



Universities UK

# Enhancing employability, recognising diversity

Making links between higher education and the world of work



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**This report, the executive summaries and supplementary material can be viewed and downloaded from the Universities UK and CSU websites at: [www.UniversitiesUK.ac.uk/employability](http://www.UniversitiesUK.ac.uk/employability)  
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# Preface by Rt Hon. Patricia Hewitt MP

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

I welcome the contents of this report, especially as the case studies show how much employers and the higher education sector are working together to enhance students' employability.



Foundation Degree programmes are already a model of collaboration between employers, professional bodies and higher education providers. They are an important part of our strategy for promoting diversity within Higher Education to address the skills gap at associate professional and higher technician level.

The principle of working together also underpins our Excellence Challenge. This initiative brings together schools, colleges, higher education institutions and communities in partnerships to raise the aspirations and attainment of bright young people from some of our country's most disadvantaged areas so that they may progress onto the higher education courses that their abilities merit.

But I know that there are many more examples of effective partnerships, involving businesses, the voluntary sector, public sector employers and a wide range of representative bodies.

This publication shows that there is a lot of work underway to change the worlds of higher education, training and employment to help build a system in which everyone can fulfil their potential. I hope you find much in this report to inspire you.

## **Patricia Hewitt**

Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

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# Section 1

## Background

### Introduction

There is a growing awareness in the UK of the importance of higher education to the development of a knowledge-based economy in an increasingly competitive global market. Three major policy initiatives in post-compulsory education are helping to drive this:

- widening participation and improving retention;
- lifelong learning;
- enhancing employability.

Both higher education and the graduate labour market are changing rapidly. The student intake is becoming more diverse: in age, background, previous educational experience, interests and ambitions. The nature of graduate employment is changing and diversifying and many students already work part-time throughout their courses. Institutional responses to developing employability are also diverse.

**Students are more diverse but so are higher education institutions and graduate career opportunities. In response, institutions are developing a variety of ways of enhancing students' employability.**

Employers are increasingly interested in what higher education has to offer, both for recruitment purposes and as a source of part-time training and development for their existing employees. Higher education institutions are reaching out to their various communities, collaborating with employers, and developing innovative and successful ways of enhancing students' employability: enabling them to manage their careers, preparing them for lifelong learning, and providing continuing professional development.

This report explores the issues arising from enhancing employability for diversity. It considers students, institutions, employers, and different types of work. It summarises research<sup>1</sup> that

analyses the ways that higher education is addressing employability in this new context. Interspersed throughout the report are a series of case studies of initiatives that illustrate the variety of ways of enhancing employability to be found in the sector. These include new courses and qualifications, enhanced curricula, imaginative developments in work experience and its accreditation, and the development of progress files and personal career planning.

**Employability is about making closer links between education and the world of work.**

Later sections of the report deal with the needs of employers and graduates, employability and recruitment, and developing employability in higher education institutions. The final section includes a series of key recommendations for the immediate future. The remainder of this section looks at the background to some of the recent, current and imminent developments.

### Dearing and beyond

The report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Lord Dearing (NCIHE 1997) helped to raise the profile of employability within higher education. The Graduates' Work research for the Dearing Committee pointed to the need for enhanced opportunities for students to undertake work-related learning opportunities (Harvey et al. 1997). Much was made of this in the Dearing



Report and it was the front-page leader in The Times following the publication of the report. Employability had been the province of programmes linked to professional accreditation (such as medicine, teacher training, social work) or the year-long work placements of 'thick sandwich' programmes such as business, social science, and the built environment, especially in the former polytechnics. Although these reflected the professional training or vocational missions of institutions, in most cases employability was confined to the placement or practice element of the course. Skill-development was regarded as a second-order activity for academics who were more concerned with broadening and deepening their subject knowledge and understanding. Two notable exceptions in the 1980s and 1990s were the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) programme and the Higher Education for Capability (HEC) movement. The EHE initiative, which involved over 60 universities at a cost of £60million, emphasised indirect preparation for work through the development of personal transferable skills in the mainstream academic curriculum, rather than via specialist bolt-on skills courses. Successive national evaluations of EHE demonstrated that it 'impacted on the culture and practice of HE' (DfEE 1999, p 1) and that 'significant parts of the HE curriculum have become more relevant to employment and employer needs' (Hawkins and Winter 1997, p 6).

The HEC movement also encouraged employability. It led the national debate on the nature of graduate capability and supported those who pioneered innovative ways of achieving it. HEC dispelled the narrow view of competence as 'tick-box testing', and reaffirmed an understanding of individual performance as being not just about doing a job competently, but also about adding value to the organisation and its operations (Raven and Stephenson 2002).

The Dearing Report commended these earlier initiatives and recommended that all institutions should identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes helped students to become familiar with work and supported them in reflecting on such experience. It also asked the government to work with representative employer and professional organisations to encourage employers to offer more work-experience opportunities for students.

Over the last five years, as the case studies in this report illustrate, higher education institutions have gone well beyond the Dearing agenda in addressing the challenges of globalisation, competition and the knowledge

economy. The changes in the graduate labour market include:

- changes in the structure of commerce and industry, especially the emergence of smaller, responsive organisations;
- more graduates employed in small organisations, becoming self-employed, or combining part-time or fixed-term employment with freelance work;
- reform of the public sector, notably government's efforts to improve performance and accountability.

There is increasing recognition by government, academics and employers of the impact that higher education has on the economy and how it can help the UK's competitiveness by raising the general level of education, and thus performance. Furthermore, higher education institutions interact with business in a variety of ways — knowledge and technology transfer, consultancy services, staff and student exchanges, research collaborations, and employer input into course content and project work. This is exemplified by the establishment of an Industrial Advisory Board in the Applied Computing department at **The University of Dundee**.

Institutions have a variety of structures in order to interact with employers, such as industrial liaison and intellectual property rights units, continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, as well as links between individual departments and employers. This has been augmented by the Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund (HEROBC), introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to enable higher education institutions to build their capacity to interact with business and to contribute to cultural life and voluntary and community activity (Rosenberg 2001).

**Higher education institutions and the world of work co-operate in many ways, such as knowledge and technology transfer, consultancy services, research collaborations and employer input into courses.**

## **New developments**

This report demonstrates that since 1997, higher education institutions have been creative in developing a range of opportunities for their students that go beyond the proposals in the Dearing Report. There have been three broad areas of development.

First, they have developed a more sophisticated

understanding of the complexity of the modern workplace and of the needs of employers and of graduates in a variety of different work settings (large and small; private, public and voluntary; employed and self-employed). Institutions have developed a new appreciation of the diversity of attributes that contribute to employability (Section 2 of this report). This process has been aided by increased employer–higher education dialogue, co-operation in curricular developments, the articulation of workforce needs beyond lists of key skills, exploring the benefits of work experience, providing continuing professional development, and promoting lifelong learning.

Second, there has been a wider debate on the nature of employability, informed by long-term studies of graduate employment and career paths (Elias et al. 1999). This debate has gone beyond considering just the first destinations of graduates and constructing employability performance indicators. There is a more sophisticated understanding of the factors that impinge on employability and its relation to widening participation and employer recruitment (Section 3).

Third, there is growing awareness of the diversity of activities within universities and of changes in approaches (Section 4). For example, there has been a significant shift in appreciation of the benefits to be derived from students' part-time work. Increasingly, institutions are aware of the need to develop a long-term integrating strategy for employability that maximises links with employers, embeds employability in the curriculum, and makes closer links between central services and programme-based initiatives.

### **Three areas are being developed:**

- **more sophisticated understanding of needs;**
- **wider debate about employability;**
- **growing awareness of diversity.**

In a few years, efforts to enhance employability have been transformed from an overemphasis on 'bolting on' skills, to imaginative initiatives designed to prepare graduates for lifelong learning in a manner that reflects the needs of workforce development and of social inclusion. The report highlights this transformation and aims to stimulate further change (Section 5, Conclusion and recommendations).

# The University of Dundee

## The Industrial Advisory Board for Applied Computing has been active since December 1994.

### Industrial Advisory Board

The membership of the Industrial Advisory Board covers a wide range of computing industry types and sizes. It includes members from large multinational organisations covering software, computer systems, communications and financial applications (Microsoft, Sun, BT and NCR respectively), members from the information technology sector including local government, and a member from a computer games small/medium enterprise (SME). Each brings a wealth of experience as to what industry needs from new graduates and what skills lead to successful long-term employment. The Board also includes Applied Computing senior staff, together with undergraduate and postgraduate students.

### Impact of the Board

The Board has played an instrumental role in the development of the Applied Computing degree that began in 1996, and in the new Interactive Media Design degree which begins in October 2003. The Board has met three times a year since 1994. It reviews the degree programme annually, and is presented with the minutes and recommendations from the Course Review meetings held each June.

### Specific contributions to the curriculum

The Board has made major contributions to modifying course content and structure since 1995. Recently, it has contributed to the modification of Software Engineering in May 2000, and in May 2002 it discussed the programming languages taught on the degree programme. The Board had input into the programme review undertaken by the university of the Applied Computing programme in 2000, and it helped prepare for the British Computer Society visit in 2002. Russell Kay of Visual Sciences has been involved in planning discussions for the new Interactive Media Design degree, and is co-ordinating the industrial collaboration on that degree. The Board has also been consistently represented at the visits to Applied Computing by each of the review panels. It contributed to the documentation sent to the Quality Assurance Agency review in 2001, for which the department received an 'exemplary' rating.

The Board has also engaged in more general discussions. The issues of standards and 'graduateness' were discussed extensively, giving the department and its students a better idea of what industry expects from graduates.



**Dundee Industrial Advisory Board picture**

From left to right:  
 Professor Alan Newell  
 John Beales  
 Russell Kay  
 George Drummond  
 Alison Armstrong  
 Professor John Arnott  
 Louisa Cross  
 Richard Murphy  
 Dr Steve Parkes  
 Professor Ian Ricketts  
 Dr Peter Gregor  
 Iain Wilkie

### Industrial input into the undergraduate course

There is a significant industrial input into the Applied Computing degree and the Industrial Advisory Board has played an integral part in the formulation of the Industrial Team Project, in work placements for the summer between 3rd and 4th year, and in Professional Studies modules. Representatives of BT have given lectures on the Software Engineering course and the Data Communications course. John Hall (NCR) and Jack Earls (former Principal of Humberside University) have given talks on personal transferable skills to the 1st year class, and an NCR representative has given students a talk on CV skills. Students have taken up work placements with Board members such as NCR, Visual Sciences and BT. In addition, student projects have been undertaken with companies represented on the Board, such as Visual Sciences, Insights and NCR. Visual Sciences have also given lectures to the final year students within their series of 'Hot Topics' lectures, and indeed employ a number of our graduates.

### Employability is enhanced by:

- bringing employers into the course design process;
- modifying courses to match industry's needs;
- using guest lecturers from business;
- building links with local employers.

# The IMPACT programme

The IMPACT programme is a joint universities of Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan initiative.

It helps students from minority ethnic backgrounds to develop their employability skills. It achieves this by developing job application skills through one-to-one discussions, confidence building, mentoring and workshops.

## Confidence building

Nussrat Iqbal, a student at Leeds Metropolitan University, initially joined IMPACT in April 2001. A first-year undergraduate studying full time on the LLB (Law) programme, Nussrat was trying to arrange work experience over the Easter vacation. On contacting one law firm, she was told that there were no placements available. However when a white colleague contacted the same firm later that day, an interview was offered. Nussrat was unsure whether her rejection had been due to discrimination, and was upset and discouraged by what she described as 'a very negative experience'.



IMPACT's Linda Holdsworth with Nussrat Iqbal

'rock the boat' for her colleague. Instead, she decided to focus on other opportunities and to rebuild her self-esteem. Nussrat began to work closely with Linda to develop her CV, her application and interview technique, and she attended job-search workshops to build up her confidence within the job market. Nussrat now reflects: "It was a difficult time for me, but the support that Linda offered encouraged me to keep trying and motivated me to take part in activities that I would not have considered previously."

## Advice, mentoring and the Global Graduates law programme

Nussrat worked with Linda on a regular basis. She applied for, and was accepted onto, the

IMPACT mentoring programme, where she developed a firm and beneficial working relationship with a professional mentor who "has a really positive attitude towards my career intentions, which encourages me."

Nussrat also applied for the Global Graduates scheme, which offers a two-year programme to minority ethnic undergraduate law students who are aiming to become solicitors. Although Global Graduates had previously offered placements only to students from traditional universities, IMPACT challenged this approach and asked Global Graduates to consider all students. Global Graduates accepted the proposal and delivered an awareness session to all interested local students, which Nussrat attended. She went on to apply and was accepted onto the scheme as their first 'new university' recruit. She says of her acceptance onto the two-year programme: "I am really pleased, and I feel that I have opened the gateway for other new university students."

Nussrat has secured work experience for the summer period. She is also receiving excellent training and support from Global Graduates alongside one-to-one support from her mentor. She says that the support that IMPACT has offered her "has changed my whole university experience for me. I wouldn't have been able to do any of this, or come this far, if it wasn't for the support and motivation that IMPACT and Linda have given me."

## The IMPACT workshops

IMPACT workshops cover application forms, presentation skills, and competency-based interview techniques. One student commented that: "[they] helped me to focus on the experience that I've got, and helped me to cut through the information to get to the essentials."

### Employability is developed through:

- advice and encouragement;
- employability skills workshops;
- employer mentoring;
- confidence building;
- tailored service;
- positive action.

# Graduates for Growth

GfG aims to break down the barriers between graduates and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).



Graduates for Growth (GfG) is a partnership project of the four Edinburgh HE institutions'

Careers Services (the University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Napier University and Queen Margaret University College) working with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and the City of Edinburgh Council. Financial support comes from Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothians. GfG aims to break down the barriers between graduates and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

A fundamental principle of GfG is that it aims to attract the best graduates into SMEs. Almost all previously-funded government schemes to get graduates into SMEs concentrated on short-term placements and were open only to graduates who had been unemployed for six months. GfG promotes SMEs as a genuine alternative to traditional graduate employers. Support and resources are now being sought to extend GfG to other areas of Scotland, with encouragement from the Scottish Executive.

## What GfG can do for students

At the first interview, GfG staff will review individual students' career aspirations and help them to find their direction within the SME sector. They provide advice about how to access the local SME job market, and they assist in developing an action plan. After the initial interview, GfG informs graduates of any relevant vacancies and, once employed, they are provided with a mentor for the first few months of employment to facilitate access to training and development programmes through the Chamber of Commerce. The GfG service has met its targets and is placing over 40 graduates per year. It has upwards of 450 graduates on the database at any one time, and a growing number of employers are using and returning to use the service.

