



STUDENTS AS
CO-CREATORS

A Curriculum Design Collaboration

Incorporating BMS training for

Improving Student Engagement

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Would Promoting (and/or incorporating) additional biomedical science training, certification and/or work experience activities improve overall satisfaction and engagement of Biomedical science students at the University of Westminster?

1. Where did the inspiration to do the project come from?

Personal experiences with the competitive and demanding job market encouraged the team to undertake the project. Engaging with impactful extracurricular activities during university is crucial, therefore the project focused on acknowledging and meeting the interests of the fellow student body at the University of Westminster (UoW), enabling personal and professional development by facilitating employability innovation.

Furthermore, recent events of the public health crisis - Sars-Cov-2 - served as an additional obstacle in seeking meaningful opportunities. Lockdowns exacerbated the declining job market (Cortes and Forsythe, 2022). Government restrictions and measures forced employability-enriching opportunities to shift to remote and online platforms, restricting laboratory-based Life Sciences students from obtaining sufficient work experience, causing an increasing competitive workforce (Su and Dai, 2021).

“Due to the pandemic, work experience in the laboratory is hard to get. It would be great if the university provides some work experience for biomedical science students in the university lab as a work shadowing or short time work experience to enhance the employability of the students after graduation.” - Anonymous, answer from questionnaire 2.

2. What did you set out to achieve?

The project had 3 main objectives; identifying the sector current BMS students want to pursue during and/or following their degree, the relevant qualifications they would need to obtain to achieve their professional goals - training, certification and work experience, and their satisfaction with UoW's approach at helping students to achieve these goals.

Anonymous questionnaires using google forms facilitated obtaining a general consensus on the current student body, their engagement and satisfaction regarding employability skills - through qualitative and quantitative data. Students were expected to answer and submit the questionnaire individually. All students were required to provide consent in order to complete the questionnaire.

Two questionnaires were released in which questions included; course of study, level of study, ability to find opportunities on job-hunting websites such as Indeed and UoW careers site “Engage”, as well as overall satisfaction of employability enriching activities they had participated in previously during university.

Questionnaire 1

Questionnaire 1 was the initial data collection stage aimed to identify the course, level of study and engagement of the student body. It yielded 85 responses from students across various Biomedical Sciences courses and levels of study. Most students studied Biomedical Sciences, Pharmacology and Physiology, Human nutrition, Medical sciences, Biochemistry and Biological sciences

Responses to question 3 in figure 1, determined that 54 out of 85 students (63.5%) were first year students, while 23.5% (20) were second year students and 12.9% (11) were third year students.

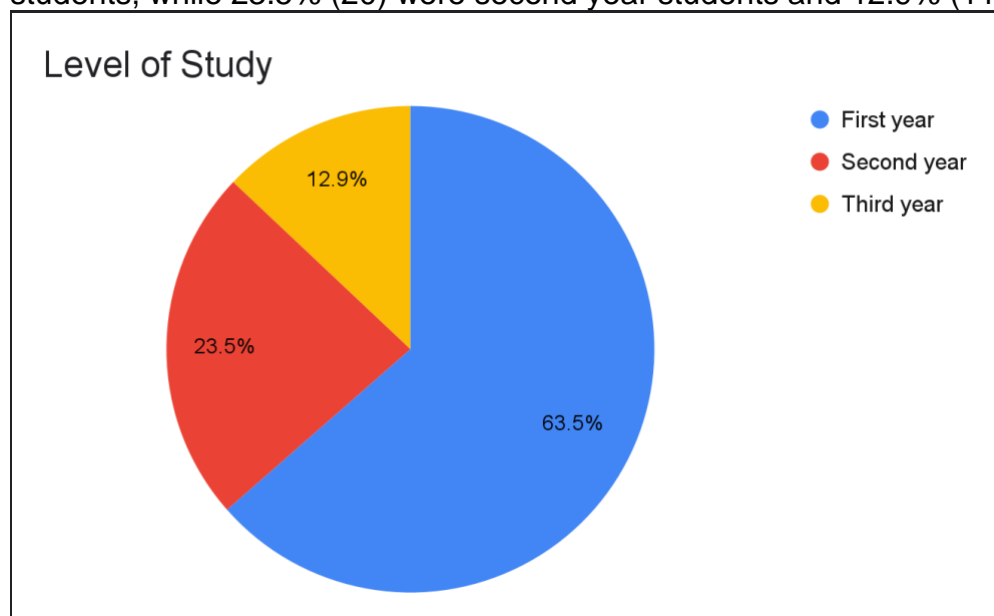


Figure 1. Questionnaire responses from question 3 "Level of study". First year students indicated in blue. Second year students in red and third year students in yellow.

