



# **Adding value to embedded in-session support: collaborating beyond the faculty**

**English for Academic Studies Centre (EASC)**

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**WE ARE THE UK  
AND IRELAND  
UNIVERSITY  
OF THE YEAR**

Times Higher Education Awards 2024



# Aims

**We will critically discuss to what extent the collaborative pilot initiative at Ulster:**

- Enabled us to promote self-reflection
- Impacted motivation and engagement among participants
- Helped to raise the profile of the English for Academic Studies Centre (EASC) within the wider academic community at Ulster



# Background





# Who we are

- EASC (formerly CELT)
- Discrete academic unit within Global Engagement Portfolio
- 7 full-time posts / multi-campus support
- School/Faculty Collaboration to provide ESAP  
(*AHSS; UUBS; CEBE; LHS; Doctoral College*)



# Teaching Context

## Pre-Covid:

- Mostly Chinese partnership and Erasmus students taking credit-bearing CPPD modules

## Post Covid:

- Changing student profile (South Asia; Africa)
- 'Mature' PG students (aged 29-31) with professional work background
- Hesitant to engage in 'traditional' non-compulsory ESAP 'closed' classes

# Exploring Possibilities

'Some institutions have tried to incentivise attendance on in-sessionals [...] Such incentivising activities may work well with certain students yet cannot be seen as equivalent to the sense of purpose that comes from well-mapped collaborative provision. That is not to say the two are mutually exclusive though.' (Tibbetts and Chapman, 2023:128)

## **Student and Graduate Opportunities Manager: Brian Byers**

'Over the last year, we have received an increasing interest from our postgraduate students wanting to complete the Ulster EDGE Award and this required the development of bespoke activities and pathways that suit the needs of a diverse, ambitious postgraduate audience.'



# EASC & EDGE

**2023/24: Collaborative** effort with *Employability and Graduate Futures* at Ulster

Pilot programme aimed at PG students for first time

Title: ***Transferable Research and Writing Skills***

Series of in-sessional workshops (10 subject cohorts)



# EDGE AWARD

**DEVELOP SKILLS, CONFIDENCE  
AND NETWORKS TO BENEFIT  
YOUR FUTURE**

**GET THE EDGE WHEN IT  
COMES TO EMPLOYABILITY**

[ulster.ac.uk/edge](https://ulster.ac.uk/edge)

# How can students achieve the Edge Award?

- Attend and actively engage with EASC classes this semester (minimum attendance: 6 out of 8 sessions). No coursework is required
- Participate in a brief reflective session with their EASC tutor at the end of the semester, either online or in person
- EASC tutor liaises with the Employability & Graduate Futures Team to submit their name for the Award





# 1. Self-Reflection

“It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost.”

(Gibbs, 1988, p. 9)



## **Description**

*What was your subject area? How many EASC classes did you attend?  
What were the main topics covered?*

## **Feelings**

*How did you feel during the EASC sessions, about what you were learning  
and/or about your main course and upcoming assessments?  
Did your feelings change at any point throughout the sessions? Why/ Why not?*

## **Evaluation/ Analysis**

*In what ways were the EASC classes useful for your main course of study?  
How do you feel either the teaching content or your own engagement could have  
been improved?*

## **Action Plan**

*How would you like to apply what you have learned in your future study and/or  
career?  
What do you need to do to make this happen? What are the barriers to this?*

# Enhancements to reflection process (Year 2)

Some changes to the question prompts after Year 1 (next slide):

- To direct students away from focusing their feedback on the quality of teaching
- To prompt greater depth on 'Action Plan' section by linking EASC learning to future employability through referring specifically to Ulster's Graduate Attributes

## Feelings about your learning process

*e.g. How did you feel during the EASC sessions, about what you were learning there and/or about your main course and upcoming assessments? Did your feelings change at any point throughout the sessions? Why/ Why not?*

## Evaluation/ Analysis

*In what ways were the EASC classes useful for your main course of study?*

***How did they build on any prior learning?***

***How did you demonstrate engagement in the classes?***

***Would you do anything differently if you had another chance?***

## Action Plan

*How would you like to apply what you have learned in your future study and/or career?*

***(Please refer to the Ulster University Graduate Attributes to inform your answer <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/graduateattributes#cct-1594056>)***

*What do you need to do to make this happen? What are the barriers to this?*



# Additional improvements

- EASC lecturers to include specific teaching content on writing a reflection and input on Ulster University Graduate Attributes during teaching sessions.
- Enhanced collaboration with *Employability and Graduate Futures* regarding teaching content and visibility.

# Graduate Attributes



## Thriving Individual

Someone who has the ability to be resilient, accept and embrace change, seeking to mentally grow themselves and those around...



## Engaged Learner

Someone who is knowledgeable and able to deepen their understanding about their subject and the world.



## Collaborative Professional

Someone who is able to contribute to society widely and especially in their field of knowledge.



## Active Citizen

Someone who is engaging, ethical, sustainable, making a positive impact.



