

Learning & Employability

SERIES ONE

Pedagogy for employability

The Pedagogy for Employability Group



Learning and Employability Series 1 and 2

The Learning and Employability series is primarily intended for staff in higher education institutions who are considering the enhancement of student employability. The publications will also be of interest to colleagues new to the area as well as those who are already engaged in developing employability and who wish to broaden their understanding of the topic.

In response to demand we have updated and reissued a number of titles from the first series of Learning and Employability, originally published by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT). We welcome suggestions for new titles in the series: email employability@heacademy.ac.uk.

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The Learning and Employability series is being extended by the Higher Education Academy and will reflect changing challenges and priorities in the relationship between higher education and the many work opportunities likely to need – or benefit from – graduate or postgraduate abilities.

The views expressed in this series are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Higher Education Academy.

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Part I. Analysis and strategic considerations

Introduction

Two ways of teaching the same content can lead to similar performances on tests of content mastery and to significant differences in other respects. For example, problem-based learning and conventional presentations of material can be associated with similar levels of content mastery but the former is also frequently associated with better problem-solving, a better grasp of practicalities and greater client-centredness.

This kind of difference is common enough to make the point that different teaching approaches often have different outcomes.

In this Part we take the stance that there is no undue tension between a concern with good learning in a subject and an interest in promoting employability. However, reconciling the two means carefully considering the ways in which we teach and students learn, and our assessment practices. There is sufficient research to indicate that our stance need not compromise a commitment to promote subject understanding and practices.

Employability in outline

The relevance of systems of higher education to national economies is accepted by governments around the world. This reflects a 'human capital' perspective (Becker, 1975) that was implicitly acknowledged 40 years ago in the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963). Writers such as Reich (1991, 2001) and Reed (2002) have stressed the importance for economic prosperity of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism in the workforce. However, economic development is not only about these qualities, important as they are. It also depends on skilful practices in a range of contexts, even if these are less dramatic than the exercise of creativity and commercial entrepreneurship.

Since the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative of the late 1980s brought 'enterprise' explicitly into higher education and spread it across the full spectrum of subject disciplines, there has been an expectation that students (particularly at undergraduate level) should develop a range of skills, understandings, qualities and dispositions appropriate to employment.

It is now widely appreciated that jobs may not be 'for life'. Careers will more typically be diverse, including voluntary, home and family-based work, retraining and career shifts (Hawkins and Winter, 1995; Hawkins, 2002). Many people make career changes that take them away from their main qualifications and perhaps towards the exercise of 'soft skills' – for example, in middle management and in the caring professions. One of the oblique aims of higher education is to get students in, say, chemistry, classics and computing to appreciate the possibility of using in new ways the expertise that they have developed through their subject-based studies.

The ESECT definition of employability, whose rationale can be found in Yorke (2004), is that it consists of

a set of achievements – skills¹, understandings and personal attributes –that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

We need to note here that employability takes on different colourings according to the background experience of the student. Mature students will frequently have had work- and life-experience, though they may not have been particularly encouraged to reflect on it and on how they might develop further.

Many younger students will have engaged in, or be engaged in, part-time employment – but again the experience may not have been exploited as a learning opportunity. In other words, success in teaching students depends to some extent on exploiting what the students 'bring to the educational party'.

What are employers looking for?

In recruiting to specific graduate-level jobs, employers are looking for graduates and diplomates who possess high-level skills, knowledge and appropriate personal attributes, and who can 'grow' the job or help transform the organisation. In some employment situations, the application of subject-specific expertise is vitally important whereas in others it is not. Some programmes are explicitly tied to occupations – medicine and veterinary studies are archetypical – though students from some apparently closely linked programmes, such as law, frequently move into posts in which they do not practise as lawyers.

Employers' 'wish lists' abound, as do lists of (variously-described) generic, transferable, intellectual, cognitive, graduate, key, practical and interpersonal skills. Many surveys of graduate employment try to assess the extent to which knowledge and skills developed during higher education are being used in an individual graduate's employment situation

(months or years after graduation), or the extent to which such knowledge and skills are required in current job situations. This latter consideration leads on to questions of graduate under- or over-employment (Bowers-Brown and Harvey, 2004) although much of this debate focuses on fixed views of what constitutes a graduate job, and ignores the extent to which a graduate has 'grown' the job. Given that (within the UK at least) analyses of graduate job vacancies show that the majority of such jobs are open to graduates from any discipline, the emphasis on possession of high-level generic skills and personal attributes is well-founded².

However, employers' 'wish lists' should not necessarily be taken at face value. Teichler (1998) questions whether employer statements should be interpreted as providing direct and objective information concerning demand in the employment system, noting that such statements are often inconsistent with actual recruitment and personnel policies and practices³. Harvey *et al.* (1997) showed that the set of desired attributes differed within an organisation: line-managers, recruiters, strategic managers had different emphases.

Nevertheless, research over a quarter of a decade finds a broad consensus about the attributes that employers expect to find in graduate recruits. They should exhibit the following:

- imagination/creativity
- adaptability/flexibility
- willingness to learn
- independent working/autonomy
- working in a team
- ability to manage others
- ability to work under pressure
- good oral communication
- communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences
- numeracy
- attention to detail
- time management
- assumption of responsibility and for making decisions
- planning, coordinating and organising ability

This squares quite well with a list of 39 aspects of employability⁴ which was developed from survey work conducted by Dr. Ray Wolfenden at Manchester University, and which can be found in full in Yorke and Knight (2004).

There is a risk that lists of qualities and attributes such as that above will draw attention away from the heterogeneity of the labour market in which there are large, medium and small enterprises, private sector and public sector organisations, and so on. Not all organisations want exactly the same set of attributes: each organisation has its own emphases, which change over time.

Furthermore, many organisations, especially small and medium enterprises, place a considerable de facto emphasis, at the point of recruitment, on experience. The expectations of a graduate in an SME are often different from those in a larger organisation: in an SME there is often a need to 'hit the ground running fast' (because there simply is not time for an induction phase) and to 'multi-task' (because there is nobody to whom to pass the buck). It must also be remembered that some graduates will opt for self-employment or 'portfolio working'.

The unevenness of benefits accruing to graduates

Although studies of the benefits (in particular, the economic benefits) of higher education regularly attest to the employment gains that accrue to graduates, these are unevenly distributed⁵. A number of factors affect the gaining of the first job, amongst them the following:

- The institution attended confers a 'positional good' on the graduate, according to its reputation. Some employers choose to recruit new graduates from particular institutions in which they have built up confidence (Brown and Hesketh, 2004), often the more prestigious universities.
- The subject(s) studied have an effect on the speed with which graduates obtain their first graduate-level job (Purcell and Elias, 2002).
- Graduates from some ethnic backgrounds find it difficult to gain employment comparable to that gained by the ethnic majority and some other ethnic groups (Brennan and Shah, 2003).
- A similar situation applies in respect of graduates from lower socio-economic groups (Brennan and Shah, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004).

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

- The sector of employment, with large differentials between the private and public sectors. The latter is more likely to recruit mature students (Egerton, 2001).
- Gender. Collective Enterprise Ltd (2002) showed that male graduates in information technology, electronics and communications (ITEC) earned 20 per cent more than females within three years of graduation, and Blackwell and Harvey (1999) showed that, even in areas of art and design dominated by female graduates, there was a salary bias in favour of males.
- Parental socio-economic status (Conlon and Chevalier, 2002).

The issue for higher education is what it should do to enhance the employment chances of the full spectrum of its graduates, whilst acknowledging that economic forces of various kinds will influence the graduates' success. However, treating all students in the same

way runs the risk of perpetuating disadvantage, as the relatively advantaged are able to sustain their position⁶.

Recent work looking at the employment 'gains' for diverse groups of students now participating in higher education suggests that confidence raising, self-esteem and aspirations might be more important than skills and competences in securing good employment for certain groups of students, including those from lower socio-economic backgrounds or certain ethnic minorities (Brennan and Shah, 2003). If this is indeed the case, then entitlements to learning opportunities that help raise levels of confidence, self-esteem and aspirations could be even more important than those dealing with skills development. This makes a strong link with the USEM account of employability (see Yorke and Knight, 2004).

