



Pedagogy for employability

Authors: Ann Pegg, Jeff Waldock, Sonia Hendy-Isaac, Ruth Lawton



Contents

This guide constitutes a revised and updated version of the Pedagogy for employability publication first published in 2006. This original publication was produced under the auspices of the Higher Education Academy and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT), and formed part of the Learning and Employability Series, a set of publications offering guidance and information to staff in higher education institutions involved in the enhancement of student employability.

This publication has been updated with the practitioner in mind – those teaching in the classroom and those engaging with policy and student interactions in other ways, such as careers guidance and learning development workers. Practitioners are our focus, as we discuss the policy and institutional context that frames the environment within which people work. The early sections of this publication are intended to illuminate the possibilities and constraints that operate in different national, institutional and departmental situations, having a direct impact on the way that teaching and learning takes place between practitioners and students. Case studies of learning and teaching that support the development of student employability, in the classroom, through distance and part-time learning and in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, are provided throughout the publication. In the later sections of the publication we focus particularly on the curriculum and learning and teaching practice. You may wish to move around the publication rather than reading it from start to finish.

- The economic and policy context for the different nations is explained in **Section 1** starting on **page 6**.
- The different ways that individual institutions have responded to this and the implications for individual practitioners of the institutional context are discussed in **Section 2** starting on **page 10**.
- Definitions of employability are discussed in **Section 3** starting on **page 19**.
- The emergence of models for employability development is discussed in **Section 4** starting on **page 21**.
- Curriculum design and development across departments and courses is discussed in **Section 5** starting on **page 30**. This includes:
 - learning and teaching practice;
 - assessment;
 - work-based and work-related learning;
 - staff engagement;
 - pedagogy;
 - strategy.

- **Section 6** starting on **page 45** briefly identifies areas for future work in this growing area of employability and the need for coherent and long-term research into effective pedagogy.
- There are brief biographical details about the authors and acknowledgements for all the support we have received in **Section 7** starting on **page 47**.
- All references used are in **Section 8** starting on **page 49**.

We are very grateful to colleagues across the UK for providing case studies as follows:

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Introduction

Employability: two definitions and a starting point

A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.
(ESECT based on Yorke 2006)

Employability is not just about getting a job. Conversely, just because a student is on a vocational course does not mean that somehow employability is automatic. Employability is more than about developing attributes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job, or to progress within a current career. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner.
(Harvey 2003)

Since the publication of the 2006 edition of *Pedagogy for employability* (Pedagogy for Employability Group 2006), the economic, political and environmental pressures upon higher education institutions (HEIs) have placed the issue of graduate employability centre stage. A substantial amount of work has been undertaken over the last five years, much of which we draw upon in this new edition, yet the key challenge to those working in this area remains: how can we best integrate and balance different ways of teaching and learning that promote both effective learning and employability for students?

In an environment of high tuition fees and low economic growth, student expectations of both the qualification, and the experience of higher education (HE) itself, have been raised and questioned. Many HEIs are now adopting a renewed focus on the student experience and in engaging students as partners in learning. The challenge for HEIs is to address this through enhancing the quality of pedagogical approaches: the context of delivery, curricula construction and recognition of the impact that co-curricular and extra-curricular activities have in encouraging students to become confident learners and individuals capable of making a full contribution to society.

We provide the two definitions of employability to illustrate the continued tensions that exist when engaging with the employability agenda in HE. The UK's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) definition, used in the earlier edition of *Pedagogy for employability* continues to be the most widely used in the sector; however, adaptations and variations abound. In taking a holistic approach to the issue of employability, we also present an explanation provided by Harvey (2003). This places the learner at the centre of our thinking and our approach to developing employability, which encompasses the value of learning in higher education as enabling and creative.

This revised edition of *Pedagogy for employability* provides a resource for teaching staff to review and develop their own understanding of employability, moving beyond the institutional employability strategy. We hope that the material provides a springboard for development and change through a focus on three areas:

- an update of the practice debate concerning the pedagogy of employability, focused around curriculum design, delivery and assessment;
- coverage of the approaches that gather together the many threads of employability, and contribute to its development within the curriculum;
- a new and broader selection of case studies to illustrate the enhancement of student employability in a variety of settings and disciplines.

A word about language: throughout this edition we wish to emphasise that our pedagogic approach seeks to integrate employability with teaching and learning through and across the disciplines. We argue that employability is not about lists or categories of skills, and when we refer to employability throughout the publication, this refers to both “skilful practices in context” (as described in the previous edition (*Pedagogy for Employability Group 2006*)) and an approach to personal development and career planning that is included within the notion of employability.

I Employability and higher education

The changing economic and policy context

The relationship between higher education and national and local economies has long been acknowledged; however, since the 2006 edition of this publication, the 2008 economic crisis and its effects on public funding across the UK, has had a significant impact on the nature and focus of the HE sector. In England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the devolved nations are developing increasingly distinct and separate approaches to HE policy and funding, detailed in a number of reports: for England the Browne Review 2010 and subsequent White Paper Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system (BIS 2011); for Scotland the 2010 Green Paper Building a Smarter Future: Towards a Sustainable Scottish Solution for the Future of Higher Education (Scottish Government 2010); for Wales, For Our Future: The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2009) and the Ministerial announcement by Leighton Andrews in November 2010; and for Northern Ireland the Stuart Review 2010-11. As these reports are followed by legislation and policy in each of the four nations, the way that each HE sector is funded and operates, will become even more distinctive. One common theme across the four nations' approaches is the need for urgency in ensuring that the graduates emerging from the HE system are ready and able to contribute to future economic growth through the provision of knowledge, skills and creativity in new business environments. The development of graduates with relevant skills and knowledge – the employable graduate as “Future Fit” (CBI/UUK 2009) – has placed graduate employability at the centre of the HE agenda:

Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring both significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development. (HEFCE 2011, p5)

Graduate employability is usually placed within the context of a 'knowledge' economy and in the context of a locally, nationally and globally competitive labour market environment (Browne 2010; CBI 2009; UKCES 2008, 2010b). A critique can be made of these policy documents as adopting a common sense and, at times, rather uncritical understanding of the knowledge economy and potential future graduate opportunities (Brown et al. 2008). Nevertheless graduate employability as a core interest, engaging both students and staff, will be crucially important in an era of increased costs, higher fees and loans, and increased competition for initial, and continuing, employment locally, nationally and internationally.

1.1 Employment and employability

It is important here that we make a distinction between employment as a graduate outcome, that may be measured and used within the information published by universities, and the issue of a pedagogy for employability, which relates to the teaching and learning of a wide range of knowledge, skills and attributes to support continued learning and career development. We reiterate that developing employability skills for graduates is an issue for the higher education sector, not only in relation to the first job students may gain after their studies, but also important for graduate prospects at future points of career development or change. In addition, for the 1.2 million part-time and distance learners, many of whom are already working, developing employability through higher education study is part of a lifelong learning process both to improve employment prospects and to achieve personal learning goals.

In this edition, we are focusing our discussion on pedagogy, practices of teaching and learning in direct interaction with students (face to face or at a distance) and will therefore be 'bracketing off' broader discussions about a number of related initiatives. We acknowledge that initiatives such as 'fair access to the professions' (Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009), widening participation in higher education, the development of employer/university partnerships and employer engagement strategies by universities are important. These initiatives impact on specific teaching and learning practices, but we mention them here only when they are made relevant to the issue of pedagogy in particular examples. Likewise, the publication of Key Information Sets (KIS) that will detail university performance, and the recording of a broader range of achievements through the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) for individual students may have a positive impact through pedagogic practice in enhancing employability.

Having made the distinction between employment and employability, it is important that we are aware of the different employment environments that graduates participate in, and that gains from higher education for those that participate continue to be unevenly distributed. It remains the case that the opportunities to gain initial graduate-level employment are influenced by a number of factors:

- the status and reputation of the institution attended: some employers continue to choose to recruit new graduates from particular institutions in which they have built up confidence (Brown and Hesketh 2004), often the more 'prestigious' universities (Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009);
- the subject(s) studied and labour market factors have an effect on the speed with which graduates obtain their first graduate-level job (Purcell and Elias 2004; AGCAS/HECSU 2010);
- graduates from some ethnic backgrounds find it difficult to gain employment comparable to that gained by the ethnic majority and some other ethnic groups (Blasko et al. 2002);
- a similar situation applies in respect of graduates from lower socio-economic groups (Blasko et al. 2002; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009) and for graduates with disabilities (AGCAS 2007; Riddell et al. 2010).

Once in post, the 'graduate premium' is far from even. Salary differentials relate to factors such as:

- the sector of employment, with large differentials between the private and public sectors. The latter is more likely to recruit mature students (Egerton 2001). The connections and variations in graduate employment, public sector occupations and urban growth in the UK regions is discussed by Wright (2011);
- gender: Collective Enterprise Ltd (2002) showed that male graduates in information technology, electronics and communications (ITEC) earned 20% more than females within three years of graduation. Webster et al. (2011) argue that this position remains unchanged in relation to salary differential and career prospects. Hunt et al. (2010) discuss the portfolio approach to work of crafts graduates and the issue of a 'graduate premium' continues to be debated across each of the four nations;
- parental socio-economic status (Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009).

The issue for higher education is what it should do to enhance the employment potential for the full spectrum of its graduates, while acknowledging that economic forces, of various kinds, will influence the graduates' success. However, continuing to make assumptions that students can all be treated in the same way, and have equal confidence in dealing with the labour market, runs the risk of perpetuating disadvantage as the relatively advantaged are able to maintain their position.

1.2 Employability development in learning and teaching

To pull together the threads of employability development for all students, and to support the range of diverse students within higher education, increasing use is being made of personal development planning tools and careers advice to assist students in making connections between their career intentions and their learning, working, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. This approach connects labour market opportunities, personal development and aspirations, skills development, career management and learning to support and inform students about the possibilities that exist for them. One example of this is the UseMyAbility website (<http://www.usemyability.org>) produced as part of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme to support employability for students with disabilities.

Over the last five years there has been sustained interest in the pedagogy of employability through many such initiatives. The 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) ran across 55 institutions from 2005 to 2010. The CETL initiative had two main aims: to reward excellent teaching practice, and to further invest in that practice so that CETL funding delivered substantial benefits to students, teachers and institutions. Across the sector, developing teaching and learning in relation to employability was a specific aim for 22 CETLs and an associated issue for many others. The review of CETL work in relation to employability identifies impact at the level of the institution, the curriculum, staff development, and employer and student engagement (Butcher et al. 2011), and we draw upon some of this work in this publication.

