Defining employability in higher education

Comparing student, academic and employer perspectives

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- Heads of School and many other DMU colleagues for their active support during the project.
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How to use this resource

The purpose is to provide a resource to help higher education institutions (HEIs) define and develop employability across a wide spectrum of subjects.

The project is necessarily specific to DMU, using the university’s various employability definitions as reference points and focusing on DMU’s subject areas. But it is hoped that other HEIs might adapt this resource to define, develop or improve employability in their own institution.

A definition of employability

The most widely used definition of employability, which features in existing HEA documentation, was developed by Knight and Yorke (2003). The project team agreed to use this working definition as a basis for the investigation and review.

“A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.”
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Institutional context

De Montfort University (DMU) is a post-92 university in Leicester in the East Midlands of England. It dates back to 1870, initially providing technical education to mainly local students, before developing into Leicester Polytechnic, offering higher education and finally, in 1992, becoming De Montfort University, named after Simon De Montfort, Earl of Leicester.

DMU has about 20,000 students in four faculties: Art, Design & Humanities (ADH), Business & Law (BAL), Health & Life Sciences (HLS) and Technology (TEC), into which are grouped 16 academic schools or departments. Within the faculties there is a wide range of academic disciplines, ranging from liberal arts to professional, vocational subjects.

DMU has a complex curriculum, with a focus both on professional and creative disciplines. It offers courses professionally accredited by national industry-standard authorities (PSRBs) in their areas. DMU also offers degrees which naturally lead to careers in specific disciplines. It offers academic subjects (eg English, History, Politics and Mathematics), creative subjects including (eg Fine Art, Design and Music Technology), vocational subjects (eg Engineering, Nursing & Midwifery, Architecture, Pharmacy and Journalism) and innovative subjects closely linked to industry and enterprise such as Game Art, Cyber Security and Forensic Science.

This range creates challenges, but also opportunities, in defining employability across the institution. Employability exists in the ‘DNA’ of professionally-aligned courses, but it might not occur as specifically and as obviously in other areas.

DMU offers students wide-ranging learning opportunities, integrated with, or alongside, their disciplinary studies, to enable and empower students to develop their employability. With this in mind, the university recently introduced Enhancement Weeks at the midpoints of terms one and two, in which the normal timetable is suspended in favour of careers and employability activities and events. With such a diverse breadth of courses, there needs to be a wide range of approaches to employability. It became apparent, as DMU sought to develop its employability support, that more subtle and discipline-specific definitions were needed, related to academic teaching and based on the expectations of employers and students.

In 2014, DMU commissioned two external consultancies on employability and in June 2014, it initiated its own strategic Employability Programme (EP) to transform employability at DMU, enacting consultants’ recommendations along with other new priorities. The EP was designed as a two-year implementation project to develop and embed new practices.

As such, the EP has always been one of the university’s top priorities, enjoying high-level leadership, support and advocacy. This level of institutional prioritisation has been a key factor in making rapid progress across campus ensuring all operations in the university are focused, co-ordinated and resourced.

Project aims

The aim is for this resource to enable academics to identify the employability issues and challenges for their students. These could relate to the employment situation in the sector itself or weaknesses and skill gaps of students and ways of addressing these issues in learning, teaching and assessment practices.
This resource aims to:

- review approaches to employability at DMU, mapped to the HEA Framework, differentiated by subject and faculty;
- review the expectations of students and employers;
- offer guidance about practical approaches to employability across a diverse range of academic disciplines;
- review how transferable skills are developed as an integral element of learning.

The result, the authors hope, is an enhanced approach to defining and delivering employability in an HEI with a broad curriculum. This will be of considerable benefit to DMU and, it is hoped, to the HEA and the wider sector. Most of all, there should be major benefits to students seeking to maximise their employability to begin appropriate and successful careers, and this will be the ultimate measure of our success.
Chapter 2 – Alignment with the HEA Employability Framework

DMU’s activity maps fit readily onto the HEA Employability Framework which now forms a basis for the next stage of DMU’s two-year Employability Programme.

**Stage 1: Discussion and reflection:** The HEA Framework was the key to the DMU project. Four Faculty Investigators comprehensively surveyed their faculty’s academic programmes, interviewing staff to help define what employability means in each discipline-specific context. During these discussions participants reflected on the nature of employability in practice and the results evaluated by the project team, alongside the other strands of the project.

**Stage 2: Review, mapping:** The HEA Framework’s second stage challenges teaching teams to evaluate the practical implementation of employability within and beyond programme delivery, to ensure this is effective and comprehensive. Much activity is already ongoing across DMU and this project has identified and recorded many examples. This project will be a guide to employability at DMU, allowing programmes to further review their existing practice, embed and extend their best existing activity, develop new initiatives and both share and respond to good practice across the institution.

**Stage 3: Action:** The key challenge for this project is to better understand how employability adapts to *every* course such that fundamental principles can be interpreted and applied across a wide diversity of programmes.
This review across DMU’s four faculties provides evidence that different subject areas prioritise different employability skills. This work consequently legitimises specific subjects’ focus in certain areas. For example, academic subjects may not develop the specific professional competencies found in programmes such as Nursing and Engineering, but offer a rich diet of softer skills development which might not be as strongly represented in disciplines concerned with specific vocational skills.

By comparing these priorities, subject areas are encouraged to re-evaluate their approach through a reinterpretation practices outside their own discipline-specific context. In addition, the results of the three strands of investigation (see below), especially from within the four faculties, will be taken up by the Employability Programme and used to frame and guide its next phase of activity.

**Stage 4: Evaluate:** An evaluation of success and failure will allow the project to be adapted where it has not worked as expected, but also allow the project to be adopted as ‘business-as-usual’ where it has proved successful. The evaluation will leave the institution with an employability strategy adaptable enough to be used across the whole range of provision, tying in with the **HEA Framework Goal:**

“A defined, cohesive and comprehensive approach to employability.”
Chapter 3 – Methodology: Three ways to approach defining employability

The project was undertaken February-June 2015. The methodology aimed to provide as diverse a dataset as possible from which to develop the resource. It was designed to feed into the university’s Employability Programme, a set of projects planned to enhance existing employability provision.

The methodology has been triple track, involving academic staff, employers and students. All three strands were explored individually before findings were brought together for collation and reflection at the end of the project.

The first step was to review the employability attributes most valued by employers. We talked to key employers to provide insight and understanding as a basis for the key aims above. Key subject areas from across the university were then surveyed to ascertain views about employability and how these are implemented, or might be implemented, in practice with reference to those skills and attributes identified by employers. Student views were collected, led by the De Montfort Students’ Union working in conjunction with student representatives across the academic disciplines. This approach allows cross-referencing from three distinct groups of stakeholders.

The academic track

This strand sought to understand faculty definitions of employability and subject-based approaches to employability attributes and skills. The project appointed a Faculty Investigator for each faculty (Art, Design & Humanities, Business & Law, Health & Life Sciences, Technology). Each faculty contains a number of schools or departments which group together cognate subject areas. The investigators were all experienced lecturers with existing employability advocacy roles in the university.

Each investigator conducted a series of structured interviews, which covered a minimum of two subjects per school and, where possible, courses with less proven involvement in employability initiatives. Investigators identified areas with established good practice in employability for wider dissemination of the approaches used.

To ensure consistency, a range of templates were developed for investigators (see Appendix 3) including:

- A standard set of questions (Error! Reference source not found.)
- The HEA definition of employability (Error! Reference source not found.)
- Employers top skills/attributes from the Employer Survey (Appendix 3)
- An action log for investigators to share successful and less effective approaches (Error! Reference source not found.)

Questions covered in these themes include definitions of employability, skills/attributes students needed, skills/attributes employers wanted and enablers/barriers to good employability delivery.
The employer track

This strand of work aimed to understand the skills/attributes employers required from DMU students, how these skills could be developed and whether or not they should be directly assessed. Because many of DMU’s students are local, and the university is committed to facilitating graduate retention in the East Midlands, the target employers were those with outlets in the region. The employers were targeted using Leicester City Council contacts, the East Midlands Chamber (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire) and the Federation of Small Businesses.

The university appointed two project managers from the careers and employability team to manage the work. A working group was established which included careers and employability staff but also lecturers from each faculty. The group was responsible for a literature review and an employer questionnaire.

For the literature review the team reviewed a number of recent reports on employability in order to identify and clarify key employability skills as understood across the HE sector (see Appendix 1). The existing DMU Employability Skills Framework (see Appendix 4) already captures many of the skills identified.

The employer questionnaire was drawn up by the project managers based upon skills that featured prominently in the literature review (see Error! Reference source not found.). A total of 123 responses were received from employers, with representation from a wide range sizes across the local employment sector (see below):

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<th>Size of organisation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Micro (less than 10)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (10-49)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (50-249)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (250+)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>7</td>
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Table 1- Breakdown of employer responses by size of organisation

The student track

This strand explored students’ perceptions of employability. A focus group was run by the Deputy President (Education) from De Montfort Students’ Union (DSU).

The focus group considered four main questions:

- Which words or phrases come to mind when you hear the word employability?
- Which skills contribute to employability?
- Where do you think responsibility lies for equipping students with these skills?
- What are your thoughts on the strengths, weaknesses and impact of existing DMU employability initiatives?

The three tracks were analysed independently then triangulated to identify similarities and differences, best practice and potential gaps in provision.
Chapter 4

As explained in Chapter 3, the Faculty Investigators set out to examine definitions of employability across a range of subject areas in their own faculties. After discussion, a set of questions was agreed as a basis for the interviews. Questions were based on existing definitions and scholarship, but with the facility and flexibility to gather new, original and challenging results. The questions are set out in Appendix 3 and form the basis for the reports from each faculty below.

Academic perspectives: Faculty of Art, Design and Humanities

This faculty has perhaps the widest range of disciplines in the university, ranging across the Humanities, including History and English, the creative arts and vocational subjects such as Footwear Design and Fashion Buying. All subjects surveyed classified their programmes to be a hybrid professional and creative programme.

Defining employability

The subjects interviewed had diverse understandings of employability. A common principle was to focus on those skills and attributes deemed directly relevant to the field of study. Where respondents were less clear about a subject-based definition, the HEA Employability Framework was used as a prompt. This led to discussions about how the HEA Framework could be revised in the subject-specific context.

Colleagues from four of the eight subjects noted the absence of research or guidance about employability in their subject. Their definitions were based on a mixture of personal experience, what they felt their employers wanted, by curriculum review, staff knowledge or by referring to subject curriculum benchmarks.

Skills and attributes

All respondents reported communication as a key skill. Self-management was an important skill for half the subjects and self-confidence, collaborative/team-working, analysis, leadership, creativity, subject-specific skills and research were also noted. These mirror many of the skills
cited by employers, but with an emphasis on self-confidence, creativity and subject-related, which might be expected given the subject areas involved.

**Developing skills and attributes**

The required skills and attributes are developed primarily through module-based activities and assessment, for example, oral/written (and visual) communication, subject-specific skills, group work and research. Personal development features in vocational courses, with specific modules focusing on professional practice through individual reflection. In the more liberal arts subjects, targeted careers events and activities were embedded within certain modules.

The need for interaction with industry/professional organisations was recognised in the majority of subjects. Inclusions ranged from guest speakers from industry to embedded work placements, external commercial projects to mock interviews with industry professionals.

**Understanding of employers’ needs**

There was a clear correlation between skills and attributes recognised by employers and those developed within the subject areas. All subjects reported support in their programmes of *oral/written communication, analysis and decision making, adaptability and flexibility, independent working, motivation/organisational fit.*

The application of *IT, team-working, self-awareness, global awareness, relevant work experience,* and *leadership* were also addressed through the curriculum in most subjects.

*Numeracy* and *commercial awareness* were embedded in half the subjects. These skills were seen as less critical in some areas due to the nature of the discipline.

The professional roles and careers for which students are being prepared were diverse, due to the varying nature of the subjects. But there was commonality between subjects. Four of the eight subjects noted *marketing* and five noted *education, entrepreneurial activities* as well as postgraduate study. Staff noted their graduates often went into roles outside their natural subject area as well as more directly relevant roles.

**Top skills**

*Communication* was reported as a top five skill for all subject areas with most identifying it as their first choice. Two subjects placed this second and the final subject placed it in its top five. Both *team-working* and *independent working* were cited as top five skills for seven of the eight subjects. *Analysis, decision-making, adaptability* and *flexibility* were also recognised as top skills developed in most subjects surveyed.

