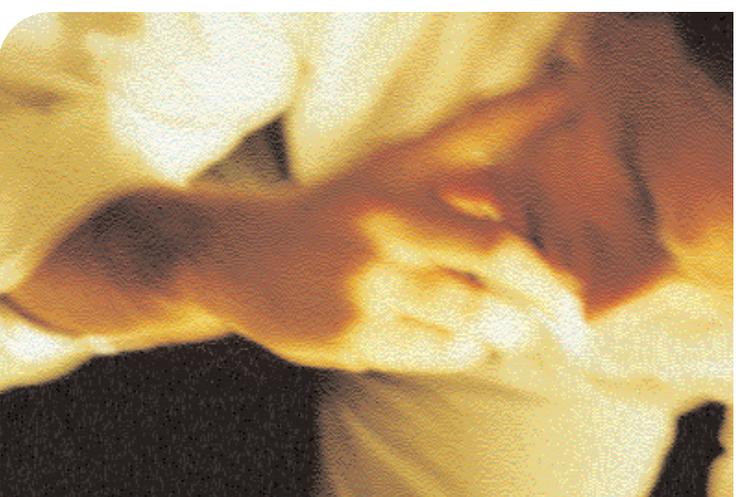


# Briefings on Employability 5

Helping departments  
to develop  
employability

Lee Harvey Sheffield Hallam University  
Peter Knight Open University



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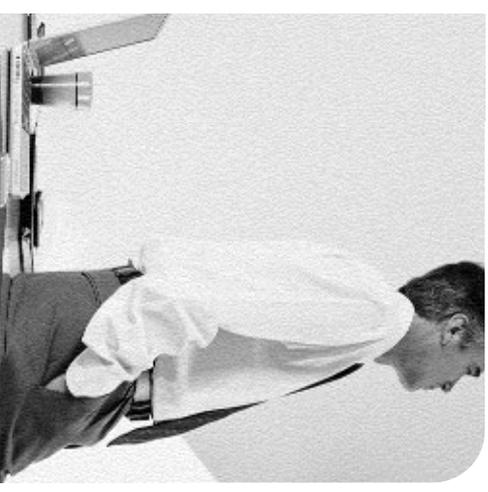
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# Briefings on Employability 5

## Helping departments to develop employability

Lee Harvey Sheffield Hallam University  
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### The purposes of this briefing

This is one of a series of briefings produced by HEFCE's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) and the UTSN Generic Centre. Their website ([www.itsn.ac.uk/ESECT](http://www.itsn.ac.uk/ESECT)) has an employability area which is rapidly becoming populated with resources – for example, on assessment, employability and the first year, personal development plans, curriculum design, and work placements.

This paper concentrates on the implications for heads of department, regardless of their subject area, of government policies to enhance higher education's contribution to student employability.

There are two other briefings that are closely related to this one and you might wish to look at them as well:

- A briefing for pro-vice-chancellors.
- A briefing on the contribution of learning, teaching, assessment and other curriculum projects to student employability.

The briefing for projects is a succinct set of suggestions about ways in which innovative projects can contribute to the development of student employability without compromising their original aims and without much extra effort. The underlying reasoning – that well-conceived work on teaching, learning and assessment almost invariably makes a contribution to student employability – can also be applied to departmental practices, which makes this set of notes a useful point of reference for heads of department as well as for project team leaders.

The pro-vice-chancellors' briefing has a great deal to say about strategic issues and change management. The suggestions are relevant to heads of department as well, although its attention is on institutional, rather than departmental, issues. In addition, UTSN subject centres are running a variety of assessment projects and many working with the Generic Centre and ESECT, are producing subject-specific briefings for departments. Those briefings will take account of distinctive features of subjects in ways that this paper does not. Here the intention is to sketch what the new emphasis on employability might mean for heads of department in general.

## What is the issue?

Employability is an issue that has gained a great deal of prominence in the last few years, partly because of evident government concern but also because employers have been more vocal about the complexities of graduate recruitment.