The curriculum and employability

Institutional learning and teaching strategies are expected to deal with the issue of how the institution is addressing the issue of employability through its curricula.

Many teaching activities that promote good learning in the particular subject also promote employability in general. Employability and subject-specific learning are complementary, not oppositional. What the 'employability agenda' does is to encourage teachers to use pedagogic approaches that are likely to enhance general employability whilst dealing with the specifics of the subject. These approaches tend to fall within the scope of the phrase 'active learning'. Some may cover an extended time-span and relate to the programme as a whole (for example, work-based learning, years abroad, and perhaps problem-based learning); others may be activities within study units (for example, inquiry-based activities, projects and dissertations), and yet others may be used within single teaching sessions (such as case studies of various kinds, solving small-scale problems, and peer assessment).

This publication focuses on pedagogy, particularly at the levels of the study unit and teaching encounter. Programme-level strategic concerns were addressed in the companion publication, *Embedding employability into the curriculum* (Yorke and Knight, 2004). The closer one gets to the teaching encounter, the greater the potential for 'fine-tuning' the teaching approach, since this can often be a matter of personal choice for the individual teacher, and adjustments can be made relatively easily within the approved curriculum structure. The larger the segment of the curriculum, the more likely it is that negotiations will be needed amongst colleagues regarding possible changes to pedagogic practices.

The Skills plus project, which ran between 2000 and 2002 in seventeen departments in four contrasting English universities⁷, tested the proposition that it is possible to take a

programme approach to fostering employability even in highly-modularised curricula. A key issue for the project was to identify ways in which adjustments could be made to an existing curriculum without making major design changes: the project used the word ‘tuning’ to capture this kind of adjustment.

Key considerations for tuning curricula included:

- Developing an appreciation of what employability might mean for the curriculum in question, and expressing it in terms of student entitlements
- Considering how the intended learning outcomes were distributed across the curriculum, and how the distribution might be made more effective for the promotion of employability
- Applying a similar consideration to the provision of teaching and learning opportunities intended to foster those outcomes, and checking that assessment practices also promoted them
- Determining what adjustments to (a) curriculum structures and (b) pedagogical approaches would be feasible within existing validated programmes of study – hence, in innovation terms, this could be characterised as a ‘low pain, high gain’ approach.

Departments reported that this way of thinking about pedagogy for employability was easy to use, acceptable and worthwhile.

Placing employability activities in the curriculum is subject to challenges and opportunities. Amongst the challenges are lack of space in the curriculum; a culture in many institutions that stresses research; and the need for stakeholders and champions with the time and energy to drive change. However, there are opportunities in many modules for small changes to have ‘win-win’ benefits by demonstrating the commonality that exists between academic activity and employability.

In this publication we are not concerned with major curricular restructuring: rather, our interest is in those areas of the curriculum in which individual teachers, or groups of teachers, can influence provision. Hence our concern is with modules and smaller sequences of learning engagement.

Analysing curricula for their employability content

A useful early move is to take a reflective look at existing curriculum practice. This can be done at different levels. Hughes’s ‘Employability Audit Tool’, developed as part of his National Teaching Fellowship, focuses mainly on curriculum content and its relationship with the world outside academe. It can be downloaded as a Word file and be completed in about ten minutes (www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/issues/employability/resources.htm).

Experience with staff from a range of disciplines shows that they are ‘doing more than I thought’, but the main benefit is in indicating areas that might provide opportunities for further development⁸.

A focus on pedagogy requires a further step: to examine the way that the curriculum is taught, and to consider whether it needs to be adjusted (or ‘tuned’) to optimise the chances of helping students to develop their employability. In the *Skills plus* project, colleagues in participating departments examined the way in which the 39 aspects of employability that had been identified were distributed across the curricula for which they were responsible. This analysis showed, inter alia, that whilst the aspects were quite broadly represented in curricula⁹, some seemed to be over-represented, some desirable aspects were not formally included, and there was the occasional discontinuity such that a complex assignment in the final year lacked essential precursors.

A more generic analysis might take the four components of the USEM account¹⁰ and ask about the extent to which each was being developed in the curriculum or curricular component under consideration. In brief, USEM acknowledges four broad, interlocking constructs:

- **Understanding** (of disciplinary material and, more generally, of ‘how the world works’)
- **Skilful practices in context** (whether the practices are discipline-related or more generic)
- **Efficacy beliefs** (under which are subsumed a range of personal qualities and attributes),
- **Metacognition** (including the capacity for reflection, and that of self-regulation).

A matrix such as the following might make a useful framework for this activity. It assumes a programme-wide perspective, but can be adapted to fit a single module if desired. However, the smaller the sample from the curriculum, the less likely it is that the results of using the matrix will be representative of the student’s programme of study. A practical compromise is to focus on the core aspects of a curriculum, rather than to try to encompass everything, and to deal with substantial ‘chunks’ of a module rather than to try to apply the analysis to every item within the module. The point of the exercise is to depict the broad picture, and not to try to catch every point of detail.

| Curriculum component | Use | Use | Use | Use | Comment |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Module 1, chunk 1 | | | | | |
| Module 1, chunk 2 | | | | | |
| ... etc | | | | | |
| Module 2, chunk 1 | | | | | |
| Module 2, chunk 2 | | | | | |
| ... etc | | | | | |

The boxes in each row can be ticked, as appropriate, and comment can be added regarding the principal focus of each tick, or regarding the absence of a tick. This will give a rough-and-ready indication of where the curricular emphases are, and are not, which might provide the basis for further – and more detailed – inquiry, perhaps using the 39 aspects of employability.

Student entitlements to help develop and enhance employability

As far as students in higher education are concerned, their entitlements relate to having the opportunity to engage in learning and assessment activities that will help them develop and enhance their employability. (Some aspects of the engagement may be explicit, others implicit: what is important is that the students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, and to draw learning from them.¹¹)

Apart from the implications for the curriculum, to which we referred in the section on ‘tuning’, this implies that students should also be helped to recognise aspects of employability that stand in need of development, and that they should have opportunities to engage in activities that will help them to fill the gaps. (Personal development planning [PDP] has considerable potential here).

Nor are entitlements confined to the formal or ‘taught’ curriculum. Beyond the development of employability and the self-awareness that goes with it, it is also important for students to be able to access guidance on being able to tell a potential employer, in a meaningful way, what personal attributes and skills they possess, how these have been developed, how they might be developed in the future, and what their value might be (now, and in future) to the employer. What students sometimes lack is the ability to explain to an employer (especially an owner or manager of an SME) how their attributes and skills ought to benefit the company (see for example, Little et al., 2003).

In essence, students should be entitled to provision that contributes to their employability in three broad ways:

- fostering a continuing willingness to learn;
- developing a range of employability-related capabilities and attributes; and
- promoting confidence in reflecting on and articulating these capabilities and attributes in a range of recruitment situations.¹²

This all implies that students’ entitlements need to cover not only the well-understood access to careers services, but also support in developing career management skills (including becoming familiar with analysing company websites and other promotional material in order

to identify the competences that employers are seeking). They also suggest the desirability of access to work experience opportunities (of which there is more in Part 2), whether paid or voluntary, through which students can gain some insights¹³ into what makes businesses 'tick' (as well as more basic considerations of regular commitment, good time-keeping, and good interpersonal relationships). Such 'access' is not the problem (most students now work at some stage of higher education). What is needed is to help students reflect on what they have learned (about themselves, others, or the organisation) through that experience, and be able to talk about that learning in a positive manner to potential employers (or potential financial 'backers' in the case of those wishing to embark on self-employment). PDP activity has potential for these, as do institutional mechanisms for accrediting work experience. Last, and certainly not least, students' programmes need to encompass learning experiences that, by actively involving students, are likely to enhance their employability.

Individual teachers, thinking about learning, teaching and assessment practices for their module, should not be doing this as an isolated activity but should also negotiate with colleagues regarding how they, collectively, can respond appropriately to programme statements of student learning, teaching and assessment entitlements. With that in mind, we consider programme approaches to pedagogy.