Three subjects noted the absence of visual references such as *visual communication, drawn communication* and *visual literacy.* ‘Creative flair’ was also noted as absent. These comments illustrate the more visual nature of some of the practice-based programmes included in the study and the need for diversity when considering the skills and attributes required by different subjects.
Good practice in employability

A broad variety of good practice is evident in the faculty. The more vocational subjects featured external client/industry projects, where students worked on ‘live’ projects and gained feedback from professionals. Mock interviews with visiting professionals were also noted by two subjects, giving a valuable opportunity to gain formative feedback on interview performance.

Embedded placements were a feature of the majority of subjects. These ranged from short-term ‘taster’ activities through to year-long placements. In liberal arts subjects, English in the Workplace and History in the Workplace modules combine embedded subject-specific careers sessions with a placement to provide students with tasters of the working environment.

Simulation activities were used by subjects from both the vocational and liberal arts to enhance group working, as well as develop more subject-specific skills.

External partnerships existed for some subject areas. In Arts and Festivals Management and in Drama, a prominent local theatre provided performance opportunities and training. In Fashion and Textiles there are links with livery companies and industry organisations providing networking, competitions and bursaries, as well as an industry advisory board for footwear, which advises on programme development. Architecture has a mentoring scheme, linking students with industry professionals. All subjects have contributions from guest speakers to enhance their curriculum.

Barriers to employability

Common challenges and obstacles faced in delivering employability were found across subjects. These included demand on human resources, and a lack of student engagement in Enhancement Weeks. Two subjects felt constrained in the design of learning opportunities by the perceived obligations arising from PSRB accreditation. Additional responses included a belief students displayed some naivety about placement opportunities, had difficulties in obtaining placements and some students who pursued postgraduate study found the transition problematic. Fine Art noted a definition of employability which did not emphasise enterprise and the ‘sole trader’ career path was not well-suited to the subject and creative subjects in general.

Recommendations

1. Start the employability journey from Level 4 entry, highlighting employability and emphasise this as a constant message throughout the programme.
2. Ensure students know about available opportunities and how to make the most of them.
3. Make students more aware of professional etiquette and model professional life more closely at university.
4. Help students articulate why employers should recruit them rather than just describing what they can do.
5. Help students become aware of the employability benefits of their degree qualification. Signpost what they are getting from their degree in an employability context.
6. Understand students’ expectations. Identify their needs and help develop these needs.
7. Identify more opportunities for industry-linked projects.
8. Actively encourage all students to undertake a placement.
9. Run an ‘employability audit’ to help students reflect on what they have learned and how they can apply it in a professional context, e.g. through a final year ‘exit interview’.

**Academic perspectives: Faculty of Business and Law**

![Organisation Chart]

The faculty has 18 employability representatives, 12 of whom were interviewed, with two other colleagues submitting information.

Law, Accounting and Finance and Housing staff classed their programmes as professional, other staff classed their programmes as a hybrid of academic, professional or vocational.

**Defining employability**

Most respondents felt the HEA Employability Framework was adequate but their subject had specific technical or academic needs which should be added to the definition. Many respondents were influenced by their subject benchmark statements and/or accrediting PSRBs. Professional bodies influenced the content of courses, specifically in Accounting and Finance and Law. The Law Competency Framework is currently under review so this is likely to influence employability sessions provided by the Law School. Most respondents cited the work placement team as one of the best ways to embed employability skills in the course, and as a way of collecting information from employers. Most areas involved employers and/or professional bodies in the curriculum, either to deliver guest lectures, help with assessment, or to mentor students. These contributors are often alumni, or current placement students and many areas have current professional practitioners among their part-time staff.

**Skills and attributes**

All respondents stated the list of key skills provided (oral/written communication, numeracy, application of IT, analysis and decision making, team-working, leadership, adaptability and flexibility, commercial awareness, self-awareness and independent working) were imperative, but there was also a great number of other skills not mentioned such as professionalism, professional ethics, critical thinking, cultural awareness, ability to network, responsibility and
accountability, resilience, persistence, tenacity, toughness, emotional intelligence, realism, solution orientation, initiative, hardworking, conscientiousness, self-motivation, cognitive awareness, time management, inquisitiveness, flexibility, technical skills in specific software packages related to the subject area, (e.g. Photoshop), political neutrality, and combativity combined with collaborativity (in the case of Politics).

**Developing skills and attributes**

Every department had a range of approaches. Almost all courses used a variety of assessment strategies including presentations, written assignments, exams, tests on specific software, group-work, case study work (often with live projects), business simulations, and student-led sessions. Most courses also offered specific subject related assessments such as writing a policy document (Public Policy), practice drafting (Law). Many staff had links with student societies eg the Law Society, Politics Society, and encouraged the integration of these within the curriculum. The year-long placement was encouraged throughout the faculty, with every student being eligible to apply.

Some respondents reported *independent working* was encouraged from Level 4 whilst others stated it was a focus in the final year. Many staff related a period of ‘transition’ at Level 4 whilst introducing and exposing the student to employability skills and requirements, whilst laying a foundation for further work at Level 5. Work at this level often concentrated on group development, and Level 6 was reported as developing the more independent and critical thinking skills. Many staff thought a more systematic approach, eg through a mapping exercise, was needed to ensure integration both within and across the levels of study.

**Understanding of employers’ needs**

This faculty is preparing students for a variety of technical, professional or managerial roles in the private and public sectors and/or self-employment, usually but not exclusively in the area they have studied (Accounting, Law, Marketing, Human Resource Management, Politics and Public Policy, Strategy).

Employers are understood to want: **reliability, personality, imagination, clear and succinct communication skills, self-awareness, common sense, confidence** (but not too much), **the ability to listen, flexibility, adaptability, an understanding of the organisational culture, good manners, be well-presented, punctuality, positive engagement, technical proficiency, integrity, motivation, enthusiasm, dedication, relevant work experience, commitment, hard working, professionalism, individuals prepared to push themselves and work outside their comfort zone, loyalty, the ability to maintain confidentiality, people who are on time and can manage their time**, as well as all the standard transferable skills such as **oral and written communication, team-working, independent working, basic IT and numeracy, analysis and decision making**. Confidence was mentioned repeatedly.

All subject areas involved employers and/or professional bodies to support the curriculum, but to varying degrees. Examples included guest lectures, placements, curriculum advisory committees, mentoring, assessment marking, workplace visits and live case studies. Many staff are current professional practitioners or involved in consultancy and corporate work, examples of which they use as real world case studies.
Most respondents placed oral and written communication in their top four skills with 11 of those having this skill in the top two. Analysis and decision-making was the next most popular skill with 13 respondents having this in the top four. Team-working was in third position with independent working fourth, commercial awareness, adaptability and flexibility coming joint fifth. Self-awareness and IT skills were sixth followed by numeracy and then leadership.

**Good practice in employability**

Within the faculty there was a very wide range of approaches to developing the employability in students.

Respondents mentioned assignments and activities such as YouTube videos, mood boards for interview portfolios, reflective portfolios, working with SMEs and large organisations on live projects, national competitions, question and answer sessions with alumni, employers and placement providers, employer mentoring, short-term work experience built into specific modules and the use of industry-based software. In addition, some respondents drew attention to the value of university-led activities such as Frontrunners (DMU’s short-term internal work placement scheme), #DMU Global (international travel opportunities), and Grad Champions (a scheme funding graduate work placements).

Examples of good practice included the Fox’s Lair (a Dragons’ Den-inspired activity with judges from SMEs and large organisations, with networking opportunities and an award ceremony), postgraduate Human Resource Management students designing an assessment centre as an assignment for undergraduate students, the Politics department’s 2014 visit to Parliament to present the project 100 Ideas for Changing Britain.

Most examples had enjoyed positive feedback from students, teaching staff and/or external examiners. In the majority of cases some part of the activity was embedded as an assessed part of the curriculum, only a few of the faculty-based activities were co-curricular (ie non-accredited).

**Barriers to employability**

Barriers highlighted during the investigation included a lack of student engagement in non-embedded activities and occasionally an inability to plan beyond graduation.

Opportunities for staff to innovate were believed to be impeded by a lack of resources.

There was also a desire for more flexible work experience options (shorter-term placements, other than just year-long).

**Recommendations**

1. All students should have at least three weeks’ work experience.
2. Start talking to students about employability from the day they arrive and encourage them to be more confident and aspirational.
3. Develop more work experience opportunities.
4. Provide a clear roadmap for students.
5. Have a university-wide consistent approach.
6. Work with the students more on a one-to-one basis to build their confidence.
7. Convince the students that it doesn’t have to be qualifications vs. jobs.
8. Students need more exposure to assessment centre and telephone interview types of scenario.
9. Cross-departmental or cross-faculty projects will enhance the student experience.
10. An employability passport (added to their HEAR report), where the students receive stamps when they attend guest lectures or employability events.
11. Induction sessions should include something challenging linked to employability/ future study engagement (such as preparing for a seminar or reading a report).
12. Career focus weeks, such as a week devoted to ‘Careers in Finance’ etc.

Academic perspectives: Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

Eight programme leaders were interviewed. Six provided information in relation to professional programmes. There were similar findings across these programmes, potentially due to similarities in the subjects. Two respondents reported their programme as a hybrid of a professional and vocational programme.

Defining employability

Many respondents said their students were required to develop specific skillsets and attributes due to the nature of their chosen profession. Often these were determined by PSRBs as well as employers’ set expectations of graduates, including the NHS. This strongly impacted on curriculum design and so influenced provision of employability in the curriculum. Most programmes had already embedded employability-themed activities into their curriculum. One respondent stated their activities geared towards “making a student stand out” alongside more specific skillsets relevant to particular subject areas. All respondents reported their subjects used skills-based employability activities such as CV writing and interview techniques.

The six professionally-accredited programmes reported their curriculum was aimed at equipping students for the workplace. Employability activities were focused towards students’ personal attributes and understanding the workplace. All subjects based their definitions on local
employers’ requirements, specific definitions in line with professional bodies’ needs and academics’ knowledge or previous experience.

**Skills and attributes**

All respondents reported *leadership* as a key skill or attribute. Many respondents from the professional programmes identified students would need to be able to undertake their role effectively at the point of graduation, so elements such as *team-working, working alongside different professional groups, independent working* and *communication skills* were cited. Within the NHS culture specifically, the notion of a strong *values* base was also reported. This area reflects contemporary NHS directives into values-based recruitment.

**Developing attributes and skills**

For many professional programmes, placements were a fundamental part of the course. In both Nursing and Midwifery there is a required 50 per cent placement and 50 per cent theoretical component to the programme. Other programmes had placements as integral components, but with less time allocation. For programmes which had placements as part of the course, practice-based clinical outcomes (linked to professional requirements) were used as a method to assess these skills. Two of the subject areas used OSCEs (Objective, Structured Clinical Examinations) to test students’ situational judgement as well as clinical competency. All eight respondents reported use of individual student presentations to develop communication skills and increase levels of independent working. Some areas used group presentations, which assessed students on their leadership and team-working skills, with many using peer assessment as a summative assessment method. The majority of respondents reported presentations were undertaken within each year of the programme, so were an embedded model of assessment.

**Understanding employers’ needs**

Academics said health care sector employers reported *leadership* was a required competency; this was a common theme across the professional disciplines. *Decision-making, team-working,* and the ability to work with different professional groups were also widely cited. There was a strong sense students needed to be competent in their roles and ‘hit the ground running’ after graduation. Two programmes reported *independent thinking* was important, and the management of tensions (between theoretical understanding, through university-based learning to practical ‘real-life’ understanding developed in the actual workplace). This links to the need to effectively manage student expectations after graduation. Effective *communication skills* were discussed with all respondents, who agreed this was integral to employers’ needs.

Four of the programmes involved employers in curriculum development, or as an integral component of employability activities. Two did not embed employability into their programmes. This is an area for development. Two programmes consulted employers on curriculum design, but did not involve them with curriculum delivery.
Top skills

Four subject areas reported *oral and written communication* as first choice for skills. Three others put it second. The final programme put it in the top five. *Leadership* was identified as a second preference by most respondents. All programmes identified *team-working* as a priority, and identified this within the top three skills.

Other skills such as *decision-making* were in the top five. One programme identified *self-awareness and flexibility* as being important, but all programmes reported very similar responses in relation to their top skills.

Good practice in employability

Within the faculty there are many innovative approaches to employability, particularly with the use of technology to support employability activities. Simulation activities feature strongly. One subject uses simulations methods (creating a car crash scenario with role play) to develop students’ critical, analytic thinking and as a situational judgment test. This is used for a distance learning programme. Other taught subjects use crime scenes simulations as a form of OSCE assessment, which attempts to marry taught theory and assessment to everyday problems in the workplace. A Dragons’ Den approach is used by one subject, where students pitch their ideas for funding a community project to employers. This subject also includes an additional learning, so students can gain a teaching qualification as well as their professional degree. Other programmes use pedagogical approaches, such as problem-based learning and workshop sessions rather than traditional lecture formats. This attempts to promote exposure to real world experiences.