'An EAP syllabus framed around graduate attributes helps students to transfer the skills they are learning in an EAP course to the performance expected on a degree programme. It also [...] helps to raise the profile and status of EAP staff within the institution.'  
(Alexander, 2020)

'The development of [...] graduate attributes can lead to greater self-motivation and engagement.' (Alexander et al., 2017)



## 2. Student Engagement

'Positive engagement is seen as essential for enhancing the student experience, supporting successful outcomes for the student and enhanced reputation for the institution'.  
(Alexander et al., 2017)

Year 1	Year 2
115 students completed the EDGE Award	96+ students expected to complete by May 2025.

Recordings of self-reflections have given us some very useful insights into the pilot and beyond.

# Qualitative findings    Feelings about your learning process (15)

Apprehensive...	...improved in <b>confidence</b>
Skeptical and scared ...	... <b>confident</b>
Feeling blank ...	... <b>confidence</b> increased
Initially unsure...	...good and improved, less stressed
Nervous and uncertain...	... <b>confident</b>
Did not feel it was needed...	...grateful for support, 'eye-opener'
Anxious...	...excitement, desire to learn about the topic
Overwhelmed...	...more <b>confident</b> , positive and motivated
Confused...	...felt supported to improve
Not motivated...	... <b>confident</b> , excited and happy
Lacked knowledge, unstable mindset...	...enjoyment and <b>confidence</b>
Aware of weaknesses...	... <b>confident</b>
Feelings did not change, excited to learn something	
Not particularly anxious but eager to enhance my proficiency	
Enjoyed class environment from the start, has grown in confidence and knowledge	

## Action Plan- Year 1 responses

*Learnt **how to research**- will help in future*

*Passing with a good mark helps you to represent the university and get a job. **Academic writing skills** will help.*

*Will use **improved academic writing skills** in future study and in future career as HR manager.*

*Generally **improved academic vocabulary** will help in legal career*

*In future writing will be able to **reference properly***

*In future career **keeping in contact with others, using formal academic style, putting class skills on CV***

***Academic skills** will be useful going into PhD*

*Will continue to use **referencing and paraphrasing skills** going forward*

*Will boost **understanding, communication skills and production of written reports** in future career*

***Report writing** will be a skill carried through to Nursing career. **Improved communication skills** and English proficiency will also help in future career.*

# Analysis- results were very general

Skills	Use of Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Academic writing skills (3)</i></li><li>• <i>Referencing (2)</i></li><li>• <i>Writing reports (2),</i></li><li>• <i>How to research</i></li><li>• <i>Improved academic vocabulary</i></li><li>• <i>Improved communication skills</i></li><li>• <i>Using formal academic style</i></li><li>• <i>Keeping in contact with others</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>'in future'</i></li><li>• <i>'helps you represent the university and get a job'</i></li><li>• <i>'in future study'</i></li><li>• <i>'in future career' (3)</i></li><li>• <i>'in legal career'</i></li><li>• <i>'in future writing'</i></li><li>• <i>'going into PhD'</i></li><li>• <i>'going forward'</i></li></ul>

## Year 2: Greater depth in reflections

### Student A:

*"The Graduate Attributes that I connected with were: **Researcher**- This class helped me to find and organise peer-reviewed sources, and with note-taking, putting notes into own words. **Active listener, growth mindset**: Academics will not be good at everything, we need a mindset to grow and learn. **Critical thinking** is a lifelong process- it may look different in the workplace but will enhance as you grow in life. Not taking everything at face value is a life skill."*

### Student B:

*"During this semester I was a **responsible team player**- this was evident in my role as class rep. I have also developed a **growth mindset** in taking responsibility for own learning. I have grown in confidence and resilience. Previously I got stressed and I was all over the place and I have slowed down since starting the course. **Creative problem solver**- Public Health is about communicating and implementing- I need to know about issues in depth. **Critical problem solver**- EASC classroom learning has helped me to learn how to structure thoughts."*



## Student C:

*" I benefitted from the Graduate Attribute '**Engaged learner**', particularly the sub elements of **critical thinker** and **creative problem solver**- I have already applied this in my assignment and know it will be useful in my future career in business for project management, problem solving, team building and analysing competitors."*

