



Designing for Digital Fluency and Employability: Embedding the Skills Canvas as a Curriculum Integrated Living CV

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Introduction

The Skills Canvas: A Living CV was developed as a curriculumembedded digital toolkit that academics deliver within taught modules, beginning at Level 4 and revisited at key stages throughout a student's degree. Rather than operating as a standalone platform, the Skills Canvas is implemented through Adobe Express and structured teaching activities, enabling students to build a reflective, evolving portfolio that captures skills developed through academic, cocurricular, and experiential learning over time.

The design of the Skills Canvas is informed by two complementary pedagogical frameworks: Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPaCK) and the Replacement–Amplification–Transformation (RAT) model. TPaCK emphasises the purposeful integration of technology with disciplinary content and pedagogical intent, ensuring that digital tools are used to enhance learning rather than exist as addons. In the Skills Canvas, technology is intentionally aligned with reflective pedagogy and employability focused learning outcomes, supporting academics in embedding skills articulation meaningfully within their subject teaching.

The RAT model provides a developmental lens for understanding how the Skills Canvas functions within the curriculum. At a basic level, it replaces traditional paper CVs

with a digital portfolio; it amplifies employability learning by enabling multimedia evidence, iterative reflection, and ongoing revision; and, most significantly, it transforms skills development by embedding reflective practice and professional identity formation directly into taught modules across multiple levels of study.

Developed collaboratively by academic staff and professional services, the Skills Canvas supports selfdirected learning, digital fluency, and authentic skill articulation through structured, curriculumembedded activities. Its repeated use across a programme enables students to revisit, refine, and reframe their skills over time, mirroring the iterative and reflective nature of professional development in contemporary digital workplaces.

This paper outlines the rationale and design of the Skills Canvas, presents initial student feedback gathered through structured focus groups, and discusses the implications of embedding a dynamic, digital portfolio into the undergraduate curriculum. An accompanying dissemination video offers an accessible overview of the tool's purpose and application, demonstrating how such resources can support holistic skill development and enhance students' career readiness.





Challenges in Student Skills Identification and Articulation

Students develop a wide range of skills during their time at university, drawing on academic study, cocurricular engagement, work experience, and informal learning. Despite this breadth of experience, many struggle to recognise the value of these skills or to articulate them effectively to employers. A key difficulty lies in students' tendency to view skills only within the immediate context in which they were learned. Without explicit support, learners often fail to appreciate how capabilities developed through coursework, collaboration, or creative practice transfer into wider professional settings.

This challenge is well documented in the higher education literature, which observes that students often need structured opportunities and varied assessment approaches to help them identify, interpret, and apply their emerging competencies beyond their original context (Hack & Norton, 2024). Educational research suggests that approaches such as self-assessment, peer evaluation, and formative feedback can play a crucial role in making skill development visible to learners and in helping them build confidence in articulating their strengths (Mason et al., 2003). When such reflective mechanisms are absent or inconsistent across programmes, students are less likely to understand the broader relevance of the skills they are acquiring.

Compounding this issue, traditional CVs and linear skill audits frequently fail to capture the nuanced and iterative nature of contemporary skill development. Experiences that matter deeply in today's graduate labour market such as interdisciplinary collaboration, creative problem-solving, or digitally mediated communication may not be easily expressed in conventional application formats. As a result, students often possess strong capabilities but lack the language, evidence, and structure to communicate them effectively.

At the same time, student participation in extracurricular employability workshops has declined, limiting opportunities for timely intervention outside the curriculum (De Gennaro, 2023). As pressures on students' time increase, extracurricular

models of careers education are no longer sufficient to support wide-scale skills development. This creates a persistent gap between what students learn and what they can successfully articulate when applying for graduate opportunities.

Together, these factors highlight the need for curriculum embedded, reflective, and digitally enabled approaches that help students recognise the breadth of their skills, understand their relevance, and confidently articulate their developing professional identities.