Many of the subjects from the six professional programmes reported employability was embedded in their programmes through careers workshops, recruitment activities and direct teaching of employability skills. One subject (Midwifery) hosts interviews at the university, rather than the local Trust to promote a more relaxed environment for students. The remaining two respondents interviewed acknowledged the importance of integrating employability within the curriculum, however skills-based sessions were only ancillary to programme learning activities.

Barriers to employability

All respondents identified similar key themes in relation to barriers to employability. The most common related to the lack of time and dedicated resources. Students with employability embedded in their programmes were open and responsive to employability activities, although it was recognised academics needed to promote relevance to maximise engagement.

Recommendations

1. Promotion of understanding to students, need to see the value of employability. Despite the jobs market, they still need to be competitive.
2. Have an awareness of the current market - how it all works.
3. Start from day one and build up.
4. Maximise engagement of academic staff.

**Academic perspectives: Faculty of Technology**

![Diagram of Faculty of Technology organisation chart]

**Figure 5 - Faculty of Technology organisation chart**

Fifteen interviews were conducted. Respondents’ roles included Heads of School, Programme Leaders and Employability Champions, who encourage and support employability-related activities in learning and teaching.

**Defining employability**

All respondents felt employability included both subject-specific technical skills and non-technical skills. The latter were also called soft skills, interpersonal skills or transferable skills. The faculty includes scientific or technical subjects such as Engineering, practical such as Computing or Journalism, and more theoretical such as Film Studies, offering a wide range of subjects and perspectives. Employability was seen as the combination of essential technical skills plus the other skills which make the technical skills applicable and practical. In Engineering this was expressed as *problem-solving*: as the ability to see the problem, solve the problem and communicate the solution effectively. In the Media School, there was a focus on broadening students’ understanding of the wide range of career possibilities and employment formats for which specific technical skills would be relevant.

There was some diversity in skillsets across the subjects. Many courses are accredited, and subject-specific skills are largely prescribed by the relevant awarding body. Where they are not, subject-specific skill lists were based on academics’ own experience in the field, combined with an understanding of employer views gleaned from placement-based work and discussions with industry contacts.

**Skills and attributes**

There was much commonality among the skills identified by respondents. *Communication skills*, (including listening, explaining and writing), were common, along with *collaboration*. *Self-awareness* and *self-management* were also frequently cited, including *initiative*, *time management* and *self-learning* skills. The ability to work in a variety of settings was important.
in many technology-related fields, ranging from self-employed freelance work, through to small companies and to larger organisations. Problem-solving skills were mentioned, sometimes as a technical skill and sometimes as an ability to bring knowledge and experience to bear on a new situation. A professional attitude was important, including client awareness and flexibility, with a willingness to engage in getting the job done. Students also needed to understand the need to develop personal responsibility and manage their expectations. Understanding their relevant business environment and knowing how and where to look for opportunities were also highlighted by several participants.

Developing skills and attributes

Practical experience was highlighted. Many interviewees felt it was essential to develop practical skills in realistic job settings. Work experience included year-long placements in industry or other settings, as well as shorter periods of a week, a month, or the long vacation. Opportunities were offered in external companies and organisations and, through schemes such as Frontrunners, in the university. Finding and winning the job or contract was often seen as part of the practical experience. In some areas this meant answering a job advertisement, in others it meant networking to find an individual project contract.

Most skills reported as needed were covered in some way on assessed modules. Most courses built in a variety of assignments using individual work, group work, written communications (for example reports, stories, portfolios) and verbal communication (for example presentations, short videos). Not all transferable skills were explicitly badged as employability skills, and it was felt students did not always recognise they were developing a wide range of abilities.

Many staff have industrial as well as academic experience, and designed assignments, case studies and assessments to reflect real-world applications. Technical subject-specific skills were taught through module sessions and coursework. It was believed non-technical generic skills could be best taught by the University Library’s Centre for Learning and Study Support, although this input was not always mandated and not always taken up.

Above all, academic staff strove to communicate and manage student expectations through guest lectures from industry. Some schools and programmes brought professionals and students together to carry out work or a training activity in an industry-realistic setting, for example student-run film festivals.

Understanding of employers’ needs

Overall, respondents reported employers needed graduates able to make sense of their working environment, fit in, and “get on with the work at hand”.

Computing graduates needed a strong understanding of relevant principles, a deep expertise in a professional context, rather than detailed understanding of specific tools and languages. Employers expected to train their staff in current tools and skills as these changed frequently. Critical thinking, problem-solving and an ability to learn were important, as were communication and client awareness. Small companies tended to need graduates to be fully effective from day one, while larger companies, where there might be more skill specialisation, needed graduates with higher-level understanding; this was seen as a significant difference.
In Engineering subjects, practical technical skills were also needed in combination with problem-solving and independent working. An understanding of current issues in the field was also felt desirable. Small companies needed staff who could understand problems and design practical solutions, whereas larger companies needed employees with potential for management skills.

Media academics said employers looked for a combination of technical skills and interpersonal abilities, evidenced by a portfolio of work built up during study. Graduates were expected to understand the environment they were joining, and to bring technical competence and commitment, original thinking and flexibility, and networking skills, in order to build contacts. Employers knew students had opportunities beyond the curriculum and graduates were expected to have engaged with these. Employers looked for curiosity, especially in Journalism, coupled with enthusiasm and open-mindedness. Media graduates needed to be adaptable and be able to manage their own careers.

**Top skills**

Respondents prioritised communication, application of IT, independent working, analysis, decision-making, and team-working. Media-related subjects placed higher value on adaptability and flexibility, reflecting the more dynamic nature of the field. In Engineering numeracy was a priority, but top skills also included adaptability, particularly in problem-solving. Computing prioritised analysis and decision-making and application of IT, along with communication, independent working and team-working, reflecting the collaborative nature of much work in the computing field.

**Good practice in employability**

A wide range of activities is undertaken by the faculty; student-run events feature strongly, such as film festivals and News days, robotics and electronics clubs, Demon Radio (operated by the Students’ Union) and cyber security ‘challenge days’. Some employability-related activities ran across years, for example a mentoring scheme whereby students were mentored by peers in later years of study. Some activities were open to all subjects within a School, for example the guest lecture series in the Media School. Some courses included professional qualifications, for example Prince2 Project Management in Computing.

Employers and alumni were included in many employability-related activities and events, for example as guest speakers. Some acted as mentors on single-day events or over a longer period. Employers sometimes provided industry-scale project briefs and helped in the assessment, whether formal or informal. In some areas, employers and alumni helped students to build their networks of industry contacts, and advised them on how to make best use of these. Employers also provided placement opportunities both long and short-term.

A common theme was variety, with a range of industries and roles represented in guest lectures and through different kinds of activities and events. Representatives from industry were used where possible, whether on modules or in other events.
Barriers to employability

Student engagement in these activities was one of the barriers identified. Tutors felt students did not always understand what was genuinely useful, or essential as opposed to what was merely desirable. It was difficult to schedule employability activities at the most appropriate times to encourage student engagement. There was also a tendency for students to focus only on tasks and activities which attracted assessment credit, but if an activity was seen to be fun, students did engage. More allocated time was felt needed for staff to develop more industry links and embedded employability activities.

Recommendations

Academic staff recognised more could be done, and there were many good ideas just waiting to be put into action if time and support were available.

The large majority of respondents highlighted these three steps that could be taken:

- get students to get real experience in a work setting;
- encourage students to see the value of non-technical skills, the bigger picture of employability;
- engage and include employers and alumni more effectively.

Respondents also mentioned other steps:

- get employers to come and talk about what they look for when recruiting;
- engage students right from year 1, this is the start of their careers;
- recognise and allow staff time to engage with employability within and beyond the curriculum.

Tutors needed to live and breathe employability, let the students see how they had achieved their roles and witness tutors using their industry contacts. Tutors needed to engage students, to make it interesting to them and make it fun through clubs and similar activities.
Chapter 5 – What employers say they want from graduates

Objectives

- Which skills do employers want?
- How can these skills be developed and should they be assessed within courses at De Montfort University?

Overall approach

- One-year project.
- Define what is meant by employability skills.
- Complete a literature review identifying the key employability skills.
- Research the skills local employers look for – interviews/surveys with local companies.
- Identify any differences and similarities in skill requirements by size of company and industrial sector.
- A small working group was established composed of academics and Careers and Employability staff. The group met regularly and completed the following tasks.

Agreed definition of employability

The group agreed to use the HEA definition of employability:

“A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.”

The Literature Review

The group read more than 20 recent reports on the theme of employability and summarised some of the key employability skills identified in the literature (see Error! Reference source not found.). They also had access to the:

- DMU Employability Skills Framework (see Appendix 4).
- Employer questionnaire (see Appendix 5).

The project managers based this on the skills which featured the most prominently in the literature review. The employer development manager sent it out to Leicester City Council contacts, the East Midlands Chamber (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire contacts) and the Federation of Small Businesses. 123 responses were received from employers.

Employers Responses

Skills

Employers were asked the level of importance they assign to a range of skills when recruiting graduate staff - with a score of 1 not being important and 10 being absolutely crucial (see Figure 6 below).
Oral/written communication, numeracy, application of IT, analysis and decision making and team working all scored above 8 out of 10. But the scores indicate all of the remaining skills were also seen as important, (6.3 for leadership was the lowest score). The results can be seen in the table below:

**Figure 6 - Level of Importance Assigned to Skills When Recruiting Graduates (10 being the highest)**

**Attributes**

Employers were asked to score how important they considered a range of attributes when recruiting graduate staff (see Figure 7 below). A graduate’s motivation and organisational fit were viewed as extremely important, with global awareness and relevant work experience close behind. Degree classification and society/club involvement scored the lowest. The results can be seen in the table below:
FIGURE 7 - LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE ASSIGNED TO SKILLS WHEN RECRUITING GRADUATES (10 BEING THE HIGHEST)

An employer networking event took place on campus, where results of the employer survey were presented to local employers (many of whom had taken part in the research).
Chapter 6 – Student’s expectations of employability

To ensure students were at the heart of this process, students’ views were sought using a focus group, convened by the Deputy President Education of the Students’ Union, supported by De Montfort’s Academic Quality staff team.

The aim was to collect and articulate a snapshot of students’ views, definitions and perceptions of employability at DMU. The first part discussed DMU initiatives. The second part articulated students’ definitions of employability in words, phrases and skills. The final part asked where responsibility to equip students with skills lay.

The group included on-campus students from all faculties as well as Leicester College students on a DMU pathway course. There was a mix of undergraduates and postgraduate taught Masters students.

Strengths, weaknesses and impact of DMU and DSU employability initiatives

**Frontrunners**

*A scheme offering students paid, part-time internships in university departments.*

This scheme was noted by over half the focus group, all in support. Students saw it as a convenient and well-paid alternative to other student jobs. There was minor criticism of the lengthy application form and variance between jobs. While some students loved their post, it was clear a small number did not. Further discussion linked dissatisfaction to relevancy the internship had to their course or career path.

**Graduate Champions**

*A scheme offering recent graduates short-term internships with external employers and within various university departments*

Third year members of the group mentioned the main draw towards this scheme being some of them didn’t know what to do after university and it offered a placement and a step on the career ladder. Some students in earlier years understandably didn’t know of the scheme, and but said the Frontrunners scheme was better known.

**Student Ambassadors**

*A scheme that pays students to participate in open days and big university events*

Every student mentioned this scheme, suggesting it is the most popular. The main upside of this role was the variety of events students got involved in, speaking to lots of people. Some felt this role wasn’t as demanding as others, so other work experience was needed to make themselves truly ‘employable’.

**Square Mile**

*A scheme offering students voluntary experience in activities in the local community*

About three-quarters of students mentioned this, again a popular and well known scheme. Postgraduate-taught Masters students commended it for being so heavily involved in their course and curriculum content, which puts theory to practice.
**Student representation**

A scheme in which students volunteer to lead their student cohort and be its voice in university, faculty and programme level consultation mechanisms, thus inputting into the quality assurance processes of academic provision at the university.

Half the forum members mentioned this, highlighting the conversational and personal skills gained as well as the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to meetings.

**DSU volunteering**

A scheme offering students volunteering opportunities in and around Leicestershire.

