

Leading Student-Centred Curriculum Co-Creation Through Design Thinking **Kirstie Burn, Perth College UHI**

KEYWORDS

Student partnership, co-creation, design thinking, curriculum development, Initial Teacher Education, employability, professional identity, workshop facilitation

SUMMARY

This case study outlines the development and facilitation of a structured co-creation workshop used to design the Events and Enterprise in Education (EEE) module within the BA (Hons) Food, Nutrition and Textile Education (FNTE) programme. Using a design-thinking approach, the workshop enabled students and staff to collaboratively identify skills gaps, explore learner needs, and shape curriculum content aligned to professional practice. The process strengthened student engagement, supported the development of professional identity, and influenced staff practice in adopting student-centred and co-creation pedagogies across the programme.

CONTEXT

Employability and professional identity are central to Initial Teacher Education; however, traditional employability curricula can be overly prescriptive and disconnected from student aspirations. Programme review activity, student feedback, and exit interviews within FNTE highlighted that while students valued professional preparation, they sought greater agency in shaping their development and clearer links between enterprise skills and educational practice.

This created a need to rethink curriculum design approaches, moving beyond predefined content towards more collaborative, student-centred models that better reflect professional realities and support identity development.

WHAT, WHERE?

In response, I led the design and facilitation of a structured co-creation workshop to inform the development of the *Events and Enterprise in Education* (EEE) module. The workshop brought together students from Years 2–4 alongside staff, creating a collaborative space for curriculum design.

The session followed a clearly structured development-day format, designed to guide participants through key stages of the design-thinking process, beginning with an empathy-focused exploration of learner experience. The workshop opened with an individual reflection activity (“one word to describe your ideal learning experience”), establishing an inclusive and accessible entry point for all participants.

Students then worked in small groups to explore what makes learning meaningful and motivating, drawing on prior module experiences and identifying areas for development. This included structured prompts focused on autonomy, ownership, and expectations of future graduates, encouraging students to critically reflect on their learning journey and professional aspirations. Groups shared key insights back to the wider cohort, enabling collective understanding and validation of shared experience.

To deepen this exploration, I introduced learner personas and guided groups through Think–Feel–Do–Need mapping activities. This enabled participants to consider diverse learner perspectives, identifying both motivations and barriers within enterprise and employability learning. These structured activities supported students in articulating not only what they experienced, but why it mattered, generating rich qualitative insight.

Building on this, participants collaboratively developed “How Might We...” statements to frame curriculum challenges, such as building confidence in professional skills, making theory more practical, and embedding collaboration and creativity within learning. This stage supported the transition from reflection to solution-focused thinking, enabling participants to generate actionable ideas for module design.

Throughout the workshop, I modelled facilitation techniques and supported colleagues in interpreting and translating student insights into curriculum decisions. This included guiding staff on how to structure discussion, capture key themes, and connect student voice to learning outcomes and assessment design.

Using evidence generated through this structured process, I led the design of the EEE module curriculum, learning outcomes, and assessment strategy. The module foregrounds collaboration, enterprise thinking, and reflective practice, enabling students to design, plan, and evaluate educational events within authentic teaching contexts.

WHY?

Initial programme delivery resulted in variability in student experience and limited visibility of progression across modules. There was a clear need to ensure coherence across a multi-year programme, embed inclusion proactively rather than reactively, align curriculum with evolving sector expectations (e.g. Next Generation Qualifications), and strengthen connections between academic learning and professional practice. Student voice was a key driver in this process, with students expressing a desire for clearer progression, more applied learning, and stronger links to professional identity.

In response, the co-creation workshop generated rich qualitative data that directly informed the design of the EEE module. Students identified key areas for development, including confidence, leadership, enterprise thinking, and professional communication, alongside a strong preference for experiential and applied learning. As a result, the module was designed to foreground collaboration, real-world application, and reflective practice, enabling students to design and evaluate educational events within authentic teaching contexts.

The impact extended beyond curriculum design. Students reported increased engagement, confidence, and a clearer understanding of their professional identity, reflecting a stronger alignment between curriculum and professional practice. Staff also reported increased confidence in using co-creation approaches and embedding student voice within their teaching, contributing to more consistent, student-centred practice across the programme.

