



## UWS Academic Portal

### Future-proofing postgraduate-level education of career professionals in Scotland

McCrorry, Marjorie

*Published in:*  
Career Matters

Published: 01/06/2021

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

McCrorry, M. (2021). Future-proofing postgraduate-level education of career professionals in Scotland. *Career Matters*, 9(3), 28-29. <https://www.thecdi.net/Resources/05894f02-fbc9-473f-a182-7805e2c4ff49>

#### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [pure@uws.ac.uk](mailto:pure@uws.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## **Future- proofing postgraduate-level education of career professionals in Scotland**

Across the sector, career professionals have responded with commitment and creativity to the challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic and the array of restrictions that have characterised professional life since early 2020. Career practitioners will also be acutely aware of the restrictions that have been faced by the UK Higher Education sector and many will have first-hand experience of the issues facing university students and applicants.

This article offers a reflection on how the Scottish universities offering the Qualification in Career Development (QCD), the University of the West of Scotland and Edinburgh Napier University, have responded to the challenge of ensuring continuity in the delivery of professional education in career guidance and development during the pandemic. It also outlines the opportunities we have taken to innovate, putting our students in the best possible position to contribute to the profession in a post-pandemic context.

Key lessons that have emerged from our experience are that strong partnerships built on longstanding, meaningful dialogue are absolutely essential to our ability to deliver what our students and our profession need and that we must remain open to having our expectations, as well as our sense of what might work, confounded- quite possibly on a regular basis! In the context of a global pandemic, it's fair to say that all of us involved in the education of career professionals had to revisit our assumptions about practice and become learners ourselves again in many other respects.

### **Moving learning online**

Our first challenge (in March 2020) was to move learning online for those students who would normally have been attending on campus. Students at UWS and ENU have always had access to a vast array of online resources and learning activities curated on our Virtual Learning Environment, Moodle. Both course centres are also well-used to catering for the needs of students completing our programmes via distance (online) learning on a part-time basis, but those students too previously had on-campus learning opportunities.

A number of really important issues emerged and had to be addressed effectively right from the outset of the transition to online delivery. We had to ensure coherence and clarity of communication with students and provide reassurance, we had to respond to the very real support needs of students, many of whom were dealing with caring responsibilities, home schooling, part-time and full-time jobs and we had to ensure that we made learning and assessment activities as accessible as possible in order to ensure that students could complete their qualification without compromising on quality. What we learned in those early days was critical for what happened next.

### **A practice-based qualification delivered virtually**

When it became clear that delivery would remain online for the new session (from September 2020), three key challenges emerged: how to find innovative ways to deliver

participative learning online, how to ensure that students could develop robust practice competence in a virtual context and how to ensure that those students who would normally attend placements could have meaningful work-based learning experiences to supplement our existing array of online work-related learning resources. There were several really important factors that allowed us to address those challenges successfully:

- we made early decisions about how we would deliver and this included deciding to deliver synchronous online sessions, replicating the classroom experience as far as possible, allowing for student participation (we got better at this as the session went on!) and for sessions to be recorded, which also greatly benefitted our existing online learners
- we foregrounded community-building, as we always do, but students deserve huge credit for taking the initiative to extend this aspect of delivery amongst themselves, developing additional channels for communication and activity
- we took interview and group work practice online, scaffolding expertise and confidence by expanding our use of peer learning in the first term- paradoxically, this resulted in students receiving more individual observation and feedback time than they would have done normally
- we were able to take full advantage of the fact that in Scotland we have a national careers service, part of Skills Development Scotland, which allowed us to offer those students who required them truly innovative “virtual placements”

### **The importance of partnership working**

The importance of partnership working in allowing us to address the challenges of the pandemic cannot be overstated. Staff at the Scottish University Course Centres have always taken a collaborative approach to delivering for students and for the sector and it was more important than ever for us to discuss and share plans and experiences. The Career Development Institute responded swiftly and constructively to facilitate the modification of requirements for the QCD (which we offer alongside and embedded within our PG Diploma) in ways that would ensure that students’ qualifications would continue to be robust and that they would not be disadvantaged as they seek to enter professional roles.

The National CIAG Team at Skills Development Scotland (SDS), in this instance led by Luisa Moreno, pulled out all the stops to develop an innovative and sector-leading model for virtual placement. This included the development of a programme of national sessions delivered to students from both universities covering the range of activities undertaken by SDS, as well as allowing individual students to be virtually attached to an SDS centre, supported by an SDS workplace supervisor and able to join the activity of the centre, including observing and conducting practice with clients. Virtual placements also allowed students to access placement settings that would normally be off-limits as a result of geographical constraints.

All placement activity was designed and evaluated to align with the forthcoming (from September 2021) QCD Learning Outcomes and a detailed evaluation of students’ placement experiences clearly shows a high level of student satisfaction as well as breadth and depth

of learning. Given the challenges faced by other HE programmes where placement is integral, this model provides a best practice example for the HE sector as a whole.

### **Going forward**

There is no doubt that many of the modified working practices in the careers sector will continue and universities will also retain many of the positive aspects of online delivery. We may soon return to delivering aspects of our programmes on campus, but we will retain elements of online, taking a “hybrid” approach for students who would previously only have learned face-to-face. We will also continue to work with our partners at SDS to develop a hybrid placement model. Our students are now in a very strong position to influence the shape and scope of professional career services- they are truly “digital careers natives”. This is clearly something that we must now ensure is part of all professional education going forward.

*Dr. Marjorie McCrory RCDP Senior Lecturer in Career Guidance and Development UWS*