However, concerns about graduate employability are neither new nor confined to the UK. There have been debates about the nature of graduate skills since the 1980s, which were accentuated with the rapid increase in graduate numbers in the early 1990s. In addition, there have been various employability-related initiatives, such as Enterprise in Higher Education and Higher Education for Capability culminating in the Dearing Report of 1997 which made considerable play on the need for key skills, work-based learning opportunities and more collaboration between higher education and employers.

The issue is that the UK and other countries in the EU need a well-educated workforce to take forward the knowledge economy in an era of globalisation. The European Commission (EC 2001, 2003), for example, is clear that if we want to be able to compete we need a well-educated workforce. No longer are industries with large unskilled workforces going to provide areas of growth for Western Europe. UK government thinking runs on similar lines. Although this is often understood as a policy for economic success, the European Commission sees it as a policy that will establish a 'knowledge society' as well, creating well-educated citizens and enhancing social and cultural development. There is some research evidence that the sorts of achievements, attributes or assets that make for career success are of the same order as those that make for life success as well (Sternberg and colleagues, 2000).

To ensure success, it is argued that the future workforce needs to be flexible and innovative, empowered and enabled rather than managed and controlled. This requires a population that can take initiative, is able to reflect, analyse and critique as well as relate to other people, operate in teams and communicate effectively.

In short, the issue for our students is to enhance them in as many ways as we can so that they have the best possibility of developing the kinds of career they want. In the process, we would expect to have an effect that will also contribute to quality of life as well.

However, some academics have said that this is not their problem, that higher education isn't a place to train graduates for jobs and that it's up to employers to sort out recruitment. Indeed, employability has often been seen as a threat to higher education's values. In this briefing it will be suggested that, vocational subjects apart, the mission of higher education in the UK is not primarily one of training students for employment. That said, it can contribute powerfully to employability because the things employers generally value in new graduates are things that most teachers in higher education also value. If we think of employability in general terms, so far from there being a conflict between what employers and academics value, there is considerable congruence. Understood like that, in higher education employability is everybody's natural and normal business.

## Isn't my main new concern widening participation? And what's the connection to employability?

The UK government is committed to continuing to widen participation in higher education. Without doubt, in the short-term at least, widening participation is a major concern of universities. However, as a departmental head you will know that widening participation means more than just getting students into higher education: it also includes supporting them through higher education and out into the world of work. This includes retention issues, student support and helping all students, including non-traditional entrants, to maximise their career potential. This analysis of widening participation is developed by Professor Layer in a paper in the Learning and Employability series (Layer, 2003, available at [www.tlcn.ac.uk/ESECT/](http://www.tlcn.ac.uk/ESECT/)).

**Widening participation is an important approach to promoting social justice through enhancing the diversity of people succeeding in higher education. For this and other reasons, higher education institutions, modes of study, and the graduate labour market are all becoming more diverse, as are student backgrounds. These are all interconnected and institutional responses to developing employability pull the different elements together (Figure 1).**

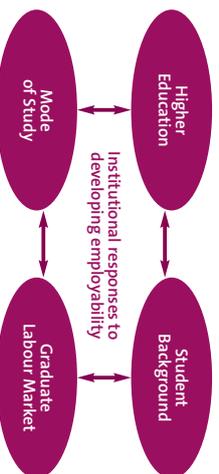


Figure 1: Diversity and employability

## What is employability?

There are two broad approaches to defining employability: job getting; individual attribute development

### Employability as job getting

The first relates to the ability of a graduate to get a job. These definitions include varying levels of qualification about the nature and timing of the job and the ability to retain and succeed in the job. In this sense employability is defined on a range that varies from:

- The ability to secure a job after graduation through...
- The ability to secure a graduate (or appropriate) job within a specified time after graduation
- The ability to secure a graduate (or appropriate) job within a specified time after graduation and to develop and succeed within the chosen career.

These job-getting definitions of employability are somewhat limited as they do not really provide any help to academics about what it is that graduates might exhibit that would help them in securing work. At worst, they suggest that a university or college's contribution to student employability is fairly represented by the graduate employment rate of institutions.