Skills Canvas digital tool and resource

The Skills Canvas is a dynamic, curriculum embedded digital portfolio designed by Bath Spa University Careers and Employability department in collaboration with Adobe, to support students in recognising, documenting, and articulating their skills as they progress through their university studies. Functioning as a "living CV," the tool enables learners to capture evidence of skills developed through academic work, cocurricular engagement, creative practice, and experiential learning from Level 4 through to graduation. Its flexible and multimodal format allows students to represent their capabilities in visually compelling and disciplinerelevant ways that reflect contemporary employer expectations.

Developed to address the persistent challenge of helping students understand how skills transfer across contexts, the Skills Canvas provides a structured framework that prompts purposeful reflection at key points within the curriculum. By introducing the resource early in Level 4, students begin to build reflective habits that support deeper engagement with their developing competencies. This staged, curriculum integrated design aligns with research demonstrating that employability is most effectively strengthened when students encounter a sequence of disciplinespecific, developmental activities that build awareness, confidence, and appreciation of the value of such initiatives (Jackson et al., 2024).

A central purpose of the tool is to support students in moving beyond the surface features of their assignments to recognise the broader capabilities they are developing. Research highlights that students often find it difficult to identify the underlying transferable skills such as communication,

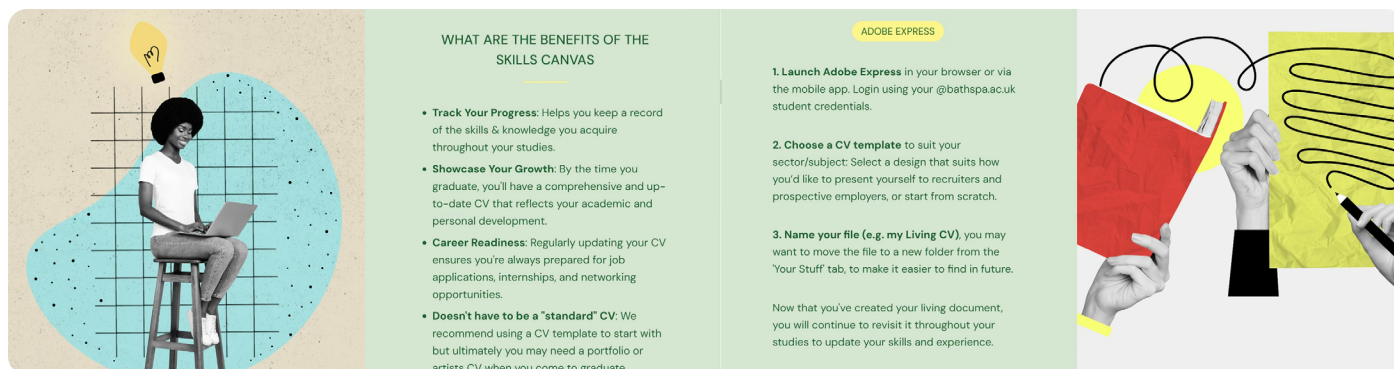


Figure 1. Two screen shots from the Skills Canvas toolkit showing the introduction to the toolkit and Adobe



collaboration, or critical thinking that sit beneath disciplinary tasks, and may require explicit scaffolding to perceive these deeper structures. The Skills Canvas therefore provides guided opportunities for students to make these connections visible, helping them understand not only what they have achieved, but why it matters in wider professional contexts (Martini, 2019).

The digital nature of the Skills Canvas is also fundamental to its pedagogical value. Using platforms such as Adobe Express, students curate interactive, media rich artefacts that incorporate images, video, links, and work samples, creating a holistic and authentic account of their learning. This process encourages higher order cognitive engagement analysing experiences, evaluating progress, and designing personalised representations of their skills which supports both academic development and career readiness.

The tool also offers significant support for staff across disciplines. Academics can use the Canvas to facilitate reflective discussion, make explicit links between disciplinary knowledge and transferable skills, and embed employability focused reflection into assessments. Careers and Employability teams can draw on the Canvas to offer targeted guidance, ensuring that students can confidently articulate their strengths in applications, interviews, and other professional contexts.

Overall, the Skills Canvas provides a scalable and accessible model for embedding employability within the curriculum. By supporting ongoing reflection, contextualised skill development, and the recognition of deeper transferable competencies, it contributes to future focused learning environments in which students can confidently build and communicate their evolving professional identities.

