Sheffield Hallam University

1. Case study title

Employability framework

2. Key words

You can assign up to six words to your case study
Employability
Framework
Institutional
Embedded approaches

3. Subjects

All

4. Summary

The Case Study focuses on Sheffield Hallam University's new Employability Framework. This relates to existing policies and frameworks and is based on many years of practice. It defines employability and articulates the features which should be embedded in the curriculum in order to encourage it. We believe that such embeddedness is the only way to support the diversity of our students. The Case Study also describes how that Framework has been developed and in doing so describes those aspects of the University's infrastructure which have enabled it. It summarises a very 'joined up' approach which builds on and pulls together a range of practices in developing important aspects of employability. For Sheffield Hallam University, the employability of its students is central to its values and vision and the University has a long tradition of vocational and professional education.

5. Setting the Scene

In 2001 the University' set up an Employability Working Party, chaired by a Director of one of the University Schools and with membership from across the University (instigated by the University's Careers and Employment Service and Registry). Its main remit was to consider the implementation of the Code of Practice for Careers Education, Information and Guidance. In 2002 this Working Group reported, producing a definition of employability and recommending the development of an Employability Framework for the University. This Framework was developed during 2003 by a group of academics and administrators from across the University, was considered by Academic Development Committee and was finally approved by Academic Board in March 2004. The Framework is based on 30 years of practice in the University and builds on existing policies and frameworks, themselves derived from practice.

6. The Institutional Context

Sheffield Hallam University is a post '92 University with three campuses, one in the city centre, and the others within a mile and a half of the centre. It has approximately 28000 students. The University is re-structuring in 2004 to form four Faculties. There is an emphasis on vocational courses, strong links with professional and statutory bodies and an increasing emphasis on provision for Continuing Professional Development.

VISION AND VALUES STATEMENT

Our vision is to set the standard for a modern, progressive University with a leading national role in the 21st Century by:

- Enabling our students and staff to meet the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow's world through educational excellence and enterprise.

- Encouraging creativity and continuous quality improvement.

Strategic Objectives

The University is committed to:

- Achieving excellence in all our learning provision and specific areas of research.

- Increasing the employability of our students.

- Encouraging and rewarding innovation, creativity and enterprise in our students and our staff.

- Promoting access to advanced level skills, in a lifelong learning framework.

- Promoting wealth creation by entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer.

- Playing a leading role in sustainable regional development in a national and international context.

- Achieving a strong and soundly based financial performance to enable future investment.

7. **Thinking on employability**

The University has employability at the heart of its vision and values (see section 7) and its learning teaching and assessment practices have always had a strong focus on employability, for example we are the second largest provider of sandwich education in the UK. The Framework, therefore, represents a re-focussing on an aspect to which the University has always been committed.

The Framework is based on clear theoretical underpinnings which include the literature on skills transfer (ie that transfer is not automatic but is more domain specific and is encouraged by specific curriculum interventions), on experiential learning and on the importance of reflection in aiding transfer and supporting deep learning. It draws on the careers education model of skills awareness, opportunity awareness, decision making and transition. It also draws on our extensive LTA practices and on our evaluations of them, for example we have extensive experience of integrating Key Skills into the curriculum and have rigorously evaluated the range of Key Skills resources we have produced (and which are published and used widely in HE). It is based on the view that only by embedding the development of employability in courses can all students in their diversity be supported.

At Sheffield Hallam there is a tendency for policy to derive from good practice. We have a history of grassroots developments which have become policy. The Framework builds on 30 years of practice.

The basis for the Framework includes the following.
- our activities in the area of Learning from Work. Since its inception as a Polytechnic, the institution has had a strong focus on sandwich education and in recent years the types of work experience have widened and now include periods of professional practice (eg in teaching or health courses), work based learning, accrediting learning from voluntary or part time work, 'live' projects with employers;
- in 1987 the University's Personal Skills and Qualities (PSQ) Project began work integrating what are now known as Key Skills and Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the curriculum. The PSQ project used a mix of grassroots approaches including networking, staff development activities and the development of resources for students. The Learning and Teaching Institute (LTI, which subsumed the PSQ Project) developed Key Skills resources which are published and used across the UK. By the mid 1990s Key Skills were in all undergraduate courses at the first level (year 1) and were moving into subsequent levels and PDP systems were in most of the University's Schools (encouraged by the Enterprise in HE project in the early 1990s).

