Enhancing the employability of psychology graduates
Enhancing the employability of psychology graduates

Researched and compiled by Jacqui Akhurst
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FOREWORD

Psychology graduates progress into a variety of careers. Three months after completing their undergraduate study, about two-thirds of psychology graduates are in paid employment with another quarter undertaking postgraduate study. Less than one fifth of psychology graduates will ultimately become professional psychologists. It is therefore incumbent on all of us in Higher Education to ensure that our psychology graduates not only gain a thorough understanding of psychology as a science, but also acquire skills and competencies, both specific and generic, which will set them up for the varied world of employment that they will encounter.

The Psychology Benchmark Statement (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002) asserts that “because of the wide range of generic skills and the rigour with which they are taught, a training in psychology is widely accepted as providing an excellent preparation for a number of careers.” If this is indeed the case, then we need to ensure that teaching and learning in our discipline continues to develop and improve to justify this belief. If it’s not, then we need to work even harder to ensure our students really acquire the employability skills which we, and employers, would like them to have.

Psychology is distinctive in drawing on and developing skills which are characteristic of study in both the humanities and the sciences. In addition, the study of some areas of psychology, such as group processes or communication, can, through reflective activity, serve to enrich the skills of the individual graduate. However, this does not mean that psychology graduates will develop optimal employability skills through mere contact with the discipline: an awareness of, and some focus on, employability issues needs to be present throughout the undergraduate programme for both staff and students.

This report provides a starting point to explore the nature of employability, why it is important for departments, staff and students in psychology, and offers some suggestions on ways forward.

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SECTION 1: WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT EMPLOYABILITY?

Employability is an important item on the national higher education agenda. The White Paper (DfES, 2003) highlighted it as a priority because ‘the government believes that a good supply of highly-skilled employable graduates is essential for national economic and social well-being.’ Also, employability is important to the ‘widening participation strategy because if it succeeds there will be more graduates looking for jobs’ (The Higher Education Academy, 2004). Numbers of graduates are rising, with a growing number having difficulty with making the transition from the student role to the worker role (Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, 2004).

Although a survey in 2003 showed that over 90% of psychology graduates found employment within six months of graduation, almost a third of these students were not in graduate-track employment, thus being ‘under-employed’ (Kingston, 2003). Furthermore, less than 20% of psychology graduates continue on to professional training, with the majority seeking employment in other or related fields. There is therefore a growing need for psychology departments to question what they are doing to equip their students for occupational life after their studies.

Some academics may respond to the above by saying that these issues are the ambit of careers advisers, and beyond their responsibilities. Others may argue that psychology is not designed to be a vocational discipline, thus giving attention to employability is inappropriate. There will also be those who have thought about the concerns raised in the first paragraph, but feel dismay at what appears to be a call to respond to yet another initiative. Many academics already feel under pressure with increased student numbers and institutional expectations that they will deliver on the research front.

It is therefore important that we consider how we might respond positively, but without adding to people’s already heavy workloads.

Knight (2004) summarises the results of a number of studies that have identified attributes that employers seek when recruiting graduates. These include oral and written communication, self-management and being able to work independently, team-work and interpersonal skills, creativity and curiosity, planning, organising, and ethical practice. When one considers this list, these are the capacities that many HE academic programmes develop. Yet it is often the case that, in job interviews, students are unable to articulate these attributes, or give examples of academic and other activities as evidence of having acquired such competences.

There are reports of there not being enough researchers produced and that what makes for employability in graduates overlaps substantially with what makes for good researchers (Knight, 2004). In addition to the attributes listed in the previous paragraph, he highlights: reasoning and critical thinking, problem-setting and problem-solving, a willingness to learn, information handling (including interpretation and evaluation), working across subject boundaries, managing projects and leadership. He believes that a useful strategy is for academics to make links between what contributes to good learning and good researchers (the goal of HE courses) and employability.

When one considers all of the above competences that are developed to various levels over the course of undergraduate study, it becomes clear that many of these core competences cannot be ‘taught’ directly. There is also the need to move beyond a skills focus - Knight (2004) thinks that too much has been labelled a ‘skill’. Consideration of the factors listed above underline the complex outcomes of learning, that may be slow to develop and are embedded in curriculum processes. This may be termed the meta-curriculum (the structure of the whole student experience). Thus, the challenge for academics is to grapple with ways in which the whole curriculum could be fine-tuned to optimise these achievements.
Students’ levels of awareness of their own employability attributes may be expressed at some point on a continuum such as that below:

Graduates have developed skills, but are unaware of these; they may have work or volunteering experience, but are unable to focus on what they have learnt from this; they lack career management skills

Graduates can articulate their transferable skills, reflect on their work and volunteering experience, and make realistic and well-informed career choices

Employability continuum

(From McFarlane, 2004)

Good academics over the decades have been enhancing student employability through enabling students to develop their competences, through the programmes of study they have designed. However, much of this development has been implicit in the tasks and activities in which the students have engaged and may thus not be obvious to the students themselves. The task is therefore to more actively and explicitly label, and enable students to articulate the competences being developed during coursework. This highlights the need to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their practice.

Meeting the criteria for the Graduate Basis for Registration, as laid down by the British Psychological Society, is also seen by some as a constraint on curriculum development in psychology, since this is said to limit flexibility or ‘space’ for innovation. Thus, the possibility of adding in modules focussed towards developing employability is limited. It has also been found that ‘add-on’ modules are not necessarily the answer, since the work done there may not be transferred to or generalised to other psychology courses by the student, unless there are activities explicitly designed to make the links.

Employability is therefore not something one can ‘bolt on’, or only the business of Careers Advisers (and this is not to discount the fine work done by such staff) and may not be best developed through a stand-alone module. Employability is something that good academics have already been developing implicitly through good teaching practice. What is now necessary is to make implicit practice more explicit, in order that students are more able to identify clearly the many competences they have developed through their studies. This enhances their ability to compete in the workplace and to market themselves more effectively.

The Higher Education Psychology Network has been developing materials to support the Psychology community in its employability work. The materials include skills checklists and work-related learning audits, a card sort for students, with weblinks and hard copies all included in this report. After considering definitions of the term ‘employability’, the report outlines potential starting points for reviewing the curriculum from an employability perspective. It then considers implications of the recruitment of a more diverse student population and follows that with suggestions for developing practice. Following a section devoted to various types of work-related learning, it then focuses on student activities and personal development planning. The final section summarises the work of the Student Employability Profiles project.

We hope you find this report on enhancing employability to be useful. The report owes much to, and draws heavily (with permission and encouragement) from, generic material resulting from various projects. The briefing by Ward and Pierce (2004) has provided a basis for
sections two, three and five. *Pedagogy for Employability* – publication no. 8 of the Learning and Employability series of the LTSN Generic Centre, has also been valuable source material. Then, some of the material generated by the following Higher Education Academy subject centres: Philosophical and Religious Studies, Biology, and Physical Sciences, has been helpful. Finally, material and ideas have also been gathered from various colleagues and workshops arranged by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT).

Sceptic says:

Our students get jobs, indeed they already have jobs, so what's the issue?

Answer:

We are talking about employability rather than employment, and they don’t necessarily have the kinds of jobs to match their training.
SECTION 2: DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

It may be surprising to some readers that we devote a section to defining the term ‘employability’. The reason for this is that the term encompasses a great deal more than the process of a student becoming employed in a job after graduating. Thus, employability has implications beyond employment.

Before exploring three different definitions of the term, you are encouraged to do the following exercise:

**Rate the importance of each of the following attributes as contributors to students’ success in their studies**

Use the scale of points from 0 = of no interest at all, to 4 = very important

| Communication: Expression of oral and written ideas clearly, convincingly and concisely |
| Leadership: Demonstration of initiative and the ability to motivate others to achieve common team goals. |
| Personal effectiveness: Self-motivation, perseverance in the face of difficulties, capacity to cope with change and variety |
| Problem solving: Production of imaginative alternatives and consideration of new ideas. Ability to be innovative, inventive and creative when necessary |
| Task management: An organised and structured approach to work. Effective prioritising and management of multiple tasks |
| Team working: Co-operation with others, contribution to a positive team atmosphere |

By adding up your ratings, you will have ended up with a total between 0 and 24. In contrast to popular magazines, though, there are no categories to rate your totals. Rather, this exercise is designed to encourage you to think about each of these competences that are being used by a major graduate recruiter for selection purposes. What your score will indicate is how similar your ratings are to the attributes valued by employers.

Employability is not just about getting and keeping a job. Employability is about graduates being equipped with skills, attributes and knowledge, in order to develop a career path that may encompass a variety of occupations, in a number of sectors, and to contribute to the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. The world of work is in a state of flux, with the status of the job market and the aspirations of the more diverse student population being different from a decade ago. There is growing competition, new opportunities exist, and regional employment issues as well as the diversity in career choice all influence students after they have graduated. In HE, there is increasing recognition of the need to enhance students’ capacities to cope in the rapidly changing context.

The Higher Education Academy Biosciences Subject Centre has defined employability as follows:
ensuring that students can demonstrate that they have the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to obtain, to develop during, and to perform excellently in, periods of employment which meet employers’ needs and provide a satisfying career.

Such a definition foregrounds both employer needs and the rewards for the individual student. It also moves beyond a single-job focus to the series of occupations that comprise a career. This definition may be criticised, however, for its use of the terms, ‘knowledge’ and ‘attitudes’. Knowledge implies a set body of content that students might acquire, but when employers are asked to specify this, they have difficulties, given the ever-changing knowledge base of modern work roles. Attitudes are also difficult to specify and measure.

The recognition that employability is a broad term is demonstrated in the next definition, chosen by the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team (ESECT). It is described as:

a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.

(Yorke, 2004a, p.7).

This definition focuses on achievements that can be accumulated over the course of degree study and through life experience. It reflects the shift from the ‘key’ or ‘core’ skill terminology of the 1990s, which prompted the development of skills taxonomies, potentially skewing curriculum development to such a focus. Teaching for skills does not necessarily provide for transfer into other areas and does not acknowledge the value of students developing more difficult to specify psychological attributes. These include self-efficacy and being able to engage in reflective practice, enabling students to make links between their experiences and the body of knowledge with which they are engaging in studying.

