



## Impactful creative pedagogy to enhance learning about innovation and creativity: Interview an innovator

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### ABSTRACT

The creative pedagogical practice presented in this paper is an innovative assessment that has been designed to encourage, support and develop transferable skills linked to the 4Cs; critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity in our students. This paper presents the students' perceptions of their learning gained and lecturers' response and perspective on the assessment delivery. Module evaluations and reflective practice is utilised, underpinned by Rogers (2003) attributes of innovation diffusion as the lens by which the authors evaluate the effectiveness of the adoption of this innovative assessment instrument. The paper presents the 'interview an innovator' assessment underpinned by innovation theories such as the Tidd and Bessant's (2020) simplified Innovation Process Framework and Goffin and Mitchell's (2016) Pentathlon Framework. The assessment enables students to relate these theories to the practice of their chosen innovator. It is proposed that the creative design of this assessment could overcome some of the challenges associated with students utilising generative AI beyond its use as a supportive 'personal companion' for their assessments. Conclusions involve reflecting on a Venn diagram of how the module utilises creative pedagogy to teach creativity, engaging students in creativity skills to craft their assessment, whilst learning about creativity in action. The continued improvement and lessons learned from delivering this creative assessment is shared and will be useful to other academics to support their academic practice in delivering modules in related topic areas.

**Keywords:** creativity, innovation management, student engagement, learning, assessment

### Introduction

Key wellsprings of economic growth are creativity and innovation (Boyles, 2022; Mendoza-Silva, 2021). Research has demonstrated that innovative organisations grow twice as fast as those that fail to innovate (Tidd & Bessant, 2020). In addition, Tidd and Bessant (2020) argue that organisations who are consistently successful at managing innovation can out-perform their peers and capture even greater social benefits of innovation. Hence creativity and innovation feature in degree programmes offered by United Kingdom (UK) Business Schools either explicitly or implicitly. Bouckaert (2023, p.4) argues that "[c]reativity and critical thinking stand among the most important skills that young adults should acquire in 21st century societies". higher education institutions (HEIs) provide "a key role in fostering students' acquisition of these skills by incorporating them into courses, curricula and assessment" (Bouckaert, 2023, p.4). Skills Development

Scotland (2018, p.8) identifies Innovation as one of three broad headings for their twelve “meta-skills” which are “timeless, higher order skills that create adaptive learners [...] in whatever context the future brings”.

Tasked with creating transformative education, our HEI recognises, in the Strategy for Learning 2030 (Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), 2024), that graduates are entering a challenging employment market with significantly increased globalisation, automation, advances in artificial intelligence and digitisation. Many jobs will be transformed, and future graduates need to be able to adapt and excel in their lives beyond university. As academic educators, we follow a set of inclusive, embedded pedagogic principles which shape the content and design of our academic programmes and the student learning experience (see GCU, 2024). Particularly relevant for our purposes is the pedagogical principle which includes “promoting research-led and enquiry-based learning through evidence-based and practice-informed curricula” (GCU, 2024, p. 7) which aligns to one of our institution’s core values of creativity.

This paper presents a case study of the assessment ‘Interview an Innovator’ (IaI or ‘the assessment’), which enables students to translate their knowledge from theories around creativity and innovation learnt from the classroom and textbooks into real world practice. The assessment is part of a Management of Innovation and Creativity (MIC) module and has been designed to enable students to capture and relate the practices of their real-life ‘innovator’ to frameworks such as Tidd and Bessant’s (2020) simplified Innovation Process Model, and Goffin and Mitchell’s (2016) Pentathlon Framework. The coursework is designed to inspire and challenge students to deeply understand, and critically reflect on, what creativity and innovation involves. A discussion is provided around the results of a thematic analysis of qualitative comments provided by students in their module evaluations, regarding their experiences in undertaking the IaI assessment. In the spirit of a module on creativity and innovation, Rogers’ (2003) attributes of innovation are utilised as the lens by which the authors have evaluated the effectiveness of the adoption of this innovative assessment instrument. Akin to Schon’s (1983) model of reflection, the case provides ‘reflection in action’, relating to the genesis of the assessment and ‘reflection on action’ (‘lessons learnt’) from both student and staff perspectives regarding the perceived benefits and challenges of the IaI assessment.

### The nature of innovation and creativity

Innovation and creativity are linked, with a common distinction being (in essence), “Creativity, in its most basic form is about idea generation and innovation, the implementation of ideas” (Gilson & Litchfield, 2017, p.80). Creativity, like innovation and its management, is seen as both output and a process (Kahn, 2018; Tidd & Bessant, 2020) or even a mindset (Kahn, 2018). From the seminal work of Rogers (2003), and built on by others since its conception, an innovation may have one or more of five interlinking attributes that make it more readily adopted by others;

- Relative advantage – the extent to which the innovation is an enhancement on what has gone before.
- Compatibility – the extent to which the innovation ‘fits’ with existing values and experiences.
- Complexity – the extent to which the innovation can be understood or used.
- Trialability – the extent to which the innovation can be tried out/experimented/experienced prior to formal adoption.
- Observability – the extent to which the innovation and its outputs can be seen by potential adopters.