Hitherto, in England that has meant the statistics derived from the first destination survey. While the employment rate may be important, it is not the primary concern of employability, which is about developing and articulating abilities. Employability – having the attributes to succeed in employment – is significantly different from actually getting employment, which is affected by a range of extraneous factors.

### Employability as developing attributes for graduate employment

The second broad approach to defining employability refers to the attributes that a graduate has developed that will assist in getting, retaining and developing within a job. There is a large array of such definitions and the following is indicative:

- Developing a range of attributes employers want.
- Developing a range of attributes necessary for career progression.
- Exhibiting a range of attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organisation.
- Developing a range of attributes to become a critical lifelong learner.

These definitions place more emphasis on student development and achievement and the ones towards the end of the list focus more on the learning for life that is also valued by employers, rather than on satisfying specific employer needs. This is the line favoured by ESECT and the Generic Centre and which underpins their description of employability as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.'

The next section goes into some detail about these attributes and it will be evident that this second broad approach to employability is more likely to engage academics than the first. A paper by Harvey (2003), *Transitions from higher education to work*, provides a great deal of information about ways of promoting them, as does another by Yorke and Knight (2003).



## So what are the attributes graduates should have?

No single word neatly summarises the things employers value in new graduates. Perhaps the idea of ‘assets’ comes closest, but it carries unwelcome connotations. Other ESSET papers talk of ‘achievements’, although not everyone is happy with the idea that self-confidence and motivation, for example, are achievements. ‘Attributes’ is the term used here but it doesn’t really capture the idea that graduates have had to work hard to develop some of the attributes. Regardless of whichever of these three terms is preferred, the idea that ‘employability = skills’ is firmly rejected. The language of skills tends to:

- Focus on a (limited) list of employer-determined skills.
- Imply a competency or ‘tick-box’ approach.
- Suggest training for a job or profession rather than education for life.
- Underplay traditional academic abilities: critique, synthesis and analysis.
- Rest on some dubious psychological and philosophical assumptions.

It is important to see attribute development as a process of learning and to insist that attributes are not collected like stamps. A student may have done ‘team working’ but that does not make the student a team worker. As with any other attribute, such as synthesis, a student can be more – or less – effective as a team worker and continuing development is both desirable and likely. Box 1 sketches some of the attributes that researchers have found that employers want in new graduate employees.

### Typical findings from research into employers’ ‘wish lists’

Lee Harvey *et al.* (1997) found that employers want graduates with knowledge, intellect, willingness to learn, self-management skills, adaptability, communication skills, team-working and interpersonal skills.

Research reported by Mantz Yorke (1998) found that small enterprises especially valued skill at oral communication, handling one’s own workload, team working, managing others, getting to the heart of problems, critical analysis, summarising, and group problem-solving. Valued attributes included being able to work under pressure, commitment, working varied hours, dependability, imagination/creativity, getting on with people, and willingness to learn.

John Brennan and colleagues (2001) highlighted the significance of initiative, working independently, working under pressure, oral communication skills, accuracy, attention to detail, time management, adaptability, working in a team, taking responsibility and decisions, planning co-ordinating and organising.

Some lists identify as many as sixty to eighty attributes. These attributes have also been grouped under various pseudo-taxonomies. Nonetheless, there is a core set of attributes that have recurred over the last twenty years. One relatively simple way of framing attributes is to identify personal and interactive attributes. (Other ESSET briefings use a different but complementary arrangement of the research evidence on what employers want – for example Lester, 2003.)

Personal attributes include:

- ‘Higher-level’ academic attributes of analysis, critique, synthesis, lateral thinking – often subsumed by employers under ‘intelligence’ or ‘creative problem-solving’.
- Knowledge of the subject or related profession. Often, though, this is not seen as particularly important in its own right by employers – rather they see it as a vehicle for the development of other attributes. In some areas, such as medicine and engineering, subject knowledge is regarded as important but the key is the understanding of core principles rather than specific knowledge. Given, the fragmentation of disciplines, the vast amount of knowledge and information in every field and the rapid rate of change, knowing how to find out things is more important than knowing things.
- Self-skills, such as self-confidence, self-reliance, self-management; aspects of the individual that equip them to compete in and be successful in their chosen career – this is about ensuring graduates are able to cope and are not intimidated.
- Flexibility and adaptability are important as the world of work is constantly changing. There are fewer ‘jobs for life’ and even those keep changing. Being able to respond to change is essential and being able to anticipate change is even more useful.
- Initiative and risk-taking – knowing when to show initiative and take risks and when to play safe – is also useful.

