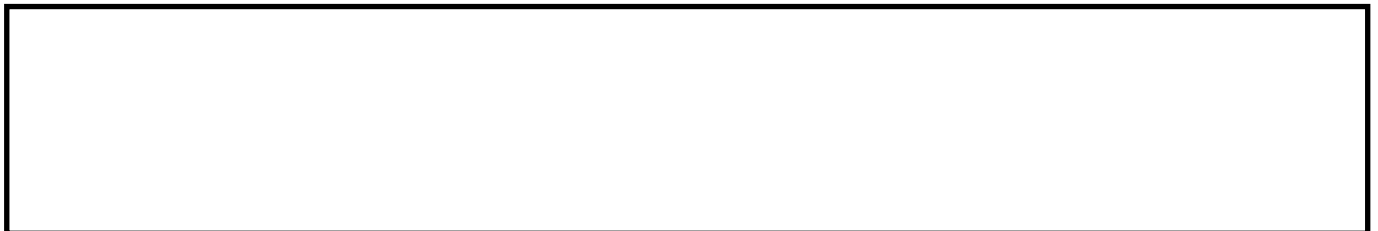


# Bringing the university of life into the classroom.

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## Bringing the University of life into the classroom

Available at: <https://www.agcc.co.uk/blog-article/bringing-the-university-of-life-into-the-classroom>

Many of us are familiar with the phrase 'I studied at the university of life' being used to differentiate between 'real world' education and learning which takes place in a classroom. In film, the media and everyday discourse, the world of higher education conjures up images of large lecture halls, long hours spent in the library and an eccentric professor holding court over unworldly-wise students. But how accurate are these stereotypes today?

Universities should aim to work closely with industry to better prepare graduates for the workplace and embed the 'university of life' firmly in the classroom by focussing on student employability and career capital through pioneering educational innovation and strong partnerships with employers and professions.

So, instead of sitting in large lecture halls for hours on end, experiential learning and teaching today can take place through a variety of ways, including live client projects, professional practice modules and industry led workshops, site visits and mentoring.

The close liaison with industrial partners across a university can add motivation to the students and help contextualise their academic practice to industry. This helps to prepare them for placements and employment, builds confidence and enhances networking skills, as shown in these comments taken from the National Student Survey (NSS): 'Very practical, I feel I am ready for the real world' and 'My course has given me ample opportunity to work in real-industry settings and provided me excellent experience.'

It has to be a collaborative process whereby students are supported with a degree of flexibility – whether it means they participate in a 6-week, 12-week or year-long placement where they are given the chance to experience the 'real world' but expected to utilise relevant academic theory from previously studied modules. This develops the students as reflective practitioners, providing an opportunity to examine critically the day-to-day workings of an organisation and to assess the value of their own contribution. This means the students gain valuable professional experience to enhance their employability, an ability to apply theory to practice and they become more critically aware of themselves as a practitioner.

It is important for any university or school to make use of synergies across its various disciplines, across courses and across institutions to enhance the student's learning experience. At Robert Gordon University (RGU), all schools and departments focus on advancing high-value cross-disciplinary work to meet learner and industry needs.

We have modules throughout the university which are a perfect example of cross-institution collaboration as they are delivered in partnership with the COEUR network of other European universities. Some students can travel to the host country and work in teams for an intensive week of learning or students can take part in an exchange programme where they study abroad for a whole semester with partner institutions in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Canada, and North America.

This couldn't get further away from the stereotypes of higher education and it comes in all forms throughout all schools within RGU – whether it's sending one of our MSc Fashion Management students to attend London Fashion Weekend Festival, to experience flagship stores or visit fashion and textile museums and exhibitions or our Media and Public Relations students producing a multi-media campaign for Sport Aberdeen. This gives students an active and 'real' experience and their work has even been shown to the Scottish Ministers for Sport and Mental Health and used extensively by Sport Aberdeen, therefore building their contacts and confidence which is another essential part of the student journey.

Allowing students to experience something outside of university can demonstrate a high level of engagement and participation from the students, providing deep and contextualised learning experiences.

Giving students access to experienced lecturers and world-class leaders means they get access to the latest research and insights from their chosen fields – it also means they get the opportunity to be guided in their specialism and receive expert feedback on their work.

To be able to give students access to such a high calibre of industry experts is something our university should pride ourselves on. We have just co-designed a CIPR Specialist Diploma with award-winning leader in crisis communications, company director and published author in the field Ella Minty, which is the only of its kind in Scotland.

All of the examples mentioned above are just some of the ways which we can bring the real world into the classroom and move further away from the outdated stereotypes of higher education.

The delivery and incorporation of practical skills in the curriculum is a key strength of RGU, ensuring that students are equipped appropriately for the workplace.

