Case Study: Agile Practices at Kingston and Westminster Universities

Universities are adapting their curricula to meet today’s workplace challenges. Kingston University and Westminster Business School offer Agile Practices®, which provides an understanding of agile practices and the impact of an agile mindset.

Key points

Challenges:
- Fitting into varied syllabuses
- Demonstrating agile knowledge to potential employers
- Providing applicable theory
- Showcasing the value of agility

Solution:
- Standalone introductory qualification
- Broad-based knowledge and practices
- Flexible teaching, standard exam
- Awarding body with international reach
The challenge:
Preparing students for today’s job market

The pace of change and the need for adaptability and innovation have made agile working and business agility essential skills for all aspects of business and commercial life. However, few educational institutions are including agility as a core part of their current syllabuses.

Furthermore, most professional agile accreditations are designed for practitioners already in the workplace. A short course was needed to offer students an overview of agile principles and practices, one that would improve their employability and act as a foundation for further career development.

The solution:
Agile Practices

‘Today’s workplace is highly competitive,’ confirms Dr Islam Choudhury, Associate Professor at Kingston University and Director of the Agile Business Consortium. ‘Kingston University has worked with the Agile Business Consortium to design this new programme to give students the understanding and vocabulary they need to talk confidently about agile during job interviews, and demonstrate that they have the mindset and attitude to create success in the workplace.

‘Students cover a lot of ground through their degree syllabuses. However, it’s valuable to have a short, focused, extra-curriculum teaching component to introduce agile as practised in industry. Agile Practices provides this as a short standalone certification course where students engage in interactive teaching sessions and workshops. This increases their knowledge, understanding, authority and credibility with various agile approaches.

‘The course content for this certification can be delivered in a variety of ways – it is itself very agile. It can be absorbed into scheduled teaching time and spread over a semester, or it can be taught externally in a couple of fast-track intensive days. Each university can decide what works best within their teaching system.’

The results:
Students qualified in agility

The Agile Practices certification now sits alongside AgilePM® as part of the learning portfolio developed at the Agile Business Consortium. It is an excellent introduction to the AgilePM Foundation and Practitioner certifications, presenting a broader outlook and wider foundational knowledge than these more specific qualifications.

Over 500 students have now achieved the Agile Practices Foundation Certificate through Kingston and Westminster universities, and the average pass rate is over 80%.

Islam continues, ‘If students start their professional agile journey with an introductory knowledge of AgilePM, Scrum, Kanban and Extreme Programming (XP), it will allow them easier entry into the job market. From there they can continue to develop their agile knowledge, understanding, and practices and can complete further qualifications as they progress through their career.

‘I believe that Agile Practices equips the agilists of tomorrow to think outside the box and build for themselves a practical and effective agile toolkit.’

- Dr Islam Choudhury

1 Agile Practices was previously named Agile Foundations and Agile101. Certificates have formerly been issued under both names.

Dr Nadia Amin is Principal Lecturer in Information Management at Westminster Business School. She introduced the Agile Practices exam for the first time in 2018. ‘Our students are already familiar with other project management methods such as PRINCE2®. For students studying project management for IT methods, awareness of agile methods is paramount. Agility is an important part of our curriculum,’ she explains. ‘It is now a mainstream business skill and we are making our agile project module compulsory from 2020. We believe that supporting students to gain a good understanding of business agility and agile methods will improve their employability. We need to equip students not only to understand different agile frameworks, but to be able to develop further to create hybrid methods and solutions in practice.

‘Our experience with the Agile Practices certification is that students value the broad learning it offers, which also gives them additional knowledge to feed into their assessment projects and dissertations. It also helps that the exam mimics the format of other professional exams, so students are well prepared for further study in the workplace.

‘This exam helps to bridge the gap between academia and the workplace, and I would encourage other universities to include it in their courses.

‘Agile is gaining increasing traction in public and private sectors alike,’ Islam affirms, ‘The education system must prepare people to be effective in the workplace and deliver the skills that industry needs and the marketplace demands. This Agile Practices course is an important step towards closing the gap between education and industry.

‘Businesses in the future will have a growing need to be agile. This course provides a life skill that will be valuable for students of all disciplines. My students that have moved into roles as wide ranging as teaching or marketing have told me how useful this grounding in agile has been for them.

‘Agile Practices offers a way to move forward when your workload feels overwhelming. When change is rapid, we need constant adaptation, incremental progress, and to benefit from transparency and the drive for continual improvement. We need to be able to stand back and review what we have done objectively, to accept feedback and move forward to make our results even stronger. In today’s world we simply cannot do everything in one go. Agile Practices helps students to see change as a benefit, rather than a whirlwind of loss.’

‘The level of comprehension and confidence I acquired from taking the course proved to be of a tremendous added value especially in the eyes of recruiters during job interviews. I truly believe that the Agile Practices module should be mandatory for all relevant undergraduate and postgraduate studies.’

- Dr Nadia Amin

‘This exam helps to bridge the gap between academia and the workplace, and I would encourage other universities to include it in their courses.’

- Rafet Maamouri, MSc Information Systems, Kingston University

Agile Practices students at Kingston University
How to find out more:
Agile Practices certification

Agile Practices provides a foundational understanding of a range of agile approaches and techniques. Drawing on AgilePM, Scrum, Kanban, XP and SAFe, candidates are tested on all-round agile knowledge through a multiple choice exam.

This certification is offered by several universities and is also available as a self-study online exam through Agile Business Consortium. If you are interested in taking Agile Practices, or offering it through your organisation, you can find out more at agilebusiness.org/agilepractices

Sandiya Baranidaran
Developer

Kingston University London

Kingston University’s Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing comprises three schools, bringing together interdisciplinary research, improving the scope of the student experience and encouraging partnerships between academia and commerce.
www.kingston.ac.uk/faculties/science-engineering-and-computing/

Dr Islam Choudhury:
www.kingston.ac.uk/staff/profile/dr-islam-choudhury-375

University of Westminster London

University of Westminster’s Business School offers a wide range of business and management courses, including the professional skills and qualifications that will prepare students to excel in the workplace.
www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/our-colleges-and-schools

Dr Nadia Amin:
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Agile Business Consortium:

The Agile Business Consortium is the not-for-profit professional body for business agility, now in its 25th year. Our mission is to lead, promote and enable business agility worldwide.

We are the brains behind AgilePM®, AgileBA®, AgilePgM® and AgileDS™. Through APMG International we have certified over 100,000 Agile Project Managers around the globe. We are the world’s oldest agile organisation and organisers of the world’s longest running Agile Business Conference.

Learn more about business agility and the Consortium at: www.agilebusiness.org

Leading, promoting and enabling business agility worldwide
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25 years
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