



## **MySuccess Modules: A whole institutional approach to enable successful student transitions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In September 2021, Abertay University implemented a comprehensive suite of transition microcredentials called the MySuccess Modules. This case study examines four years of implementation data which includes analysing student choice patterns, pass rates and progression outcomes. This case study will share reflections of broader impact at student, institutional, and sector levels.

Grounded in Kift's (2015) transition pedagogy and drawing on Lizzio's (2006) five senses model, the MySuccess Modules positions the curriculum as the primary vehicle for supporting student transitions. Rejecting deficit-based narratives, the programme adopts McNair et al.'s (2016) concept of 'student-ready' institutions through a strength-based approach that empowers students to personalise their learning pathway. Recognising transition as a process rather than a single event, all students complete ABE101 Being Successful at Abertay, which includes the Abertay Discovery Tool, a diagnostic instrument providing individualised insights into academic and social strengths. Students then select three additional modules from nine options covering academic literacies, digital skills, wellbeing, employability, and social integration, embedding engagement within the academic sphere.

The case study exemplifies a whole-university approach, with modules designed and delivered by professional services, academic staff, and the Students' Association, fostering meaningful relationships essential to student success. Senior students serve as Module Assistants, providing peer support and co-creating content. Over four years (2021-2025), the programme has achieved consistently high pass rates, positive student feedback, and stable retention rates despite sector-wide challenges. Recognised as good practice by QAA Scotland's 2024 review, the MySuccess approach demonstrates how strategically deployed microcredentials can integrate academic and social

support whilst positioning student success as a collective institutional responsibility. Through these credit-bearing modules specifically designed to build academic and social foundations for university success, this case study acts as a potential model for other tertiary institutions and contexts.

**Keywords:** student development, student transitions, students as partners, microcredentials, personalised learning

## Context

In 2021, Abertay University replaced a 20 credit (SCQF, 2007) elective offering with a purposefully designed suite of microcredentials to support student transitions and outcomes. The microcredentials, known as MySuccess Modules, include 10 x 5 credit microcredentials each aligned to the core aim of building the foundations of academic and social success.

Abertay University is a small Scottish University with approximately 4,500 students. The university's purpose is 'to offer transformational opportunities to everyone' and 'prepare students for the world of work and a lifelong journey of learning and growth' (Abertay University, 2025). Social inclusion and fair access to higher education is a core mission of the university. This means that approximately 19% of our student population are from SIMD20 backgrounds (Scottish Government, 2020). The SIMD measure considers seven broad factors which include education, health, access to services, crime and housing. The SIMD20 indicator is a way of reflecting the student population and the index of multiple deprivation. SIMD20 represents students from the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland. This means that as 19% of the Abertay University student body is from SIMD20, Abertay has a vibrant and diverse student population which is reflective of wider society.

Abertay University is proud of the social inclusion and fair access mission but has been concerned by its retention profile. Retention of first year students has consistently been around 83-87%, which means the university has often been in the lowest quarter of Scottish Universities for retention rates. At the time of designing the MySuccess Modules the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on student behaviours, motivations, strengths and weaknesses had not been fully established. The previous elective offering provided an opportunity to redesign and repurpose the curriculum space to rethink our approach to student transitions whilst responding to the emerging and changing needs of students.

The development group saw the opportunities that personalised learning through microcredentials in the curriculum could have on preparing students during the transition and on outcomes achieved by students at the end of year 1 study.

## Vision

In creating the MySuccess modules we had to understand the student lifecycle at Abertay University. We took a transition pedagogical approach (Kift, 2015) that placed the power to personalise student learning within a defined framework. As Gale and Parker (2014) remind us, student transition is not a single event but a process of navigating change and adapting to new environments and expectations. Tinto's (2017) research reminded us that effective retention strategies require coordinated efforts across the entire student lifecycle, with particular attention to the first year experience. These thoughts became central to the design of the MySuccess Modules.

Kift et al. (2010) position the curriculum as the primary vehicle for supporting student transitions into higher education. This work emphasises the importance of intentionally designing curricula that are flexible and recognised as a core part of curriculum structures. The 'What works' study concluded that embedding

engagement opportunities within the academic sphere clearly demonstrates to students the value and purpose (Thomas, 2012).

We had the opportunity to embed this into the curriculum but made a deliberate choice to take a strength-based approach and avoided a position that sees students as lacking in skills (Smit, 2012). Instead, the design team saw the opportunity to provide students with control to shape their own learning and develop strengths. McNair et al. (2016) challenge institutions to move from student deficit-based narratives that position students as underprepared to examining and transforming policies and practices that enable student success by becoming 'student-ready'. This position became an important anchor for module designers during each stage of development. Therefore, we recognised that each student who enters higher education brings different strengths and the MySuccess Modules aim to build on these.

Felten and Lambert (2020) argue that meaningful relationships between students, academics and staff across the whole university are essential to student success and creating an environment that enables students to thrive. One of the ways in which Abertay University has adapted its thinking is by moving away from focusing solely on academic success to recognising the whole student life which encompasses both academic and social success. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement recognises the importance of this in relation to student engagement which has direct influence on retention and progression.