Interactive attributes, which are usually linked together as the basis of effective working in any environment, include:

- Interpersonal skills: These are to do with getting along with other people. They include tact, diplomacy, being aware of other people’s status and concerns, through to conviviality and humour.
- Team working is the main way in which people operate in the work setting. Even self-employed graduates in their own small businesses are not immune from working on team-based projects. Team working is about the ability to take appropriate roles in different team situations, to be able to develop and progress a project through discussion and negotiation and to allocate and take responsibility for parts of the project, ensuring that the whole is coherent and completed to schedule and specification.
- Written and oral communication skills are highly valued. The former includes the use of information technology and encompasses everything from the ability to produce learned pieces such as academic articles and theses, through to complex reports, bullet-pointed briefings, newspaper articles, press releases, letters, emails and websites. Written communication skills include being able to write grammatically, and punctuate and spell correctly. Oral communication ranges from formal conference presentations, through short presentations to peers and making points in meetings, to informal communication with colleagues and the ability to ‘network’. Networking ranges from making links with people through events such as meetings, conferences, seminars – using the informal time to make and reinforce links with people – to using electronic communication to identify people with similar interests.



## What role do academics have in helping students acquire these attributes?

A first reaction might be that academics cannot be expected to be involved in developing this large array of attributes. Many of them are, in any case, closely linked to the personality of the student. If someone is not particularly convivial or has no apparent sense of humour, then it is surely not the role of academics to attempt to change this.

A response is that providing employability-development opportunities is not about attempting to change the personality of students, nor is it, indeed, about attempting to make micro-level changes in individual attitudes and actions: it is, though, about making students aware of the world of work and helping them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and what they might do to enhance their attributes.

Higher education teachers do much more than this though. As academics, we are good at helping students become analytic, solve problems, record observations, synthesise information, construct coherent arguments and communicate them in written form (through essays, for example), think creatively and critique texts: increasingly, we get students to work in groups and encourage them to do oral presentations. Many of us, though, are not so confident about teaching team-working or oral presentational skills, and would not consider it our role – or even possible – to teach flexibility, risk-taking, self-management and interpersonal skills. Yet, well-designed courses and programmes do expect students to be able to work in groups, to communicate in seminars or oral examinations, to be flexible and cope with several modules simultaneously: to work on different pieces of coursework at the same time, manage their time and resources, take risks in assessed work, think imaginatively and to be able to get on with their peers, both in and outside the university, and with staff. If individual teachers are uncertain about their ability to help students with difficulties in these areas, programme and course teams are likely to have expertise and – in mature courses and programmes – resources, routines and ‘tools’ that have been developed to support students and teachers alike.

## Do academics have any role in developing students’ self-promotional or job-getting skills?

It might seem that self-promotion or preparing students with specific skills to help them get jobs is not really the province of academic subject specialists. This seems like a job for careers and marketing specialists who have a better, and more up-to-date, knowledge of employer recruitment processes, portfolio working and business start-ups.

In many respects this is the case. Most institutions have specialist support of this sort and students are well advised to use those resources. There are likely to be workshops run by careers services on such things as *curriculum vitae* writing, labour market intelligence, recruitment practices and assessment centres. There may even be modules available on aspects of transitions to work, which may be generic or integrated into programmes of study (see Harvey 2003 for a summary of this sort of provision). Personal development planning, which is a good basis for integrating these self-promotional and job-getting skills into the curriculum, should be well-developed from late 2005 onwards – if they are not already. Yet students often seek advice from their home department, so it is worth making sure that the department does know the types of things that are available to students and that some – clearly identified – staff are briefed to advise students on events, modules and other specialist careers information, advice and guidance.

