Using Achievements and Badges to incentivise student skills and engagement

Dr James Woolley
Digital Education Lead
Prifysgol Aberystwyth University
jbw@aber.ac.uk

1872 PRIFYSGOL ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

Structure

- Blackboard Achievements
- Case Studies:
  - Department of Life Sciences: Skills Passport
  - Law and Criminology: Assessed Seminar Performance
- Blackboard Milestone
  - Graduate Attributes



Achievements

Summary

- Course level / Organisation level
- Tied to activities, tasks, or goals
- Badging and gamification contexts

Join the Vevox session

Go to **vevox.app**

Enter the session ID: **115-762-861**

Or scan the QR code

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **115-762-861**

Do you use Achievements?

Yes

0%

It's enabled but I don't use it

0%

No

0%

Do you use Achievements?

Yes

##.##%

It's enabled but I don't use it

##.##%

No

##.##%

RESULTS SLIDE

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **115-762-861**

What activities do you use Achievements for?

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **115-762-861**

What activities do you use Achievements for?

RESULTS SLIDE

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **115-762-861**

What's the most interesting achievement you've come across?

Join at: **vevox.app** ID: **115-762-861**

What's the most interesting achievement you've come across?

RESULTS SLIDE

Summary

Once earned, students can access this badge on the Achievements tab.

Badge Preview



Brain Dissection Skills

Earned by: [Learner name]

Earned on: [Earning Date]

Course: Comparative Animal Physiology (AB1 2026-27)

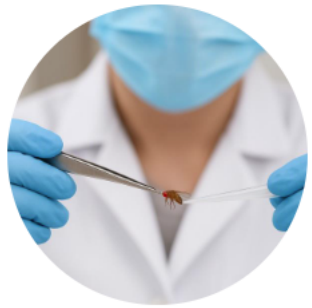
During the practical you undertook a dissection of a sheep brain, and identified the major anatomical regions of the brain together with...

Read more

Course badge

This badge recognises course achievements but isn't verifiable outside the course.

Badge Preview



DLS Skills Passport: Appropriate Handling of a Laboratory Animal.

Earned by: [Learner name]

Earned on: [Earning Date]

Course: Genetics, Evolution and Diversity (AB1 2026-27)

Appropriate handling of a laboratory animal. Anesthetise and handle Drosophila in a safe and humane manner. You have been observed using the correct handling methods.

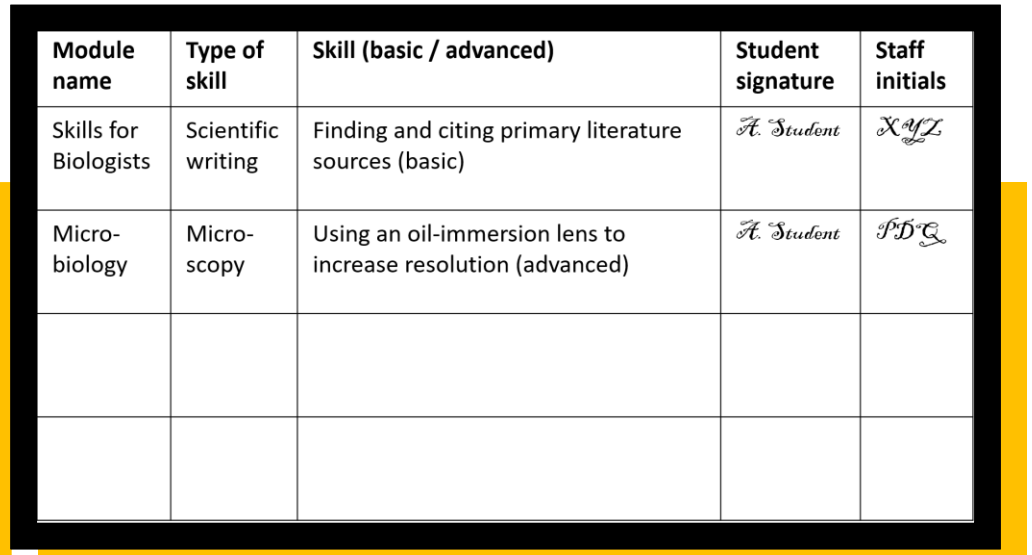
Read less

Course badge

This badge recognises course achievements but isn't verifiable outside the course.