The above definitions fit with the complex outcomes of employability that employers value. Many lists have been produced based upon varying levels of investigation and research into what employers value in graduates, for example the work of Brennan et al. (2001).

However, although an employer focus is one important facet of employability, there is also the need for the incorporation of a broader concept of career development than that of getting (and keeping) a job. In response to the changing employment scene of the late twentieth century, career psychology has developed a much more comprehensive understanding of the term ‘career’, which includes the succession of work roles and the integration of the learning from other life roles into the progression through occupational and other activities that comprise career development. There is thus the need for a view of employability that incorporates the complexities of what might constitute successful adaptation to the demands of the rapidly changing and much less certain nature of a career in the 21st century.

A group of HE staff drawn from different contexts recently described employability as fully employing your learning to achieve your objectives throughout life. Such a definition, though less specific, focuses the attention on lifelong learning, and the individual’s responsibility to make choices and determine her or his career trajectory.

Some academics might react against the use of the term ‘employability’ in the context of higher education studies, believing that it is not our role to be providing people who will fit into the economy like cogs into a machine, but rather that we should be developing independent people capable of critical thinking in order to enhance the democratic nature of society. Although this might be one of the desired results of HE study, in psychology we also need to be aware of our responsibility, at a postgraduate level, to the profession of psychology. At that level, equipping students with the competences to perform the roles and responsibilities in the profession, as well as enhancing their grasp of the core knowledge of the discipline, become an important focus.

If you scored reasonably on the quiz at the beginning of this section, this shows that you see links between attributes developed in HE and attributes that interest employers. The qualities
that employers value are precisely those that support effective learning and that we seek in our postgraduate students. As Harvey (2003, p.6) has noted:

Despite concerns that some graduates are not work-ready, employers repeatedly say that they do not want ‘trained’ recruits. They want intelligent, rounded people who have a depth of understanding, can apply themselves, take responsibility and develop their role in the organisation. Employers want graduate recruits who are educated and can demonstrate a wide range of attributes not least the traditional high-level academic abilities of analysis, reflection, critique and synthesis. Employers do not want graduates trained for a job, not least because jobs change rapidly. Although they may want new recruits to add value rapidly, employers wanted graduates because they can potentially do more than add value.

We believe that employability is enhanced by good learning and can be incorporated without damaging the subject-specific dimensions of learning. Over time, many HE staff have regarded the development of such qualities and capabilities as intended outcomes. Much existing curriculum practice already promotes student employability. We may however need to ensure that such learning is captured by the students themselves in order that they can represent themselves effectively to employers (or academic selectors). Thus there is an overlap in the goals of the employability drive and our work as academics, but there may be variations in emphasis. It is not that we should see our work with students as driven by employer needs, but we do need to take into account ways in which we might enable our students to better articulate the generalisable achievements from their studies, seeing their relevance in the workplace.

Sceptic says:

Employability is equated with training, erosion of subject time, low standards, betrayal of academic values.

Answer:

Anything but – it has the potential to enhance the student experience and enable students to value their academic studies.
SECTION 3: CHOOSING A STARTING POINT

There is no one right way to foster student development, and hence employability, through the curriculum; it all depends upon the systems, circumstances and context of your department and your institution. Opportunities for major curriculum reform are limited, except for example where institutions are moving to a modular system or re-designing their modules to meet Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) specifications and benchmarks. Therefore this section suggests, as a starting point, the considering of existing practice through one (or more) of three foci: student development, curriculum content and learning outcomes, and staff and student beliefs and attitudes.

Focus 1. Student development

Conventional lists to describe those aspects of student development that may contribute towards their employability have tended to identify specific characteristics such as communication, problem-solving, independent learning and team or group work. Others have adopted a broader approach and identified four management skills that can be applied across a range of contexts. These are:

- Management of self
- Management of others
- Management of information
- Management of task

The purpose in using such a categorisation is twofold. The first is to strengthen learning within HE – such skills are fundamental to, and underpin, academic study. The second is to provide learners with opportunities to enhance and develop employability skills and attributes and to encourage life-long learning.

In order to assist you with input from student’s evaluations of their skills, we have included (in the back-cover folder of this report) a Student Skills Audit. To enable you to produce multiple copies, or to customise the audit, it may also be downloaded from the Employability page on the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network website.

The Student Skills Audit has been designed as a self-evaluation tool for the student and may be used as a basis for personal tutoring or with groups of students within a tutorial situation. It enables the gathering of information about students’ perceptions of their skill levels, may be used to enable students to set realistic goals for a period of study, and may be re-used at a later date to assess progress.

Focus 2. Curriculum content and outcomes

The emphasis here is on finding ways in which particular attention can be paid to the all-round development of students. We need to consider how our curriculum can be developed or – more often – tweaked so that it fosters such development in students. This may be more about how the curriculum is taught rather than about changing the content per se.

The Skills Plus project, for example, led to the development of the USEM Model. In the model, the U stands for understanding of subject, S for skilful practices in context, E for Efficacy beliefs, and M for metacognition defined in terms of capacity to reflect and act in a self-regulatory manner. The model emphasises the central importance of students’ beliefs about themselves and their ability to make a difference, along with personal attributes which influence the other aspects. This model and its utility is described in the Learning and Employability Guides, published by the LTSN Generic Centre/ESECT (at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/929.htm) and is elaborated in Knight and Yorke’s (2003) book, Learning, Employability and Curriculum.

Should your department wish to review the skills being developed over the modules comprising your psychology degree, a Skills Audit Across Modules has been designed as a
tool to assist you. This audit focuses on the skilful practices developed through the study of psychology. A copy of this *Skills Audit Across Modules* is included in the back cover folder of this report and may also be accessed from the Employability page on our website.

The *Skills Audit* lists potential skills, dividing these into five categories: cognitive, self-reliance, communication or people specific, technical and psychology-specific skills. Lecturers are encouraged to consider the learning outcomes of their particular modules, and to check the matching categories in the audit. Once this has been done across modules, the department would then have a picture of those skills that are well developed in their students, and would be in a position to identify gaps in the programme. This then enables changes and adaptations to be made in order to enable well-rounded student development.

**Focus 3. Staff and students' beliefs about the difference higher education can make to employability**

Many academics might feel that they have an inadequate understanding of the 21st century job market, and may resist engaging in employability issues because of they feel unsure of the territory. Furthermore, if lecturers and students believe that many of the attributes employers value are fixed personality attributes, or have been shaped before higher education, then employability work will not be taken on board. If such beliefs are prevalent, carefully designed workshop activities for staff, to challenge some of these attitudes, will be fundamental to embedding employability enhancement into the curriculum.

Similarly it has been argued that students’ success in a range of fields is dependent to an extent on their theories about themselves, and how far they can admit the possibility that attributes such as cognitive flexibility and self-efficacy can be developed.

Three things might be done to work with students' self-efficacy beliefs. The first two are linked to the self-efficacy tool in the ESECT/Higher Education Academy employability toolkit (available from http://www.esect.co.uk/tools.php).

- Ask students to complete the self-efficacy tool, to get a better idea of the beliefs on which they are operating.
- Tell students, repeatedly, about the research evidence on the relationship between beliefs and achievement. A summary of this research is included in the self-efficacy tool.
- Create opportunities for students to get feedback on their achievements. Provide occasions to help students to see how they might improve and challenge 'learned helplessness'. This could also be done during personal development planning (see: http://www.recordingachievement.org).

*Sceptic says:*

*Careers Services can do this!*

*Answer:*

Careers Services are very important but don’t always have the resources to give sustained attention to all students. Furthermore, they may not have the power or influence in the institution to get the message across.
SECTION 4: EMPLOYABILITY AND INCREASING STUDENT DIVERSITY

The widening participation agenda lies at the heart of student recruitment, with the government’s target of 50% of young people having an experience of HE by 2010, and includes a drive to increase student numbers from currently under-represented groups. It may seem surprising that an entry issue is linked with employability which appears to be more of an exit issue. We will endeavour to explain the links in the following paragraphs.

Psychology, currently the third largest subject at undergraduate degree level in the UK (according to Universities and Colleges Admissions Services data), is a popular choice of study for students from ethnic minority groups as well as students with disabilities. However, retaining such students through their course of study is a challenge, because they are more likely to drop out than students from more traditional backgrounds (Howe, 2004). This is of concern to the profession of psychology, since the recruitment of under-represented groups into graduate training, and therefore into the profession, is important to enable the profession to be able to meet the needs of the diversity of people in the UK.

Zinkiewicz and Trapp (2004) note that psychology ‘has not always been proactive and positive in relation to diversity, with research limitations in the training of culturally sensitive students in psychology’ (p.9). They encourage educators to consider strategies for increasing recruitment and retention of diverse students, such as including more relevant class topics and fostering training which employs a greater diversity of activities and applications. They report on the experiences of lecturers who have implemented work-related learning, and note that:

Despite the effort required to implement work placement opportunities, they were worth doing and had resulted in some evidence of improved performance, greater confidence in studying, many examples of positive student feedback and, in some cases, an opportunity for students to revise their career choice (p.23).

In universities where there are higher levels of student diversity, it has been found that there are a higher proportion of mature students, and students paying for their own studies. Therefore, part-time and even full-time work is already a part of many students’ lifestyles. There is evidence that such students will typically be working 14 hours a week, and many will be living at home rather than on campus. This leaves little time for the social activities typical of residential students’ life, since the students need to keep up with the demands of their academic work. Yorke (2003a, p.11) states that:

... there is a need to redesign curricular activities in order to avoid situations in which students come together for lectures and seminars and then depart from the institution without having engaged to any great extent with their peers. The inclusion of group activities not only fosters a sense of ‘belonging’ at an early stage, but also implicitly addresses those features of employability that involve working effectively with colleagues.