However, careers services tend to be limited in what they can achieve with the number of students they have to deal with and, in any case, the direct transition into work cannot be entirely divorced from the subject area of study. In the art and design field, for example, graduates often have to mix part-time working with self-employment, are required to promote themselves to get commissions, and need to understand the tax system, sources of grant income and so on. Careers services can offer some advice and guidance but the biggest impact on the self-confidence to self-promote will be the feedback and guidance students get from tutors, who need to be aware of the state of the market: if the department is not sufficiently up-to-date on sources of funding, or on taxation and self-employment regulations, it is worth arranging a specialist discipline-specific session, set of workshops, or module for students. The same would be the case in other disciplines. For example, the Faculty Health and Community Care at the University of Central England in Birmingham has a ‘Transitions to Work’ module that *inter alia* addresses the politics of working in the health system. Besides, in many areas, academics have direct links with the world of work through applied research or consultancy. Some areas have a lot of part-time or sessional teachers who are practising professionals. This is a resource that can be used to enhance the curriculum in various ways, not least by bringing real-life problems to the teaching and learning situation.

So, although developing students’ self-promotional or job-getting skills is not the primary role of academics, it is not something that can be entirely sidestepped. Indeed, to make this as useful as possible for students, it helps if aspects of this are brought into the curriculum through collaborative work with other professionals in student services such as the careers department. Students benefit from a holistic approach that makes a fairly smooth link between career development planning and the academic subject.

## I can see that reflection and articulation are important but what should I expect my staff to do about this?

This is about students being able to assess themselves and identify, in explicit ways, their strengths, weaknesses and areas for further development. A Generic Centre paper (Moon, 2003) goes into some detail about reflection and employability so only highlights are covered here.

Personal development planning (PDP) will provide a framework to enable and encourage students to be reflective and to articulate their attributes. It is likely, in many institutions, that this will be an institution-wide, online facility. However, that doesn’t mean that academics should not be involved at the departmental level. On the contrary, students will need supporting through this process and aspects of PDP might be linked to the curriculum or used as a vehicle for assessed work. As for reflection generally, all staff can be involved in various ways. At the end of a module, students could be asked to reflect on what they have learned and what attributes the module has contributed to developing. In some instances, lecturers encourage students to do this at the end of every taught session. In some modules this may be augmented by asking students to keep a reflective log.

Where students are involved in work experience that is embedded in the programme of study, such as short periods of work experience, work shadowing, or longer external placements, then ensure that there is an adequate process of debriefing. Again, this is helped if students keep a log or diary that reflects on what they have learned from their experiences. It also helps if, from the outset, there is a close relationship between student, employer and tutor resulting in a clear programme of work and explicit expectations and outcomes. This enables evaluation of learning against these initial targets.

## Should I actively encourage the development of employability?

The short answer to this is 'Yes', although none of what follows will work if you, as head of department, are not convinced.

It is important to persuade staff to be involved and to enable their involvement. Directives, however well-intentioned, are likely to result in a veneer of compliance at best and implacable resistance at worst. The general advice is to encourage positive thinking, which doesn't mean staff becoming converts, disciples or 'born-again' employability purists. It does mean showing how a concern for employability can not only be reconciled with good curriculum practices but can actually enhance them. In departments with good programmes and learning and teaching arrangements, taking employability seriously doesn't mean staff having to make huge changes or completely restructure programmes. It usually involves thinking creatively within existing frameworks: making small changes to content, delivery or assessment. York and Knight (2003) drew on the Skills *plus* project to describe a 'tuning' approach to enhancing the contribution good programmes make to student employability.

**Bearing in mind that many of the attributes employers value come from the whole undergraduate experience rather than from any one module, it is better to move this process ahead on a team basis rather than have individuals 'exposed'.**

Although one often needs pioneers and champions, it is important to establish innovation as an expectation across the department. There is also a more pragmatic reason to encourage teamworking. It is well known that if one member of a teaching team 'goes out on a limb' students will often react adversely. On the other hand, if a programme has a distinct learning culture with clear, regularly experienced expectations, then students will generally take it up. The issue here is managing student expectation and that is best treated as a programme, not as a module, issue.