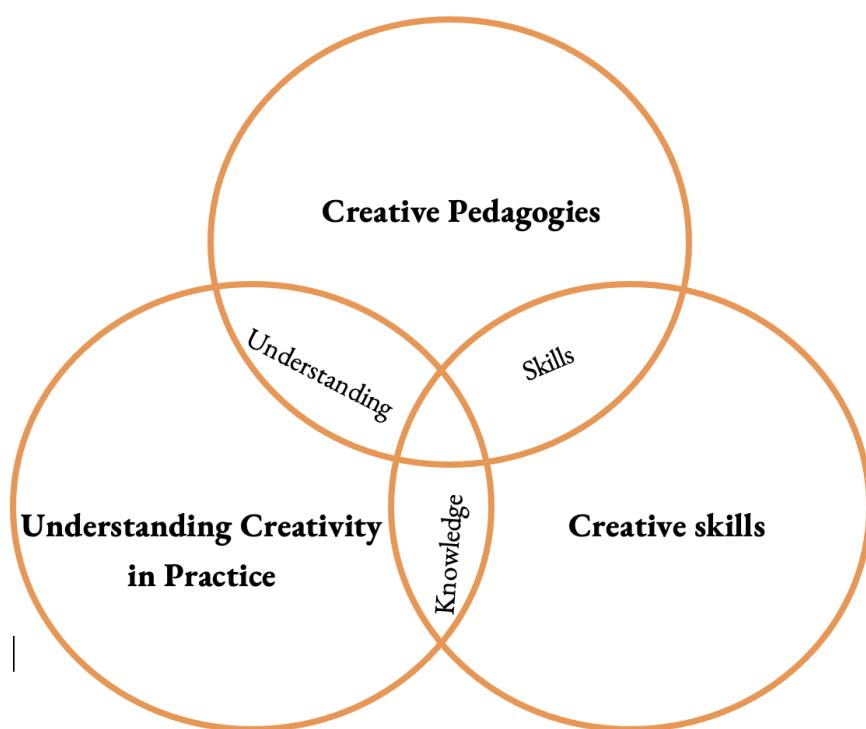
Depending on the interplay of the attributes, an innovation may be adopted, not adopted or adopted then discarded (Rogers, 2003). Rogers' attributes have been used to inform research across a range of education-related contexts. For example, Almohtadi and Aldarabah (2020) relate students' attitudes on the integration of Facebook into their education or Chen (2024) and the adoption process of new teaching methods in secondary education in the USA.

### Being creative about assessing innovation and creativity

Engaging undergraduate students in a post-pandemic world requires creative pedagogies that motivate and inspire students to engage in their learning. To support graduates to be responsible business leaders in the future workplace, they need to graduate with skills in the 4Cs; critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Graduates that can draw on these higher order skills to assess and use information effectively are achieving a far greater learning gain (Benjamin, 2012; Speight et al., 2018). Given the importance of both creativity (e.g. Bouckart, 2023) and innovation (e.g. Skills Development Scotland, 2018) knowledge and understanding of the skills for, and outcomes of, the practice of creativity (and innovation) are of individual and societal value. The challenge facing the module team was to use creative pedagogies to teach/assess innovation and creativity whilst engaging students in enhancing their creativity skills as well as learning about and understanding innovation and creativity in practice.

How do practitioners 'teach' (or rather facilitate the learning about) innovation and creativity, creatively? Creative pedagogy (Cremin & Chapell, 2021), 'creative learning' (Creative Scotland, 2017, p14) and student creativity (Jahnke et al., 2017) can relate to several different factors. When comparing the 'lists' from Creative Scotland (2017), Cremin and Chappell (2021) and Jahnke et al. (2017), although there are some differences, several commonalities emerge. From these common factors, for this work, creative pedagogies would be characterised by (in no particular order): independent/autonomous learning; curiosity/problem solving; generating and exploring ideas/different perspectives to produce something original leading to changes in the student's knowledge, understanding and skills; and finally, self-reflection and evaluation.

Based on the discussion in this section and elsewhere, a triptych of knowledge, skills and understanding is illustrated in Figure 1, showing the relationship of each attribute to the three key goals of the assessment. Firstly, developing the Creative Skills of students (see for example Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Secondly, Understanding Creativity in Practice (for example the requirement for enquiry-based learning through practice-informed curricula; GCU, 2024) and Creative Pedagogy (relating to the factors identified by (for example) Cremin & Chappell, 2021).



**Figure 1** Venn Diagram of Creativity and the Challenge for the Module Team

Source: created by authors, 2025

The next section introduces the Management of Innovation and Creativity module and the Interview an Innovator (Iai) assessment.

#### Context: The module and the assessment

Management of Innovation and Creativity (MIC) is a 20-credit module, delivered to over 100 students largely from the institution's BA (Hons) Business Management programme, though the module is also taken by students on other programmes e.g. those focused on supply chain management or computing. Students are in the final year of their undergraduate programme (SCQF Level 10; SCQF, 2024). The module explores the effective management of innovation and creativity for competitive advantage. It enables students to encounter diverse types of innovation and strategies for managing innovation, as well as the importance of networking and open innovation. The module investigates and analyses frameworks unpacking the innovation process, including how organisations search for, select, implement, and evaluate innovative ideas (Tidd & Bessant, 2020).