Other work emerging from the National Teaching Fellowships, JISC networks, HEA subject centres and the CRA have provided a wealth of resources and reflections on teaching and learning practice. Of particular importance is the work resulting from the Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP) (1999-2009), which drew together evidence-informed principles for teaching and learning (see *Effective Learning and Teaching in UK Higher Education* (TLRP 2010) and *Higher Skills Development at Work* (Brown, 2009) and our reflections on a pedagogy for employability are informed by this work.

What does seem clear from reviewing the vast range of resources is that looking at the employment 'gains' for diverse groups of students now participating in higher education suggests that the ability to articulate learning and raising confidence, self-esteem and aspirations seem to be more significant in developing graduates than a narrow focus on skills and competences. For the increasing numbers of part-time and foundation degree students who are already working, the notion of employability is also likely to be linked to issues of confidence and self-esteem (Little 2011) as well as career development and access to the professions. It seems that some employers, and many students, continue to value the broadest understandings of employability and higher education learning in developing their professional identities.

2 Institutional context

Challenge and change

While the external context is certainly important for HE practitioners, it is the local institutional context that directly frames the way teaching and learning takes place and influences the pedagogical approaches to employability that may be developed. With an increasingly diverse higher education system across the devolved governments in the UK, and differing policies that relate to teaching and research interests in higher education, how these work in the interests of a diverse student population is called into question. The Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP) identified that it is important not to forget the wider cultural and social benefits to be gained from the expansion of higher education, and point out that a wider range of learning outcomes for personal learning and economic growth are required. Additionally, we are reminded that the “employability and skills agenda set down by government may not be fully shared by students” (TLRP 2010, p21), and this addresses what might be called a narrow interpretation of employability skills in many policy documents. It is therefore worthwhile to emphasise the connection between effective pedagogy and policy – the first of the TLRP’s list of evidence-informed principles:

Effective pedagogy demands consistent policy frameworks, with support for learning for diverse students as their main focus. Policies at government, system, institutional and organisational level need to recognise the fundamental importance of learning for individual, team, organisational, institutional, national and system success. Policies should be designed to create effective and equitable learning environments for all students to benefit socially and economically. (TLRP 2010, p14)

For those teaching in higher education in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England, national policies in relation to employability for higher education students have provided a diversity of funding for the development of resources alongside differential opportunities to reflect upon and to research teaching and learning. For example, in Scotland the Enhancement Themes programme had, from 2005, a five-year rolling plan of topics supporting focused work on aspects of higher education across all Scottish institutions. In 2004-05 the enhancement theme for Scotland was employability and this work continues to develop. In the first instance, a sector-wide network of institutional contacts was established, comprising one senior academic and one student from each Scottish university to act as their institution’s main point of contact with the employability enhancement theme. Over time a library of resources was developed and outcomes of the work can be found at <http://bit.ly/suzP8k> and further case studies and resources for practitioners at the Scottish Higher Education Employability Forum (SHEEF) (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/scotland/ourwork/institutional/employability>).

The Scottish enhancement theme work identified three strands as helpful in considering how to work with the issue: embedding employability within the curriculum; enhancing students’ employability through the co-curriculum; and engaging employers in developing the curriculum.

Reflecting on this enhancement theme in their paper *Employability and the austerity decade*, Gunn and Kafmann (2011) point out that there has been a shift from variable engagement with employability among higher education institutions in Scotland to a general acknowledgement of the centrality of this issue and an increased sophistication in our understanding of employability. They suggest that there are some key research findings that are repeatedly restated in the work reported:

- the advantage of providing work-based learning activities;
- that employability should be embedded in the course design process;
- that it is helpful to work with academic/careers adviser partnerships.

They also identify some specific Scottish issues concerned with rural regeneration and employability initiatives provided through distance delivery to rural areas, those in work and through internationalising placements.

Likewise the agendas for Wales, England and Northern Ireland have a specific flavour connected to the employability development work, although perhaps less well articulated than that of the Scottish enhancement theme initiative. Welsh institutions are tasked with targeting part-time education, work-based learning and social justice alongside economic growth and enhancing employability for HE students (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). For Northern Ireland, an emphasis on STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), productivity and social inclusion (DELNI 2011); and for England, an emphasis on STEM subjects, work experience and employer engagement in curriculum development. The English HE environment also highlights the issue of social mobility within a competitive higher education market system (BIS 2011). In response to these national agendas, institutions therefore shape the immediate teaching and learning context through their outward positioning and their corporate plans that inform internal strategies.

2.1 Institutional positioning

From 2010 each English HEI has been required to articulate their position in relation to student employability through the provision of an ‘employability statement’ for prospective students available on both the Unistats and UCAS websites. The HEA review of such statements identified variability in the provision of support for employability, the approaches adopted by institutions and in institutional readiness to adopt a coherent approach to this issue (HEA 2011). The challenge for practitioners is therefore both to understand the institutional context within which they work, and in working with what is likely to be a changing institutional picture. For example, the introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), intended to provide a single comprehensive record of a learner’s achievement and how each institution takes up and adopts this initiative, creates a change to the institutional environment within which practitioners work. In relation to employability, the importance of the HEAR stems from the opportunity it affords an institution to formally recognise more from the HE experience than just the degree programme including:

1. Significant opportunities for formal learning off-campus (e.g. within the workplace or community) where these are not explicitly evident from the academic record.

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2. A short statement in respect of expected graduate attributes derived from undergraduate study.
 3. Information to help a user assess the nature, level and use of the qualification and/or information about aspects of delivery that might contribute to outcomes and skills (for example, delivered through enquiry- or problem-based learning, or involving field/study trips, study abroad or work-based learning).

Sector-wide initiatives, such as the introduction of employability statements and the HEAR, form part of the formalisation and endorsement of employability development as a core aspect of the HE undergraduate offer, articulated at the level of the institution. This has led to a plethora of interest in awards recognising extra-curricular activities and achievements. In March 2011 the CBI working with the NUS produced *Working towards your future: making the most of your time in higher education*. The case studies generated demonstrate the importance of recognising employability developed through 'added value' alongside the HE experience, and the attractions that this has for attracting prospective students. This 'added value' is particularly emphasised by employers seeking graduates who stand out from the crowd (High Fliers 2011) and their approach to recruitment: "it's not who you know but who knows you".

On a practical level any immediate institutional context for practitioners is likely to be shaped by an institutional curriculum and/or learning and teaching strategy and the responses, such as the employability statement and deployment of the HEAR, made to the external environment. This institutional environment impacts directly on models of delivery; for example, whether an institution provides additional careers and employability modules, embeds employability within the curriculum or includes employability within its assessment strategies. Different models are discussed later in Section 4, but can be briefly described as ranging between a 'bolt-on' approach, where employability modules are provided as an optional extra, through to an entirely embedded approach, where employability is assessed and supported within the disciplinary curriculum.

In addition to the three research points identified on page 11, we suggest that there are three other significant features that shape this immediate context for practitioners developing the curriculum and teaching sessions:

- how an institution articulates the careers service provision for students in relation to the curriculum;
- whether the institution develops an 'employability award' as separate (sometimes called 'bolt-on') or embedded provision for students;
- whether the qualification has been professionally accredited by an external body (e.g. the Engineering Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, etc.).

The extent to which the careers service is integrated, or detached, from faculty activities has a direct impact on the way in which joint work can take place with lecturers and the way in which they are able to influence the creation of employability modules within the curriculum (Bridgstock 2009). Careers departments are often responsible for placements, internships and volunteering activities for students, yet other universities retain placement or industry liaison officers within faculties; however, the different models have not been evaluated to explore how they impact on the development of student employability or the embedding of employability-related issues within the curriculum. Where careers services are also responsible for designing and managing employability awards, the nature of these awards is shaped by the way in which the careers services interacted with the delivery of academic subjects within the university.

Employability awards have proliferated across UK higher education institutions, and to date there are over 50 awards that we are aware of, some of which have been provided as case studies via the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) website (AGCAS 2011). The range of approaches can be best described as those that are fully embedded (with the placement or sandwich year being an integral part of the course and the modules connected with employability a part of the core provision and attracting credit) to those that are totally optional and an add-on certificate for students providing some acknowledgement for sports activities, CV building, volunteering and career-planning activities. The Edge/SCRE Centre report points out that, as yet, there is a “lack of clear evaluative evidence on the longer-term impact of these measures” (Lowden et al. 2011, p20), but these awards have been generally welcomed by students and employers.

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) have developed an institutional approach founded upon the CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), discussed in Section 4). It seeks to ensure that employability is embedded into all courses, underpinned by a range of bolt-on development opportunities provided centrally through ‘futures’, the UCLan employability service.

Case study 1: Tailoring employability learning to students’ needs

David Bagley, Head of Employability and Enterprise, University of Central Lancashire

During 2010-11 over 1,200 UCLan undergraduate students have signed up to undertake employability development learning through the ‘futures’ scheme following a diagnosis of their needs. Learning opportunities are available through face-to-face classes, e-learning, work-based learning and independent study at Levels 4-7. Twenty staff from across the University have been involved.

Students work through an Employability Development Profile (EDP) questionnaire with support from tutors. They identify their areas of greatest need and tackle them through the workshop/elective programme or extra-curricular activities.

The futures programme team have developed a set of over 70 modules, 'mini-modules' and workshops addressing all aspects of the EDP. These learning opportunities are offered in a variety of formats to allow students to fit them more easily into their study programme. Examples include:

- Presenting with the X factor;
- Kick-start your career;
- The language of work;
- I'm the one (you're looking for);
- Writing reflectively;
- Emotional intelligence;
- Writing for websites;
- Self-presentation and impression management in the recruitment process.

This list of topics is being increased by staff across the University who are able to offer topics in their specialist area; for example, mentoring, ICT skills and volunteering.

The futures award

The various learning elements of the futures programme can be combined into an agreed study programme through a credit system. This enables students to gain the futures award, a second qualification they can pursue in addition to their undergraduate degree. To achieve this, students must complete an assessment for each element. Employers are engaged as judges and advisers, sometimes delivering workshops. Academic staff working in teams undertake regular programme evaluations, reflecting upon progress and considering opportunities for improvement.

Feedback from students and employers shows that the approach meets many of their needs. Students engage with the learning because they select their programme based upon their recognition of their own development needs. Course teams recognise the advantages for students who are able to augment their existing study programme with high quality employability learning. futures staff are also working with course teams to incorporate customised study units into degree programmes. Employers recognise that the topics addressed seek to develop graduate attributes they need. Employers and students alike appreciate the way employability learning is presented in different formats and particularly the flexibility that allows small study units to be combined into a coherent programme.

For more information contact David Bagley: dbagley@uclan.ac.uk.

