

University of Aberdeen

## Sustainability themed work-based projects: An opportunity with challenges

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ABERDEEN 2040

# Sustainability themed work-based projects

## An opportunity with challenges

By John Storm  
September 2022

# AGENDA

## INTRODUCING WORK-BASED PLACEMENTS

*Fundamental gains and limitations of placements*

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## KEY DRIVERS FOR SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS

*Drivers for embracing sustainability initiatives at HEIs  
providing an opportunity*

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## ASSUMPTIONS

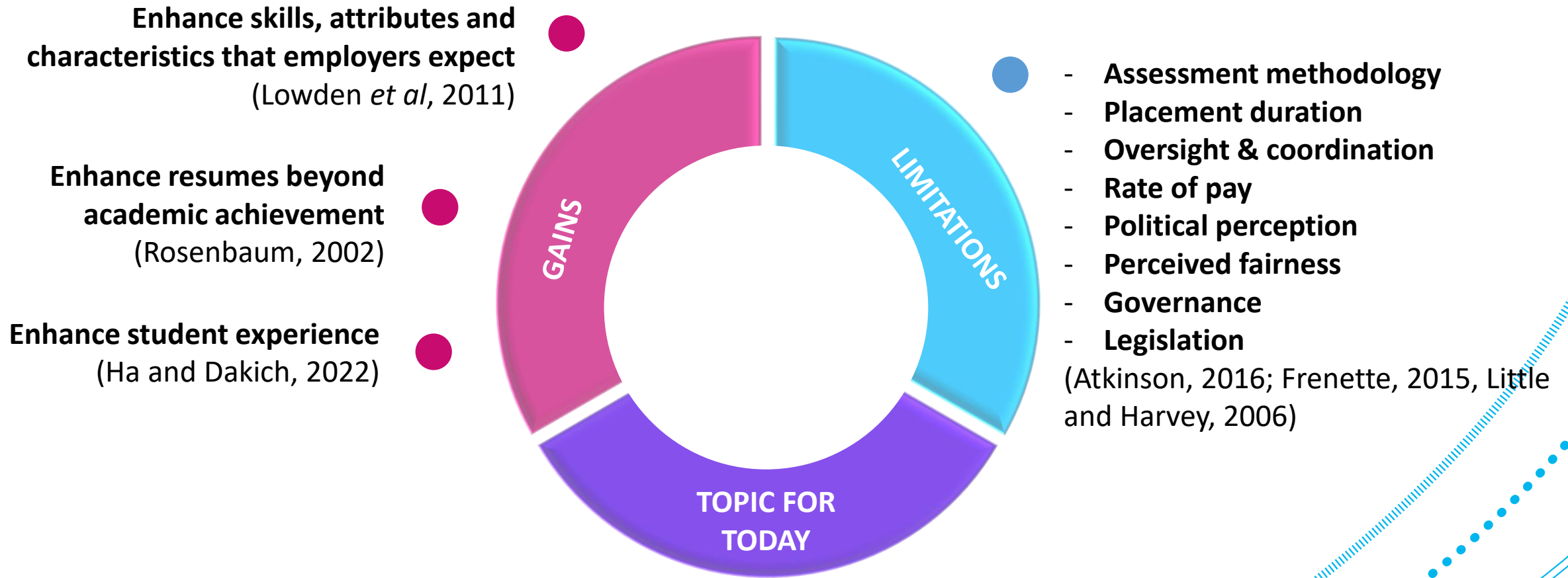
*Placements are collaborative initiatives*

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## INVOLVEMENT AND OBSERVATIONS

*Acknowledging challenges for programme leads*

# INTRODUCING WORK-BASED PLACEMENTS



What about sustainability themed projects that bring together diverse students from several universities?

# KEY DRIVERS FOR SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS



Accreditation standards increasingly driving HEIs towards sustainability  
(*Standard 9, AACSB 2020; Chapter 9, EQUIS 2019*)