Creativity and especially the generation of creative ideas, is crucial within the innovation process so the module also examines how a supportive working environment and management can encourage creativity. Students learn about organisational leadership, structure, culture and the role of teams to stimulate, facilitate and encourage innovation and creativity. Examples from a range of international innovative

organisations give students an understanding of the practical management of innovation and creativity. Guest lecturers such as a practising intellectual property lawyer and entrepreneurs offer deeper practice-based insights into the concepts learned.

The MIC module has two summative assessments each worth 50% of the overall mark for the module, this case study focuses on Assessment 1 – Interview an Innovator. The assessment gives an opportunity for students to investigate and reflect on the management of innovation and creativity in practice. What follows is a concise version of the task presented to students based on the 2024/2025 iteration of the assessment brief.

Firstly, students **chose an individual** they had access to and could talk to about innovating. There was scope for some creativity and the innovator or innovation is not restricted to a particular type of organisation or individual - a librarian, university lecturer, entrepreneur or cafe manager all have stories to tell of how they came up with ideas and took them to fruition. The interview could be face-to-face or online. If a student could not find someone to interview, a back-up possibility was to use a YouTube interview or autobiography as an alternative.

Secondly, students **designed their interview instrument** to find out about their interviewee's innovation process. It was recommended students use an innovation process framework, such as (but not restricted to) the Tidd and Bessant's (2020) framework. Given the limited word count available (1,500 words) students were expected to focus on the innovation theories/concepts that interested them and were appropriate for their interviewee.

Thirdly, **conduct the interview**. There was no time limit specified for the duration of the interview, and it was recorded. Advice on automatic transcription of the recording was given. Finally, students **critically analyse the data collected from the interview in relation to theories on innovation management** and reflect on the evidence provided by the innovator. Given the limited word count, students had to write concisely, choosing the most relevant stages of the innovation process to discuss that related to their interview, in order to provide sufficient depth in the word count.

When the assessment was first introduced, the Module Leader sought advice from the School's Research Ethics Committee on ethical considerations for the assessment. Students were expected to follow good practice and provide their innovator with a written or oral explanation of the study in advance of the interview. Only participants aged 18 or over could be interviewed. Verbal or written informed consent should be obtained.

As well as a detailed coursework brief, other support for the assessment included: a 12-minute podcast on the assessment; a Padlet 'wall' where students could post questions, and the tutors replied, which became an extensive Q&A resource and also supported transparency in marking between module tutors (see Figure 2); signposting to supporting literature e.g. Cope's (2005) article on researching entrepreneurship through phenomenological inquiry; and a tailored academic writing session from the School's Learning Development Centre.

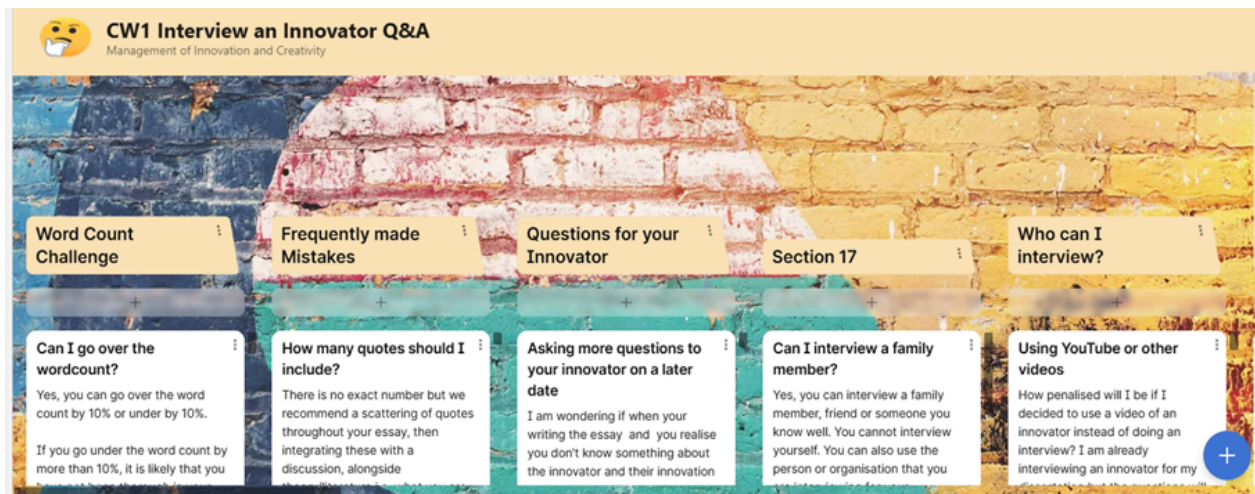


Figure 2 Example of Q&A Padlet Wall used to support the Interview an Innovator assessment

Source: created by authors, 2025

Methodology

This research encompasses an epistemological stance utilising reflections of the student and staff lived experiences as its knowledge base. The primary data from the student perspective was captured through the centrally created School Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ). The results of the MEQ have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The focus of our analysis has been on the qualitative data set on the students’ lived experiences. While this is a useful way to capture a nuanced and complex data set, this data collection method has been critiqued as only being partially effective as a means of measuring and enhancing higher education (Wiley, 2019). Some have called the usefulness of this type of data into question, primarily on the grounds that results may reflect many influences other than the teaching itself, such as the students’ efforts on the course impacting the responses (Stroebe, 2016). However, such evaluations still hold value in exploring students' perspectives on an assessment which is the reason for its inclusion in this research. Table 1 shows the number of students taking the module and the number of respondents to the centrally created MEQ. Response rates for the MEQ are variable with a maximum of 41% for the first cohort, with the response rate more typically being around 20%.