Employability issues might be addressed by making links between the students’ work and lives and the course material they encounter. Some universities have taken cognisance of this, and have developed activities and assignments that use the students’ current work experiences as a reference point for their studies. Furthermore, building in activities that draw on interaction with peers will have a number of benefits. Students need to be drawn into communities of practice, learning from each other and reflecting together.

The inclusion of activities in a curriculum linked to students’ employment, and designed to enhance student employability may lead to students not feeling as alien within the different context of HE. Also, activities that also include a social dimension (such as group
assignments and activities) have the potential to promote a greater feeling of belonging in students from diverse backgrounds.

In universities where there is lower participation from students from non-traditional backgrounds, it might be necessary to consider ways in which students might gain work experience. This could be through voluntary and community work schemes, as well as through involvement with student societies and activities that provide administrative, team, organisational and communication opportunities. However, traditional students often have developed a network of contacts, as well as knowledge and experiences of different work-roles through the broader range of social contacts provided in their family and peer contexts. This is often termed ‘social capital’ and may be of assistance when such students are at the point of entering the world of work. Students from non-traditional backgrounds may find greater difficulty entering the graduate job market because they lack this network. Work-related learning then provides the opportunity to build this social capital. In South Africa, work experience for undergraduates gives students from disadvantaged backgrounds opportunities to experience work in office or organisational contexts, developing certain skills that might be taken for granted by more privileged students, for example answering the telephone appropriately, managing time effectively, and an understanding of organisational roles and functions.

Including links to work experience and group reflective tasks into the curriculum have implications for assessment. Formative assessment of such tasks is often more valuable and helpful, particularly if the tasks are compulsory. There is the risk of working students not undertaking non-compulsory tasks, missing out on formative opportunities and then potentially failing when summative assessment occurs. When designing a curriculum, students from non-traditional backgrounds are assisted when early summative assessments are planned with an essentially diagnostic purpose. The key to supporting such students is the provision of helpful feedback at an early enough point (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

The methodology associated with work-related learning includes an emphasis on reflective practice. Activities such as keeping journals and doing self-evaluations may be challenging to all students because they are not part of familiar academic practice. Non-traditional students are, however, more likely to need more scaffolding, to enable them to build confidence and to learn to be more challenging and critical in questioning and debating. Such activities might go against culturally appropriate practices that don’t challenge authority. Students may be uncertain about what is expected of them, and this needs careful management with the lecturer providing reassurance and very clear guidelines.

From a theoretical perspective, the above suggestions link with the following ideas.

- Yorke (2004b) refers to the various writings of Sternberg which distinguish between ‘academic intelligence’ (closely related to IQ) and ‘practical intelligence’ which – as the term implies – refers to the capacity to resolve the often unbounded and ‘messy’ problems that employment and life in general throw up. Whereas academic intelligence tends to decline from early adulthood, practical intelligence tends to grow through much of adulthood. Hence for any entrant to higher education there is a lot, educationally, to play for, irrespective of the qualifications or experience that led to their being admitted.
- The work of Bandura (1997) and the concept of self-efficacy. This refers to the student’s belief that they can (probabilistically) ‘make a difference’ in respect of a situation in which they are involved.
- Yorke (2004b) also refers to Dweck who differentiates between ‘performance goals’ and ‘learning goals’. Performance goals are those adopted by students whose primary purpose is to show themselves in a good light relative to their peers. Learning goals are those in which the student is aiming for self-development, and where the comparison with

1 Pintrich (2000) distinguished between ‘approach’ and ‘avoidance’ versions of performance goals, with the former relating to shining, and the latter to ‘not being shown up’, in relation to peers.
peers is not of great significance. Poor performance tends to affect students differently according to the personal goals they espouse. The student who has adopted performance goals is likely to be demoralised by poor grades or critical feedback, whereas the student who has a learning-goal orientation is likely to see the situation as an opportunity for further learning.

To summarise the points raised thus far in this section, the following three factors have been identified for consideration:

1. **Task structuring**

Higher education is qualitatively different from other education sectors, not least because students are expected to work independently and develop autonomy. Transition therefore requires a mindset that is different from that often adopted by pupils in school. The need for significant adjustment in a short time may be a barrier to learning and an influence towards learned helplessness and discontinuation of study. The cognitive and cultural jumps may simply be too large, demoralising the student and increasing feelings of inadequacy.

The student is likely to need some form of staged guidance if they are to get up to speed fairly quickly, especially if their self-efficacy is low or they lack confidence. The provision of plenty of structure (scaffolding) on early tasks is necessary, progressively removing it as the student gains in confidence.

2. **Curriculum appreciation**

As noted earlier, various institutional curricula seek to develop in students aspects of employability (such as ‘personal transferable’, ‘core’ and ‘key’ skills) beyond those contained within the subject discipline. Where skills modules are included as freestanding components of the curriculum, there is limited scope for misunderstanding by students of what is expected of them. But the material in such separate skills modules may not lend itself to transfer, unless students are assisted to make the links. In contrast, when skills are blended seamlessly into curricula, there is greater scope for students not to recognise their development unless these are specifically highlighted by carefully designed activities at various points in the programme.

There is thus the need for better communication between lecturers and students about what is expected, and how it will be assessed. Broadly, this is a facet of what might be termed ‘curriculum climate’. If the first year experience of full-time study is treated as a year-long induction to honours-level work, then the students need to appreciate what this means for them. It may take some time for students to discard inaccurate preconceptions about the learning experience in higher education, and to come to terms with its reality.

3. **Formative feedback**

Yorke (2004b) refers to a meta-analysis of a large number of studies\(^2\) of formative assessment, which concluded that formative assessment is a powerful contributor to student achievement.

Formative feedback is needed at a time when it is usable and can point the learner towards improvement in performance on a future task. Many students entering higher education as a consequence of the policy decision to widen participation may need particular encouragement if they are to flourish to the full. In an educational climate that focuses strongly on student learning and development, formative feedback is especially important:

*Students observed that feedback was given in such a way that they did not feel it was rejecting or discouraging or placing an unbalanced focus on negative aspects of performance. Instead, they experienced it as supportive criticism . . . [and] as an important support for learning and motivation.*

\(^2\) The vast majority of studies referred to learning in school, though the meta-analysis did include some relating to higher education.
Students observed that feedback procedures assisted them in forming accurate perceptions of their abilities and establishing internal standards with which to evaluate their own work. For some students, positive interactions with faculty or peers appeared to have been an important factor motivating achievement in the absence of grades. Students responded . . . to their teachers’ expectations and personal recognition.

(Mentkowski and Associates, in Knight and Yorke, 2003)

The value of formative assessment is enhanced where the learning climate is such that attention is focused primarily on the learning, and not on the grading of performance. For those used to grading, this can be a disturbing change of focus that may take some time to have effect. The move that has taken place in the UK towards modular programmes has had a damaging effect on formative feedback, since the module of a semester’s duration has been seen as allowing less opportunity for formative exercises than in the year-long programmes that were previously the norm. The typical module is summatively assessed towards the end, with little by way of embedded formative feedback. If the educational value of formative assessment is to be properly exploited, a change in the way in which modules are implemented will be required.

Sceptic says:

Widening participation is the main priority.

Answer:

That’s certainly important in policy terms. But so is employability. And they are related. We need to ensure good levels of student retention and completion in order for students to value what HE can offer.
**SECTION 5: ACTION PLANNING**

A curriculum that enhances employability will develop:

- student self-efficacy;
- skills of management in the four domains of ‘self’, ‘others’, ‘information’, and ‘task’;
- students’ metacognitive and reflective capacities, linking experience with theory (see section 6 for more detail);
- the complex of achievements that employers value: communication, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, personal effectiveness and task management.

If we are to provide such a curriculum, then we will need to make our action plans by selecting from the list of actions below:

**Skills audit**

It has been suggested that a major goal of the curriculum is to develop subject understanding, specific skills, efficacy beliefs and metacognition (Yorke, 2003b). In order to audit what we already do in the curriculum we need to consider the degree programme as a whole, including all the modules it comprises (see next two pages and the module audit tool in the folder at the back).

**Curriculum objectives**

Make sure that the approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that are implemented are consistent with our curriculum objectives, not least by creating opportunities that support the sorts of learning we intend to happen. In the development of employability, how we do things, and how we ask students to do things, are as important as the stated objectives of a particular module.

**Student awareness**

Make sure that students are ‘tuned in’ to their learning intentions and to the significance of aspects of their learning. They should also have a perspective on their achievements, and a clear idea of actions necessary for improvement. Formative assessment can play a key role here. Students need to understand that the goals of a programme are wider than academic achievement alone, and to appreciate ways in which the work they do could support claims to employability.

**Graduate destinations**

Understand more about the career destinations of our graduates, not only their ‘first destinations’ six months after graduation but in terms of their longer-term career paths. See, for example, the survey of graduates done by the Centre for Higher Education Research Information three to four years after graduation (Brennan et al., 2001) and Purcell and Elias’ work (2002) on graduates seven years on.

**Career change**

Recognise the increasingly uncertain and less supported career trajectories that many of our graduates are likely to encounter, with more in self employment, people managing ‘portfolio’ careers where their week might consist of contractual work for two or three agencies, working in smaller companies or coping with a number of career changes.

**Student achievements**

Provide students with opportunities and support when reflecting on – and documenting – their achievements inside and outside the programme of study, thereby raising their capacity to represent their achievements to others. It is vital for universities, including careers staff, lecturers, tutors, student unions and others who advise students, to help them to translate
what they do during their undergraduate years into a language that has relevance to employers. The processes of Personal Development Planning (PDP) are likely to be important here, though most employers are unlikely to want to see the records or portfolios that accompany this process. (A leaflet on PDP has been included in the back cover folder.)

Promote employability activities
Last but not least, consider explicit approaches to promoting employability, such as work-based or work-related learning, or career management provision, where relevance and meaning can be made very clear to students and outcomes easily articulated to potential employers.