### Key elements are:

- Persuading colleagues that employability is not toxic to academic values: this involves going over the ground covered in the 'what is employability section?' above.
- Treating programme leaders as the key people in this work.
- Moving step-wise over a few years, so that some changes are made one year, consolidated in a second and extended in a third.
- Providing aids, such as curriculum auditing devices, to help programme teams identify what they are already doing and what could be done more decisively.
- Negotiating some changes to the emphases of existing modules in order to strengthen the coherence and coverage of the programme.
- Highlighting the programme's contributions to employability and making sure that students and teachers are regularly reminded of those highlights.
- Exploiting the potential of the PDP systems that universities, colleges and departments will soon need to have in place.

Another good mechanism for getting a team approach off the ground is to use the periodic programme review and validation mechanism. Use the review cycle to encourage and enable change and the embedding of employability. The cycle has the additional advantage of allowing an overview across a programme, which permits an analysis of the balance of emphasis on different attributes. Preferably, ensure that students have a variety of experiences and develop an array of attributes.

## What employability-development opportunities should we offer?

There are many ways of reducing the lists that come from asking employers what they look for in new graduate recruits (see Box, on page 6), just as there are various ways of describing the things they value: as skills, achievements, assets or attributes. The approach used here is compatible with that in other ESFECT writing (in York and Knight, 2003, for example) but different from it. The advantage of summarising employability attributes in this way is that it, taken with the account in York and Knight (2003), shows that it is reasonable to re-arrange the data to suit the culture of the institution.

### Four inter-related areas that students need to develop are:

1. Employability attribute development;
2. Self-promotional or job-getting skills;
3. Willingness to learn and continue learning;
4. Reflection and articulation.

The first three are underpinned by a process of reflection and articulation on the part of the student. Academics cannot do this for students but can help and provide opportunities for them to do it. The development of personal development planning and progress files is designed to aid this process.

Figure 2 suggests that employability attribute development, self-promotional or job-getting skills, willingness to learn and continue learning and reflection – which is an aid to attribute development – emerge from a complex of factors. Clearly, students need to engage with the opportunities available. Harvey (2003) reviews a considerable number of opportunities that departments and institutions have made available to undergraduates. Naturally, the range of opportunities and experiences will vary from institution to institution and will be

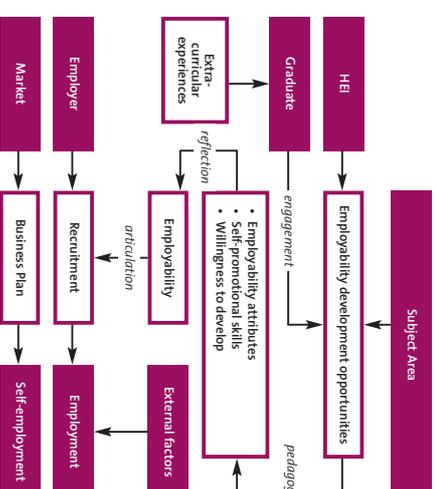


Figure 2: A model of graduate employability development. (Adapted from Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002)

mediated by the subject area of their study. Students also, of course, bring with them a range of abilities and experiences (Ward and Pierce, 2003 review some of them). Further

development should come through the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities, not least of which is part-time or full-time paid or voluntary work. There is also a need to consider how to help students to make well-supported claims to achievement in terms that will resonate with employers. PDP offers opportunities here, and in some institutions and subject areas it is becoming usual for students to develop professional portfolios and business plans.

That said, it is helpful for departments to appreciate the limits of the possible. External factors, outside the control of the institution or the graduate, will have an effect on the employment opportunities and success or on the ability to sustain self-employment or a new business.

### Sources of ideas about the opportunities that can be provided to help students develop their claims to employability are:

- Pamphlets and, in 2004, 'toolkits' on the ESFECT/GC website ([www.itsn.ac.uk/ESFECT](http://www.itsn.ac.uk/ESFECT)).
- Careers services. There is a growing readiness to help departments think about their employability provision and to contribute, directly or otherwise, to programmes.
- ITSN subject centres, all of which have engaged in employability projects, and the ITSN Generic Centre, which has a senior adviser working on employability.
- The Centre for Recording Achievement, which has expertise on PDP.