DID IT WORK?

The workshop generated rich qualitative data that directly informed the design of the EEE module. Students identified key areas for development, including confidence, leadership, enterprise thinking, and professional communication, alongside a strong preference for experiential and applied learning.

As a result, the EEE module was designed to foreground collaboration, real-world application, and reflective practice, enabling students to design and evaluate educational events within authentic teaching contexts.

This module-level enhancement contributed to wider programme-level impact. Outcomes demonstrate clear improvement, with NSS satisfaction increasing from 54% to 100%, alongside improved student retention across academic cycles. Students reported increased confidence, engagement, and a stronger sense of belonging, while placement schools noted improved preparedness for professional practice. These enhancements also contributed to a strengthened programme reputation, including ranking 3rd in the Guardian University Guide.

The impact extended beyond curriculum design. Students reported a clearer understanding of their professional identity and stronger connections between academic learning and professional practice. Staff also reported increased confidence in curriculum coherence, inclusive practice, and the use of co-creation approaches, demonstrating sustained influence on teaching practice across the programme.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

The workshop required careful planning, facilitation, and follow-up to translate insights into curriculum design. This process also involved significant initial investment in staff collaboration, curriculum mapping, and resource development. However, the benefits were substantial.

The process provided a transferable model for student-centred curriculum development, demonstrating how structured facilitation can support meaningful co-creation. It also influenced staff practice beyond the module, with colleagues adopting design-thinking and student partnership approaches within their own teaching.

Importantly, this work contributed to a shift in how curriculum development is approached within the programme, moving from staff-led design to collaborative, evidence-informed practice. This resulted in a more sustainable and shared approach to programme delivery, reducing reliance on reactive support and improving consistency across modules.

The impact extended beyond the FNTE programme. Approaches to student voice, curriculum mapping, inclusive design, and digital practice have influenced wider curriculum teams, demonstrating how programme-level leadership can drive broader institutional enhancement and sustained change in teaching practice.

Development Day

WELCOME ALL



UHI

University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

Schedule:

Time: -----

Location: -----

Participants:-----

Facilitators: -----

Focus: Empathise- understanding learner needs, motivations, and experiences to shape the new ----
----- module

Lunch at 12 –

“One word to describe
your ideal learning
experience.”

In Groups

What makes a learning experience meaningful and motivating?

What gave you autonomy and ownership in previous modules?

What areas of development did you notice?

What should a future----- graduate know/do around *-----?

Groups share back key insights
(2–3 mins per group).

Lunch time questions:

“If I could redesign one aspect of ---- education, it would be...”

“An idea I’d love to see in the new module...”

Small groups have learner personas provided:

What does this learner think, feel, do, need?

Grid of what think, feel, do, need

Small groups have learner personas provided:

What motivates them, and what barriers do they face in events/enterprise learning?

Grid of motivation /barriers

Groups create “How Might We...” statements:

Design a module that builds confidence in -----
skills?

That makes theory practical?

That values collaboration and creativity?

“One insight or
idea that stood out
today.”

A close-up photograph of a yellow sticky note on a light blue textured surface. The note has the words "Thank you!!" written in black cursive ink, with three dots below "you!!". A black pen tip is visible on the right side of the frame.

Thank
you!!
...

Day Layout

Co-Design Workshop: Empathise Stage

Time: 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Location: UHI 324

Participants: FNTE Students (Years 2–4) + UHI Lecturers (Facilitators: Kirstie Burn, Gemma McKenzie)

Focus: Empathise- understanding learner needs, motivations, and experiences to shape the new Events and Enterprise in Education module.

10:00 – 10:30 | Welcome & Context Setting

Overview: Why we're here / co-developing a new module grounded in real student experience. Highlight NSS improvements as evidence of impact of student voice.

Design Thinking intro with a focus on Empathise stage today.

Icebreaker: “One word to describe your ideal learning experience.”

10:30 – 11:30 | Student-Led Think Tank

Mixed groups of students (Years 2–4)

Focus: Drawing from experience of similar modules (e.g., past enterprise/events units).

Guiding questions:

What makes a learning experience meaningful and motivating?

What gave you autonomy and ownership in previous modules?