Declining Engagement with Extracurricular Employability Activities

For many years, careers and employability services have relied on extracurricular skills workshops as a primary mechanism for helping students understand the competencies required for graduate level employment. These workshops traditionally provided opportunities for students to explore employability concepts, practise skill articulation, and engage with career development outside formal teaching time. However, in recent years there has been a marked decline in attendance at such activities, reflecting significant shifts in student behaviour, workload, and competing commitments (De Gennaro, 2023).

As students increasingly balance academic responsibilities with employment, commuting, caring roles, and other pressures, their capacity to participate in optional workshops has diminished. This reduction in engagement presents a challenge for institutions that continue to rely on extracurricular provision as their main avenue for supporting skills development. When participation is low, access to

employability learning becomes uneven, with students who cannot attend in person or optional sessions missing out on essential guidance that could enhance their graduate outcomes.

Data drawn from MyCareer, the BSU's iteration of the Target Connect careers & employability platform, when looking at reporting data illustrates this trend, showing a consistent and substantial drop in student attendance at centrally delivered employability workshops over a three year period (Figure 2). This pattern suggests that extracurricular provision alone is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of contemporary learners or to ensure equitable access to skills development opportunities.

The declining viability of extracurricular workshops reinforces the need for employability learning to be embedded directly within the curriculum. By integrating reflective tasks, skills identification, and digital portfolio development into academic modules, institutions can ensure that all students not only those with the time and flexibility to attend optional events develop the confidence and capability to articulate their strengths effectively. This shift toward curriculum integrated approaches underpins the rationale for the Skills Canvas, which seeks to provide a more inclusive, sustained, and academically aligned model of skills development.

A Collaborative Model for Curriculum-Integrated digital learning resources

The development of the Skills Canvas was grounded in a collaborative model that brings together the expertise of professional services staff, academic colleagues, students, and external contributors. This model recognises that meaningful employability learning emerges most effectively when multiple stakeholders codesign resources that are pedagogically robust, contextually relevant, and aligned with programme level expectations.

Central to this approach is a structured five stage process for designing and implementing curriculum embedded digital resources. The process begins with professional services

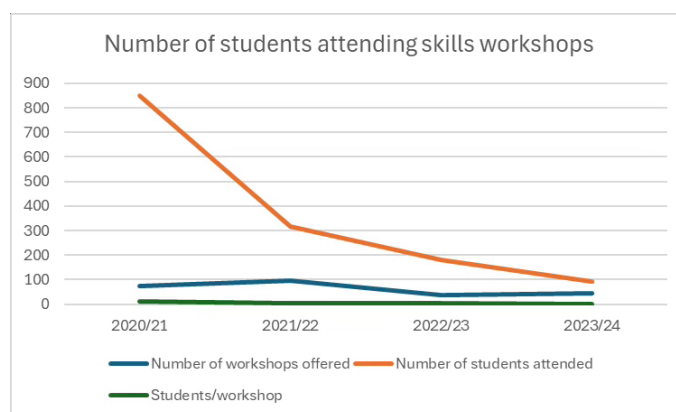


Figure 2. Graph showing the decline in attendance to employability extra-curricular workshop



team often Careers and Employability, identifying a clear developmental need using evaluative tools such as a Theory of Change. This initial scoping stage establishes the intended learning outcomes and ensures that the resource will directly support the skill development needs of students across different programmes.

For example, the second stage involves reaching a contextual agreement with academic partners. Here, the resource is aligned with course level expectations, disciplinary priorities, and graduate attributes to ensure its relevance and seamless integration within existing curricula. Through these discussions, academic and professional services teams develop a shared understanding of how employability and skills articulation can be meaningfully embedded within modules.

Cocreation forms the third stage of the model. Drawing on a range of voices—including academic staff, careers and employability practitioners, industry professionals, alumni, and students—this phase ensures both the authenticity and disciplinary relevance of the resource. For example, academics and industry professionals work collaboratively with careers and employability staff to identify the types of skills graduates are expected to demonstrate, as well as the most appropriate formats through which these skills should be evidenced, such as digital CVs, portfolios, or multimodal artefacts. These discussions inform the structure, prompts, and outputs of the Skills Canvas, ensuring alignment between disciplinary learning, employer expectations, and contemporary recruitment practices.