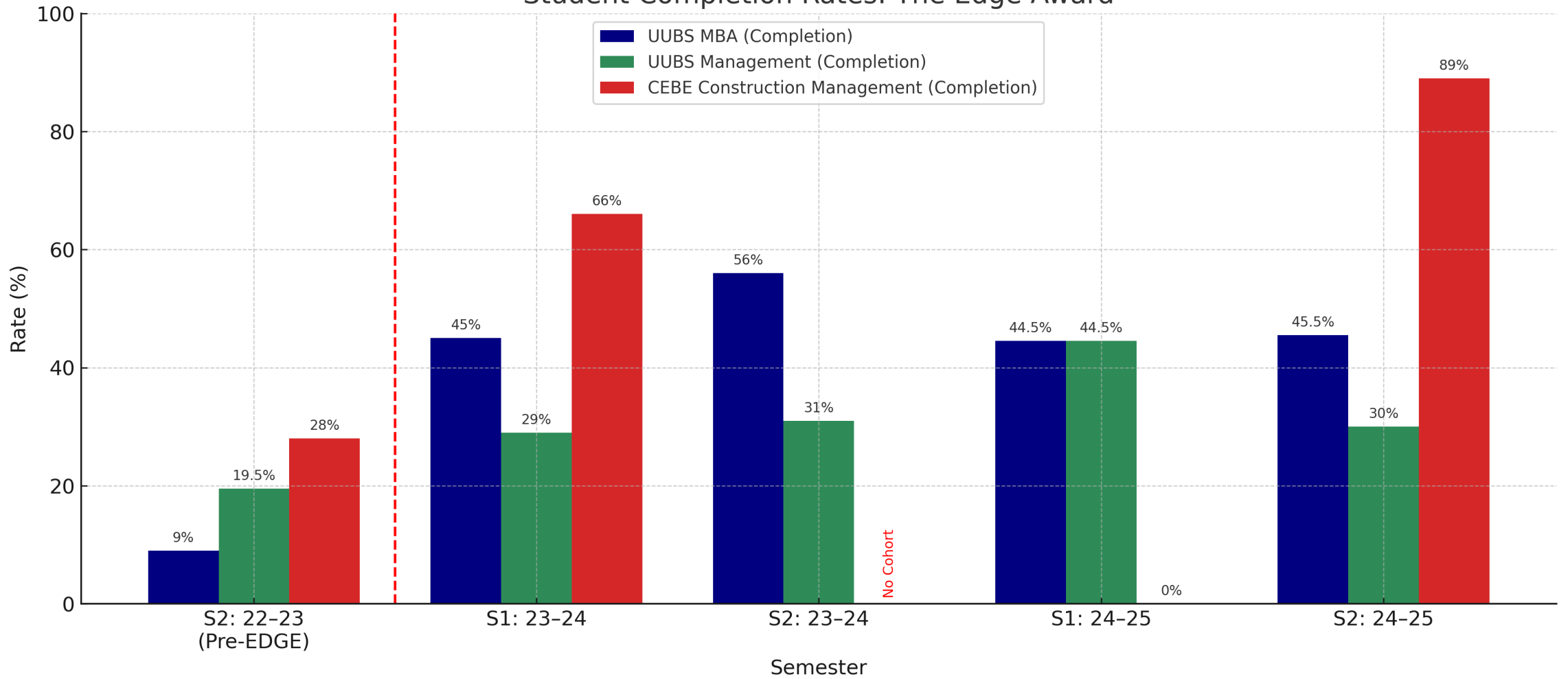


## Student D:

*"Graduate Attributes that resonated with me were **Collaborative professional**- confidence in group learning, **Team player**- able to communicate effectively. In future work I will be confident in my role to contribute to the team goal and objectives- I will be able to use tentative and fair language to negotiate e.g 'Can we look at this another way?' I will be able to use an analytical approach to reach conclusions and make recommendations. I can collaborate and communicate effectively. **Thriving individual- Growth mindset** has given me confidence to face new ideas and challenges in life- I can make decisions and be assertive in defending my position, I can take responsibility for actions and outcomes."*



# Student Completion Rates: The Edge Award





Tibbets and Chapman (2023): 'At its heart, in-sessional EAP itself remains ill-defined. Its boundaries are often fuzzy ; it is often perceived differently by different stake-holders and paradigms for delivery can vary greatly.'

Variables:

- Perceived need
- Cultural expectations
- Conflicting priorities
- Awareness
- Accessibility
- Teaching schedules
- Course Director investment



# 3. Raising the profile of EASC



[Insight](#) > [Staff News](#) > [2024](#) > [August](#)

## The Ulster EDGE Award extends to Postgraduate Students

Over 100 international postgraduate students were able to receive an EDGE Award as part of a pilot programme, which has now seen the expansion of the programme to PG students.



Over 100 international postgraduate students have recently completed the newly established Ulster EDGE Award Transferable Research and Study skills pathway, led by the team at the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT).

### ELSEWHERE ON INSIGHT

[Recent Stories](#)

# I'VE ACHIEVED MY GOAL



[ulster.ac.uk/edge](http://ulster.ac.uk/edge)



## **Student and Graduate Opportunities Manager: Brian Byers**

“The success of the Ulster EDGE Award...is demonstrated by the impact it has had on each individual learner, their personal confidence and their ability to adapt and thrive as a postgraduate student at Ulster...”

'ESP initiatives are fragile, at least in the sense that (like Hamlet) they are subject to "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". But recognising that fragility can lead to one of ESP's great strengths- our capacity for educational attunement and adjustment in the light of changes in the broader educational context.'

Swales et al. (2001)



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