A quarter of students specifically noted DSU volunteering, highlighting the varied choice of organisations to get involved with, which allowed them to better match it to their course and future career options. Criticism came from students not knowing about it, and it requiring more advertising in faculties.

**DSU sports**

A scheme which allowed students to play sport competitively or for leisure.

Some forum members were sports team member and noted many skills they gained such as teamwork, time management and perseverance. Criticism mentioned despite there being 30 teams to participate in, it could be expensive to hire equipment and travel to practice. For others, sport did not appeal to them.

**DSU societies**

A scheme allowing students to lead and manage an interest group.

A couple of students were members of societies. They noted many skills gained, including event promotion and management, teamwork and communication. Criticism stated the success of a society relied on a handful of committee members and if some became inactive, the society as a whole struggled to function.

**Demon Media (TV, radio, newspaper, online)**

A scheme which offers students the opportunity to contribute and lead student media.

Lots of students knew of Demon Media, two of the forum members were managers of particular strands. They referenced particular skills such as time management and effective timely communication as being crucial to their roles. Others had watched videos/read the newspaper/listened to the radio station.

**Student mentoring (both course specific and DSU’s MyUniPal initiative)**

A scheme which allows students to guide other students.

Three-quarters of the forum were aware of mentoring initiatives across the university, either embedded into their course or the DSU MyUniPal initiative. They praised these initiatives for bonding students and allowing them to network effectively with one another. Criticism was minor, one student wanted better promotion of MyUniPal.
Course validations/periodic reviews etc

Quality assurance mechanisms used to ensure new and existing courses are of a high standard in which students are invited to participate

One student had been a part of validating a new course at DMU, functioning as a full member of the panel. They highlighted how involved they felt in this important process, flexing communication skills both with potential students and highly regarded members of staff. Criticism was minor, they mentioned lengthy paperwork but felt they had been briefed effectively and it was worth the effort.

Words/Phrases used to describe employability

![Word cloud showing students' phrases for describing employability](image)

**Figure 8 - Word cloud showing students' phrases for describing employability**

- Becoming a better person
- Working on key skills
- Getting a job
- Volunteering
- Getting good grades
- Going outside your comfort zone
- Booking appointments to see the careers service
- Getting involved in extra stuff outside of studying
- Adapting and updating
- Going to careers fairs
- Doing a placement year
Which skills come to mind when you think of employability?

Number of times mentioned in discussion

- Communication x 15
- Teamwork x 14
- Application of IT x 5
- Numeracy x 7
- Analysis and decision-making x 9
- Leadership x 8
- Adaptability and flexibility x 6
- Commercial awareness x 2
- Self-awareness x 10
- Independent working x 13

In summary, this focus group of 20 students mentioned communication, teamwork, independent working and self-awareness the most. Commercial awareness was the least common skill mentioned from the list given.

Other skills such as event management, time management and punctuality were also discussed by the students.

Where do responsibilities lie when equipping students with these important employability skills?

- The academic staff/curriculum content?
- The university careers staff?
- The student? (you!)
- Other?
What students said

"It needs to be a team effort, the university should provide opportunities and support but students need to go out and grab them with both hands."

"I’m part of a huge course, I cannot expect my small number of tutors to hand me employability skills on a plate."

"The way I see it, my course content should teach me the technical skills, academic staff should be able to provide a bit of help with that where possible. They should signpost to other help available for me too when it goes beyond the academic, same goes for the careers staff. It’s down to me to go and seek those opportunities and help myself develop those core skills and contacts."

"I had absolutely no work experience before university and found adjusting to university life really hard. I see a lot of opportunities but for me and some of my course mates we just try to focus on learning the course then branch out when we feel ready."

"I did my undergrad here and got loads of employability opportunities, now at Masters level it’s harder to find information and work out which bits are relevant. There seems to be far more responsibility on me now."

"I wish I’d had a bit more confidence in first year, now I’m nearly done studying and do not feel ready for the working world. I had so many things I could’ve got involved in but didn’t."

"I go on placement next year, so the careers staff at university and my personal tutor are going to be really important ways to get support. I need to make the most of my year in industry but also not be afraid to ask for help when I need it."

"Main thing the university needs to do is communicate to us clearly what opportunities are there and when the deadlines are. I have to find stuff out through my friends sometimes which makes it harder for me to manage my time and apply for these things."

Possible themes

Students from larger undergraduate courses, final year students and postgraduates all seemed to emphasise the students’ roles and responsibilities. Students on smaller courses and first year students were more likely to think of the university’s roles first before explaining the students’ roles and responsibilities. Second year students had the most varied answers.

The majority of students saw the roles and responsibilities of both themselves and their institution.

Conclusions

This forum was a cross-section of 20 students all doing either undergraduate courses or postgraduate taught Masters programmes, from first year through to final year and all faculties were represented, plus two Leicester College students.

The forum had three aims, to hear from students, their definitions and perceptions of
employability. It tasked students with articulating and discussing the key skills associated with employability. Finally, and most importantly, it heard students’ perceptions of responsibility in equipping them with such skills.

Despite being a good diverse range of students, the views represented here are of that forum and not necessarily reflective of the entire student body. This forum adds qualitative data and any potential trends or findings are tentative.
Chapter 7 – Differences and similarities
Comparing employer and student feedback on skills and attributes

Skills

Differences
The most striking difference across all of the data was the importance employers gave to *numeracy* and *application of IT* when compared to how students rated this. Numeracy scored an average of 8.6 out of 10 from employers, compared with a score of 7.2 from students (see Figure 11). This chimes with anecdotal evidence from employers reporting students often struggled with the psychometric assessments in recruitment processes, which often test numerical reasoning and related skills. It was also interesting to note students rated the skill of *leadership* more highly than employers (7.2 out of 10 compared to 6.6 from employers). This indicates some employers do not expect to see this evidenced early in a graduate career, and students’ self-expectations are at variance with this.

Similarities
*Team-working* was given the same high rating by both employers and students (8.9 out of 10); and *analysis and decision-making, commercial awareness, and adaptability and flexibility* were also given similar and high ratings, ranging between 7.7 and 8.3 out of 10.

Attributes

Differences
The most significant difference between employer and student ratings was *degree classification*, closely followed by *relevant work experience*. Both of these attributes were more highly rated by students than by employers: 6.9 versus 5.3 for degree classification; and 7.8 versus 6.3 for relevant work experience. These results reinforce a widely-held belief employers look for attributes other than the strictly academic when recruiting, perceiving these as more relevant to career success. Employers also rated *motivation, organisational fit, and global awareness* much more highly than *degree result*. Although employers rated *relevant work experience* less highly than students, the overall rating indicated employers still saw this as being important (6.3 out of 10).

Similarities
Employers and students agreed about the high-level of importance of *motivation and organisational fit* (8.5 and 8.7 out of 10); and the lower-level of importance for *non-relevant work experience* (5.6 and 5.4 out of 10).

The Employer Survey Working Group conducted a ‘mirror survey’, to explore which skills students thought employers wanted. This survey was distributed to graduates participating in the Graduate Plus programme in June and July 2014, via an online survey and through interviews. A total of 171 student responses were received.
Both the students in the forum and the students surveyed identified and rated highly the importance of good grades, but employers surveyed did not view this with such high regard. Overall, the most important skill for employers was *motivation/organisational fit*. 

**Figure 11 - A Comparison of Employer and Student Perceptions of Important Skills for Graduate Recruits**

**Figure 12 - A Comparison of Employer and Student Perceptions of Important Attributes for Graduate Recruits**
Despite such apparent mismatches, students can clearly articulate what employability means to them. The challenge institutions face is how to instil in students confidence to quickly understand the importance of career-orientated learning opportunities.

**Comparing the students’ forum to the student and employer survey**

The forum primarily identified *communication, team-working, independent working and self-awareness*. The survey however rated *communication, team-working, independent working and analysis/decision making* the highest. These are similar and yet mismatch some employer priorities (see Figure 11). However both students and employers valued *communication* and *team-working* highly.

**Comparing the views from academics, with those of employers and students on employability skills and attributes**

**Comparative analysis employability skills – Art Design and Humanities**

**Employers**

The top five skills were *oral/written communication* (8), *team-working* (7), *independent working* (7), *adaptability & flexibility* (5) and *analysis & decision making* (5). Oral/written communication, team-working, and analysis and decision-making agree with the employers’ top five skills, with *communication* noted as the top skill for both employers and subjects alike. *Numeracy* was not perceived as one of the top five and *application of IT* was only cited as a top five skill in one subject, illustrating a mismatch. These skills were deemed relevant for a number of the subjects but weren’t given the same level of importance as those specified in the top five. This is likely to be a reflection of the disciplines involved.

**Students**

There is a strong agreement about the most relevant skills. *Communication* was the highest ranked skill for both the subjects and students, followed by *team-working*, and *independent working*. Hence the top three skills in order of importance match. *Self-awareness*, the fourth most popular choice in the student forum, was included by academics, but only three of the eight subjects included it in their top five. *Analysis and decision-making* is included in both populations’ top five. *Numeracy* and *application of IT* had a lower relevance to students which correlates with the findings from the subjects. Overall the strong similarities in the findings are encouraging, as students are clearly able to articulate the skills developed within their programmes.

**Skills triangulated**

Across the students, subjects and employers, there is a clear agreement about the top two skills. *Communication* is cited as the top skill and *team-working*, the second most relevant. There was also agreement on *analysis and decision-making*, which was ranked in the top five by all parties. These similarities demonstrate the importance of these key skills and illustrate their shared value. Students and the subjects ranked *independent working* as their third most important skill. This was equal sixth place for the employers, alongside *adaptability and flexibility*, which was recognised as a top five skill by the subjects and by the student survey. *Numeracy and application of IT* were ranked third and fourth respectively by employers. Neither skill featured in the top five for students, only one subject cited *application of IT* in their top
five and *numeracy* wasn’t included as a top skill for any of the subjects surveyed. The relevance of numeracy relates to the discipline and hence may account for the difference. It should also be recognised whilst these skills do not particularly feature in the top five they are recognised as important for subjects and students alike, as demonstrated by the broader findings of the study.

**Comparative analysis employability skills – Business and Law**

**Comparing employers’ expectations and Business & Law Faculty findings**

Employers rated *communication* and *team-working* as the most important skills but the faculty investigation concluded *communication, analysis and decision-making* were most important. *Team-working* slipped to third place in the faculty data. *Application of IT* and *numeracy* was much more valued by the employers than the faculty, but *leadership* seemed to be one of the least important skills from both areas of the investigation.

The employer survey outlined a number of skills needed on top of the standard key skill areas and this reflected the results from the faculty work to some extent. *Motivation* and *organisational fit* seemed particularly important in the employer survey unlike the faculty research.

**Comparing students’ expectations and Business & Law Faculty findings**

Students agreed with employers when ranking the top two skills (*communication, and team-working*), but academic staff thought *analysis and decision-making* was the second most sought-after skill. Employers did not value *independent working* as highly as both the students and the staff. Students thought *self-awareness* was more important than staff did.

Students on larger courses understood more readily it was their responsibility to access opportunities which suggests they develop independent skills more quickly.

**Skills triangulated**

*Numeracy* is far more important to employers than staff or students believed. *Leadership* is not as important to employers as it is to staff and students. *Team-working* is valued more highly by students and employers than staff, but *analysis and decision-making* is more important to staff. Overall there is an understanding that specific technical skills will be needed on top of the classic transferable skills but also a degree of professionalism such as time-keeping and punctuality.

**Comparative analysis employability skills – Health and Life Sciences**

**Comparing employers’ expectations and Health & Life Sciences Faculty findings**

The employers’ expectations scored highly in *oral/written communication, IT and numeracy, analysis and decision-making and team-working*. This was replicated with the faculty findings to some degree, with *oral/written communication* being perceived as an essential requirement alongside *team-working and analysis and decision-making*. *IT skills* in particular were not viewed as highly as employers suggested. This, in some part may be due to the professional nature of the programmes investigated, where an essential part of the graduate role is working
with different professionals within the healthcare context, and the ability to be able to communicate effectively.

The employers scored leadership and independent thinking as low, whereas the faculty findings rated both of these highly. There was a strong view that graduates should be able to 'hit the ground running' at the point of completion; leadership in particular was viewed as the highest essential skill by all faculty respondents.

Employers viewed prior relevant work experience, motivation/organisational fit as extremely important, which was reflected strongly within the faculty findings. For many of the professionally-based programmes, placements are an integral component of the course content, so students will receive relevant experiences throughout their course. A large proportion of the professional programmes are designed with the NHS and health and social care needs as a central component, so students actually experience these organisations and can view how they work, thus aiding organisational fit at the point of completion.