Question 5 enquired whether students had previously engaged with employability enriching activities such as pursuing internships, participating in the career mentoring scheme offered by UoW, attending network events and professional training. 25.8% (22) of students responded that they have taken on activities beneficial for their chances of employment, while 74.1% (63) indicated that they had not participated in such activities, evident in figure 2. Increasing the number of the BMS relevant activities and its promotion can achieve higher engagement in the student body. Moreover, most respondents are first year students, it is likely that they have not found activities which they are eligible for.

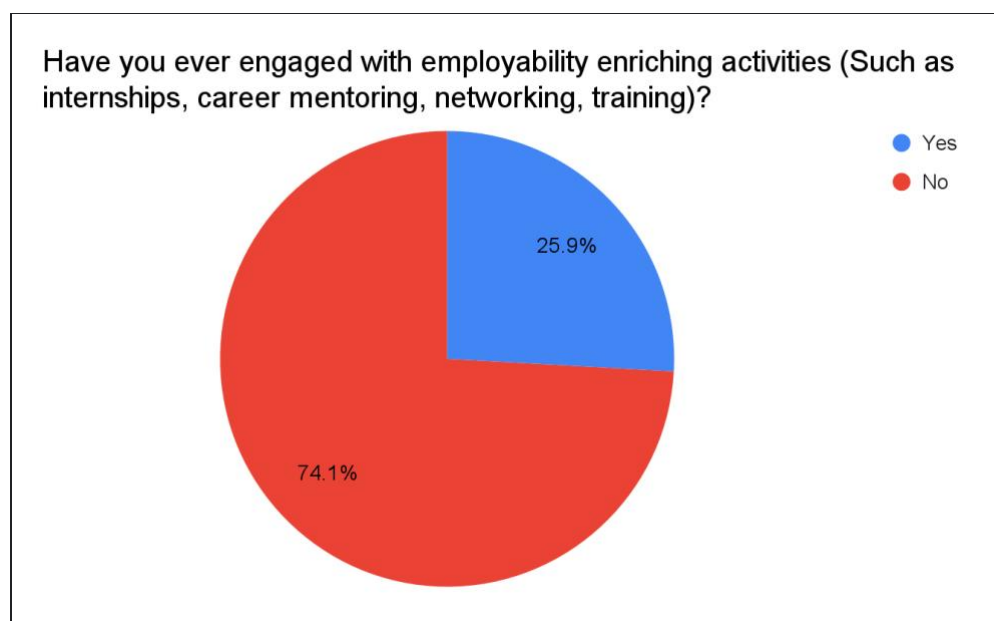


Figure 2. Questionnaire data from question 5 "Have you ever engaged with employability enriching activities (Such as internships, career mentoring, networking, training)?". Responses "Yes" labelled in blue and "No" labelled in red.

In Question 6, 22 students expressed satisfaction with the employability enriching activities. 100% (85) of students indicated that they would like to participate in additional BMS training if provided by the University in question 7. The positive responses imply that additional employability-enriching activities would improve BMS student satisfaction.

Questionnaire 2

Questionnaire 2 obtained information on student's personal experiences with the job market and industry - if finding work experience opportunities were challenging, their confidence in achieving their professional goals and the types of additional training, certification and work experience students would like to receive from the university.

In question 6, 56% (14) specified that it was difficult to find employability opportunities online through job hunting sites as well as Engage - UoW's personalised platform designated for finding various employment opportunities within and outside the BMS sector, see figure 3. This suggests that either available opportunities are not easily accessible to the student population, or the opportunities do not align with the student's needs. Notably, the available opportunities are typically accounting, business management and translation-related roles.