Equity, diversity and inclusiveness



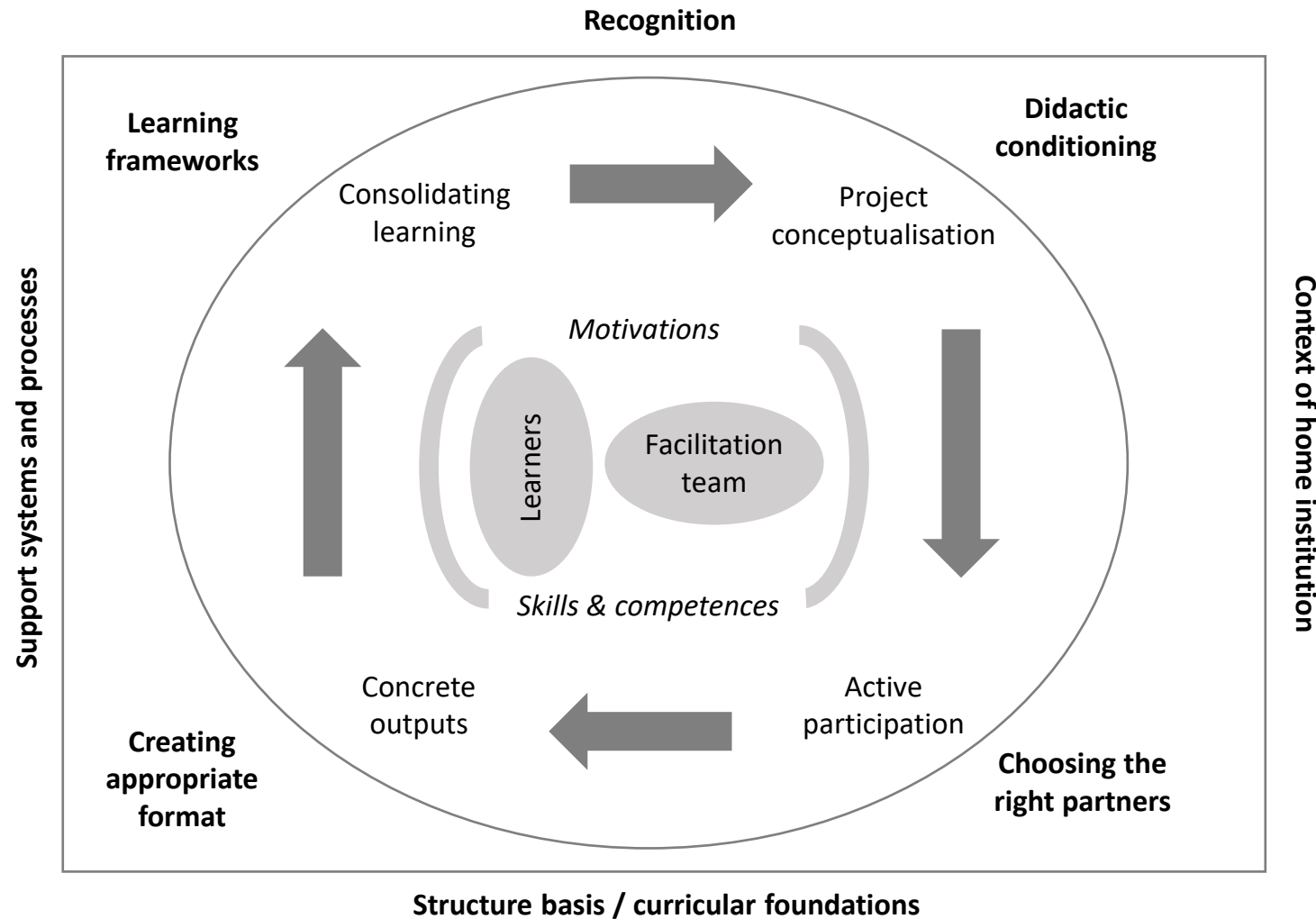
Students increasingly expect educators to incorporate sustainability themes into programmes \*

\* Yet equally:

- Sustainability typically viewed as not a personal responsibility (*Rosentrator and Burke, 2017*)
- Sustainability frequently viewed as a green issue, pitched against economic and social issues (*Kagawa, 2007*).
- Significant scope for educators to improve explicit linkage between decision making and sustainable action (*Garrecht, Bruckermann and Harms, 2018*)