Evidence-based pedagogy

There are some teaching approaches whose relationship to student employability is quite well known – for example, work experience. Researchers agree that students with work experience are more likely to get jobs on graduation than those without¹⁴, which led the Dearing Review (NCIHE, 1997) to recommend that work experience should be a student entitlement.

Research evidence shows that there are variations in the quality of work experience and, by extension, in what work experience contributes to employability. Blackwell *et al.* (2001) drew on four research studies to suggest six indicators of good quality work experience:

- Stakeholders – students, employers, academic staff and employees – all appreciate the underlying intentions.
- The quality of work experience is greatly enhanced by prior induction and briefing for all concerned; facilitation of ongoing reflection; debriefing; reflection and the identification of outcomes.
- Work experience is accredited, encouraging it to be taken seriously.
- Low-stakes or formative assessment is used to support the process of learning from work experience.
- Students build up a work-experience portfolio.
- Students can say what they have learned, provide illustrations and, if need be, a

commentary.

These points, which are securely anchored in research findings, can be treated as guidelines for maximising the benefit from work experience.

The lack of an evidence base

Yet, the research findings, by themselves, can mislead. For example, although work experience can enhance a student's appeal to employers¹⁵, we are not implying that strong claims to employability depend upon programmes providing work experience or work-based learning. Employers can be impressed by evidence of achievement based upon voluntary work or part-time employment. In programmes in which the provision of work-based learning is a challenge (such as History), a lot can be done to enhance employability by using pedagogy to foster outcomes that bear on employability.

Once a move is made from simple 'skill and drill' routines to more ambitious learning aims, there is a shortage of evidence about 'what works', because what works is highly context-dependent (hence there is no point in calling for 'more research' in the hope that this will come up with universal answers). For example, lectures can be powerful in some circumstances and for some purposes; online discussions can work well (Salmon, 2000); and both often fail. Rather than expecting an evidence base that will tell us what works, we would do better to think about an expertise base, by which we mean people who are well acquainted with the research evidence and who use experience and judgement in working with colleagues to determine what might be best suited for a particular purpose with a particular group of students in a particular subject area and setting. Nobody can be expected to have a complete answer to all of the challenges thrown up by employability, although much can be achieved by pooling the insights of colleagues across an institution, or across a subject discipline.

The lack of a secure evidence base does not mean that we are bereft of principles upon which to base attempts to enhance student employability. The analysis of employability developed early in this paper has important consequences for pedagogy. For example,

- Many of the achievements employers value cannot be promoted by individual modules (or study units) alone, because complex learning takes time. They are programme-level learning outcomes. Implicit in this is a challenge for higher education systems that allow students a great deal of choice from a wide array of modules.
- Instruction has a part to play, but it is not sufficient to promote these outcomes. Rather than thinking of pedagogy alone, we need to consider the design of what Goodyear (2002) called 'learnspace' – physical and psychological environments – that are conducive to the desired learning. We know that the link between teaching approaches and outcomes is probabilistic – for example, it is more likely that students will be skilled

at working in groups if they have had experience of groupwork, have been coached in it and know some of the research evidence about effective groups. There are no guarantees that provision will lead to the desired outcomes in any particular case.

- The tasks we set are pivotal. They need to engage students in what is sometimes called 'active learning', and to be life-like.
- We therefore need to shift from thinking about pedagogy as instruction to pedagogy as encompassing task design as well as actual teaching. Task design is a neglected area in higher education research, although we know from research in primary schools that tasks are seldom as appropriate as teachers imagine.
- There are massive assessment problems: how do we measure 'fuzzy' or non-determinate outcomes? Is it ethical to try? How might achievement be reported? We address these briefly below: a fuller treatment of the issues can be found in Knight and Yorke (2003).

Strategic implications

Ideally, a pedagogy for employability suffuses a whole curriculum, with the component parts (modules, for example) contributing towards the fulfilment of the employability aim. This can be seen in a number of vocationally-oriented curricula in higher education, such as in nursing, education, social work and business-related programmes.

However, in many areas, the recent emphasis that has been placed on employability has left some programmes, validated perhaps five or ten years ago, in need of attention. As a consequence, a concern to promote employability has had to be added to many existing curricula.

In *Embedding employability into the curriculum* (Yorke and Knight, 2004, p.11), a spectrum of curricular approaches was suggested, ranging from 'Employability through the whole curriculum' to 'Employability-related module(s) within the curriculum'. Underpinning the approaches is the view that the development of employability shares many features of the development of good learning. The list of 39 aspects of employability in Yorke and Knight (2004, p.22) contains many that teachers in higher education would be happy to promote, and others that (whilst germane to students' performance in higher education) are less likely to be the focus of teachers' attention (for example, self-management and prioritising).

Put another way, a pedagogy that optimises students' academic development is likely to be beneficial to the development of their employability. Such a pedagogy will encourage student engagement, amongst other things, by

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- requiring students to work on learning tasks, where possible, in authentic and/or richly-resourced contexts;
- involving collaborative work where appropriate (notwithstanding the challenges this introduces regarding high-stakes or summative assessment);
- providing cognitive 'scaffolding' to help students towards achievements currently beyond their unaided capability and progressively removing it as that capability develops; and
- encouraging the development of metacognition (for example, reflection and self-regulation).

It will also encourage students to evaluate their achievements with respect to the expectations of employers and the broader society.

Part 2. Supporting the development of employability

Introduction

This Part focuses on what the individual teacher – or perhaps a team of teachers¹⁶ – can do at a relatively local curricular level to foster employability. Two themes suffuse this Part: first, that employability correlates highly with good learning; second, that good learning is most likely when students are engaged by challenging tasks, rather than being relatively passive recipients of curriculum material. An implication is that a programme of pedagogy for employability will use a variety of learning and teaching approaches – a range appropriate to the broad set of learning outcomes that the programme specification contains.

The key issue is how best to secure student engagement, not only for work in the academic discipline, but also for work that addresses the more generic aspects of employability. In many circumstances, the most appropriate approach to the latter may be indirect¹⁷, by using the teaching of the subject discipline as an opportunity for introducing activities that simultaneously address more generic concerns. On the whole, an integration of this sort is likely to be more successful than separate, ‘bolt-on’, curriculum components devoted to employability.

Teaching activities

Teaching activities that stimulate good learning are likely to benefit employability, if only indirectly in some cases. Active student engagement is central to good learning. Knight (2002, pp128–131) lists 32 activities which offer the prospect of stimulating student engagement, of which an illustrative sample is provided in Box 1.

When time is more restricted, the opportunity can be taken within a large lecture group to give students the task of working on problems and demonstrating responses (so that the tutor can judge the students’ success-level at a ‘mass’ level); to use short ‘buzz-group’ discussions; and to create peer feedback on assignments¹⁸.

- Analysing case-study material
- Annotating a bibliography rather than writing 'yet another essay'
- Writing critical commentaries, or reviews, perhaps in the style of a particular kind of publication
- Summarising complex material into a short briefing paper or executive summary
- Constructing criteria against which a performance might be judged
- In-tray exercises, perhaps under time-constraint
- Presenting a case, and being prepared to justify it
- Role-playing
- Group problem-solving, including attention to the group dynamics of teamwork
- Surveying the public's perceptions, such as in collecting oral history data¹⁹ or consumer preferences
- 'Snowballing' activities which might begin with pair-based work with the groups progressively combining to produce a larger-group response to the challenge set.

Box 1. Some teaching approaches likely to stimulate good learning.

Making the connection with employability explicit

Academics do not always take the opportunity to make plain to their students the parallel between the academic task and workplace tasks, and students too may not fully appreciate the connection. A further dimension is the experience that students themselves bring to their study programmes. Many will have had (and will continue to have) experience of working part-time and/or in a voluntary capacity, and part-time students, who tend to be older, are quite likely to have had experience of full-time employment and/or being responsible for the well-being of dependants. All of these experiences are potential assets as far as employability is concerned, and the variation within any student group means that the teaching approach needs to take this into account.

A study conducted in the Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences at the University of Glasgow²⁰ found that students had an appreciation that employability was important to them. However, those in the first two years of their degree, compared with those in the final two years, were less sure of what employability might mean for them: further, they did not see the development of employability as an immediate priority, since most were concentrating on adjusting to the demands of university. When students at the University of Leeds used materials developed by Kneale from organisations' own performance development materials (see below) some of the responses were similar, for example:

I am not sure that I really want to take time on this just at present. I know I should but for university study I can get enough done without. I will do it at work when it means something.