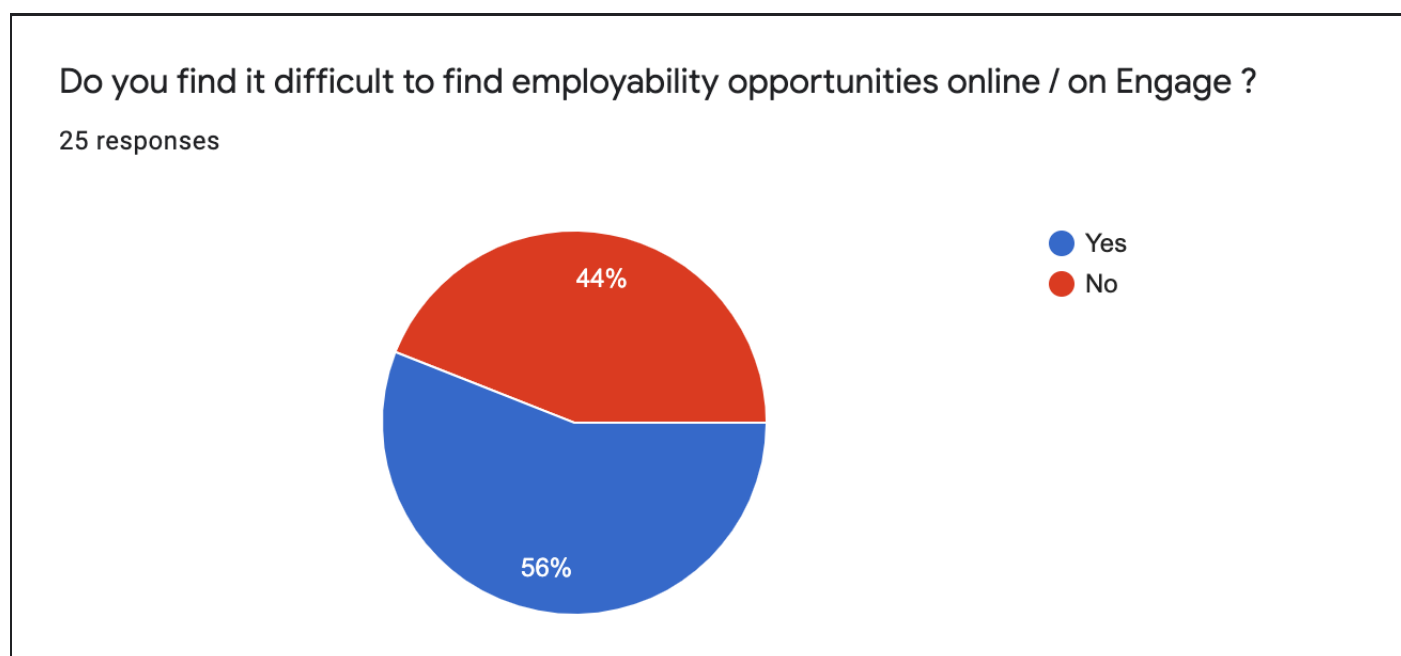


Figure 3. Questionnaire responses for Question 6 "Do you find it difficult to find employability opportunities online/on Engage". Responses for "Yes" indicated in blue. "No" evident in red.

Responses for question 9 - student's confidence in pursuing their professional goals - demonstrated a varied level see figure 4. Students were asked to rate their confidence on a scale of 1 to 5. The median and modal answer was "3" with 34.9% (9) of responses, indicating some confidence while suggesting they would prefer additional support to achieving these goals. The second most common response was "4", suggesting that they are fairly confident. 26.9% (7) and 7.7% (2) chose the responses "5" and "2" respectively. There were no responses for "1" implying that UoW students are at least slightly confident in achieving their goals.

On a scale from 1-to-5, how confident do you feel on achieving this goal?