**Comparisons between students’ views and HLS Faculty findings**

Students identified communication, team-working, independent working and self-awareness as the highest rated skills. This was partly replicated the faculty findings (communication and team-working). Independent thinking was also rated as important from both the students and the employers’ perspective; but was not highlighted particularly by faculties. Again, although a degree of independent thinking is pertinent across professional programmes, students are more used to team-working and working inter-professionally rather than independently, so this may be a reason as to why this was not demonstrated within the faculty findings.

There was a mix of views on whose responsibility employability was, with students suggesting it was theirs as well as the institution’s. From faculty-based findings, academics provided a clearer direction suggesting employability activities should be an integral component from an institutional perspective, rather than relying on the student.

**Skills triangulated**

There are some clear similarities triangulated from the faculty findings, the employers’ needs and the students’ discussion in relation to the valued employability skills of effective communication and team-working, which were all placed highly across all respondents. All subjects identified communication, team-working and leadership as the top three skills but leadership was not highly regarded by either employers or students. Leadership was seen as necessary by professionally-based programmes, and was frequently the first answer provided. This may be due to contemporary reports in the media leadership skills were a necessity in the national context. A lack of leadership has been highlighted in Government reports into notable healthcare inadequacies. Such reports place both leadership and effective team-working among professional groups as an essential requirement to deliver safe and effective patient care. Equally, independent working was not identified within faculty findings, but was reported as an essential skill by both employers and students.

The faculty-based findings made the assumption it was the university’s responsibility to deliver effective employability programmes to students, but again, this was not replicated from student responses.
Comparative analysis employability skills – Faculty of Technology

Comparing employer expectations and Faculty of Technology views

Communication skills were rated the highest by both. Team-working, application of IT, and analysis and decision making were all in the top five skills for both groups although in different order. Employers looked for teamwork before IT or analysis, whereas academics focused on technical skills. Employers valued numeracy more highly, whilst academics favoured independent working, possibly reflecting the requirements of employment within a small company. Adaptability, commercial awareness, self-awareness and leadership were all outside the top five skills for both groups, reflecting a perception recent graduates could not be expected to understand the professional world so early in their careers.

Comparing students’ views and Technology Faculty lecturers’ views

Communication skills were again rated the highest by both. Other top five skills included team-working, independent working, and analysis and decision-making. Academics included application of IT in their top five, reflecting the technical focus of the programmes. Students included self-awareness in their top five. Numeracy and adaptability were valued similarly by both groups although neither group placed them in the top five. Application of IT was low in students’ priorities. Students viewed leadership as more important than more applied skills such as numeracy and adaptability, perhaps not realising leadership is likely to be more relevant later in their careers than in the earliest stages. This comparison could also reflect the proactive nature of the student survey sample.

Skills triangulated

All three groups reported communication skills to be paramount for employability. Team-working and analysis and decision-making were also perceived to be important by all groups. Numeracy and adaptability featured more highly in employers’ and academics’ perceptions than in students’ views, whereas students prioritised self-awareness and leadership. The application of IT appeared to mean different things to the student group as to the employer and academic groups, resulting in students not appearing to value it highly. Commercial awareness was low on all groups’ priorities, perhaps indicating that some awareness is needed but not in great depth.

Overall conclusions

This project has confirmed many expectations and best practices. In this way it is not surprising to see employers, academic staff and students all highly valuing communication skills and team-working.

But in other areas, mismatches and differences suggest there are opportunities to rethink and ensure better alignment between employers’ expectations and what, and how, students learn. Students, and some academics, have often been seen in this project to rate leadership as an employability skill, but that value is not necessarily shared by employers, who may plan to develop graduates’ leadership qualities to suit their own organisational approach ‘on the job’. Equally employers rated numeracy consistently higher as a graduate attribute than did either the students or their academic tutors. Finally, there is a mismatch between the value employers and students attach to degree classification, with employers rating this less highly.
So this project has shed light in specific areas, but also endorsed much excellent existing work and the general view that there is a definite range of attributes, which if developed consistently by students throughout their studies, will greatly increase their future employability.
Chapter 8 – Potential benefits of this HEA project

The next steps for the institution, and for any HEIs replicating this process, will be to use the data discovered in this project to empirically inform and extend future work. At DMU the findings will guide the university’s Employability Programme’s next phase of work in 2015-16, creating a systematic map of employability provision within the institution, identifying gaps and matching academic provision more evidentially to employers’ expectations. These definitions and expectations will become ever more useful material for students, their lecturers and university careers and employability professionals.

The first stage of developing and disseminating some of the material gleaned from this exercise was the university’s first ever Great Ideas for Student Employability (GISE) Showcase, a conference held in June 2015, aimed at promoting and sharing good practice in employability from specific academic and professional services areas of the university around the institution generally.

This project can also be used to help students to ‘map’ the growth of their own employability via a PDP tool which includes elements of the HEAR, action planning and target setting.

DSU hopes to create ‘shape my future’ kits either online or paper, explaining students’ own disciplines’ specific definition of employability, key employers in their area, and which activities will be relevant for that student to take up in year 1, year 2, year 3. These kits will be integrated with existing student online portals.

Students will be supported and encouraged to make use of the academic definitions and engage positively with academic staff and the university’s understanding of employers’ expectations to make themselves as employable as possible.

Excellent data has been gathered from key subject areas in all faculties. Similar data can now be gathered for the subject areas not covered in this project and the whole data set can be used to empirically and academically inform the next stage of the Employability Programme to ensure all students at DMU have the best employability experience and potential from their higher education.

Other information:

- Case studies.
- Appendix 1 – Literature reviews.
- Appendix 2 – Top tips to improve students’ employability, derived from investigations of employability in DMU subjects.
- Appendix 3 – Faculty Investigator templates.
- Appendix 4 – Skills & attributes employers want from graduate recruits.
- Appendix 5 – Original DMU Employability Skills Framework.
- Appendix 6 – Employer questionnaire.
- Appendix 7 – Redefined Employability Skills Framework.
Case study - Linking theory to professional practice in the Arts and Festival Management sector
Tony Graves and Dr Claire Orwin

Overview
Key modules at each level of study in the BA (Hons) Arts and Festival Management programme develop knowledge of theoretical frameworks, such as marketing and project management, which are then applied to professional practice. The complexity of application and the level of student autonomy develop as students progress through their degree.

Activity
The philosophy of practical application of knowledge and skills applies to all levels of study.

Within Level 4, students’ knowledge of project management and marketing is applied to the Leicester Comedy Festival, where students promote acts and venues, run front of house, undertake logistical planning, manage technical requirements and then evaluate the process. They develop an understanding of the application of theory to practice and an appreciation of the challenges of working on a live festival. It also develops the ability to work in groups.

Level 5 students put on events within the community in a professional setting as part of De Montfort University’s award-winning Square Mile community engagement programme. Working within a set budget, students contract artists, carry out health and safety checks, and promote the venue, all in a community setting, producing work for a diverse audience, developing a greater sense of autonomy in decision-making and a higher expectation of delivery.

In Level 6, students deliver De Montfort University’s week-long Cultural Exchanges Festival, a nationally-recognised public festival where students apply the culmination of their learning into practice for public consumption, working with high-profile contributors to develop a professional event with an esteemed reputation.

Outcome
A supported system facilitates the growth of students’ independence through the programme. Level 4 has a ‘hands-on’ supportive approach where practical experiences are made available with a safety net, using an existing framework to work within. Level 5 students have more ownership, developing their own novel concepts rather than working within an existing predefined project. The approach focuses on problem-solving with feedback & advice. Level 6 is seen as a blank canvas, using independent thinking, putting everything into practice they have learned for public consumption, in doing so creating exit velocity.

Reflections
1. A selection and interview process is applied to create the Cultural Exchanges team. Employers have remarked on this, recognising how it replicates a real-life situation adding value for the student experience.

2. Programme staff recognise the transformation of students participating in the Cultural Exchanges Festival as students really take ownership of the event.
3. External examiner feedback has recognised the practical work on Cultural Exchanges as good practice and innovation and student feedback endorses their appreciation of these practical opportunities.

4. Undertaking such practical activities across all levels of the programme is labour intensive. Whilst the philosophy adds value, there is an impact on staff resources in terms of general management and in their high-level of festival attendance.
Case study - Developing a digital marketing presence for Fine Art graduates

Ben Carpenter and Dr Claire Orwin

Overview
The BA (Hons) Fine Art programme requires students to express the contextual background to the development of their creative work and to reflect on the process and outcome to develop their personal professional practice.

Activity
Each student is provided with a WordPress site, pre-populated with help pages, teaching and learning materials, and an easily-navigable structure. These sites are hosted on ‘DMU Commons’, a university blogging platform. Using their sites, students create a blog detailing their contextual research and professional development. The blogs are a key feature of the year-long 30-credit Contextual and Professional Studies modules which run at every level of study. The blog is created in Level 4 and continues through to Level 6, creating a reflective space for the entire transition through undergraduate study. The collection of blog posts documents the development of inspiration and practice and facilitates a space to research, explore and develop ideas. The process is assessed via two 500-word reports which detail key learning-points and provide links to blog posts where they address these key issues. This effective approach focuses on what really matters: reflective narrative with evidence.

In Levels 4 and 5, the blogs are only accessible by members of the University. In Level 6, the students develop an externally-facing online presence. This requires students to consider how they present themselves to an external audience. This phased approach means students are able to leave with the ability to articulate their creative professional practice through an online presentation. To extend the process the blogs will continue to be hosted post-graduation and enhanced by the inclusion of an additional portfolio plug-in, (currently under development), enabling students to create an online portfolio to complement their blog, facilitating self-promotion to gain employment or for self-employment as a practising artist.

Outcome
The blog activity develops clear communication skills as students need to reflect and present their work. The process of creating the blog applies the skills developed within the programme and creates an externally facing digital marketing presence evidencing their application of IT and their abilities as creative professionals.

Developing a reflective summary for the assessment requires students to identify and evaluate their key learning points for themselves for the year, demonstrating their skills of analysis and decision-making.

As a reflective space, the blog facilitates an intimate relationship with their discipline, developing self-awareness. Through being an open resource, the platform also facilitates peer-learning.
Reflections
By threading the blog activity through the programme, students are continually developing their skills as they transition through the levels of study. The ability to articulate their personal professional practice and reflect on the process and product supports students not only to enter self-employment as practising artists, but to enter educational and creative management roles.

From a staff perspective, by assessing the key narrative, students distil the broader work undertaken through their blog posts, creating both an effective and time-efficient assessment process which is particularly relevant when dealing with large student numbers.
Case study: Capture the spirit of enterprise - soar with your strengths
Edwina Goodwin

Overview
A variety of modules studied by the students in the Enterprise and Entrepreneurship subject area

Activity
Stimulate, develop and enhance creative minds to develop and innovate business ideas and meet real entrepreneurs to present their strategies and convince of their feasibility and workability in the real world.

These activities manifest themselves in a range of challenging and thought-provoking modules all of which can be adapted and contextualized for various levels of learning and cultures: namely The Fox’s Lair® , Work-Based Live Case Study, The Art of Selling & Negotiating, Perspectives in Creative Leadership and Creative Management & Marketing.

Outcome
Key words: Confidence, Self-worth, Inspiration, Creativity, Innovation Enterprise, Entrepreneurship.

Strapline: Maximise your strengths and manage your weaknesses, and thus maximise your transferrable employability skills.

Reflections
This innovative offering has been running with great results for a decade now. It provides a crucial link with real-world business and enterprise. Indeed it is so well established that alumni of this programme and this activity often return to take part as the judging ‘foxes’.
Case study: Politics in action - supporting students to develop and reflect on their employability

Dr Alison Statham

Overview
This is a compulsory employability module for about 40 students at Level 5. The students are registered solely within the department of Politics and Public Policy.

Activity
This module combines fortnightly workshop activities with a short work experience placement (25-30 hours) organised by the student. The module is assessed by a reflective logbook. Students create a SWOT analysis at the beginning of the module, and use the assessment to demonstrate how it has evolved during the course of the module. In addition, they reflect, with evidence, on how the placement has helped them meet key criteria in the subject benchmark statement.

Outcome
This module supports students to create and develop networks which will support their employability and continuing professional development. Students undertake work experience of genuine quality (eg with embassies, think-tanks, local government, charities, community projects, Parliament). Several have gone on to undertake longer-term placements with their respective organisations. Others have developed their placement activity in their final year dissertations, and this, in turn, has supported them in accessing graduate employment and/or postgraduate study in their chosen field.