## What GfG has done for one SME

Managing Director of Campbell's Meat and Poultry Suppliers, John Ferguson, decided that

he needed to broaden awareness of his company and employ someone with creative skills to develop and implement promotional campaigns, as well as to support and motivate the telesales team. John contacted Graduates for Growth after hearing an advert for it on a local radio station. Following an evaluation of the company's requirements, the selection process began, using the GfG database of high-quality, career-minded graduates from all disciplines. After interviews with three graduates, Suzie Lampshire (a first-class honours graduate in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Queen Margaret University College) was appointed as Marketing Manager. In two years she has raised the company's profile through marketing and advertising campaigns, brought new technology and techniques to the company, and constructed a direct marketing database. She is also launching a newsletter to strengthen relations between the company and its customers.

John Ferguson is delighted: "Before Suzie joined the company, our marketing was rather amateurish. We cobbled things together when they were needed. Now Suzie provides a very professional image for the company and has increased [customer] awareness ... We were very pleased with the Graduates for Growth process, which continued to provide support after Suzie's appointment through mentoring and access to training. Altogether an extremely worthwhile exercise!"

## Employability is enhanced by:

- developing a mutual awareness between graduates and SMEs;
- providing information on jobs and graduates seeking work in SMEs;
- close liaison with the HE institutions' Careers Services;
- assisting with SMEs recruitment, and advising on the training and retention of graduates;
- the provision of central training and mentoring support for graduates in SMEs;
- marketing materials for SMEs and graduates;
- liaison with other relevant schemes (eg Graduates into Software).

# Section 2

## Employer and graduate needs

Universities and colleges train the professions and increasingly, they are meeting employers' broader needs. UK higher education has always been a blend of vocationalism and intellectualism.

The ancient universities educated the clerics and later the civil servants and military commanders of empire. Despite initial reticence, the universities educated and trained medics and engineers alongside the men of letters. There is a long history of collaboration between professional bodies and higher education in producing professionally competent graduates. Some regulatory and professional bodies have a considerable input into curricula and the assessment of students. In addition to degree and professional masters programmes, universities provide an increasing range of programmes for the ever-growing professional areas, including HNDs/HNCs, top-up courses, short courses, flexible modular programmes offered in the workplace, and other forms of continuous professional development. Indeed, higher education is at the forefront in the delivery of government targets for increases in numbers of nurses, doctors and teachers.

least because of the continuing debate about the purpose of higher education.

There is also some ambivalence among students as to what type of employability development they think is appropriate. University of Wales College, Newport, for example, does not take student engagement with employability for granted, but assesses the importance students place on the acquisition of employability skills and how they prefer to develop them.

Some academics think that embracing employability could infringe academic autonomy, undermine critique, and result in a shift in the balance away from education towards training. There is, though, no desire in government or among employers for such a shift. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) notes that 'employers are not looking for oven-ready graduates' (Lindsay 2002). Training has a short shelf-life and it is far more important for employers that graduates have a range of attributes that empower them as lifelong learners (Harvey et al. 1997).

**There has been a cultural shift in higher education towards taking employability more seriously.**

### **Cultural shift**

There has also been a considerable cultural shift in higher education and a growing awareness among academics of the need to develop students' employability (Mason et al. 2002). This is paralleled by a revival in interest in pedagogy and a focus on student-centred learning. However, despite a growing engagement with the employability agenda, there are reservations, not

**The prominence of the employability agenda and the responsiveness of higher education institutions mean that there has probably not been a better time for employers, to help enhance curricula and to make mutually beneficial links with higher education institutions. This is especially so for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).**

## The changing world of work

The world of work has changed significantly since the 1980s. Commerce and industry, the public sector and the voluntary (not-for-profit) sector all have to operate in a world of continuous change driven by the information revolution, the growing need to be responsive to stakeholders, and the increased pressure from global competitors.

In a climate of technological and organisational change characterised by downsizing, delayering and outsourcing, graduates cannot expect either a job for life or linear career progression. In 2000, there were just 18,000 places on graduate recruitment schemes and 400,000 graduates. Therefore, graduates need to be aware of diverse opportunities, often in non-traditional areas or in jobs formerly done by non-graduates. Enhancing 'non-graduate' jobs by integrating functions and extending the job specification is a major contribution by graduates to the transformation and competitiveness of companies and public sector organisations.

Increasingly, graduates are entering small and medium enterprises (SMEs), going into freelance work (especially in art and design, but increasingly in other areas) and going into self-employment. In any setting, they are likely to be working simultaneously in a range of project teams, taking on a variety of roles.

## Graduate attributes

With the expansion of higher education, the long-time concerns of employers about graduate attributes have become more pronounced. Employers are looking for something in addition to a degree. Through the 1990s, employers in all sectors, especially large-scale recruiters of graduates, became more explicit about the skills they sought and more sophisticated in identifying them in their recruitment procedures. Many research studies<sup>2</sup> have revealed a consistent core set of desirable skills, often independent of the degree subject, and a periphery of organisation-specific requirements.

The core set consists of interactive attributes - communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working - and personal attributes. Personal attributes include intellect and problem solving; analytic, critical and reflective ability; willingness to learn and continue learning; flexibility, adaptability and risk-taking. These are, in short, the attributes that help organisations deal with change. An understanding of the world of work, some commercial awareness, and an appreciation of work culture are often desirable

attributes. In some cases, subject knowledge and understanding are desirable, as are specific technical skills. However:

"I don't care what you did your degree in, I really don't ... Even in areas like finance, I don't necessarily want a finance-trained human being. It is as much if not more about personal traits, personal drive and ambition. You could be managing director of this company with a degree in sociology."  
(Director, commercial operations, vehicle manufacturer: quoted in Harvey et al. 1997, p 58)

Some employers have gone beyond compiling lists of desirable attributes, to examining how these attributes enable graduates to be effective at work. The innovative element of the Graduates' Work survey was not the identification of attributes necessary for the 21st century, but the exploration of the relationship of attributes to the roles that graduates will play in the flexible organisation. Graduates play different roles in different settings. It is important that they have the attributes to know when to fit into the work place and do the job; when to take risks and persuade people of the merit of new ideas; and when to think laterally, take the initiative and the responsibility, and move the organisation forward.

## Employers want graduates who can help them deal with change.

Employers used to ask potential employees what they had done and, implicitly, what skills they had acquired. Now they ask what it is that students have learned from their experiences and, implicitly, how well equipped they are to learn and continue learning.

## Moving on from skills

As analyses of employer needs and graduate attributes have become more sophisticated, there has been a refinement in thinking about skills. The 1990s were characterised by approaches that sought ways to develop skills, especially the key skills first identified by the CBI and confirmed by the Dearing Report in 1997. The Skills Task Force (1998), for example, claimed that 'the lack of skills among graduates and young people is a key concern for employers'. The DfEE Higher Education Projects Fund, 1998-2000, included projects to 'develop strategies to ensure all learners had the opportunity to develop Key Skills, employment skills and transferable skills'

(DfEE 1999, p 2). As the projects developed, initial concern about the place of skills in the curriculum moved on to exploring where students might develop skills, how they might be assessed, and how they link to the work environment (DfEE 2000).

There has been a shift in higher education from seeking to develop specific skills through specialist modules or extracurricular activity to a more holistic approach. Institutions are seeking to develop employability attributes as an explicit and embedded part of academic learning.

learning amongst the communities of which UEL is a part' (Miller 2000). Innovatively, UEL has also undertaken to map lifelong learning in East London and produce a website with a map of opportunities in the area.

Other institutions have focused on developing one-stop shops, more often as virtual rather than physical sites. The Vocational Lifelong Learning Information Gateway provides a one-stop point of access to information about lifelong learning courses within the University of Bristol and approved external providers.

## Developing employability requires a holistic approach.

### Continuing professional development and lifelong learning

Employability is about more than recruiting employable graduates. It is also about developing the existing workforce. Employers frequently assert that their workforce is their most important asset and are aware of the need to ensure development opportunities to enhance their skills and abilities. Continuing professional development (CPD) is an area of expansion in most higher education institutions. Cardiff University's Business School and Centre for Lifelong Learning, for example, developed courses in strategic management and project management aimed at small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The University of Leicester's Institute of Lifelong Learning offers a range of CPD courses including developing a business and marketing plan, computer skills for humanities students, and leading teams in the public sector. An innovative approach in Glasgow involves collaboration between the universities of Glasgow Caledonian and Strathclyde to offer a range of lifelong learning programmes for the construction industry and construction sector professionals through the Centre for the Built Environment. **Liverpool John Moores University** has established the Learning at Work Framework to enable lifelong learning.

CS Pg.13

## Universities have invested in continuing professional development and lifelong learning.

## There is growing awareness of the needs of SMEs, who in turn can benefit from links to universities.

Some institutions have taken a community-focused approach to pre and post-degree lifelong learning (Marks 2000). For example, the University of East London's (UEL's) year-long Festival of Lifelong Learning (May 2000 to July 2001) aimed to 'enhance awareness of lifelong

# Liverpool John Moores University

The Learning at Work Framework reflects the university's commitment to lifelong learning.

## Learning at Work Framework

### Background



The Learning at Work Framework reflects John Moores University's (JMU's) commitment to lifelong learning and offers individuals the opportunity to gain

undergraduate and postgraduate awards through workplace-centred learning. It enhances JMU's ability to meet the demands of a growing number of employees wishing to return to higher education for professional development, but who find it difficult to attend day-release or night-school classes.

### The Framework

Programmes operating under the Framework are based on a three-way partnership, in which an academic tutor, an employee and an employer negotiate a programme of study that will achieve the aims of the award and the partners. At JMU, programme teams validate programmes according to principles in the Framework.

Students negotiate how they will address the programme outcomes through a combination of taught and work-based modules, and present this for approval in the form of a Learning Agreement. They are able to gain accreditation of past projects through an Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) portfolio, and then develop new learning through work-based activity and taught modules. Students are supported throughout their programme by their academic tutor and a Learning at Work module.

Workplace support is an essential element of Learning at Work programmes, and employers are asked to provide a workplace mentor for each student. Mentors support and advise the student when preparing the Learning Agreement and when carrying out work-based study.

### Professional Benefits

Current programmes operating through this Framework include MA Consumer Science, Cert HE Sports Development, and PG Cert Subject Leadership in Physical Education. All these programmes operate differently within the

Framework, but all work on the principle that students should use their workplace as a source of learning. The Learning at Work Framework is particularly useful in meeting the needs of niche areas where there is either the lack of a formal professional and academic development route, or a particular need to satisfy the requirements of individual professional bodies or standards.

Negotiated learning, requires students and employers to be highly motivated and clear in their development needs. The introductory module, helps students to identify whether they wish to pursue such a form of learning, and to identify and formalise their development needs and how to achieve them through work-based learning.

### Results

"I've really enjoyed the course ... I also feel that it's helped my work at [my company] as I'm much more externally focused and look at work issues in a new light. I've been able to apply theory to practice and vice versa. It's broadened my horizons, and the flexibility of the course means you're in control of your own destiny."  
(MA Consumer Science student.)

"This process has changed me [and] I hope that I am beginning to change the school and staff's outlook on PE, with a much more positive view to its development."  
(PG Cert Subject Leadership student.)

"[The course] has created opportunities to instigate change in a confident and direct manner. It has provided a focus for reflection on workplace practices and procedures. The course has enabled me to set up challenging goals which will contribute to developments within the subject."  
(PG Cert Subject Leadership student.)

"As a workplace learner I am able to set up specific areas of study that are relevant to my own workplace practices, rather than have the subject matter determined by others."  
(PG Cert Subject Leadership student.)

### Employability is enhanced by:

- recognising the importance of lifelong learning;
- basing learning in the workplace;
- accrediting past projects (APEL);
- meeting the requirements of professional bodies.

# University of Reading

Incorporating Career Management Skills as a standard part of the degree has increased student motivation.

## Career management skills

The Reading career management skills (CMS) model combines four features into a unique system:

- a university-wide component contributing five credits towards final degree classification;
- substantial differentiation of resources according to degree discipline;
- a partnership arrangement between careers professionals and academics;
- co-ordination with other opportunities for advice and guidance.

Developed in 1999 as part of a wide-ranging response to Dearing, CMS drew on pre-existing, curriculum-based careers education programmes that had been running successfully in a few departments. Thirty-seven departments are currently involved with CMS, and all 45 will be participating by 2002/03.



CMS website homepage

There are three parts to CMS at Reading:

**Finding your Profile** (self-awareness, employability audit and skills development);  
**Finding the Fit** (awareness of

jobs, courses and other opportunities, plus labour market research and decision making); and **Effective Applications** (understanding employers' recruitment and selection methods). While each part starts with an interactive, taught session, the bulk of the learning takes place online, using over 200 pages of specially-written text. At the end of each section students submit an assessed assignment.

## Delivery through the curriculum

CMS has been incorporated as a standard part of the degree, thereby increasing student motivation (as it is credit-bearing). It also overcomes the problem of optional careers modules, which typically are avoided by those who most need them. Curriculum location enables clear links to

be made between students' subject knowledge, discipline-related skills development and the jobs market. Substantial steps are being taken to incorporate students' learning from CMS into the personal tutorial system so that it forms part of the personal development planning aspect of their HE progress files.

## Differentiated by degree

All sections of CMS are modified according to the audience, but the one that possesses greatest capacity for differentiation is Finding the Fit, which looks at careers and courses that are discipline related. Each subject area has its own package of online information about opportunities, covering employers, occupational information, professional bodies, postgraduate courses and entrepreneurship. Specific information is also provided for groups likely to encounter discrimination in the labour market. These links, of which there are already over 1,000, enable students to produce a job study on a career of their choice (the assignment for this section) and provide a research resource for the future.

## Co-ordination with other opportunities for advice

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) argues that an important feature of successful personal development planning (PDP) schemes is their integration with other opportunities for careers advice. CMS achieves this through several means: hot links from the online material to relevant services (eg the work-experience vacancy database); co-ordination with the tutorial system; and front-loading online learning with face-to-face taught sessions led, in part, by careers advisors. Contact sessions are also key to establishing strong links between students and careers staff, ensuring that CMS acts as a gateway to other careers advice services.