The Glasgow students wanted material that they could 'dip into' with support when they felt the need – but a question here is whether they would act when faced with many other things competing for their attention. The students nearer to the end of their programme emphasised the desirability of workshops and one-to-one sessions. Arising from this work, a series of key decision-making points has been drawn up²¹ for students undertaking a science degree at the University, which may assist in students' personal development planning, including that relating to employability.

Self-awareness and Personal Development Planning

The development of students' self-awareness is part of the rationale for the introduction of personal development planning [PDP] from 2005. The QAA (2002, para 12) states that the PDP should help students to:

- become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners;
- understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context;
- improve their general skills for study and career management;
- articulate their personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement;
- encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life.

This is sound as an aspiration (and captures some aspects of the 'M' of USEM). However, the Skills plus project insisted that provision without student awareness is a missed opportunity. Students need to know that PDP has these purposes and to see how it can link to job-getting and employability generally. They need to see the significance of PDP for their personal development, rather than treat it as an externally imposed requirement (which might be perceived merely as a bureaucratic chore with no apparent benefit). In order to achieve maximum effectiveness, the introduction of PDP may well involve some development of the 'learning culture' in which the students find themselves, such that the connection between PDP and the subject discipline is established.

Students are often unaware of how their achievements might be of value when presenting an application for a job. Apart from PDP, a way of addressing the challenge is to run one or more awareness-raising workshops for students. A collaborative partnership between academics and colleagues in the careers service may be particularly fruitful²².

There is, further, usually an opportunity for teachers to point out during teaching sessions

that learning activities can have a 'carry' beyond the immediate programme context. Two such opportunities are:

1. Indicate that, while students' oral presentations using PowerPoint or slides can be found across curricula in higher education²³, presentation involving these can be highly applicable in some work situations.
2. Noting that effective collaboration, such as is required in group work and group-based report writing, is highly relevant to employment, since reports in work settings are frequently written on a collaborative basis.

The connections between higher education activities and work can be made in introductory and concluding remarks, and during evaluation and reflection sessions. Students can be advised to note down such experiences in personal portfolios and to draw upon them when applying for a job and at interview.

Other ways of helping students to recognise their own employability include the electronic employability card-sort developed by Hughes (see www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/issues/employability/cardsort/index.htm), which can be run in a computer-based class en masse or set as a personal exercise for students. Students are asked to sort cards which contain employability-related statements according to the statements' perceived relevance. This helps them to clarify the relevance and importance of experiences (for example, from part-time work) that they might not otherwise consider of any interest to employers. Statements originally perceived as least important may become relevant as students reflect on the implications of their choices. The card-sort challenges students to think about their aims and ambitions, their personal preferences and dislikes, and may raise issues that have not been explicit previously. It is visually stimulating while encouraging students to take responsibility for their own planning for learning and work, and it is valuable as a starting point for an employment discussion and as a steer towards career planning. One student said:

I had expected to get a marketing job, but [the card-sort] showed me that I wasn't thinking about what it was really all about or done any thinking about why or what else is happening. Really useful for getting started properly.

Developing reflection

A card-sort exercise is essentially reflective. In assigning cards to different categories, students are responding to their experiences and beginning to think about decisions for the future. Without prompting, however, many students would not necessarily see this as a reflective activity and hence would not think to record it in a Progress File or portfolio of achievements²⁴, or mention it in an interview.

A simple way of inducing reflection is for staff to use with their students an end-of-session/day/module questionnaire which could contain questions drawn from the list in Box 2, or elsewhere. This sort of questionnaire is simple to initiate and can be included in class handouts as a final page. Ideally, the last five minutes of the session could be used for students to fill in the sheet. Where the students are working with access to computers then such forms could be completed on-line with a direct link to an electronic Progress File or portfolio of achievements.

- What employment relevant skills have you used today? (e.g. discussion / argument / negotiation / group writing / interpersonal communication).
- What elements of this activity could you talk about in an interview? What were the most difficult elements and how were they overcome?
- Where could you have improved on the result/outcome? What stopped you doing better at the time?
- How has this activity developed your knowledge and skills?
- How could you make the most of this experience in an interview/application?
- How will what you have learned in this activity influence the way you tackle future challenges?
- Was your input proportional to the value of the project? Was your time well used? How might you reassign your activities to be more effective in the future?
- What risks did you take to achieve your aims? Were they worth taking?

Box 2. Some questions intended to prompt reflection.

Whatever the questions, the last part of the activity and the final exhortation should be 'Please add this page to your Progress File and re-read it²⁵ before writing applications or attending an interview'.

The significance of PDP for, and in, employment

Kneale has developed a website (www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/courses/other/casestudies/) containing the performance development plans or reflection materials used by a range of companies. Student activities are built around these materials which can be used by individuals, or in small or large group activities. The materials are derived from actual companies and organisations, and are copyright-cleared. They comprise Tutor Notes and Student Materials that are self-contained and easily reproduced from Word documents. The intention is that tutors cut and paste the Student Materials into their own handouts.

The Tutor Notes give information on running the session and all activities are suitable for use in sessions lasting for an hour or less. The suggested activities are short and self-contained. By themselves they will not change a student's life, but they do reinforce the value of developing reflection skills as part of the lifelong learning process.

Materials are available that relate to companies including Avenade, BAE Systems, BNFL, Environment Agency, Bradford Metropolitan District Council, The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, CRAC, Kirklees Council, HBOS plc, Somerfield plc and Woolworths. The original company/organisational materials are also available for students to view and evaluate. Examples of activities are given in Box 3.

- What does a Personal Development Plan look like? Compare your current practice with company procedures at Woolworths or HBOS.
- Personal Development: Reviewing a year, the CRAC approach.
- How do I learn? And also Self-regulated learning – how do you complete academic activities?
- Goal setting for a project, module, placement or semester using BAE Systems planners.
- Reviewing performance against goals using Woolworths' criteria.
- Incidents and achievements, as if you were preparing for interviews with Bradford Metropolitan District Council.
- Setting longer-term goals using BAE Systems planner.
- Planning for the future using Somerfield's template.
- How will you be managed? Research and reflection based on Avenade/Bradford Metropolitan District Council's/Environment Agency's approach.

Box 3. Some teaching approaches likely to stimulate good learning.

Student comments after using these materials reveal the surprise they have that reflection is a workplace activity and the seriousness with which it is addressed:

I was really surprised that a company like HBOS takes this sort of time with staff. Planning for courses in the next two years seems a long way off.

I could be doing more on this, I find reflecting difficult so it is good to see different ways to try.

It was really interesting talking about our plans and working out what you need to do to get ready for an interview. Having the Avenade template made it seem more relevant.

At the University of Hull, students taking an advanced skills module in the physical

sciences have been involved in activities relating to the acquisition of a first job. One activity has the students critiquing a fictitious *curriculum vitae*, and then engaging in mutual critique of their own *curricula vitae*, prior to the next activity, making applications for a fictitious job. In this simulation, their peers compose the interview panels, make the 'appointment' and provide constructive feedback. This has proved to be a very popular part of the module²⁶.

Time management

Time management is another topic that students fail to regard as 'cool' but it is ever more vital as students balance commitments to part time job(s), university work, a social life and their sporting activities. Caring for dependants of various kinds is also a key issue for many older students. It is important that students realise that all the juggling they do is itself valuable in employability terms. For example, one senior employee interviewed in the Skills plus project expressed her frustration that some students seemed unable to value their capacity to juggle commitments:

Mature students juggling home life and further study ... I think 'Come on, you can see that they've got good organizational skills, they must do!' I mean they've certainly got a bit more about them ...

