

Education for mental health case study

Graduate Attributes

Dr Rebecca Upsher

King's College London



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Context

Inductions and core module curriculum content did not address certain skills in detail or in a timely manner ie, content delivered in induction was often too early or overwhelming. This included study skills, digital skills, communication and supporting wellbeing. Directing students to central services was often ignored or there were long waiting lists. In addition, mitigating circumstances on the BSc Psychology programme were high, as Psychology is often associated with higher levels of mental health concerns or links to those with concerns. There were gaps in the curriculum that needed to be filled in order to help students succeed.

Module leader, Ellie Dommett, was involved in writing the 2017-2019 KCL education strategy that stated the need to equip students for success:

“Equipping students for success, success is so much more than a degree in psychology, and if all they come out with is a degree, then as a university we have failed.”

Dr Ellie Dommett, module leader.

From this, the Graduate Attributes programme was developed. The Graduate Attributes programme consists of three separate non-credit bearing modules designed to help students develop key attributes from the beginning of their journey as a student through to becoming a graduate. Each module is associated with a specific year of study on the BSc Psychology and offers an opportunity to develop key graduate attributes in a way that compliments other modules on the BSc Psychology degree and supports personal development.

Outcomes of module

The module aims for students to:

- + understand the core skills and communication skills necessary for university study
- + show awareness of the issues around student wellbeing and how to support themselves
- + better plan their time to work with conflicting demands
- + be more confident in using technology for learning
- + show awareness of employability skills and how to communicate these.

Key module information	
Typical intake	Entire year group can participate in up to twenty activities consisting of either: + asynchronous activities built around relevant LinkedIn Learning courses + face to face workshops. The workshops require prior booking and are capped at 50 students (split into two seminar rooms).
Format	Synchronous workshops; Asynchronous LinkedIn learning based activities
Level of study	All undergraduate years
Status	Optional. Students can choose whether to complete the module and within that they can choose which activities they do from the 20 on offer across the year.
Credited	Non-credit bearing module but appears on transcript.
Assessment	No, but completion is dependent on engagement in activities which is determined by attendance at synchronous sessions, or 100% completion of LinkedIn Learning tasks combined with ≥40% pass rate in an associated online quiz. Pass = completion of four sessions, Third = 6, 2.2 = 8, 2.1 = 10, First = 12 + sessions.
Assessment feedback	No
Location*	Seminar rooms and LinkedIn learning
Teaching staff	Lecturers, teaching fellows, student-led sessions
Duration/frequency	Weekly; two semesters

*This information refers to usual circumstances (not under Covid-19 restrictions)

Development of module

Graduate attributes modules have been running since 2017-2018 academic year.

There have been some adaptations over the years:

- + Asynchronous online sessions changed over time based on available sessions on platform eg, LinkedIn learning platform.
 - + For face-to-face sessions, these will depend on teaching staff running the sessions and their expertise.
 - + Student-led activities were added. For example, the department paid students to develop a session on implicit bias and then they ran that session for other students.
 - + Learning outcomes were developed for all sessions so students could clearly see what they would be getting out of those sessions. This was important for uptake as it is an optional module.
 - + Quizzes were added to give the students opportunities to self-assess and be sure that LinkedIn learning activities were not just played in the background.
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Session Title	Format	Theme
Example from Foundation Graduate Attributes (year one undergraduates)		
Ramp up reading & improve your note taking	LinkedIn	Core Study Skills
Learning from lectures and video	Face-to-face	Core Study Skills
Internet safety for students	LinkedIn	Tech Savvy
Working well in groups	Face-to-face	Planning, Projects and People
Writing in plain English	LinkedIn	Core Study Skills
Looking after your mate	Face-to-face	Skills for Mental Wellbeing
Learning Word 2016	LinkedIn	Tech Savvy
Sleep	Face-to-face	Skills for Mental Wellbeing
Grammar Foundation	LinkedIn	Core Study Skills
Techniques for enhancing your memory and scoring better on tests	LinkedIn	Core Study Skills
Reigniting your Motivation	Face-to-face	Planning, Projects and People
Getting things done	LinkedIn	Planning, Projects and People
Excel Training	LinkedIn	Tech Savvy
Learning PowerPoint 2016	LinkedIn	Tech Savvy
Presentation Skills	Face-to-face	Communication Skills
Communicating with confidence	LinkedIn	Communication Skills
Buddy Training	Face-to-face	Skills for Mental Wellbeing
Writing under a deadline	LinkedIn	Planning, Projects and People
Career Planning Essentials	Face-to-face	Building your career
Improve your focus	LinkedIn	Skills for Mental Wellbeing

Pedagogic approaches to promote student wellbeing

There are a number of features of Graduate Attributes that are designed to support student wellbeing:

- + Optional module: this has an advantage as it means students attending want to be there and therefore would benefit them more than students who don't want to be there (if it was compulsory).
- + Flexibility: the online sessions can be completed when student desires.
- + Small group seminar sessions promote engagement and a more relaxed, safer learning environment.
- + Some sessions directly impact wellbeing eg, time-management, stress and mindfulness, building effective relationships.
- + Opportunity to meet members of staff that don't teach on core modules and see their approach to teaching. This is important as it sets up expectations that there are different approaches to teaching.
- + Teachers that have expertise and are enthusiastic about that topic.

Challenges

- + Engagement was an issue eg, students could just run asynchronous videos without listening or attend live sessions without contributing. So, from 2020-21 academic year, students needed to attend (or 100% watch) sessions and get at least 40% on a five-question quiz that assesses content.

“The biggest challenge we have is engagement”

Dr Ellie Dommett, module leader.

- + Attendance-based completion has an impact on engagement i.e., if students don't feel they have enough time to attend enough sessions that earn them a 2:1 (eg, 10 sessions), then they don't want to attend at all. Is easy to attend, they can achieve this by asynchronous sessions only, and watch these whenever they choose. Those who do engage attend many sessions, but it's getting students to engage in the first place. Making students see the value in something that isn't compulsory is hard.
- + First year students tend to engage more as there are very clear links to core modules, teaching staff can say 'this GA session will help with this assignment'. This is difficult to do with optional modules in the second and third year. Deeper working in the second and third year means students find it harder to attend graduate attributes sessions BUT by outlining explicit outcomes hopefully it will become clearer for students why these sessions are important.
- + Third year students have 'eyes on the prize' in terms of their future career or further study so see the value in sessions. First years don't necessarily have this sense so leave it until the third year but if they haven't developed skills to manage their studies, they won't have time to attend.
- + As it's not a credit bearing module, for teaching staff it doesn't officially contribute towards standard teaching tariffs in the education database. Therefore, staffing is a challenge. But does allow early career staff to be creative and amend current sessions/develop own sessions.
- + Timetabling is huge challenge, finding time whole year group is free.

Advice for other academics from module leader

- + Allow for flexibility and choice for students.
- + Think about how you will check students are fully engaged with it.
- + Don't want to unnecessarily add to the student workload, so clear planning is important.

“The biggest thing, is you should only embed what you definitely need, and you have to make it really clear to the students what they are going to get out of it.”

Dr Ellie Dommett, module leader

Contact us

General enquiries

+44 (0) 3300 416201

enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk

www.advance-he.ac.uk

Media enquiries

+44 (0) 1904 717500

communications@advance-he.ac.uk

www.advance-he.ac.uk/contact-us

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