## Employability is delivered by:

- building upon existing good practice;
- incorporating CMS into degrees;
- co-operating with academics and employers.

# University of Central England

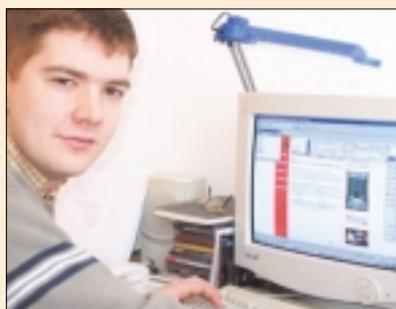
The confidence to set up on his own came through “a combination of the course, the placements and part-time work.”

## BA(Hons) Media and Communications

Jon Hickman is a graduate of the BA Hons Media and Communications programme at UCE. At 23, he runs his own web-page design company, High Tide Productions Ltd. The confidence to set up on his own came through “a combination of the course, the placements and part-time work.”

Jon describes the degree programme as ‘broad and deep’, covering all aspects of working in the media and enabling

students to go deeper into specialist areas. Crucial elements of the course were two compulsory placements.



## Work experience

One of Jon’s four-week placements was with a research department at UCE that wanted to develop a website. The people he was working with were ‘very techie’, and Jon brought a wider set of media skills to the workplace. He learned how to draw out from clients what they needed from a website and whom it was for. Jon also gained insights into how web-pages were used in a commercial setting, which reinforced the broad picture from the degree course.

## Theory and skills

The Media and Communications course developed media-related skills alongside theoretical understanding of the media. Jon writes that it: “provided both a technical skill base and knowledge of the media. The theoretical elements have been invaluable in giving me a broader understanding of how web design fits alongside other media, including television, newspapers, PR, word-of-mouth, exhibitions.”

Course director, Tim Wall, describes the degree as vocationally orientated, but with a balance between theory and skill development. Virtually

everybody who teaches on the course worked in the media themselves. Furthermore, through excellent contacts with graduates and local media companies who provide feedback on the latest industry practices, the course is constantly updated. Tim notes that: “We ask students to do things that will make them more employable, that will help them understand the market that they are going for, that will give them skills that will impress.”

## Flexibility

Countering the derogatory remarks about media courses made by people both within and outside the media, Tim observes: “My philosophy is summed up in the phrase ‘practical criticism and critical practice’. The industry changes very, very fast and what students need is to be multi-skilled, so that they can move quickly and efficiently from one of those sorts of activities to another.”

## Confidence

Initially, Jon thought that on graduation he would work for a company, pay off his debts, and then at about 30 start out on his own. Instead, after being offered a good job at a large design company where ‘Everyone just looked so depressed’, he made a ‘lifestyle decision’ and started up his own business. Drawing on the confidence that the course and his work experience had given him, Jon began to put together a client base. “The first year was hard, but now I’m on top of it.” High Tide Productions now has an impressive and diverse client base including organisations in automotive engineering, marketing, property, local government and higher education.

## Employability is developed through:

- embedded placements;
- assistance with part-time work;
- a responsive programme that accommodates industry changes through good links with past graduates and media companies;
- skills development alongside theoretical understanding;
- employer inputs into the course.

# Section 3

## Employability, recruitment and performance

Employability is a process of learning that leads to individuals gaining and retaining fulfilling work.

### **The nature of employability**

Employability is a property of the individual. In essence, the core notion of employability relates to the propensity of graduates to obtain (and retain) fulfilling work (Hillage and Pollard 1998; Harvey 2001a). To put it another way: do graduates have the attributes that will make them employable? At root, employability is about learning, not least learning how to learn. Employability is not a product but a process (Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) 2002).

### **Employability is, at heart, about a process of learning.**

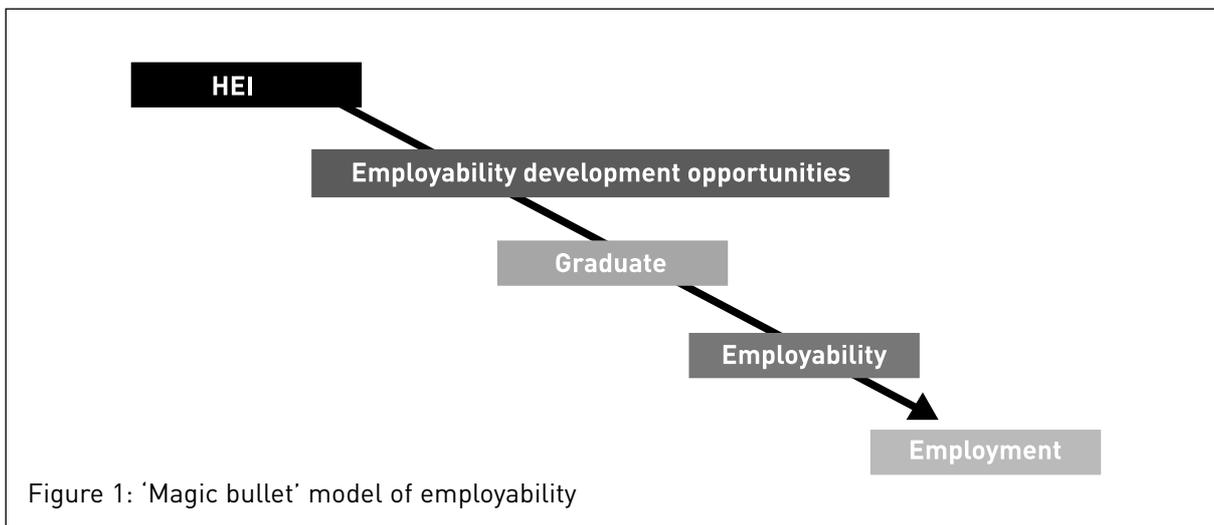
There is a tendency to measure employability in terms of whether the graduate obtains a job of a specific type within a given period after graduating. This, of course, only relates to the employability of new (full-time) graduates and is irrelevant as an indicator of the employability development of those already in work. However, whether a graduate has a fulfilling job or not is dependent on a range of factors among which being equipped to do a job is but one element. There are the personal characteristics of the individual including age, gender, ethnicity and personality traits, all of which have been known to influence recruitment. There are also external economic factors, which may be sector or region specific (Harvey 2000). There is thus a distinction between the employability potential of the individual (a matter of self-development) and the actual employment of the individual (a matter mediated by external factors).

Employability should not be confused with the employment rate of graduates from an institution. Employability cannot be used to refer to the institution itself: an institution is not employable. An institution may develop graduates' employability and enhance the attributes that make them employable. The employment rate of graduates from an institution is not an employability measure. Employability can only be applied to individuals.

The employment rate of graduates is a crude performance indicator of the employability development activity within institutions. It implies a direct link between institutional activity and graduate recruitment success: a 'magic bullet' approach. See figure 1 opposite.

However, the institution is but one among many factors that influence the employability of graduates. While the institution might contribute to a graduate's knowledge, skills and experience, graduates also draw on other life experiences, including paid and voluntary work.

The employment rate of graduates also reflects a range of factors including the subject mix of the institution, the characteristics of the undergraduate entry, the mix of full and part-time students, and so on (Gould and Harvey 1999). Thus, the employability agenda involves more than building league tables based on first destination returns.



### There is no 'magic bullet' solution to employability.

The factors linking together the development of graduate attributes and the obtaining of an appropriate job are summarised in Figure 2 overleaf. This is a more realistic representation than the magic bullet model. The graduate has had to choose to engage with the employability development opportunities provided by the institution. The graduate will also have extracurricular activities to draw on, some as a result of the higher education experience and some external to it.

Employability development has three focuses:

- development of employability attributes;
- development of self-promotional and career management skills;
- willingness to learn and reflect on learning.

Three core processes impact on employability: first the **pedagogic** process that encourages development; second, **self-reflection** by the student; and third, **articulation** of experiences and abilities. These are discussed further in the following sections.

### Employability is about how individuals engage with opportunities, reflect, and articulate their skills and experiences.

In addition, employability development opportunities are affected to some extent by the subject discipline of the graduate. Some programme areas tend to be more active than others in promoting employability, either because they more readily lend themselves to developing particular employability attributes, or because of a need to ensure engagement with the world of

work. Similarly, engagement in employability development, reflection and articulation are often easier for students in vocational areas. See Figure 2 overleaf.

### Recruitment practices

Recruitment practices of the employer are a key element in the process by which graduates get jobs. Although '[large] companies with very different activities and concerns recruit graduates using selection criteria that are very similar' (Bennett et al. 2000, p 143) the process is not always as transparent as it appears. Almost all employers in the Graduates' Work survey exhibited some bias in their recruitment processes, most noticeably discriminating against older graduates (Harvey et al. 1997).

"If I was employing somebody I would probably go for a younger person, but it's down to the individual really. Somebody who is 30-plus probably had a career change and those sort of people, I just think, they might not be stable in the company, they might spend a couple of years with the company and move on." (Studio Manager, small design and print agency)

Data from the General Household Survey on occupational attainment showed that, compared to traditional-age graduates, mature graduates were disadvantaged on entry to the labour market. After a further 15 years they have similar attainment to non-mature graduates. However, mature graduates are more likely to work in public or welfare sectors, which has implications for levels of pay (Egerton 2001).

A recent research project, Access to What? (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information [CHERI] 2002), also found that even

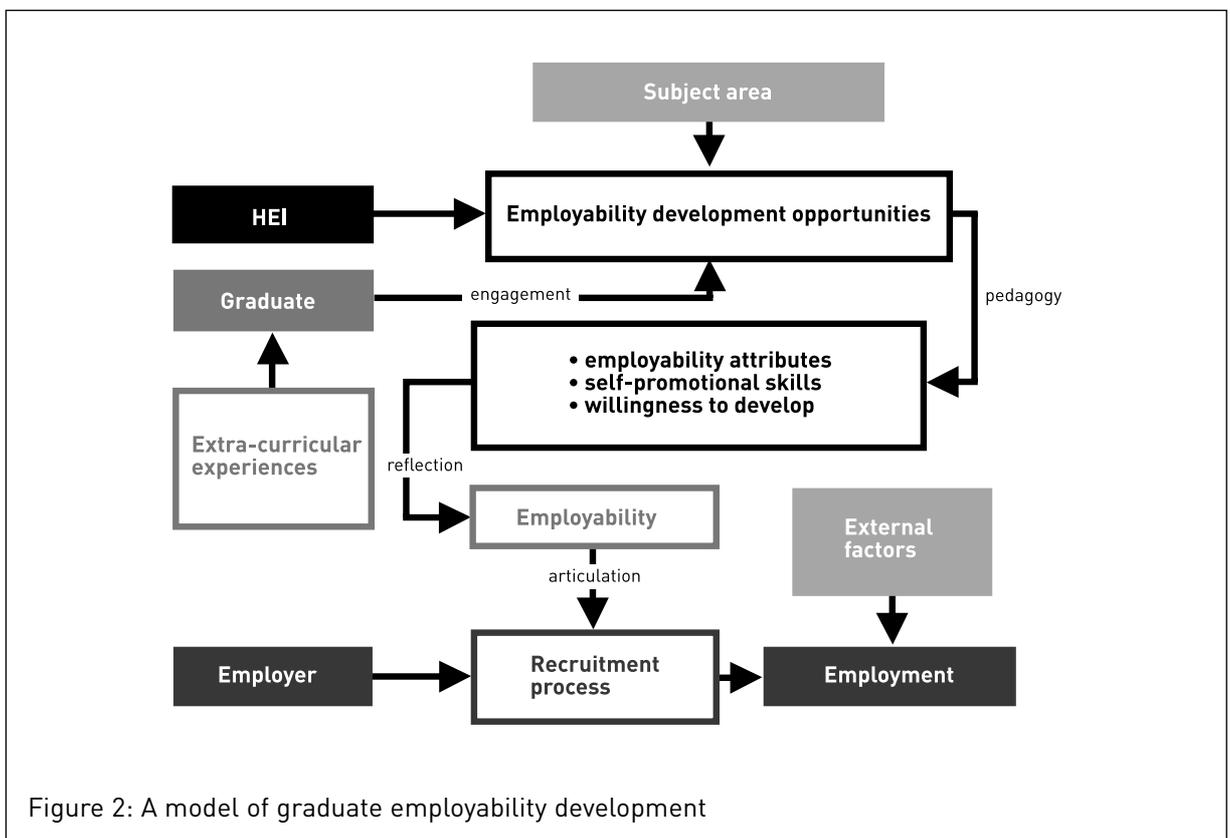


Figure 2: A model of graduate employability development

after taking the 'indirect effects' of status of university, subject studied, and geographic region into account, the age and socio-economic/ethnic background of a graduate appears to influence recruitment decisions. A study commissioned by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) also showed that graduates from lower social groups earn less than those from professional families. 'Graduates from Oxbridge whose father is an associate professional have the highest gain from their degree; their earnings increase by 16 per cent compared to those graduating from Oxbridge whose father is in a non-middle class occupation' (CIHE 2002, p 25). This has prompted CIHE to issue guidelines for good practice in recruitment (CIHE/ Employment Studies Research Unit (ESRU) 2002).

Recent research by Collective Enterprise Ltd (CEL) (2002) showed that six months after graduation, male information technology, electronics and communications (ITEC) graduates earned three per cent more than females, and this grew to 20 per cent three years after graduation. An earlier study of art and design students also showed salary bias in favour of males (Harvey and Blackwell 1999).

In some large organisations the recruitment criteria established by the human resource department do not necessarily coincide with the immediate requirements of graduates' line

managers, or with the longer-term strategic view of senior managers (Harvey et al. 1997; Bennett et al. 2000). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that sometimes chief executive officers (CEOs) are out of touch in their public pronouncements with the skill sets required by their organisations and with the abilities exhibited by new graduates.

Recruitment processes, particularly among large organisations, continue to be skewed in favour of certain groups of graduates, often from institutions who are not at the leading edge of employability development. This may suggest that employers prioritise intake standards over employability development initiatives. However, recruitment practices have changed over the last five years. There is less recruitment onto graduate schemes and more direct job-related recruitment. There is also a growing tendency to recruit from students who have had some work experience with the organisation. Use of the Internet for recruitment widens the potential pool of recruits. Nonetheless, higher education and employers need to work together to overcome biases, in particular the structural discrimination against older graduates.

**Higher education and employers need to work together to overcome biases in recruitment against some groups of graduates.**

# York St John College

The course achieves a balance between academic learning and real management practice.

