1.792
Pair 5	ICPost - ICPre	Cohen's d	.80775	1.387	1.016	1.752
		Hedges' correction	.81898	1.368	1.002	1.728
Pair 6	PCPost - PCPre	Cohen's d	.56657	1.120	.782	1.452
		Hedges' correction	.57444	1.105	.772	1.432

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.
Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

Assessment methods: Planned event

Running employer events for students has a long history within our institution and has been often delivered through a mix of centrally-led careers service and department-led events. We wanted to bring employer events within our module structure, and enable the student voice to shape their provision, promotion and delivery. This would benefit the students studying the module and those across the wider department. This assessment was worth 10%.

For individual students, responsibility for delivering and hosting a planned event by inviting former students or employers to speak with current students, developed their confidence in approaching and engaging with employers. They achieved a tangible output, improved their career networks and developed marketing skills, promoting their planned event to the department's student body. Students were required to host the employer, chair the event and ensure the activity went smoothly. It also assisted students to gain experience of working with an employer's deadlines and to use their influencing and negotiation skills in relation to event scheduling and its subsequent delivery. The department in turn, benefitted from a wide-ranging employer programme of twenty-five employer talks, open to all interested students. Attendance ranged from 15-40 students per talk, with a core group from the module attending each one (between 5-15). This extensive programme of subject-relevant career events would not have been possible without utilising the module's students.

Assessment methods: Recorded review

A notable student favourite was the recorded book review (worth 10%). Students were required to select from a list of forty self-help books focused on increasing productivity and effectiveness, which we had curated for the module. They could also propose their own book. Titles included 'How to be a Productivity Ninja' (Allcott, 2016), 'Stop Worrying, Start Writing' (Painter, 2021) and 'Getting Things Done' (Allen, 2015). Students were required to produce a short five-minute video format book review, summarising the book's core content, a critical review, and commentary on its impact upon their personal, academic, and work-based habits. They were also asked to appraise the book's relevance for fellow students and whether or not they would recommend it and why. Students reported that they enjoyed the novel format of assessment and for many, having grown up with social media and using it extensively in their everyday lives, it played to both their strengths and preferences. It provided students with an opportunity to be creative with how they produced and edited their video and to consider how to communicate with impact. Most reported they had employed their book's principles within their daily lives, including their studies, with real benefits. Having completed their videos, students were asked if they were willing for them to be used as a resource to benefit all students within the wider department, to which the vast majority were happy to. This is a further example of our module delivering peer-created, scalable, careers-related activity.

Assessment methods: Employability Ambassador Engagement

We have discussed the common challenge for centralised careers services and subject departments of having sufficient resource and capacity to run a series of career activities reflecting students' diverse range of career interests.

Many years prior to the creation our module, the second author developed a potential solution. A group of students within the department were designated 'Employability Ambassadors' who assisted developing, promoting, and delivering a range of activities. Against this backdrop of limited resources and with low student awareness and engagement, the scheme constituted a 'win-win' for the employability lead, the department, and its students. However, the scheme's voluntary nature meant student engagement was unstable from year to year and week to week. In good times, the group swelled to over thirty students and an ambitious range of initiatives were delivered. In exchange for working on various teams, student ambassadors developed key skills, gained experience, and received a signed certificate and letter of reference from the employability lead. However, as there was no pay or academic credit, consistent formal commitment was difficult. When other demands emerged, notably assignment deadlines, those less committed would often miss meetings and deliverables. This uncertainty was to be expected but generated tension among students and made planning precarious.

The module was an opportunity to formalise the positive aspects of the ambassador scheme, adding greater accountability and awarding academic credit (15%) for engagement in weekly meetings and contribution to one of six sub-teams. We briefed students in detail during the first week on the scheme's logic, their role and expectations. We highlighted the positive contributions previous ambassador groups had made. We outlined the six sub-teams (see Figure 5), including the events team and communications team and allocated each student based on their preferences.

While some students selected a team based on what they enjoyed or to enhance their own CV, others wanted to try something new or develop specific skills such as planning or analytical skills. Each week, there was a timetabled session dedicated to team progress updates. Meetings were student-led and agendas sent in advance, with minutes and

Figure 5: Ambassador Teams

Organisation Team	Events Team	Communications Team	Research Team	Education Team	Engagement Team
Help to run the ambassador group including, agenda, meetings, notes and homework. Liaise with all other teams.	Help to coordinate and support individuals and sub-teams organising specific events. Come up with ideas for new events. Develop master schedule. Develop templates and procedures for events.	Promoting and sharing all information about events, initiatives, supports, opportunities etc through physical and virtual channels.	Help to design and conduct research related to employability (student surveys for example). Help to analyse data and feedback into ambassador initiatives and planning.	Help to identify, design and implement ways to embed employability into the curriculum.	Help to tackle the largest issue which is to improve student engagement with events and available supports / resources.
Key Duties & Projects					
Setting meeting agendas	Develop priorities for what events to run	Promoting events and resources	Focus Groups / surveys / interviews	Reviewing the module for enhancement	Why is student engagement so low?
Taking meeting notes	Developing schedule of event times	Getting students to join our channels (LinkedIn etc)	'Borrowing' strategies from other departments and universities	Develop short videos about careers resources (student friendly)	How to increase engagement?
Capturing and circulating 'homework'	Scheduling all events strategically (avoid conflicts and heavy assessment periods)	Developing content for Blackboard	'Undercover' Student - trying careers supports and reporting back	How to embed employability into modules?	Prize draws / giveaways?
Running Slack Platform	Developing database of events, speakers and contacts	Developing physical flyers	Use LinkedIn Group to find out what former students are doing now	Expanding the list of book and app resources for the module	Deploying carrots and sticks
Coordinating final ceremony and certificates	Developing ideas for new events	Managing Instagram	Work with Engagement Team on 'Student Engagement' challenge	Explaining and promoting the module to future students	Ensuring and enhancing engagement across the department
	Coordinate with Ambassadors planning individual events	Sharing content with wider student groups			Focus Groups / surveys / interviews
	Create Database of former events and speakers	Developing promo templates for all events			Getting students to join our channels

