

STRENGTHS · PROFILE

CASE STUDY

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) is one of the largest universities in the UK, with over 34,000 students. Its Business School is amongst the most elite in the country, holding Triple Crown Accreditation with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) in the United States, the Association of MBAs (AMBA) in the United Kingdom and the EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) in the European Union.

The Challenge

Like most universities, MMU provides careers support and guidance at an institutional, faculty and departmental level, to provide accessible and relevant experience and skills in their students' final year for assessment processes.

Historically, Accounting, Finance and Banking (AFB) students – part of the Business School – engaged in a mock Assessment Centre with external coaches. This was delivered during the third and final year of study, through the core Level 6 Corporate Reporting unit. Students were assessed via a reflective written essay.

The department was not seeing a good return on investment for this activity because whilst the mock Assessment Centre was experiential in nature, it did not provide students with an individualised personal activity that was sustainable. Year 3 is also too late for some graduate scheme and placement applications, which can start as early as August before the first term of Year 2.

Without wider personal development in place at Level 6, other than through the Personal Tutor scheme, the skills developed in the mock AC were not linked clearly into the programme delivery or other units.

The Approach

MMU partnered with Cappfinity to create a Personal and Professional Development (PPD) plan, in addition to a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) plan using Strengths Profile for Level 4 (first year) to Level 6 (third year), with a focus on future skill needs.

MMU's PPD and CPD units have been developed collaboratively utilising a strengths-based approach to employability skills, including Best Self Workshops to consider future skills employers will want, strengths for employability and to develop each student's authentic personal brand. They were able to attend mock assessment centres using the strengths approach.

The key team strategically and operationally engaged with others on this change journey at their respective levels across the faculty, with in excess of 70 staff in the Business School choosing to become Accredited Personal Strengths Profile Tutors and using the Career Development Toolkit.

Among the Accredited Strengths Profile Practitioners were personal tutors, ensuring each student had personalised learning.

The strengths approach was embedded into the curriculum, rather than an extra curriculum activity.

The impact has been phenomenal and highlights our collective efforts to deliver excellence in business education whilst also making a positive impact on our communities, nationally, and internationally.

Hannah Holmes

Dean of Business School and Deputy Pro-Vice
Chancellor of Business and Law at MMU

The Outcome

8,000 first year students completed Strengths Profile in two departments of the Business School at the start of their studies. Using Strengths Profile early on helped to forge stronger bonds between students and Personal Tutors by placing them at the centre of the student's development.

The standard of assignments following the introduction of a strengths-based approach has been extremely high, with 36% of students in the 2020-21 cohort achieving a 1:1 degree classification. Introducing a strengths-based approach early on helps to guide students towards developing a specific strength. Feedback from students has been insightful and positive, with the departments involved achieving the highest internal student satisfaction scores in the whole university for personal development.

The Business School won the 2024 award for the Best Innovation Strategy at the Association of MBAs and BGA Awards for their work in strengths-based personal development with students.

30% of students in 2023/24 secured placements with Times Top 100 Employers increasing from 2% pre-strengths.

183% increase in students declaring themselves 'career ready' at the start of their final year.

One of the key benefits of the strengths implementation approach is that MMU staff will now have the knowledge and materials to deliver and evolve the content on a sustainable basis.