## BA (Hons) Leisure and Tourism Management



Adam Lowthorpe, a former professional footballer with Hull City Football Club, completed his degree as a mature student in Leisure and Tourism Management in July 2001 and is now Sports Delivery Officer for Hull City Council Sports Development Section. Following five years as a professional, Adam sought qualifications to enable him to gain his ideal job in Sports Management. Adam comments: "I achieved a BTEC in Leisure Studies when I was 18, so chose a mature entry to the degree in Leisure and Tourism Management at York St John. My main concern was that after five years as a professional footballer I would be unprepared for the workplace and that I wouldn't have the skills employers were looking for. I specifically chose this course because it enabled me to undertake specialist ...whilst preparing me for the workplace and teaching me the skills that employers are looking for."

The course combines marketing, finance, and theoretical approaches with specialist leisure and tourism modules. Adam identified its particular strength as achieving an appropriate balance between academic learning and real management practice. He also developed language, communication and IT skills.

### Work experience

The work placement serves four broad purposes: understanding organisations, personal development, career planning, and key skill development. For his eight-week work placement, Adam negotiated a placement at the Hull City Community Office developing football in the community initiatives. This led directly to his current post. He also completed further professional development, achieving a series of coaching qualifications to add value to his degree.

All students on work experience are supported by an academic placement supervisor who provides an objective view of the workplace and the opportunities within and beyond it. In addition, a work-based supervisor focuses on developing undergraduate strengths, provides advice on areas of weakness, helps develop business awareness and contacts, and provides constructive feedback in regular reports.

### Theory and skills

The Head of Programme, Dr Alison Dunn, describes the learning and teaching on the programme as being founded on individual personal development. "Students work towards becoming more autonomous learners. They acquire and practise key skills in ever more complex interpersonal and project situations, thus developing into reflective management practitioners." Adam agrees that "a real strength was in being able to negotiate my own placement with an employer and college tutor, so that all concerned were clear about my learning objectives and the skills and knowledge that I had to offer and also wished to acquire or develop."

As Sports Delivery Officer for Hull, Adam works with existing sports clubs, helps to establish new clubs, and at weekends he still finds time to coach the under-16 football team at the Hull City Centre of Excellence. Adam agrees that learning how businesses operate on a day-to-day basis has proved invaluable in developing his employability skills. "My degree gave me an appreciation of the pressures of deadlines and the importance of time management. I developed organisational skills and an understanding of organisational culture and management styles. I learnt about recruitment procedures, investigated the impact of technology on businesses, and developed research and public speaking skills - all of which have enabled me to do a better job now."

### Employability is developed through:

- establishing the needs of businesses and of students;
- achievement of marketable skills within academic learning;
- work experience embedded within the programme.

# University of Newcastle upon Tyne

During the first semester, students form small teams and devise a business idea, culminating in the delivery of a viable business plan.

## Business Enterprise Module

Get Shirty, suppliers of personalised shirts, is just one of the successful student companies operating as part of the Business Enterprise module and was developed by the Careers Service and Business School 1999.



## Informing career choice

The module emphasises the development of commercial understanding, new venture creation and occupational awareness.

The 'Get Shirty' team

Paul Freeman of the Careers Service, who developed the module, believes that an equally valid outcome is for students to decide not to pursue a career in small business or self-employment. "The module provides an excellent opportunity to put theory into practice, but some students realise self-employment isn't for them. However, the experience and skills gained will still be valuable in any employment situation, particularly given the demand for more enterprising graduates across all sectors."

Integral to the module is the support of the recently developed Graduate Programme, a Higher Education version of the national Young Enterprise scheme. It lets students register their company, receive insurance, and provides a negotiated position within the tax system. To finance their business the companies open a bank account and raise cash through fundraising, sponsorship, selling shares, and receiving a start-up grant once a business plan is produced.

## Business development and operation

During the first semester, students form small teams and devise a business idea, culminating in the delivery of a viable business plan. During this phase, and throughout the trading period of semester two, each company is supported by an outside business person who acts as a mentor.

The module places emphasis on student initiative and problem solving, with the mentors acting as guides, advisers and occasionally as a safety net. To provide more specialist advice, a second group of mentors from banking, public relations, sales and legal firms contribute to the course.

The trading element tests the students' ideas and abilities in the market place and provides the most valuable aspect of the course. Successful ideas have included an online textbook brokering service, language translation and tutoring, a student employment agency, and website design. At the end of the academic year the companies must liquidate, but whilst the module is not designed as a start-up programme, some companies do re-form and continue trading in their own right during the students' final year.

## Recognition and currency

Recently, the module has been validated against the relevant occupational standards, enabling those who complete the module to receive an additional award recognised by the small business sector. This partnership also enables the sector to inform curriculum development, ensuring the module remains flexible as business changes.

Stephan John, Education Manager of the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative, the organisation that has developed the occupational standards for the sector, supports such programmes. "We are delighted to endorse the University of Newcastle's Business Enterprise module. We believe this module highlights opportunities for business start up, encourages and widens participation in enterprise, and improves the long-term success of small businesses."

## Employability is developed through:

- enabling students to experience the reality of business operations;
- introducing students to business owners, specialist advisers and business networks;
- providing practical evidence of personal and skill development that is validated by the sector;
- employer inputs into the course.

# Section 4

## Developing employability in higher education institutions

Higher education has always developed students' employability, but now it is doing this in more explicit and systematic ways, and in close collaboration with employers.

Higher education institutions in the UK have always played their part in developing employability. The last five years have seen a much more explicit engagement with all three aspects of the employability agenda: developing student attributes (designed to make them employable), developing students' self-presentation skills (designed to improve their recruitment chances), and developing students' flexibility and willingness to continue learning (designed to ensure they continue to be employable).

Some initiatives are course-specific, others are institution-wide developments such as the establishment of progress files or the development of career education modules. Some activities, for example, target under-represented groups while others enable self-employment or aid small business incubation. There is a growth in partnerships with employers, non-government organisations (NGOs) and further education. There are also initiatives such as occupation-specific foundation degrees intended to produce graduates who are employable in the intermediate labour market. An example is Kingston University's aeronautical engineering foundation degree, which incorporates within the programme the licence to practice required to work in aeronautical engineering.

**Employability is about attribute development, building confidence and self-promotional skills, and encouraging lifelong learning.**

### **System-wide developments**

Wales has a system-wide approach as a result of the pioneering work of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA). Following the publication of Future Skills Wales (1998), HEFCW undertook an employability audit of the higher education institutions in the principality (HEFCW 1999). This revealed that considerable work was being done in the area, although most institutions did not have an overall strategy for the development of the employability. Activities included providing or encouraging students to undertake work experience in various forms, providing central careers service support to undergraduates and graduates of the institution, and — to a lesser degree — embedding employability skills in the curriculum.

Since the audit, institutions have been asked to provide Work Experience and Employability Plans (WEEPs) with a focus on developing all three strands. The original plans in 2000/01 revealed extensive development of work experience opportunities. The updated WEEPs for 2001/02 show, in addition, a considerable increase in efforts to embed employability elements within the curriculum and develop a strategic approach to employability. The Welsh approach, linked to ring-fenced funding to support WEEPs, encourages institutions to review in detail the types of opportunities they make available across the institution at both programme level and centrally. It also encourages a strategic approach. The University of Wales, Swansea, for example, links together the learning and teaching plan, the

careers education, information and guidance policy, and the work experience and employability plan, and gives overall responsibility to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

### **A system-wide approach to encouraging employability development has been successful in Wales.**

To date, there has not been an equivalent system-wide employability approach in England, although HEFCE, in collaboration with DfES, is commissioning a team to co-ordinate initiatives to enhance the student employability in higher education. The lack of a system-wide approach has led some institutions to develop their own. At The University of Newcastle, for example, there was no clear strategy linking the wide range of employability projects. A new approach, which is supported by senior management, has a single strategic aim that now provides a basis for developing activity because 'everyone can now see where everything fits together' (Harvey 2002). At the University of Central England in Birmingham, employability is integrated into the learning and teaching strategy.

### **Range of activity**

The diverse range of employability-enhancing activities within institutions can be categorised into four broad areas:

1. enhanced or revised central support (usually via careers services) for undergraduates and graduates in their search for work;
2. embedded attribute development within the programme of study, often as the result of modifications to curricula to make attribute development explicit or to accommodate employer inputs;
3. innovative provision of work-experience opportunities within, or external to, programmes of study;
4. enabled reflection on and recording of experience, attribute development and achievement, alongside academic abilities, increasingly by using progress files. (Please see page 37)

As we saw in Section 3, employability development has three focuses: attribute development, self-promotion and career management, and willingness to learn and reflect on learning. Whereas in the past these tended to be the province of specialist bolt-on courses or implicit parts of programmes, they are now addressed in a more holistic way through the different areas of enhancement (See Figure 3 opposite).

The cultural change in higher education has seen a shift towards central support services working with programme staff, helping to develop attributes as part of the curriculum and to maximise reflection on an array of different work experiences. Self-promotion and career management is no longer a separate activity but increasingly integrated into the programme and linked to career planning and recording achievement. This is important, as graduates must be able to do more than just sell themselves: they have to be able to perform in a job once they are recruited. Conversely, potentially good performers also need the skills to get a job in the first place. Emphasis is also being placed on learning to learn, through programmes with a shift in pedagogy from 'knowing what' to 'knowing how to find out', and through reflecting on work experience. See Figure 3 opposite.

### **There is a more integrated approach with central support services working with programme staff to develop, identify and record skills and abilities.**

### **Central support**

Central support, usually in the form of careers services, has changed radically since the mid-1990s. It used to consist mainly of careers talks and one-to-one career advice sessions for students approaching graduation. The University of Huddersfield Careers Service, for example, now takes responsibility for the job shop, the newly-established one-stop shop, and the student information centre. It has a system for regular feedback from staff, students and employers and is involved with local and regional agencies and guidance providers. It runs an annual Employer Strategy Day with employers in the region and has close links with senior management. It is involved in developing work experience and supporting career development modules (DfEE 2001).

### **Central services have been transformed over the last five years and are no longer marginal to learning.**

This change will continue in the wake of the Harris Report (DfEE 2001), which reviewed higher education careers services and made a series of recommendations designed to raise standards,

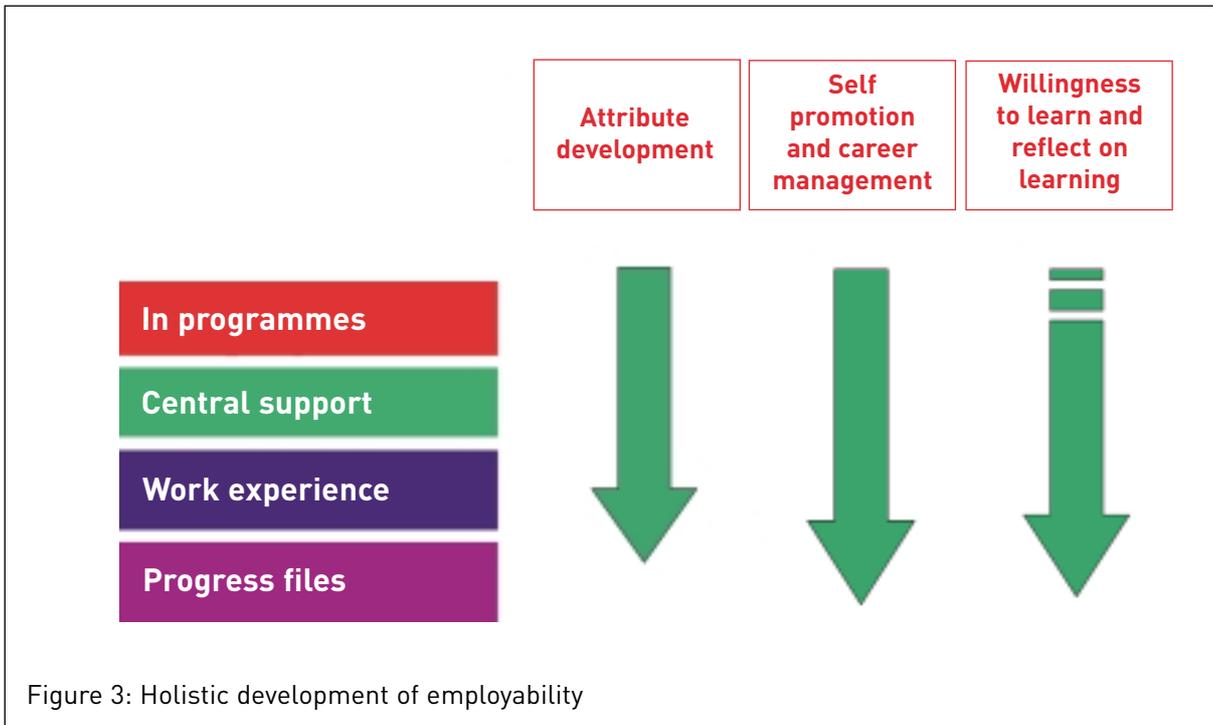


Figure 3: Holistic development of employability

improve performance, and to integrate careers services into the organisation as a whole. Universities UK, in commissioning an assessment of the costs of implementing the Harris recommendations, noted that most universities take an institution-wide view of employability and provide information and guidance through both centralised and course-based provision. The Harris Report noted that in an era of widening participation, careers services should ensure that those students most in need of advice are encouraged to seek it.<sup>3</sup>

An important initiative in supporting disadvantaged students is the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Minority Ethnic Recruitment, Information, Training and Support (MERITS) Project, which works with Black and Asian students and graduates who tend to be disadvantaged in the job market. The programme involves several institutions including the Southampton Institute, Manchester Metropolitan and De Montfort universities. A group of universities in Yorkshire have developed a similar initiative called **IMPACT** that provides tailored support for students to develop their employability skills through confidence building, mentoring and workshops.

Complementing support for disadvantaged students is support for SMEs. In addition to the well-known Shell Technology Enterprise Programme (STEP 2002), **Graduates for Growth** aims to help SMEs in the Lothians recruit graduates by breaking down the barriers.

A similarly named project was devised and developed by the Foundation for SME Development at the University of Durham, which involves institutions in the North East and aims to develop graduates' talent and widen their career opportunities. It also offers local SMEs 'lasting benefits through the employment of graduates' (Graduates for Growth 2002). The Knowledge, Innovation and Technology Transfer Scheme (KITTS 2002), a development in the greater West Midlands area supported by nine higher education institutions, helps about 60 SMEs a year to take on graduates to undertake a specific project for up to 13 weeks.