The related issue of enhancing employability through industry recognition and endorsement of degrees is sometimes dealt with within these awards, and sometimes identified through separate professional recognition arrangements. Where there are established professional bodies, practitioners have a clear remit to include the necessary professional requirements within course materials as part of the validation process, and developing employability is long established within many directly vocational qualifications. What is important to remember is that these vocationally led courses also have students who need to understand and to be able to articulate their learning in the longer-term as they develop, and may change, their career pathways. Indeed, their intended career pathways may evolve or disappear with changing local, national and global economic circumstances.

2.2 The challenges

One of the challenges for practitioners lies in how to maximise the way in which a contribution from careers services and additional awards can be integrated into course design and delivery; at the same time, where professional accreditation is required, to meet both those and university and external regulatory requirements – all within a crowded curriculum!

A useful starting point for dealing with institutional context, and for developing an institutional approach, is to develop agreed methods for curriculum review and to engage staff in their own development in this area. The University of Ulster have been developing and refining a toolkit for staff over a number of years as illustrated in Case study 2.

Case study 2: Engaging with EDORT Online: A resource to support course teams in reviewing employability development opportunities within programmes

Dr Sharon Milner, Employability Development Manager, Career Development Centre, University of Ulster

The Employability Development Opportunities Review Toolkit (EDORT) was first developed as a paper and pencil version (2007-2009) and the online version piloted during 2010-11. Since the initial development of EDORT 22 schools, 33 programmes, 121 staff and 1,063 students along with 23 focus groups have been involved.

EDORT is a University-wide resource that has supported course teams in their development and planning of employability development opportunities for students within their programmes. The toolkit comprises both staff and student questionnaires. EDORT contains nine subscales covering: curriculum development; learning from work; personal development planning; enterprise, innovation and creativity; transferring learning between contexts; real-world activities engagement; graduate employment; career development learning; and extra-curricular activities.

The focus of the toolkit is about identifying skills and also the structures in place to support student employability.

EDORT highlights and celebrates examples of current good practice, identifies gaps in provision and areas for future action within an employability action plan, and establishes staff and student training needs. The toolkit was successfully developed, piloted and refined over a two-year period (2007-2009).

The paper version of EDORT, however, was very resource intensive as all results had to be manually input and individual school reports produced. Developing a bespoke online system in collaboration with an external partner 'SurveyGalaxy' was intended to resolve this. 'EDORT Online' produces an automated feedback report and allows staff to generate core questions specific to degree programmes. It was piloted during 2010-11.

An important element of the EDORT process is the construction of employability action plans with allocated seed money to support their development. This led to significant innovative developments, e.g. promotional DVD of past graduates, work experience incubation unit, Art & Design creativity hub, creation of a virtual business and employer forum engagement (disseminated at: <http://employability.ulster.ac.uk>). The following quotes sum up the benefits of engaging with this resource:

- The questions were very thought provoking and enabled staff to think of new ways to address employability within their modules. (Sports Studies)
- It has provided a very valuable insight into students' views which was used to inform the revalidation of the current programme of study. (Business Studies)

In summary: EDORT Online generates automatic feedback reports in both Excel and Word formats, which can help inform and map into current revalidation documentation at Ulster, as it covers the nine key areas required. The Teaching and Learning Committee within Ulster has now recommended that all Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) funded programmes preparing for revalidation use EDORT. Further information regarding EDORT is available at: <http://employability.ulster.ac.uk>.

For more information contact Dr Sharon Milner: ST.Milner@ulster.ac.uk.

Embedding employability concerns within institutional policy and processes is important, but no less important, and often more intransigent, is dealing with the issue of cultural change. The learning and teaching strategy at Birmingham City University used institutional curriculum redesign to develop an inclusive approach that included both employability development within the curriculum and working in partnership with students to achieve cultural change.

Case study 3: Redesign of the Learning Experience (RoLEx)

Ruth Lawton, University Teaching Fellow for Employability, Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

An institution-wide initiative to support cultural change and engage staff and students in jointly reviewing the curriculum offer.

The Redesign of the Learning Experience (RoLEx) strategy was driven by a practical need to change the undergraduate courses credit structure from 12 credits to 15, but it also provided a framework for culture change led by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). RoLEx aims to encourage programmes of study to:

- consult with employers, particularly in relation to embedding the ‘real world’ in the curriculum with work experience, placements, live projects or by working with employers to identify skills gaps and taking steps to bridge them in the classroom;
- consider how to make their courses more attractive to potential students and employers by making the outcomes of them more obviously and directly related to the graduate labour market;
- develop assessment of employability and/or skills without adding to assessment and marking load;
- make courses more meaningful, valuable and attractive to current students in relation to enhancing their employability;
- provide opportunities for staff to consider their own personal and professional development, thereby increasing their understanding of the importance of doing this for their students.

One of the changes of culture related to changing the design of a programme of study from an amalgam of ‘modules’ to one of a course with an overarching philosophy and rationale. One of the reasons for this was a desire to ensure ‘partnership’ in the design, delivery and philosophy of courses.

The most important partnership is between academic staff and students and in 2010-11 CELT facilitated large-scale ‘development days’ based around faculties and course teams and including students in those ‘teams’. Faculties were offered one of these days each and there were fundraising incentives on offer to both students and course teams to attend. All faculties participated.

The format for the day was simple. There was an initial introduction and scene setting and then students and staff were separated and facilitated to reflect on and discuss issues relating to employability and assessment. Some genuine surprises emerged in the plenary, e.g. at each of the development days staff commented that they thought they were doing a lot to embed employability but their students felt more could be done! Faculty and course groups then negotiated a plan of action to make the improvements and changes identified and agreed. How the money given to the academic staff would be spent had to be part of the plan, but there was a lot of flexibility for its use. Some of the ideas put forward by teams were wonderfully creative, inventive and suggested some very powerful learning.

Initial and ongoing evaluation suggests that both staff, students and programmes of study benefited from these days, and they have made a significant contribution to changing the culture of many of our programmes from 'androgogy' to 'heutagogy' (Hase and Kenyon 2000).

For more information contact Ruth Lawton: ruth.lawton@bcu.ac.uk.

If the second challenge is in achieving cultural change, the third, and equally important, challenge is to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population – diverse in relation to characteristics and individual students' relationship to employability development issues. In particular we are aware that widening participation students, part-time and mature students (and these are often overlapping categories) are less likely to participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and are less likely to access careers services provision (Redmond 2006; Stevenson and Clegg 2011). Indeed students may have different interests and motivations in participating in higher education (Pegg and Carr 2010; Little 2005, 2011). Attending to employability development as personal development planning in the widest sense is one way to capture this diversity of interests, and to acknowledge and build upon the prior experiences and skills of mature and part-time learners. The issue of personal development planning is discussed further in Sections 4 and 5.

We suggest that for practitioners in HEIs supporting the development of student employability, the national and institutional context is subject to a high degree of variability and change. Possibilities and constraints for work are felt at the local level, and understandings and definitions of employability are subject to institutional policies and cultures. It is to definitions of employability that we turn to next.

3 Definitions

We began this publication with two definitions for employability as our starting point and acknowledged that no one definition is agreed. Although the definition adopted by ESECT has been widely used in the UK, many adaptations and reversioning of this definition exist as institutions develop their unique approaches to employability.

Lowden et al. (2011) give a detailed overview of the difficulties of defining employability, but perhaps a useful method of characterising the various definitions is between those that take a narrow approach (skills and attributes based) with those that take a broader and inclusive approach to employability based on values, intellectual rigour and engagement (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011).

The degree of influence garnered by employability definitions is also worth considering, and the CBI in its *Working towards your future* report (CBI 2011) has worked with its members to define what employers mean by employability skills. This has been an influential document in establishing policy understandings of employability activities in HEIs. The document begins with the broad ESECT definition and then narrows this down, adding that for employers employability skills specifically include:

- Business and customer awareness – basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.
- Problem solving – analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.
- Communication and literacy – application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy – including listening and questioning.
- Application of numeracy – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).
- Application of information technology – basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.
- Underpinning all these attributes, the key foundation must be a positive attitude: a ‘can-do’ approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make these happen.
- Frequently mentioned by both employers and universities is entrepreneurship/enterprise: broadly, an ability to demonstrate an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking. (CBI 2011)

Narrow definitions of employability as skills have led to regular research into the ‘missing’ skills as defined by employers’. These relate to the ‘gap’ between employers expectations and what they perceive as ‘receiving’ from the performance of graduates beginning work. Although the skills

identified in these 'gaps' lists have tended to remain relatively constant in recent years, this is not a useful measure around which to define curriculum intervention. As we identify in Section 5, curriculum design for employability is more than language and skills. However, skills awareness is essential, for example, in understanding and articulating the tools of graduate recruitment found in a person specification relating to an employment opportunity.

Skills 'auditing' is now a commonly used tool for embedding employability in the curriculum; the use of skills experience and development as a measure of employability also forges an easy connection with the personal development planning (PDP) initiative – alongside self-awareness, reflection and action planning. However, although employability, as defined by skills, is common, there is no agreement in the employment and employability sectors about the notions of definition of 'skills'. ESECT defined skills as "skilful practices in context" (Pedagogy for Employability Group, 2006), but there is an ongoing and powerful academic debate about skills and attributes. Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) offer a critique of 'skills-based lists' for understanding employers' definitions – they suggest that we should be interested in defining the 'graduate experience' against, values, intellectual rigour, performance and engagement. They agree with Hagar and Hodkinson (2009) that there is no simple 'transfer of skills', but instead it is a process of 'becoming' related to graduate identity. Hinchliffe and Jolly conclude that: "universities and government would be better employed promoting student employability indirectly through the promotion of graduate identity and well being (through the provision of opportunities for functioning) rather than directly through employability skills" and that "employers themselves are not unsympathetic to this approach" (2011, p582).

In recent years there has been a shift in terminology away from skills; the penultimate bullet point in the CBI report (2011) cited above clearly illustrates this: "underpinning all these attributes, the key foundation, must be a positive attitude". The continued foregrounding of 'skills', 'attributes' or 'capabilities' to access and describe employability endures, as it is a quick and relatively easy way to engage employers, curricula and students with employability and with career management.

This brings us to the last definition dilemma, because employability as it is practised in the HE curriculum is likely to include, or be exclusively, aspects of 'career development learning' (see Watts (2006) for a discussion of the language and definitions). In 2010 the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) defined Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) as a "range of teaching and learning activities, associated with career contexts, preparation, development and planning". Bridgstock (2009) has created a model of career management for maximum employability, which she sees as:

... an ongoing process of engaging in reflective, evaluative and decision-making processes using skills for self-management and career building, based on certain underlying traits and dispositional factors, to effectively acquire, exhibit and use generic and discipline-specific skills in the world of work. (2009, p35)

Bridgstock goes on to suggest that learning how to manage a career needs to begin early in the student's higher education experience and that it should be both mandatory and credit bearing in academic programmes. However, because of the different ways employability is defined, career management may not be included in models used for curriculum design. Furthermore, as we go on to discuss, there is lack of agreement about the value and evaluation of such models.