Table 1 Number of responses to Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs)

Academic Session	Trimester of Delivery	Number of Students Taking Module	Number of Respondents	Respondents as % of students taking the module
16/17	B	111	46	41.4%
17/18	B	164	39	23.8%
18/19	B	149	29	19.5%



19/20	B	176	33	18.8%
20/21	B	155	35	22.6%
21/22	B	163	19	11.7%
22/23	A	131	19	14.5%
23/24	A	128	25	19.5%

Source: created by authors, 2025

The data set on the staff perspective of the module and assessment stemmed from both spontaneous and organised opportunities for reflection to take place. The module team ran multiple touch points across the module in which reflection was able to take place. Moreover, the Module Monitoring Report and Programme Reviews enabled staff to formalise their reflections in written formats which were used as the basis for the Staff Reflections primary data set in this research. The External Examiner was consulted at the time of changing the assessment to the Ial, with the Module Change Request Form constituting a further formal point of reflection on this assessment involving multiple stakeholders. Therefore, the analysis is framed in the spirit of Schon's (1983) 'reflection in action' (e.g. the thinking as the assessment was being created) and 'reflection on action' (post hoc reflections).

We analysed the module evaluations over the eight completed cohorts of delivery to date, to explore student perceptions of the assessment instrument. Our pedagogical principles drive the design of our curricula in both the delivery and assessment of our students (GCU, 2024). This study fits with two of the priority areas of the strategy, whereby the Ial assessment was designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of our students, as discussed later in this section but also to enrich the student experience as will be reflected from this data set. In this vein, the analysis of the staff reflections largely uses Rogers' (2003) well-established attributes of innovation as its lens: relative advantage, usability, compatibility, trialability and observability. This use of innovation theory, in discussing creative/innovative pedagogy was inspired by the work of Almhtadi and Aldarabah (2020) and Chen (2024, p.9) who argues "[f]actors influencing the adoption of new teaching methods closely align with Rogers' key concepts" though Chen's work was in relation to secondary education in the USA rather than higher education in the UK.

By doing so, the thematic analysis of the module evaluations identified two key themes and related sub-themes, around the students' perceptions of the Ial assessment;

1. The assessment type and student enjoyment

- Evidence of usefulness of guidance/support on assessment (positive and negative)
- Evidence of enjoyment of assessment
- Comments on the assessment type

2. Self-reflections of the impact on the students’ own learning

- Knowledge of the subject area
- Theory into practice
- Flexibility of the coursework

Ethical approval to use the MEQ data was approved via the School’s Research Ethics Committee (10 September 2024; Ref GSBSREC24-007). There is no data for the current running of the module (2024/2025). The longitudinal time horizon of this data set showcases the validity and reliability of the data (White & Arzi, 2005). The direct data sources, standardised data collection instruments and non-leading questions are good practice for rigorous data sets which was upheld in this study (Watts et al., 2017). An overview of the methodological choices employed in this research is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** An Overview of the Methodological Choices Employed

Prism	Interpretivism
Approach	Inductive
Strategy	Case Study
Methods	Qualitative, mono-method
Data Collection Instrument	School MEQ; Module Evaluation Questionnaire; Module Monitoring Reports and Programme Reviews
Sampling	Quota Sampling paired with convenience sampling
Time Horizon	Longitudinal data across 8 [eight] completed cohorts
Analysis	Thematic Analysis

Source: created by authors, 2025

The themes/sub-themes are discussed in terms of the students’ perceptions (next section).

Students' perceptions of the assessment

This section discusses the students’ perceptions of the Ial assessment based on the themes/subthemes identified in the previous section.

Theme 1 - The assessment type and student enjoyment



It is well known that if students enjoy a topic area or indeed an assessment, then they are more likely to perform better. Some researchers have also developed an enjoyment measure, known as the enjoy scale, noting that enjoyability can have a positive effect when engaging in a challenging experience (Davidson et al., 2023). There was a positive response from students to the Ial assessment, with students identifying it as interesting and enjoyable, one student reflected, 'the innovator essay was fun to do'. Students who were learning during the 2020-2021 cohort, where the class was delivered fully online during the Covid-19 pandemic, explained that remote studying was difficult. However, one student said of the Ial assessment, "I engaged more than I have with any other learning from home class". Engaging students whilst learning remotely was important, as noted by Cheong et al. (2021) who identified that involving the students in research, creativity, and innovation supported their engagement, during a highly constrained time.

The reasons for the students' enjoyment of the assessment was explored further. In particular students felt they benefited from the freedom to choose the theories and concepts that interested them, and in addition commented on "getting to choose an innovator that I had an interest in". Understanding what motivates students to learn has been the subject of much research (Wentzel, 2020). When asked why they enjoyed the assessment, another student mentioned that this freedom to choose, made them "more independent than past assignments". This is a characteristic that we aim to develop in our students' learning journey.

The students also commented on the benefit of engaging in a different type of assessment from their other modules as being a "nice change". They were pleased not to have to do another essay or presentation. They reflected on the value to them of interviewing an innovator in that it "helps expand your communication and gives you interviewing skills which a lot of university students will not have at this stage".