This collaborative design process reflects best practice in digital pedagogy by foregrounding learner agency, participatory knowledge construction, and the integration of realworld perspectives into curriculumembedded employability learning.

Once the resource is developed, it moves into the implementation phase, in which academics embed the Skills Canvas within their teaching practice. This curriculum integrated delivery ensures that students encounter employability learning in a timely and structured manner, reducing reliance on optional extracurricular activities and creating more equitable access to support.

The final stage involves creating a feedback loop that connects classroom activity back to professional services. As

students engage with the Skills Canvas and develop greater awareness of their strengths and gaps, they are encouraged to seek further personalised guidance from Careers and Employability. This reciprocal relationship reinforces the Skills Canvas as a dynamic portfolio that evolves through continued interaction with both curriculum and cocurriculum opportunities.

Overall, this collaborative model highlights the value of interdisciplinary partnership in developing innovative digital learning resources. It ensures that employability is embedded not as an add on, but as an integral part of the student learning experience, supported by both academic and professional expertise.

Professional Services and Academic Partnerships in the Third Space

The development and implementation of the Skills Canvas is situated within what Whitchurch (2024) describes as the third space, a domain in higher education where professional services staff and academics collaborate in ways that transcend traditional role boundaries. This environment brings together diverse forms of expertise, including pedagogical knowledge, digital practice, industry insight, and student support, enabling the cocreation of learning resources that are both academically rigorous and grounded in real world employability needs.

Third space roles are increasingly recognised as an integral part of the contemporary university landscape. Whitchurch's work highlights that staff operating in these hybrid spaces often contribute to areas such as digital learning, employability, widening participation, and public engagement. These professionals frequently possess advanced qualifications and extensive sector knowledge, yet their contributions can depend heavily on local cultures, institutional structures, and the extent to which their expertise is acknowledged and valued. In essence, their influence is shaped not only by formal responsibilities but also by the relationships and social capital they build within their institutions (Whitchurch, 2024).

Within this context, academic engagement is central to ensuring that resources developed in the third space such as the Skills Canvas translate effectively into classroom practice. The lecturer's role involves guiding students through reflective processes, helping them make explicit links between learning

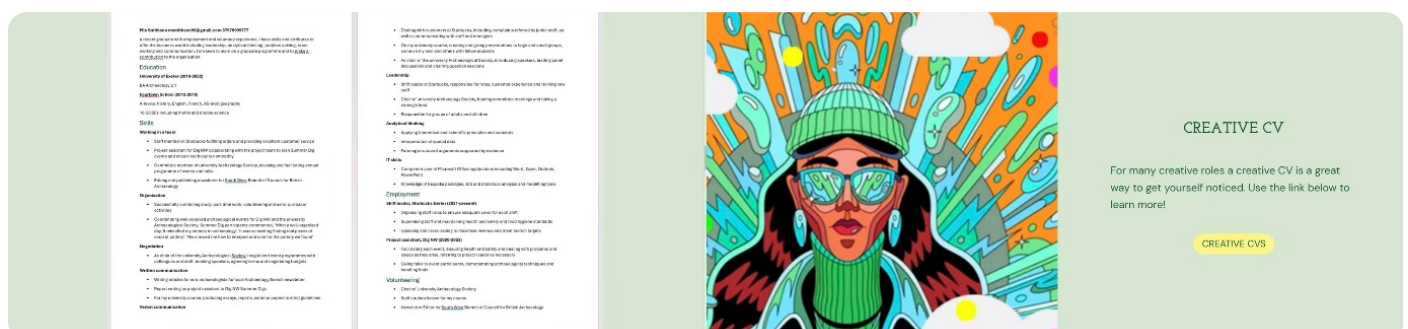


Figure 3. Screen shots from the Skills Canvas toolkit showing the desired outcome for the creative arts of a technical and creative CV



activities and skill development, and supporting them as they build their professional identities. This pedagogic contribution aligns with constructivist principles, in which learning emerges through active participation, dialogue, and connection-making (Kop & Hill, 2008).

