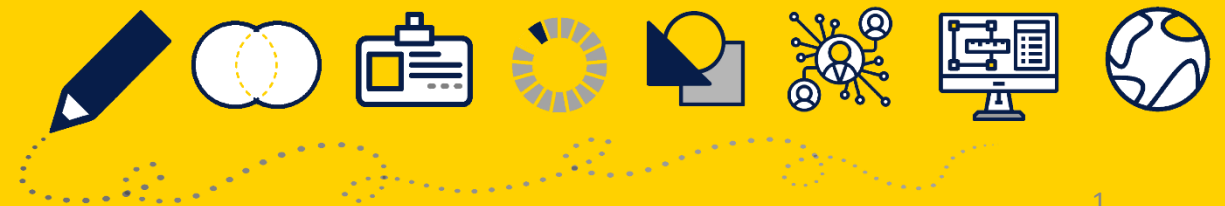




# Interdisciplinary learning journeys start where we are

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# Start where we are

- Context of ARU & Ruskin Modules
- Why: the challenge, why personas
- What: research
- How: we used the findings
- What: we found





# Anglia Ruskin University

*Transforming lives through innovative, inclusive and entrepreneurial education*

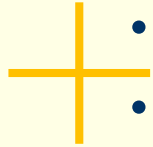
- Regionally-rooted: Cambridge, Chelmsford, Peterborough, London
- 1858 Cambridge School of Art; 1992 APU; 2005 ARU
- >25,000 students from 185 countries
- Widening participation: majority of our students  $\geq 1$  group of disadvantage
- Times Higher Education University of the Year 2023
- TEF Gold 2023



# Context of Ruskin Modules

- Students from different courses integrate disciplinary perspectives to respond to a complex challenge
- Award-winning 15 credit, compulsory at level 5 undergraduate, online
- ~3,100 students choose
- Shape and size:
  - > 50 approved, problem-focused Ruskin Modules (e.g., *Do we own animals?*)
  - >17,000 students, 125 courses, 7 faculties
- Skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, thinking critically, creatively and flexibly; aptitudes such as resilience, curiosity, and self-awareness

## Students tell us



- Engaged in Ruskin Module
- 75% think differently
- Skills
  - Creativity (73.9%), ideation (79.5%)
  - Listen (77.3%), resilience (75%)
- Emergent outcomes:
  - Transformation & empathy
  - Confidence for passion / career
  - Play with assessment
- Module Evaluation



- Allocated
- Attendance
- Engagement in online activities
- Module Evaluation comments

How can we better  
talk with students  
where they are?



# Personas

## What are personas?

*'fictitious, specific, concrete representations of target users'* (Pruitt & Adlin, p.29)

- User-centred design versus self-centred (and assumptions)
- not real people (nor every person)
- models to represent / humanise data based on patterns of behaviour (Cooper, Reimann & Cronin, 2007)
- create a common language ('common ground') & evoke empathy

## How personas have been used in education

- support learning and teaching through professional development (Zagallo et al., 2019)
- promote diversity, inclusivity and accessibility (Farooq et al., 2025)
- [Open University](#), [University of Edinburgh](#), [FutureLearn](#), [University of Oxford](#), [University of Reading](#), [Keele University](#)

## Commissioned Research (*Nigel & Team*)

- Incentivised survey (n=612), interviews (n=18)
  - 48 questions: reason (and feeling) for choosing, communication, module characteristics

# Ruskin Module student personas

## Meaning makers

### Self Developer

- Hands-on, creative, concerned for others
- Hopeful, confident, energised

### Personal Passionate

- Passionate, conditional engagement
- Inspired, confident, motivated

## Explorers

### Deep Thinker

- Seekers, investigators
- Motivated, confident, inspired

### Comfort Zone Pusher

- Craves new experience, push
- Confident, somewhat motivated

## Outcomes focused

### Career Focused

- In charge of their career
- Frustrated, disinterested

### Future Preparer

- Blue sky thinker, future savvy
- Inspired, excited, confident

### Self Contained

- Insular, not seeking challenge
- Indifferent, frustrated

(Adapted from Ni and team, 2025)



# Supporting student communication

## Students

- Persona-specific student-facing webpages
  - A/B tests

## Ruskin Module Leaders

- Copilot 'recipe'
  - ARU's Tone of Voice
  - Background to Ruskin Modules
  - Descriptions of personas and motivations



# Findings & future

## Pilot

- Analysis of A/B user tests
- Webpage visits
- Whilst module was similar: number of courses = 41, 25% students allocated
  - MES 92.1%, above 79.4% 2025/6 average, and 90.2% top-quartile average
  - MES Response Rate 46.9%, above 35.6% 2025/6 average
  - Students may be perceiving better quality or relevance (not higher rates of submission or marks)
- Student comments, Ruskin Module Leader reflection.

MES=Module Evaluation Survey

## Enrich persona stories

- Longitudinal study with first year undergraduates
- Experience journey mapping workshop with second year undergraduates
- ‘Validate’ personas

## Caution

- stereotyping, tokenism
- false sense of certainty
- marginal, fluid, intersectional

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