However, each year we find some students in the cohort struggle, as at first, they do not know who to interview and take some time to plan out their assessment – they see it as a challenge. However, our discussions with students at seminars often results in a change in thinking and reflections on their learning experience. Most often it turns into a positive experience; one student emphasises this point, saying "I found it hard finding an innovator to interview at first, however, I am over the moon with my results and found the essay extremely interesting to write".

Many students get a sense of relief and satisfaction after their interview is done, having stepped out of their comfort zone and embraced the challenge, and come to consider the rewards of this experience. One student reflected on feeling very engaged with the content of the module learning and that it reflected in their assessment mark which was the highest mark they had obtained. Keeping students engaged in the material and enjoying the topic was enabled by the Ial assessment giving them a real-world experience (see Plakhotnik's informational interview, 2017). This point is emphasised by a student who commented that "the learning was interesting, because it did not involve pure theory".

Whilst most students responded very positively to the assessment, we are aware that we have different archetypes of students, where some interventions can 'switch on' a student's learning, while for others it will 'switch it off'. Doyle (2023) discusses the paradox we face in engaging students with their learning and despite universities becoming more learner-centered, some students need to be persuaded that learning is the central purpose. Some students are not comfortable with taking responsibility for their own learning. In our study, we found differences in how students understood what they were learning. An example of this

are students' contrasting views on their experience of attending the same guest lectures. For example, a student commented "I didn't enjoy the guest lectures. I found them confusing and unnecessary. There's a lot of content to get through, and I found these distracting". Adding to this point, a challenge many of us face relates to students focused on passing rather than on the gains to their wider learning, exemplified by a student's view that "lectures need to be relevant to provide support of the assessment".

Conversely, we find other students with different perceptions on the same guest lectures, enthusiastically stating "One of my most favorite and best experience of this module was hearing from guest speakers this allowed me to gain an understanding of how different entrepreneurs and innovators have been innovating at their workplace", and for many of the students it was the guest lectures that contributed to making their learning more interesting and engaged them in the topic area.

There was a similar conflict in views on students' understanding of the assessment. There was a minority of students who, despite receiving the same support on the assessment, responded negatively when asked to feedback on the module. Whilst some students found the flexibility of the assessment engaging, the opposite was true for other students; one in particular said "I thought assessment 1 was a bit unclear and found it hard without a structure". Another student felt that the "assessment guidelines (were) very vague". The result of not being sure what was expected of them was that it made them less confident in their work. However, from the other perspective, a positive impact from participating in this assessment is demonstrated when one student said "congratulations to the person who had a brilliant idea of an interview with the innovative person [...], this [was] an amazing opportunity and experience for me, this was the most enjoyable assessment so far".

These student perspectives emphasise the challenges in delivering education to students with different attitudes towards learning. Just as O'Donovan (2017) discusses that students held different interpretations on what made assessment fair. The context of O'Donovan's study is similar to ours with undergraduate business students in a post-92 institution. The author supports our findings that some students viewed 'good teaching' as effective assessment preparation (O'Donovan, 2017, p. 627) rather than interventions to support learning. O'Donovan's (2017) paper discusses that short-lived student discomfort may be risky in a context where universities are viewed and judged as service providers. In this vein, we identified that the Ial assessment presents challenges to the students and a level of difficulty that only some students fully engage with, whilst others would prefer an easier route to passing. However, what we wanted to do with the Ial assessment was to engage all types of students by stimulating their interest in real-world practice and providing enough support for all learners.

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## **Theme 2 - Self-reflections of the impact on the students' own learning**

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Fullana et al. (2016) identified that some students have an awareness that reflective learning can contribute to better understanding of themselves and their learning. The three sub-themes of Knowledge on the subject area, Theory into Practice and Flexibility of the coursework are now discussed.

### *Knowledge on the subject area*

The students commented on how the assessment helped their understanding and knowledge of the topic area of managing innovation and creativity, for example one student commented that “putting the learning into practice by interviewing an innovator (has) enhanced my understanding of the theory”.

There is a growing interest in higher education in relation to the benefits of reflection and different ways to promote reflection. In practice, Veine et al. (2019, p. 147) explain that “students will face several situations that are unclear, confusing, complex, and unstable; the outcome may be highly uncertain, and the goals may be conflicting. Such situations demand a reflective approach”. Some students were able to observe their peers and reflect on their learning, an example being the observation of one student who recommended “please keep the practical aspects to the modules, the only ones who complained about this were lazy people who complain anyway”.

Others, meanwhile, reflected on the career benefits of the assessment, with one student reflecting on conducting the interview and how it supported them with “Learning about the importance of creativity and innovation, especially as I intend on being a business owner”. Another student talked about the assessment as a process and reflected on the benefits of exploring their innovators' lived experience. We designed the assessment with this in mind as we were aware it provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the topic by bringing in the perspectives of people who have directly experienced the phenomenon (Beames et al. 2021; see also Plakhotnik, 2017).