Bostock's work underscores the value of this more facilitative academic role, suggesting that when lecturers engage students through negotiation and collaborative discourse, learners are better able to construct understanding from their experiences. In such environments, students take greater responsibility for sequencing their learning, making meaning from activities, and developing the frameworks through which they interpret their progress (Bostock, 2018).

By bringing together academic staff, students, and professional services colleagues, the Skill Canvas initiative exemplifies how third space collaborations can enrich the learning environment. These partnerships ensure that employability development is not treated as an external add on but is woven meaningfully into the curriculum, supported by expertise that spans teaching, careers work, and digital design.

Pedagogical and Technological Design Principles Underpinning the Skills Canvas

The creation of the Skills Canvas was guided by a set of pedagogical and technological design principles that reflect the realities of a digital first professional world. Central to this design process was the decision to adopt a digital learning model capable of supporting scaffolded reflection, authentic assessment, and the development of digital fluency among both students and academic staff.

The TPaCK framework (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) provided a useful conceptual foundation for integrating technology with the pedagogical intentions and skills-based content of the initiative. Rather than functioning as an add-on, the Skills Canvas embeds technology in ways that deliberately enhance students' engagement with their own skill development. Using platforms such as Adobe

Express, students create media rich, multimodal artefacts that encourage them to analyse, evaluate, and synthesise their learning across academic and cocurricular contexts. This alignment echoes Koehler and Mishra's argument that effective teaching occurs when educators purposefully combine technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge in integrated ways (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

At the same time, the limitations of TPaCK are acknowledged. Critics have argued that the framework pays insufficient attention to institutional culture, learner agency, and the wider sociocultural dynamics that shape digital learning (Brantley-Dias & Ertmer, 2013). In the context of the Skills Canvas—an initiative developed within professional services but enacted through academic delivery—these concerns are particularly relevant. The collaborative, cross boundary nature of the project therefore extends TPaCK by foregrounding the roles of professional identity, third space practice, and institutional partnership in shaping technology enhanced learning.

The RAT model (Replacement, Amplification, Transformation) further informed the design process by providing a developmental lens through which to consider how digital tools could enhance or reconceptualise traditional employability learning. At the Replacement level, the Skills Canvas offers a digital alternative to conventional paper-based CVs and static skill audits. At the Amplification level, the digital format increases efficiency, visibility, and accessibility, allowing students to update their portfolios in real time and integrate a wider range of evidence. Ultimately, the goal of the initiative is to support Transformation, reshaping employability education by embedding reflective practice, skill articulation, and professional identity development directly into the curriculum. Through this lens, the Skills Canvas acts not merely as a digital substitution for existing practices but as a tool that reconfigures how students understand, narrate, and evidence their learning.

Together, TPaCK and RAT provide complementary perspectives that informed the pedagogical architecture of the Skills Canvas. The first offers a structured approach to integrating technology with learning design, while the second illuminates the extent to which digital tools can meaningfully