Case Study 1: Department of Life Sciences' Skills Passport

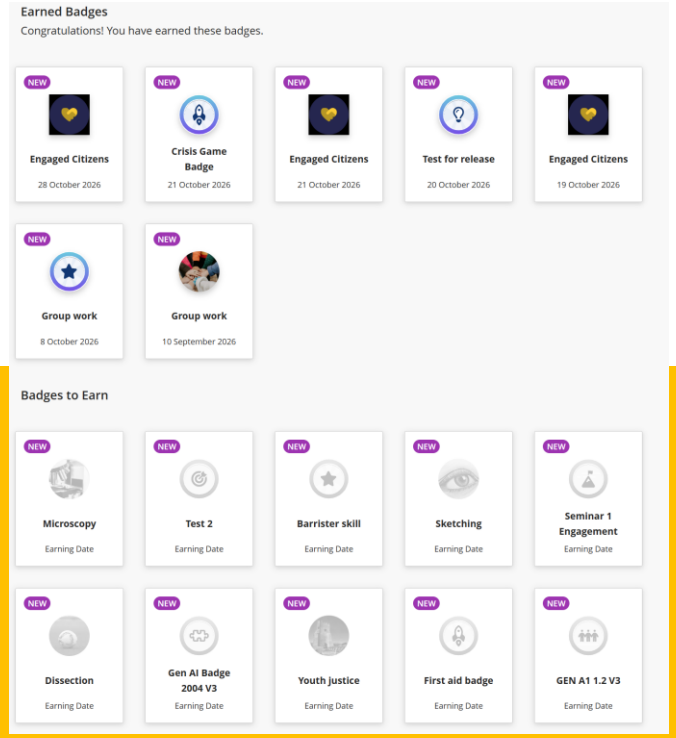
Development of the Skills Passport for Department of Life Sciences



Module name	Type of skill	Skill (basic / advanced)	Student signature	Staff initials
Skills for Biologists	Scientific writing	Finding and citing primary literature sources (basic)	A. Student	XYZ
Micro-biology	Micro-scopy	Using an oil-immersion lens to increase resolution (advanced)	A. Student	PDQ

- The DLS Skills Passport documents the skills that students acquire during Years 1 and 2
- Skills Passport enables students to appreciate and collate their skills to facilitate writing their CV
- Skills passport assessed in their final year as part of a Research Project module
- Original problem: paper-based system
- Students downloaded and printed a blank form
- Students brought paper document to each practical class:
  - Class leader observes skills
  - Signs off
- Document signed by student and class leader
- Issues:
  - Loss of paper
  - Hundreds of students needing to be signed off

Workflow



- Class leader sets up DLS Skills Passport in Gradebook in advance
- Class leader identifies achievement associated with the skills, sets up the Badge and the associate skill
- Leader takes tablet into class:
  - Awards badges when satisfactory skills are observed
- Students see online which Badges they have gained (and which ones they haven’t gained)
- If a tablet not practicable – e.g., for wet labs, class list can be printed and badges updated on Blackboard later

Data: *Genetics, Evolution and Diversity*

- 4 badges:
  - Ability to use a Compound Microscope
  - Appropriate handling of a laboratory animal
  - Applying the Principle of Parsimony
  - Construction of a simple phylogenetic tree
- 251 Registered students
- 878 Skills Badges awarded
- 12 other modules