#### *Theory into practice*

Comparing theory from the textbooks into practice through the interview technique was also reflected on by many students, with one student identifying that it “allowed the opportunity to consider the motivational triggers and ambitions of an entrepreneur, as well as share various aspects of topics I've studied and give meaningful recommendations” and thus, it brought to life learning from other modules. Learning about practice was also suggested as helping the students to understand the concepts and definitions better such as incremental or radical innovation. Meanwhile, students who studied the module from other subject disciplines (beyond the ‘dominant’ Business Management programme) also found value in this assessment. For example, a computing student was enthusiastic about the opportunity to do the module and noted the positive experience of “visiting the office of my innovator”.

The module team reflected that many times students commented on interviews taking them beyond the required time needed. They got so interested in talking to their innovator and their innovator shared wider knowledge that motivated them for their career. This resulted in students observing they gained more experience and insights than they expected.

#### *Flexibility of the coursework*

Whilst it was commented in the previous section that many of the students enjoyed the flexibility with this assessment, some students also reflected on how it benefited their learning, for example, that it was a “well thought-out assessment [...] that trigger(ed) learning”. There was an awareness that learning was gained from the ability to choose who they could interview and from a context that they were interested in and that they were able to get “the chance to be able to explore different industries”. Thus, this flexibility supported their career goals. In addition, the fieldwork gave them experience that they could use for their

dissertation. It was suggested that we should do more in designing the earlier years of their degree, to “incorporate transferable skills from modules that can be used for (their) dissertation”.

In response to the student reflections of the assessment, there now follows reflections from the module team using the lens of Rogers’ (2003) attributes of innovation diffusion to identify characteristics of the assessment which have led to its adoption as an innovative assessment instrument.

#### Reflections from the module team

All authors of the paper have been involved in the delivery of the module, with the lead author being Module Leader for all eight cohorts on the module. This section reflects on the module team’s experiences in designing, setting up and delivery of the Ial assessment. The discussion is in the spirit of Schon’s (1983) ‘reflection in action’ (i.e. the thinking as the assessment was being created) and ‘reflection on action’ (post hoc reflections). The discussion is framed around Rogers’ (2003) well-established attributes of innovation that influence their rate of adoption: relative advantage, usability, compatibility, trialability and observability. This use of innovation theory in discussing the creative pedagogies, was inspired by the work of Almhtadi and Aldarabah (2020) and Chen (2024) who discuss new secondary level teaching methods whereby their adoption are influenced by factors that align with Rogers’ attributes of innovation diffusion.

The genesis of the Ial assessment came from asking ourselves– could the module team themselves be creative in the summative assessments for a module focusing on innovation and creativity? An innovative assessment was designed that put into practice the ethos of the module; *compatibility* with the team/module’s values and experiences. A chance comment along the lines of “Rather than us finding the innovators, what if the students could find their own innovators” provided the spark for what became the Ial assessment. Though not known to the team at the time, there is some congruence between interviewing an innovator and what Plakhotnik (2017, p.2) calls an ‘informational interview’. The context of Plakhotnik’s work was (in our parlance) ‘interview a manager’. Plakhotnik (2017) noted that students may have “little exposure to how organizations work” (p.1) and the informational interview allows a student to ask a “wide range of questions” (p.2) to “receive first-hand information [...] from experienced professionals as well as their perspectives on issues that arise in their professional practice” (p.2). Plakhotnik’s (2017) informational interview with a manager, was very much in the spirit of the Ial assessment, though our context was more narrowly focused on innovation and creativity (and its management) rather than ‘management’ more generally. With reflections already discussed from the students on the module, we now consider each of Rogers (2003) attributes in turn.

**Relative advantage** relates to the extent to which the innovation may be better than alternatives. These attributes fit with Theme 1 – the type of assessment and student enjoyment. The Ial assessment allowed students to engage with theory in a comparatively free and creative way. Though most students used the Tidd and Bessant framework (2020) to scaffold their essay there was variation in the elements focused on. The limited word count required this element of focus, critically evaluating the data collected to tell the best story in relation to the theory. The assessment offered an advantage to the students in that it was different to the common assessment methods they had experienced at university, thus combating so called ‘essay fatigue’. It fueled students with a curiosity to learn and do this more independently. A study on business students’ perspectives by Koris et al. (2017, p. 176) on the purposes of business school teaching, identified that students “value and identify with intellectual curiosity”.

All tutors showed **compatibility** (relates to the values and experiences of the module team) in that they had expertise in the topic area through their doctoral studies and further relevant research experience. In addition, one tutor had been an entrepreneur themselves, but all had experience of idea generation and implementation in their home and working lives to draw upon. It could be argued here that there was co-creation of the curriculum, with the students as partners, themselves involved in shaping the enhancement of the assessment. Both formal and informal feedback mechanisms led to these changes (as discussed in Table 3). However, as Shelton et al. (2025) note, this co-creation is best viewed as a journey with stops and starts, which for us occurred with changes following each cohort's experience of the assessment. We valued our students' input as embedded in our module evaluation processes and we communicated the changes in closing the feedback loop announcements on the virtual learning environment, so students could see their role in this change. We believe this co-creation also supported the compatibility of this assessment.