Careers Services are not the only organisations providing generic support. The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), for example, offers a week-long Graduate Skills Programme that develops skills for postgraduates. The National Union of Students (NUS) has also developed the effective and well-established National Skills Learning Programme (NSLP 2002) which began in 1998. In all, 84 student unions have been involved in the scheme, and 52,000 students have been trained by peers in at least one key skill.

Continued on page 26

# University of Birmingham

Vocationally, the course provides technical skills, but also produces graduates who have 'something extra' when applying for media-related jobs.

## American and Canadian Studies Department, MPhilB History, Film and Television



### Academic and vocational

The course was created in 1996 as an outgrowth of an undergraduate course that had been running since the mid-1980s. From the outset the programme was explicitly set up to reconcile academic and vocational

requirements. The academic aspect consisted of a specialist approach to the study and production of history using audio-visual materials. Critical engagement with these media is integral to the course. The adoption of the MPhilB model allows for flexibility in two ways: first, it allows for a longer dissertation than an MA (20,000 rather than 12,000 words) and, second, makes it possible to introduce specialist dissertations: in this case a 45-minute documentary supported by a 6,000 word defence. Another unusual feature of the course is that the second semester is given over to a full 12-week work placement

Vocationally, the course provides technical skills, but also produces graduates who have 'something extra' when applying for media-related jobs. The course produces graduates who are first and foremost good researchers, but who can also apply their research skills in a work scenario. Paul Woolf of Maverick Television, which takes placement students from the course and has employed its graduates, commented that the course produced academically qualified students who, unlike some graduates from more explicitly vocational courses, did not expect to walk into high-level positions: "They come in without any preconceptions, just wanting to learn about the job."

### Placement partnerships

Integral to the course are the placement partners, practitioners willing to take students on work experience. The first six students enrolled in 1996 were placed in locally-based organisations. As the course has expanded, placements have become more varied, both in location and type of employment. In recent years,

multimedia companies have become involved and students have worked in London for companies such as Jeremy Isaacs or CNN.com, Europe. Current students have been accepted by CBC in Toronto and CNN in New York. Overseas links, both academic and vocational, are integral to the development of the course. Graduates of the course are also forming a network for feeding back both to the department and to current students.

The placement is a two-way process, with students identifying organisations they want to work for, and employers having the chance to see CVs and interview candidates. At the end of the placement, employers produce reports on the students' performances, rating them on time management, creativity and group work. The students themselves produce a report applying theoretical aspects from the first semester to practical work-placement experiences.

### Responding to reality

The course has, to some extent, been the victim of its own success, as several students have been offered rolling contracts as a result of their placements, so have been unable to complete their dissertations. To resolve this academic/vocational friction, students can declare that they will complete the coursework (but not the dissertation) and thus receive a Post Graduate Certificate. This was built into the course from the academic year 2001/02, but should be introduced on an ex post facto basis to former students.

Jonnie Tarpey, Chairman of Maverick Television, commented: "If this research is looking at how we [employers] think the future could be thought through, I think that's the area we should be looking at: that interface ... between university education ... and industry."

### Employability is developed through:

- balancing academic and vocational requirements;
- the development of links between the university and local and national employers;
- a flexible attitude towards the needs of students on the course.

# University of Liverpool

Students learn about the ethics of equal opportunities volunteering and the practical issues of working with a range of organisations.

## Voluntary Service Learning

### Background

Two years ago, the Department of Sociology at the University of Liverpool proposed an innovative work-based learning module for first year students that would provide both an experience of the sociology of work in practice and actively contribute to the local community. The new module, Voluntary Service Learning, aims to 'allow students to demonstrate their understanding of social action and learning from undertaking voluntary service work'.

### The application of theory in practice

Students attend induction training provided by Liverpool Student Community Action (LSCA), part of the Guild of Students. They learn about the ethics of equal opportunities volunteering and the practical issues of working with a range of organisations. The department offers seminars covering topics such as the role of the voluntary sector and the concepts of social capital and civic society. A range of assessment methods reflects the various learning objectives: students complete a mini-essay on the sociology of work, where they consider the issues that their host organisation has to face, and the problems for the future of that organisation. They also give a presentation. The students also complete reflective logs to help them analyse their experiences in terms of the development of their understanding of sociology in the workplace and the development of their personal/managerial skills.

### Electronic support for skill development

The module is supported by a web-based personal development planning tool, LUSID (the Liverpool University Student Interactive Database). LUSID has three main elements: a recording section that contains the template for the reflective learning log; a customisable skills audit (covering a range of skill areas such as teamwork, communication and information technology); an action planning section; and a reporting section which helps students compile a CV from the information stored. LUSID has the advantage of easy access via any web connection,

and also gives the facility for work to be sent to a tutor for feedback. The Centre for Lifelong Learning can tailor all aspects of LUSID to department or module requirements.

### Placement opportunities

The majority of placements are organized through Liverpool Student Community Action. Students do have the opportunity to organise their own placements if they wish, subject to department approval.

There are a wide variety of volunteering opportunities: working with education groups to devise and put on anti-bullying plays, devising and implementing play days for young children, and helping out at care homes are typical examples.

### Evaluation

The first year that the module was offered, the module co-ordinator expected between six and 12 students. The actual take-up was over 30 students, indicating a real interest in this type of opportunity. The host organisations have been very positive about the initiative: "This work was extremely helpful, and I hope that it proved as useful to the students as it most certainly did for our organisation" (Citizen Advocacy Project Manager).

Many of the students feel they have benefited from the volunteering experience, the independence of choosing their own work, and the value of the group/peer discussions in tutorials. Perhaps one of the most telling aspects is that 79 per cent of the first group of students intended to carry on with volunteering the following year.

### Employability is enhanced by:

- working with the Guild of Students;
- utilising the LUSID database effectively;
- using a range of training and assessment methods.



## Career management

A significant change, as mentioned above, has been the development of students' own career management skills. The CRAC Career Management Skills Programme was a pioneer in encouraging students to begin to plan and manage their future careers early on while at university. Recent developments include careers management skills modules designed to help students and graduates develop and gather evidence of skills, identify career preferences and plan effective job applications. The University of Newcastle makes their course available online and the University of Wales, Bangor's Career Management and Job-hunting Skills course is also accredited, at level one, through the Department of Lifelong Learning. The **University of Reading** is introducing a career management skills component into all undergraduate programmes for new degrees, starting in 2002. Career management, as will be discussed below, is also being integrated into student progress files, along with the recording of achievement and reflecting on practice.

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## Central support for embedding employability in the curriculum

A relatively new activity is the attempt to integrate centrally supported employability development into the curriculum in various ways. Hitherto, in most institutions, central staff have tended to work in an ad hoc way with academics on request.

Leeds Metropolitan University's Skills for Learning, for example, is an attempt to broaden this process. It is an online resource available on and off the campus, accompanied by self-study packs. It is innovative in combining employability development with study skills, information and research skills, using IT, learning and teaching, group skills, assessment and personal development planning.

University of Central England in Birmingham's Careers Service has produced a self-help guide *Delivering Employability: A Framework for Career Development in the Curriculum* (2002), which identifies attributes that could be developed within curricula. This unique resource suggests how attribute development might be integrated into, and assessed within, the programme of study. For each attribute there is a list of other resources that might be useful for lecturers. The resource contains a checklist for employability, which can also be used to audit existing programmes.

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In several institutions, including Queen's University of Belfast and University of Wales College, Newport, central careers services, lifelong learning departments and academic staff collaborate to develop employability skills in programmes and, where appropriate, they share delivery. The University of Wales, Swansea has appointed an employability and skills officer to work with departments to review their programmes of study in order to identify and enhance vocational elements, embed key skills in programme specifications and promote their value to students. Support and guidance is provided through the careers centre and the staff development unit.

## Embedding employability in the curriculum

Apart from central initiatives, there is a growing tendency towards an integrated approach to employability development that includes embedding the development of student attributes within the subject curriculum. A recent study of media courses at four universities showed that current students, recent graduates and employers considered attribute development to be well embedded in programmes (Lambert et al. 2002). A third-year student at the **University of Central England** thought that the 'entire course' was 'geared towards getting a job'. It incorporated visiting speakers 'currently working in the industry' while "many of the lecturers are current practitioners and can give practical help and advice, and have useful contacts."

An employer in the study noted:

"When they do get a position in the company, media studies graduates seem quite eager to develop their skills, take advantage of the post to get some real work experience - more so than someone who has got a good conventional degree from an established university. They sort of rest on their laurels and think, "Well, I can go to any company and get a good post." [Media graduates] are very hard working ... they have the direct skills which they need to do the job, including IT packages and HTML."

**More and more programmes are being revised to include employability elements alongside subject-based learning, in ways that meet learners' needs.**

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# University of North London

The placement provides vital constructive employer input.

## School of Health and Sports Science Origins

The Applied Consumer Psychology degree offers a scientific approach to explaining consumer behaviour and was the first undergraduate course of its kind in the UK. The course covers consumer psychology, marketing, and consumer science. It integrates an understanding of consumer behaviour with aspects of marketing and research methodologies, and seeks to develop the knowledge and skills sought by major employers.

The final year module, Psychology of Consumer Analysis (a professional placement), was inspired by the subject-based module, Work Placement for Professional Experience, which is available to all undergraduates at the university. The Psychology of Consumer Analysis module involves students undertaking placements with companies and then conducting independent, small-scale consumer research projects. It is a practical opportunity for students to develop and apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during their degree. They produce two written reports on their findings - an academic one, and a commercial report for their organisations. They also give an in-company presentation. The experiences prepare them for graduate employment and provide them with vital, constructive employer input.

## Delivery

At the start of the 12-week assignment, employers visit the university to outline their activities and requirements and to agree a project with each student. These require students to act as consultants and tackle real-life business challenges, producing solutions for genuine problems and products. The project typically involves:

- negotiation with employers and development of a client/customer relationship;
- development and analysis of questionnaires;
- qualitative analysis;
- time management, self organisation and reflection;
- development of communications skills.

Students take responsibility for the project, with support from both employer and tutors.

Academic assessment is through the written academic report that incorporates evaluation and self-reflection at each stage of the project.

Employers assess the commercial report and presentation. Recent projects have included: the effects of colour in the evaluation of perfumes, evaluation of company IT training programmes, consumer expectations in the evaluation of beverages, and a comparison between experiential and conventional advertising.

## Involving employers

The support and cooperation of employers is integral to the module operation. Good working relationships have been established with a mix of both local and national employers such as Bass Industries, Fast Marketing, Couatts Retail Communication, and Islington Council - providing a good variety of organisations and products for student projects.



The 'pitch':  
presenting project  
recommendations

## Outcomes

Students are extremely positive about the experience: "[It] helped me to put together lots of things from my course ... practical work instead of mountains of theoretical info". "Thinking that a company was really interested in what you said was so scary - but [the employer] was really good. I learnt a lot - it made me more confident in what I could do."

Employers have also welcomed the involvement of and enjoyed the contact with students. They also appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the development of an expert workforce. "We feel that we gain fresh ideas and input and [we] like the enthusiasm of the students. It's exciting seeing what can be achieved in a relatively short time - but this is what's required if you want to work in the industry: a rapid response to clients' requirements, and effective action!"

## Employability is developed through:

- active engagement with employers;
- employer assessment and feedback;
- self-reflection;
- developing time-management and communication skills;
- putting theory into practice - real assignments.

# University of Wales, Bangor

Students participate in interactive workshops, tutorials and group work, and are required to deliver presentations.

## Peer guiding modules

### Complementary curriculum

Peer guiding modules are a formal and accredited acknowledgement of the important and valuable work that some students perform. From the outset, the programme was designed to develop the autonomy and general skills of participants. The programme, is one in which second year students volunteer to act as mentors to 'freshers' within each department at the start of the academic year. There are usually about 400 mentors operating during a year.



Peer guiding has been an integral part of a general provision of opportunities for students to participate in Bangor's complementary curriculum. This is where

students can undertake activities that provide opportunities to practice and develop skills in a way that is not often possible in their chosen academic course. The pilot module, Personal Development and Employability, ran in Semester 1, 2001/02, as an add-on module. 41 students took this module; 40 students successfully completed it and received certification. 121 students registered for the second, current module. The dropout rate has been higher than expected due to exam stress. Currently, 96 students are still actively learning.

### Academic Recognition

Peer guiding modules are valued at 10 credits, run during semester 2 and are regularly updated and improved. They are based on an analysis of needs and are intended to develop interpersonal and communication skills, management and organisational skills, presentation and group-work skills, problem solving, referring and networking.

Students participate in interactive workshops, tutorials and group work, and are required to

deliver presentations. Interactive workshops provide an opportunity to develop an understanding and awareness of the concepts and principles of peer guiding and to explore problem-based scenarios. Students work in groups to collate relevant information in order to produce a handbook for peer guides, and to devise a departmental activity for Welcome Week. Tutorials with the departmental Peer Guide Co-ordinator are arranged in order to plan and discuss projects. Group presentations provide an opportunity for students both to describe their projects and to identify skills and experience that have been enhanced during the module.

All assessment now involves an important element of group work. Students are required to:

- demonstrate their ability to discuss situations and devise solutions that exhibit a knowledge and understanding of problems, through working in small groups looking at problem-based scenarios;
- research, organise and collate information to produce a handbook for peer guides;
- plan a mini-project. Groups create a department-based activity for first years during Freshers' Week. They then present these ideas.

### Student comments

"The fact that it is recognised as an extra module, and the variety of workshops [are good]."

"[It] gave me an opportunity to reflect on what I had done, and to identify skills that could be applied to future employment."

"[It] helped when working out which skills we were gaining."

"[The] relaxed easy atmosphere [was] conducive to learning. It addressed subjects that were thought-provoking."

"Interactive sessions, job-hunting, and interview skills workshops were very useful."

### Employability is developed through:

- academic recognition of the value of work experience;
- training students as mentors.

Vice Chancellor Professor Roy Evans presenting certificates to students in recognition of their Peer Guiding Role

## Employability audits

Following the national audit in Wales, most Welsh institutions have followed up with their own audits of the employability content of programmes and modules. Swansea Institute of Higher Education is undertaking an audit of all programmes to determine how key employability skills are being embedded. Cardiff University has a periodic review procedure that requires departments to identify skills inherent within schemes and the stages at which these are developed. Heads of schools at Trinity College Camarthen are responsible for specifying which transferable skills are being developed within the module and how they are being developed through the teaching and learning process. University of Wales College, Newport audits programmes to analyse the skills gained by students and to develop an understanding of how innovative teaching encourages and develops employability skills.