## We use traditional forms of assessment to assess students so how do we adapt these to assess employability?

There is no easy solution but it is very likely that assessment practices will need to change. However, a Generic Centre publication (Knight and Yorke, 2003a) on assessment and employability argues that practices should not just change to accommodate employability. Instead, assessment should be reviewed to see whether it assesses the things specified in aims and objectives of programmes. Or if the programme identifies learning outcomes, it is necessary to ensure that the assessment process is compatible with the learning outcomes. Employability will then potentially be assessed if the right attributes are in the programme specification's learning outcomes.

Employers use assessment centres to assess such skills and some ideas may be gleaned from them. Assessment centre practices cost far more to copy than most departments can afford, so it is usually a case of looking for ideas that can be applied to programme assessment practices in an efficient way. Assessment centres often do a lot of psychometric testing. We warn against this because it is frequently designed to match an individual with a predefined individual profile (that supposedly matches a specific job). Much psychometric testing is misused by recruiters and it is risky to introduce it into higher education assessment practices, even if it is only used so that students can test themselves to see what sort of profile they have.

So, what might be involved in the assessment of employability? Suppose learning outcomes specify aspects of employability, such as learning to work in teams, creative problem-solving, oral presentations, being able to promote oneself and one's work? In some areas, these kinds of skills are graded or summatively assessed. Most obviously, students' final shows in art, design and craft often involve displays and oral justifications. Whether we give students much chance to practise such skills is another matter.

More and more students are expected to work in groups, supposedly operating as a team to complete a project or solve a problem. Mostly we still assess the product of teamworking rather than the process itself but some people are attempting the latter. However, this tends to fall out of the normal set of assessment competences of academic staff. Not only are most academics not too happy with assessing 'fuzzy' achievements, such as team working, they often have little direct evidence to go on unless they rely on peer- or self-assessment by students. Although peer- and self-assessment are used for improving future performance (formative assessment), using them for high-stakes or summative purposes raises the spectre of comparable summative assessment. If assessing teamworking looks formidable, academics are even less comfortable with assessing other non-tangibles such as 'flexibility', 'risk-taking', 'self-management'.

The solution is to formatively assess such things and to link such assessment into the students' reflective process, particularly development of their personal development plans. When students undertake work experience, for example, their reflective logs might also be the basis for some assessed work. **Part of the problem, for many academics, is the time available for such formative assessment on short unitised courses, such as semester-length modules. There is considerable evidence that semester modules are almost exclusively summatively assessed and often the assessment is convenience assessment rather than considered, suitable assessment to match programme objectives.** Knight and Yorke (2003b) argue that the best answer lies in looking at programme assessment plans and moving away from the traditional concern with the individual course or module. This is in keeping with what was said earlier about treating employability as, first and foremost, a programme issue.

## Where do I find examples that other academics have used? Do they need to be subject specific?

There are a lot of examples of practice around and most ideas are transferable from one discipline to another. The subject content may need changing and ideas may need minor modification but most are essentially generic.

There is probably a lot going on in your own institution. You might try contacting the learning and teaching support department (if you have one) and ask them, or send an e-mail to internal colleagues to ask what they are doing. You might also contact colleagues in your subject networks or people on appropriate e-mail lists.

However, there are also other published sources, although this is a fast developing area: electronic resources go out of date quickly, websites change, printed material goes out of print, individuals move on. Nonetheless, it is worth consulting various sites. There are other resources on the web and direct links to all this material can be found on the following web page: <http://www.shu.ac.uk/cre/employability>

Note that not all practice is good practice, but there are usually ideas or examples readily available that work in at least some areas. There is little around that catalogues things that haven't worked.