The following extract highlights qualities and skills that might form the foundation of an audit. Extract from a Perspectives briefing paper (Yorke and Knight, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECTS OF EMPLOYABILITY</th>
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</table>
| Because USEM is too coarse grained to enable careful study of a curriculum from an employability perspective, in the Skills Plus project, a listing of 39 aspects of employability was developed to assist participating departments in this task. As in all lists of this sort, there are gaps and overlaps of meaning, and some of the categories may not be particularly relevant in specific circumstances. This list is offered not as a prescription, but as something that might be adapted or drawn upon in the light of the local context. (The acquisition of disciplinary understanding and skills is assumed).

A. Personal qualities
- Malleable self-theory: (belief that attributes [e.g. intelligence] are not fixed and can be developed)
- Self-awareness: (awareness of own strengths and weaknesses, aims and values)
- Self-confidence: (confidence in dealing with the challenges that employment and life throw up)
- Independence: (ability to work without supervision)
- Emotional intelligence: (sensitivity to others’ emotions and the effects that they can have)
- Adaptability: (ability to respond positively to changing circumstances and new challenges)
- Stress tolerance: (ability to retain effectiveness under pressure)
- Initiative: (ability to take action unprompted)
- Willingness to learn: (commitment to ongoing learning to meet the needs of employment and life)
- Reflectiveness: (the disposition to reflect evaluatively on the performance of oneself and others)

B. Core skills
- Reading effectiveness: (the recognition and retention of key points)
- Numeracy: (ability to use numbers at an appropriate level of accuracy)
- Information retrieval: (ability to access different sources)
- Language skills: (possession of more than a single language)
- Self-management: (ability to work in an efficient and structured manner)
- Critical analysis: (ability to ‘deconstruct’ a problem or situation)
- Creativity: (ability to be original or inventive and to apply lateral thinking)
- Listening: (focused attention in which key points are recognised)
- Written communication: (clear reports, letters etc written specifically for the reader)
- Oral presentations: (clear and confident presentation of information to a group [also 21, 35])
- Explaining: (orally and in writing [see also 20, 35])
- Global awareness: (in terms of both cultures and economics)

C. Process skills
- Computer literacy: (ability to use a range of software)
- Commercial awareness: (operating with an understanding of business issues and priorities)
- Political sensitivity: (appreciates how organisations actually work and acts accordingly)
- Ability to work cross-culturally: (both within and beyond the UK)
- Ethical sensitivity: (appreciates ethical aspects of employment and acts accordingly)
- Prioritising: (ability to rank tasks according to importance)
- Planning: (setting of achievable goals and structuring action)
- Applying subject understanding: (use of disciplinary understanding from the HE programme)
- Coping with complexity: (ability to handle ambiguous and complex situations)
- Problem solving: (selection and use of appropriate methods to find solutions)
- Influencing: (convincing others of the validity of one’s point of view)
- Arguing for or justifying a point of view or a course of action (see also 20, 21, 34)
- Resolving conflict: (both intra-personally and in relationships with others)
- Decision making: (choice of the best option from a range of alternatives)
- Negotiating: (discussion to achieve mutually satisfactory resolution of contentious issues)
- Team work: (can work constructively with others on a common task)
Taking the ‘core’ modules of a programme, the following questions offer a starting-point for a curriculum audit:

- Should this [particular aspect of employability] appear in the module?
- Does it appear?
- If present, does it cohere, developmentally, with its appearance in earlier or later modules?
- Is there duplication with its appearance in other, perhaps contemporaneous, modules?
- Does the ‘core’ offer a student the opportunity to combine aspects of his or her learning to deal with complex and perhaps unfamiliar problems? (And does the ‘flow’ of learning opportunities facilitate this?)

Prescribed assessment tasks constitute a key to answering questions such as these. For example, work on the Skills Plus project turned up examples of over-use of particular methods of assessment to the detriment of exposing students to the need to demonstrate a wide range of skilled practice, and of final-year projects that assumed – erroneously – that students would earlier have been required to have demonstrated some essential skills. The difference between assessment that is primarily formative and that which is summative is important: broadly, the former should be creating conditions that assist students to succeed with the latter. Remember, too, a number of aspects of employability are not amenable to valid and reliable measurement.

Sceptic says:

Time is precious. We need quick fix add-ons, not slow grow programme redesigns.

Answer:

Yes, that’s true. But we are not necessarily talking about wholesale re-design, more a matter of auditing, fine-tuning and highlighting what is happening where.
**SECTION 6: WORK-RELATED LEARNING**

*All I did was study, study, study, and that was just half of it. Now I’m really regretting it. I wasn’t aware that employers required other examples – not just your degree. It doesn’t matter how much education you’ve got – you need experience. (Graduate comment during job search process)*

The term ‘Work-related Learning’ is used in this section in a broad umbrella-like way, to include work-based learning, learning through work experience (part-time or voluntary), work placements and learning by utilising work-based scenarios and simulations in various forms. The purpose of work-related learning is to assist graduates in the transition to the workplace. Whilst it encompasses the development of certain skills (e.g. communication, team working), it also aims to increase the student’s awareness of the context and functioning of the workplace, and to make links between the subject content studied and a real-life environment. Thus, the student’s learning experience is central to work-related learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-related learning</th>
<th>Work based learning</th>
<th>Non work based learning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non vocational</td>
<td>Part/full time and voluntary employment</td>
<td>Live project/ shadowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Placement Short / Long</td>
<td>Simulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role Play</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Case study/ learning scenario</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There are many ways in which work-related learning might be included in a curriculum. This ranges from, for example, regular placements on a set day across a term, or utilising volunteering work in which the students are involved, through to week-long placements during a vacation, and brief problem-based learning scenarios set in a work context. Given the range of methods and contexts, it is not possible to describe the relative merits of each, since the selection of the type of work-related learning will depend on factors unique to your department and the intended learning outcomes of programmes, your institution, and the regional context in which you are situated.

Work-related learning therefore includes a wide range of activities. There are, however, certain distinguishing features of work-related learning activities that successfully promote learning. One of the important features is the linking of the activity with the intended learning outcomes and assessment methods to be used (the coherence of the module). The second is the pivotal role played by the reflective process in which students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and make links between the practical and theoretical. The support of student learning grows out of well-structured reflective practice. Thirdly, the building of partnerships is also central to work-based learning. These features will be discussed below.
Developing coherence in a module – learning outcomes and assessment

For many students, it is possible to have a work-related learning experience without optimising the learning opportunities embedded therein. It is crucial that academics, when planning such activities, should be utilising the activity in direct relation to the learning outcomes specified for the module. Thus according to Pilkington (pers. comm., 2004), an outcome-based definition of work related learning is where ‘learning outcomes are achieved through activities which are based on, or derive from, the context of work or the workplace’. In order to develop good practice, Pilkington suggests that academics ask themselves the following questions.

Does the learning and teaching activity:

- develop and encourage skills, knowledge and understanding?
- develop and encourage skills, knowledge and understanding that will be useful in the world of work?
- provide an opportunity to apply the skills, knowledge and increased understanding in the context of the world of work?
- demonstrate effective planning, design, progression and implementation of the activity?

Then, to develop the coherence of a module further, it is important that the assessment methodology is linked to the learning outcomes and activities. Yorke (2004b) states that ‘It is well known that the students’ perceptions of assessment influence the way they approach their studies’ (p.26). In the realm of work-related learning, innovative assessment tasks and activities have been developed. We will not be exploring assessment in depth in this report, since there are a number of easily accessible resources for that purpose (see http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/Assessmentoflearning.htm). However, we will raise some questions regarding assessment, and list the different types of assessment activity suggested by practitioners.

In relation to assessing work-related learning, the first question to ask is should the activity be assessed at all? This may seem a curious question, but if the content and process of an activity is integrated into other aspects of the course to be assessed, assessing the activity itself might be superfluous. One of the important distinctions to be made is between content-related and process-related outcomes. Content-related outcomes specify mastery of a body of knowledge or the development of certain skills from a work-related activity. For example, outcomes such as ‘Students will be able to … show knowledge of the organisational structure … (or) … produce a well-targeted CV’ then lend themselves to the development of relatively straightforward assessment criteria. Process-related outcomes are much harder to assess. For example ‘Students will be able to … undertake an observation of a psychologist’s assessment activity… (or) …produce a self-reflective diary’, lead to assessment challenges.

Another important distinction to bear in mind is whether the assessment should be formative or summative (or a combination of the two)? Yorke (2004b) notes the value of properly done formative assessment as a means for students to make remarkable gains in achievement, yet such assessment has been identified as one of the weakest aspects of provision in HE. Formative assessment provides the student with valuable feedback, enabling the student to work on modifying his or her learning or activities accordingly. Whereas in universities academics are generally competent at providing summative assessment, the achievements valued by employers are resistant to common types of summative assessment. See Yorke (2004b, pp.26-28) for further discussion of these issues.

The following types of student assessment, appropriate to work-related learning, were generated at a workshop during 2004:

- Written: learning logs, a learning contract, critical incident reflections (including action plans), case study reports, an organisational study, a business report, portfolios.
• Presentations: interviews (before or after), role plays, structured talks, poster presentations, video
• Audits: skills audit (self-evaluation or by a mentor), self assessment (structured e.g. using the Belbin format), 'write your own reference', skills-based CV or application form, peer assessment of group activity, SWOT analysis of self in workplace, 360-degree (self, supervisor, 3 clients + 3 co-workers)
• Graphic representation: poster, mind map, symbolisation through ‘rich’ pictures (what you did, how you did it, how you felt)
• Creating a web-page
• ‘Mock’ assessment centre

A variety of factors will influence your choice of assessment technique. Some of these relate to the prior structuring of the exercise, the time and resources available for the exercise and for giving the students feedback, and the parameters of module design and assessment within which you work.