In bringing this vision together in a coherent framework we drew heavily on Lizzio and Wilson's (2010) student lifecycle model. Lizzio's (2006) five senses which include a sense of purpose, sense of connectedness, sense of capability, sense of resourcefulness, and a sense of academic culture provided lenses by which to consider each of the MySuccess modules. This model which hugely influenced the design of the modules is holistic and acknowledges that the student lifecycle and student success encompasses multiple dimensions which intersect. All of the elements build effective learning environments which first year students can interact with to build their futures.

The ambition for the MySuccess Modules centred around transition and preparation for a successful university career. In line with the literature discussed, the aim and vision were to prepare students academically and socially for the Abertay community. This provided clear opportunities to fundamentally rethink our approach to student transition, moving towards an integrated curriculum based model which focused on academic expectations and social integration from the outset (Tinto, 2017).

### **MySuccess Module principles**

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As an institution we set a number of principles to support the development and on-going delivery of the MySuccess Modules. This clearly articulated the purpose of the microcredentials suite to offer flexibility and choice to students, broaden their education and to develop the skills and practices that support their success at university and beyond through personal and professional development. A key principle was that any area of the university can put forward a proposal to develop as a MySuccess module, cementing the idea that student success is a whole institutional responsibility and all have a responsibility to be educators (McNair et al., 2016). Microcredential size was restricted to 5 or 10 credits with a maximum of 1 learning outcome per 5 credits. They should explicitly align to the Abertay Attributes (Abertay University, 2017) and have an emphasis on supporting students to integrate into university and develop their skills for succeeding within the University environment. They must be interdisciplinary and allow students flexibility in making their choices. To facilitate this, MySuccess Modules should normally be delivered online, allowing students

to engage in asynchronous study when they choose. A final key principle is that assessment should be automated whenever possible and that the summative work is marked as pass/fail.

These principles align with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education’s Micro-Credentials Characteristics Statement (2022) which centred around the ability for students to personalise their learning through a learner-led approach. The Characteristics Statement also notes that having microcredentials delivered online asynchronously has a benefit in terms of flexibility.

### MySuccess Modules

In preparing students for a successful university career the MySuccess Modules included a suite of 10 x 5 credit modules (See Figure 1). All students complete 4 options in total, making up 20 credits. These modules represent 20 credits out of the 120 credits which form the 1<sup>st</sup> year degree programme (SCQF, 2007).

All students complete ABE101 Being Successful at Abertay during their transition to Abertay University. This sees students gain early access 4 weeks prior to on campus based activities within Welcome Week and beyond. Through completing and reflecting upon activities within ABE101, students make an informed choice and choose 3 options. It was important that students developed agency in personalising their own learning pathways through the structured framework and module optional choices.

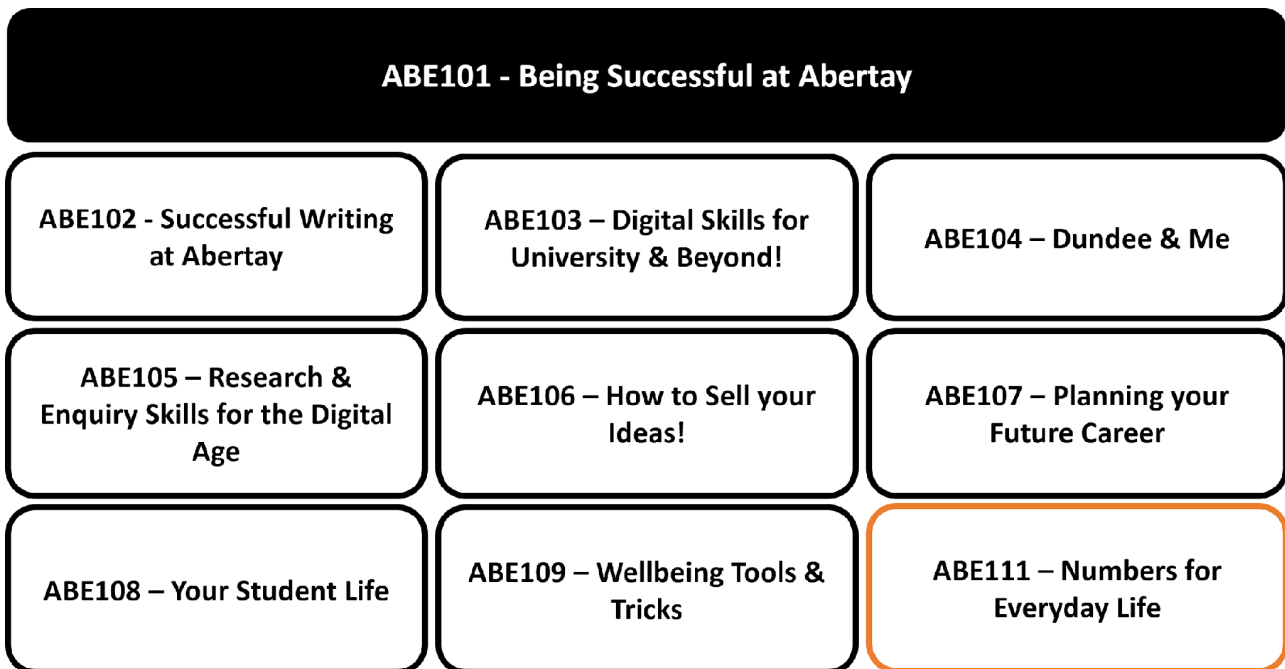


Figure 1 MySuccess Modules Offering

ABE111 Number for Everyday Life was included within the suite of options from 2024-25. It was noted through student feedback and university recruitment analysis that numeracy skills were often a barrier to accessing higher education. This is a pattern seen across the Scottish HE sector. Therefore, ABE111 was created for multiple purposes. Firstly, to offer as an option to build numeracy confidence for all students and secondly, to address a skills gap where students did not have National 5 Mathematics qualification and then could still be admitted to the university by completing ABE111 as a core module.