In 2001, our Academic Framework was reviewed, providing an opportunity to formalise what had become accepted practice. A Learning from Work policy was produced articulating good practice and reflecting the QAA Code of Practice. Since then Guidelines for Accrediting Learning from Work have been developed (2003). A Key Skills policy articulated good practice and required that a specified set of Key Skills be developed in all courses (undergraduate and postgraduate) at all levels. A PDP Framework gave a minimum specification for PDP, to be required in all courses.

8. Policy

The University has recently (2004) approved its Employability Framework. The Framework is based on a very broad definition of employability '*Enabling students to acquire the knowledge, personal and professional skills and encouraging the attitudes that will support their future development.'.* It specifies seven essential features which all courses

should include to enhance student employability and two additional features which may be relevant to courses. The essential features are:
- the progressive development of autonomy;
- the development of skills (intellectual, subject, professional, Key);
- PDP;
- the inclusion of activities similar to those to be found in the 'real world';
- reflection on the use of knowledge and skills;
- career management skills;
- learning from work.

The additional features are:
- preparation for specific professional areas;
- engagement with enterprise activities.

As indicated in section 9 above, the Framework draws on and links to existing policy and practice. In addition to the existing work referred to above on Learning from Work (LfW), Key Skills and PDP, there is other long standing practice relating to the Framework features. The University's Careers and Employment Service has had a careers education approach to working with courses since the early 1980s and each course has a link careers adviser. The University has an Enterprise Centre, which, amongst other things, coordinates a cross-University network of staff involved in enterprise work with students. Many of our courses prepare students for professional areas and we have strong ties with professional and statutory bodies. The Framework supports one of the main aims of the University's LTA strategy ie support for a diversity of students within a culture of lifelong learning.

The development of the Framework was led by the LTI working with a member of staff from the Enterprise Centre/School of Science and Maths, the Head of the Careers and Employment Service and the Head of the Centre for Research and Evaluation (Lee Harvey, who has an international reputation for research into employability) in consultation with others (e.g. Registry staff, the University's LfW Forum). It was discussed by Academic Development Committee and then approved by Academic Board with minor amendments. Its 'easy passage' is largely due to the fact that it articulates existing practice and policy. Over the years, many staff have been involved in developing those practices and policy and students have been involved in evaluations of that practice.

There are existing strategies for ensuring good practice in relation to the features. For example, our course planning templates have for some time required staff to specify subject/professional/intellectual/
Key skills as learning outcomes, along with assessment methods and criteria and learning and teaching methods. The LfW policy advocates preparation for LfW and reflection and review on it.

Now that is has been approved, the Employability Framework will be published on the Registry's web site and will be used by course planning teams. We will ensure that critical University processes encompass it, for example validation and quality review processes. Our major dissemination points will therefore be at the points of the planning and review of courses.

9. Strategy for implementing policy

The LTI has taken a lead in developing the policies described above and in supporting learning, teaching and assessment activities (ie in embedding employability in the curriculum). The LTI works closely with other departments and this is perhaps one of our major strengths. The main departments involved are as follows:

- Careers and Employment Service - the head instigated the University's working party on employability and has been involved in drafting the Employability Framework.
- Centre for Research and Evaluation (CRE), whose head (Professor Lee Harvey) has been involved in the drafting of the Employability Framework and provided presentations on his research.
- Enterprise Centre - this coordinates funding bids related to enterprise and supports enterprise activities in the University. (eg an Enterprise Coordinators network).
- School placement/professional practice units - these support the placing of students in work experience.
- Hallam Volunteering - provides volunteering opportunities for students (run by the Student's Union).
- From 2004 our Schools will be reorganised into Faculties each of which will have a Faculty Head of LTA, whose responsibility it is to progress LTA issues, including employability.
- Registry is responsible for validation and quality processes.

Our ongoing strategies are as follows:

- The LTI works closely with Registry to ensure that policy and validation/quality requirements encourage employability (e.g. recently amending the Programme Specification template to make more explicit reference to employer involvement, career options and support in relation to PDP and career management skills).
- Collaboration between the above departments ensures that information is shared and allows us to maximise on development opportunities.
- Collaboration between the above departments and academic staff supports academic staff in their work with students (e.g. each course has a link Careers Adviser; Enterprise Centre staff work with academic staff to develop 'enterprise modules', the LTI works with academic staff to develop courses or aspects of courses).
- The use of cross-University networks (e.g. Learning from Work Forum, Enterprise coordinators).