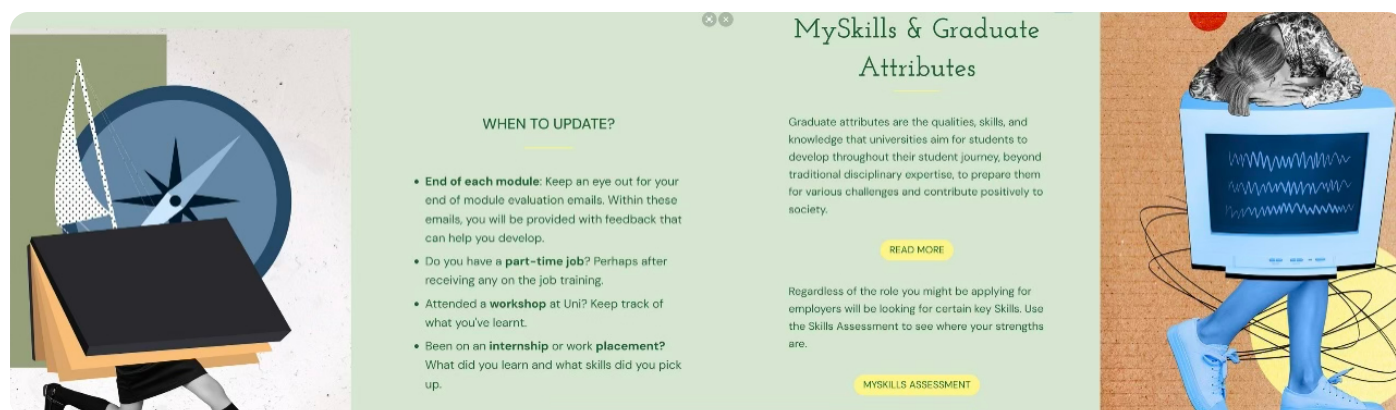


Figure 4. Screen shots of the Skills Canvas toolkit showing the reflective tools and cycle for students as they develop skills



transform educational practices. Grounded in these frameworks, the Skills Canvas supports students in engaging with employability as an iterative, developmental process and equips academics with a digitally enabled, pedagogically sound resource that enhances reflective learning at each stage of the curriculum.

Academic Facilitation Through Connectivist and Constructivist Approaches

Academic staff play a central role in ensuring the successful implementation and impact of the Skills Canvas within the curriculum. As facilitators of learning, lecturers guide students in making meaningful connections between their academic work and the skills they are developing, helping them see how disciplinary tasks contribute to their broader professional formation. This aligns closely with principles of connectivism, (Kop & Hill, 2008) which emphasise the importance of recognising learning as a process of building relationships between ideas, experiences, and digital networks.

Within this framework, the lecturer's role extends beyond delivering content. Academics help students surface the implicit skills embedded in their assignments, interpret their learning through reflective dialogue, and identify areas for further growth. By prompting students to articulate how academic tasks contribute to transferable skills such as teamwork, communication, or critical analysis, lecturers support learners in constructing coherent narratives about their developing capabilities.

Kop and Hill (2008) argue that as digital learning environments evolve, learners increasingly take responsibility for directing their own learning and building knowledge through networks that extend beyond formal educational structures. In such contexts, the traditional role of the tutor shifts from controlling the learning process to enabling it. Their work suggests that as students gain greater autonomy, educators serve as facilitators who help them navigate information, make informed decisions, and connect different learning experiences in meaningful ways — a perspective that aligns strongly with the intentions of the Skills Canvas (Kop & Hill, 2008).

Academics therefore act as crucial connectors between the curriculum and the wider ecosystem of student support. When students identify gaps in their skill development through engagement with the Skills Canvas, lecturers are well positioned to offer targeted academic guidance or direct students to professional services such as careers, enterprise, or academic skills teams. This collaborative approach ensures that students benefit from a holistic support network that enhances both their reflective capabilities and their employability outcomes.

In addition, the adaptability of the Skills Canvas allows lecturers to embed employability learning in ways that

align with disciplinary norms and pedagogical priorities. This flexibility is essential, as Kop & Hill discuss generic, decontextualised approaches to skills development often fail to resonate with students. By situating employability within authentic subject-based activities, academic staff play a pivotal role in ensuring the Skills Canvas becomes an integrated, meaningful component of the learning experience.

Early Evaluation of the Skills Canvas and Plans for Continued Study

To explore the usability and perceived value of the Skills Canvas, an initial evaluation was conducted with a purposive sample of students drawn from a range of disciplines and academic levels. Participants included Level 4 students from Sports Nutrition, Level 5 students from Acting and Business Psychology (Professional Placement Year), and Level 6 students from Creative Writing and Publishing & Journalism. This sampling approach enabled the research team to gather insights from students with varied experiences of skills development and reflection across their programmes.

Students were asked to work through each stage of the Skills Canvas toolkit and produce a sample CV reflecting their learning. Following this activity, they completed a structured questionnaire that combined Likert scale items with open ended questions, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative insights into the usability, clarity, and perceived usefulness of the resource.

Findings from the pilot indicated two key themes. First, students expressed a strong appetite for structured opportunities to reflect on and articulate their skills, particularly those gained through academic work that they had not previously considered relevant to employability. Second, participants highlighted that the toolkit would have greater impact if introduced within taught sessions rather than as an optional or independent activity. Students noted that guided, in class use would help them better understand the relevance of each stage of the Canvas and provide the space needed for meaningful reflection.