Each module was designed and delivered by experts within that particular field. Therefore, this saw a whole university approach to creating the MySuccess modules. For example, ABE102 was designed by the Study Skills team, ABE105 by academic librarians, ABE107 by the careers service, and ABE109 by university advisors and wellbeing practitioners. In addition, a student partnership approach was a core theme throughout the design process. Therefore, ABE108 Your Student Life was designed and delivered by the Abertay Students Association. This strengthened the partnership approach and trust between the university and students' association.

### **ABE101 Being Successful at Abertay**

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This foundational module provides students with insight into how university operates, revealing the hidden curriculum (Birtill et al, 2022). Topics such as navigating Abertay systems, how a module works, assessment and feedback processes, expectations of university and successful student behaviours are explored. The topics within this module aligned with Lizzio's (2006) five senses and enabled students to develop a sense of connectedness, purpose, capability, resourcefulness and academic culture.

Thomas (2012) stated that pre-arrival activities that emphasise engagement and academic purpose are beneficial to student belonging and retention. During the module delivery, daily drop-in sessions are delivered giving students the opportunity to meet each other, ask any questions and explore different topics from within the module. Reflecting on this, a student commented:

Transitioning to university as a mature student was initially daunting. Having been out of higher education for many years, I expected it would take some time to adjust to university life. However, through the MySuccess modules, I was able to take part in online sessions before the semester began which eased my nerves, made me feel welcome, and helped me feel part of the Abertay community from the very start. **Lucinda Shale, BA (Hons) Game Design and Production Student and Co-Author**

#### *Abertay Discovery Tool*

The Abertay Discovery Tool (Hogan & Millard, 2025) forms a core part of ABE101 and sees students complete a series of strength-based questions on several areas related to academic and social success in higher education. Each topic includes several multi-choice and multi-select questions to gain insights into individual students' current knowledge, understanding, and skills. Central to this are questions where students are asked to indicate their confidence levels. These topics include:

- **Studying at University** – Providing insights into student perceptions of independent learning, weekly learning activities, knowledge of good academic practice, how they start assignments and the purpose of assessment and feedback.
- **Academic Writing** – Gaining insights into understanding of formal versus informal writing style, academic reading and elements of academic communication.
- **Referencing** – Current level of knowledge for why we use sources, why we summarise and paraphrase, and what plagiarism means.
- **Numeracy** – Level of understanding on the fundamentals of statistics, problem solving and financial skills.
- **Digital Skills** – Insights into students' experiences of digital tools, collaboration and security.
- **Employability** – Understanding the individual students career aspirations, planning, experiences and exposure to opportunities.

- **Wellbeing** – Providing insights into existing relationships, physical activity, goal setting, feelings and emotions.

These sections provide valuable insights into student strengths and areas for growth. Each student receives an instant and individual report which highlights strengths and recommendations to support their development. This feedback also recommends which optional modules the students should consider choosing. Students then reflect on the findings from the report to create an individual action plan. Separately, each cohort of students are analysed to provide programme-level and institutional-level insights into the new cohort of students. This provides the opportunity for programme teams and institutional teams to adapt and respond accordingly to evolving student needs.

### Optional module offering

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The MySuccess Modules framework consists of 9 options which link to the aims of preparing students to be successful academically and socially within the Abertay community. Through completing ABE101, students select 3 modules from the suite of options below.

#### *ABE102 Successful Writing at Abertay*

This module develops foundational academic literacy skills, focusing on use of academic language, sentence construction, and presentation of ideas appropriate to university level study. The aims are to support students in identifying and implementing key academic writing conventions within written assessments.

#### *ABE103 Digital Skills for University and Beyond*

ABE103 equips students with the understanding of digital tools by identifying their current skills and abilities. Students engage with the JISC Digital Capabilities tool to help them reflect on their digital skills and create a personal development plan aimed at enhancing their digital literacy.

#### *ABE104 Dundee and Me*

This option focuses on the place and role of Dundee within Scotland. It aims to foster a sense of belonging to the city by developing knowledge of Dundee's location, heritage, culture, and innovations. Throughout the module students are encouraged to explore opportunities and connect with the city by participating in activities which include visits to landmarks.

#### *ABE105 Research and Enquiry Skills for the Digital Age*

ABE105 aims to prepare students for independent learning by developing information literacy skills. Students gain an understanding of different types of sources of information, consider how to evaluate information and reference according to the conventions of their programme of study.

#### *ABE106 How to Sell Your Ideas*

This module develops persuasive communications skills through considering a variety of appropriate media types (written and visual) suitable for the target audience. Students present ideas effectively, reflecting critically on communication strategies and can identify how these are suitable for a range of audiences.