4 The emergence of a model?

The increase in studies and reports relating to student and graduate employability over the past decade, as discussed in Sections 1, 2 and 3, in addition to the work carried out through the CETLs, would perhaps indicate that the development of a model through which HEIs can construct and support effective curricula would have already emerged. As each report engages in (re)definition of the notions of employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise, it would seem that a 'one size fits all' model for the pedagogical delivery of these concepts has not been forthcoming. The 2009 CBI and UUK study, Future Fit, recommended that each institution should undertake "a process of reflection and consultation to consider what they are doing now and how [delivery of employability] could be improved". In the light of this, the evidence indicates there is a tendency for localised development of delivery models, and their implementation, which is "tailored to the needs and ethos of each institution" (CBI and UUK 2009, p21).

With this in mind, it is unsurprising that a wholesale model remains elusive and we suggest that it is perhaps in the interest of all HEIs to consider a more individualised approach to both their students' employability needs and academic methods of delivery. This correlates with each institution's responsibility to respond to national policy, institutional strategy and course-level engagement with the employability agenda as discussed in Section 2. This does, however, leave institutions with a need to adapt and evolve the models and approaches that have emerged with a view to creating their own.

The PALATINE (Performing Arts Learning and Teaching Innovation Network) project, featured as Case study 4, contains dissemination of a range of institutional approaches to promote entrepreneurial learning in Dance HE.

Case study 4: Entrepreneurship and professional practice in Dance higher education

Ralph Brown, Projects Officer, PALATINE, The Great Hall, Lancaster University, Lancaste

A recent PALATINE project, funded by the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCGE), investigated a range of approaches now being used on dance courses to promote entrepreneurial learning through creative practice.

The BA (Hons) Dance degree at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts aims to deliver entrepreneurship through modules at all levels; developing the students' abilities to organise and present themselves and their work to a professional level through a range of management, performance and promotion skills. Work placements and work-based learning ensure real-world experience; the use of learning contracts encourages each student to develop their own pathway and to take charge of their own learning, reflection and collaboration.

From 2006, Coventry University introduced an enterprise and employability strand as a mandatory component in all courses. The BA (Hons) Dance and Professional Practice degree has embedded professional practice throughout the course where students are prepared for portfolio careers through opportunities to apply skills and knowledge in a variety of work-based situations. The University of Sunderland employs a 'Dance Entrepreneur', who develops a range of community projects, enhances networks and involves undergraduates in projects, while mentoring the students; by linking with its communities in this way, progression routes are enhanced for the community and the employability of students is improved.

The BA (Hons) Dance Choreography, designed to enable students to develop as choreographers/contemporary performance makers, is a partnership between the Northumbria University and Dance City, the National Dance Agency for the North East. Teaching Artists, resident at Dance City, support students in their artistic development through their knowledge of professional practice. Transition beyond the degree is discussed in tutorial, in addition to Dance City's Dance Connect scheme, which offers professional support including mentoring, regular classes/workshops and advice on managing a dance career.

Common themes that can be identified in current approaches to pedagogy for entrepreneurship in Dance are:

- engagement with industry and professional awareness are central to Dance education and enterprise training;
- enterprise is taught through the core subject of study, is student centred and located in the student's personal and professional development;
- enterprise takes the form of a process of progressive learning through creative practice and personal development.

For more information contact Ralph Brown: ctcflweb@hotmail.com or go to <http://www.palatine.heacademy.ac.uk>.

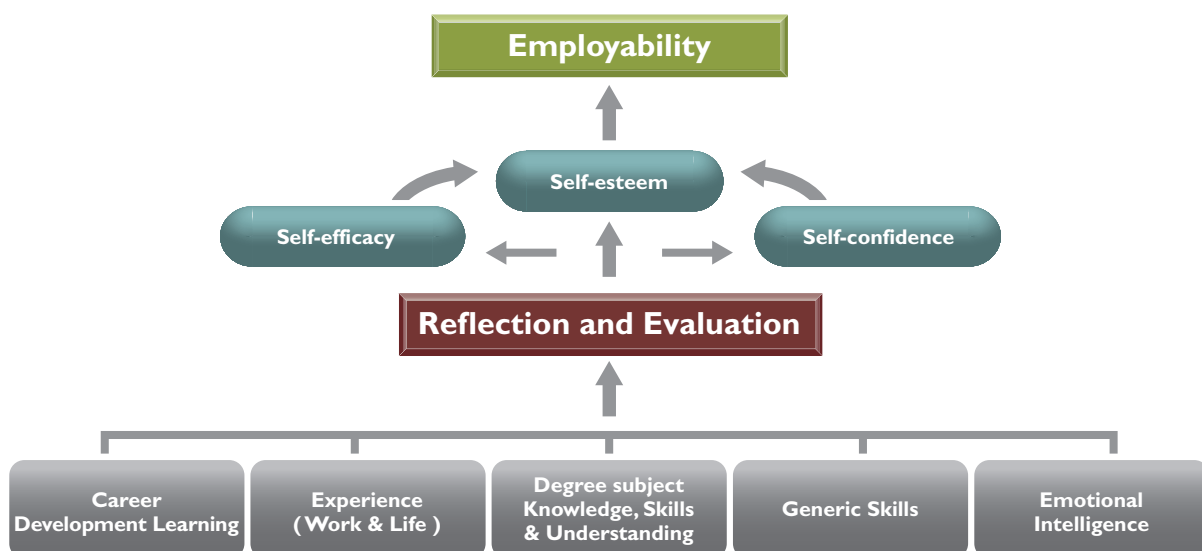
4.1 And so, in practice ...

The USEM model featured in the previous edition, was “an attempt to put thinking about employability on a more scientific basis, partly because of the need to appeal to academic staff on their own terms by referring to research evidence and theory” (Yorke and Knight 2004, p37). It recommended that academics might take the four key components of it and ask to what extent each was being developed, in order to form a generic analysis of the curriculum and/or a curricular component:

- **U**nderstanding (of disciplinary material and, more generally, of ‘how the world works’);
- **S**kilful practices in context (whether the practices are discipline-related or more generic);
- **E**fficacy beliefs (under which are subsumed a range of personal qualities and attributes);
- **M**etacognition (including the capacity for reflection, and that of self-regulation).

USEM certainly serves as a useful starting point from a curriculum audit or curriculum design perspective; there is no doubt that the concept of this framework is well researched and considered, but there are limited examples of this being readily, or transparently, adopted within HEIs at the present time. This may be, in part, due to a lack of evidence and evaluation more widely, a subject that will be returned to in this section.

Since the previous publication a number of alternative models have emerged, and we discuss two examples here. In 2007, as part of UCLAN’s Centre for Employability research, CareerEDGE emerged (see Case study I, model detailed below). This “practical model of employability” was designed to “explain the concept of employability ... to students and their parents ... [and] to be a useful tool for lecturers, personal tutors, careers advisors and any other practitioners involved in employability activities” (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007, p5-6)



Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007)

In the same year, the personal development model Self, Opportunity, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) (Kumar 2007) was published with an emphasis on enabling students “to value and exploit learning ... for the linked purposes of personal growth, intellectual ability and preparation for future careers” (pp7-8). The following case study indicates ways in which these approaches might be integrated into teaching and learning.

Case study 5: Embedding CareerEDGE and SOAR models within the Sports Management curriculum

Doug Cole, Senior Lecturer, Buckinghamshire New University

Personal Development for the Sports Industry is a core, year-long, module for all Sports Management students (approximately 100); it defines and explores the components of employability in an engaging manner to allow the students the opportunity to ‘individualise’ their own learning. By focusing on self-reflection and consideration of their own motivations, abilities and personality, the students are enabled to select appropriate opportunities in relation to eventual jobs and future careers. The CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007) and SOAR model (Kumar 2007) provide a coherent structure and framework, which has been adapted and contextualised in relation to the subjects being studied on each of the courses. These models have been used to underpin the delivery of a range of topics in a progressive and logical sequence throughout the year; the SOAR model is designed to be used across the entirety of a course, but this module has facilitated expansion of both models into a second-year optional module.

A critical feature of the module is that students are required to engage with the Careers & Employability Department, National Occupational Standards from Skills Active and the personal development planning process both on paper and face to face with tutors through assessed progress meetings.

In relation to evaluation, Kumar (2007) provides a detailed evaluation form for modules adopting the SOAR model, which was used in the 2010-11 academic year with a sample of 31 students. Qualitative data was gathered; only 11% of the responses collected were perceived as ‘negative’ and included items such as ‘too much detail at times’ and ‘the 9 o’clock starts’ for classes. However, overwhelmingly the majority of comments were positive and included comments such as, ‘I feel more confident when applying for a job’, ‘being more realistic about my present and my future’, ‘the tutors teaching style’, ‘the approachability of the lecturers’ and interestingly, being surprised by ‘the amount of detail and work it takes to become employable’. Crucially, the quantitative data demonstrated that 80% of the respondents reported that their skills, in 11 different areas, had improved, and 76% reported an increase in knowledge over eight key areas within the module.

For more information contact: Doug.Cole@bucks.ac.uk.

It is interesting that both models directly explore the influence of DOTS (Decision learning, Opportunity-awareness, Transition skills and Self-awareness: Law and Watts 1977; Watts 2006) on their respective inception. The DOTS model has been used extensively within career-planning education and makes a clear connection between career planning and employability. In a recent publication, the QAA were explicit in their inclusion of the term ‘employability’ alongside career education, career management and career development and advise us that:

... where career education is embedded in the curriculum, awarding institutions [must] ensure that intended learning outcomes:

- contribute to the aims and objectives of the programme;
- clearly identify knowledge, understanding and skills;
- are assessed appropriately. (QAA 2010)

The connection between the theoretical models for career planning and the emerging, but not widely utilised, ‘models for employability’ is evident, but the key distinction here is embedded – a model restricted to the context of the university careers service is insufficient – we must consider implementation of employability and career education across the entire curriculum. So how do we do this?

