

# Learning & Employability

SERIES TWO

4

## Ethics and employability

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The Reverend Simon Robinson



## Learning and Employability Series 1 and 2

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

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The Learning and Employability series will continue to be extended by the Higher Education Academy and will reflect changing challenges and priorities in the relationship between higher education and the many work opportunities likely to need – or benefit from – graduate or postgraduate abilities. Some titles in Series 1 have been rebranded and republished. We welcome suggestions for new titles in the series.

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

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# 1. Introduction

Ethics and employability constitute, for many many, a contradiction in terms as great as that between ethics and business. Business, after all, is primarily about the interest of shareholders, not of society, so the argument goes. So if one is to be employable one needs to focus more on the maximisation of profit than on matters of ethics, unless a career in a non-profit-making organisation is chosen.

In this publication I aim to show how ethics, far from being antithetical to business, or an optional add-on to any description of employability, is central to both. To do that I will need first to establish the importance of ethical reflection in contemporary business and the professions. I will then analyse more closely the meanings of ethics and employability, noting how the two relate. The term 'ethics' is capable of several meanings, and I will focus on the ethics of virtue, dialogue and responsibility. Finally, I will look at how ethics might be embedded in the curriculum.

## 1.2 Preview of the key points

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- Ethical awareness is of major importance for the professions and business. Moral meaning and agency are fundamental to the definition of professions. The capacity to deal with ethical issues is critical to modern business.
- By extension, this means that awareness of ethical issues, and the capacity to deal with them, makes one more employable.
- An oppositional view of employability and ethics is inadequate.
- Ethics is more complex than codes or prescriptive theories, and increasingly is concerned with character, identity, virtues and related skills.
- Employability is a more complex concept than simply transferable skills.
- The ethical virtues relate closely to the skills and qualities associated with employability.
- Ethics, including the identification and development of skills and attributes, can be learned in the context of higher education.

## 2. Ethics in the professions and business

There is increasing concern in the professions and business about the need for ethical practice, with arguments that are both positive and pragmatic.

### 2.1 The professions

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Firstly, there is a sense in which core values and the need to make effective ethical decisions arise from the nature of the professions. It might be said that ethics arise from the telos (the end or purpose) of the profession. The end of the civil engineering profession, for instance, is significant technical creation. Whatever the engineer might create will affect the good not just of clients but of future generations, and therefore he or she also has responsibilities to the environment and the wider society. In any situation, this may entail working through conflicting responsibilities and values. Martin and Schinzinger (1989, p.167) go further and suggest that responsibilities to society and the environment make the engineer's role essentially one of social service. The end of the legal profession as a whole is to provide justice for all. Again, this involves a responsibility and service not just to the client but to society. There will, of course, be continuing debate about the equitable distribution of this service in the legal and in the health services. Writers such as Tawney (1921, p.149) and Campbell (1985) have argued that such service also contributes to moral meaning in the wider society. This, then, is the positive argument, that the very nature of a profession is value-centred and therefore demands that members of the profession are ethically aware.

Secondly, there is a concern for the professional not to be compromised or partial. Professional autonomy is central to the idea of a profession. This is exemplified in the case of the Challenger disaster (Robinson, 2002a). The engineers initially stood out against the pressures from politics and management to launch the space shuttle. Once they moved away from their professional autonomy into a more managerial perspective, this led to a decision which was compromised. By bracketing professional judgement, the underlying technological and scientific truth was corrupted, and managerial rather than scientific criteria were used to justify the launch. This is a double cautionary tale for the professional: lose your professional autonomy, and professional and scientific integrity can soon follow, with potentially disastrous results.

Thirdly, underlying much of these arguments is the importance of trust in the profession. The effective practice of the profession depends upon trust. Hence, the individual professional holds a responsibility not simply to the client or the wider society but to the profession, such that trust in the profession as a whole can be maintained. This is partly trust based upon the knowledge that the professional will maintain the highest possible technical standards. The professional has to be competent, not least because most

professionals are dealing with clients who are, in some way, in need. However, the competence has to extend beyond the technical to the relational, and to the belief that the professional will both not take advantage of, and also seek the best for, clients who are, in many cases, vulnerable. This ethical concern is well expressed in the four principles that Beauchamp and Childress (1989) suggest are the basis of the medical profession:

- Respect, for the confidentiality and autonomy of the client, ensuring that any decision is fully informed.
- Non-maleficence. Whatever happens, harm must be avoided.
- Beneficence. This looks to find the best for the client in the situation.
- Justice. This includes equitable treatment of clients.