**Observability** relates to seeing other users adopt the innovation. From the staff perspective, the Ial was a step into the unknown and there was some trepidation as to how students would react, and cope with, the novel assessment. In the end, the student feedback was largely positive as discussed in the student reflection section. Given the unfamiliarity of the exercise, students wished to see (*observability*) what an interview and the subsequent essay might look like. Unfamiliarity with the nature of the assessment made its **complexity** comparatively high, initially, for both staff and students. For staff, breaking down what was to be required and guiding students on how to carry out the task was both reassuring for them, and provided a process for students to follow (reducing *complexity*). In relation to *observability/complexity* students are often reassured by being able to review exemplars of previous work. Of course, initially there were no prior student examples to provide. Even if there were, the module team agreed that showing 'who' others had interviewed and 'how' they had woven theory and practice together would be contrary to the spirit of a module about creativity and innovation, and hamper encouraging autonomy in students as part of a creative pedagogies (after Cremin & Chappell, 2021).

Key to overcoming both student and staff unease about the new form of assessment (*observability, complexity and trialability*) was the range of support for the assessment that was put in place. A feature of the module is the use of guest speakers who share their own experiences of innovation. Rather than examples of prior work, for the first cohort, the module team took recorded material from a guest lecture given by two entrepreneurs on their firm's innovation journey and created a document indicating how the interactions from the 'quasi-interview' could then be framed around the use of innovation theory. This gave a 'live' example where students had seen the presentation, asked questions then theory applied to what had been initially a largely informal event. The support mechanisms put in place overcame, for both students and staff, the limited **trialability** of the Ial.

Students found the first step on deciding who to interview to be the most challenging. They were encouraged to be creative in finding someone to interview but could also seek help from the tutors. This part of the process mimics the *Search* (divergent thinking) and *Select* (convergent thinking) stages of the Tidd and Bessant (2020) model of the innovation process. Over the years, a wide range of innovators have been chosen and students were encouraged to consider less traditional innovators, which have included: a tent designer; someone involved in the Scottish Government 'baby box' initiative; hairdressers; lecturers, librarians, nurses, family members or friends, and more recently social media influencers have featured;

and so on. Some students reached out to product innovators via LinkedIn, and this has resulted in fruitful interactions for some, leading to job opportunities or at least providing motivation in career direction. Although there was the option to use a YouTube interview or biography as an alternative to students gathering their own data, this choice would not give students the same experience. In practice very few students have taken this alternative although the opportunity to 'get close' to an innovator, having to identify an innovator, interview them, analyse the data and write up the essay was seen by some students as a significant burden in terms of time and effort at the end of their degree and at the same time as the final stages of their dissertation. Having to gather primary data for both their Dissertation as well as Ial was felt to be challenging. This could be related to **compatibility** in Rogers' terms i.e. students' values, preferences and experiences, as well as **relative advantage** where though Ial might be perceived as an interesting idea, its timing in the final trimester of the degree meant the potential benefits were reduced compared to a more conventional form of assessment.

Following the quinquennial review of the main programmes accessing the module, from 2022/2023 delivery of MIC moved. As well as alleviating a potential bottleneck for students in terms of 'data gathering', the timing of the module/assessment in Trimester A of their final year improved the potential benefit of preparing students for their Honours Dissertation data collection stage in Trimester B. The Ial provides practical experience of selecting an innovative participant to interview, negotiating access to conduct the interview, dealing with the ethical issues around informed consent, creating an instrument (questions) and the conduct of the interview itself. Followed by experience in transcribing the data, analysing the data and presenting the findings framed using innovation theory and underpinning literature.

### Discussion – lessons learnt

Over the eight cohorts of the module, continuous improvement was implemented. A number of enhancements may provide ideas for academic practice by others. Some of the ideas were developed as a particular iteration/cohort/class progressed in response to staff/student classroom reflections in line with Schon's (1983) 'reflection in action' (i.e. during the event itself). Other enhancements were 'reflection on action' (Schon, 1983), based on reflections 'between cohorts' by the module team and analysis of the student voice from module evaluations and Student Partnership Forums. See Appendix 1, as a summary of the principal changes made and outcomes resulting from the student feedback provided.

The student feedback led to enhancements to the assessment being implemented and as can be seen in Appendix 1, this included timing of the delivery of the module, to enable the skills learned to be used in the students' final year dissertations. Additional support was also provided, with technology solutions, writing guidance, and a new seminar designed to provide support for the interview.

Reflecting on our findings, it is hoped there may be transferability of ideas from our learning to the practice of other higher education tutors. Three notable areas have been identified for lessons learnt;

1. An Ial assessment can be instrumental in supporting students to develop key graduate skills. We need to go beyond what O'Donovan (2017) says about good teaching not just being about effective assessment preparation but also to challenge students and engage their wider learning. However, the two areas students are most challenged with in this assessment are a) identifying an innovator



and b) structuring the essay and choosing the concepts/areas to cover. Carvalho et al. (2021) discuss that teachers and students should take the step to recognise the need to innovate but that there is a gap in the need to articulate higher education with the students' profile. Support is needed to alleviate anxiety and provide some guidance, including seminars tailored to the coursework. There was a tension between maintaining flexibility and student autonomy, particularly given the creative focus of the module, and providing support for all archetypes or profiles of students.