Student feedback focuses frequently on the importance of the module in terms of building confidence and a better understanding of how studying a traditionally academic discipline relates to vocation and employment.

The module has been praised by the external examiner as follows:

“This was a fascinating module to mark. I was particularly struck by the very challenging positions in which students are placed, and it was a pleasure to read the reflective logs which revealed the positive impact placements had on the students as they ‘grew’ into their positions. The students presented a number of very interesting case studies, and … demonstrated an ability to reflect on their practice. Indeed, I would be interested to talk in due course to the module leaders about how they have managed to crack the problem of getting students to undertake quality reflection – something which I have rarely seen done to this standard in modules I’ve assessed at other UK HEIs.”

Reflections
Reflection can be difficult to teach, and students can struggle with the idea of reflective writing. This has been supported by introducing them to it via popular cultural references, such as the “Big Brother” Diary Room. Asking “so what?” questions has helped students to frame their experiences in reflection, and to view the practice as a key element of continuing professional development. What also works well is a focus on appropriate behaviour for different situations.
One of the strongest messages from the module is that students realise and better appreciate the importance of professionalism, for example, the need to disaggregate their private and professional digital footprints, and how to use less formal communication modes, such as email, appropriately to the situation they are in.
Case study: Embedding employability within a BSc Nursing programme

Nicola Brooks and Sang Townsley, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (HLS), DMU.

Overview
The Embedding employability within BSc Nursing project was designed to promote employability engagement within the curriculum. An academic member of staff and the HLS Careers Consultant developed a programme of events that would occur within students first, second and final year of their course. The programme was based on the ‘DOTS model’, a framework used within careers education, which comprises of personal and professional development activities encompassing decision-making, opportunity awareness, transition and self-awareness. This model has been translated to devise a framework for embedding employability-based activities into the BSc Nursing programme.

Activity
All BSc Nursing students attend theoretical sessions based on the DOTS careers education model. In year one, the focus is on student self-awareness, with taught content centred on introducing employability, portfolio planning; values based recruitment within the NHS, and working within a team. The second year focuses on opportunity awareness, with practical CV preparation sessions, writing application forms, and a careers choices workshop with presentations from healthcare providers, prison nursing, military nursing etc. The third year focuses on transition and decision-making with taught content discussing prioritising care, delegation, leadership and management as well as refresher sessions on employability skills such as CV checking and interview techniques. The programme culminates with a recruitment fair with attendance from approximately 25 healthcare providers engaging with students over potential employment opportunities.

Outcome
The embedding employability project has received excellent verbal feedback from students who value the opportunity to receive theoretical sessions on employability skills, and being able to understand what employers want. The taught sessions act as a promotion for the careers team, as students actively engage and use their services to support them in CV writing and completing application forms. The careers choices workshop and the recruitment fair as isolated events allow the opportunity for students to consider a range of employment options and often challenge their thinking regarding obtaining a first graduate-level job. This equally promotes under represented areas of nursing such as opportunities in prison nursing and military careers.

Reflections
This initiative is now within its second year. The primary aim of embedding employability across the BSc Nursing programme has been achieved and has provided a directed and structured approach to employability activities for the BSc Nursing programme. This has also encouraged students to consider future graduate jobs from the beginning of their course, as well as increasing their understanding of the concept of employability.
Case study - Bringing Dragons’ Den into the curriculum
Mary Tyler and Julie Flett, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (HLS), DMU.

Overview
Using Dragons’ Den’ as a teaching and learning method is used in the second year Context, Management and Governance module of the BA Youth Work and Community Development.

Dragons’ Den is designed to extend student’s knowledge and skills in community assessment, project design, presentation skills, income generation, developing a business plan and teamwork.

Activity
Students work in groups of 4-6 to investigate the needs of a local community of interest and design a project to meet one or more of those needs. Examples of this include a project for unemployed young people in a deprived local community to gain employment skills, a project designed to raise confidence of young people from those communities using the medium of a European youth exchange, a project to develop peer educators to work in schools raising awareness of Female Genital Mutilation to ensure young people at risk know their rights.

Students pitch their project to a Dragons’ Den panel, consisting of experienced youth and community work practitioners who have raised money successfully from Trusts and charities (some of whom are DMU graduates). The Dragons provide feedback to the groups on the projects and their presentation. The feedback and suggestions are used by the groups to improve the project design.

Each group then completes a funding application for the Big Lottery or Erasmus+ and submits this as a group assignment for module assessment along with a community profile.

Outcome
Students evaluate the experience positively as they can see the real practical relevance of it. In their final year when they are assessed in placement on their organisational, planning and management skills some of the students each year draw on this Dragons’ Den experience to make applications for funding for small projects and these are often successful. In the context of the recession and huge cutbacks in services for young people the ability of youth work practitioners to generate income is crucial both to maintain some services and find ways of earning a living in their chosen profession. This process provides confidence, insight, skills and knowledge for this task.

Reflections
Students learn there is far more work involved in the research of needs and the detailed design of projects than they had realised. They also learn working as a team effectively to complete this demanding task takes a great deal of joint planning, and the need to be reliable and meet deadlines is a crucial part of being successful. They learn to play to the strengths of different team members.
Case study: Principles of engineering design
Mary Clarkson / John Gow

Overview
Faculty of Technology – School of Engineering.

Activity
An integrated first-year module common to all Engineering undergraduate courses, taking students through Engineering Design principles and practice. A variety of activities culminates in an industrial-grade project based on a live engineering brief, often proposed by engineers within the industry. Students maintain a logbook throughout their project, and present their work to panels composed of academics and people from industry; students are assessed on their designs and on their approach to project work both as groups and as individuals. Students are expected to achieve their brief within realistic constraints, finding an innovative solution to the problem set.

Outcome
Students get first-hand experience of understanding and applying Engineering Design concepts. They also get a feel for the kinds of work they will be expected to do upon graduating. Exposure to practising engineers helps them start to build their professional networks.

Reflections
On this module, students become commercially aware, using their developing design skills to solve real-world engineering problems. They start working with engineers from different parts of the industry, and lay the foundations of their own professional networks. “It is highly rewarding to watch students turn into young engineers,” reports John Gow, Subject Group Leader for Engineering. [Employability Champion for the School of Engineering].
Case study: News days
Mary Clarkson / John Dilley

Overview
Faculty of Technology – Leicester Media School – Journalism programmes.

Activity
Journalism students across all years and courses are given a live brief to gather news stories from the local community and publish them in a newspaper format and on an associated news website. A full day is devoted to the exercise, in which students produce a small newspaper, magazine, website or similar, working with media professionals as mentors and sometimes as clients.

Outcome
Students from all years work together producing real outputs, working with and getting to know professional journalists. Students begin their professional networks and learn how to use their contacts. The work produced is of high-quality and often makes a real difference to its target audience.

Reflections
“The students undertake a lot of real-world digital and print publishing during their course and this project brings it together and makes it real for them. The range of projects is astounding and the products are high-quality. Most of all, students are getting introduced to their chosen profession. Their career starts here,” reflects John Dilley, Director of the Leicester Centre for Journalism.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature reviews

Definitions of ‘Employability’: Academic, Industry, Student, DMU – Adele Browne, Senior Work-Based Learning Unit Manager, De Montfort University.

Academic and industry definitions

‘Employability’ has been discussed as a distinct academic theme since the early 2000s.

Harvey (2003)

Initially, Harvey (2003) proposed that:

“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: 21)

Knight and Yorke (2004)

Knight and Yorke (2004) produced the ‘USEM’ model outlining employability as four broad and interrelated components:

- understanding;
- skilful practices (including development of skills);
- efficacy beliefs (including students’ view of themselves);
- meta-cognition (including self-awareness and a capacity to reflect on learning).

Yorke produced two papers: Employability in higher education: what it is - what it is not and Embedding employability into the curriculum, in which he identified three “superordinate constructs of employability”:

- the graduate actually obtaining a job;
- the student being developed by his or her experience of higher education;
- the possession of relevant achievements (and, implicitly, potential).

Yorke then proposed the following definition of employability that is widely-used and referenced in the UK:

“A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.” (Yorke, 2004: 2).

Confederation of British Industry (2011)

The Confederation of British Industry took up the skills agenda with the publication of their influential report: “Working towards your future”, drawing up the following list of skills:

- business and customer awareness;
- problem-solving;
- communication and literacy;
- application of numeracy;
- application of information technology;
- ‘can-do approach’;
- entrepreneurship and enterprise.

Some have argued that listing skills leads to a simplistic approach where it is assumed that if we can ‘teach’ students the ‘missing’ skills the problem of making them ‘employable’ will be solved. Supporting this view, the text of careers activities does commonly tend to focus on skills, attributes and capabilities. This perhaps demonstrates the convenience of this approach as a “quick and relatively easy way to engage employers, curricula and students with employability and with career management”.

Those who have argued against this approach suggest that the use of catch-all phrasing may undermine the credibility of employability interventions and what they really are (Pegg et al. 2012: 20).

**Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011)**

Hinchliffe and Jolly developed the concept of the ‘graduate identity’, which challenged the definition of employability based on skills, competencies and attributes. They suggested instead that employers take into account value, intellect, social engagement and performance, and not independently but as part of a “composite identity, with different employers emphasizing different facets” (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011: 565).

In the period since the publication of his 2004 definition, Yorke has also come to urge caution against a simplistic approach to ‘making students employable’:

1. The 2004 definition is probabilistic (desirable characteristics do not convert employability into employment).
2. ‘Skills’ and ‘knowledge’ cannot be construed in narrow terms.
3. It is difficult to place a grade on aspects such as drive, cooperative working and leadership. This need extra testing by the recruiter.
4. The choice of occupation is often likely to be constrained (Yorke, 2004: 3).

**Pegg et al. (2012)**

Finally, Pegg et al. suggest that the recurrent emergence of new studies relating to employability itself suggests difficulty in embedding a fit for purpose model to support “effective curricula” (Pegg et al. 2012: 21). This perhaps corroborates findings from an earlier 2009 CBI and UUK Study, “Future Fit”, which suggested that each institution should individually undertake a process of reflection and consultation, [with] growing evidence that a tendency has developed for the localized development of delivery models “tailored to the needs and ethos of each institution” (CBI and UUK 2009: 21).

**Students’ definitions**

Students’ views of ‘employability’ also support a broader definition. At the Bright Futures Employability Conference in April 2013, 120 students from 40+ institutions reached agreement that ‘attitude’ is what matters and that:
“preparation for employment goes beyond the core skills we all hear so much about, and work experience, to include: finding what you are passionate about and love doing; developing all of you throughout school, college and university; preparing to build a career, not just get a job; being proactive in order to create choices and opportunities; creating a personal brand that communicates what you want it to say about you; making informed decisions about what to do... Ask yourself “why are you at ... university?” and if [the answer], like 79% of all students... [is] to enhance your job prospects, then you need to ask yourself “what are you doing to make that happen?” (Bright Futures Conference Report, 2013: 8)

**De Montfort University definitions**

On its public-facing website, De Montfort University uses an equation to define employability:

*The formula is very simple - Degree + Work experience+ Skills = Employability*  
(http://www.dmu.ac.uk)

The University Strategy and University Employability Strategy make further statements:

*We will focus on employability and understand the needs of business and the professions so that the university’s courses are relevant and give our graduates a head start.*

*Our objective is to 'embed and assess employability skills within the curriculum’ and ‘to concentrate on a whole array of employability and career development activities’ including:*  
- developing students’ awareness of the labour markets and occupations;  
- understanding recruitment and selection techniques;  
- meeting employers;  
- addressing levels of career aspiration and career development.

**Employability skills required by graduate recruiters - Alison Skellern Susan Rees, Sang Townsley, Careers and Employability Service, De Montfort University.**

This literature review was undertaken to try and establish which skills employers are looking for in graduates, and approaches to the teaching and assessment of these skills as part of the curriculum in higher education (HE). The project itself focused predominantly on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), but we acknowledge a large proportion of the literature refers to large employers.

The literature identifies a range of different definitions of employability, and that there is a considerable debate concerning appropriate definitions. For the purposes of the project, Yorke’s definition was adopted, which defines employability as “a set of achievements, skills, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”. (Yorke, M. (2004) *Employability in higher education: What it is and what it is not.* The Higher Education Academy/ESECT).
In Rees, C., Forbes, P. and Kubler, B. (2006) Student Employability Profiles; A guide for higher education practitioners. Graduate Prospects; CIHE; and The Higher Education Academy the following key competencies were identified as the most valued when recruiting:

**Cognitive skills/brainpower:** The ability to identify, analyse and solve problems; work with information and handle a mass of diverse data, assess risk and draw conclusions. (analysis, attention to detail, judgement).