A somewhat different approach was developed through the Higher Level Skills in the Creative Industries collaborative case study research project between the University of Central Lancashire and the Cumbria College of Art and Design. The research produced a series of 'talking heads' videos and users' guides to illustrate the perceived needs of employers and the perceived attributes of graduates developed through higher education for creative industries. The recommended actions to reduce mismatches included wider provision of careers education, up-to-date and embedded IT skills development, elective module opportunities for IT, career management, work-based learning and skills for small business, and active encouragement and development of work-placement opportunities (Sewell 2001).

## Outcomes and benchmarks

In some institutions, the integration of skills in the curriculum is being aided by the restructuring of programmes to identify outcomes or take account of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) benchmarks. To some extent, this also involves a pedagogical shift. For example, academic departments at the University of Wales, Swansea are expected to provide clear statements about the employment aims of each programme and explain how these are to be achieved. The BA Leisure and Tourism Management at **York St John College**, for example, focuses on the development of learner autonomy and supporting employability-oriented learning objectives.

Integration of key skills in the curriculum at the University of Glamorgan takes into account the QAA subject benchmarks and the national qualifications framework. Reliance on QAA benchmarks, though, is problematic as the employability elements of benchmark statements are highly variable between subjects (Harvey 2001b). There is also a danger that their use will stifle creativity as teachers comply with the hidden national curriculum (Holloway 2002). On the other hand, in engineering, for example, there is compatibility between benchmarks and the Engineering Professors' Council's Engineering Graduate Output Standards (QAA/EPC 2002).

## Pedagogic developments and managed learning environments

The introduction of computerised managed learning environments offers another opportunity to embed employability in the curriculum. For example, the University of Glamorgan is developing such a curriculum, supported by appropriate teaching and learning materials and staff development. Appropriate use of managed learning environments can encourage new pedagogical approaches to employability. For example, Sheffield Hallam University has introduced Blackboard, a computer-based learning environment that highlights the way in which the curriculum develops employability skills (Sheffield Hallam University 2002). Skillsplus (2000) does not require such a large investment. It is a collaborative project in the North West involving Liverpool John Moores, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Lancaster universities. The project has developed a set of practices in collaboration with colleagues in 16 subject areas, with a view to producing 'educationally sound curricula that will enhance employability'. It contends that higher education's contribution to employability and, more generally, to work-related learning, involves promoting a complex mix of outcomes. It takes the view that 'highly employable people need Understanding, Skills of various kinds, Efficacy beliefs, and Metacognitive fluency — USEM'. This view of employability prioritises pedagogy. It is compatible with many descriptions of good learning in general and is not just to do with learning in, about and for work. The approach draws on over 200 semi-structured interviews with new graduates and those working alongside them, and nearly 3,000 questionnaire returns from undergraduates. It proposes that education for employability is neither distinct from, nor harmful to, higher education institutions' mandates. Rather than the development of overly

mechanistic outcomes-oriented curricula, Skillsplus (Knight and Yorke 2000, p 8) suggests that:

"Learning outcomes tend to look after themselves when learners engage with worthwhile content through a variety of well-conceived learning, teaching and assessment processes that provide occasions for strategic thought and consideration of self-theories."

A widely used pedagogic device to develop employability skills is group working. However, this is frequently unsupported and students are often grouped together and merely told to work as a team. At the London School of Economics and Political Science, Peter Levin and Ivan Kent, with the agreement of tutors, help student groups to work effectively as teams.

Some embedded employability developments reflect local pedagogic initiatives, such as the Business Enterprise module in the Business School at the **University of Newcastle upon Tyne**. This module represents an unusual way to embed the development of an array of attributes. Some programmes, particularly in the arts, are aware of the self-employment option. At Liverpool John Moores University, there is an optional one-day course for arts students on self-employment that has been in operation since 1997. It had 89 participants last year. It is now attracting attention from graduates in other disciplines.

The full extent of the embedding of employability within curricula is difficult to assess as development activity is often informal. It may include lecturers' own business and industry contacts, personal support and encouragement to students, and provision of information.

## Employability in the curriculum takes many forms.

### Work experience

Increasingly, work experience is being seen as a major vehicle to enable students to make connections between their academic study and the world of work, and to familiarise themselves with the skills necessary to be effective in the work setting.

The Dearing Report placed considerable emphasis on work experience, concluding that 'students can benefit from experience in many different settings, structured and informal, paid and unpaid' (NCIHE 1997, para 9.30). Employers also benefit in a number of ways from work

experience, such as having staff develop as mentors and enablers, as well as building up links with higher education institutions (Blackwell et al. 2000). The National Council for Work Experience (NCWE), now part of the Careers Service Unit (CSU), was established to promote work experience and has established a dedicated support website (NCWE 2002b).

## Work experience is currently the main vehicle for students to develop employability skills.

### Types of work experience

Work experience can take a variety of forms ranging from traditional placements, through 'live' project work, to part-time employment. Three main categories of work experience can be identified (Harvey et al. 1998; CSU/NCWE 1999; Little et al. 2001):

- organised work experience as part of a programme of study;
- organised work experience external to a programme of study;
- ad hoc work experience external to a programme of study.

There is some overlap between categories. Voluntary work, for example, can sometimes be accredited by institutions, is sometimes organised as external to the programme of study, or may be ad hoc work undertaken by students.

### Organised work experience as part of a programme of study

There are three main variants of work experience as part of a programme of study:

- a conventional programme with some work experience element attached to it, either as an optional or a compulsory component;
- generic work experience modules that are available to students on a range of programmes;
- work experience through a programme that is wholly, or predominantly, delivered in the workplace setting.

## There are many different types of work experience, including part-time work unconnected to programmes of study.

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# University of East London

The course promotes a critical understanding of key aspects of the modern workplace.

## School of Education and Community Studies Work-based Learning

### Becoming 'the complete graduate'

Work-based Learning was developed both as a response to the growing need of students to work while they study, and as recognition of the value that such work can have in creating today's 'complete graduate'. The unit provides students in the School of Education and Community Studies with an opportunity to make use of part-time work undertaken during study, and to earn credit towards their degrees. The unit runs during the second semester of the second year.

### Developing skills in the workplace

The opportunity to work part-time and gain work experience increases students' work readiness and prepares them for the more flexible and varied workplace of the future. Those taking part in the unit develop four principal attributes. They are expected to become specialists, generalists, self-reliant and team players.

### Academic skills

The course promotes a critical understanding of key aspects of the modern workplace through workshops, tutorials and written assessments. Students may attend as many of the eight workshops and tutorials as they feel are needed to support themselves through their placement. They are also required to produce three pieces of written work. The negotiated learning agreement specifies the general aims of the student's project, planned research, transferable skills to be developed and enhanced, the research methodology and the learning outcomes, the benefits to be gained by the employer as well as the student, and the learning resources that are to be made available. Students also compile a reflective learning log, recording their learning experiences, and they submit a written report, which provides an opportunity to consolidate the work-based learning and to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been met.

### The placement

There are six main types of work placement, but students may work with any company or institution agreed by all parties concerned, thus

providing the work placement that most suits an individual student. A placement may be part-time work in which the student is already engaged, or something new. It may be voluntary work. Some students work in a variety of capacities for the Student Union. Students can also undertake project work, become self-employed, or work-shadow. It is important that students have a work opportunity in place before the beginning of the unit, and that they have submitted both a job description form and an employer consent form to the course tutor. This forces students to be self-reliant, to explore and create opportunities, to negotiate and promote themselves.

Currently (2002), 44 students are involved in the project.

Teresa Brooks, an Education and Community Studies student working for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham as a School Crossing Patrol Supervisor, undertook a project which critically evaluated recent research into children's road safety. She then designed and delivered a road safety assembly in the school. Her employer commented: "I fully support the concept of this type of learning. Teresa ... has become much more involved in the culture and workings of the department and organisation in which she works since her attendance at the course. If this or similar attitudes to employment can be created by the provision of such a learning environment, then I would wholeheartedly support the continuance of the course Teresa is currently attending."

### Employability is developed through:

- **balancing and connecting academic and vocational requirements;**
- **recognising the value of work experience in today's degree programmes;**
- **flexibility of attitude towards the needs of students on the course.**



Teresa Brooks -  
School crossing patrol  
supervisor

# TCS

## TCS forges links between companies and higher education.

TCS (formerly known as the Teaching Company Scheme) is a government scheme, managed by the DTI's Small Business Service, designed to improve businesses access to the skills and resources of the UK knowledge base. TCS forges links between companies and staff at Higher Education Institutions and other research-based organisations. The TCS programmes that result from these partnerships focus on innovation projects that are 'central to the strategic development of the company partners'. TCS Regional Consultants match company needs with a partner from the knowledge base, and work with both partners in preparing a proposal. Once a project is approved, the two partners recruit the best graduate for the post and a TCS Consultant monitors progress.



From left: Steve Baxter, Improvition Ltd, Dr Ken Poulter, Small Business Service presenting the Best TCS Programme 2001 Award to Benjohn Barnes and Robert Morrey, TCS Associates. Also pictured is Tim Atherton, Warwick University.

### Graduate to Associate

The graduate, or TCS Associate, is employed by the knowledge-base partner but located at the company and paid an industrial salary. Alison Chappell, who finished her Associateship in 1997, commented: "I would really recommend TCS to other graduates. But be ready for a baptism of fire, because you are likely to be given a lot of

responsibility from the beginning." One of the main benefits to Associates is the amount of responsibility they are given from an early stage. It is the Associate who 'owns' the project, supported by staff at both the company and the research organisation. At the end of the project, the majority of Associates are offered a permanent job by the company and over half of all Associates accept a post in their host company. There are currently over 900 TCS programmes at any one time, with over 1100 graduate places.

### Benefits to companies

Backed by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Department of Health (DoH), the devolved administrations, and most of the Research Councils. Programmes are funded by a grant to the knowledge-base partner, with

companies contributing to the direct costs of the university or research organisation. Currently, the direct cost to a company with less than 250 employees, participating for first time, and involving one graduate for two years, is £14,000 per year. The company also has to fund its own cost of participation. The outcomes, according to the 1999/2000 TCS Annual Report, were an increase in company annual profit of £138,000 and a one-off increase of £98,000 per Associate project. In addition, a partner company on average saw 18 staff receiving training and around three new jobs being created.

Winner of the 2001 Prize for Best Programme: Improvition Ltd and the Department of Computer Science, University of Warwick.

Improvition Ltd, a small Coventry company, has become a global leader in the market for scientific imaging products. Its sales have surged by 230 per cent and its workforce has trebled, all as a result of TCS.

The company needed to produce alternative software to replace the bought-in component it had previously used, which is where the TCS Associates, Robert Morrey and Benjohn Barnes, came in. The software they developed helped Improvition increase its sales in the year after the end of the programme by 55 per cent, to £5.5million. At least £2million was attributed to the sale of products containing the new imaging technologies. Both TCS Associates were offered permanent positions with Improvition and both are also expected to gain PhDs. For the university, this partnership stimulated five undergraduate projects and three MSc projects, while academics themselves gained useful 'real world' experience.

### Employability is enhanced by:

- finding the right graduates for the right jobs;
- working at both national and regional levels;
- demonstrating to business the usefulness and cost effectiveness of the scheme;
- building links between universities and businesses.

## Conventional programme plus work experience

Work experience on conventional courses includes:

- traditional placements on sandwich courses;
- short periods of work experience on non-sandwich programmes;
- clinical or practice placements on some professional degrees;
- 'live' project working: collaboration between students and employers;
- work shadowing.

The work done may or may not be directly assessed towards a final award. Sandwich placements are still taken as the paradigm for work experience, although relatively few students are enrolled on them. Year-long placements carry an extra cost for students: they still pay fees in England and have to extend their loans to a fourth year. Paid placements, which predominate, may or may not be sufficient to cover the costs of the extra year.

In 1998/99, 180,000 UK undergraduates (17.5 per cent of the total full-time undergraduate population) were engaged on full-time sandwich or non-sandwich programmes that included organised work experience, including medical, health and teacher training programmes.

Work experience on full-time programmes is not confined to undergraduate study. **Birmingham University**, for example, includes placements in the vocationally oriented MPhil in History, Film and Television offered by the Department of American and Canadian Studies.

Available data underestimates the full extent of programme-embedded work experience. In addition to sandwich programmes and full-time programmes that include compulsory blocks of professional practice, a significant minority of full-time students are involved in short placements or 'live' projects with employers (Little et al. 2001).<sup>4</sup>

Courses in library studies, media studies, business and social science often include a short work-placement element, such as the Voluntary Service Learning module on the first-year Sociology degree at the **University of Liverpool**.

A final-year module in the BSc Applied Consumer Psychology course at the **University of North London**, for example, uses 'live' projects.

## Generic modules

Generic work experience modules include:

- year-long placements unconnected to a specific programme;

- credit for part-time, term-time or vacation work;
- credit for voluntary (unpaid) work;
- programmes developed by student unions for elected officers.

Generic modules are often assessed and count towards the final award. They may also attract separate accreditation.

University of Wales, Aberystwyth has run the generic Year in Employment scheme for over 20 years, an option taken up by five per cent of students.

An early example of accredited generic work-based learning modules was that developed at University College, Chester. Students have been able to gain academic credit for their learning achievements in and through work placements since 1992. The assessment process involves students making a presentation to college staff, and completing a report in which they are required to reflect on their learning achievements during the placement. **University of Wales, Bangor** gives modular credit to second-year students who act as peer guides to first years.

The general work-based learning module at the University of Luton, originally validated in July 1993 (Weller 1994) is accredited as a level 2 module. It was revised in June 2000 to incorporate a more structured approach to help students analyse and reflect upon their learning. It now enables students to focus upon a much wider spectrum of work-experience opportunities than conventional placement learning. To date, this module has been taken by 450 students from many different degree programmes. As one employer put it:

"The main benefit of work experience is that the student can focus on issues that the factory management would like to examine, but never seem to find the time amidst the general distractions of running the business. In this respect, they are a small-scale 'John Harvey-Jones'! There is no doubt that provided the correct thought is given before the individual starts, particularly into understanding the goal, any organisation can benefit in this way." (Eley 2002)

Middlesex University has an extensive work-based learning programme operating at diploma, degree and masters level. Programmes are customised for individuals or employers, who are from the public, private and voluntary sectors. In 2001/02, 750 students were enrolled, of whom 70 per cent did not attend a university campus.