Such principles set out an ethical attitude of inclusivity and care. They are not always straightforward in practice. Concern for patient autonomy, for instance, can easily clash with the doctor's view of the patient's best interest. Hence, if trust is to be maintained, the professional needs to be skilled at handling such tensions in practice.

Fourthly, Koehn (1994) and May (1985) suggest refining the definition of a profession in terms of the professional empowering the client. From this perspective, client autonomy and responsibility are seen as developing as part of the professional relationship, and a great deal of the professional's role is about teaching and enabling. The dark side of this, stressed by Illich (1977), is the negative practice of professions and professional bodies. Professions can easily evolve into self-serving power blocks which, far from enabling client autonomy, encourage dependency upon the expert and thus discourage the responsibility of the client. The tension between the two sides presents an ongoing ethical challenge to the professions.

## 2.2 Business.

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Business is often not seen in the same 'exalted' way as professions. Nonetheless, there are parallel arguments surrounding the importance of developing ethical awareness.

Firstly, concern for corporate social responsibility continues to develop. It is still argued by some that business is responsible only to the shareholders and the law (Sternberg, 2000). However, it is increasingly clear that business has to be aware of the value and concerns of all stakeholders, and that the success of business depends upon responding appropriately. A good example of this is international mining, where the corporation is faced by concerns for land rights, the environment, the needs of surrounding communities, and the concerns of the indigenous government (BHP Billiton, 2003). There are now many initiatives from governments, business and non-governmental organisations to develop global corporate social responsibility, including:

- The UN Global Compact
- The Caux Round Table Principles
- The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprise (Jamal, 2001).

Secondly, underlying much of the concern for corporate social responsibility is the critical point that business in the 21st century depends upon its reputation if it is to survive and flourish. One of the most interesting examples of this is the case of Nestlé and the sale of baby milk substitute (Robinson, 2002b). This has raged over thirty years. In its earliest stages the whistle was blown by *The New Internationalist* on the alleged practice of providing free baby milk substitute to poor Third World mothers in hospitals, leading to dependency upon the substitute and eventually to the deaths of millions of babies. Whatever the rights or wrongs of this complex case, there is little doubt that Nestlé's immediate handling of it was ill-judged. Rather than taking the claims seriously, and trying to address the issues and the underlying value conflicts, Nestlé tried to paint this as anti-capitalist propaganda, taking on the role of champions of the free market. First, this led to a polarisation of the issues. Then it led directly to an economic boycott of all Nestlé goods. Only when Nestlé entered into serious dialogue did the issue become manageable. What this case shows is that regardless of the positive arguments for corporate social responsibility, business does depend on its reputation, and thus even on a simply pragmatic level there is a need for the capacity to handle such issues creatively.

In short, then, professions and business are increasingly aware of the need to address ethical issues (Webley, 2003). Ethical literacy, defined as awareness of the ethical issues and the capacity to respond creatively to them, therefore increasingly becomes an important capacity for the new graduate.

### 3. Ethics versus employability?

Despite such arguments there is still, for many, a divide between ethics and employability. This exists for several reasons.

Firstly, employability is often seen as a utilitarian concept, referring to what is needed to make money, to achieve individual success. Ethics on the other hand is seen as 'being good' or 'doing the right thing', and this has more than a hint of piety and altruism about it. Concern for material well-being is thus set against altruism.

Secondly, the term 'ethics' is often seen as essentially about philosophical theory, and therefore seen by many as not relevant to practice. Hence, as Vardy (1989, p.194) notes, practitioners are often suspicious of the philosopher, whom they see as living in 'a secure and problem-free environment removed from business realities'.

Thirdly, ethics is often seen as prescriptive. Embodied in rules and codes, and imposed

from above, it is therefore antithetical to the idea of ethical autonomy. In the so-called 'postmodern postmodern world', it is argued, the stress is rather upon individuals and groups working their own moral meaning out, with no grounds for challenging personal ethical views other than harm to others.

However, neither employability nor ethics falls into the polarised categories suggested.

## 4. Ethics

One would hardly expect the term 'ethics' to be understood in the same way by everybody. Postmodernism suggests that any convincing overview of ethics has gone. The effort of sustaining some overarching prescriptive framework of meaning is now too great (Connor, 1989). In any case, so the argument goes, we all have very different, personal or local, views of what is right or wrong. Moreover, we have every right to follow what we feel is morally acceptable, unless it is harming another. Whatever view is taken regarding postmodern theories, it is clear that in many areas there is no shared moral discourse. Moreover, regardless of views about content, perceptions of the nature of ethics differ according to experience. If, for instance, an individual has been brought up dominated by prescriptive and legalistic ethical practice he or she may well be inclined to be suspicious of the term 'ethics'.