These early findings informed the design of the next phase of evaluation, which will run throughout the 2025/26 academic year. The Creative Arts Practice programme has agreed to embed the Skills Canvas with its incoming Level 5 cohort, enabling a more sustained examination of how students engage with the resource over time. To support this work, funding has been secured from the Creativity Curiosity Award to employ a student researcher who will assist with focus groups, feedback gathering, and iterative refinement of the toolkit. Alongside this curriculum embedded trial, the Skills Canvas will continue to be available as an extracurricular resource, allowing the research team to compare patterns of engagement across taught and optional contexts.

Together, these evaluation activities form a developmental research trajectory that will inform future iterations of the



Skills Canvas. Ongoing data collection will help determine how the tool shapes students' reflective habits, confidence in articulating skills, and engagement with employability support, as well as how staff across disciplines can integrate it effectively into their teaching practice.

Conclusions and Implications for Curriculum Integrated Employability Learning

The Skills Canvas represents a purposeful and pedagogically grounded response to the ongoing challenges students face in recognising, evidencing, and articulating their skills within an increasingly competitive and digitally mediated graduate labour market. By embedding reflective skills development directly into the curriculum, the initiative moves beyond traditional extracurricular models and provides a more inclusive, equitable, and sustained approach to employability learning. The resource is intentionally designed as a digital, multimodal portfolio that encourages students to engage in iterative reflection, identify the deeper transferable competencies underpinning their academic work, and communicate their developing professional identities with confidence.

Underpinned by frameworks such as TPaCK and the RAT model, the Skills Canvas exemplifies how digital tools can meaningfully enhance learning when technology, pedagogy, and content are intentionally aligned. These frameworks helped inform the creation of a resource that progresses from merely replacing existing practices to transforming the ways in which students reflect upon and articulate their learning. The initiative also draws strength from its collaborative development process, in which academics, professional services staff, students, and industry partners each contributed to the design of a tool that is both theoretically robust and practically relevant.

Early evaluation findings demonstrate that students value structured opportunities for guided reflection and perceive the Skills Canvas as a supportive mechanism for understanding the broader relevance of their academic experiences. The feedback also highlights the importance of embedding the tool within taught sessions, ensuring students have dedicated time and guidance to engage meaningfully with the reflective process. This insight has informed the design of the next phase of implementation, which includes programme level adoption and further evaluation throughout the 2025/26 academic year.

The initiative also contributes to wider conversations about the role of professional services and academics working together within the third space. The Skills Canvas demonstrates how hybrid, cross boundary models of curriculum development can enhance students' learning experiences by bringing together disciplinary expertise, pedagogical insight, and employability focused knowledge. Such collaborations strengthen institutional capacity to

deliver coherent, student centred approaches to skills development across programmes.

Looking ahead, continued evaluation will be essential to understanding the longer-term impact of the Skills Canvas on student outcomes, including confidence in skill articulation, engagement with career development, and preparedness for graduate employment. Future research may also explore how different disciplines adapt the resource to reflect their specific pedagogical cultures and how this shapes student engagement. Additionally, there is scope to investigate how the digital portfolios students create can be used in external contexts, such as placements, employer engagement, and transitions into postgraduate study.

Overall, the Skills Canvas offers a scalable and futurefocused model for embedding employability within the curriculum. By foregrounding reflective practice, digital fluency, and cross institutional collaboration, the initiative supports students in developing the self awareness and communicative capabilities required to navigate complex professional landscapes. As higher education continues to respond to shifting digital, economic, and social contexts, approaches such as this provide valuable pathways for aligning curriculum design with the evolving needs of learners and employers alike.



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Teaching Expertise Guide

Supporting our staff to develop their expertise in teaching and facilitating student learning.

This [open access guide](#) provides support for staff to deliver effective teaching and learning to students at Bath Spa University, and to develop their expertise in this area.

The guide is structured principally around Bath Spa's Education Design Principles:

- Connectivity
- Creativity
- Sustainability
- Digital fluency
- Inclusive teaching
- Collaborative learning
- Curiosity-driven pedagogies