An example of a structured exercise, developed by the student, in collaboration with the tutor and workplace mentor, is the **learning agreement**. This focuses on the intended learning outcomes, developed and articulated by the student in collaboration with both tutor and mentor, which then determines the tasks and products to be assessed. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
<th>Learning resources and strategies</th>
<th>Evidence of learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What will I learn?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How will I learn?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How will I demonstrate what I learn?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I have completed the module, I will be able to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify and describe the working practices in my placement organisation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrate my understanding of how the organisation achieves its aims with reference to the structure of internal management, and be able to identify relevant staff responsibilities.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Demonstrate that I understand how economic and environmental factors influence the operation of the organisation.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Demonstrate that I have acquired basic skills or knowledge that enable me to carry out a number of designated tasks (to be outlined below).</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Demonstrate that I can reflect on and evaluate the learning I have achieved in the context of: my academic subject knowledge; my job related skills; my personal development.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Hills *et al.*, (2004a)
Another example of a strategy is the structuring of reflective practice, leading to the student recording work-based learning experiences in a journal. The journal contents will then be used to contribute to a final reflective report, to be assessed. The journal may be submitted for formative comments by the tutor, should the student desire, but the reflective report is compulsory and assessed summatively. The following description is part of a course guide:

Your learning log is your own journal which details what you are doing and what you are learning throughout the experience. Some tips:

- Start this journal at the beginning. Now! It is very hard to construct a journal in retrospect. You do not have to write reams for each entry - just a reminder to yourself (that is understandable to the reader - me and the external examiner) and an explanation of why it is significant.

- Do NOT write the journal in the way a child tells a story i.e. We got in the car and then we... and then we... etc. Use the format below:
  - Explain WHAT you experienced (Description)
  - Explain the SO WHAT of the experience (Why is it significant? What are the implications?)
  - Explain the NOW WHAT of the experience (How does it affect your future actions?)

- Wherever possible integrate theory into what you are writing. This will make it much easier when you have to write your final reflective report. e.g. The learner quietened down when I ignored his behaviour. (Behavioural principle of extinction, Skinner).

- Submit your learning log to me as often as you like (I recommend at least twice before your final submission.) This way I can check that you are on track and secondly I can have a 'conversation' with you about your learning.

Class explanation: I explain that reflection is about watching what we do so that we can improve our practice. I use the analogy of learning to dance and watching oneself in the mirror so that you can correct any mistakes you might be making. Then progressing to dancing on stage - but all the time being aware of where your body is in space, so that if anyone stopped you and asked what you were doing you would be able to reflect on it. Likewise as practitioners we need to develop this internal mirror.

Acknowledgement: This outline was contributed by Carol Mitchell, lecturer and specialist in community-based learning, Department of Psychology, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.
Developing students’ reflective practice

In the above table and box, the examples demonstrate the encouragement of reflective practice. Dewey (in Eyler, 2002, p.523) describes critical reflection as the ‘persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends’. Thus, the comparison of experience with the intended learning outcomes, established before the event, illustrates critical reflection.

Schon (1995a) wrote a useful text entitled ‘The reflective practitioner’, and has developed ideas around reflection, and the stimulation thereof. Readers are referred to his writings, for further detail, in particular the ideas about ‘reflection-in-action’ (1995b). Pilkington (2004, p.16), has developed a model, using an iterative process of moving from needs analysis to considering the opportunities available to the student; to reflection through tasks, leading to informed decisions; and then making it work (feeding the resultant understandings back into the students’ academic work). She lists the following reasons for promoting reflection: to enhance students understanding of the relevance of their experience, for consciousness-raising, to enable students to recognise when action might be necessary, to develop their strategic thinking and enhance their self management.

The terms reflection and critical reflection are often used interchangeably in the student learning literature. However, it is important that we ask the question, ‘what makes reflection critical?’ It would seem that part of the answer relates to developing students’ social awareness, and the challenging of the status quo, or of concepts they had previously taken for granted. Developing this type of reflection takes students into the political realm, and enhances their insight into the complexities of social and economic structures, developing moral and ethical awareness. When planning exercises to enhance reflection, we therefore need to consider whether our aims are more on the surface level, viz. enhancing the understanding of the application of knowledge, or to encourage the students’ questioning of assumptions upon which knowledge is based (as in critical reflection).

Using simulations to enhance work-related learning

Simulations and experiential exercises are already quite widely used in the teaching of certain sub-disciplines of psychology, for example: perception, behaviourism, social psychology. In comparison with the utilising of real-life experiences, simulations are cost-effective, can be done within the departmental buildings, reduce the practical organisation needed for other visits, and reduce the risks associated with letting student loose in, for example, the workplace. However, simulations require thorough initial preparation, especially if they are being developed from scratch, careful planning, and then both briefing and debriefing. It is also important that they ‘fit’ well into the learning objectives of the curriculum (i.e. that they are not just games or entertainment).

Simulations can play a number of roles, such as:

- introducing students to the variety of factors impacting on a field of enquiry;
- giving students a sense of the complexity of and nuances within a field;
- reinforcing important aspects of learning, for example through the repeated viewing of videotaped exercises, with different objectives in mind;
- involvement of the ‘whole’ student, with student affect, behavioural reactions, interpersonal responses becoming accessible for discussion, and
- providing valuable opportunities for feedback.

(Acknowledgement: This summary was extracted from a report by H. Swann, the Psychology Network special coordinator for experiential learning)
Work placements to enhance employability

The provision of relevant work-based learning to psychology undergraduates is plagued with a number of difficulties. Wrennal and Forbes (2002) note that ‘It is difficult to place unqualified students in work positions needing professional qualification and expertise and even ‘shadowing’ professional psychologists is extremely difficult because of ethical problems and client confidentiality’. Thus, finding placements might prove more difficult in psychology than in other disciplines. However, a number of UK universities have managed to develop modules, and should you wish to find out more, please contact staff at The Higher Education Academy Psychology Network, who would be pleased to facilitate your contacting academics who have undertaken this work.

Employability skills may also be developed through part time and other work (e.g. Graduate Teaching Assistants). A graduate who did some teaching, recently said:

*I've definitely developed my communication skills for a different situation other than university, as well as professionalism when talking to teachers and explaining my ideas…*

Building partnerships

Partnerships to develop work-related learning may be nurtured both with staff within your institution as well as with organisational representatives on the outside. Within your institution, interest groups or networks of people involved in work-related learning within their disciplines can be valuable as a resource and for support. In some universities, ‘brown bag’ lunches for such groups, and the sharing of practice, have led to work-related learning gaining credibility and ‘clout’ within institutional structures. This has resulted, for some, in the employment of a campus-wide placement officer, who has the responsibility for the time-consuming liaison with placements, and a unified institutional approach to employers.

Within your institution, it is also very important to work closely with the student advisor(s) responsible for psychology students, careers officers and other staff responsible for liaison with the community. In a number of universities, student advisors have contributed to curriculum content and development in a variety of ways. They may provide useful information, be available for talks to students at different points of their programmes, or participate more fully in work-related modules. Student advisors may also assist in the development of employability skills workshops and assisting students with preparations for CV and reference requests. Partnerships with other organisations that may provide valuable links into the community, such as student volunteering schemes, or student work agencies, should also be explored.

Managing the links between HE and employers willing to provide placements is one of the central issues to be addressed. Great care needs to be taken that the HE partner is not seen to be dictating from an ‘expert perspective’, and the prospective employers need to see the benefits to their organisations, and the value of what they will be contributing. Thus developing the relationship is crucial, and the establishment of goodwill, and a partnership where each feels respected and of equal status, must be given attention. Pilkington (2004) has described a model for collaboration, termed a Learning Organisations Network, for use when building partnerships. In order to illustrate the potential value of work placements, three case studies have been included below. The first two case studies were collected by the National Council for Work Experience (www.work-experience.org) whilst the third was contributed by a work-based learning tutor. Identifying details have been changed in each case.
CASE STUDY – Change in Action

The organisation
Change in Action is a voluntary organisation that offers a service for those who have been affected by some form of substance misuse and aims to improve people's physical and psychological health, resulting in the improvement of the clients' quality of life. A range of services is available through the company, as well as in collaboration with other voluntary and statutory organisations.

The work undertaken during the placement
A student studying psychology, who was looking for a placement, approached the company. Although they had not taken a student on before, the organisation had tasks they wanted done and felt that the student studying this type of degree was ideal for them.

During the placement the student took part in a range of projects –
- In-house training to be a counsellor.
- Working with the Clinical Services Manager, she was involved in the training of other volunteer counsellors and GP’s (after taking part in training herself).
- Producing an evaluation of the acupuncture service the company offers.
- Researching and updating information on training courses offered by the company.
- Involvement in clinical interventions, such as observing home visits and supportive procedures and dealing with hospital administration.

The student was set objectives throughout the placement to ensure her time there would be a practical learning experience, enabling her to focus on developing such skills as communication and team-working, as well as an understanding of the world of work.

Benefits to the student
The student was able to see the results of the work done and therefore able to put theory into practise, gaining confidence along the way.

Additional benefits
An unexpected outcome was the way in which the student influenced the way the organisation worked. As a result of her work they decided after the placement period that they would benefit greatly from employing younger counsellors as they can be effective, especially working with people of their own age group.

The placement was such a success for both the company and the student, the student continued at the company as a volunteer counsellor following on from the placement.

July 2004
CASE STUDY – Early intervention service
St. Lukes Health Care Centre

The organisation
The Early Intervention Service works in a new field of psychology that aims to improve the lives of 16-30 year olds who are suffering from mental illness. The service is based in a unit at St. Lukes Health Care Centre.

Although the service takes on post-graduate students, this was the first time they had taken on an undergraduate. The student's role was to work alongside other members of a small team and so gain practical experience that could not be gained from textbooks. The student’s needs, hopes, tasks and projects were all taken into account when drawing up a job description for the placement. This included the development of skills such as problem-solving, working on her own and with others. In addition, she was given the chance to attend seminars and had plenty of opportunity to see how the theory she learnt at university worked in practice.

The work undertaken during the placement
The student spent one hour a week under the supervision of a clinical psychologist, who was part of the team, and was shown around the other services that the unit offers, to broaden the experience.

Some of the tasks the student was involved in were:

- Helping to identify referrals through the Patient Admission Session and checking the patient notes to verify if they met criteria.
- Personally supporting a patient to increase social activities to combat social exclusion.
- Helping out with the preparation and running of psycho-educational and occupational therapy groups, as well as assisting in group outings.