Invariably the design and delivery of modules and/or full programmes are currently reliant on the integration of more traditional models, modes and types of teaching, learning and assessment. The presence and development of self-awareness through reflective practice (Kolb 1984; Gibbs 1988) is evident in all models discussed here; however, the effectiveness of these approaches often relies on qualitative (or sometimes anecdotal) evidence that may not contain or consider the longitudinal perspective or document a direct impact on the students’ employment or employability outcomes. Without this, and in the current economic climate, HEIs may continue to find it difficult to assess, evolve and evaluate their approaches.

Case study 6: Graduate Challenge and ESP

Sonia Hendy-Isaac, Senior Lecturer, formerly of University of Gloucestershire
Susan Bray, Director of Studies – Gloucestershire Framework, University of Gloucestershire

Graduate Challenge was an Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) funded initiative delivered through collaboration between University of Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire First and aimed to facilitate funded internships for unemployed graduates to improve their skills, experience and employability. The programme focused on a 16-week, full-time work placement in conjunction with academic learning through a compulsory postgraduate module (30 CAT points) and an additional (heavily subsidised, but optional) module that enabled students to obtain a Postgraduate Certificate in Personal & Professional Development while supported by academic mentors throughout their placements. The initial scheme, started in July 2009, ran for 18 months and was team taught through several full-day workshops; a commercial version of the course now runs online through the University of Gloucestershire.

The modules of the academic programme were taken from the University of Gloucestershire's Framework and are specifically geared towards work-based learning. With a multi-disciplinary cohort, the programme was designed to avoid subject specialism as the focus and instead encourage deep, personalised learning throughout. The teaching approach enabled students to reflect directly on the work carried out in their placement, and understand how both their subject (professional) expertise and (personal) attributes, attitudes and abilities had been enhanced. The aim was to develop the student's employability and provide an opportunity to reflect on the processes necessary to be successful in the current employment market. One of the emerging approaches developed within the programme was ESP: Experience – Skills – Personal/Professional Development (Hendy-Isaac 2011). This model, taught alongside more traditional reflective approaches, enabled students with no background in reflective practice, work-based learning or PDP to engage with these principles to facilitate clearer articulation of experience, its relevance and their ability to action plan and evaluate their learning, employability and self-awareness.

To illustrate the effectiveness of the approach:

- 27 students received a PGCert in Personal & Professional Development;
- 138 graduates completed the compulsory programme;
- some students were able to APL one/both of the modules for further study;
- 64% of students gained suitable graduate-level employment;
- 29% of students continued into further study;
- 75% of students rated the programme as very good or good;
- 79% of participating organisations considered the impact of the programme on the business as high or medium.

For further information on the Graduate Challenge programme:

<http://insight.glos.ac.uk/DEPARTMENTS/CEI/BUSINESS/GRADUATECHALLENGE/Pages/default.aspx>

For more information contact: Sonia.Hendy-Isaac@bcu.ac.uk.

4.2 Integrating PDP

The QAA strongly recommend the use of PDP to help students “plan, integrate and take responsibility for their personal, career and academic development, identifying learning opportunities within their own academic programmes and extra-curricular activities” (QAA 2009, p6). PDP tools, such as skills auditing, action planning, personal profiling, personal and academic records, development plans, progress files, learning portfolios, e-portfolios, learning logs, and experiential and/or reflective diaries can all be used to explore and record the progress of a student’s employability. In addition to this, experiential and work-based learning approaches, as documented above, can be integrated with live projects, work placements, internships and voluntary experience to ensure that students are able to reflect constructively upon the experience itself, their learning and their development.

Case study 7: e-Progress files

Jeff Waldock, Principal Lecturer in Mathematics and Faculty Lead for Employability, Department of Engineering and Mathematics, Sheffield Hallam University

Research literature supports the claim that both student achievement and the development of graduate employability skills are enhanced by the inclusion within the curriculum of structured processes that develop the ability for self-reflection. Since 2001, the Mathematics programme at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) has incorporated a web-based progress file system. Unlike some other e-PDP approaches, in which student reflection takes place only once or twice per semester, the SHU Maths system requires students to engage with the reflective process on a continuous basis through weekly entries in their progress file for each module, and they receive academic credit for doing so.

Use of the system has spread to other courses – during the academic year 2010-11 the 550 students from nine courses involved made over 30,000 entries, comprising more than 2.6 million words.

Student entries are accessible by staff members able to see all entries by a particular student, all entries for a particular module or simply the latest entries. This helps them gain a course-wide overview of each student’s progress, something that had been lost through modularisation. Students quickly develop a culture of topping up their progress file entries at every opportunity, helping staff get feedback on lectures, for example, within hours of delivery. The system supports early intervention whenever a problem occurs and is more effective and representative than relying on staff-student meetings to gather feedback on the progress of the course.

The progress file system encourages the development of vital employability skills, and has become a hub of staff-student communication, helping create a shared community of learning, and an environment in which each student feels supported.

Evidence that this is successful comes from student feedback, which is very positive:

- The online progress file has been a huge help in making the jump from being in a 6th form to university.
- Looking back made me realise what I needed to do to improve and also build on aspects where I had problems.
- When a teacher send me an email as a reply of what I wrote in the logbook I fell [sic] that our teacher really care about our progress.

Further support is provided by the results of the National Student Survey, questions 19-21 of which address students' personal development. Nationally, for Mathematical Sciences, SHU has been ranked first for this area in each of the years 2007-2009.

Student feedback suggests that these results are principally due to the culture of a supportive shared learning brought about by the electronic progress file system. In the 2010 National Student Survey, Mathematics at SHU was first in the country, receiving a score of 100% for overall satisfaction.

Further evidence for the success of this approach – as part of a coherent employability strategy – comes from graduate employment data. The Guardian University League Table 2011, for example, reports that Mathematics at SHU is equal second in the UK in relation to career prospects.

More information is available at:

<http://maths.shu.ac.uk/MSOR/GraduateSkills/> (Case study 7 in that document) and <http://maths.shu.ac.uk/MoreMathsGrads/> (Case study 4.6 in that document).

For more information contact Jeff Waldock: J.A.Waldock@shu.ac.uk.

There is an existing issue surrounding student articulation of such learning and the integration of PDP approaches can begin to address this. The increasing relevance of online presentation is evident through the rising use of e-portfolios as an articulation tool, and, as demonstrated in the above case study, this approach to technology can have direct and tangible impacts on student engagement and satisfaction. JISC have also developed a range of resources, support and central dissemination to evidence the use of such technology and the ways in which this might be integrated into the learning environment (see: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/eportfolios/effectivepracticeeportfolios.aspx>).

However, the amalgamation of these existing models, tools and resources doesn't address the key concern here; just as the definition of employability varies in its application from institution to institution, the adoption of a central, consistent 'model for employability' embedded within (or even alongside) the curriculum has yet to happen. This raises several questions – how do we

evaluate the success or effectiveness of individualised institutional approaches? Is it sufficient to rely on Key Information Sets (KIS), the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) statistics or student satisfaction recorded through the National Student Survey (NSS) to assess this? How can we begin to disseminate such ‘successes’?

Ultimately, the crux of the quandary lies in the variation, application and consistency regarding the use of models, tools, measurable outcomes and accountability. The emergence of an integrated, embedded model relies on the presence of a sector-wide research commitment to disseminate a core template for the delivery of employability, which can then be tailored and adjusted to meet the needs of each individual HEI; there will remain an issue of value, quality and sustainability until that commitment is met.

5 The curriculum and employability

For employability to be successfully developed through the curriculum it is clear that, as described in Section 2, an important factor is the support provided by the institution. This includes direct support, in the form of staff resource (such as through the establishment of teaching fellow posts), strategic support through corporate policy, and cultural support. With increasing recognition of the importance of employability, frameworks to provide this support are now much more readily available. Furthermore, QAA subject benchmark statements, first published in 2007, all make reference to the expectation that graduates will develop employability skills through their programme of study. This, together with the requirements of professional bodies, has meant that most course curricula are now expected to address student employability, and to evidence this at validation. For these reasons, the curricular climate is now considerably more favourable for the explicit inclusion of activities that develop student employability than in 2006.

5.1 Learning and teaching practice

One consequence of the increased value placed upon the student experience is the desire to develop a shared community of learning focused around a degree programme, encouraging staff and students (at all levels) to work together towards a common objective. This in turn recognises that students are active partners in the educational process, and that there is a need to increase their awareness of the wider purpose of each activity in developing their skills, and the value of doing so. In this regard, it is very important that a learner is able to recognise the part that each activity in which they engage plays in helping them demonstrate the attributes expected of a graduate from their course. If so, they will be better able to see the benefit of the curricular strategies adopted and hence better able to articulate their skill development when required.

It is vital that students recognise what they have been learning. There is quite a lot of evidence that they are often not prepared to translate their experience of 'doing a degree' into the language of achievements valued by employers. When employability-enhancing elements are only tacitly present, students' claims to employability are seriously compromised. If your project fosters achievements valued by employers, does it also ensure that learners know this? (Knight et al. 2003, p5).

This point was emphasised in the previous edition of this publication when arguing the case for cognitive scaffolding and metacognition. To maximise the likelihood of success, academic programmes should therefore foster a culture in which the wider picture in relation to graduate skills is clear at each stage. This has been summarised succinctly as "making the tacit explicit" (Knight et al. 2003), with module learning outcomes making reference to graduate skills, and programme outlines including a mapping grid to illustrate which skills are developed by which modules, highlighting their developmental nature across levels. The HEA guide to student employability profiles (Rees et al. 2007) is a useful resource for practitioners at the subject level and an example of this taking place on an institution-wide scale (since 2006) is the Graduate Development Programme at the University of the West of England (<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/gdp>).

As well as looking forward towards the outcomes of a programme, the importance for a learner of reflecting on past developments, and recognising how far they have come, should not be underestimated. It is easy to undervalue past achievements and current skills, regarding skills yet to be gained as somehow more worthy; however, a clear awareness of skills already gained, together with the ability to clearly articulate and evidence where, and how, they were acquired helps to build self-confidence and provide a solid foundation for future skill development and improved graduate employment prospects. To support this process, personal development planning is therefore a vital element that should be built into the curriculum, and supported by enthusiastic staff, at each level. There are of course many ways in which to implement PDP, each tailored to the individual institution, discipline and student needs. Two selected examples have been provided (see Case studies 7, and 8 below).

Case study 8: Graduate podcasts for employability

Jean McAvoy, Lecturer in Psychology, The Open University

First-year Psychology module; distance, online and face-to-face tuition via a dedicated module website. Delivered to 5,000 students each year by approximately 200 associate lecturers.

Five podcast interviews with OU Psychology graduates have been embedded in the module study schedule as online activities, encouraging self-reflection and providing interactive links to further information and support. These activities are scheduled strategically to make links from the teaching of subject specialisms and generic skills to employment possibilities.

