GES App Project Newsletter

May 2021, Issue 1

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Erasmus+ GES App Project

Welcome to the first newsletter of the GES App Project. The project aims to develop a digital application that will allow students to plan, record and evidence the acquisition and development of graduate employability skills (GESs) throughout their university journey.

In this newsletter, we will introduce the partnership and the project; share the achievements so far, upcoming tasks and forthcoming events. The GES App project is funded by an Erasmus + Strategic Partnerships for higher education grant and it is overseen by the British Council. The project runs from 2nd October 2019-1st October 2022. The project was awarded a six-month extension due to COVID.

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Project Partners

The GES App project is an interdisciplinary collaboration between four European Universities with the University of the West of Scotland as the lead partner:

1. University of the West of Scotland (UWS)
2. Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)
3. Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie (UKSW)
4. University of Peloponnese (UoP)

Colleagues with relevant content and methodological knowledge, pedagogical expertise and technical skills are working together to design and develop the App and support material to evaluate the game.

Project Staff

1. **UWS:** Dr. Graham Scott, Lecturer in Psychology; Dr. Elizabeth Boyle, Reader in Psychology (project coordinators), Dr. Amanda Simpson, Dr. Greg Maciejewski, Dr. Zara Brodie, Dr. Marjorie McCrory, Dr. Aisha Abbas, Dr. Gavin Baxter, Dr. Paul Keir, Dr. Gillian Bruce, Dr. Rachael Flynn, Nigel Royle
2. **UoP:** Prof. Athanassios Jimoyiannis (Professor of eLearning), Dr. Panagiotis Tsiotakis, Dr. Nikolaos Koukis
3. **UKSW:** Dr. Ewa Topolewska-Siedzik, Dr. Ewa Skimina, MA Bartosz Jasiński, MA Katarzyna Kwiatkowska
4. **NTNU:** Sobah Abbas Petersen (Associate Professor), Hege Anette Olstad (PhD Student), Lars Fredheim (Msc Student), Maria Iqbal (Research Assistant)

The aim of the GES APP project is to develop an App that will allow students to plan, record and evidence the acquisition and development of graduate employability skills (GESs) throughout their university journey. A downloadable app could provide an active, agentic approach to supporting students in thinking about their skills and self-development by using motivational and interactive exercises, achievable goal-based tasks, and inducing in users a sense of fun and self-actualisation patterns that will help to raise awareness of varied employability issues. As "digital natives" who have been brought up with digital technology and embrace universal smartphone use, students would find an app-based approach to GESs development highly attractive.

Project Meetings

The Kick-off Meeting

The Kick-Off meeting for the project took place on 28th and 29th November 2019 at the Paisley Campus of the University of the West of Scotland. The Kick-off meeting went well with partners establishing good working relationships, identifying targets for the early stages of the project and making good progress in discussing initial ideas for the game.

Picture 1 The Kick Off Meeting in Paisley, UWS 2019

Partner Meetings (post-Covid)

The Second Partner Meeting for the GES App project was initially due to take place in Norway in March 2020 but was re-arranged to Warsaw in May 2020. Eventually, this meeting had to be cancelled because of the impact of COVID-19, including travel restrictions. Since then four partner meetings have been held virtually, on (i) 30th June 2020, (ii) 18th November 2020, (iii) 3rd March 2021 and (iv) 21st April 2021 respectively.

Picture 2 Networking Dinner Paisley, Scotland 2019

Early Design Tasks for the Project

In the first few months of the GES App project, the focus was on carrying out the initial design activities for the APP that will help the team to identify issues and activities relating to employability. The **key deliverables** for the first 15 months of the project were the initial design activities for the App; **O1**: the literature review (UWS lead), **O2**: the review of existing electronic resources (UoP lead) and **O3**: The user requirements analysis (UKSW lead). Deliverables O1 and O2 have been completed to target and have provided useful background knowledge and information providing theoretical and empirical frameworks on which to base the GES-App.

O1 & O2	O3	O4 & O5	O6
Literature Review	**User Requirement Analysis**	**Content Development**	**E-learning Platform**
Review of Literature on Graduate employability and existing digital resources catering GES.	The interviews, focus groups and survey from the students and employers are to directly inform the design of the app.	Development of content, and specification of instructional material, including skills identifiers and PDP exercises.	App to educate users about GES, help them develop these over the course of their university, and to keep an evidenced record of these skills.

O1: The literature review has been extremely helpful in identifying models of employability and graduate skills and attributes, and in defining what we mean by graduate employability skills and how these are operationalized in educational frameworks worldwide. It has helped us to think about the theoretical basis and structure of the activities we will host on the App. The literature review has contributed to informing the design and development activities for the App.

Teamwork
Communication skills
Time management
Problem solving
Critical thinking
Work ethic
Commitment/enthusiasm
Interpersonal skills
Leadership skills
Self-motivation
Work experience
Analytical skills
Confidence
Continuous learning, ability to learn
Coping with stress
Decision making
Independence at work
IT skills
Presentation skills
Organisation skills
Self-esteem/self-belief
Assertiveness
Business awareness
Credibility
Cultural awareness
Flexibility
Hard work
Research skills
Respect

O2: The Review of existing digital resources in the areas of graduate employability skills has identified and collated existing on-line material related to the development, tracking and evidencing of GES. The resources are classified into six major categories:
1. labour policy documents;
2. educational policy and practices for employability;
3. models of integrating employability in HE programs;
4. research and development projects;
5. educational material for GES;
6. Existing apps and educational games related to employability skills.