**Generic competencies:** High-level and transferable key skills such as the ability to work with others in a team, communicate, persuade and have interpersonal sensitivity. (image, influencing, interpersonal sensitivity, planning and organising, questioning, teamwork/working with others, written communication).

**Personal capabilities:** The ability and desire to learn for oneself and improve one’s self-awareness and performance – lifelong learning philosophy, emotional intelligence and performance. To be a self-starter and to finish the job (achievement orientation, adaptability/flexibility, creativity, decisiveness, initiative, leadership and tolerance of stress).

**Technical ability:** For example, having the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern laboratory equipment. The ability to apply and exploit information technology (technical application, technical knowledge).

**Business and/or organisation awareness:** Having an appreciation of how businesses operate through having had (preferably relevant) work experience. Appreciation of organisational culture, policies, and processes through organisational understanding and sensitivity. Ability to understand basic financial and commercial principles (commercial awareness, financial awareness, organisation understanding).

**Practical elements:** vocational courses - critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice; reflect and review own practice; participate in and review quality control processes and risk management.

This list provides a useful starting point and overview; and subsequent reports tend to fall within one or more of the above headings when exploring the employability skills required by graduate recruiters:

**The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in The Employability Challenge (2009) UKCES** developed a framework for the skills it considers important to employability. These include:

- developing a positive approach to work and employment;
- using numbers, language and IT effectively;
- self-management;
- thinking and solving problems;
- working together and communicating;
- understanding business.

The report also highlights that the development of entrepreneurial skills and encouraging enterprise is important within the employability context, which would fall within the Personal Capabilities and Business Awareness categories identified by Rees et al. (2006).

This report considers why employability skills are important and highlights the importance of the following skills in the modern workplace:

- ICT;
- communication;
- interpersonal;
- aesthetic (how individuals present themselves).

The report also notes that the ability for the employee to deal with change and to continuously develop their skills is vital to being and remaining employable.

The following research documents focus on the particular skills that both large and SME employers are seeking in their recruitment process.

In Wilson, T. (2012) *A Review of Business-University Collaboration*, published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) the report provides an overview and a context for the recruitment of graduates into companies according to the number of their employees. It notes that vacancies available from the 700 Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) account for 30,000 vacancies per annum. (AGR members tend to be those companies with 250 or more employees). These vacancies alone are clearly not enough to meet the career aspirations of a cohort of 300,000 graduates each year. Only 10% are destined to join an AGR member organisation. There is a clear mismatch between the aspirations of graduates and the realities of the job market: Only 19% of finalist job hunters look for jobs in SMEs (i.e. those companies with less than 250 employees), whilst over half seek employment in major national or international companies. “There is a clear priority to align student aspirations with the reality of the graduate recruitment market and to highlight the importance of small and medium-sized companies in graduate recruitment.” It is recommended that universities should reflect on how students’ perceptions of employment with small and medium-sized companies could be improved.


The project identified the factors influencing successful graduate transition to the job market, to inform the promotion of graduate recruitment good practice and raise awareness of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). Key findings include:

1. A mismatch between the emphasis that many larger employers place on graduate mobility and the willingness of many graduates, particularly non-advantaged graduates preferring to return home after graduation, to embrace such mobility in pursuit of a job.
2. Students and institutions appear to place a disproportionate emphasis on large employers with graduate training programmes as the primary source of jobs. The effects are to overlook SME sector as providers of the majority of graduate opportunities. This supports the findings in the review by Wilson T (2012).
3. A total of 46% of employers stated a 2:1 was a basic requirement for recruitment, with SMEs being 44%. This probably reflects the greater importance of this to large employers in the early sifting process.
4. Only 17% of employers overall stipulated a minimum UCAS points as part of the selection criterion, of these 29% are large employers and 11% SMEs.

5. Two-thirds expected graduates to have clear career ideas by their final year with large employers (74%) being more demanding than SMEs (62%).

6. Nearly all employers (97%) felt that graduates should know how to articulate their skills and attributes effectively. Large employers were slightly more demanding than SMEs but the difference was small.

7. Nearly all said that work experience was important.

8. Two-thirds of employers indicated that an internship with them gave graduates the best chance of later being offered a job; with SMEs being twice as likely to respond as strongly agree.

9. About half of the employers felt that graduates needed to have extra-curricular experience before they would be considered seriously as applicants, with large employers 55% being slightly more demanding.

10. Large employers were more likely to target in order to recruit graduates from preferred degree disciplines, whereas SMEs were more likely to want to attract applicants from local institutions and to feel that their targeted universities always provided them with good applicants.

11. The highest ranked criteria for both large and SMEs were graduates’ motivation and interest, and fit between them and the organisation.

The mismatch between supply and demand for graduate roles within larger companies, as opposed to SMEs is also borne out in Phillips C. and Donnelly P. (2013) Smaller businesses – a positive career choice for graduates? The views, opinions and suggestions of undergraduates and small business owners. Gti media research and Step. Key findings include:

1. Larger companies are responsible for around 15-18% of the permanent jobs that new graduates enter each year. This means the majority of graduates find work with smaller organisations.

2. Smaller businesses are taking on more graduates for permanent jobs and work placements than previously – 45% had recruited at least one graduate to a permanent position (up 20% since 2010) and 41% had offered at least one graduate work experience opportunity in the last year (up 15% since 2010).

3. In terms of graduate skills, knowledge and experience, the employers’ experience of recruiting graduates led them to the view that successful graduates were more likely to have the following attributes:- enthusiasm 18%, technical knowledge 16%, communication skills 11%, working hard 11%, imagination 10%, commitment 9%, team-working 8%, managing potential 7%, discipline 6%, delivering results 6%.

4. Common themes emerged in terms of the skills and competencies that graduates lack:- a sense of commercial awareness and self-confidence – often expressed in terms of poor communication., There were also concerns about attitude and approach: lack of focus; low boredom thresholds and lack of ongoing commitment.

5. The skills and attributes that businesses feel are important or essential to be successful in a small business environment include team-working, flexibility to handle multiple roles, a can-do attitude, an innate understanding of profit and loss, sense of purpose, ownership of responsibility, initiative, organisational and time management skills, be
disciplined to do work they may not necessarily be excited about and going the extra mile as required.

6. Smaller companies value attitude, flexibility and commitment above technical skills: if the former are obvious in the graduate candidate, they are telling us that the latter can be taught.

7. When these employers were asked how they measured the value which their recent graduate hires or placement students had brought to the business, their response was as follows: - for their ideas and different perspective (25%); by success in the task given to the person (24%); by benefits which will be more obvious in the medium term (22%); by their potential to become future managers (14%); by direct and immediate impact on the bottom line (12%).

CBI and NUS (2011) *Working Towards your Future Making the Most of Your Time in Higher Education*. Published by CBI identified the skills required by graduate recruiters; namely, self-management, team-working, problem-solving, application of IT, communication, application of numeracy, business and customer awareness, and a positive attitude. The report quotes the CBI/EDI Education and Skills Survey of May 2011, in which employers were surveyed about their satisfaction with graduates’ employability skills:

**Employer satisfaction with graduates’ employability skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; customer awareness</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic literacy</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude to work</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic numeracy</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of IT</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The report states that at the start of 2012, there were 4.8 million SMEs in the UK and that these businesses employed 59.1% of the UK workforce and accounted for 48.8% of the total turnover in the UK private sector (BIS Business Population Estimates, 2012). The report goes on to discuss how SMEs perceive graduates as not having the necessary skills, both in terms of level and type of skill needed. It is perceived that graduates have limited practical experience of work generally and SME environments more specifically. Employers prefer ‘work-ready’
employees who have prior work experience and can demonstrate an ability to work autonomously and creatively. It emphasises the importance of the creation of more graduates who demonstrate enterprising abilities, behaviours and skills so that they can shape their own career path upon leaving HE, particularly in terms of the potential to add value to the development of small businesses.


This report explores some of the hot topics emerging from UK recruiters, whilst building upon the findings from previous research on the internationalisation of higher education, as set out in CIHE’s *Global Horizons (2008)*. Key findings include:

1. The market for high skilled graduates is increasingly global. Multinational employers, and increasingly employers of all kinds, require their workforce to work readily and confidently across worldwide operations, using a global outlook.
2. UK graduates must be able to work across national borders, manage complex international and intercultural relationships, and understand global aspects of the world of work.

The authors asked 12 leading employers to rank a list of global competencies by order of importance using a 10-point scale. Relatively speaking, the four most important global competencies were:

- an ability to work collaboratively;
- communication (both speaking and listening);
- drive and resilience;
- embracing multiple perspectives.

Of all the behaviours and attributes discussed by employers, those synonymous with adaptability and flexibility are most commonly emphasised.

Several employers “see a difference” in those graduates who have lived abroad or travelled extensively. For many employers, studying overseas adds value to an applicant’s CV. However, it seems that UK students, unlike some European neighbours, are reluctant to take up transnational exchange opportunities such as Erasmus.

Recruiters are also looking for graduates to have experienced real-life work situations and started to have developed understanding of the commercial world before they apply for a job.

The authors noted that entrepreneurial work experience may also be particularly helpful in graduates’ personal and professional development.

The report suggests that universities can foster global employability by providing, facilitating and encouraging work experience for students in a global business environment.

**Pedagogy and employability**

**Pegg, A., Waldock, J., Hendy-Isaac, S. and Lawton, R. (2012) Pedagogy for employability. York: HEA** focuses on three main areas – an update of the debate concerning curriculum design, delivery and assessment for employability; coverage of the different curriculum development approaches to employability; and a selection of case studies of current practice across a range of different HEIs. Key findings include:
1. The importance of making the distinction between employment as a graduate outcome that may be measured, and pedagogy for employability which relates to teaching and learning that supports ongoing career development and learning. When looking at developing graduates – they argue – the ability to articulate learning, and raising confidence, aspirations and self-esteem seem to be of more significance than a narrow focus on skills and competencies.

2. The report identifies the crucial importance of the local context within a particular HEI for determining pedagogical approaches to employability.

3. HEIs have adopted different definitions of employability and developed localised approaches tailored to their particular context. The authors of this report see this individualised approach to delivery as something to be recommended.

4. A number of models for curriculum design and delivery are discussed, including the USEM model, the CareerEDGE model and the SOAR model. The influence of the DOTS model on subsequent models is also acknowledged. The authors highlight the difficulty of evaluating the success or effectiveness of individual institutional approaches given the lack of a central, consistent "model for employability" embedded within the curriculum, which may partly explain lack of evaluation of the teaching and learning of employability.

5. The authors identify a number of factors that are crucial to the successful development of employability through the curriculum including:
   (i) Institutional support including staff resource, policy and cultural support.
   (ii) Students as active partners in their education who should be made aware of how different curriculum activities develop their skills, and why this is valuable.
   (iii) Elements such as personal development planning that allow students to reflect on past achievements and skills already gained, as well as looking forward.
   (iv) Research studies demonstrate that experiential action learning methods combined with direct work experience are the most effective pedagogical strategies for developing employability.
   (v) Using assessment methods and tasks strategically to motivate and engage students. The more creative and formative approaches to assessment are particularly appropriate, but teaching staff may be less confident in using these methods. Another challenge is the perceived lack of rigour and parity with more traditional methods like tests.

6. The authors conclude by recommending that pedagogy for employability should inform the entire curriculum and be made explicit to all participants. They identify three key areas that require action if this is to be achieved:
   (i) Learning, teaching and assessment to include experiential learning; and successful assessment methods identified that have parity of esteem with technical skills and academic knowledge.
   (ii) Work experience that includes reflection and articulation of the learning achieved.
   (iii) Building an institutional culture that promotes employability.


This report focuses on the development of personal development planning (PDP) within a careers-oriented context and provides case studies. It also notes that in HE, PDP usually comprises two elements – a transcript recording learning and achievement; and a means by which students can reflect on their personal development (the latter made up of records/reviews/plans; and processes represented in PDP). Key findings include:
1. Although PDP can be viewed both within a learning and a career context, HE has tended to focus on the learning context – both within actual practice and within the literature.

2. The authors identify three main ways that PDP relates to employability:
   (i) Helping students translate learning experiences into the language of employability.
   (ii) Developing skills to sustain employability.
   (iii) Developing a bank of evidence that students can draw on when presenting themselves to potential employers.

3. PDP is particularly relevant when employability is not just seen as concerning itself with immediate employment, but with sustainable employability.