What areas of development did you notice?

What should a future FNT graduate know/do around *Events & Enterprise?

Resources required – Poster paper and Coloured pens

11:30 – 12:00 | Shareback & Key Themes

Groups share back key insights (2–3 mins per group).

Facilitators map and cluster responses into key themes:

- Motivation
- Learning challenges

- Successful strategies
 - Gaps in current delivery
 - Relevance to future careers
- (using post it notes)
-

12:00 – 12:45 | Lunch & Informal Discussion

Catered lunch.

Prompt cards on tables:

“If I could redesign one aspect of FNT education, it would be...”

“An idea I'd love to see in the new module...”

12:45 – 1:15 | Empathy Mapping

Small groups have learner personas provided:

What does this learner think, feel, do, need?

What motivates them, and what barriers do they face in events/enterprise learning?

Purpose: Build empathy and keep the student experience central in module design.

Resources required –

- Grid of what think, feel, do, need
 - Grid of motivation /barriers
-

1:15 – 2:45 | Define the Learning Problem

Groups create “How Might We...” statements:

How might we:

design a module that builds confidence in enterprise skills?

that makes theory practical?

that values collaboration and creativity?

2:45 – 3:00 | Reflection & Next Steps

Round-table reflection: “One insight or idea that stood out today.”

Share what comes next in the co-design process.

Collect feedback forms.

Handouts to support

Barriers	Solutions

Motivations	Implantations

Handouts to support

1. Ayesha – The Purpose-Driven Planner

Year : 2nd Year FNTE

Goals: Wants to become a teacher who promotes sustainable and meaningful change through school events.

Strengths: Organised, strategic, confident with planning and logistics.

Challenges: Struggles with risk-taking and creative thinking under pressure.

Motivation: Feels empowered when tasks have a clear real-world impact and benefit others.

Learning Needs:

Wants frameworks and structure (e.g., step-by-step planning models)

Values case studies and real-life examples of school/community enterprise

Appreciates assessment that rewards careful preparation and execution

2. Liam – The Hands-On Doer

Year: 2nd Year FNTE

Goals: Excels in practical tasks, wants to run food-related events (cooking demos, cafés).

Strengths: Creative, collaborative, strong in food prep and delivery.

Challenges: Disengaged with theoretical planning and paperwork.

Motivation: Learns by doing – thrives in fast-paced, team-oriented environments.

Learning Needs:

Needs learning-by-doing and experiential opportunities

Wants room for practical leadership (e.g., leading part of a group task)

Needs scaffolded support with documentation and reflection

3. Erin – The Creative Collaborator

Year: 2nd Year FNTE

Goals: Interested in creative branding and visual storytelling within events.

Strengths: Strong aesthetic sense, excellent communicator, team player.

Challenges: Sometimes overwhelmed by open-ended projects; avoids taking the lead.

Motivation: Feels confident when given space to contribute ideas visually and creatively.

Learning Needs:

Enjoys working in creative teams (design, marketing, themes)

Needs supportive group structures where everyone has a role

Responds well to formative feedback and flexible formats (e.g., posters, media, journals)

4. Callum – The Reflective Analyst

Year: 2nd Year FNTE

Goals: Interested in understanding how and why educational events work – wants to innovate and evaluate.

Strengths: Analytical thinker, critical writer, interested in research and theory.

Challenges: Less confident in leading practical activities or working in large groups.

Motivation: Enjoys meaningful reflection, values depth over speed.

Learning Needs:

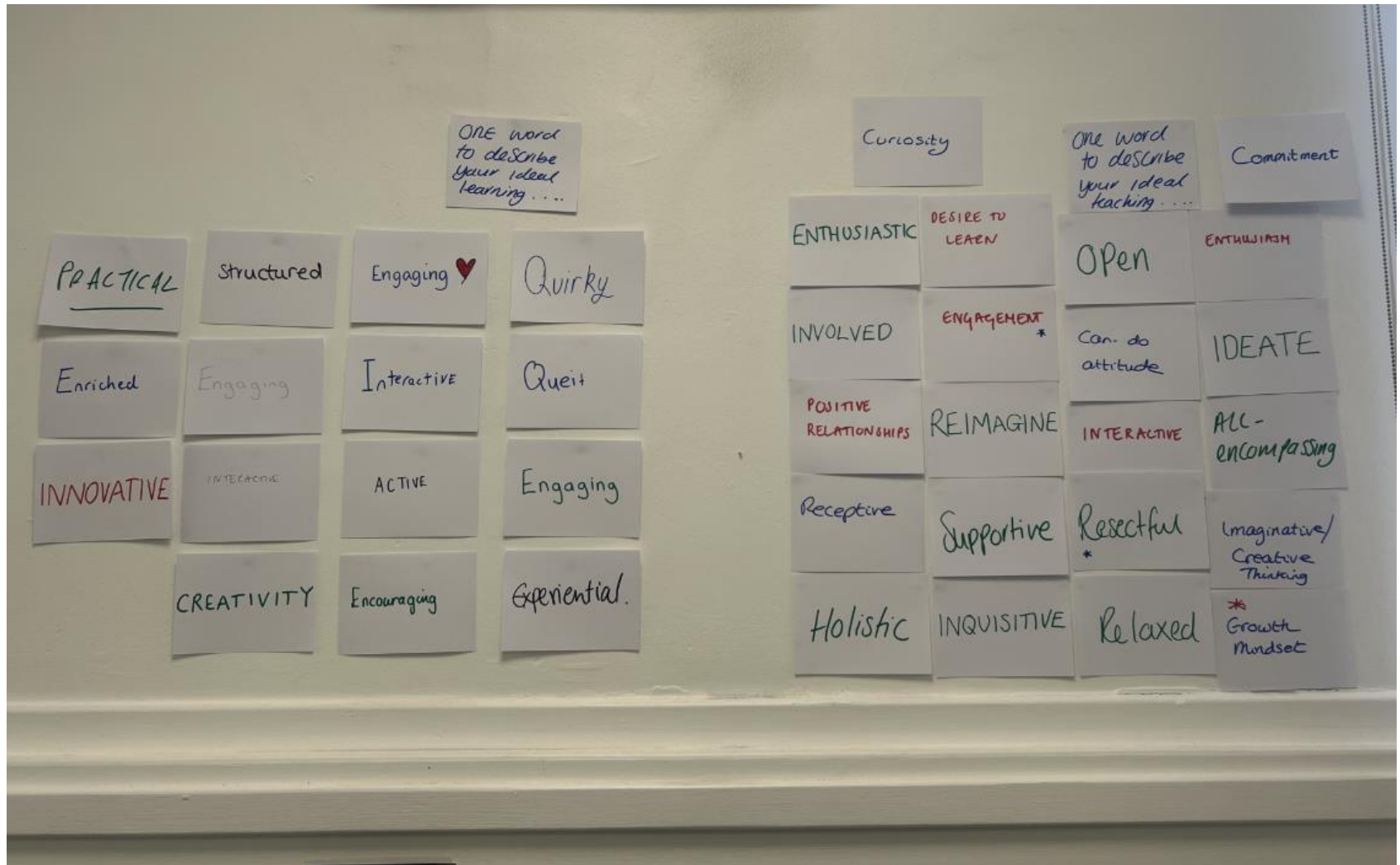
Needs space for individual reflection and analysis

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Handouts to support

Think	Feel
Do	Need

Examples of workshop



Examples of workshop

One insight or idea that stood out today?

Reflective Strategies about what is a good experience.

Job Fair when selecting team members.

Job Advert - people apply for roles to be apart of your event.

Student led development

Relating the module to prior learning from previous years and future years.

post it note to break down the subject to give specific feedback

Narrowing the criteria for an event (not so)

• (collaboration) - with different people/groups you don't know both early and for events Next Year Year!

Pilot of event / soft launch

Really like the use of post-it notes for mapping responses

CONNECTING THE MODULE TO WHAT QUALIFICATIONS WE WILL TEACH.

An idea I'd love to see in the new module

Delivery that strengthens the link between events/ industry & business - economy

A ~~small~~ uni trip to see behind the scenes of organising a wedding from start to finish

Q2 - a whole class event, where every person is involved for a 'client'. Theme, location, budget, food, capacity etc.