The graduates interviewed talk about how they became interested in psychology, the skills they developed during their studies, how they are using these skills in their careers, and the routes they have taken to their current employment.

The interviewees address the application of subject-specific knowledge, such as behaviour shaping in work with children, discuss the value of the generic skills they developed as part of their OU degree and link examples from the module content to their employment experiences. Attention is also given in the interviews to routes into particular careers, including further training, gaining paid and/or voluntary work experience, and recognising the benefits of transferable skills. Supporting notes provide direct weblinks to information on Psychology qualifications, advice on further study, and careers information.

Students are encouraged to allow up to an hour of study time for each interview, to reflect on their own interests and career aims, and to follow up the embedded links to further information and career planning support.

The podcasts have received positive feedback from students and tutors for the way they cover a range of student circumstances and aspirations. They are an effective way to provide up-to-date guidance to large numbers of students. They address one of the findings of recent OU research, that students require help in translating academic achievement into employability skills. The presentation of real-life examples from graduate perspectives contributes to this in a way that makes sense to students. Further, using directed study time to integrate skill awareness and employability awareness helps develop capacity for recognising transferable skills.

Students may still request one-to-one careers advice, which builds on the material provided in the podcast activities, and can therefore be more efficiently targeted to specific needs rather than repeating generic information.

Moreover, while the podcasts were produced with a particular module in mind, the emphasis on applying transferable subject and generic skills to the workplace means the interviews are valuable across the whole Psychology programme. The podcasts are to be placed on a generic website available to all OU Psychology students as well as to University-wide OU careers advisers.

For more information contact [Jean McAvoy: j.m.mcavoy@open.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.mcavoy@open.ac.uk).

Constructivist (i.e. active or experiential) approaches to learning and teaching are well aligned with this process and develop employability because they encourage exploration, provide feedback and develop reflection, motivation and engagement. Examples include experiments, field trips/ observations, games, model-building, role plays, simulations and surveys. Their benefits have been well documented, as described in the previous edition of this publication, and are often used successfully in conjunction with a range of more traditional styles (UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) 2008; Birmingham City University 2010).

Lecture-based teaching methods are still important in developing theoretical and abstract contextual knowledge. Action learning approaches necessitate a move away from didactic instructional approaches to teaching methods based on facilitation and coaching, involving difficult transitions for both teachers and students who are schooled in the more traditional methods:

The vast majority of studies suggest that active learning by doing is what works in relation to many employability skills, particularly for communication, working with others, time and personal management and problem solving. Learners must also take responsibility and reflect on their own development and progress against agreed objectives and in relation to specific tasks through a form of PDP. Group projects, role plays and simulations are often used to develop team working and communication skills as well as allowing learners to develop their own approaches to solving problems, including through failure.
(UKCES 2008, p131)

This publication is, as before, concerned with pedagogy at module level and an overriding message from a variety of sources is that the concern for developing employability is not in conflict with the desire to provide excellent subject-specific content:

Good learning, teaching and assessment projects will be developing practices that are also likely to help students make good, well-founded claims to employability. (Knight et al. 2003, p3) Successful practice in delivering student employability within the curriculum, as with other areas of learning, entails the use of a wide variety of learning and teaching approaches, including lectures, tutorials, seminars, online delivery, workshops, directed activities, and individual and group projects. In fact “unless students experience such kinds of learning, teaching and assessment approaches, it is hard to see how higher education contributes to the achievements valued by employers”. (Knight et al. 2003, p4)

5.2 Assessment

If institutions are serious about developing graduate attributes or employability (with their implications for interaction between students), then the challenges posed by assessment have to be addressed. A commitment to the development of graduate attributes or employability implies, for many subject disciplines, a preparedness to rethink curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. (Yorke 2010, p10)

It is clear that assessment can be used strategically to motivate and engage students, and carefully chosen assessment tasks can help develop specific employability attributes (see CETL in Assessment for Learning: http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/lteia/cetl_afl/). While the effective development of employability is incentivised by using assessment, there is also a concern that traditional assessment systems might frustrate the development of personal skills (UKCES 2010a).

The Deloitte Employability Initiative (UKCES 2010c) reports that:

The fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are usually assessed by assignment, multiple choice test and oral examination. Research confirmed that these skills are viewed by providers as competency-based and lend themselves to traditional methods of assessment.

The strength of such assessment methods is that they can in themselves be used as tools to actively develop personal employability skills. One approach to using assessment to directly develop student employability is through realistic tasks, relevant to the discipline, such as illustrated in Case study 9 below.

Case study 9: Project 'pitch' assessment

Mark Smith, Lecturer in Physical Geography, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University

147 second-year Geography undergraduates; problem-based delivery, multi-component assessment. Delivered by one member of staff.

Student groups were tasked with competitively 'pitching' for one of five 'real-world' project grants at a staged end-of-module conference. Each group was allocated a five-minute slot in which to make both a video and an oral presentation. Space for an A0 poster was provided at the conference venue and each group also had five sides of the conference handout in which to present specific details of their project. The five grants covered a range of environmental management projects each of which gave student groups a specific role (e.g. 'You work for a private energy company') and a client or awarding body (e.g. Forestry Commission Wales, Local Planning Authority). While these grants would not be awarded through such pitches, the projects were adapted to make the most of this assessment style. A meeting with the local council was instrumental in the design of these projects with two projects actually relating to 'live' applications.

Once each group presented on a particular project, time was allocated for questions at the posters. Students not competing for the same grant were designated 'roles' from which to question the other groups. To develop a sense of competition, a 'popular vote' was taken before the next grant was introduced. All attendees were encouraged to dress formally and act professionally during the conference and to enhance this effect a real conference venue was booked. Two council members attended the conference and formed part of the panel, alongside other lecturers and staff from the careers service.

Questionnaires were returned by 79% of module participants, 87% of whom enjoyed the assessment. Positive feedback emphasised the welcome variation of assessment style and the fact that the module offered something 'different'. 95% stated that they enjoyed the conference. Dressing for the workplace had a remarkable effect on the students who, on the whole, acted professionally and engaged with each project. Many students appreciated that the projects were grounded in the 'real world'. As one student wrote: "Different! Challenging, thought provoking, IT IS AN ALMOST 'REAL' PROJECT..."

Students identified and rated competency in the new skills they had developed, such as team skills, presentation skills, attention to detail, budgeting, time and project management, public speaking and organisation. Since 'self-assessment' is not always reliable, it is relevant to note that the council members were also impressed. They noted students' ability to present under pressure and to use different media effectively while communicating a key message to an audience. They were surprised at the imaginative project ideas put forward and at students' ability to create professional video. One council member noted: "All projects executed with endeavour and imagination. With such enthusiasm the future's bright, the future's green!"

For more information contact Mark Smith: mark.smith@aber.ac.uk.

Formative assessment has a great potential for promoting attitudes required to develop employability that is often unfulfilled (Knight and Yorke 2003), but since more flexible, tutor-driven approaches to assessment are required many practitioners may be less confident about using it (UKCES 2010a). There is scope for curricula to build in a variety of creative forms of assessment, including tests, project work, presentations, reports, posters, group work, portfolios (including e-portfolios), work-based (employer- or institution-based) and work-related learning, peer assessment and self-assessment. Good practice in delivering generic employability skills training requires the provision of a large variety of such experiences and learning strategies (CDELL 2007).

Two principal concerns have been identified with methods of assessing personal employability skills. The first surrounds the lack of rigour and parity with more traditional assessment methods like tests; the second is that awarding organisations and inspectorates have questioned the ability of some providers to employ a suitably wide range of assessment techniques to assess personal employability skills effectively. The training of tutors in assessment literacy is an essential component of achieving systemic change in the delivery of employability skills (UKCES 2010a).

5.3 Work-based and work-related learning

In the Dearing Report (1997) the Government recommended that every student should be given the opportunity to undertake a placement. Despite this, by 2007 only 29% of UK students were undertaking a work placement, compared with the European average of 55%, France at 72% and Germany at 80% (Little 2007). Over more recent years, driven again by the rise in tuition fees, there has been an increasing recognition of the many benefits of authentic work experience, not least in building graduate employability: “A third of graduate vacancies this year will be filled by applicants who have already worked for their new employer as an undergraduate” (High Fliers 2011, p5). The numerous benefits of participation in work placements for students, employers and academic institutions have been clearly described by ASET (2007), and further research reports have continued to reiterate that structured work experience and work-based learning approaches are key tools in developing both initial and continuing employment opportunities for graduates (Mason et al. 2006; Lowden et al. 2011).

The most obvious example of work-based learning (WBL) built into the curriculum is the traditional placement year, delivered as part of a ‘sandwich’ course. QAA have published a Code of practice for work-based and placement learning (QAA 2007), and a ‘good practice’ guide to work placements in HE was published by ASET in 2009 (Wilson 2009). Recent innovations in embedding WBL into the curriculum include the award of academic credit for skill development gained on placement and the involvement of students as academic partners in managing the placement. An example is Case study 10.

Case study I0: Innovative approaches to work-based learning

Cassandra O'Connor, Learning and Teaching Fellow, School of Arts, Media and Education, University of Bolton

Lynne Webster, Senior Teaching Fellow, School of Design, University of Leeds

Up to 70 second-year Fashion/Textiles/Graphic Design undergraduates; delivered by three part-time members of staff.

Students on the Fashion Studies degree at the University of Leeds can undertake elective industrial placements as a credit-bearing part of their award during the second year of the programme. While this practice is firmly embedded in a good deal of curricula in Fashion and Textiles at a national level, the demonstrable, innovatory element is the level of student engagement within the process of identifying, procuring and managing the placement.

The module's learning environment has been significantly enhanced by the support materials that are provided. Technology is used in securing, monitoring, assessing placements and in reflective elements of the module, which has led to innovative approaches within the curriculum and developed the nature of the contributions and engagement of both students and employers.

There is also a strong in-built reflective element, as students are required to review these experiences to help successful progression and development through their final year of study: "It is important therefore that educators address the ways in which programmes of study are able to instil in students an understanding of the realities of working in competitive sectors along with an entrepreneurial mindset that will prepare them for portfolio careers and self employment following graduation" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2006). This process has proved to be extremely valuable as a learning and developmental tool in supporting student success and in recruitment and retention, as many undergraduates actively seek out courses that provide work-based learning, returning to the final year with a more professional and mature approach to their studies.

Access to reflective diaries and overall placement feedback gives an enlightening view of student experiences in the workplace. These demonstrate how students develop an understanding of industry structure, globalisation, commercial practices, time management, personal strengths and weaknesses, career goals and self-awareness (Moreland 2005, p4). The accelerated learning that often ensues during the placement does not end upon the return to University and there is a clear and associated continuation of this positive, experiential learning into the final year of study, where students involve their commercial experiences to inform their creative, working practice and enhanced professional attitudes during their final year.