26 responses

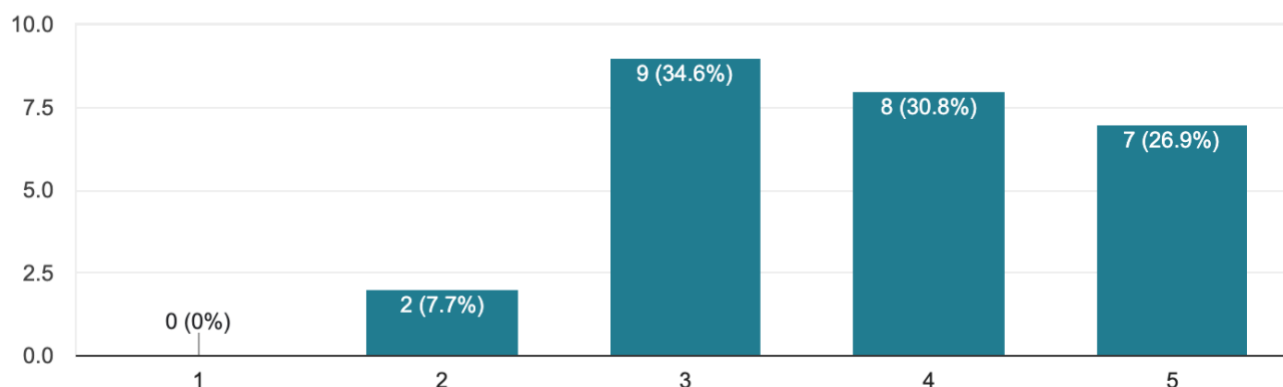


Figure 4. Question 9 responses for "On a scale from 1-to-5" how confident do you feel on achieving this goal?".

Through questions 10 and 11, the majority of students indicated enthusiasm in undertaking additional certification programs, courses, lab-based shadowing, training and research opportunities such as Excel, Python, Good Clinical Practice qualifications and shadowing, if provided by the university, figures 5 and 6.

Have you ever considered engaging within certification programmes / courses ? (Such as software, Excel, SPSS, R, Python, Good Clinical Practice...)



26 responses

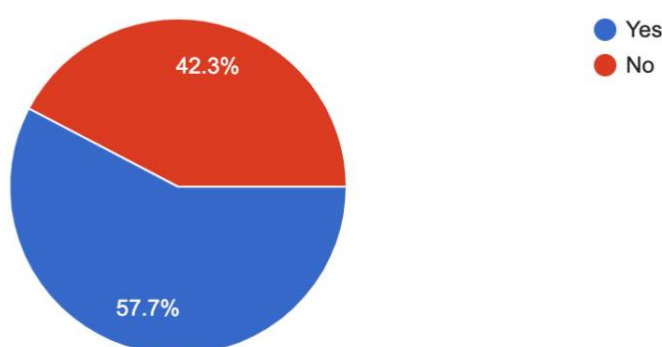


Figure 5. Responses: question 10 "Have you considered engaging within certification programmes/courses?". 57.7% (15) answered "Yes", while 42.3% (11) answered "No".