#### *ABE107 Planning Your Future Career*

Focusing on self-awareness, this module guides students through a series of reflective activities to understand their motivations, work preferences, values, attributes and strengths. Students apply these reflections to well established career development frameworks to support their effective goal setting.

*ABE108 Your Student Life*

ABE108 provides an overview of student opportunities, many of which are led by the Students Association. This module addresses practical aspects of independent living including financial management and healthy eating. It also focuses on the vital role the student voice plays in the university experience and how students can fully engage in student life.

*ABE109 Wellbeing Tools and Tricks*

This module focuses on the Five Ways to Wellbeing model and uses evidence based strategies to enable students to demonstrate good levels of personal wellbeing and resilience. Students are encouraged to apply these in daily life and share reflections of what works for them.

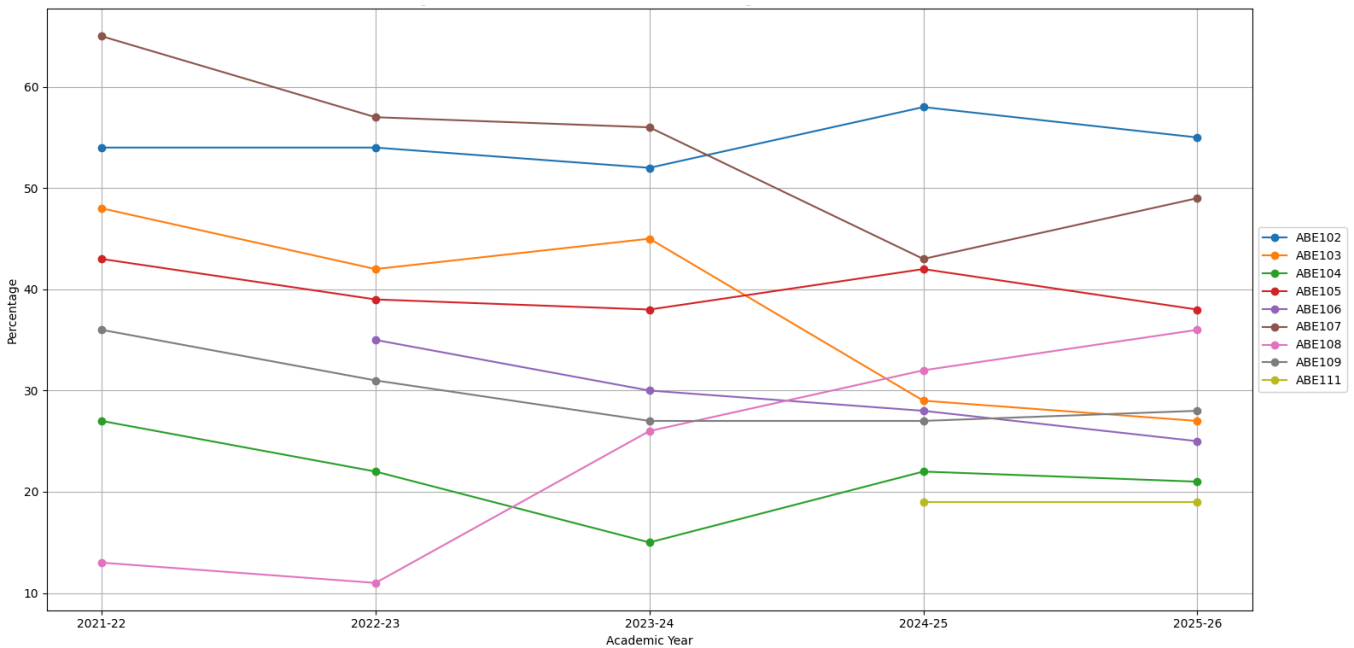
*ABE111 Numbers for Everyday Life*

ABE111 develops practical numeracy and problem solving skills which are applicable in everyday life and therefore across disciplines. This module builds student confidence and capacity in addressing real-world problems and making informed decisions by applying numeracy skills and basic statistics.

**Student impact**

**Student Choices**

To enable a personalised curriculum, students through reflecting activities in ABE101 Being Successful at Abertay and the Abertay Discovery Tool make informed decisions about which module options to choose. Reflecting on 5 years of module choice trends (see figure 2), we see interesting patterns which have emerged which suggest the changing nature of learners each year.



**Figure 2** Module Choice Trends (2021/22 – 2025/26)

It's worth noting that in academic year 2021-22, 65% of students opted to take ABE107 Planning Your Future Career. This was reflected in the institutional results of the Abertay Discovery Tool where only 15.37% of students reported more than 1 prior work experience (such as part time job, placement, internship etc). This was not a surprise given that the majority of these students had spent most of the prior 2 academic years in Covid-19 lockdowns, unable to gain experiences that students may have been exposed to previously. Furthermore, the ABE107 trend declined (although remaining the most popular option in 2022-23 and 2023-24) over the following academic years. The Abertay Discovery Tool over those subsequent years did see more students report prior or current work experiences as lockdowns were eased and students had the chance to complete placement, work and volunteering opportunities.

The predominately academic skills based modules such as ABE102 and ABE105 have shown to be the most steady and consistent student choice. Over 5 academic years, ABE102 has consistently been chosen between 52-58% of students with ABE105 between 38-43% of students. We can also see from the data that students regularly opt to choose both options. This would suggest that students value the academic skills they can develop through these options which cover academic writing, referencing and critical thinking skills.