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The Community Enterprise module at Napier University was one of the first generic voluntary work modules. It was open to students across the institution, and reflection on the work experience was assessed towards the degree. Now called Volunteering in the Community, it has run since 1994 and has been taken by around 180 students in total. The **University of East London** offers a work-based learning elective module in the School of Education and Community Studies for either paid or voluntary work. The module provides the opportunity to 'earn and learn' by getting part-time work accredited, or 'learn to earn' by engaging in relevant part-time voluntary work that will 'provide investment towards future employability and earn credit' towards the degree (UEL 2001).

Like many Student Unions, Coventry University Student Union (CUSU) provides training for its student representatives that covers the basics of doing the job. Other workshops develop self-reliance skills including assertiveness, and meeting skills such as influencing, listening, decision-making and achieving consensus. Representatives are also encouraged to pursue the Horizon Personal Development Certificate endorsed by CUSU, which focuses on eight transferable skills that are highly regarded by graduate recruiters and employers. These are team working, leadership, planning, problem solving, communication, negotiation, presentation and time-management. Horizon is open to all Coventry students, who get a certificate if they complete at least three workshops.

### Work-based programmes

Work experience is also achieved through programmes wholly or predominantly delivered in the workplace setting. This may include professional learning, for example continuing professional development (CPD), graduate apprenticeships, accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) or the DTI's **TCS (Teaching Company Scheme)**.

In the 1990s, Vauxhall Motors invited Luton Business School to develop a partly-customised business studies degree programme for its managers. It was delivered using the company's training facilities and involved both work-based learning and traditional taught components. The first cohort completed the programme in 1997 (Kinman and Kinman 1998). Vauxhall degree programmes are still in operation, though the delivery will be changed to the university (partly because many of the Vauxhall staff have transferred to IBC Ltd).

Graduate apprenticeships, piloted 1998/2000, aim to link 'a work-based apprenticeship approach to higher education' (DfEE 1999, p 1). They are frameworks that combine an honours degree or higher-level qualification with work-based learning, underpinned by National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or National Occupational Standards and key skills (DfEE 1998). Around 50 higher education institutions are currently developing and delivering graduate apprenticeships, including University of Cambridge's Graduate Apprenticeships, which provide CPD in the pharmaceuticals industry.

### Organised work experience external to a programme of study

Students also undertake organised work experience external to the programme of study. There are a range of such opportunities including well-known national programmes such as CRAC Insight Plus (2002) and STEP (2002), in which the university plays no direct role in supporting learning.

Others, such as Business Bridge (2002), Sheffield Plus (2002) and the 'Qualify for Employment' initiative in which London Guildhall University is an active partner (Cityside 2002), involve limited support for learning from the higher education institution. Science students at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth are encouraged to develop their specialist and generalist skills through work experience arranged by the International Association for Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE).<sup>5</sup>

### Volunteering

Another form of organised work experience is voluntary work through Community Service Volunteers, Millennium Volunteers, or Student Volunteering UK. There are about 25,000 student volunteers across the UK working in community-based projects in over 180 FE and HE volunteering groups.

Student Volunteering Bangor, for example, is a student-led voluntary group based in the University of Wales, Bangor Students' Union that has been volunteering in the community for over 30 years. The Sussex Coastal Highway, run by the University of Sussex Students' Union, is a voluntary programme that encourages local young people from non-traditional backgrounds to progress to higher education. The Experience Works project at the **University of Glamorgan** identifies opportunities for students to undertake voluntary work-experience placements that are relevant to their career aspirations.

Some institutions, as noted above, provide a way to accredit voluntary working. However, most volunteering is not formally accredited but students use it to develop employability skills and to explore different potential career paths. The case studies of The Art of Crazy Paving research project (Speakman, Drake and Hawkins 2001) showed that volunteering promoted an organic learning process that honed continuing personal development, planning and self-reflection.

Recent research among 200 of the UK's top businesses shows that three quarters of employers prefer to recruit candidates who have undertaken voluntary work experience. Over half think that voluntary work can be more valuable than paid work (Reed Executive 2001).

**More and more institutions are giving formal credit for the learning from volunteering and part-time work.**

### **Ad hoc work experience external to a programme of study**

Increasingly, students obtain work experience through casual, part-time or vacation work, or for part-time students, through their own full-time employment or other activities. Institutionally-based surveys found that the majority of students already had work experience before entering higher education (Work Experience Bank 1998).

Recent surveys showed that about 60 per cent of full-time students worked during term-time and over 80 per cent of full-time students worked over the summer vacation. The indications are that the proportion of full-time students working is increasing, and that they are working on average around 10–14 hours a week during term-time.<sup>6</sup> The increase in part-time working is greatest among low-income and older students, students living at home with their parents, female students (especially from minority ethnic groups), students attending a university in London or Scotland, or attending 'post-1992' universities, students with low A-level scores on entry to university, and those whose father was not a graduate. Students from low-income families also tend to work longer hours. Similarly, older male students, students studying in London and in Scotland, and students who have taken out a student loan, are most likely to work 20 hours or more a week.<sup>7</sup>

Traditionally, part-time working during term-time was seen as 'interfering' with academic work (Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)

1998). Now, most universities run job clubs for students. In some places, as noted above, the learning from part-time work is being taken more seriously and given credit.

**About 60 per cent of full-time students work during term-time, and most universities run job shops.**

### **Endorsement of work experience**

Employers tend to be favourably disposed to work experience and there is a growing trend towards recruiting graduates who have undertaken work placement with companies. One company, reported in Bennett et al. (2000, p 137) recruited 80 per cent of its graduate employees in this way. Studies<sup>8</sup> have shown that employers from large and small organisations think work experience helps students develop desirable attributes.

"Probably a quarter of the graduates we recruit have had work experience ... They actually interview better because they have more to talk about, and they tend to be able to allude to an insight into working life that the other graduates aren't able to do." (Partner, small specialist employment agency)

Work experience is an intrinsic feature of HEFCW's approach to employability enhancement. A work-based placement aids the development of specific work-related skills, provides a foretaste of workplace culture, helps graduates to be effective quickly, and provides a broader perspective on attribute development and career management.

"A lot of courses have a year out, which I think is very powerful, both in terms of the learning experience for the students and in terms of self-reliance and people skills and mixing with different cultures. There is also the business motivation bit: it equips them to make an informed career choice. So, I think that it is a positive thing that could be encouraged." (Vice-president, multi-national food manufacturers)

**Work experience helps students develop and gives them an advantage in the labour market.**

### **Added success in the job market**

The positive view of employers is supported by a statistical analysis of first destination employment returns, provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for all full-time degree qualifiers from all higher education institutions in the United Kingdom in 1995/96 (Bowes and Harvey 2000).<sup>9</sup> Overall, graduates

from sandwich courses have higher post-graduation employment rates (69.1 per cent) than students on equivalent non-sandwich courses (55.3 per cent). This advantage is dependent on subject area: science and language sandwich graduates for instance do not enjoy a significant advantage, but most built environment, business, engineering and social science sandwich graduates do. Of the 33 subject areas that could be directly compared, sandwich students had the highest employment rate in 21.

A study of nearly 2,000 art and design graduates from 14 British institutions in the mid-1990s (Blackwell and Harvey 1999) revealed that respondents who had undertaken a work-experience placement had higher rates of full-time permanent employment after graduation. They also had a more favourable view of the undergraduate programme and a belief that their employability skills had been more strongly developed in the undergraduate years. Those who had work experience that was related to their current job also tended to have higher incomes.

These outcomes are mirrored in the Working Out? study: "Nearly 48 per cent of graduates felt that relevant work experience in a similar organisation was an important factor in enabling them to obtain their job." (Purcell et al. 1999, p 16)

## Recording and reflecting on achievement

Two major complementary developments have occurred over the last five years: first, provision of support to help students reflect on work experience and identify the learning from it, and second the development of progress files.

### Learning from work experience

The Work Experience report (Harvey et al. 1988) argued strongly that experience of work should not be regarded as something that is intrinsically beneficial. On the contrary, it is the learning that comes from the experience that is important. This view now appears to predominate within higher education institutions and is reflected, for example, in the approach adopted by the National Council for Work Experience (NCWE 2002a), InsightPlus and the NUS.

Different forms of work experience offer different benefits and students may participate in a range of work experiences. This fits in with viewing learning as a transformative process that is not restricted to particular institutions of learning. Effective learning from work experience implies the following (Harvey et al. 1998):

- 1. A meaningful experience:** If work experience is meaningful or relevant to the future career development, then it appears to be more useful and effective as a learning tool in aiding personal development planning and in enhancing career prospects. If non-traditional forms of work experience are to be maximised for their learning opportunities, then students need some kind of structure and support so they can reflect on and articulate the learning.
- 2. Intention:** If the learning from work experience is planned and intentional from the outset, it is easier for students to reflect on it and identify what has been learned. This can be enabled by using learning contracts which identify specific goals.
- 3. Assessment and accreditation:** There is pressure to formally assess and accredit work experience that is integrated into undergraduate programmes. Assessment also provides evidence of learning, which may be demanded by higher education institutions and employers. Assessment ranges from 'satisfactory completion' of traditional sandwich placements, through credit awarded towards degrees for generic modules, to separate awards. These awards may be made by the institution (such as the new Certificate of Work Experience being developed by The University of Manchester), by employer schemes (such as ASDA's Flying Start), or by an independent body (such as a City and Guilds licentiateship, or an NVQ).<sup>10</sup> Evidence suggests that students prefer nationally recognised accreditation of work experience to local schemes. Unfortunately, there has been little progress, despite several attempts, towards a national scheme. There is little hard evidence that employers are interested in accreditation of work experience. The emphasis in institutions is now shifting towards documenting work experience through progress files, which are likely to fulfil the certification and accreditation role in a rather more inclusive and consistent manner.
- 4. Quality monitoring:** To ensure work experience is a good quality experience, employers, academics and students must all be committed to it and be fully aware of the implications. Planning and responsibility for success needs to be shared, which means ensuring adequate, trained and supportive supervision. The quality of work experience is greatly enhanced by prior induction and briefing, facilitation of ongoing reflection by the student, debriefing, and identification of outcomes.

5. **Work-experience portfolio:** Students should be encouraged to develop a varied work-experience portfolio, such as a mixture of course-embedded placements and part-time working. Mature students, for example, may have different requirements of work experience from traditional undergraduates. This can be linked into progress files and incorporate school-based work experience, thus developing a seamless approach.

6. **Reflection and articulation:** The ongoing processes of reflection on, and articulation of, learning from work experience are pivotal to employability development. When recruiting, employers are interested in the ability to identify and communicate what has been learned from work experience. However, reflection needs to be understood in a wider sense than reflecting on the development of narrowly defined, job-relevant skills. Although retrospective reflection on work experience can be meaningful, a well-planned experience, with ongoing and built-in real-time reflection, linked to identifiable outcomes, is likely to optimise the learning potential.

### Reflection on and articulation of the learning from work experience is pivotal to developing employability.

Reflection and articulation can be assisted by skills trackers, such as the NUS online skills tracker, which generates a learning log; the Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences et Commerciales (AIESEC) Tracker (1998); the Prospects Planner online, developed by CSU and AGCAS; and Skills Online (STEP 2002), which helps students identify skills development. Skills Online also generates a STEP-approved placement portfolio to show future employers, allows students to browse graduate job vacancies and employer profiles, and allows them to set preferences to receive information on specific employers and jobs.

### Progress files

Part of the developmental framework for higher education is the introduction of progress files. Following recommendations in the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997), Universities UK, Universities Scotland, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the QAA published a revised joint policy statement on progress files for higher education in February 2001.<sup>11</sup> The proposed progress files are intended to include transcripts of formal learning and

achievement, an individual's reflection on and recording of their own personal development, and personal educational and career development planning. Progress files 'support the concept that learning is a lifetime activity' (QAA 2002). The LTSN argues that by making the learning in higher education more explicit, the quality of learning will be improved, students' records of learning will be more complete and consistent, and a national culture that values lifelong learning will be developed (LTSN 2001).

### Progress files offer the opportunity to record a range of achievements, reflect on learning and manage career development.

Personal development planning (PDP) is an important element of the progress file and should be operational across the whole higher education system by 2005/06 (QAA 2001). PDP is a structured and supported process undertaken by individuals to reflect upon their own learning and to plan their development. The intention of PDP is to help students:

- 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 personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement;
- and encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life (QAA 2002).

There is significant development work via the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) in institutions such as Anglia Polytechnic University and the universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham. To date, however, no system appears to be in place and operating across an institution. Both the University of Plymouth and **Edge Hill College of Higher Education** have been working on developing PDP since 1997.

Progress files offer the opportunity to record a range of achievements, reflect on learning from a variety of sources, as well as plan and manage career developments. The Internet, perhaps through managed learning environments, provides substantial potential to develop progress files. There seems to be considerable overlap between aspects of progress files and established skills trackers, which might be consolidated. Progress files also provide a possible alternative to the distant goal of national accreditation of work experience.

# University of Glamorgan

## Identifying voluntary placements relevant to students' career aspirations.

### The Experience Works project

The University of Glamorgan's Work Experience and Employability Plan (WEEP) is integrated into the learning and teaching strategy. The WEEP has three broad and linked themes:

- experience of work: creating choices for students in a flexible way;
- curriculum development: facilitating reflection upon the experience of work;
- employability initiatives: enhancing the profile of employability beyond the curriculum.

The project, Working Through College, addresses the first theme. Experience Works is part of this project, along with the Job Shop (advertising paid part-time work) and Cymru Prosper Wales (a paid placement scheme).



Sophia Plunkett (seated) on work experience

The Experience Works project is now well into its second successful year. It involves identifying opportunities for voluntary placements that are relevant to students' career aspirations. This enables students to develop a more realistic view of their chosen career area. They also help

students gain a clearer understanding of the skills required and to assess their own skills.

### Voluntary placements

Philip Jones is a graduate of the BA Humanities programme. While studying, he undertook a work-experience placement with the Cardiff Post. His duties involved writing news stories, re-writing press releases, sub-editing, reviewing events, researching and proofreading, as well as developing written, IT and organisational skills. Philip also acquired a better knowledge of the organisation and type of business, and learned about the motivation, attitude and flexibility required.