From Knight and Yorke (2004b, p.67)

Asking students when they think, and how they assign thinking time tends to draw a blank even at postgraduate and PhD levels. Some of the most innovative companies, such as Proctor & Gamble and Microsoft, demand that staff take time to think about what they do and how they can progress as part of encouraging innovation. Providing a time sheet (Figure 1) for a module, requiring its completion on a weekly basis, and asking students to reflect at the end of the module on what they have learned about how they organise their time can be very fruitful. A class was asked, after the first five weeks, to calculate the cost of their time at a rate of £250 an hour. This made the students reflect and appreciate the point of the exercise.

| Time Allocation Sheet | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Module Name | | |
| Student Name | | |
| Date/time | Activity | Benefit to (module) |
| Mon 8.30–11.00 | Library read Bloggs and Bloggs 2004 | Key points are: Links to: |
| Weds 10.00–12.00 | Library database search | Gained an idea of literature in 1997–2004, 6 references to follow up, 15 to add to bibliography |
| Weds 19.00–21.00 | Planned essay outline Thinking round key points | |
| Total hours = | | |

Figure 1. Example time sheet

In students' comments 'insufficient time' is regularly cited as a major constraint, but this activity changed some individuals' approaches:

[It] encouraged me to break down each task into manageable chunks and spread the workload over the week. This meant working efficiently in 2–3 hour time slots, rather than labouring for 8 continuous hours as a deadline approached. This lesson was reinforced on those occasions when my time management methods broke down and I faced a two-hour seminar for which I was ill-prepared. Such experiences, however, ensured that for ensuing weeks, work time was better structured and more effectively timetabled.

Realising that the work done in the first five weeks had cost around £7,500 really made me look at what I was doing. By week 4, I was doing twice as much in the time and had sorted out my reading and note making to be much more efficient. The financial side really brought home the cost of such activities to a company.

Enterprise, entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship²⁷

The enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives during the last two decades have encouraged students to develop skills that will help them start their own companies, and graduate start-ups are a feature of some university programmes. However, for many students this is not what they want to do. The art of working within an organisation to effect change, termed 'intrapreneurship' (Pinchot, 1985), may be closer to many students' intentions. Intrapreneurship includes innovating practice by developing new ideas, procedures or products, thereby enhancing the organisation²⁸.

Intrapreneurship Context case studies

Organisations develop through the enterprise and initiative of their staff, but being proactive can seem daunting to younger and newer employees. The research that underpins the Intrapreneurship Context case studies (see www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/courses/other/casestudies/, and Kneale, 2002b) has been with employees who are 'intraprising'. A series of case-based activities has been created to help students understand the roles they can play in the workplace and make transferable skills from degrees explicit. The cases encourage students to

- realise that they can be creative, innovative, commercially aware, intrapreneurial and self-motivated within businesses and organisations;
- develop confidence in their graduate skills including networking, managing awkward situations, creativity, understanding decision making, negotiation, team working and writing;
- develop a range of tools which enable them to articulate their experiences and aspirations.

The cases make real links with employers, and bring workplace experience to many students. They could be used, for example, with students in preparation for work placements. Students need experience of employment, but experience shows that work placements can be very variable, because quality control is difficult and learning outcomes vary widely: using these case materials can help to develop students' understanding of the workplace in a consistent way.

Nine cases have been produced to date, with others under development, and the website is supported by two fully scripted PowerPoint lectures which introduce intrapreneurship. There is also a reading and resources list. The materials also include copyright-cleared Tutor Notes and Student Materials which are self-contained and easily reproduced as Word or PowerPoint documents. The Tutor Notes give full information on running an activity and

include feedback from sessions in which the cases have been used. Cases may be used within modules and have been used in academic M level and undergraduate modules as well as in modules focusing explicitly on careers and employability. The sessions have been used as stand-alone items in 'skills' sessions by skills officers and in staff training events. They have also been used with the general public and a couple have been used with pre-university and masterclass summer school groups.

Students' post-case reflections have been consistently positive:

It shows you can make a difference even as a temporary employee, I hadn't thought before about how I could get my ideas across effectively.

Being the newest person at work always made me feel unconfident and I can see that putting these ideas in . . . would make me feel more involved and more confident.

I hadn't thought about networking at all, but this really showed you can get a lot from being a bit organised, although I'm not usually that way.

I found having to make the decisions when we didn't know half of what was going on really stressful, having the [company representative] explain that working in an organisation with 6000 people but only really knowing about 40 and realising that people make decisions this way was a real shock.

The challenge of not possessing full information is worth emphasising with students since in their academic work they are faced with deciding when to cease researching and start writing. The academic approach tends to assume almost infinite time for rigorous academic research followed by reasoned and well-argued decision making. In modern workplaces (and, it must be said, in many academic management situations) this is a rare luxury.

Running cases for the first time can be daunting but also good fun. It is important to encourage students to interact and to keep talking. It is essential to leave time at the end for debriefing so that the students understand what happened in the real cases (the information is in the tutors' notes), and that they understand the processes they have used. If you do not debrief them, they will probably remember a jolly afternoon but not realise they have been practising networking, teamwork and debating skills. Each case has an example reflection sheet for use at the end of the case to help focus the students' thoughts.

Student business plan competitions

Many universities run Student Business Plan Competitions (e.g. Research Councils 2003, WRCE 2004). Typically these competitions are underpinned by advice on how to research and write a business plan, and have significant prize money that is raised by sponsorship

from a local company. Despite the generous advertising associated with these schemes their practical visibility to students can be low. They are too easily dismissed as ‘just for business students’, or ‘as classics/dentistry/music/... students, we wouldn’t have a chance’. Raising the profile by introducing in class the idea of participating can help enthuse students who need some ‘push’ to get involved. It is about getting non-business students to realise that business planning can be for them, and that the winning may not in the end be as helpful as the associated support sessions²⁹.

Foundation degrees and employability-oriented modules

The tuning of whole curricula has been addressed in the companion publication *Embedding employability into the curriculum*, in which a number of approaches were advanced. We are not revisiting the whole of this territory, but in this section draw attention to some employability-related curricular components (and, in the foundation degree example, a whole-curriculum initiative), using short vignettes. These vignettes do not purport to be ‘the full story’ of each initiative, since that would require considerably more space than is available here. They may, however, be useful as sources of ideas – rather than as potential ‘transplants’ into a new institution – since the number of situational variables impinging on a different context always makes transplanting problematic.

Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees have been introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in full-time, part-time and distance-learning modes. Full-time programmes tend to attract younger students, whereas the other modes tend to attract students who are already in employment. Foundation degrees have a specific remit in respect of employability that is captured in the need for them to have been developed in conjunction with employers, and in the expectation that they will incorporate a substantial proportion of work-based learning. In practice, some foundation degrees involving small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs] have been constrained to incorporate *work-related* learning because the SMEs have not the capacity to deal with the supervisory and mentoring needs of the students: instead, they offer projects (such as design briefs) which can be undertaken in the educational institution. Paradoxically, in some sectors (such as the new media industry) this replicates to some extent the mode of working in the industry, in which people often work on contracts away from the actual enterprise itself. Over half of the students who responded to a survey³⁰ in 2003 indicated that the work experience component of their programme was an attraction, and the opportunity to combine learning whilst also earning money from employment was – not surprisingly – a particular attraction for students on part-time programmes³¹.

Vignette 1: The foundation degree in Management at the University of Central England³²

The foundation degree programme in Management at the University of Central England, which recruits students who are already practising managers, has been built upon the concept of action learning³³. The programme exploits the sharing of real life experiences across a range of organisations, hence ensuring – in conjunction with the staff's own expertise – its relevance to the current world of work.

The programme provides students with the opportunity to work on real organisational problems. It takes an experiential approach in which students spend most of their time in Action Learning Sets (ALSs). The ALSs (which contain 6-8 members) are formed at the start of the course. ALSs can be diverse in terms of gender, ethnic, age and occupational diversity, and hence mirror some of the patterns in organisations and society. As part of the induction process individuals share information about themselves – skills, abilities, strengths, reasons for undertaking the programme, interests, and approaches to learning, for example.

Students are provided with a handbook which contains all of the task and assignment briefs, module outlines and assessment criteria for the programme. Pre-written case studies are not used. Assignments are almost entirely based on a live issue selected by a student or an ALS. The ALS spends two thirds of its time in working collectively on specific tasks, and is facilitated by a tutor. The ALS not only undertakes group tasks which are real organisational problems, but its use of action learning encourages students to reflect on how they work together, and to work through process issues. The ALS provides a forum for shared learning, the testing-out of the validity of ideas, and the developing of consultancy and research proposals that are work-based. Mutual support and rigorous feedback are essential components of the learning process.