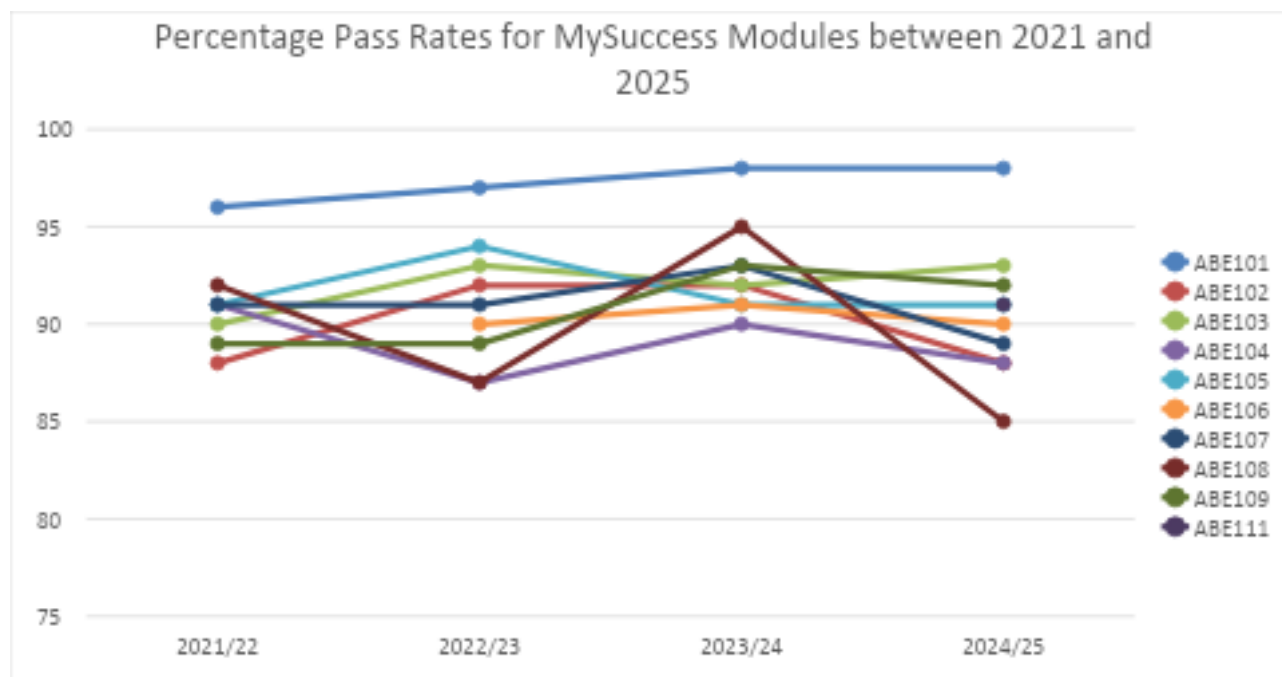
For the first 3 academic years, ABE103 was fairly consistent in uptake however a considerable drop in uptake was noted in 2024-25. This drop was in line with the decrease in uptake with ABE107. This could be explained by the fact that students had grown familiar with online learning and self-perceived to have developed the digital skills required for university.

Throughout the 5 years, ABE108 has been through consistent evolution responding to student feedback. This module option was designed and led by the Abertay Students' Association. It is believed that this is the first students association to deliver academic credit-bearing modules. However, the first 2 academic years saw this module option chosen least by students. Following 2 years of student feedback and a newly appointed module leader, who had recently graduated from the institution and brought prior experience as a Student Consultant, a redesign was undertaken. These changes included a module title change to 'Your Student Life' which was agreed by the SA's Student Representative Council. As part of the changes to topics, two new topics were introduced including healthy living and managing your finances. Across the module 'give it a go' activities and discussion boards for students to share their reflections were included to build community both in person and online. These changes have made a positive impact to the MySuccess modules with student numbers increasing from 11% (in 2022-23) to 32% (in 2024-25). The impact of these changes resulted in the number of students choosing this option increasing by 177% (from 66 students to 242 students).

### Pass rates

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The pass rates for the modules have been consistently high as can be seen by the graph below (see figure 3). In calculating these figures, the pass rate is for students who have submitted and passed, therefore the fails comprise students who submitted and failed and those who did not submit. This needs to be borne in mind when considering the analysis of these figures.



**Figure 3** Percentage Pass Rates for MySuccess Modules between 2021 and 2025

ABE101 Being Successful at Abertay has achieved a consistent pass rate of between 96 and 98% with an average pass rate of 97%. Because of this high pass rate, we know that students who submit and fail are in the minority and need to be targeted with support. This shows high levels of engagement with this mandatory module. From other analysis, we know that the majority of first year students who do not complete year one, do complete and pass ABE101 (Blackwell Young et al., 2024). Therefore, whilst the high pass rates for ABE101 are positive, we know that they do not tell the full story and so we still need to use other engagement data to get a full picture of what students are doing. This highlights the potential volatility of student engagement in that this needs to be a continuous endeavour, and we cannot assume that because students are engaged at one point in their studies that they will be automatically engaged throughout (Tinto, 1987).