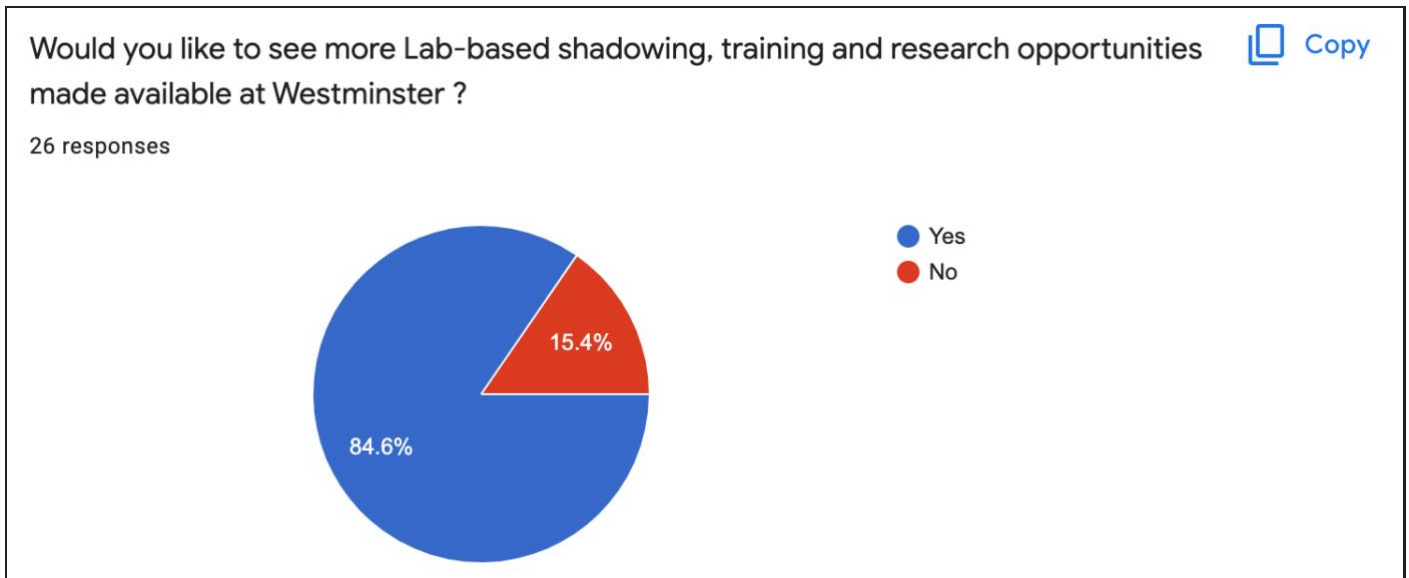



Figure 6. Responses for question 11 "Would you like to see more Lab-based shadowing, training and research opportunities made available at Westminster?". 84.6% (22) indicated "Yes", they would like to see more of such opportunities, while 15.4% (4) stated "No".

The final quantitative question requested students to rate their satisfaction with the university's approach in providing employment opportunities, on a scale of 1 to 10, figure 7. Most students - 20% (5) voted "6", indicating that UoW had some success with providing satisfactory support for employment however it could improve. The second most common answers were "4", "5", "7" and "10" - all received 16% (4) responses. "8", "3" and "1" followed, as 8% (2) students, 4% (1) and 4% (1) responded with those answers, respectively.

How Satisfied are you with the University of Westminster in providing employment opportunities? 

25 responses

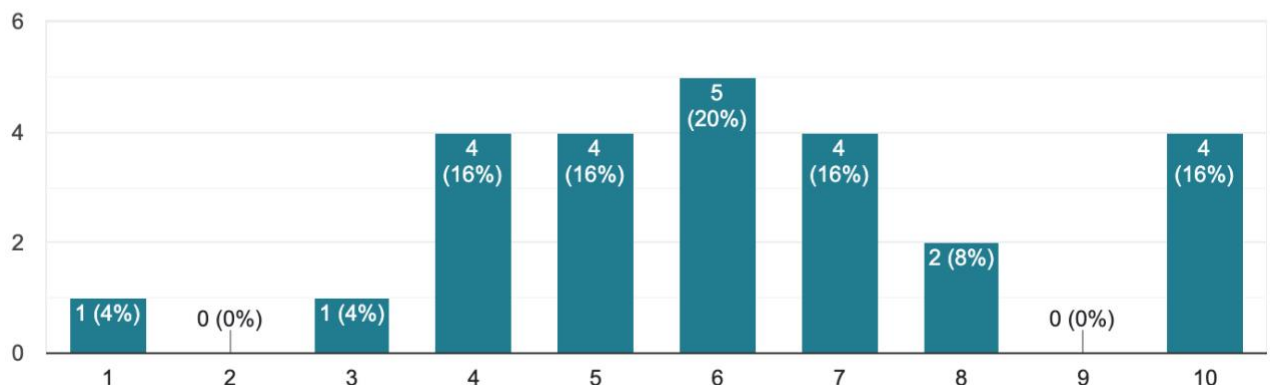


Figure 7. Question 12 responses "How satisfied are you in UoW providing employment opportunities?". The responses required students to rate their experience on a scale of 1 to 10, with "1" denoting extreme dissatisfaction and "10" indicating extreme satisfaction.

Results obtained from survey responses concluded that promoting and incorporating additional training, certification and work experience for BMS students at UoW would improve overall satisfaction and engagement within their degree and the institution. Importantly, the majority of students stated they look forward to taking part in more of such activities, providing more scope for the project.

3. How did staff and students work on this project?

Consistently throughout the project there was equal distribution of responsibilities and workload between students and staff - Dr. Anjali Ghosh. Bi-weekly meetings were arranged for project planning discussions. In the initial meeting, there was a collaborative effort in identifying the key objectives and goals of this project, and how these goals would be achieved.