There is a marked difference between those who have taken a placement and those who have not in relation to maturity and confidence in approaches to study, and in areas such as time keeping, motivation, volume of work produced and engagement with the academic staff. This manifests itself in several ways: there is often a marked improvement in the grade profile and exit velocity; students are more proactively engaged with the award and their learning environment; and they are frequently more proactive in seeking employment prior to completing their degrees (though many are actually offered graduate-level employment with the original placement provider)

For more information contact [Cassandra O'Connor: CO2@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:CO2@bolton.ac.uk) or [Lynne Webster: L.C.Webster@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:L.C.Webster@leeds.ac.uk).

Industrial placements are becoming increasingly popular once again, and many courses now offer these as an optional route, often as part of a four-year integrated Masters award. With tuition fees still being charged for the placement year by most institutions, although often at a reduced rate, there has been a move to include some accredited study during this year, either through distance learning or through block delivery. A number of programmes are introducing career planning modules as part of the taught programme, often to support placement year applications. Engaging students in considering their employability and career development while undertaking work-based learning presents new challenges for students and tutors. An example is provided in Case study 11 of distance learning where students shared different workplace experiences to begin to articulate their learning.

Case study 11: Career Development and Employability at The Open University

Linda Robson, Associate Lecturer, Communication and Systems Department, The Open University

Approximately 120 first-year, distance-learning undergraduates every six months; delivered by five full-time academics and ten associate lecturers.

Part-time distance learning students often find there is a tension between commitment to study and commitment to their workplace. The Career Development and Employability module explicitly asks the students to situate their learning within their workplace and view it as a 'learnspace' (Goodyear 2002) providing the physical and psychological environment in which to develop skills and understanding. These students are active in the workplace so are able to reflect on a day-to-day basis on their role and its impact within the organisation. They are also required to audit their skills, taking into account previous roles and consider development opportunities both for themselves and their organisation.

In addition, students are encouraged to discuss issues with each other, benefiting from reflections related to a variety of different workplaces. They are required to identify similarities and differences between roles in varying sectors, industries and at different organisational levels.

The diversity of the student group provides both an opportunity and challenge. Student communication skills are tested through the requirement to explain their particular situation and role.

Student feedback indicates they find the course useful in reflecting on their experiences and increasing their self-awareness and articulation of their own skills and attributes and how they can be utilised within the workplace. They also consider and construct their personal development plans using a format requiring both identification and justification of tasks.

Presenting students with ready-made meanings is counter-productive to the learning process – it means they don't have to think things through for themselves or engage seriously with the learning opportunity; hence they are not making new neural connections. This leads to a surface rather than deep learning approach – memorising 'facts' for repetition rather than manipulating information to create owned knowledge and understanding.

Instead students keep working and thinking throughout the module. It is a way of getting them to engage with the learning opportunity to help them get the most from the learning process. During this process they obviously think about the gaps in their knowledge and skills. This provides a prompt to think about what they need to know and how they can go about acquiring new skills and knowledge. Contextualising knowledge and skills is important. How is this knowledge useful to me? In what context(s) will I be able to use it?

For more information contact Linda Robson: L.Robson@open.ac.uk.

There are many other forms of WBL, including integrated practice, company projects, residential activities, 'live' projects (Mitchell and Nixon 2008) and mentoring and apprenticeship schemes, all of which offer a variety of opportunities for different disciplines to build accreditation of 'learning from work' into their programmes in an appropriate context. Foundation degrees have a specific employability focus because of the requirement for them to be developed in conjunction with employers, and in the expectation that they will incorporate a substantial proportion of work-based learning (UKCES 2008; Foundation Degree Forward 2006). It should not be assumed, however, that a foundation degree, simply because employer engagement and work experience are built in by design, will therefore be effective in developing student employability. It is still important that such courses give adequate consideration to the curriculum and pedagogy. Some recent initiatives have helped build capacity for the inclusion into the curriculum of enterprise and entrepreneurial skills; for example, the Venture Matrix (VM; see Case study 12), Scottish Institute for Enterprise (2007) and the Institute for Enterprise at Leeds Metropolitan University (<http://www.lmu.ac.uk/enterprise/>).

One additional benefit of initiatives such as these is that they offer the scope for students to work in interdisciplinary teams and to integrate their learning experiences across levels and subjects of study, as part of their programme of study. Although some areas – notably Health and Construction – are able to do this by sharing modules across a broad programme, disciplinary boundaries within institutions often make opportunities to develop these important workplace skills difficult to achieve. The VM, described in Case study 12, is an institutionally managed mechanism for doing so, and one which provides a learning experience that directly and explicitly influences student employability skills and attributes (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009).

Case study 12: Venture Matrix

Charmaine Myers, Project Director, Venture Matrix, Sheffield Hallam University

Approximately 1,100 first-, second- and final-year undergraduates from over 50 modules across many disciplines.

The Sheffield Hallam University Venture Matrix scheme (VM) is an innovative learning and teaching enterprise environment that enables students to develop their employability and enterprise skills and enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities. The VM extends the concept of enterprise education beyond the familiar tools of ghost companies and virtual business simulations by enabling students to form their own businesses, social enterprises and other ventures and to trade with each other in person in a safe environment.

Within the VM students are given the chance to tackle real-life challenges while gaining new skills for their future employment. They are able to set up their own venture or social enterprise and trade with each other across disciplines and study levels, simulating the real world.

The VM is a unique scheme that is open not only to students and University staff, but also to organisations and businesses in the local region. Businesses can get involved and gain access to students to work on real-life projects, often with tangible results.

At this difficult economic time, when graduates are experiencing high unemployment, the VM is providing hands on employability skills experience and development. This is further supported by a process whereby our staff along with business/organisation partners help the students reflect on their experience and conceptualise it. In turn, this aids the students to articulate their experiences when they have placement/graduate job interviews. Skills are embedded into course provision through experiential learning, putting discipline theory into practice.

During the 2010-11 academic year over 1,100 students have formed Venture groups and undertook some 60 projects with local businesses/organisations. These have included planning and running a fundraising fashion show for the local hospice, producing and broadcasting a live radio show with BBC Radio Sheffield and working with a well-established local SME to design an animated viral advert. Groups have also traded with each other creating symbiotic learning, providing, for example, an IT service desk to Nursing students. The Nursing students gained IT skills, where the IT students were given feedback on their communication skills.

A sample of VM students were asked to rate their competency in 13 employability skill areas both before and after undertaking their projects. All reported that they perceived they had enhanced their skills in each area.

The Venture Matrix and the team that support it have become an essential part of the course culture. Their success is real and measurable, making a significant contribution to student progression, achievement, experience and ultimately employability. (Staff feedback)

Being involved in the Venture Matrix has given me real life examples to talk about in interviews. I got a graduate job with Teach First recently and used examples of the work I did in the Venture Matrix for my application form and interview. The interviewers were really impressed and said it made my application stand out from the crowd, which is what you need in a busy job market. The Venture Matrix is a brilliant opportunity. (Student feedback)

For more information contact Charmaine Myers: c.e.myers@shu.ac.uk.

A further example of how enterprise and work experience have been integrated into a particular programme, in this case Design, is presented in Case study 13. One important reason for its success, once again, is through the direct relevance of the scheme to the likely career path of graduates from the programme.

Case study 13: Enterprise in Illustration

Jo Davies, Associate Professor in Illustration, School of Art and Media, Plymouth University

Up to 50 final-year undergraduates in Design; one lead tutor, supported by visiting lecturers.

Students entering stage 3 of the program begin an enterprise module, which runs parallel to, and informs, practical and theoretical dimensions of the course. Its aim is to equip them to operate confidently as professionals within their chosen area of art and design activity. By establishing their strengths and weaknesses and plotting them against their ambitions and objectively working in teams within role-play situations, students establish objectives for their final year. They make contact with their competition in the workplace (other successful professionals) and potential employers to gather information that will inform their exit into the precarious field of freelance practice.

All students must demonstrate during their final year that they are able to work within the arena that they have identified. Opportunities for work experience are increasingly competitive and are as ever limited for Illustration students so they have to create their own exhibitions, approach potential clients, enter competitions, make websites and other promotional materials, and prepare a professional-level portfolio to alert clients and potential employers to their presence.

This independent, year-long research and practice is complemented by visits from professionals from the field and ex-students, careers talks that address generic skills and knowledge such as networking, CV design, business and ethics, and lectures around business law, and fees and copyright.

Students document and critically reflect upon the experience through a written and illustrated report that serves as a resource for them and for future students on the course.

Over the years that this module has been running we have been able to catalogue high degrees of success on many levels. Firstly, by making contact with successful practitioners students have received first hand current information from professionals working at the top of their field; information that has been realistic, inspiring and useful, provided by people they respect and admire.

Research and engaging with employers forces students to make practical studio decisions throughout the year that reflect understanding gained from those they seek to work for. They leave university armed with a tested list of contacts and a clear sense of their position within in the workforce. They have the chance to test and challenge their understanding of commercial protocol and take firm hold of their own learning, directing themselves and seeking information and support outside of the academic environment.

Students have met with tremendous professional successes. Working individually and with the support of their peers and tutors, they have bridged the gap between university and commercial work. Most have worked for major clients and had success in competitions, exhibitions and external projects. Through their work experience ALL students have made the transition to operating professionally during their final year of study. This bolsters confidence for the individual, brings recognition to the programme and permeates a sense of enterprise through to other stages of the course.

For more information contact Professor Jo Davies: jdavies@plymouth.ac.uk.

5.4 Barriers, challenges and staff engagement

A major barrier to focusing on pedagogy at all and employability development in particular, as discussed in Section 2, is the culture that exists in many institutions of rewarding research activity rather than teaching and other scholarly activity (UKCES 2008; Lowden et al. 2011). This has an impact on attempts to raise the quality of teaching provision and to refocus aspects of provision on employability and the innovative (and time-consuming) teaching approaches that this implies. The problem is compounded in three ways.

The first is that some academics are opposed to what they would consider an overemphasis on the utilitarian mission of HE, and do not believe that employability development should form a taught and assessed part of a degree programme. The concerns of such staff may be addressed by pointing out that learning, teaching and assessment approaches designed to develop high level subject-based skills will also help develop key employability skills – one does not preclude the

other. In such cases, it may simply require a change in emphasis and realignment of task objectives to make the skill development explicit. Professional jobs (graduate-level jobs in particular) require the application of metacognition in various ways, and hence a strong case can be made that the teaching approach adopted should foster it (Yorke 2010).