Q1
• build skills work shop
• use group that better chooses
• like Ever stop of Everyone every other
So Everyone can see take part in the event

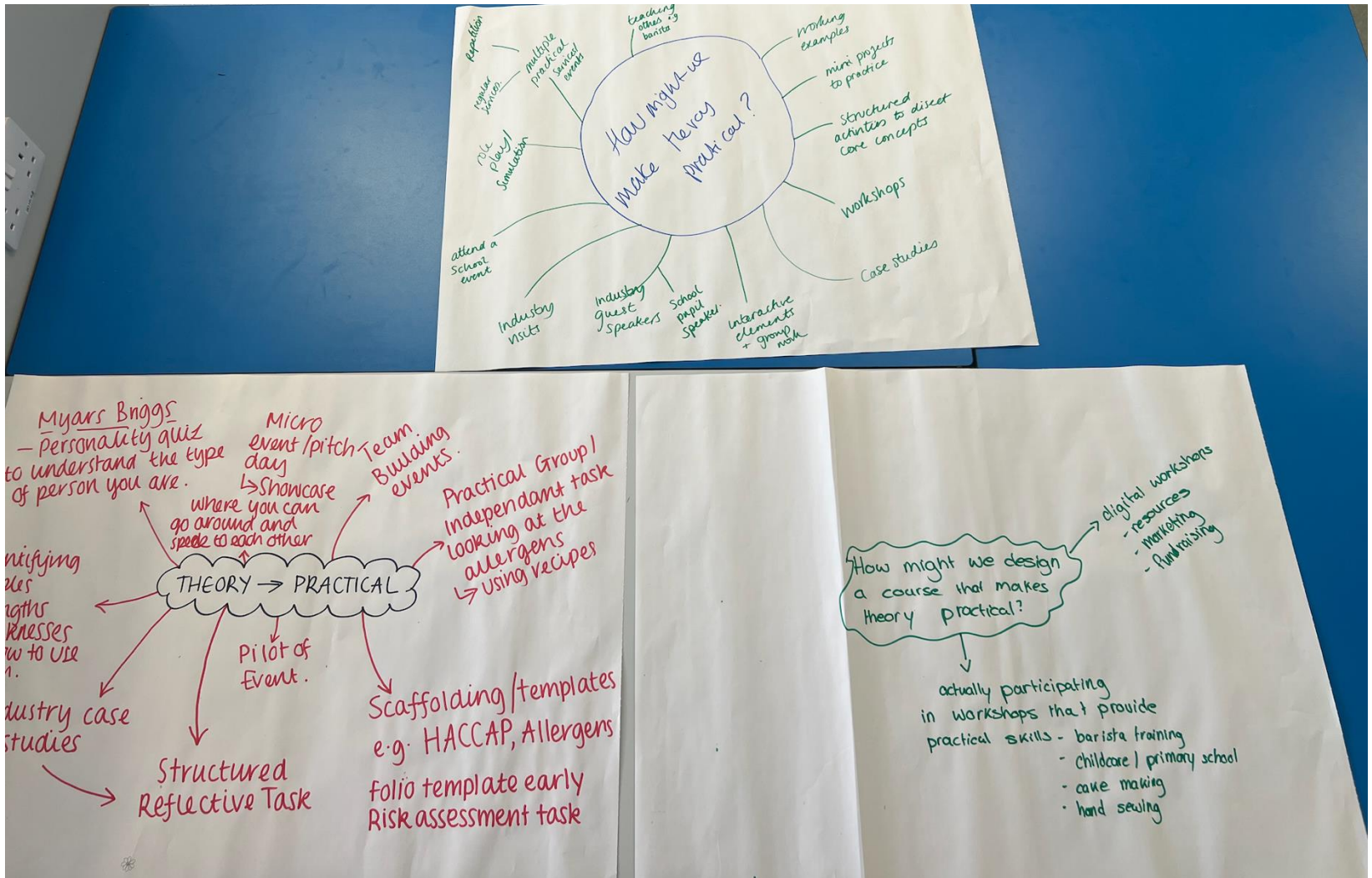
Q2.
mix class up, choose groups for an event.
Have an event co-ordinator guest speaker.