The ALS makes a 45-minute presentation based on the outcomes of the set's study and discussion of the concepts and issues identified. Each member of the task group contributes to the work of the group, but each individual's contribution to the presentation has to be identifiable. The presentation is assessed, using an agreed appraisal and assessment sheet, by student peer-representatives and a member of staff in open forum, with all assessors having equal status.

Some employability-oriented modules

The vignettes provided here are ordered roughly according to the level of study, and include examples involving work placement. The effectiveness of learning through work placements, intercalated industrial years and sandwich courses can be very varied. Students need support to bring out the employability learning explicitly. Constructive

preparation³⁴ (linked to an active personal development plan) and reflection during the experience can help students to appreciate what they have learned, and also raise their expectations and self-confidence.

Vignette 2: Employability skills for language users³⁵

The Department of Languages and International Studies at the University of Central Lancashire developed and refined a first-year module for languages specialists in which the students developed their skills base in preparation for working on a simulated problem. The students underwent a series of preparatory tasks covering languages and skills, IT skills, communication skills, cultural skills, presentation skills including the use of PowerPoint, teamworking, project work, planning and time management, and problem solving. They tracked the development of their learning through a reflective portfolio.

The final activity, the simulation, was of a graduate trainee induction programme in which students were faced with a short-term project, such as designing a holiday experience. This required the negotiation of hotel contracts, making telephone calls in the foreign language, dealing with complaints, and coping with a range of unanticipated events of the kind thrown up by the industry. The simulation can be run as an intensive single day at the end of the module, or in a more spread out format.

A strength of the simulation is that it can engage students powerfully. However, for this to happen, good handling of the experience is essential – and this extends to the production of appropriate stimulus materials for the precursor activities. A key feature has been the production of subject-specific support materials, rather than a reliance on generic materials covering the same topics – but this is acknowledged as a time-consuming exercise which needs to spread the developmental commitment across a number of cycles of the module if it is to be cost-effective.

Vignette 3: Accredited work-based learning in Biological and Earth Sciences³⁶

A work-based learning module, refined over a decade, is available to Level 3 students on all honours degree programmes in the School of Biological and Earth Sciences at Liverpool John Moores University. The module is based on a short-term (approximately 135 hours) placement with a company/organisation relevant to the student's degree programme, and aims to challenge learners within a network of academic and workplace support. Students are encouraged to find placements themselves, thus simulating the process they will encounter following graduation. Students undertake the placement either at the end of the vacation between levels 2 and 3 or, increasingly, during semester 1 of level 3.

Once the module leader has confirmed the validity of a proposed placement, a learning agreement is drawn up. This process is central to the placement learning. The student

produces the first draft of the learning agreement. Most find this to be a challenging learning activity, but one whose value they recognise. The tasks vary with the placement, but must be appropriate to the level of study and demonstrate academic rigour. Most incorporate opportunities for the students to demonstrate their ability to review scientific literature – to analyse, synthesise, and evaluate data and information. In addition many placements enable the student to develop a range of higher level subject-specific and generic skills.

Learner support is provided by a mentor in the workplace and a tutor at university. The mentor ensures that necessary opportunities and resources are available during the course of the placement. The tutor acts as broker in case of any difficulties during the placement, and thereafter supervises the preparation of a portfolio by the student. The portfolio has to be submitted for assessment, and carries 85% of the total marks for the module. The balance of the marks is allocated for the presentation of a seminar.

The employer evaluates the student's performance against a checklist of professional skills, including communication (written and oral), IT skills, the ability to work autonomously or as part of a team, and the ability to demonstrate initiative and resourcefulness. This evaluation is formative in intent, and provides the opportunity for reflection.

All portfolios are double-marked. Tutors are presented with clear assessment criteria that relate to the learning outcomes of the module and the tasks identified in the learning agreement.

The module has demonstrated that incorporating independent study into a professional environment offers the student a broader learning opportunity than does a traditional honours-level project. Work at the academic/vocational interface enables the student to gain a more realistic awareness of the professional environment and its requirements, provides challenges unlikely to be available at university, develops a much wider range of generic skills, and provides an opportunity for undergraduates to identify their preferred career progression. Many students report that this exposure to a professional environment before, or early in, their level 3 studies has aided their focus on modules throughout the year. They take more responsibility for their learning and have indicated that their experience in the workplace has added value both in determining their career direction and developing their attitude. Personal development is clearly enhanced: the majority of students report improved confidence and self-esteem.

Vignette 4: Work experience opportunities in History at Staffordshire University³⁷

Work experience opportunities were introduced into the History curriculum at Staffordshire University in 1999 following the publication of the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), and their use has increased steadily in recent years. The students have a 12-week commitment in one or other semester at level 3, which attracts 20 credits. The time-commitment is agreed between student and supervisor.

Students work in conjunction with professionals in History-related occupations, and apply their knowledge to practical situations. This has entailed working locally in an Archive and Record Office, museums, and primary and secondary schools. The students are assessed on their ability to reflect on, and learn from, their experiences.

Vignette 5: Embedding careers education in Geography at the University of Plymouth³⁸

In its Code of Practice, the Quality Assurance Agency calls for the embedding of careers education within the academic curricula. Whilst careers education has often been a 'bolt-on' activity, this has led to many undergraduates completing their degrees without the career skills necessary to ensure a smooth transition to the world of work and with which to underpin their future career development.

The Plymouth University School of Geography was one of the earlier pioneers of embedding integrating careers education in its design and delivery of a compulsory module taught jointly by academic staff and careers specialists. A stage three (first semester) module in 'Geography, Employment and Careers' has now been running for four years. The module is weighted at ten credits and builds on a key skills and employability theme which runs through stages one and two of the degree programme. To be successful in this module, the learning outcomes require that students will have:

- demonstrated appropriate academic knowledge and understanding of changing employment patterns, especially in the graduate labour market
- prepared an effective curriculum vitae and application form and given a satisfactory account of themselves at interview
- reflected critically on the value of an education in Geography, and other learning experiences, in relation to employment and careers.

The module therefore combines the academic study of employment change with the development of practical skills in areas such as *curricula vitae*, application forms and interviews. Students find some of these practical activities, particularly writing applications, every bit as challenging as the module's more academic components.

In addition to lectures and exercises led by academic and careers staff, the teaching is enriched by a range of guest speakers, each representing a relevant area of employment potential. There are also short talks from former graduates who reflect both on their undergraduate experience and on their subsequent career paths.

Half of the marks for the module attach to a coursework essay, a quarter to the curriculum vitae/application form exercise, and the final quarter to a mock interview. The interviews, each lasting twenty minutes, are conducted on a one-to-one basis by academic staff, with each staff member assessing six students against a published set of criteria.

Although the methodologically difficult task of measuring the module's impact on the graduates' subsequent employment achievements has not yet been attempted, the immediate student feedback is strongly positive. Over 90 per cent agree or strongly agree that the module has been 'a valuable part of my undergraduate education'. However, with 160 students, it does not provide one-to-one advice on individual career avenues and it is in no sense a replacement for personal discussions with a careers counsellor or personal tutor. The module does, however, provide a reasonably resource-efficient means of embedding careers education in the academic curriculum and one which most of the students value and appreciate.

Vignette 6: Work Project Module development on English MA Courses³⁹

A Work Project Module is under development, with support from the Higher Education Academy English Subject Centre, at the University of Glamorgan and at University College Worcester, which focuses on the potential transfer of learning at postgraduate level to the workplace. Particular interest has emanated from secondary and further education, where teachers are seeking to update their knowledge of recent contextual and theoretical issues in the study of literature in the light of alterations to the A Level syllabus.

Interviews with students (many of them teachers) on existing MA programmes are designed to lead to the production of a template for the module together with a series of guidelines for the creation of similar modules across the higher education sector. Issues being addressed include

- the skills, methods of learning, and understandings of literature and culture that postgraduate students transfer to the workplace
- how postgraduate work in English actively facilitates the transfer of learning to the workplace (and specifically to the classroom)
- the kind of module that would be most successful in meeting the aims both of teachers and other workers who might wish to transfer their learning, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of academic rigour.