## How do I manage the change so that employability becomes part of the academic culture?

This is the hardest part and, as was said earlier, it takes time. Employability needs to be seen as part of a general process of change that includes other aspects of diversity, widening access, flexible provision, and new pedagogic practices, especially the utilisation of communication and information technology. Indeed, in England, the funding council's 2004 briefing on widening participation strategies is likely to ask institutions to pay more attention to student success, both on courses and in terms of employability. Thinking about the next round of teaching and learning strategies is on similar lines. A case in point is that, as managed or virtual learning environments become more widespread and contact teaching is augmented with electronic resources and support, there will be a variety of opportunities to rethink programmes and develop a varied learning environment for students: 'blended learning' as it is currently known.

As mentioned above, the use of the periodic review and validation cycle can help the process of change and adaptation. However, this will only work if staff buy into it, otherwise it will be a compliance procedure that appears on paper but possibly not in practice. And the more that employability is fully integrated into curricula and the less it is seen as an add-on, the more it will become part of the culture. Integration will work best if it includes everything from aims to assessment.

## What can I do about staff who are resistant to incorporating employability into their teaching?

Not a lot, but it is often surprising how much can be achieved by refuting the belief that a concern for employability is tantamount to academic dereliction. The alternative, that a concern for employability aligns well with many academic values in all subject areas, significantly reduces hostility.

It also helps to refer positively in meetings to the innovations elsewhere among the staff group. Find out why a member of staff is resistant. Help if you can. Ultimately, stronger drivers for change will be student expectations and the need to align individual modules with programme designs that are suffused with employability-enhancing practices.

If you are using the review and validation procedure to embed employability, then this provides a framework for insisting on developments.



## How can teaching staff encourage learning beyond graduation?

There's not much that staff can directly do once students leave the institution.

Students can have a considerable indirect influence, though. It is increasingly common for undergraduate programmes to tell students that their undergraduate study is one stage in a process of lifelong learning and that they will need to be prepared to continue learning when they start employment. As the implementation of the Bologna agreement gathers pace, it will become a lot more common to make this clear to students: the new language, referring to first- second- and third-cycle higher education, plainly indicates that the bachelor's degree is one step in a series.

Good programmes also give students the tools they will need for continued learning and often succeed in generating expectations that life-long learning, often self-driven, is the norm. This is more easily done nowadays when there is an increased recognition in society that continuing professional development is necessary just to stand still in career terms. It is also appreciated that the early years of employment or self-employment involve a steep learning curve, in which graduates frequently need to enhance their current knowledge and abilities and be prepared to learn new things. Some departments, especially those with strong local and regional identities, offer their alumni special opportunities for professional updating and other post-graduation study to support lifelong learning.

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### LTSN Generic Centre

Assessment, widening participation, e-learning, employability – these are just some of the issues which concern everyone in higher education today. No one person or institution has all the answers, and yet plenty of answers are out there. Within the UK's higher education institutions, there are some excellent learning and teaching practices. Many of these practices are common to a number of subject disciplines and are easily transferable. The LTSN Generic Centre aims to broker this expertise and promote effective practices in learning and teaching across all disciplines.

The LTSN Generic Centre team is just one part of the much larger Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN). This larger network includes 24 Subject Centres whose role it is to address learning and teaching issues specific to their subject areas.

To find out more visit our website at [www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre](http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre)

### Graduate Prospects

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Formed by Universities UK (formerly CVCP) in 1972, Graduate Prospects is now a multimillion-pound turnover business in the graduate and postgraduate recruitment market. Each year its trading arm covenants its surplus to the charity (HECSU), which in turn redistributes around £1m of funds back into the HE sector in general and careers services in particular.

Graduate Prospects not only supports financially the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) but works in partnership to produce careers information products for students and graduates, and engages in robust and relevant research, such as *Careers Services: Technology and the Future* (2001) and *Careers Services and Diversity* (2002-3).

Graduate Prospects produces the Prospects Series of commercial publications, and the sector's leading graduate employment website, [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) (3,727,060 page impressions, 227,637 unique visitors – March 2003 ABC-E audited). The website is also home to the UK's official postgraduate database of 17,500 taught courses and research programmes, as well as Careers Advice for Graduates, careers information, advice materials, and information about part-time and temporary vacancies.

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