The second is the concern that traditional course content should not be lost – a particular concern for programmes that must deliver specified material to retain professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation. This leads to the practical difficulty of finding space for employability enhancement in a crowded curriculum. This problem can be addressed – at least in part – through different approaches toward learning, teaching and assessment that allow skills development to take place alongside the development of discipline-specific skills, and by encouraging students to take part in extra-curricular activities. Alignment between graduate attributes and traditional university values is possible (Yorke 2010): “Embedding generic skills in the curriculum alongside discipline-specific knowledge is a challenge, but one that has the potential to considerably improve the employability of graduates” (UKCES 2008, p66).

The third is that when asked about the employability content of their course, many academics will point out that they’ve ‘been doing it for years’. If the students on these programmes are not equally clear about where, how and why they are developing graduate attributes, however, some clarity and re-emphasis is needed.

Most importantly, it is vital to emphasise the need to integrate employability development into the development of skills in the core discipline. Course planning teams might view extra-curricular sessions focusing on employability or graduate attributes as a quick and easy approach to meeting university requirements in this area, but such approaches are rarely successful. There are risks inherent in separating out graduate attributes from disciplinary knowledge:

To artificially separate what are referred to as generic skills ... from discipline knowledge ignores the more integrated understanding universities have developed as graduate attributes and undermines the adoption of innovative teaching approaches designed to foster these graduate attributes.

Australian universities have moved beyond understanding the outcomes of a university education as ‘discipline content + generic skills’. Indeed the dominant model of graduate attributes (as statements of the core outcomes of a university education) are that these are contextualised by the disciplines. (Barrie 2009, p2)

5.5 Pedagogical skills

Even when employability skills development has been successfully built into the curriculum, and suitable learning, teaching and assessment vehicles identified, success by any measure is still dependent on the effectiveness of the teaching practice. Teaching ‘employability’ well requires some distinctive skills and attributes, including an understanding of how people learn to develop such skills and the ability to contextualise employability-related teaching within vocational programmes. We cannot assume that all practitioners have these skills and attributes (Lawton 2010).

The fact that the context is so important in the pedagogical approach to delivery has meant that generic guidance on successful methods is rare. However, one example is a guide based on Tuckman's model of team development presented by Riebe et al. (2010).

5.6 Teaching time and space

An example could be scheduling part of a module in lecture, online and seminar/tutorial slots but then allowing other parts of the module to be booked out as block time to undertake structured games or even placement activities. This might involve resolving timetabling conflicts with other modules, varying lecturer working hours, for instance where placements were evening or weekend based, or the use of different rooms and delivery methods.

5.7 Evidence-based pedagogy

Despite the various models of employability development that have been proposed, as described in Section 4, evidence to support any claims of success that particular pedagogic approaches may have had is hard to obtain. This is principally because of the difficulty in identifying something that can be measured to establish an 'index' of employability. The principal mechanism used currently is the measure of graduate employment (as distinct from employability) represented by the DLHE survey of new graduates. This provides an indication of the employment status of graduates six months after finishing their course, but gives quite a skewed picture. Graduates of vocational programmes such as Medicine, Nursing and Teaching, for example, are much more likely to be employed in a graduate-level job than a graduate of Performance or Creative Arts, who might expect to have to build their portfolio over several years before being in a position to report their status as 'in graduate-level employment' (or, more likely, self-employment). Gibbs points out that:

There is a lack of evidence about the long-term consequences for graduate employment of either narrowly focused vocational education or education that emphasises efficiency in generic 'employability skills', rather than emphasising the higher order intellectual capabilities involved in adaptable expertise. This makes relying on HESA's very short-term employment data a risky thing to do. (Gibbs 2010, p42)

Similarly Lowden et al. (2011) report:

Much of the HEIs' evidence for the longer-term impact of their employability programmes and measures was anecdotal rather than based on systematic evaluative research.

Because employability development is multi-factorial and context dependent, and may in many cases be long-term, any attempt made to evaluate a particular pedagogical approach will be limited, for example by the nature, volume and relevance of the evidence. A common approach is therefore to ask students to self-assess their skills after trialling one or other pedagogical tactic. Such feedback is useful and should not be simply discounted; however, it can result in findings that are either trivial or fail to demonstrate whether or not students have actually become more employable (UKCES 2008).

A large-scale example of self-assessment is the NSS, in which final-year undergraduates are asked to judge their university experience in a number of areas. One section (questions 19-21) deals with personal development. An analysis of NSS responses over several years for these questions, averaged over all institutions, has been carried out and summarised by discipline. A surprising result for one subject area (Mathematics) is that although it consistently receives some of the lowest average scores in this section, it also receives some of the highest for ‘overall satisfaction’ (Waldock 2011). For this discipline at least, one conclusion that could be drawn is that in general, students still do not regard personal development as an important part of the curriculum.

The ability to research appropriate job opportunities, make a successful job application and succeed at interview requires technical skills – often referred to as career management skills (CMS) – that many universities recognise can lead to rapid improvements in graduate employment rates. Strategies to provide CMS for students are increasingly being built into undergraduate programmes, but in few cases does this form part of the curriculum, attracting academic credit.

One curricular intervention that has long been recognised as having a direct influence on graduate prospects is work experience. Research studies carried out into the longer-term impact of work placements suggest that these are “key to employability” (Hall *et al.* 2009; Mason *et al.* 2006; High Fliers 2011). In addition, Mendez and Rona (2009) present evidence for a link between work placements and academic achievement.

Most studies reporting successful pedagogical strategies for developing employability claim that experiential action learning methods combined with direct work experience are the most effective. Although the evidence presented to support this is subjective, there is a remarkable consistency across disciplines and contexts in recommending experiential and action learning strategies. This evidence suggests that action learning approaches are strengthened by reflection and evaluation by all participants, and by integration with more traditional didactic approaches (UKCES 2008). Crucially, the context in which particular skills are demonstrated is essential to learning and embedding them, and educators should carefully consider the context-related implications of the skills that they aim to promote (UKCES 2008).

6 Concluding thoughts

Ideally, as we identified in Section 2, a pedagogy for employability should inform the entire curriculum, with each programme of study designed to ensure that the learning, teaching and assessment activities with which students engage will help enable and develop the creative, confident, articulate graduate that Harvey (2003) identified. It is also important that this is made explicit to all participants, perhaps by identifying an employability ‘pathway’ or establishing a graduate development programme with recognition through an employability award.

Achievement of this ideal requires action in three principal areas:

1. Learning, teaching and assessment

Evidence suggests that successful pedagogical approaches include experiential learning – an emphasis on exploration, learning by doing and reflection in authentic contexts – ideally mixed with rather than simply replacing existing approaches.

Existing assessment methodologies should, where necessary, be challenged and new approaches explored that reward successful practice in developing employability, giving them parity of esteem with technical skills and academic knowledge.

2. Work experience

There is strong evidence to indicate that authentic work experience contextualises learning, has a strong influence on graduate employment and should be integrated into course curricula wherever possible. In order to maximise learning for employability and the academic subject it is important that this should be a pedagogically supported experience, which includes reflection and articulation of the learning achieved. Where this is difficult or impractical, it may be possible to embed examples of work-related learning or simulated work experience.

3. Build an institutional culture that promotes employability

A principal challenge for institutions is to create an environment in which learning providers put employability enhancement at the heart of what they do.

Teaching employability may require that organisational practices and structures such as timetabling and resourcing are amended to fit different pedagogical approaches.

Courses should make employability explicit through validation processes and through module learning outcomes.

It is easy to see why institutions are keen to invest heavily in some areas of employability skills development, such as career management skills, that can lead to substantial short-term gains in graduate employment rates. It is also important to emphasise, however, that some other very valuable graduate attributes such as communication and team-working skills take time to develop but are equally in need of investment (Yorke 2010).

In updating this issue of Pedagogy for employability we have identified a shift of emphasis in the way in which people are thinking about the HE experience – and located a substantial body of work and discussion about the issue of student employability and a range of research. This work seems to have some key areas of focus:

- the development of explicit connection between study and the workplace (part-time students, work-based learning, placements, students working while studying, the influence of employers on course design, the emphasis on readiness for work at completion of study, a focus on entrepreneurship in some sectors such as creative arts and business, and knowledge transfer in science and technology);
- the issue of student autonomy and the shared contribution to the student experience of higher education, and its concomitant responsibility for learning (HEAR, student articulation of skills, enterprise projects, course representation, and university charters);
- the lack of evaluation of initiatives and approaches to teaching and learning employability skills.

If we are to take student employability seriously we believe that there is a need for a coherent research approach that necessarily takes a longer-term (longitudinal) assessment of the way that different approaches may or may not suit different types of students and sectors of the economy/ disciplines within HE.

We believe it is vital, in an increasingly competitive labour market, that students graduate with all the qualities necessary to gain and retain fulfilling employment. To achieve this, course curricula must develop learning, teaching and assessment practice to encourage employability development to take place alongside developments in subject specialisms, and do so explicitly so all stakeholders recognise where, how and why this is happening.

7 The authors and acknowledgements



Back row left-right Ruth Lawton, Jeff Waldock. Front row left-right Sonia Hendy-Isaac, Ann Pegg.

Ann Pegg, [The Open University](#)

I have been working at The Open University for three years researching policy and practice in employability across the UK nations and undertaking large-scale institutional research into student views and teaching and learning practice. My main interests are in the development of policy and I have been an active member of the Employability Developers group.

Jeff Waldock, [Sheffield Hallam University](#)

I am a lecturer in Mathematics, with 25 years' experience, and a Teaching Fellow in Employability in the Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Science at Sheffield Hallam University. I am particularly interested in developing the HE Mathematics curriculum to explicitly embed the development of employability, and have been co-ordinating a national project collecting, analysing and publishing case studies of successful practice.

Sonia Hendy-Isaac, [Birmingham City University](#)

I am the academic lead for Birmingham City University's new Employer Engagement Team; my role is to develop and innovate curriculum design through collaborative partnerships, both internally and externally, to deepen, broaden and embed our employability strategy. My research interests lie in teaching pedagogy relating to personal development planning (PDP), reflective practice and work-based/-related learning.

Ruth Lawton, [Birmingham City University](#)

I am University Learning and Teaching Fellow for Employability supporting individual academic staff and course teams as they embed employability. I was a member of the team for the 'Creating future-proof graduates' NTFS project. My interests are in the practical application of employability – equipping students to be successful in their life and career. I was the convener of the Employability Developers group and continue to both support its growth and benefit personally from its support and community.

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Contact us

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York
YO10 5BR
+44 (0)1904 717500
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk

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