ABE103 Digital Skills for University & Beyond, ABE106 How to Sell Your Ideas, ABE107 Planning Your Future Career, ABE109 Wellbeing Tools & Tricks, and ABE111 Numbers for Everyday Life seem to be quite stable in terms of their pass rates across the timescale these modules have been running. ABE105 Research & Enquiry Skills for the Digital Age has seen a bit more fluctuation, though this is still only a few percentage points, similarly with ABE102 Successful Writing at Abertay. This might also reflect a change in how modules were allocated to those students who had not made a choice in week 2. In 2023-24 the programme team made the decision to allocate ABE102 Successful Writing at Abertay, ABE105 Research & Enquiry Skills for the Digital Age and ABE108 Your Student Life to students who had not indicated a choice. The lack of choice made by those students may reflect a lack of engagement of those students especially as the fail rate includes those who did not submit at all.

The module with the most fluctuation is ABE108. The significant changes in the numbers of students taking the module as discussed earlier may be a contributing factor as is how students were allocated to that module as noted above.

## Learning experience

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The impact of the MySuccess modules on the learning experience has been multifaceted. Student feedback through focus groups, module evaluations, and institutional quality review processes have demonstrated a clear impact on the student experience. In addition, these feedback mechanisms have enabled themes to emerge on how students would like the MySuccess Modules to evolve. An early example of this is the redesign of ABE108. In particular the feedback has centred on students' transition to university, feeling prepared for academic life and building connections across the university.

### *Transition Support*

Students have consistently identified the MySuccess modules as useful modules for navigating their transition to university. A core objective of the MySuccess modules is about setting academic expectations and considering the differences between prior educational experiences and university level study.

A notable reflection from students included the balance between academic skills development and social development.

My experiences with the ABE modules in first year were really positive. They seemed daunting at first due to the vast amount of information they presented.... I was especially grateful for ABE102 which helped me with my referencing as it's something I had only scratched the surface of in high school. Not to mention ABE108 helped me find several sports teams that I was interested in and are still into today. This helped me settle in fast as I was able to find good friends. **Chloe Crier, Criminology Student and Co-Author**

### *Student Perceptions*

Students have commented on being sceptical of completing online modules. However, have reported that as the academic year progressed, they realised how the skills learnt in the microcredentials helped to support their transition to university, navigate their first year and provide the essential skills for success. Through learner analytics, we see that students refer back throughout the 4 year degree to MySuccess modules.

### *Belonging & Wellbeing*

Students have also reported improvements in their wellbeing through taking relevant microcredentials such as ABE108 Your Student Life and ABE109 Wellbeing Tools and Tricks. We have seen how interactive activities such as discussion boards and drop-in sessions have resulted in increased participation in student societies. For example, the Abertay Students' Association have reported at least 6 new societies have been set up by first year students through initial engagement with activities in ABE101 Being Successful at Abertay. This has demonstrated how the curriculum has been used as an icebreaker and increased students' sense of belonging.

### *Discipline-Specific Examples*

Whilst the overall response to the MySuccess Modules has been positive, students have consistently requested greater integration of discipline-specific examples and contexts within the modules. After five years of implementation, the design team has begun a reflection on the future evolution of the programme. This reflective process specifically addresses the feedback regarding disciplinary examples, with plans to reshape the module content aligned to subject areas whilst maintaining the benefits of whole community shared learning experiences.

## Module Assistants

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All modules were co-delivered by MySuccess Module Assistants. During the initial design and development phase, Module Assistants contributed to the testing of these modules, providing feedback on their experience.

These paid senior students provided an embedded peer-to-peer support mechanism to support the scaffolding of student engagement and progression. This was achieved through responding to discussion board posts, monitoring engagement, designing and delivering ad hoc events such as digital skills drop-ins, walking tours of Dundee, study sessions and social activities including pizza parties. Throughout the five years since the inception, these student staff members have functioned as peer mentors, offered guidance and shared experiences using their knowledge of successfully navigating the university journey.

I have had the opportunity to represent the university at open days, contribute to discussions about the student experience, lead workshops, and collaborate on projects, all of which have helped me develop skills I will carry into my future career. **Lucinda Shale, BA(Hons) Game Design & Production Student and Co-Author**

Module Assistants are a core component of the successful delivery of the MySuccess Modules. They have identified gaps through student feedback and responded proactively. In October 2023 they organised a mature student's event focusing primarily on students over the age of 40 as students in this category had provided feedback that they felt isolated and did not feel the definition of a mature student was appropriate to them. The arranged coffee morning was successful with students who attended reporting feeling more connected to the university through the structured support and advice from the Module Assistants. Not only have the Module Assistants organised successful in-person events they have contributed to online drop-in sessions which throughout August and September take place daily to provide transitioning students the opportunity to meet each other and ask questions. Module assistants are an integral part of the delivery team, attending the termly meetings and contributing and executing ideas for change.

Module Assistants have the freedom to develop supplementary materials, such as stress awareness initiatives and assessment tips, which benefit all students for all types of assessments across all modules at the university. In addition to this a module assistant who was in the final stages of their PhD study was asked to contribute to the development of a new microcredential for introduction in 2024-25. This new maths module (ABE111) was aimed at supporting Abertay's fair access agenda by enabling those students who lacked confidence or had not achieved Nat 5 Maths to enrol onto an Abertay degree programme.