The student gained first hand experience engaging with young people who are suffering severe and enduring mental health problems. The student set boundaries for her work and used the opportunities for clinical supervision for enhancing her learning.

Benefits to the student
As the student contributed to the team effort as a whole, she was able to see how her work contributed to the day-to-day concerns of the Service and get an understanding of the world of work and of the appropriate protocols such as timekeeping, work ethic, and integrity.

July 2004
CASE STUDY – Working with primary level children in a community centre

The organisation
The Community Centre is a not-for-profit organisation in an economically deprived inner-city area. It provides poverty relief, the building of community awareness, counselling, and an advice desk, children's programmes and the training of peer educators.

The work undertaken during the placement
Two final year psychology students worked with the organisation, establishing and running a weekly after school group for children.

During the groups the students facilitated the activities with the children, to enable them to explore:

- family and social support structures;
- hopes and plans for the future;
- children's rights;
- role models in the community.

In addition the students worked with volunteers in the community to build their capacity to run the groups, so that the programme could continue beyond the students’ involvement.

Benefits to the student
The students were able to gain practical experience in working with children in the context of an impoverished community in the real world. This provided an opportunity to apply counselling and facilitation skills and reflect on theory that had been taught to them in their academic studies.

Additional benefits
The organisation reported that hosting the students had been a success in terms of both the children’s responses and in terms of building the capacity of the community based workers and the volunteers. They have requested that the relationship with the university continue in the future.
Summary
In the preceding section, the concept of work-related learning has been described, and certain concepts, central to the design of such activities have been outlined. A number of generic publications are listed in the references, and you are referred to these, for further information. Should you already have in place work-related or work-based learning activities, three different audit tools are available to assist you in evaluating these activities. These are described in the box below.

Audits for work related learning
Graduates will have gained specialist knowledge of their discipline, but since the majority will not get employment in a directly subject-related career, we need to identify what other skills they will be able to apply in the world of work. In psychology, students develop a variety of skills, through demonstrating their abilities as learners. The skills developed by students need to be recognised, made more explicit and enhanced in the effort to address employability issues as part of the curriculum. This combination of discipline-based and more generic skills has been used to generate the items for the Psychology Employability card sort (see the printed card sort items in the folder at the back of this publication).

Three audit tools have been adapted for psychology departments, depending on the chosen approach to work-related learning. These are the Work-Related learning, Work Placements and Employability Audits. These may be viewed and downloaded from the tools section of the Employability page at http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk

The purpose of the audits are developmental and do not aim to simply to come up with an overall score for the course. They have been devised to help you consider, with respect to work related learning, the content and design of a piece of course-work or a module, to identify where there are strengths, and where improvements could be made. It is possible for these tools to be used again, at a later date, to re-evaluate the module(s).

Sceptic says:
Work-Based Learning is the answer!

Answer:
It’s certainly important, and we know employers value it in graduate applicants. But not all courses provide such opportunities, and not all undergraduates are able to take advantage of them. Other activities might also enhance employability.
SECTION 7: FOR THE STUDENT: WHERE TO NEXT?

(Note: This section is included for lecturers to photocopy for their students.)

Students often start thinking about employability skills only towards the end of their degree studies. This means that opportunities to get involved in activities that are helpful to enhancing employability and developing work-related competences may not have been optimised. However, it is never too late to actively enhance your employability, and this section gives some pointers for consideration.

What does ‘employability’ mean?
Employability does not only mean getting a job, but is about the way in which the person functions in a job (Yorke, 2004). It does not only refer to employment, but is relevant to lifelong career development and is defined as a ‘set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations’ (Knight, 2004).

What skills do you develop by studying psychology?
Along with generic and interpersonal skills, the study of psychology promotes a number of skills widely sought by employers. These include: problem definition and project planning skills, information gathering and reporting skills, methodological, statistical and inferential skills, the capacity to analyse and synthesise, and an enhanced knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of people (see www.apa.org/science/nonacad-jobs.html). These are the competences that psychology students need to emphasise. In addition, research training enhances the thinking, problem-solving, team-working, information management and dissemination skills that are of great value to employers (Knight, 2004).

How might your knowledge of psychology appeal to potential employers?
Employers often have little knowledge of what psychology graduates can offer. They are more likely to write job specifications linked to core and desirable employee attributes, and do not necessarily have preconceived disciplines in mind. Thus, it is up to the applicant to market what she or he has to offer, related to the specific and general competences required in the job. What is unique to psychology graduates is that they are equipped with enhanced understandings of human behaviour, an asset to employers for the management of people. This knowledge contributes to teamwork, decision-making, improving productivity and the general wellbeing of employees.

Applying psychology in other fields:
Various websites give examples of possible occupational directions. Data at http://www.prospects.ac.uk shows that graduates choose health, education, and childcare related occupations (18.8%), commercial, industrial and public sector administration and management (11.0%), social work, welfare community and youth work (9.4%), marketing and sales, business and finance, and IT (9%). Career directions are also suggested on this website, and it has been noted that about 60% of vacancies advertised for graduates in the UK do not specify a particular degree subjects. Employers are more interested in the skills and experience (including work experience) that the applicant can demonstrate.

How are universities planning to assist students?
Employability is much higher on university agendas due to commitments to have Personal Development Plans (PDPs) in place for students by the end of 2005. The challenge for academics is how the curriculum might be adjusted to help students to build up the complex constructs that make for success in the workplace. In part, lecturers are more actively making the skills that students are acquiring more explicit. Some psychology departments have responded by making better links with their careers services, and others have included careers modules at various points in the curriculum. Recent work has indicated that the best
approach is an integrated system where competences are developed over the course of the whole degree, often through making more explicit what has been an implicit part of academic study (including both curricular and extra-curricular learning, Knight, 2004).

**What helps graduates get jobs in the competitive market?**
One of the key contributors is some form of work experience. This can take a variety of forms, varying according to time spent and the nature of the experience. Voluntary or community-based work, considering the learning from your vacation or part-time work as a student, and work placements related to your studies (with varied durations from week-long to a weekly slot through a semester to courses that include a year-long work experience) all make valuable contributions. The other contributor is careful research into the job requirements in the area that interests you, and then customising of your application to highlight the specific experiences and learning related to that job.

**You are not alone**
There are many resources available to assist you in this process. Student advisory and career services offer a great deal. To check your own skills development, a number of checklists are available. There is a useful checklist on the Employability page of www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk (a copy is also included in the folder at the back of this guide), as well as links to a number of other resources. A further useful tool is the *Psychology Card Sort* also to be found on the above web-page. This card sort (played like a game of ‘solitaire’ or ‘patience’) enables you to identify your level of development against a number of items related to the skills and knowledge developed during a psychology degree. You are then encouraged to print out your final allocation of cards, for discussion with your personal tutor, to help you decide on the next steps to enhance your employability. Details of the card sort cards are on a handout in the back cover folder.

Note: A leaflet on PDP has been included in the back cover folder.
SECTION 8: STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY PROFILES

It has been recognised that many employers, as well as students and their families, have a limited knowledge of the applications of psychology, beyond those related to professional psychology. Over 80% of psychology graduates enter the workplace in other fields.

When we think about what psychology has to offer, we recognise that it is an empirical science that aims to understand how and why people act in the ways they do and to apply that knowledge in a wide variety of settings. Although psychology is a broad subject area, it attempts to analyse and explain behaviour in a systematic, reproducible way. There is often a virtuous circle between theory and empirical data, the results of which may find their expression in applications to educational, health, industrial/commercial and other situations.

Some 60% of graduates leave their first job after less than three years and this suggests that improvements in matching graduates to first jobs might lead to better retention of staff for employers. Through enabling students to make better informed initial choices, with an enhanced understanding of the skills they have developed in their studies, the rate of attrition might be reduced. Also, as higher education continues to expand and the impact of the widening participation policy grows, employers need practical tools to help them recruit and train staff cost effectively.

In order to provide a resource for employers, students, and prospective students, to increase knowledge of the attributes and knowledge developed by the study of psychology, a student employability profile for psychology has been developed, as part of a larger project. The project was jointly funded by ESECT, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre and the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE). A resultant profile for psychology matches the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statements (the criteria to which academic courses in psychology must conform) to a list of graduate attributes that employers value when recruiting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The QAA Benchmark Statements for psychology identify the following main categories:</th>
<th>The graduate attributes valued by employers are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Research skills</td>
<td>• Cognitive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysis skills</td>
<td>• Interpersonal competences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication skills</td>
<td>• Personal capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Handling data and information effectively</td>
<td>• Technical ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective team working skills</td>
<td>• Business organisation awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem solving and reasoning skills</td>
<td>• Practical elements specific to the employment context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing lifelong learning skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above two sets of criteria were placed on two axes to create a matrix, for example to consider which cognitive skills are developed in research training, or how interpersonal competences are enhanced through the communication skills developed in the study of psychology. The resultant table may be used as a tool to help an individual student identify their own examples of skills relevant to the intersection of each of the two list items. Students may then generate a comprehensive list of their own examples which fit in to the list of qualities and attributes typically sought by employers. Thus the student can give evidence of the skills developed through studying psychology.
The student employability profiles document gives comprehensive definitions of the criteria and skills listed above, and provides examples of recruiter questions which the student can work on in preparation for interviews. The full document may be located on the ‘employability’ page at http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk.

The student employability profiles have sections of relevance to students, but are also useful to employers who might like further information about the attributes psychology students may have to offer an organisation. Prospective students and their families are also catered for, since many people have misconceptions of the content of and skills developed through, the study of psychology. For ease of access, the sections relevant to each of these categories are available as a separate document on the website referred to above.

Employability profiles have also been developed for a number of other disciplines in HE. The profiles of more than twenty disciplines may be located at http://www.cihe-uk.com/publications.htm.
CONCLUSION

As we move into the 21st century, the world of work is dominated by the ‘knowledge economy’. The workforce thus needs to be increasingly highly-skilled, flexible, creative, and open to ongoing learning. The only certainty for graduates today is that they will face change and they need to develop the abilities to effectively manage that change.