Arrange a trip for all 4 years of the degree as a class

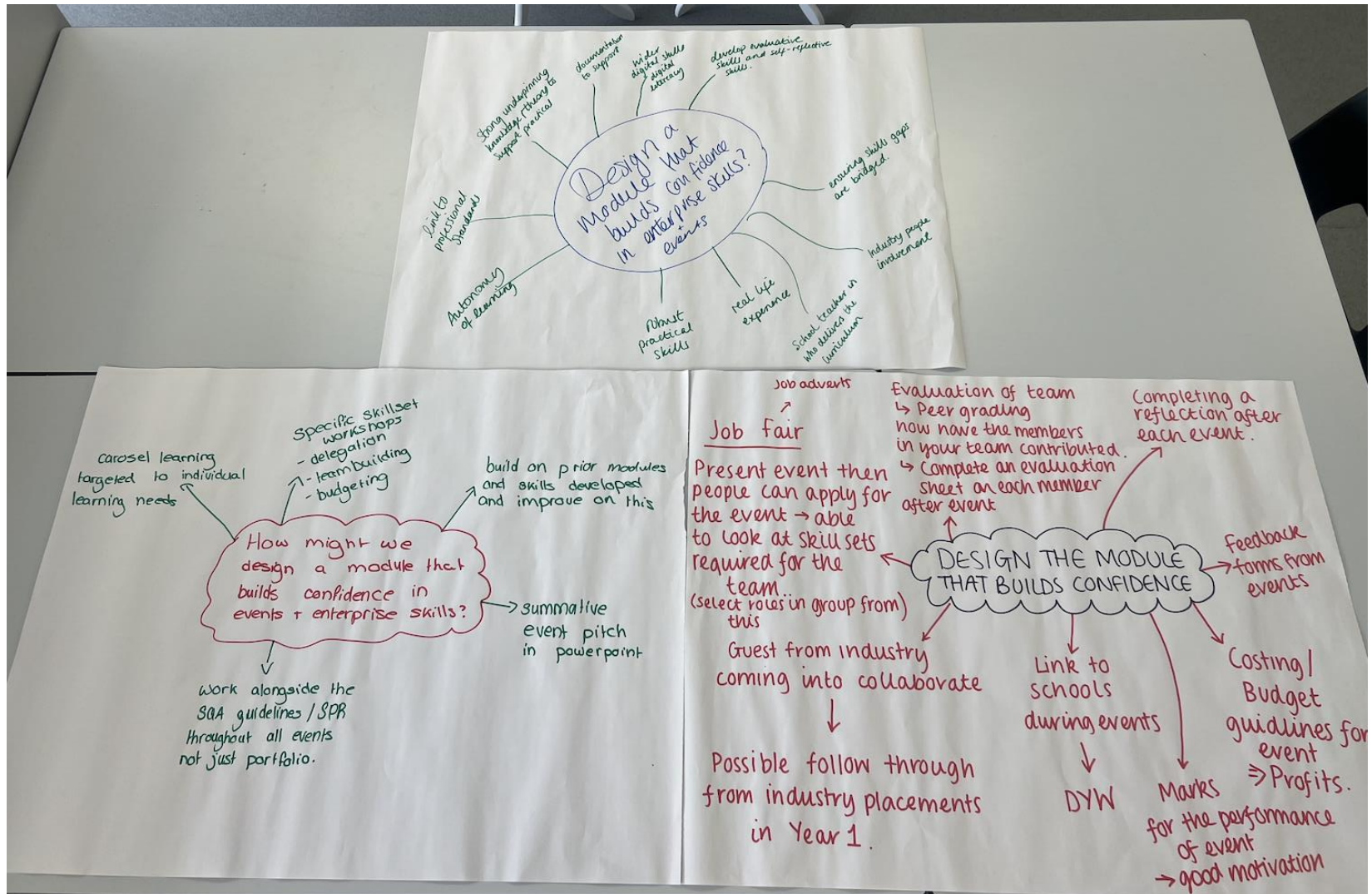
MELPING / WORKING COLLABORATIVE WITH A SCHOOL TO RUN AN EVENT, i.e. 'DINNER FOR ONE FOR A LOCAL AWESOME HOME'