A graduate placement scheme

Whilst the focus of this publication is on undergraduate teaching, a lifelong-learning perspective smudges the pedagogic boundary between undergraduate and postgraduate education. This final vignette is located in the transition between undergraduate study and graduate employment, and may be suggestive of other pedagogic possibilities regarding such transitions.

Vignette 7: The Graduate Placement Scheme at the University of Western England⁴⁰

In 2001 the University of the West of England's Faculty of Art, Media and Design developed a pilot project in the area of graduate employability – The Graduate Placement Scheme. This was a partnership project between UWE's Faculty of Art, Media and Design and South West Screen (the new Regional Screen Agency incorporating the region's three media agencies). The main aim was to provide an opportunity for talented graduates to work within interactive media companies for a period of twelve weeks.

Placements were initially sought in the Bath and Bristol area, targeting media companies which were interested in sharing their knowledge and understanding of production with graduates whose creative and technical skills and knowledge could enhance the potential of the host company. Companies were invited to propose a project or piece of work that the prospective graduate could research and develop utilizing their specific skills whilst working alongside company staff.

The scheme enabled graduates to recognise opportunities available to them in the region, to gain a better understanding of working in a client-based environment, and to make contacts within the industry. 'New media' companies in Bristol were able to explore the possibility of several new and different products that incorporated the innovative and creative use of interactive digital media. The scheme helped the staff of the Faculty to develop a network of relationships with employers in the area. The success of the scheme has enabled the Faculty to expand its engagement with employers across the region.

Assessment and pedagogy⁴¹

It is important not to undervalue the contribution that assessment can make to pedagogy. It is well known that the students' perceptions of assessment influence the way they approach their studies. So how teachers use – and promote the virtues of – assessment is likely to have an impact on what students do. This has implications for the development of their employability.

Formative assessment

With higher education enrolling an increasing proportion of the age cohort, the student body is more likely than ever to need help in coming to terms with the demands of higher education. If the only assessment is summative, at the end of a semester, then this is very likely to prove insufficient for optimal student learning – and hence inefficient in the use of that expensive resource, staff time. Black and Wiliam's (1998) meta-analysis showed that formative assessment, properly done, can produce remarkable gains in student

achievement⁴², yet it is arguably the weakest aspect of provision in higher education, according to QAA Subject Reviews (summarised in QAA 2004). Where weaknesses were identified by QAA, they included:

- a failure to indicate how the student might 'do better next time'; and
- lateness in returning work.

The second of these may be related to semesterised programmes in which summative assessments tend to occur at the end of a semester, and in which formative assessment is relatively limited.

Feedback on work submitted in the autumn semester may not appear until the following semester has begun. This undermines the value of the feedback because students have by then moved on to other things.

Students need to know how well they are doing if they are to appreciate the full meaning of statements of expected learning outcomes⁴³ and to internalise the standards against which they can calibrate their work (part of the 'M' of USEM). This means that there needs to be some progression in task difficulty across a degree programme. Help and – as was noted earlier – 'scaffolding' will be provided in the early stages – but progressively removed as the student develops their capability. Particularly in the early stages of a programme, feedback is needed more often than occurs in the typical modular curriculum.

To this must be added the importance of the student's growth as a person. This is an aspect of higher education that has perhaps been overshadowed by the instrumentalism inherent in the focus on expected learning outcomes. Yet there is plenty of evidence from the psychological literature⁴⁴ that the way that students feel about themselves and their capacity to succeed (these are included in the 'E' of USEM) are important influences on their success. Hence whilst it might be necessary to address the practical weaknesses noted by the QAA, it may also be necessary to address the psychological needs of the student, if they are to be optimally helped to attain their full potential.

There is some further evidence which hints at a positive effect from accentuating formative assessment. A study conducted under the aegis of the HEFCE-funded 'Action on Access' team found that some institutions that had emphasised formative assessment during a student's first year of study were achieving rates of completion higher than their HEFCE benchmark would suggest (Thomas et al., 2001). The logic and 'psychologic' point towards increasing the emphasis on formative assessment in the stance that teachers take towards pedagogy.

Summative assessment can't cover everything that employers value

The 'assets' – achievements, attainments and dispositions – that employers value resist traditional high-stakes, or summative, assessment, where the aim is usually to get precise, robust measures. Attempts to get fine-grained measures of, say, critical thinking trivialise it, are too expensive, or both⁴⁵. The same applies to self-confidence, emotional intelligence or adaptability⁴⁶. With formative assessment, when the stakes are lower, the need to make a precise and robust judgement comes second to providing helpful comment. There is still a demand, though, for high-stakes assessments, which implies that modules and programmes will in practice use a blend of low-stakes and high-stakes tasks. This differentiated approach, using formative tasks to reach some outcomes, summative to deal with others, means that we need to develop assessment plans so that everyone knows what the 'rules of the game' are for any one task.

In order to reduce clutter and 'task overload', it is a good idea to design modules to have a few 'target' outcomes that naturally call upon understanding and skilful practices *that will not be directly assessed in that module*. Such outcomes ought to make the exercise of understanding and skilfulness-in-practice a necessary condition for a student's success, even if the actual summative assessment does not specifically address them. These target outcomes need to be determined in the light of the programme as a whole (or, perhaps, the 'core' elements of the programme⁴⁷).

Implications

The differentiated approach makes it possible to contemplate assessment methods that could not be used for high-stakes purposes because they do not yield affordable and reliable measures of achievement. Books such as those by Banta *et al.* (1995), Brown *et al.* (1997), and Knight and Yorke (2003) describe the range of assessment methods available. Not only does the differentiated approach allow us to use a wider range of assessment methods, it also favours 'authentic assessment'. Some North Americans have been concerned that students face 'tame tasks', rather than being assessed with tasks that present real, messy, 'in-the-wild' problems. Employers are, of course, interested in how students cope with the latter kinds of task, and we know that performance on tame tasks does not necessarily predict performance on 'in-the-wild' tasks. Freed of the need to ensure that all tasks yield reliable *measurements*, we can make more use of authentic tasks.

How might achievement on 'authentic' tasks be judged and recorded? It is not enough to say that these tasks will create feedback that will help students to do better in future.

What about 'feedout' to employers? Employers need to be able to make some sort of judgement regarding the achievements of the students who are applying to them for jobs.

Employers can often have a part to play in working with HEIs to develop assessment instruments that provide evidence that is useful to all parties⁴⁸. There are implications for students, staff and employers, which can only be acknowledged here in passing⁴⁹.

One way of dealing with the problem is to say that the tasks and the feedback allow students to make and defend claims to achievement. In essence, this is saying that authentic assessment will tend to be judged formatively and then the experience will be rolled, via a claim to achievement, into the Progress File. Students seeking employment need to be aware of the need to put a compelling and robust case to employers, which implies a good understanding of their achievements in and beyond higher education and how these match the intended employer's requirements, and also the capacity to present their case cogently and succinctly⁵⁰. Only if students believe that the assessment process is valued by employers will they be prepared to invest the time and energy necessary to prepare and update portfolios of evidence. If employers do not treat portfolios seriously, then neither will students, however much emphasis their tutors place upon them⁵¹.

A differentiated approach to assessment involves some high-stakes assessment that leads to certificates and statements of competence. It also involves low-stakes assessment that creates feedback and leads to claims to achievement. It is vital that students understand the differentiated approach and the thinking behind it. Teachers in higher education often say that students do not – and will not – take low-stakes assessment seriously. They are unlikely to take it seriously if they do not appreciate its purpose and know that it pervades the *programme* of study. They are likely to take it seriously if they see low-stakes assessment as an integral part of an assessment-and-learning culture.

Some key questions ...

The questions below are broad, and need to be interpreted with reference to the situation. The teacher of a particular learning session will necessarily have a more 'local' perspective than someone planning a module, or even a whole curriculum. There is also the dimension of time to be considered. Some things may be able to be implemented quickly within existing programme arrangements, whereas others may have to be considered during the process of academic review.