In Spring 2003 we decided to re-focus on employability. Since then we have:

- developed a small active group which is pushing forward the agenda and which consults a larger group as appropriate. The small group consists of a member from the LTI, CRE, Careers Service and a Faculty. It has developed a proposal for a Centre for Excellence and in doing so has involved staff from across all Faculties. This has created a great amount of enthusiasm and has already led to the establishment in one of the new Faculties of an employability forum;
- defined what we mean by the 'employability', 'enterprise' and 'professional' aspects of a student's development and are clear about the differences between them;
- worked to ensure that policy is in place. The Employability Framework has been through Academic Development Committee (ADC) and has been approved by Academic Board; - the Guidelines for giving Credit to Learning From Work' have been approved by ADC;
- worked to raise awareness: the LTI held a mini-conference on employability attended by 50 staff from across the University to ensure we had a shared understanding of the term; Lee Harvey (CRE) presented recent research to a cross university group of 40 staff;
- established the current position across the University re employability. CRE carried out an audit of employability and PDP practice across the

University, surveying all undergraduate and postgraduate course leaders. This has raised awareness of employability and has also provided valuable data about our current position (the questionnaire was based on the features in the Employability Framework), which we will use to begin discussions with the new Faculty Heads about Faculty needs for development;
- developed a bid for a Centre for Excellence which has involved the LTA structures in Schools and this has raised the profile of employability;

Our next step is to being work with the new Faculty LTA Heads to progress the agenda in their Faculties.

Responsibility for implementation is as follows:
- the Pro VC Academic Development has overall responsibility within the University;
- within each Faculty a Head of LTA is responsible for support for employability within the Faculty;
- the LTI is responsible for supporting the University and its Faculties in implementing the framework;
- specific central departments have responsibilities for supporting specific features of the Framework.

10. Costs

Costs can roughly be divided into development costs and implementation costs. Over the years, costings have been carried out for developing particular items relating to the Framework Features. For example, costings have been estimated for the development of Key Skills resources, especially where those resources were externally funded (e.g. £30k for the development of skill packs from a predecessor of DfES; £7k for the development of an oral presentation CD from a predecessor of DfES; £200k from TLTP3/HEFCE leading to the development of Key Skills Online). Original PDP work was supported by EHE funding, and was again costed.

Other development work and support for implementation is carried out by central departments as part of their remit and within the funding allocated to them (e.g. work by the LTI, CRE, Careers and Employment Service).

In the main, work by academic staff comes under the yearly business planning round for the Faculties. Within this business planning, certain areas which need specific funding might be highlighted, whilst other areas are seen as an integral part of normal staff duties. For example, ensuring that course planning takes into account the Employability Framework will be part of the normal course planning work carried out by course teams.

We have produced costings for the Centre for Excellence bid and these costing both relate dot the provision of a physical space, the provision of physical and virtual resources and staff time.

11. Problems encountered and how they were overcome/are being tackled

As a University we do not have many problems in convincing staff of the importance of employability or the features which the new Employability Framework articulates. The Framework is based on existing, tried and tested practice. We have a strong advantage here.

There are areas we see as challenges rather than problems, for example we are committed to widening participation. Provision for a diverse student population presents issues but we do not see this as a problem because of our commitment to this area. Another challenge is to ensure that all staff engage with the whole range of features in the Employability Framework. Our recent Employability survey has indicated the areas which need particular attention.

Our problems, rather, are ones of resourcing and funding in the context of mass HE. For example, our experience is that students will not engage seriously with PDP unless it is within the curriculum and well supported and that staff commitment to it is key, but staff:student contact for PDP can be costly.

Our main approach is to work closely with Faculty LTA Heads as they feed into the business planning process for their Faculties. The LTI is a central resources which Faculties can draw on for educational development and for research into its effectiveness.