My role as a module assistant has been fulfilling and encouraging. Throughout the 3 years of supporting students and module leaders and running several activities including study sessions and flexi-stretch classes for stress, I have developed my professional and interpersonal skills. This role led me to create the newest micro-credential, ABE111 'Numbers for Everyday Life'. This opportunity allowed me to further continue my development and get an insight into an academic career; a pathway I am considering pursuing following my PhD. **Mairi Gardner, PhD Student and Co-Author**

Therefore, as part of the partnership approach undertaken within the MySuccess modules, Module Assistants are seen as equal and full participating members of the team and 'students as colleagues' (Bovill et al., 2015). Ensuring that throughout the process co-creation was maintained and developed was

important to the module designers as this enabled authentic voices to shape the content based on prior experiences. The Module Assistants played an important role in this.

As Millard (2020) found, the impact of working on university campus enhances and shapes attitudes towards the university experience. In addition, students reported a clear impact on their skills development around confidence, organisation, time management and prioritising workloads. There is also a clear focus on students working on campus and being able to give back to the university community. These findings apply to the experiences of Module Assistants.

Being offered the opportunity to work and help on the modules and support other students has been such a rewarding experience, having known first-hand how difficult making the move to university life can be and the overwhelming nature of having to learn so many new skills before even beginning to study. Having the opportunity to reassure new first years and provide them with tips and tricks which can only be learnt through experience and seeing the relief cross their face has been incredible. The role has also been so pivotal in building my confidence in working one-to-one in supporting adults, which is an area I have always struggled with, coming from a childcare background. This role has also made me reflect and reassess what I want for myself from university and has opened up a whole new world of opportunities and possibilities which previously hadn't even crossed my mind. **Hannah Giessler, BA (Hons) Psychology Student and Co-Author**

### Institutional impact

The QAA Scotland's Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) of Abertay University (March 2024) featured the MySuccess Modules as good practice in the published report. The review team also specifically commented on how positively the students talked about their experience of the microcredentials in supporting their transition.

The QESR team identified the effective and proactive approach to student transitions taken by the University through the development of a suite of microcredentials that provides core academic literacies and supported peer learning. This has embedded support and development for academic success and for building student communities, and the team considers that the development of the microcredential suites as a proactive measure to support retention and inform enhancements within each programme is a feature of good practice. **Quality Assurance Agency (2024)**

Through the MySuccess Modules, we have been able to better understand how we design the student journey and transition into higher education at Abertay. We have discovered that our systems and data were not as strong as they could be, and this has led to changes in processes which allows us to have a better understanding of our student population. For example, the early assessment (week 2) for ABE101 has enabled early indications of engagement and allow for follow-up of non-engaged students which is then further measured by an early resit assessment (week 10). We employed a student consultant to analyse the data coming from learner analytics, pass rates and wider university performance to further work on transition and retention practice across the university. This data confirmed that most withdrawals from the university for 'Academic Failure' is in fact non-submission (which accounts for 87% of all first year withdrawals) and therefore non-engagement rather than academic failure which has led to an institutional re-development of student welcome and induction implemented in 2025-26 (Blackwell Young, Hogan and Perschke, 2024). Across the Scottish HE sector, concerns around declining retention have been noted.

However, through Abertay University analysis we know that since the introduction of the MySuccess modules first year retention rates have remained steady. Through continuous collaboration and development, we hope to build on this and see retention rates improve.

Cohort strength profiles are provided to programme leaders from the data captured by the Abertay Discovery Tool (Hogan & Millard, 2025), an activity within ABE101 which enables programme leaders to support programme level skills development. This was identified as a positive development by the QESR team and programme leaders themselves have commented on their usefulness in promoting the strengths and supporting the areas of development for each new cohort of students.

### External impact

There has been interest in the MySuccess innovation from across the higher education sector within the UK and internationally. As discussed, within the mandatory ABE101, students complete the Abertay Discovery Tool which enables them to reflect upon their perceived strengths and identify areas for development to shape their subsequent module choices (Hogan & Millard, 2025). The basis of this work formed a project as part of the resilience learning community's enhancement theme (QAA, 2023). This project focused on personalised approaches to resilience and community through holistic diagnostic testing. The collaborative project brought together collaborators from 9 universities across England and Scotland. The cluster has resulted in outputs for the sector such as conference presentations, case studies and discussion papers, many of which are available on the QAA Enhancement Themes (2023) website.

There have been a variety of external outputs which have contributed to sector-wide development and impact. Through the development work of our institutional principles around microcredentials, the MySuccess Modules contributed to the development of the QAA Micro-credentials Characteristics Statement (2022). Millard et al., (2023) contributed a chapter in Willison and Henderson (2023) 'Perspectives on enhancing student transition into higher education and beyond' looking at how this institutional approach supported student transitions. In addition, multiple module leaders have spoken of the impact of this approach with sector networks through presentations and contributing to discussions.

We have had direct approaches of interest from the USA, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal who have implemented elements of the MySuccess approach within their context. Discussions with these active external collaborators have revolved around how we have taken a whole-university and systems approach to the implementation, breaking down and moving from silo working to collaborative working.

A Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Research and Evaluation Small Grant (2023) was awarded to evaluate the staff development framework developed and implemented to support module leaders in the design and delivery of their microcredentials. The main project completed in August 2024 and has been presented at the 2024 SEDA Autumn conference and at a showcase event in January 2025.