Major areas of discussions for successive meetings were regarding methodology for obtaining data, how the data would be used, allocation of work between group members and deadlines for completing allocated responsibilities.

It was collectively agreed that surveys were the most effective method to collect data from the current student body. Each student member was responsible for providing two relevant questions by a fixed date, to be included in the questionnaires. Dr. Ghosh reviewed and discussed whether the questions were beneficial to our research.

Once the surveys were designed by student members within the deadline, Dr. Ghosh aided in distributing them by helping student members contact other staff at UoW, within the set deadlines. The questionnaires were granted permission to be uploaded on "Blackboard" - a platform where course and module content is published, enabling direct student-staff contact at UoW. As we recognised the importance of social media platforms in reaching a wider UoW student body audience, Instagram, Twitter and Whatsapp groups were also used to promote the questionnaires.

Following questionnaire release, student members were allocated tasks such as reviewing and analysing the responses, social media platform management and keeping the student body engaged with our research.

Group members concurred on hosting an in-person workshop inviting BMS students to an introduction on the project - the goals for this project and the "roadmap" to achieving them. Students were re-allocated tasks relevant to the event, including even promotion - placing posters throughout the campus and on social media, inviting guest presenters, organising refreshments and budget recording. Staff assisted with identifying and contacting guest presenters, booking a room to host the event and reviewing the budget.

4. What kind of impact do you anticipate that your work may have on learning and teaching going forward (specific to your course/module or in a broader context)?

Implementing the suggestions from BMS students in the surveys will help expand UoW's network with the industry while achieving the primary goals - increasing student engagement, satisfaction, thus confidence in their degree pathway at UoW.

The conducted research provided a clear understanding on the areas which BMS students at UoW would like to pursue and the types of employability enriching activities they are interested in. This information is crucial to ensure more relevant employability enriching activities are available and easily accessible for students - optional or compulsory. The implementation of such activities could revolutionise the approach UoW takes in Life Sciences education, tailoring the BMS degrees to cater directly towards the industry's need.

Introducing opportunities and training schemes outside of the university involving external companies, organisations and other institutions can help expand the professional capabilities and network of UoW students. For example, collaboration with regional laboratories, facilities and societies can provide students insight on the various graduate opportunities available, further bridging the knowledge and experience gained from the degrees with the wider industry. Participaction would equip students with the essential knowledge and skills to succeed in the field, improving satisfaction and confidence in professional performance.

Continuation of the project within a new cycle in the upcoming academic year aims to broaden the goals and achievements, for an effective delivery of student employability opportunities. Focus will be applied on introducing new employability enhancing schemes and networking opportunities for students, enabling direct interaction with well-established professionals in their fields of interest.

5. Any lessons learned from working in partnership

"The most rewarding lesson attained from this experience, simply, was not the genuine satisfaction towards the ownership of work we each independently contributed, fundamentally, the due process of recognising and commemorating the quality of work of fellow team members was uniquely distinguishing. Whilst momentous in its own right, the collective passion and dedication towards actuating an impactful change towards fellow students at the University of Westminster was deeply profound and personally enriching."

~Joseph Valenti.

"Working in partnership enabled the integration of many different ideas and strategies to form the basis of this project. Partnership has played a pivotal role in broadening our perspectives on how the university can achieve more engagement, satisfaction and confidence for fellow UoW students, facilitating an approach to serve their goals and aspirations. Each team member had equal importance and opportunities to give back to UoW, highlighting the significance of community spirit."

~Mugdha Karri.

"Working on a project with student fellows and collaborating with a teaching staff member, was a very unique experience. In this journey I have been working with dedicated and determined team members. There are lots of skills I was able to learn from my team members. After completion of this research project now I have understood different steps collecting and analysing data in accordance with ethical requirements. Overall, it was a distinctive experience and enriched in terms of skills."

~Soman Ahmad.

"As partnership is described as a process of engagement, a way of doing things. It was a great experience to work with a great team on this project. This project played a vital role to help students to engage with different things and enhance the opportunities which will help them in their

career. It was beneficial for students to use more efficient ways to use resources and better alignment of goals and curricula. The result we received from fellow students of UoW was incredible and It was great for all of us to see the desired result.”

~Auosha Auosha

References

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