- Is there more scope to focus on pedagogy for employability in the curriculum component for which you are responsible?
- How good is the 'fit' of this component with the whole curriculum, as far as the development of employability through students' learning experiences is concerned?

- Are students expected to engage to a substantial extent in active learning?
- Are students reminded, where appropriate, of the potential for making claims to employability through their work?
- Do the assessment requirements adequately deal with employability?

And a final reminder ...

The website of the Higher Education Academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability.htm) has a growing range of resources which may be helpful.

About the authors: the Pedagogy for Employability Group

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The Pedagogy for Employability Group met, as an ad hoc group of colleagues interested in the topic, at Coventry University on 17 November 2003. At that meeting it set itself the task of scoping out a publication for the Learning and Employability Series that would to some extent fill the space between *Embedding employability into the curriculum* and *Employability: judging and communicating achievements*. The Group realised that it needed to draw on expertise beyond its immediate membership in order to flesh out some of the pedagogic principles with examples of actual practice, and was supported in this by Subject Centres of the Higher Education Academy which were able to pinpoint some interesting examples. Since its initial day-long meeting, the Group collaborated electronically to bring this publication to fruition.

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Notes

- 1 The word 'skills' has been widely used in official and other publications, but it has a narrow connotation that does not adequately address the needs of graduate employment. ESECT refers to 'skilful practices in context' in order to convey the 'situatedness' of performance.
- 2 Where the job calls for subject-specific expertise, this is an additional requirement that does not detract from the importance of the generic.
- 3 See also Purcell *et al.* (2002).
- 4 Note that these are not the only aspects of employability that might be identified – they are intended as prompts to thinking about curriculum development and implementation. Some of the 39 may not be relevant to certain situations.
- 5 Note that, in this publication, we are by-passing factors relating to entry into higher education, which impact unevenly on potential students (see, for example, Archer *et al.*, 2003, for discussion relating social class to perceptions of graduate employment).
- 6 As a case in point, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act [SENDA] requires that institutions make reasonable adjustments to provision and assessment in order to ensure that disabled students are not placed at a substantial disadvantage. SENDA serves as a reminder to institutions that some aspects of disadvantage are not covered by the Act itself. A separate publication will address issues relating to disability.
- 7 See Knight and Yorke (2004b).
- 8 The same site has an 'Assessment Audit Tool' that colleagues might find useful.
- 9 Not every aspect was relevant to every curriculum.
- 10 See Knight and Yorke (2004b, Chapter 3) or Yorke and Knight (2004) for elaboration.
- 11 E.g. through the personal development planning process.
- 12 See, for example, the employability enhancement model developed in Harvey *et al.*, 2002, p.18.
- 13 Some of these insights will be relatively uncodified, as 'tacit knowledge' – the kinds of things a sensitive and alert observer notices about 'the way things work around here'.
- 14 Mason *et al.* (2003) observe, however, that the early advantage associated by work experience is eroded after three years in work.
- 15 See the companion publication *Employability and work-based learning* for a fuller treatment.
- 16 Mutual support can be very valuable when thinking about, and trying out, something new.
- 17 For example, a critical thinking task will necessarily involve analysis and evaluation.
- 18 See Gibbs (1999: 43–44) for an example of this in an engineering class, and also a report by Bruce Sinclair: Feedback on review articles in a 'Transferable skills for physicists' module, at www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment/ass026d_senlef_feedb_ackonreview.doc
- 19 See, for example, Castle (1993).
- 20 By Anne Tierney, Anne Duff and Debra Macfarlane-Dick.
- 21 By Anne Tierney, Iain Allison and Debra Macfarlane-Dick
- 22 As has occurred at the University of Glasgow between John Corbett, Susan Bryson and Shirley Sayer in the area of English and Scottish Language and Literature. Amongst the activities is analysing a vignette of Sarah, a fictional second-year student, with a view to identifying what she might present to a possible employer.
- 23 Though research by Mason *et al.* (2003) suggests that the giving of presentations is over-emphasised in higher education curricula. Mason *et al.* also suggest that some students lack appreciation of clients' business problems and of the realities of cultural diversity in the workplace.
- 24 The completion of such compilations is not generally seen as a 'cool' student task (Kneale, 2002a).
- 25 And all the other similar pages. The full Progress File will almost certainly be a large and probably cumbersome collection of evidence, and it will be important for the student to distil out the key information at appropriate intervals.
- 26 Material provided by Tina Overton
- 27 There is a Learning and Employability publication on this theme which can be accessed from: www.heacademy.ac.uk/1433.htm.
- 28 One can be intrapreneurial in not-for-profit organisations as well as in businesses.
- 29 The original ethic of the Olympics come to mind here.
- 30 Conducted as part of the HEFCE-funded formative evaluation of foundation degrees.
- 31 Cited by 88% of part-time respondents, compared with 40% of full-time respondents.
- 32 Material provided by Kiran Trehan.
- 33 A useful source of practical information on action learning is McGill and Brockbank (2004).
- 34 See some of the cases mentioned in the following section, and Kneale's Intrapreneurship Context case studies (above).
- 35 A fuller account can be found in Pilkington (2003).
- 36 Material provided by Jenny Jones.
- 37 Material provided by Pauline Elkes.
- 38 Material provided by Brian Chalkley and Glen Crust.
- 39 For further information: www.english.heacademy.ac.uk
- 40 Material provided by Sophie Harbour.
- 41 These themes are developed in another publication in this series, *Employability: judging and communicating achievements* (Knight and Yorke, 2004a).
- 42 Their analysis was based largely on school-level data, but did include some data from higher education.
- 43 Wolf, 1995, pointed out that abstract statements on their own are insufficient to convey expectations: Cases and examples are necessary.
- 44 This is developed in Knight and Yorke (2004b).
- 45 Some say that assessment centres can produce reliable and valid verdicts. Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue otherwise. We share their stance, being sceptical about the ontological, epistemological, psychological and practical assumptions on which many assessment centres rest.
- 46 These are amongst the 39 aspects of employability described by Yorke and Knight (2004).
- 47 That is to say, allowing some modules to be unfettered choices on the part of students. Pedagogy for employability
- 48 Following DfES (2003), Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals and HEFCE established a scoping group to identify the work that needed to be done in order to render the recording of student achievement more useful to a range of interested parties.
- 49 For example, employers will need to reconsider the weight they currently give to degree classifications and to scores at A-level.
- 50 Employers faced with many applications will prefer clearly-focused summaries to lengthy curricula vitae.
- 51 For more on assessment and employability, see Yorke and Knight (2004).

Enhancing Student Employability

There are many definitions of what it is to be 'employable' and views on the processes that develop this attribute. The Learning and Employability Series offers a wide range of perspectives on the employability of graduates, based on the premise that, in higher education, 'employability' is about good learning.

One of many definitions of employability is:

'A set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.'

ESECT was an initiative to support the higher education sector in its efforts to develop highly skilled, employable graduates who can contribute effectively to national prosperity in the 21st century.

ESECT consisted of individuals with extensive experience of employability issues. The team comprised representatives of stakeholder organisations including the National Union of Students (NUS), the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) and the Higher Education Academy. It drew on the expertise of key researchers and practitioners in the field including Professor Peter Knight, Professor Lee Harvey, Brenda Little and Professor Mantz Yorke.

ESECT was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England between October 2002 and February 2005.

The Higher Education Academy is progressing the work to enhance the employability of graduates developed in partnership with ESECT.

To find out more visit the Higher Education Academy Employability web pages:

www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability.htm



Higher education institutions are coming under increasing pressure to ensure their graduates have relevant employability skills. Institutions are also being encouraged to help students develop enterprise skills so that more graduates have the confidence and knowledge to set up businesses.

Senior managers and academics are looking for support at all levels to embed employability and enterprise into the higher education experience.

The Higher Education Academy is committed to helping institutions improve the employability and entrepreneurship of all students. The Academy has worked with a number of partners to provide a range of tools and resources in these areas.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) to help the sector engage with the employability policy. Its work began in September 2002 and finished at the end of February 2005.

ESECT dovetailed its plans with those of the Academy to provide a one-stop-shop on employability matters. The priority was to strengthen links with others committed to enhancing student employability.

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