Finally, based on the aim of building the foundations of academic and social success, Abertay hosted the European First Year Experience Conference (2023) and European Access Network (2024). Delegate feedback included comments such as 'I took a lot out of the microcredentials approach for my home institution' and 'the workshop on microcredentials introduced a useful model to embed academic literacies into the curriculum.' The increased interest within the Scottish sector on the first-year experience coming from those conferences has led to the creation of the Scottish First Year Experience network (Hogan et al., 2024) which has over 100 members, and growing.

## Conclusion

The MySuccess Modules demonstrate how purposeful curriculum redesign, grounded in transition pedagogy (Kift et al, 2015) and student-centred principles, can create meaningful support structures for first-year students. By replacing a traditional elective with a suite of personalised microcredentials, Abertay University has successfully embedded academic and social support within the curriculum rather than positioning it as peripheral to the student experience (Thomas, 2012).

The strength-based approach, combined with the Abertay Discovery Tool and genuine student choice, has empowered learners to take ownership of their transition journey. The consistently high pass rates, positive student feedback, and recognition as good practice by the QAA Scotland validate this approach.

Importantly, the whole-university delivery model has broken down traditional silos, positioning student success as a collective institutional responsibility shared by academic staff, professional services, and the Students' Association. The integration of Module Assistants as peer mentors and co-creators demonstrates authentic partnership working. Their contributions to module evolution and supplementary support activities demonstrate the value of students as colleagues (Millard, 2020).

However, the journey is not without challenges. Student feedback consistently highlights the need for greater discipline-specific integration, and the data reveals that early engagement does not guarantee sustained participation throughout the year. The ongoing reflective process to reshape content whilst maintaining the benefits of shared learning experiences will be crucial to future success and collective understanding across the university.

The external impact and sector-wide interest suggest that the MySuccess model offers transferable insights for institutions contending with retention, transition, and personalised learning. As higher education continues to evolve, approaches that genuinely place students at the centre of student success recognising both the academic and social foundations are integral to student outcomes (SFC, 2025). The MySuccess Modules provide an example of how microcredentials can be strategically deployed across a whole institution to support both individual student success and institutional missions around access, inclusion, and student outcomes.

## Biographies

*Jack Hogan* is a Lecturer in Academic Practice based in the Abertay Learning Enhancement Academy, where he has coordinated the MySuccess Modules since April 2021. His professional interests focus on student transitions and outcomes, helping students navigate their academic journey successfully. He is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Jack has previously hosted and co-chaired the European First Year Experience Conference 2023 and European Access Network Conference 2024.

*Julie Blackwell Young* serves as Head of Teaching Quality and Learning Enhancement at the AbLE Academy. She has pioneered microcredential developments at the university and significantly influenced institutional policies and practices to enable the microcredential approaches.

*Luke Millard* is Dean of Learning and Teaching, and Head of the AbLE Academy at Abertay University in Scotland. He is a Professor of Student Development and a Principal Fellow of the UK's Higher Education Academy.

*Sophie Kennedy* is an Abertay University graduate who now works as Democracy and Representation Coordinator at the Abertay Students Association. Sophie leads student representation initiatives and is Module Leader for ABE108 Your Student Life.

*Mairi Gardner* is a PhD student and MySuccess Module Assistant who has been instrumental in supporting the delivery of the MySuccess Modules. She created and led ABE111 Numbers for Everyday Life, bringing her PhD research insights into module content.

*Lucinda Shale* is a fourth-year BA (Hons) Game Design and Production student who serves as a MySuccess Module Assistant. She supports the delivery of MySuccess Modules while pursuing her undergraduate studies, offering peer perspective and assistance.

*Chloe Crier* is a fourth-year BA (Hons) Criminology student working as a MySuccess Module Assistant. She balances her undergraduate studies with supporting MySuccess Modules delivery, providing valuable student insights and peer support to fellow learners.

*Hannah Geissler* is a fourth-year BA (Hons) Psychology who in addition has served for the past 3 years as a MySuccess Module Assistant. She supports MySuccess Modules delivery while completing her studies, sharing her experiences with 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

*Kerith George-Briant* is the Learner Development Manager who leads academic and study skills provision across the university. As Module Leader for ABE102 Successful Writing at Abertay, she helps students develop essential academic writing and communication skills.

*Laura Gauld* serves as Technology Enhanced Learning Manager and leads ABE103 Digital Skills for University & Beyond. She focuses on integrating technology into education and helping students develop crucial digital competencies for academic and professional success.

*Lisa Clark* is the Library Services Manager. She is module leader for ABE105 Research and Enquiry Skills for the Digital Age.

*Alison Duffy* is a Research Fellow in the Department of Built Environment & Life Sciences. She leads multiple modules including ABE104 Dundee and Me and ABE106 How to Sell Your Ideas.

*Stephen Morrison* is the Careers Service Manager who leads ABE107 Planning Your Future Career. He helps students develop career planning skills and navigate their transition from university to professional life through career guidance and support.

*Richard Ogston* serves as Head of Student Services and leads ABE109 Wellbeing Tools and Tricks. He focuses on supporting student mental health and wellbeing, providing practical strategies and resources to help students thrive academically and personally.

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