4. The report discusses a number of ways in which employability can be built into the PDP process such as involving employers in its design, including work-based learning experiences, and making links with later professional practice. The authors note the increasing use of technology to support PDP processes and identify five models of curriculum delivery for PDP. They also discuss reasons why staff may resist involvement in PDP and argue that many of these problems with resistance may be reduced where PDP is embedded into the curriculum.

5. Key recommendations are to connect PDP to core academic activity; and to emphasise the process of PDP rather than the bureaucracy/products.

Butcher, V., Smith, J., Kettle, J. and Burton, L. (2011) Review of good practice in employability and enterprise development by Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs). Higher Education Academy is a resource for policy makers, practitioners and researchers who are interested in understanding more about the nature of employability and enterprise learning in HE. The first part of the report explores what is meant by employability and enterprise learning and traces its development in England over the last 25 years. It then considers how the CETLs have impacted on different elements of HE policy and practice. The research for the project took place between June and September 2010. The report concludes that articulating the impact of employability initiatives is difficult, because there are so many external variables influencing student outcomes, including individual choice and institutional approaches and attitudes.

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Rees, C., Forbes, P. and Kubler, B. (2006) Student Employability Profiles; A guide for higher education practitioners. Graduate Prospects; CIHE; and The Higher Education Academy

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in The Employability Challenge (2009)


Appendix 1: Top tips to improve students' employability - derived from investigations of employability in DMU subjects

1. Start talking to students about employability from the day they arrive and encourage them to be more confident and aspirational.
2. Induction sessions should include something challenging linked to employability/future study engagement (such as prepare for a seminar/read a report).
3. Ensure students know about opportunities and how to make the most of them.
4. Make students more aware of professional etiquette.
5. Make more of the fact students need to be able to articulate what they can do and think about how to apply and address applications for work.
6. Students should demonstrate why employers should want them rather than just saying what they can do.
7. Signpost what they are getting from their degree in an employability sense, e.g. competences and their desirability.
8. Find more opportunities for work-based projects – for companies and organisations to recognise the value of what a work-based project might offer their organisation.
9. Incorporate guest speakers into programmes.
10. Encourage all students to do an internship/placement relevant to their subject.
11. Introduce an employability audit for all students, requiring students to reflect on what they have learned and how they can apply this in the future – like an exit interview.
12. Work with the students on a one-to-one basis to build their confidence.
13. Convince students it doesn’t have to be qualifications vs jobs.
14. Expose students more to conference call/telephone interview scenarios.
15. Develop an Employability passport (which is added to their HEAR report) where students receive stamps when they attend guest lectures or employability events.
16. Prepare students so they can ‘hit the ground running’ with their first graduate jobs.
17. Involve employers in curriculum design and delivery – they will tell you what they want.
18. Use the students, positive experiences will sell employability for you.
19. Include a variety of activities and ‘challenge’ events.
20. Make the links between teaching content and workplace tasks more explicit and more natural (model some assignments on real work tasks).
21. Demonstrate employability importance, live and breathe it, let students see you using your own contacts.
22. Make it fun, run clubs across years and subjects, take part in national clubs across years and universities.
### Appendix 2: Faculty Investigator templates

#### Question & response template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Investigator name</th>
<th>Programme name</th>
<th>Interviewee name</th>
<th>Interviewee role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your subject, your students, their attributes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does your subject define employability?*</td>
<td>(Use Definitions in Appendix 2 as a prompt)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is that definition based on?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Which skills, attributes and attitudes should your students have?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you help your students develop those attributes through learning, teaching and assessment?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are specific skills/attributes covered/differentiated in each year of study?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employability and employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which roles are you preparing your students for?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do prospective employers want from your students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you involve employers in or around your curriculum at all?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our SME survey said employers wanted the following skills/attributes from graduates, how might these areas be covered on your course?</td>
<td>(Use skills/Attributes outlined in Appendix 4 as a prompt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which are the top five skills developed by students as part of your programme? *</td>
<td>(Use framework in Appendix 4) Number skills 1 – 5 (1 = top skill)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Innovation and good practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any innovative approaches to employability? Case studies? Anything you think worthy of sharing more widely?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which employability activities are you most proud of, or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HEA definitions of employability & enterprise

Definition of employability

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.

Definition of enterprise

Having ideas, doing something about them and taking advantage of opportunities to bring about change and can occur in any number of contexts including technological, social, environmental, political or ethical. The desirable graduate characteristics which can be classified as enterprising will include being creative, possessing the ability to solve problems, add value and bring about change and can be demonstrated by many students, and will generally improve learning, employability, and job satisfaction.
What was difficult?

How have barriers been overcome?

What strategies were used?
Appendix 3: Skills & attributes employers want from graduate recruits

WHAT SKILLS DO EMPLOYERS WANT?

[Bar chart showing the skills employers want, with various categories like Oral/Written Communication, Numeracy, Application of IT, Analyse and Decision Making, Team Working, Leadership, Adaptability and Flexibility, Commercial Awareness, Self Awareness, Independent Working, each with different labels indicating Micro, Small, Medium, Large, Not Stated]
WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO EMPLOYERS WANT?
## Appendix 4: Original DMU Employability Skills Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral/written communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to communicate formally and informally, verbally and in written form, with a wide range of people, both within and outside the organisation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Numeracy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to use, analyse and present numerical data in appropriate contexts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Application of IT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to use, present and communicate information using a variety of IT skills and software.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis and decision-making</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to reach a position, opinion or judgment demonstrating a critical consideration of the options.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team-working</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to co-operate and communicate effectively with others. Contribute to a group to meet shared objectives. Contribute to an atmosphere that supports and empowers all group members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to take a leadership role allowing others to contribute effectively, whilst accommodating differences in opinion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptability and flexibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to manage change in an adaptable and flexible manner. Ability to think on one’s feet and change styles in different situations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commercial awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to view situations from a business perspective, especially from the point of view of the client. An awareness of wider trends which have an impact on individual organisations, industry sectors or the economy as a whole.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of personal characteristics and interests. Ability to identify, and articulate their own strengths, weaknesses and values.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent working</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take control and responsibility of own contribution within set boundaries or constrictions. Work without supervision to meet a set target. Use initiative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further comment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5: Employer questionnaire

Q1 You may be thinking about, or have recently employed, one of our De Montfort University students for a period of work experience or employment. Which of the following skills do you consider to be the most important when recruiting a student or graduate?

Please give each skill a score out of 10 with 1 being least important and 10 most important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral/written communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to communicate formally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and informally, verbally and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in written form, with a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide range of people, both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within and outside the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organisation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to use, analyse and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present numerical data in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriate contexts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of IT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to use, present and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate information using</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a variety of IT skills and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>software.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to reach a position,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opinion or judgment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrating a critical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consideration of the options.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team-working</td>
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<td>Able to co-operate and</td>
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<td>communicate effectively with</td>
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<td>others. Contribute to a</td>
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<td>group to meet shared</td>
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<td>objectives. Contribute to an</td>
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<td>atmosphere that supports and</td>
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<tr>
<td>empowers all group members.</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Able to take a leadership</td>
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<td>role allowing others to</td>
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<td>contribute effectively, whilst</td>
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<td>accommodating differences in</td>
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<td>opinion.</td>
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<td>Adaptability and flexibility</td>
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<td>Able to manage change in</td>
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<td>an adaptable and flexible</td>
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<td>manner. Ability to think on</td>
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<td>one’s feet and change styles</td>
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<td>in different situations.</td>
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<td>Commercial awareness</td>
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<td>Able to view situations from</td>
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<td>a business perspective,</td>
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<td>especially from the point of</td>
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<td>view of the client. An</td>
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<td>awareness of wider trends</td>
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<td>which have an impact on</td>
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<td>individual organisations,</td>
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<td>industry sectors or the</td>
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<td>economy as a whole.</td>
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<td>Self-awareness</td>
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<td>Awareness of personal</td>
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<td>characteristics and interests.</td>
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<td>Ability to identify, and</td>
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<td>articulate their own</td>
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<td>strengths, weaknesses and</td>
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<td>values.</td>
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<td>Independent working</td>
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<td>Take control and responsibility</td>
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<td>of own contribution within</td>
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<td>set boundaries or constrictions.</td>
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<td>Work without supervision to</td>
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<td>meet a set target. Use</td>
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<td>initiative.</td>
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</table>

Further comment

Please answer the following questions using a rating scale of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>How important do you consider prior <strong>relevant</strong> work experience or employment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>How important do you consider <strong>non-relevant</strong> work experience or employment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>If you have recently recruited a graduate, how important do you consider degree classification (whether a student has a first, 2.1, and 2.2)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>How important do you consider an individual’s motivation and organisational fit (whether a person understands how they can contribute to an organisation’s values, ethos and priorities)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>How important do you consider that students are actively involved in clubs, societies and voluntary activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>How important do you consider that students demonstrate a global awareness (being able to understand and respect different cultures and perspectives)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>Please comment on any other issues which you consider to be important for your sector.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. We appreciate your feedback.**
## Appendix 6: Redefined Employability Skills Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental skills</th>
<th>Thinking skills</th>
<th>People and social skills</th>
<th>Personal development skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral/Written communication</strong></td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Team-working</td>
<td>Integrity and honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to communicate formally and informally, verbally and in the written form, with a wide range of people, both internal and external of the organisation</td>
<td>Able to reflect upon, analyse and learn from significant experiences to support and encourage self-understanding</td>
<td>Able to co-operate and communicate effectively with others. Contribute to a group to meet shared objectives. Contribute to an atmosphere that supports / empowers all group members</td>
<td>Demonstrate the ability to develop a relationship over time showing honesty, reliability, and fairness. An understanding of right from wrong and consideration of ethical dilemmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Numeracy</strong></td>
<td>Action planning and organisational skills</td>
<td>Self-belief</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to use, analyse and present numerical data in appropriate contexts</td>
<td>Ability to plan, develop and oversee projects / events from start to finish: time management, reliability &amp; attention to detail</td>
<td>Self-promotion and confidence in one’s own identified strengths, abilities and capabilities. Having a positive attitude</td>
<td>Awareness of personal characteristics and traits. Ability to identify – and articulate – their own strengths, weaknesses and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IT skills</strong></td>
<td>Analysis and decision-making</td>
<td>Influence and negotiating</td>
<td>Career management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use, present and communicate information using a variety of IT skills and software</td>
<td>Able to reach a position, opinion or judgment demonstrating a critical consideration of the options</td>
<td>Identify desired outcomes, show flexibility in negotiating assertively to reach mutually agreed outcomes</td>
<td>Demonstrate relevant work experience, ability to assess current / future situation and plan development in relation to employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Explanation and student guidance notes</td>
<td><strong>Problem-solving</strong>&lt;br&gt;Define and apply strategies for changing or resolving a situation or problem. Evaluate and review method used</td>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong>&lt;br&gt;Able to take a leadership role allowing others to contribute effectively, whilst accommodating differences in opinion</td>
<td><strong>Adaptability and flexibility</strong>&lt;br&gt;Able to manage change in an adaptable and flexible manner. Ability to ‘think on feet’ and change styles in different situations</td>
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<td>This is a list of skills that recent surveys of British employers show as most valued in new graduates who come to work for them. Many of these also correlate with those often called ‘academic’ or ‘study’ skills. In other words, these skills can do you a double duty – help you with your studies AND make you more employable</td>
<td><strong>Ability to put theory into practice</strong>&lt;br&gt;Able to clearly understand theory and integrate theoretical concepts into practical work.</td>
<td><strong>Networking</strong>&lt;br&gt;Establish and maintain working and communicative relationships with others to support and further their own objectives, identify role models and develop a professional identity</td>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong>&lt;br&gt;Demonstrate motivation towards goals, showing passion and dedication. Being tenacious and maintaining focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please think carefully where to target your skill development for the coming academic year.</td>
<td><strong>Enterprise, creativity, innovation &amp; initiative</strong>&lt;br&gt;Create and develop original ways of working and problem-solving – ‘thinking outside the box’; initiative: a positive attitude to risk; being resourceful and resilient</td>
<td><strong>Interpersonal skills</strong>&lt;br&gt;The ability to relate to, and feel comfortable with people at all levels, to be able to make and maintain relationships as circumstances change, to be able to demonstrate active listening</td>
<td><strong>Specialist skill</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Work-awareness</strong>&lt;br&gt;An understanding of appropriate relationships with a wide range of individuals, commercial and political awareness in a work context</td>
<td><strong>Independent working</strong>&lt;br&gt;Take control and responsibility of own contribution within set boundaries or constrictions. Work without supervision to meet a set target. Use initiative</td>
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