BRISTOL
NETWORKING WITH SCHOOLS AND ORGANISATION
ITALY SCHOOL TRIP - AROUND TRIP AROUND FOOD
PLANNING TO VISIT FOOD BUSINESSES (PARK TO COOK)

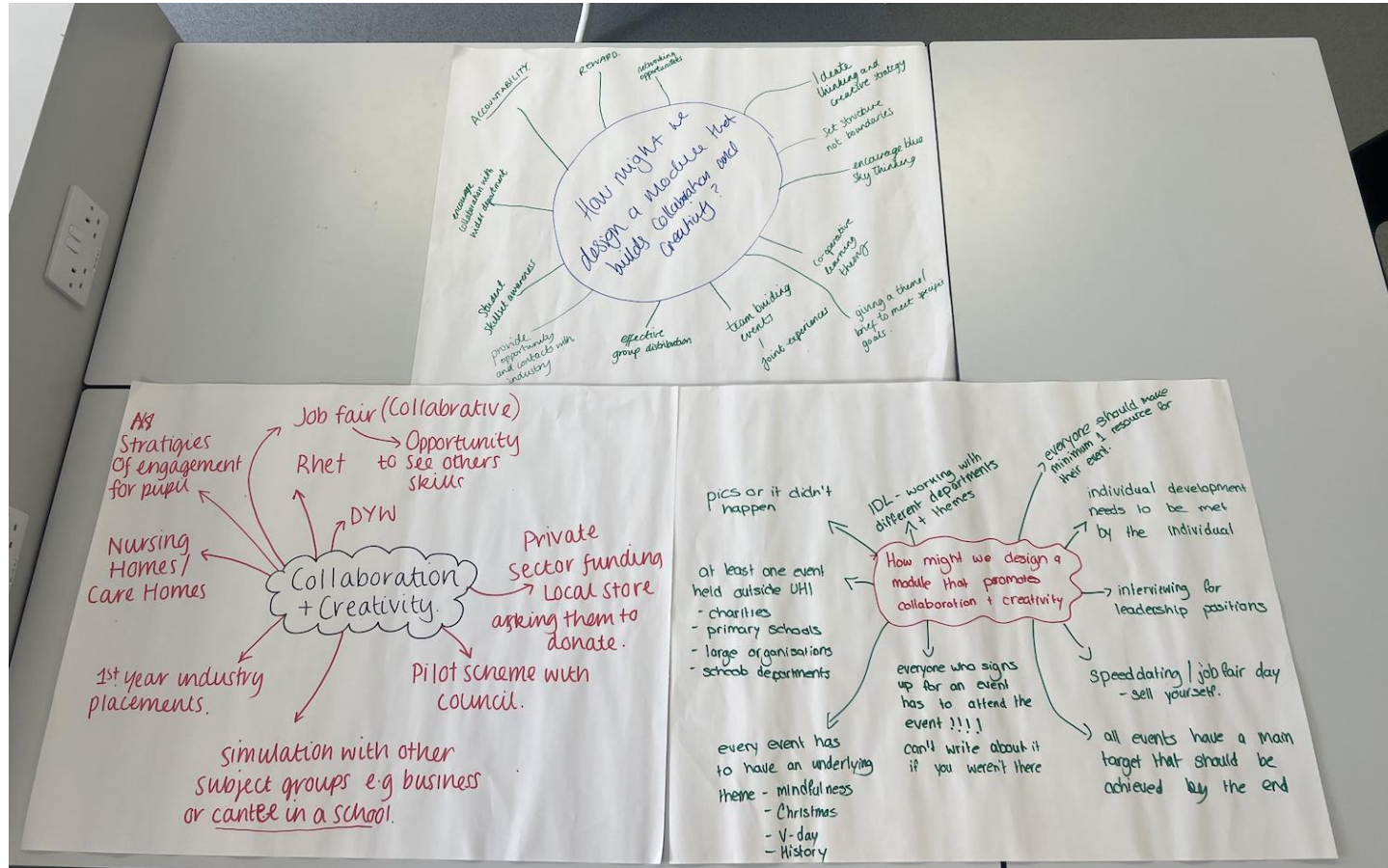
Examples of workshop



Examples of workshop



Examples of workshop



Examples of workshop