We actively pursue funding opportunities for example:

- our HEIF2 bid has identified activities which cross over between the 'enterprise' feature of our Employability Framework and the seven essential features;
- we are using widening participation money to start activities which will both recruit students and also start them off on the road to employability;
- we have funding from Business Links South Yorkshire for summer schools which will improve our graduates' employability;
- we are planning a 'solutions centre' in our new Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Science (ACES) that will draw in large amounts of money from Yorkshire Forward (the Regional Development Agency) and the Learning and Skills Council as it endeavours to place hundreds of students in local SMEs as well as offering SMEs access to consultancy and University resources;
- we have recently submitted a bit a Centre for Excellence in Embedding, Enhancing and Integrating Employability.

12. Perceived benefits and evidence of outcomes

In putting together our bid for a Centre for Excellence we evaluated a number of courses which our LTA networks had identified as potentially excellent in embedding and integrating all the Framework Features. We interviewed staff against an extensive proforma and also conducted structured group sessions with students. Staff interviews indicated that the encouragement of good practice over the years had paid off, with excellent examples of practice against all the Framework Features. The outcomes the student identified were in the areas of: relevant knowledge, applied to practice; skills, applied on the course and in employment; attitudes supporting employability; confidence in their employability. Students were very positive.

The CRE Employability survey conducted in December 2003 identified current practice in relation to the Employability Framework features and therefore indicated how far the encouragement of those features over the years had been effective. The survey indicated very high levels of embedding of Key skills (well over 90% of courses fully embedded all the skills) and widespread practice for all the other areas, showing that there is a strong base from which to work. For some features, it indicated the need for development work. For example, for some features most courses included them but fewer courses had assessment related to them. The

report can be seen at
http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cre/employability.htm

Over the years, we have carried out evaluations into specific aspects relating to the Employability Framework features, although these have not been pulled together into one document. For example, we have evaluated all the Key Skills resources we have developed and our final versions have been based on staff and student perceptions of their usefulness (our evaluations of the skill packs and Key Skills Online each involved 1000 students, and over 70% said the resources were helpful or very helpful). We have also evaluated placement review schemes gathering student, staff and employer perceptions of their helpfulness.

There are others indicators within the University which show the impact of our more general LTA approaches, which overlap with the features in the employability framework. For example our University retention rate is higher than the average for HE, our University -wide first destinations are good, we had 11 full scores for the former QAA subject reviews, we have high positions in various league tables.

13. What remains to be done?

We need to rationalise existing policies and frameworks with the new Employability Framework and have already set in train discussions with Registry to that end, and to ensure that Registry templates and guidance (for course planning and quality review) adequate reflect the Employability Framework.

The LTI needs to work with the four new Faculty Heads of LTA to ensure that the employability agenda is actively pursued and supported in the Faculties. The LTI will work to ensure that the findings of the recent Employability survey are used to identify priorities for development.

We need to continue to raise awareness of all University staff about employability, our definitions of employability, enterprise etc, and about the new Employability Framework and to support staff in putting those features into practice in their courses. Our work on the bid for the Centre for Excellence means that we have a clearly articulated view of excellence in this area which we can use to further encourage excellence.

We need to ensure that CRE is actively involved in the employability agenda and that the LTI and CRE work together to continue to evaluate progress.

We need to ensure (mainly though the work of the Enterprise Centre) that we coordinate and effectively use external funding in this area.

14. How generalisable is the policy/strategy/innovation to other institutions

The concept of having a clear definition and identifying curriculum features which support it is very generalisable. The nature of the definition and the features may vary between institutions, depending on institutional aims, values and missions, but the overall concept is very transferable.

Our experience of encouraging good employability practice (ie a mix of top down and bottom up) is very generalisable, as are our practices in collaboration between central and academic departments.

At a more micro level, the actual practices we have against each feature are very generalisable. For example: our generic Key skills resources are widely used (Key Skills Online is licensed for use on 52 institutions); our practices in preparing students for and using work experience to create and enhance learning; the range of our LfW approaches (eg our close connection with Hallam Volunteering, a student led organisation which encourages volunteering in the community and which has the associated Hallam Award for students); our PDP approaches.

15. What should be done differently if this were to be begun anew?

We would more actively engage with the Students Union to ensure they are involved at all stages of the process. They have been involved (they have membership of the LfW Forum; they have been consulted about the new Programme Specification template which has many references to employability) but perhaps not systematically enough. It might be helpful to

have more central administrative and project management support to ensure good coordination across the University.

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Appendix: Employability Framework