In this report, we have highlighted the need for teachers and students of psychology to develop their awareness of the changes in the workplace, and to more actively prepare for these in HE. Whereas undergraduate psychology has traditionally not had a particularly strong vocational focus, postgraduate psychology prepares students for entry into the profession. We are not recommending wholesale changes to undergraduate teaching, rather we encourage lecturers to examine what they teach, to see where they are able, more explicitly, to enhance students’ preparation for the world of work through the material in their academic studies. We recommend considering what is already being done, to see where practice might be enhanced, and where partnerships might be developed, and offer suggestions of tools and techniques that could be helpful.

We hope that this publication will enable readers to expand their understanding of the many facets of employability. Our goal is not necessarily to meet employers’ specific training needs (since those might change), but rather that students develop as ‘capable people who can manage their own career development and who will be effective in their chosen occupation…’ (SHEFC, 2004, p.4). We believe that psychology has much to offer in the diverse contexts in which graduates find themselves, and hope that this publication has generated ideas for curriculum enhancement.
REFERENCES


USEFUL WEBSITES:

American Psychological Association:

Association of Graduate Careers Advisers:
http://www.agcas.org.uk/index2.htm (click on ‘employability’ link)

Association of Graduate Recruiters:
http://www.agr.org.uk/home.asp

Council for Industry and Higher Education:
http://www.cihe-uk.com

Higher Education Funding Council for England:
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2001/01_38.htm

The Higher Education Academy:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/

The Higher Education Academy Psychology Network:
http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk

Prospects (careers website):
http://www.prospects.ac.uk

Purcell and Elias’ work (2002) on graduates seven years on:
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/current/7yrs2/

Recording Achievement:
http://www.recordingachievement.org
Developmental audit tools

A Student skills Audit (developed by Sue Palmer, Edge Hill College)

This audit tool has been developed to help individual students assess their level of development on a matrix of skills. It is in a ‘checklist' format, where the student self-evaluates. It may be used as an initial tool to assist the student to begin work with a personal tutor, to allow for the setting of realistic goals for a period of study. It may then be used again, at various intervals, to monitor progress and identify new areas for focus. This tool has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the student’s personal development planning.

This checklist was developed by Sue Palmer of Edge Hill College. If this questionnaire is used for a cohort of students, it is possible that this could help departments assess key skills strengths and weaknesses in their courses. Lecturers and other teachers are encouraged to download it. If you collect any data using this questionnaire, an electronic copy of the data sent to the following address would be very much appreciated: palmers@edgehill.ac.uk. Please email Sue for her address, if you would like to send her hard copies of the questionnaire.

Since this tool has been designed for use by the student, lecturers might prefer to do a skills audit from the teacher’s perspective. The ‘Skills audit across modules’ may be of assistance to groups of lecturers doing such evaluations. If the interest is broader, to consider employability across programmes, then the more general ‘Employability Audit’ will be a more appropriate tool, whereas the ‘Work Placement Audit’ or ‘Work Based Learning audit’ might be helpful if specific work placements are undertaken. All of these audits are available from the employability section of http://www.psychology.ltsn.ac.uk/
**Psychology: SKILLS CHECKLIST FOR NEW STUDENTS**

*Where 1 = not at all confident, and 5 = very confident*

**NB Communication skills refers to your confidence in written and spoken English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>ft/pt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>First language/TOEFL/IELTS/CCEL score if applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1. Communication Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taking part in discussions:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) one to one</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) in a small group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) in a large group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making a presentation to people:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) who are familiar with the subject</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) who are new to the subject</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researching a topic or subject:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) finding my own sources of information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) using text covering complex subjects interpreting charts, tables or graphs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) interpreting diagrams, sketches or photographs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gathering information:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) judging its relevance and accuracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) comparing different points of view</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) relating specific issues to a wider context</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) letters or summaries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) essays</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) reports</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) documents with references to sources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) for an academic audience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) for a non academic audience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Create documents including:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Charts, tables and graphs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Diagrams, sketches and photographs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Overhead Transparencies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Information leaflets for parents/teachers/nonacademic audiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Technical documents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Remember to take your completed Skills Checklist with you to your first meeting with your Personal Tutor.*
2. Skills in Working With Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing:</th>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) cooperative working relationships with others</td>
<td>Not at all confident very confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) ways to overcome any difficulties in group or team activities</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and agreeing with others:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) group or team objectives</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) responsibilities and working arrangements within a group or team</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising my own activities so that I can be effective and efficient in a group or team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing with others in a group or team:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) how tasks are progressing</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) how far objectives have been met</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) ways the group or team activity could have been done differently</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Numeracy Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collecting numerical data:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) by measurement, observation and counting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) from published data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording data in the form of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) tables or diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) graphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing calculations to do with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) amounts and sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) scales and proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing the correct statistical test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using and rearranging formulae</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. C&IT Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using IT to produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) numbers/numerical data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) documents with text and image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using e-mail to obtain and send information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using functions in software packages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) word processing eg Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) statistical packages eg SPSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating formulae to generate information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for information using IT e.g.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) on the worldwide web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) on electronic database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember to take your completed Skills Checklist with you to your first meeting with your Personal Tutor.
Identifying:
(a) my reasons for using IT for a particular piece of work
(b) problems and issues associated with IT
(c) the effectiveness of using IT to meet a particular purpose

Comparing IT methods and software
Using safe and efficient working practices in IT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Skills in Improving Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Skills in Improving Learning</th>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all confident very confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seeking information on ways to achieve my personal learning targets
Agreeing realistic learning targets with appropriate others
Planning:
(a) how to manage my time to meet targets
(b) actions I need to take to overcome problems in meeting learning targets
Using support from others to help my learning
Trying different approaches to learning
Identifying and recording what I have learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Problem Solving Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Problem Solving Skills</th>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all confident very confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describing the main features of a problem I need to solve
Agreeing what would be a successful solution to a problem
Generating and comparing different options for tackling a problem
Select the option which has the most realistic chance of success
Planning how to carry out a chosen option
Implementing a plan for tackling a problem
Reviewing:
(c) progress towards solving a problem
(d) the problem-solving approach I took

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Remember to take your completed Skills Checklist with you to your first meeting with your Personal Tutor.
Remember to take your completed Skills Checklist with you to your first meeting with your Personal Tutor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. Intellectual skills</th>
<th>How confident am I about doing this? *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) critically</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) with an open mind</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to evaluate ideas and theories with</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reasoned argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to assimilate and synthesize concepts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to present information logically and</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thematically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to reflect on and revise my own</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing in the light of experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are your expectations of the psychology degree programme?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4.
Developmental audit tools

A Skills Audit across modules

This audit tool has been developed to enable groups of lecturers evaluate the skills being developed across a course of study. It enables programmatic evaluation, and may be a useful developmental tool. *The audit can be changed to suit your requirements. All we ask is that you clearly acknowledge LTSN Psychology as the originator. We would appreciate it if you would let the Psychology Subject Centre know that you are using this audit tool and the nature of any changes you have made as a result of your analysis by emailing: ltsnpsych@york.ac.uk*. Should you wish to consider other audit tools in the series, please consult from the employability section of [http://www.psychology.ltsn.ac.uk/](http://www.psychology.ltsn.ac.uk/)

**Instructions:** Insert module titles in columns of the table. Then mark (X) the specific skills developed by the content and activities within the modules.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules of course/programme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PSYCHOLOGY-SPECIFIC SKILLS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Display ethical sensitivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of terminology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand and interrogate theories</td>
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<td>Transfer knowledge from one domain to another</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administer psychological tests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretative skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apply theoretical knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Networking with professionals</td>
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<td>Consult with an organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand individual and group behaviour</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COGNITIVE SKILLS</strong></td>
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<td>Reading effectiveness</td>
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<td>Numeracy</td>
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<td>Information gathering and retrieval</td>
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<td>Analysis of text</td>
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<td>Creativity</td>
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<td>Reasoning skills</td>
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<td>Planning and prioritising</td>
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<td>Reflection on learning</td>
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<td>Synthesis of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical thinking and questioning</td>
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</table>
### SELF-RELIANCE SKILLS
- Self-awareness
- Self-confidence
- Independent task orientation
- Action planning and self-regulation
- Time management and organisation
- Adaptability
- Stress tolerance
- Initiative, proactivity, self-motivation
- Problem solving
- Coping with ambiguity and complexity
- Decision making

### COMMUNICATION/PEOPLE SKILLS
- Listening
- Develop an evidence-based argument
- Summarise information
- Write a report / essay
- Oral presentation
- Write/give an explanation
- Produce computer-generated documents
- Influencing/ arguing for a point of view
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- Resolve conflict
- Negotiate
- Team work
- Seeking and making use of feedback
- Empathy and imaginative insight
- Work cross-culturally
- Evaluation of own and others’ performances

### TECHNICAL ABILITIES
- Generate and explore hypotheses
- Develop research questions
- Select appropriate methodology for a task
- Analyse a data set
- Project leadership
- Use IT across a range of functions
- Develop illustrative material (eg. graphs, tables)

**ACTION PLAN:** Note the skills areas covered by too few modules, and discuss ways that these might be introduced to module(s) and the programme as a whole.
1. What is Personal Development Planning (PDP)?

PDP is part of the HE Progress File which is now being introduced across all levels of higher education. The Progress File will:

- provide each student with a transcript - a record of their learning and achievement
- and a means by which the student can 'monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development.'

The term Personal Development Planning (PDP) is used to denote this process and HEIs are expected to have their own policies in place by 2005/06.

**Personal Development Planning (PDP)** is "a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and / or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development."

The primary objective for PDP is to improve the capacity of students to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning. In developing this capacity students will be better equipped to convince employers that they are employable and they should be more aware of what they need to do to stay employed.

What do employers want to see from PDP?