Philip was subsequently offered a half-day a week paid job with the Cardiff Post. He commented: "I am now more confident in applying for similar roles in the future, and the experience has helped me secure a place on the Postgraduate Diploma in Magazine Journalism." Philip also successfully built up contacts in his

chosen career area, a key aim of the Experience Works project. Ian Williams from the Cardiff Post described Philip's placement as very helpful to the organisation, making a valuable contribution to a busy office: "He was attentive, quick to learn and willing to engage in any task he was set."

Another successful story from Experience Works is that of Sophia Plunkett, a student of the BA in Theatre and Media Drama. Sophia undertook a work-experience placement at Raw Charm Ltd. The type of placement that Sophia undertook involved documentary and factual TV programme production, programme ideas and research of various subjects. She developed writing, IT, team-working and organisational skills and was credited as the researcher on one documentary. Through her placement experience, Sophia increased her knowledge about the type of organisation in which she intends to make a career, learning about the personal qualities (such as motivation, punctuality and flexibility) and attitudes required in such organisations.

### Reflection

One of the WEEP project aims is for students' placements to facilitate reflection upon the experience of work. When asked about her experience, Sophia observed: "I learnt how a television programme develops from an idea to a reality. The placement reinforced my determination to work in TV, and gave me a better background and range of skills to increase my prospects of getting a similar graduate job." The Experience Works project benefits both students, by facilitating work experience opportunities relevant to their career aspirations, and employers as Pippa Hunt from Raw Charm states: "We gained the satisfaction that we helped an 'up-and-coming' in our industry."

### Employability is developed through:

- an integrated work experience and employability strategy linked to learning and teaching;
- identifying opportunities for students to undertake voluntary work experience placements relevant to their career aspirations.

# Edge Hill College of HE

Progress Files make the results of learning in higher education more explicit.

## A 'customised' approach to Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Edge Hill's mission is to 'support the development of students as rounded professionals, with high levels of academic, professional and life skills, and employability'. Edge Hill is developing and introducing Progress Files help achieve its vision. Progress Files make the results of learning in higher education more explicit, by providing the basis for consistently recording such learning and promoting the idea that understanding, reflecting upon, and planning for our own personal development are important life skills.

The integration and use of Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a key element of Progress Files. The Edge Hill model has a holistic approach to both the intellectual and practical skills that underpin the process of higher education.

### Customising personal development in the study of geography

From 1997 to 2001, the Geography department utilised a version of the Edge Hill Personal Learning File (PLF), for students studying geography, geology and environmental sciences. Key elements of the Geography PLF were:

- introducing the types of learning experience in the Geography department, particularly at level one;
- a skills checklist for the self-assessment of current skills so that students can identify 'areas for improvement' through action planning;
- records of achievement, in which students reflect upon and record what they learned, and the skills and abilities they acquired.. Part of the reflection process involved students thinking through examples and providing evidence of achievement and skills development in a learning log.

Students are expected to use the PLF to evaluate their progress and to review and reset their action plans. They are supported and monitored in their completion of the PLF through the Personal Tutor programme. The Tutor is important in developing students' self-confidence and advising on appropriate teaching and learning support and services.

The PLF was promoted by explaining to students that it would assist them in getting the maximum benefit from their degree programmes, and would provide a record of their achievements that could be useful in seeking employment. Student feedback on the PLF was generally positive, particularly when the PLF was linked to other initiatives within the programme. In particular, the PLF was clearly linked to a newly-developed, compulsory, level one study skills module for students in geography, geology and environmental science.

In September 2001, the Geography department, in conjunction



with the Teaching and Learning Development Unit, introduced Personal Development Planning (PDP) and included the key elements of the PLF in the new PDP.

The Geography PDP places increased emphasis on the reflection process and action planning, particularly in relation to feedback on coursework assignments and a learning log of skills development. Through combining a paper based and online version it enables students to link with a range of online services to access exercises, tips and advice, and information about teaching and learning development workshops, programme and module learning outcomes, and customised geography skills audit. Online provision enables Personal Tutors to maintain contact with their tutees. There is also to be an online chat room where staff and students can share ideas and information. Throughout the year this electronic PDP will be monitored and reviewed, to develop access to a wide a range of support for personal development, and to provide students with opportunities for interaction and engagement with the process.

### Employability is developed through:

- enhanced recognition of skills and qualities taught and developed within subject study;
- a manageable and realistic assessment regime that recognises and gives academic credit for generic skills;
- linking PDP to other features of the degree programme.

# Section 5

## Conclusion and recommendations

Higher education, employers and the Government need to engage in a wider debate about enhancing employability among an increasingly diverse student population.

The last half-decade has seen considerable proactive development of employability in higher education institutions, augmented by collaborative activities with employers. Employability initiatives are varied in character and are increasingly being integrated into programmes of study rather than left on the margins. Furthermore, more institutions are taking a strategic approach to employability development.

### **The excellent practice in the sector must be taken forward.**

However, the dynamic nature and the very diversity of the provision mean that development is uneven. Some institutions are better at embedding employability in the curriculum than others. Some institutions prioritise the role of central services. Others have excellent relations with employers and have made enormous progress in developing and acknowledging work experience opportunities. Some institutions have taken a strategic approach - which in Wales has been encouraged by the funding council.

The field is also constantly changing and not all changes are incrementally forward. Some initiatives do not achieve their goals and others lose momentum and fade away. There is a long history of funded initiatives that produce good results during the funding period, but which, despite good intentions, fail to be embedded in institutions. There is a lot of information (albeit scattered) on initiatives and activities, but relatively little analysis of the impact of employability development in universities. Employability performance indicators are entirely inadequate as measures of the impact of such activities.

## Recommendations

As a result of the overview this report provides, and bearing in mind the excellent practice in the sector, the following recommendations are made to move the employability agenda forward:

1. Higher education and its stakeholders need to engage in a wider debate about employability and the respective roles of higher education institutions, employers, the Government, and other parties in enhancing employability among an increasingly diverse student population.

## Recommendations to Government, funding and policy agencies

2. Where developments occur, as a result of fixed-term initiatives, continuity of funding should be provided to ensure that employability continues to be a priority.
3. The combination of short-term funding and marginal projects and initiatives for employability should be avoided.
4. Funding councils and education departments should adopt a holistic approach to employability based on a sophisticated understanding of employment and career management needs. They should avoid simplistic indicators of employability, such as those based on first destination returns.
5. Funding councils and education departments should encourage and facilitate a strategic approach, as is the practice in Wales.
6. Funding councils and their agencies (including the LTSN and HEFCE Employability National Co-ordinating Team) should enable and encourage the sharing of resources for employability development between institutions (to avoid re-inventing the wheel).
7. Government, Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils should encourage employers to:
  - a) provide work experience for higher education students,
  - b) provide other inputs to higher education provision, and
  - c) enable their employees to engage in work-based learning on part-time higher education courses.

## Recommendations to CSU and other higher education sector agencies

8. Agencies such as CSU should aid the sector through appropriate analyses of labour market information to identify business and public sector workforce needs.
9. There is a need for more relevant, accessible and better-targeted career education, information and guidance, based on an appreciation of the diversity of graduate employment, self-employment and graduate business start-ups.
10. CSU's website [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) should continue to be the established and well-publicised central portal for the growing numbers of institutional and national websites for both students and employers.
11. NUS, AIESEC and other agencies should explore how their established skills trackers can be made compatible with the development of progress files.
12. Higher education funding councils, education departments and research programmes should support research into the impact of established initiatives and into the importance attached to elements of employability by students, graduates and employers.

## **Recommendations to institutions**

13. Institutions must develop a strategic, institution-wide approach to employability, ensuring that a very senior manager has overall responsibility.
14. Institutions should develop a holistic approach, facilitating the linking together of different aspects of employability.
15. The excellent work to embed employability enhancement in curricula should be continued. This might be facilitated through revising course structures, curricula content and teaching methods, and ensuring staff are supported through this process.
16. If students are to take employability in the curriculum seriously, institutions should consider including it in the assessment and grading process.
17. Work experience, either as part of a programme of study, or as an external extracurricular activity, should be recognised in some way and formally accredited where possible. The National Council for Work Experience is a major source of expertise in this area.
18. It is essential to give students structured support to learn from experience and to record their learning, preferably through integrated personal development planning processes: for example, within a progress file.
19. Institutions are encouraged to identify ways of maximising the effectiveness of links with employers.
20. Institutions should collect evidence of the impact of efforts to enhance employability. This needs to be ongoing, rather than the one-off evaluation of a specific project. Impact assessment might involve consultation with employers and alumni, and analysis of take-up and employment. It should be noted, though, that some developments drip-feed employability rather than deliver an immediate and dramatic effect.
21. Institutions should exchange information about, and their experiences of, employability development initiatives to avoid duplication of effort, including through agencies such as the LTSN and other networks.

## **Recommendations to employers and their representative bodies**

22. Employers, employer representative bodies, professional bodies and alumni should participate in efforts to enhance the employability of higher education students.
23. Employers should participate in ongoing evaluations of the impact of efforts to enhance employability.
24. Employers should ensure that their recruitment practices and criteria reflect the immediate requirements of graduates' line managers and the longer-term strategic views of senior managers. Recruitment practices should also be compatible with the principle of equality of opportunity for all students, regardless of social or ethnic background, gender, age or disability. In particular, there should be general awareness of the needs of non-traditional students who may be disadvantaged in the labour market.
25. Industry leaders should ensure that public debates on graduate employability are informed by up-to-date and accurate data both on the actual requirements of employers and on the attributes offered by graduates.
26. Professional bodies should ensure that their membership requirements for students and graduates are compatible with the principles of social inclusion and the efforts to widen participation in higher education.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The research is not a comprehensive audit of all institutions in the UK, but it provides an indication of the range of activities to be found in the sector.
- <sup>2</sup> There are many summaries including: CBC (1992); Harvey with Green (1994); Harvey et al. (1997); FSW (1998).
- <sup>3</sup> A Joint Implementation Group has taken forward the six Harris recommendations that were addressed to the sector as a whole and will publish guidance on core services for students, graduates and employers. (See Universities UK/SCOP, 2001)
- <sup>4</sup> Many courses include academic projects, which help develop research and presentation skills. These should be distinguished from 'live' employer-linked projects, which are less common. They involve students working directly on a project of concern to an employer. These may be undertaken during a period of work experience and subsumed in the work-experience learning, or can be used as a substitute for a work-experience placement.
- <sup>5</sup> Some students get limited work experience through structured courses offered by private organisations. However it is unlikely that this includes many students who are not getting experience through other routes (Little et al. 2001).
- <sup>6</sup> Research sources include: Daniel (2002); Barclays (2001); Callender and Kemp (2000); Newell and Winn (2000); Unite/Mori (2000); Smith and Taylor (1999); NUS (1999); Walker (1999); Taylor (1998); Rover Group (1998); Lucas and Ralston (1997); Hallowell (1995); Paton-Saltzberg and Lindsay (1995); Mason and Harvey (1995); Ford et al. (1995); Edmundson and Carpenter (1994).
- <sup>7</sup> Sources include: Callender (2001a, 2001b); Connor et al. (2001); Metcalf (2001); Barke et al. (2000); Callender and Kemp (2000).
- <sup>8</sup> Sources include: Harvey et al. (1997); Rover Group (1998); Purcell et al. (1999); Sewell (2001); Lambert et al. (2001). The two quotes below are from the Graduates' Work research (Harvey et al. 1997), previously unpublished.
- <sup>9</sup> The results of the study are based on aggregated figures. The first destination returns (FDRs) are collected only six months after graduation, and employment rates may not reflect the longer-term pattern in a subject area. The reliability of FDRs is dependent on accurate returns from institutions. Furthermore, it is not possible to identify whether graduates were employed in their career of choice or in relatively unskilled positions. Subjects taught only on a full-time basis, or on a thin-sandwich basis (such as nursing), or with small numbers of sandwich students were removed from the sample. After excluding residual categories, and combined and general studies, an operational sample of 33 subject areas remained for this analysis involving 74,922 graduates.
- <sup>10</sup> The Work Experience report (Harvey et al. 1997) noted that a widening of work experience raises four kinds of issues around assessment:
  - 1) assessment to make work experience 'valuable' to students (instrumentalism);
  - 2) making work experience equivalent to non-work experience (equal amounts of assessed work);
  - 3) assessing the development of a range of attributes, not just written output (assessing the whole experience);
  - 4) shifting the emphasis to give the student more opportunity and responsibility to develop as an independent learner.
- <sup>11</sup> A Progress Files Implementation Group (PFIG) was established to monitor and support the introduction of progress files. The PFIG works closely with the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) and Personal Development Planning in Higher Education (Scotland) (PDPHESN). The Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre also works with CRA and PDPHESN to support institutions, subject centres and practitioners through briefings, resource packs, seminars and surveys of practice in personal development planning. The CRA web site contains higher education case studies, material and links (Harris, 2001).

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## List of abbreviations

AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
AIESEC	Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences et Commerciales
APEL	Accreditation of prior experiential learning
CBI	The Confederation of British Industry
CEL	Collective Enterprise Ltd
CEO	Chief executive officer
CHERI	Centre for Higher Education Research and Information
CIHE	The Council for Industry and Higher Education
CPD	Continuing professional development
CRA	Centre for Recording Achievement
CRAC	The Careers Research and Advisory Centre
CSU	Higher Education Careers Service Unit
CUSU	Coventry University Student Union
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EHE	Enterprise in Higher Education
ESRU	Employment Studies Research Unit
GHS	General Household Survey
HEC	Higher Education for Capability
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEROBC	Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community fund
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAESTE	International Association for Exchange of Students for Technical Experience
ITEC	Information technology, electronics and communications
KITTS	Knowledge, Innovation and Technology Transfer Scheme
LSCA	Liverpool Student Community Action
LTSN	Learning and Teaching Support Network
LUSID	Liverpool University Student Interactive Database
MERITS	Minority Ethnic Recruitment, Information, Training and Support
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Lord Dearing 1997)
NCWE	National Council for Work Experience
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSLP	National Skills Learning Programme
NUS	National Union of Students
PDP	Personal development planning
PDPHESN	Personal Development Planning in Higher Education (Scotland) Network
PFIG	Progress Files Implementation Group
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
STEP	Shell Technology Enterprise Programme
TCS	Teaching Company Scheme
UEL	University of East London
UMIST	University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology
WDA	Welsh Development Agency
WEEP	Work Experience and Employability Plan

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