

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.

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.

Additional Outcomes

70+ Personal Tutors have received expert-level training on the strengths-based approach allowing them to clearly support students in identifying and utilising their own strengths for employability. Each of these Personal Tutors has undertaken 17 hours of online learning, including a live assessed debrief to become an Accredited Strengths Profile Practitioner.

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.

The Outcome

1,000 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 Strengths Profile had an immediate impact on the students. The simple analysis and presentation of their skills encouraged them to reflect and plan ahead. The clear focus on a personalised self-development plan has motivated students to gain the necessary skills to be successful in the workplace. It also allows them to plan and start developing these skills in the early part of their academic journey."

Yahya Goga, Level 4 Personal Tutor