

# Major new study into how students develop employability skills

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The University of Lincoln, UK, will lead a major new study exploring how extra-curricular activities can contribute to students' academic success and employability skills.

Experts from Lincoln's Educational Development & Enhancement Unit (EDEU) will follow a group of undergraduates from enrolment through to graduation to measure the 'distance travelled' in developing sought-after transferable skills during their time at university.

The three-year longitudinal study, supported with a grant of just under £300,000 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), will involve students from a variety of academic disciplines across the arts, sciences and social sciences.

A collaboration with the University of Huddersfield, the project aims to test and evaluate measures of 'learning gain' - defined as the improvement in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development made by students during their time spent in [higher education](#).

The research team will work with employers to identify the attributes recruiters want to see in [university](#) graduates and develop a methodology for benchmarking and monitoring how students develop these qualities over time.

They will explore in particular how extra-curricular activities, such as volunteering, work placements and involvement in student clubs and societies, can support students to develop abilities such as critical-thinking, teamwork, leadership and problem-solving. The University of Lincoln already recognises these types of student activities through the Lincoln Award, an initiative run jointly with Lincoln's Students' Union.

Dr Karin Crawford, Director of EDEU at the University of Lincoln, who will lead the pilot project, said: "Higher education is a journey, not a destination, but like any journey it is important that we chart significant milestones along the way to track our progress. For universities, these milestones cannot simply be measures of academic achievement.

"University is where many young people develop the self-confidence, autonomy and problem-solving skills which set them on their way to successful careers or further study at postgraduate level. A great deal of good work takes place in our universities to develop these transferable

skills – but there is no accepted way of measuring the impact of that work.

"Through this project, we aim to develop a proven framework and practical methodology for evaluating this aspect of students' learning gain which can be replicated in universities across the UK. We are very proud to have secured this grant funding from HEFCE to deliver this important pilot study, which will add to understanding of the full value of higher education to individuals and employers."

The Lincoln-Huddersfield study is one of 12 pilot projects nationally to receive a share of £4million in grant funding from HEFCE out of 49 bids received to evaluate learning gain in higher education.

Speaking about these projects, Madeleine Atkins, Chief Executive of HEFCE, said: "The outcomes from this work have the potential to support measurement and indicators at institutional and even national level, but also crucially to improve learning and teaching practice in universities and colleges for the benefit of [students](#)."

Provided by University of Lincoln

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