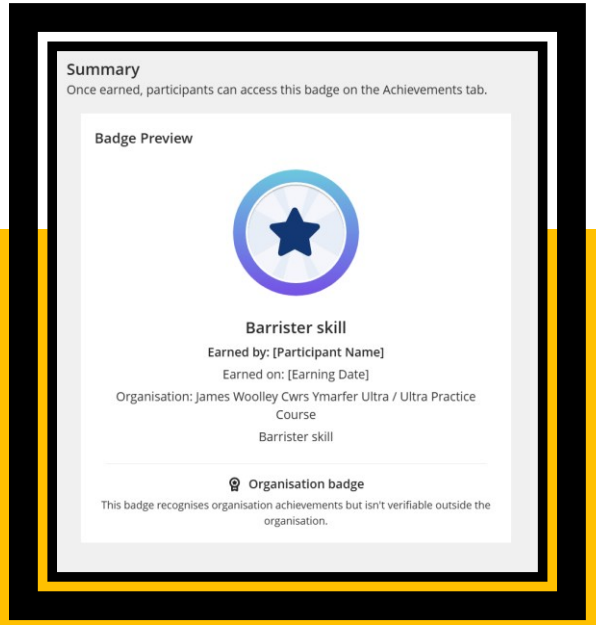
Rollout

- Small pilot test:
  - Does this do what we need it to do?
  - What was the student response?
- Training video for colleagues
  - Downloading and uploading data from the Gradebook
- Support for students
  - Reference in class, build into reflective exercises in the latter parts of the degree



Case Study 2: Department of Law and Criminology

Assessed Seminar Performance for Law and Criminology



- Introduced in September 2026
- 1st Year Modules
- Focus on skills and engagement
  - Including attendance
- Variety of different activities:
  - Multiple Choice Quiz
  - Reflective reading activities
  - Group work activities

Workflow

Set up Groups for Seminars (optional)

Set up category in the Gradebook for Assessed Seminar Performance

Set up graded activity:

- Minimum a gradebook column
- Assignment – manually marked
- Blackboard test – automatically marked (depending on question)
- Graded Blackboard tool
  - Discussions
  - Journal

Create an achievement and associate it with your graded activity

Mark the activity

- Can also include download and upload gradebook column

Create a column to bring together the top components to be mapped

Rollout

- Showcased at Annual Education and Student Experience Conference
- Departmental Training Session offered to colleagues
- Focused on incorporating the Assessed Seminar Performance into a conversation about skills

Tips for implementation

- Prepare students for the activity
- Demonstrate to students where they can get the achievements from
- Use the description field to explain to students what skills they have
- Link to wider skills such as group work, communication skills, employability skills
- Helps to create achievements in manageable chunks
- Use as a discussion about skills students have gained from engaging with the activity

Case Study 3: Blackboard Milestone and Graduate Attributes

Context: Education and Student Experience Plan

To design and implement a portfolio to maximise student employability and enterprise

- Agree and roll out a set of graduate skills that will inform design and delivery of our curriculum.
- Develop a student journey blueprint to chart employability and enterprise milestones at scheme level.
- Explore opportunities for enterprise work across and beyond the undergraduate curriculum by working with key stakeholders such as the Arts Centre and Old College.
- We will develop a skills framework that equips our graduates for the next stage of their career

Key Performance Indicators':

- To increase the proportion of AU graduates reported as being in graduate level work at a rate of 1% per year from yrs 1 – 5.
- Improvement in the proportion of good honours outcomes to above the Welsh average by 2030.

				
Parod am Yrfa/ Career ready	Cymwys yn Ddigidol/ Digitally competent	Arloeswyr/Innovator	Datryswyr Problemau Dadansoddol/Analytical problem solver	Dinasyddion Ymgysylltiedig/Engaged citizen

Graduate Attributes and Milestone

Milestone Pilot

- 1000 licenses
  - Pilot 1: DLS Skills Passport
  - Pilot 2: Law and Criminology Assessed Seminar Performance
  - Pilot 3: International Politics
  - Pilot 4: Welsh Language

Workflow

- Academic involved in pilot completes an online form:
  - Module code
  - Gradebook item
  - Score
  - Mapping
- Digital Education Team create the attribute mapping

Tips for implementation

- Key is design – be clear about what you want Milestone to do
- Involve the right people:
  - Education Senior Leader
  - Information Technology Colleagues
  - Students
  - Careers and Employability Leaders

Join at: **vevox.app** ID: **115-762-861**

What are you going to do next with achievements?

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **115-762-861**

What are you going to do next with achievements?



RESULTS SLIDE

Diolch yn fawr iawn
Thank you very much

Questions

jbw@aber.ac.uk