next actions captured and circulated by members of the organisation team. During the first few weeks the teams agreed on logical goals, projects, and initiatives and each team then worked towards these. For example, while the events team would develop and schedule a programme of events, the communications team would promote those events, experimenting with different channels and methods of communication to maximise impact. Their Instagram account, for example, attracted followers across the department and was highly effective in promoting events, supports, resources and opportunities. For example, during the semester the account attracted 552 followers, reached 1684 accounts and achieved 52,049 views. The engagement team interreacted with students across the department to ensure events and speakers were relevant. They implemented innovative ways to ensure strong student attendance levels at employer sessions, for example, entry into a prize raffle. Members of the engagement team encouraged peers to take advantage of supports provided by the central careers service, for example, by producing short video-based promotional content posted via Instagram. This saw a 28% increase in students from the wider department asking for individual career guidance and support, plus increased attendance at both departmental and central career events.

As with module homework tasks, the ambassador role was designed to model professional environments and foster effective peer teamworking. While many students were eager to share and discuss their work, others were motivated by not letting their team down as this would be obvious to all during the weekly meetings. A key benefit to students of working within their sub-teams was developing effective teamwork skills. To facilitate the ambassador role and effective communication between the six sub-teams, we had students use the messaging platform Slack, commonly used in external organisations. Utilising Slack assisted modelling real world, real-time work interactions. Teamwork skills are crucial within the world of work, yet personal experience has repeatedly shown us that students generally do not like group assessment. This is driven by mainly instrumental concerns, that their individual awarded mark will be adversely affected by the contribution (or lack thereof) of their fellow team members. To address these concerns, we asked each team to produce a joint final report outlining both what they had collectively achieved but also summarising individual contributions. This report enhanced transparency and fairness in awarding marks, which the students appreciated:

> ‘I liked getting credit for my contributions as this is rare in other modules.’

Students reported that they enjoyed the creative and real-world nature of the ambassador role. Weekly meetings meant they felt supported in fulfilling the role’s requirements, and they appreciated regular in-person contact with friends and peers (especially following the relatively recent aftermath of Covid isolation), plus that attendance was formally recognised. Students commented that they valued gaining practical experience and tangible examples to add to their application packages:

> [The ambassador role] ‘gave me something ‘solid’ to say I have done in interviews, rather than just essays.’

Ultimately, formalising the ambassador scheme within the module proved successful with consistently high engagement driven by both carrots and sticks.

Conclusion

Although students and universities are increasingly concerned about employability, student engagement with specific supports, events and developmental activities remains low. This paper considered why and what can be done. It reflected upon the design and delivery of a dedicated credit-bearing employability module for third year geography students. It highlighted some effective transferable and scalable solutions to challenges facing careers professionals, academics, and higher education institutions. These solutions are pragmatic and demonstrate the powerful role of 'carrots and sticks' upon the design of teaching content, delivery, and assessment and in enhancing student motivation, engagement, and learning.

Our experience resulted in a number of key lessons. To enhance levels of student engagement and deliver meaningful impact, it is crucial to capture and incorporate the student voice. We need to understand what motivates students and align content, formats, and incentives accordingly. Throughout this paper, we have demonstrated the role of effectively deploying carrots and sticks (intrinsic and extrinsic motivators) which students regard as desirable and necessary. One student notably reported at the end of the module:

> 'It has 'forced' me to do something that's employed me with some valuable skills.'

Although the module was capped at thirty students to facilitate effective interaction, and limited to third-year undergraduate students, we achieved our goal of creating meaningful impact for both module students and those in the wider department, notably creating a programme of student-led and tailored career learning activities, resources and events.

The module received an overall student satisfaction score of 4.5/5, demonstrating that despite challenges, it proved successful in engaging students and developing their career learning and employability. Notable student comments received include:

> 'The most practical and genuinely useful module I have ever taken''
>
> 'Favourite module to date''
>
> 'I have gained more knowledge and skills from this module than any module I have ever taken.'

While the individual components and solutions within this module are not intrinsically radical, we have demonstrated that if carefully combined and applied, they can be highly effective in enhancing student engagement, learning and satisfaction. Although the module may seem resource-intensive to those working in leaner environments, we feel that there are opportunities to be strategically selective for your own context, for example, involving students as effective resource-creators, (as in our ambassador concept), to create scalable resource to deliver change. Moreover, despite our focus on a geography module, we believe that these solutions can successfully be scaled and transferred across disciplines, institutions and learning contexts.

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