Employers are primarily interested in the learning that derives from the process of PDP rather than the documented outcomes. Employers do not want voluminous PDP records presented to them as part of recruitment activities.

At the recruitment stage employers see the value of PDP in helping applicants to explain and demonstrate what they know, what they can do and have done, and from this deduce their potential as an employee.

**PDP and graduate application forms**

Graduate application forms are regarded as the basic tool in the initial stages of recruitment. They are used to screen and sift applicants and determine which candidates should progress to later stages in the recruitment process - such as interviews and assessment centres.

Most application forms include a significant number of 'open' questions. These are designed to allow candidates to outline experiences and achievements so that recruiters can come to a first perception of key underlying competencies.

The most common areas of open questioning ranked in terms of frequency:

- Overcoming difficulties and sticking to a task
- Most significant achievement
- Experience of team-working and organisation of others
- Reasons for applying and career interests/aspirations
- Extra-curricula activities
Strategic/broad questions which reveal understanding of employers' business
- Positions of responsibility and details of responsibilities
- Customer service and behaviours displayed

These questions are not just focused on the academic subjects that have been studied. They demand reflection and description of both academic and non-academic activities. Employers frequently use highly structured templates when evaluating job application forms to look for evidence of behaviours, practices or 'indicators' of the underlying competencies being sought.

**PDP can be used to encourage students to recognise their learning in the contexts that employers are interested in.**

How can PDP help students prepare for assessment centres?

Job applicants who have passed initial screening are often invited to an assessment centre where employers are seeking evidence of competencies. They also give candidates an opportunity to evaluate the company/organisation from their own perspective. The most common activities undertaken in assessment centres (ranked according to frequency) are as follows:

- interviews
- group exercises
- in-tray exercises
- presentation
- abstract reasoning exercises
- verbal ability test
- informal discussions
- case study
- numerical ability test
- solving a complex problem
- written report
- questionnaire
- observation test

The emphasis in assessment centres is on how candidates think and behave in new situations or when encountering new tasks/challenges. Often, the tasks are time constrained or in groups. They are not usually intended to test what a candidate knows in a subject sense.

Key activities are interviews and group exercises. Reflection, practice and familiarity with interview situations together with understanding of strategies interviewers employ is clearly beneficial. In the context of group exercises, skills emerging from both academic programmes and extra curricula activities are of importance e.g. leadership style, team member roles and effective working with others.

Other activities of almost equal importance are rapid information processing/decision making (e.g. in-tray exercises), formal presentations, case studies and abstract reasoning. Typically candidates will have developed presentation skills during their academic programmes. However, additional reflection, development and action planning in the other areas may be necessary.

**PDP activity can help prepare students for assessment centres by broadening understanding of their ‘transferable’ competencies relating to thinking in new situations and addressing new tasks and challenges, particularly in time-constrained or group situations.**

Reflection and action planning: key competencies for employment

Employers use graduate application forms and assessment centres as tools to help them identify the competencies they are looking for in recruits. But what are these competencies? The key competencies sought by 8 employers are listed...
below (ranked according to frequency).

- Flexibility, adaptability and the capacity to cope with & manage change
- Self motivation and drive
- Analytical ability and decision making
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Team-working ability and skills
- Organisation, planning and prioritisation abilities
- Customer focus and service orientation
- Ability to innovate / change things
- Mental and physical resilience
- Leadership ability

Graduate recruiters use structured guidelines and checklists which specify the ‘indicators’ (i.e. behaviours, practices and mindsets) that are considered to provide evidence of the underlying competencies.

**The reflection and self awareness promoted by PDP can prepare students for the type of competency frameworks they will encounter in many organisations.**

In particular PDP can help students understand:

- the competencies they have
- how they have obtained them
- the indicators they can quote to evidence them
- how to highlight the impact of their competencies on things they have done
- how they might be applied and evidenced in new situations
- how to develop or enhance their competencies

**Career management and lifelong employability**

Employers recognise that PDP skills learnt by students in their undergraduate courses are crucial for the management of their own careers and to the widest possible contribution to performance improvement in organisations.

Professional bodies also welcome the concept of introducing PDP skills in the student years. An ability to continually reflect, ‘self assess’ and plan specific actions in relation to required learning and their own development is a crucial professional ‘life-skill’.

Increasingly, individuals are being given primary responsibility for their own CPD in their early careers. Also, it is becoming essential to fulfil the requirements for periodic ‘re-registration’ of some professionals.

Employers see PDP related skills and behaviours as helping their employees:

- to adapt to continual change and movement within companies
- to be self-motivated, a key requirement for graduate level employment
- to take responsibility for the development of their own competence portfolio to ensure currency and applicability
- to provide the evidence of competency and currency in professions that require periodic re-accreditation.

PDP activities should emphasise to students the longer term benefits in relation to the development of self-awareness and skills that will help them gain employment and develop their career in the modern commercial world and, where relevant to the CPD requirements of their chosen profession.

To download a paper on connecting PDP to employer needs click here

http://www.recordingachievement.org/a
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/
Play Your Cards Right

This card sort exercise has been developed to help you review your employability skills. Its purpose is to help you prioritise your action plan. As you click on a card, it will become easier to read. Read the description on each card, then ask yourself the question “Am I able to do this?” Then place the card in the relevant column for you. Click on the ‘deal’ button to begin. To return to the card sort home page, use ‘Back’ on your toolbar.

As a STUDENT:
- How the card sort will help you improve your employability
- How to use the employability card sort
- Run a card sort

As a TUTOR:
- Find out what the employability card sort can be used for
- Find out how to use the employability card sort with your students
- Find out about other card sorts
- Find out about providing support for students who have completed a card sort

Feedback:

Please send us your feedback.

Acknowledgements:

This card-sort has been developed from more generic card-sort programmes, which may be found at: HE Academy Biosciences website or HE Academy Physical Sciences website. We acknowledge, with thanks, the technical support and assistance we received from HE Academy Biosciences and HE Academy Physical Sciences.
PSYCHOLOGY CARD SORT ITEMS

Students are asked to respond to the following question for each item:

**“Am I able to do this?”**

The categories of response are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not relevant</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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</table>

1. Gather information (T1)
   - Know how to access information from various sources including indexes, psychological abstracts and the web

2. Extract ideas (T1)
   - Read psychological texts with understanding, identify important points and link information to concepts

3. Evaluate research (T1)
   - Critical appraisal of material; consider whether research has used accepted methods

4. Distinguish theories
   - Identify important principles, and be able to consider features and limitations of various theories

5. Take different views (T1)
   - Be open to others' positions, be able to see rationale behind alternative psychological approaches

6. Integrate findings (T1)
   - Use data organisation skills, distil main points from different psychological sources, develop concepts

7. Question ideas (T1)
   - Listen for not only meaning, but also compare to your constructs for similarities and differences

8. Be motivated (T1)
   - Identify intrinsically appealing interests, link theory to experience, make sense of phenomena

9. Develop arguments (T2)
   - Use research findings and references to take a position on an issue

10. Summarise and report (T2)
    - Extract information and present it succinctly, in appropriate format and language

11. Manage discussions (T2)
    - Brief a group, facilitate participation, keep flow of ideas going, summarise

12. Collaborate (T2)
    - Exchange ideas and observations with others, enhance cooperation, share roles, build on individual strengths

13. Manage time (T2)
    - Plan your time carefully and commit to meeting deadlines

14. Presentations (T2)
    - Order your material logically and judge your audience, presenting clearly

15. Independent work (T3)
    - Be flexible in approaching tasks, take on responsibilities, managing and organising your activities

16. Show sensitivity (T3)
    - Awareness of and sensitivity to others' concerns and positions, assertive communication

17. Make decisions (T3)
    - Develop and consider alternatives, investigate implications of courses of action

18. Show commitment (T3)
    - Reflect on your motivation - are you interested, proactive, confident and persistent?

19. Evaluate experiences (T3)
    - Introspection to evaluate your responses to an experience, consider personal meaning

20. Solve problems (T3)
    - Practice solving unfamiliar problems - identify the question, collect information, allow for various outcomes

21. Know my skills (T3)
    - Identify the subject areas where you've achieved, or those that interest you
| 22 | Approach tasks flexibly (T3) | Generate ideas for different approaches to tasks, consider others' ideas, choose best approach |
| 23 | Get feedback (T3) | Talk to your tutor and identify areas for development |
| 24 | Generate hypotheses (T4) | Think of original and creative questions related to a psychological issue and explore possibilities |
| 25 | Research phenomena (T4) | Investigate research questions using tried and tested methodology, as in a research project |
| 26 | Administer tests (T4) | Follow instructions with care, check the validity of the test for your purposes, generate results |
| 27 | Analyse data (T4) | Organise and analyse data using appropriate technique or package |
| 28 | Lead a project (T4) | Look for new projects, initiate start-up, arrange and plan, motivate participants |
| 29 | Use IT programmes (T4) | Create text and documents, present graphics, use the internet and communicate with email |
| 30 | Understand groups (T5) | Apply your knowledge of individual roles in groups, consider group processes related to your team |
| 31 | Organisational consulting (T5) | Make contact, clarify needs, engage using accepted conventions, follow through on commitments |
| 32 | Work ethically (T5) | Consider the ethical implications of your practice and follow procedures for protection of participants |
| 33 | Plan strategically (T6) | Think ahead and position yourself for new projects, roles and experiences to move you on |
| 34 | Analyse adverts (T6) | Analyse job adverts to see where your skills match or where you need to develop |
| 35 | Picture a job (T6) | Take a broader view of where you want to be and the roles and skills needed |
| 36 | Prepare for interviews (T6) | Seek a mock interview and rehearse a range of answers |

**TACTICS:**
T1 = Cognitive skills  
T2 = Generic competencies  
T3 = Personal capabilities  
T4 = Technical ability  
T5 = Specific organisational practice related to psychology  
T6 = Generic career planning activities

The cards were created from the following source material:
Skills audit tool developed by Sue Palmer  
Key skills documents (Uni. Southampton website)  
Physical Sciences card sort