Symbiosis: creating green contracts through student business partnerships.

For investigative participation, action competence and group discussion.

This week-long annual ESD ‘hackathon’ engages marketing and law students from two higher education institutions, at transition to Year 2/Level 5, working in small interdisciplinary and cross-institutional groups.

Groups interrogate how a ‘green contract’ benefits participating organisations/customers and ‘pitch’ their solution(s) to the participating businesses. An alternative ‘green’ contract aims to address a specific Sustainable Development Goal by adopting contractual obligations to change the behaviour of the parties.

Our choice of task and assessment is fundamental to achieving our learning objectives. It enables us to engage our students’ social and emotional domain in the challenge and with it their ways of being. By pitching the value of green contracts to businesses they must also learn their value for themselves.

**Hackathon structure:**

**Day 1: Understanding.** The groups, the aim, what a green contract is, what the business is, where the potential for sustainability improvements is.

**Day 2: Explore.** Builds on day 1 – learners get further into detail within the context of their specific business. They research, assimilate, organise and share knowledge to form a foundation for their green contract.

**Day 3: Develop.** Groups draft their green contracts and gather feedback from teachers and expert panels.

**Day 4: Execute.** Contracts are finalised and groups begin working on their pitch. How do they sell the benefits of sustainability to their business, especially if the business does not want to engage?

**Day 5: Pitch.** Students submit their video presentations and contracts to the businesses. They receive feedback from teachers and businesses, and evaluate their lessons through the week.
How specific learning objectives have been achieved:

At the end of the module students were able to:

- Devise and display understanding of upcoming sustainability issues and challenges within the context of a business or industry (Future Thinking - Head)
- Recognise and articulate understanding of challenges and opportunities to improving sustainability within the context of a business or industry (Systems Thinking - Heart)
- Evidence an ability to work collaboratively in creating and articulating solutions to problems (Collaboration - Heart)
- Articulate, present and justify sustainability solutions and developments as part of a ‘green contract’ proposal (Strategic - Heart)
- Apply subject and discipline specific knowledge and understanding to contemporary and practice based problems and/or challenges (Problem Solving - Hand)
- Appraise and illustrate insights to dimensions of sustainability that can be integrated with minimal disruption within the context of a business or industry (Normative - Hand)
- Demonstrate an awareness of knowledge and experience surrounding sustainability and evidence individual capabilities to make positive change (Self Awareness - Hand)

How specific learning objectives were assessed:

Formative assessment is central to scaffolding the learning journey. From the start check-ins with business partners and tutors are used to guide and support insights and reflection and the development of the green contract and pitch.

Part way through the week learners present their work in progress, respond to questions and gain feedback ahead of the final 5min pre-recorded video pitches. The pitches are shared with the business partners and their feedback communicated to the students, along with a final Q&A, before complete a reflective exercise to conclude the Hackathon.

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How SDGs have been included:

The learner understands sustainability within a business, work and economic growth context.

The learner understands how to incorporate sustainability within business/industry infrastructure and innovative practices.

The learner is informed about sustainable consumption and production patterns within the context of their business partner.

The learner understands the benefit of partnerships and collaboration across domains.

How have the designed teaching and learning activities been delivered?

With focus on the outcomes and the SDGs, and facilitated by webinars and online for and ongoing formative assessment and feedback processes, learners actively engage with each other and the overall task and the elements within.

Learner agency, collaboration and cooperation – learners are at the core of the work and outputs and are supported in their problem solving and solution finding through debate and discussion and questioning and guidance from businesses and tutors. The cross discipline nature, and location, of the work stretches boundaries.

Experiential learning and transformation(s) - the location of the Hackathon at a point of transition (Level 4/Year 1 to Level 5/Year 2) in the learner journey is important. The focus on experiential learning (through doing and reflection, again combined with the cross discipline work, supports the richness of insights and facilitates individual and group transformation(s).