2. Although Smyth and Carless (2021) recommend the use of exemplars as a tool to illustrate quality and for students to understand the expectations of them in the assessment, we recommend not providing full essay exemplars to students. For this assessment, this stifles their creativity, and prevents them making their own informed choices on the concepts they engage with. Extracts from different sections of previous students' essays can be pulled out into a PowerPoint and used in a seminar activity. This type of assessment requires lots of additional support and we found a Q&A Padlet wall helpful. In addition, to support consistency of marking, a podcast to orally explain the coursework brief and additional writing workshops to support critical writing were valuable.
3. There are different archetypes of students. Despite a student-centered focus, there will still be individuals who require more support to manage their expectations, to be convinced of the value to their learning of the assessment and the need for them to develop their own independent learning. It is argued by Baldzhy (2024) that improving the independent work of students in HEIs to achieve quality results has a positive influence. It is important to proactively present the benefits of this assessment method to the students. Scheduling the module at a time that would enable these newly developed skills to be impactful in student dissertations, can provide yet more advantages.

## Conclusions

This paper has presented the 'interview an innovator' (Ial) assessment designed using creative pedagogies, to support students' learning on creativity in practice, whilst at the same time developing students' creativity skills. This triptych of knowledge, understanding and skills was graphically illustrated using a Venn diagram (Figure 1) to show their relationship with the three key goals of the assessment.

Using Roger's (2023) attributes of innovation framework as a lens, the authors evaluated the effectiveness of the adoption of the Ial assessment as an innovative instrument. The Relative Advantage, Observability and Compatibility of the assessment was examined, and we found that the assessment instrument related highly to these attributes and hence could be more readily adopted into use. However, the higher Complexity of the assessment was evident at first, and hence the requirement to provide additional support to students. In addition, limited Trialability due to the authors not wanting to provide full student exemplars of the essay for fear of stifling creativity, may impact on the effective adoption of this innovation.

Both the students' perceptions of their learning gained using module evaluations and lectures' perspectives utilising reflective practice were analysed. Considerable benefits were identified in the Ial assessment to address development of the skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century graduate, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. It was seen as an interesting and even enjoyable assessment (by both students

and staff) that was a shift away from the mundane of the traditional essay. The continued improvement made on the assessment instrument was presented as well as sharing of lessons learned from delivering this creative assessment, which may be useful to other academics to support their academic practice in delivering modules in related topic areas.

Finally, considering future work by the authors: There has been a considerable diversity of innovators interviewed by the students, with students providing high-quality essays of insights gained whilst linking theory to practice on creativity and innovation management. The module team proposes compiling a 'compendium of best essays' in the future. This would be in collaboration with our students and with consent from the innovators, to be able to share more widely the innovators' journeys and support others' research, teaching and creativity/innovation practice.

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Authors' Note: we invite any reader who wishes more information on the module/assessment to contact the corresponding author.

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**APPENDIX 1 - Areas of Improvement of the Ial assessment and its Outcome**

<b>Example of Student Feedback suggesting Enhancement</b>	<b>Change to Assessment made</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Cohort 16/17</b> <i>'The module being in the second term within fourth year doesn't work that well. Because the first assessment involves interviewing an innovator, this is obviously timely so by having this module in the first semester of fourth year ...It can also allow students to practice for their interviews for their dissertation'</i>	Moved module to Trimester A of final year instead of Trimester B	<p>Students were able to benefit from interviewing, transcribing and critically analyzing data, to support their dissertation.</p> <p>Less stressful in the first trimester, with fewer deadlines.</p>
<b>Cohort 18/19</b> <i>'Innovator Interview – a lot of work goes into this, and the weighting for marking does not reflect this'</i>	The assessment weighting changed from 40% to 50% of the overall module grade.	Recognition of the level of effort that goes into the assessment. Change approved by the External Examiner.
<b>Cohort 16/17</b> <i>'I think Assessment 1 needs to be rethought. I personally did not really have an idea what I was supposed to do. The expectation that we have access to an 'innovator' who can provide the kind of detail we need to include in the report (essay) is unrealistic'</i>	Additional support using technology solutions: Podcast, Padlet wall	<p>Further guidance was provided using a podcast – this was well received by future cohorts.</p> <p>A Padlet wall featuring Q&amp;A and Frequently Made Mistakes.</p>
<b>Cohort 18/19</b> <i>'The assignments could have been more specific in terms of structure to provide a more obvious basis for answering the question.'</i>	An Academic Development Tutor session was arranged focused on critical writing for this assessment	<p>More guidance on critical writing, writing concisely and structuring the assessment was provided.</p> <p>The assessment podcast also helped here too. International students, in particular, felt it useful to listen to several times.</p>

<b>Cohort 17/18</b> <i>'One suggestion for seminars might be having the content be more related to assignments. The times when we had seminars dedicated to this were extremely beneficial as it allowed us to ask questions relevant to assignments while we were still in the headspace of research'</i>	New Seminar: interview role-play	Students benefited from guidance on interview technique and a flipped classroom identifying relevant questions for their innovator. Directly aligned to support assessment.
<b>Cohort 17/18</b> <i>'Examples of previous work provided which help all students a lot in knowing how to layout/structure assessments.'</i>	Essay Exemplars provided as part of a seminar	Included in a seminar, but only parts of essays and not the full essay, to not inhibit creativity.

Source: created by authors, 2025

The student feedback led to enhancements to the assessment being implemented and as can be seen in this table, this included timing of the delivery of the module, to enable the skills learned to be used in the students' final year dissertations. Additional support was also provided, with technology solutions, writing guidance and a new seminar designed to provide support for the interview.