(From most cited to least cited in literature) List of GES deemed important by students (emerged from O1)

O3: The user requirements analysis Work on this output is ongoing. In this activity staff, students, and graduate employers are being interviewed and are taking part in focus groups to investigate their views on graduate employability skills and the usefulness/functionality of the app. UKSW has developed interview and focus group schedules for each target group. All 4 partners have identified 3 graduate employers or professionals in the area of graduate employability skills for an interview, five staff members to take part in a focus group, and 10 students to take part in focus groups. These are currently being finalised. Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups will help to extract differing perceptions of graduate employability skills and will inform the development of app content. Results will also inform a student survey that will be administered via an online questionnaire in **Questionpro** to generate more specific data.

Together these outputs (O1, O2 and O3) will provide a theoretical foundation for the app, as well as empirical evidence from potential users about what they would want to and expect to see in such an app. The findings will feed into O4, O5 and O6, and help to characterise the app content and activities.

Upcoming Tasks

The results of the early design tasks feed into the next 3 tasks: O4: Development of the App content (UKSW lead), O5: Design specification document (NTNU lead) and O6: GES Educational App and Platform (UWS lead). These tasks are interrelated and their output will be the GES App.

Events

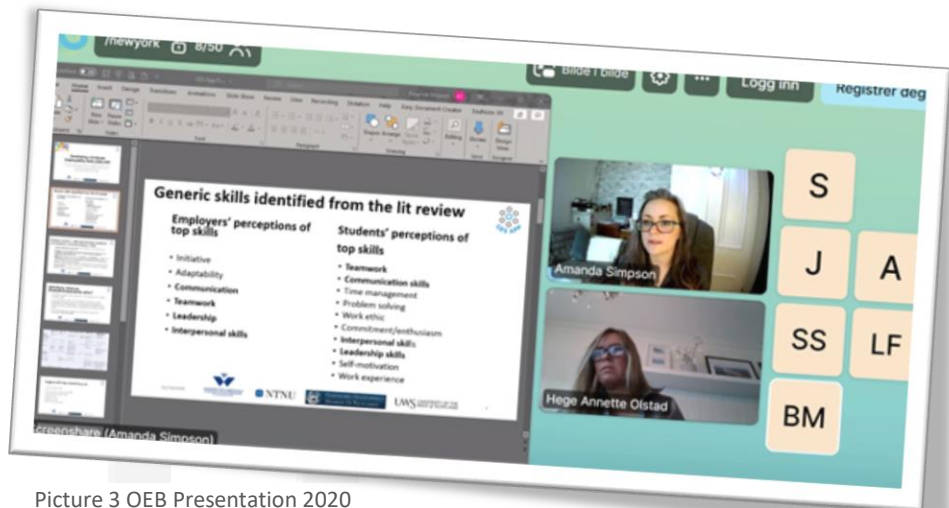### Global Employability Skills at Online Educa Berlin (OEB)

"Could a mobile app support students in becoming aware of their employability skills?"

"Is there a skills gap between what university graduates know and what employers are looking for?"

"Are there new skills that are relevant during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?"

These are some of the questions the GES App project team discussed at an interactive session at Online Educa Berlin (https:/oeb.global/) one of the largest meeting points for educational technology providers, academics and researchers. The session took place on 1st December 2020 and this was the first multiplier event for the project. Picture 3 shows some of the participants in our session at OEB.

During this session, the results from our literature review on employability skills were presented by Liz Boyle from UWS. A plenary presentation was followed by breakout sessions and discussions, chaired by Sobah Petersen (NTNU) and Amanda Simpson (UWS) and Hege Anette Olstad (NTNU). While there was agreement that there is a skills gap between the skills perceived as important by students and employers, and universities should do something about that, one participant suggested the ambition for the App should be to bridge this gap,

Picture 3 OEB Presentation 2020

but focus on a subset of skills and do that well. It was clear that COVID has necessitated the rapid acquisition of new skills, especially digital skills, relating to communication and the packaging, editing and presentation of information. However, engagement with online learning materials can be challenging.

Additional skills that were identified as important were the ability to reflect and "learning to learn".

In fact, "learning to learn" was identified as an important non-digital skill related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation too, as we have all had to regulate our learning.

A key aspect of graduate employability rests on students' abilities to reflect upon what skills they have learned and to successfully articulate that to prospective employers.

There were 32 participants registered for the interactive session. However, the participation was less than that. It left us wondering if this could be due to a skills gap to find the way through the digital meeting spaces and transitioning between two virtual meeting rooms! We aim to return to OEB in 2021 with more results from the GES App project.
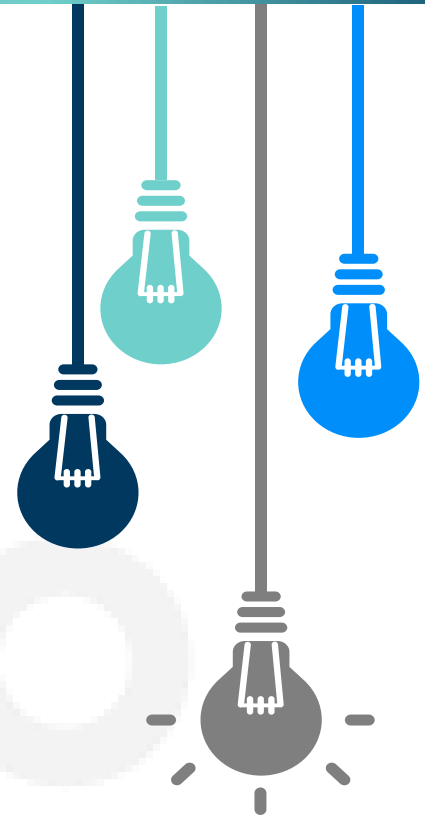
Forthcoming Events

Project Dissemination

Partners are currently considering other conferences where we might present the project results, including OEB 2021, EDULEARN and the GALA 2021.

Acknowledgements

Contact Information

For further information about the GES-App project please contact;

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