# ASSUMPTIONS

## Teaching approach

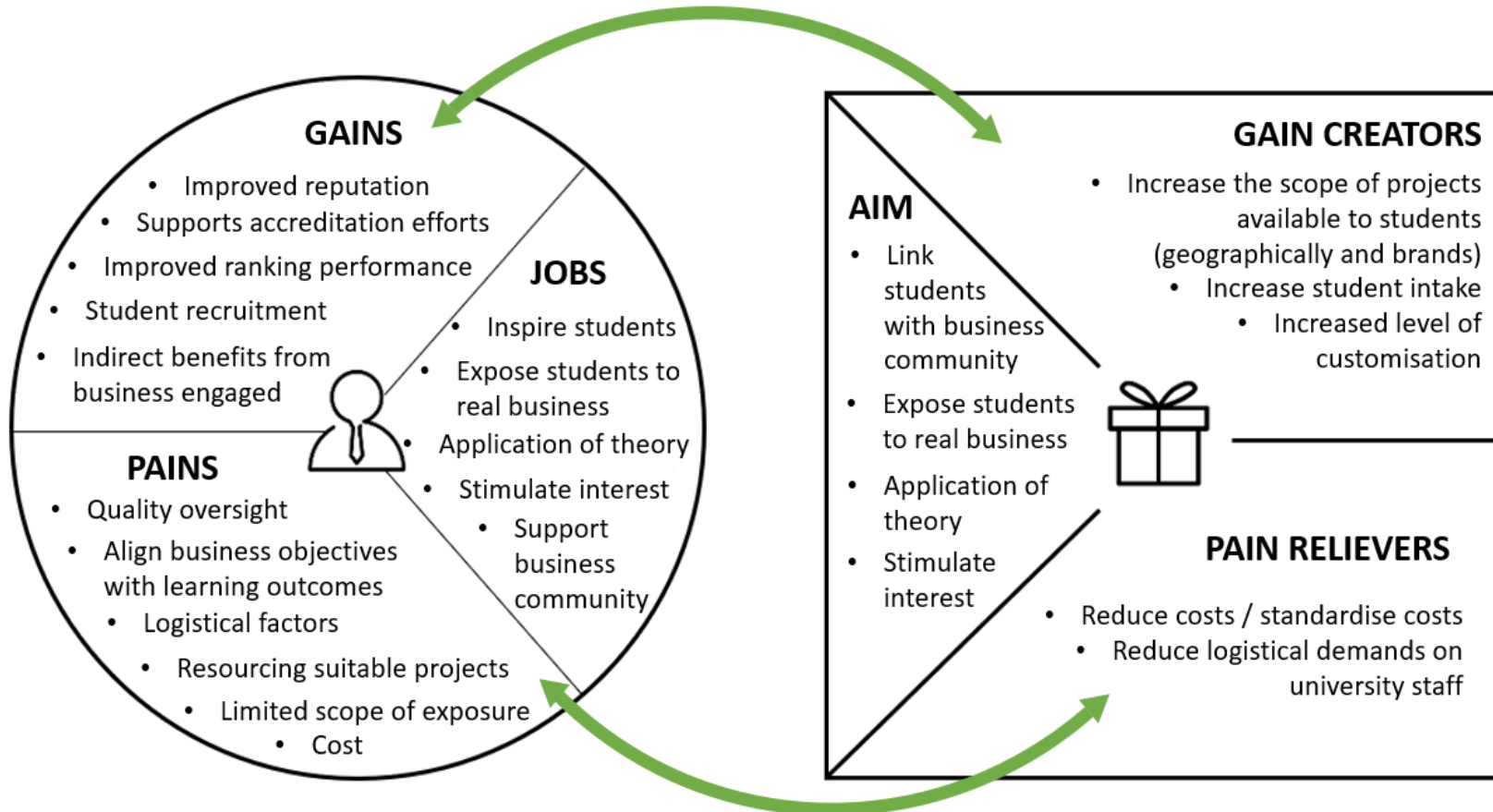


Adapted from Halberstadt *et al* 2019, several assumptions may be observed. E.g. experiential learning is materially beneficial to students; facilitation team intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to support work-based projects; supporting faculty have the skillset to engage in practical projects; the wider institution is supportive towards such initiative(s); tolerance towards an iterative model of implementation, etc.

# ASSUMPTIONS

## Proposition for partnership

- Multiple HEIs
- Organising entity
- Placement company



# INVOLVEMENT AND OBSERVATIONS

Consulted with 5 initiatives  
involving 19 companies, >40  
universities from >15  
countries and >250 students

## Challenges observed

- HEI driver may be Programme Level or from Careers and Employability Services, potentially resulting in differing priorities.
- Criteria for partner selection is variable. E.g. some schools emphasise Practice Academic advisor over Scholarly Academic advisor and vice versa
- Lack of rigorous framework for post-evaluating (e.g. how to measure open-mindedness?)
- Core learnings of students: e.g. consulting vs. implementation, grasping reality etc
- Challenges with bringing core learning(s) back to the home institution
- Differing national holidays make schedule alignment between institutions and organisations challenging
- Equalising fairness across time zones (e.g. early morning US = evening Asia)
- Technologies and communication an immediate obstacle
- Students have range of motivations for joining. Difficult to align and/or achieve
- Prepping students to encounter different ideologies? E.g. Leaderless decision making
- Broad student diversity may bring diversity in both institutional and subject level diversity. May result in learning outcomes becoming increasingly transferable, inherently limiting ability to achieve some students expecting to enhance industry specific technical skills
- With diversity, comes increased opportunity for disagreement (how to manage)
- Negative relationship between demand for flexibility, non credit-bearing courses and drop out rate



# WRAP UP

The Covid pandemic provided an opportunity for online work-based projects, particularly initiatives supported by core trends in employability, diversity, and sustainability. Several companies have arranged impressive opportunities for students to engage in sustainability-themed projects with companies and students from across the globe. Equally, projects are typically viewed as standalone and outside of a programmes' core curriculum. This limits ability for students to build on their learning upon return to their home institution. The question of how to consolidate and recognise learning, not only of students but also of the programme team running these initiatives, deserves further consideration from educators.

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