The study of ethics has traditionally been the concern of philosophy, theology or religion. However, with the rise of applied ethics it is becoming less clear that any of these disciplines or traditions can 'own' ethics in its entirety. Disciplines such as psychology and sociology increasingly have insights about the natures of ethics (Williams, 2004), and the many professions seek to locate a particular perspective of applied ethics in their area. However, whilst it is plausible to see the practice of ethics as transcending any discipline, and based rather in the development of the reflective and responsive agent and communities of practice (see Barnett, 1994), the disciplines of philosophy, theology and religious studies do have an important role, in helping to:

- locate and connect underlying belief systems to individual and corporate ethical practice
- develop shared discourse in value and belief systems
- develop the tools of critical thinking
- enable critical reflection on and dialogue about underlying ethical theory and meaning.

These functions are important in practice, not least in international business which is faced by cross-cultural diversity and ethical issues. Hence it is important to have partnerships between ethicists and practitioners in the development of ethics in work and in the teaching and learning of applied ethics.



Philosophy, in any case, has also been important in clarifying the nature of ethics, and demonstrating that the primary focus of ethics is not so much either theory or prescription as reflective deliberation. Philosophy and theology tended to focus initially on two views of ethical theory – the deontological and the utilitarian. The first of these argues that ethical meaning is found in principles, such as the Ten Commandments, applicable to all situations. The second argues that moral meaning is discovered in calculating how any action might maximise the good. Neither of these theoretical perspectives can stand alone, and presentations often suffer from simplistic, polarised thinking, and a lack of practice-centredness.

At least five other different approaches have emerged in the last century, each trying to develop a view of ethics which is richer, more complex, and focused in practical reflection:

- Virtue ethics
- Feminist ethics
- Post-holocaust ethics
- Discourse ethics
- Global ethics.

**Virtue ethics.** Building on the ethics of Aristotle this argues that ethics is not so much about determining what is right or wrong, but rather about building a good character. The character is informed and sustained by the stories of the community, which embody the virtues. The virtues are learned through practice (Macintyre, 1981), and good character will lead to good ethical practice.

**Feminist ethics.** Feminist writers contrast justice with care (Koehn, 1998). Justice, they argue, is solution-driven and based upon power. This approach to ethics has dominated Western history. In contrast, care as the foundation of ethics is concerned not simply to solve ethical dilemmas, but rather to understand the nature of any dilemma and to include all who are involved in working it through. This is an ethics which looks to develop trust and is dependent upon key attributes such as empathy.

**Post-holocaust ethics.** Writers such as Bauman (1993) reflect on the experience of the Holocaust. The Holocaust happened because of the way in which certain groups of people were excluded from humanity. Responsibility for the other was, in these cases, denied. This denial was exacerbated by management techniques such as the division of labour, which further distanced any sense of responsibility. The basis of this ethics is inclusive awareness and appreciation of the other. Hence ethics begins with taking responsibility for the other, and the rest is how that responsibility is worked out, with others.

**Discourse ethics.** Habermas (1992) suggests that ethical meaning emerges from discourse, enabling reflection on values and the discovery of shared norms. Getting the process right for such discourse is thus of the highest importance, and Habermas

suggests basic conditions for this. Benhabib (1992) goes further, noting that whilst the discourse may reveal shared moral meaning, the conditions of discourse themselves already embody moral meaning, not least respect. This in turn requires attributes such as empathy (Benhabib, 1992, p.52).

**Global ethics.** Building on the sense of connectedness stressed by the feminist ethics, global ethics stresses our responsibility for the environment and human kind globally. In one sense this is also a natural progression from post-holocaust ethics, stressing responsibility for all on a global scale, and a concern for structural global response to issues that dwarf the all too often individualistic focus of ethics (Kung, 1991).

These approaches overlap. All have some reference to:

- Character, involving virtues or qualities
- Awareness of and openness to the other
- Process focused on reflectivity and dialogue that embodies core values
- A starting point if taking responsibility for the other.

Viewed in this way, ethical reflection can tie directly in to employability.

## 5. Employability

Employability is a complex construct. Employers suggest that a number of deeper qualities and task-centred skills go to make up employability, including: effective learning skills, self-awareness, the capacity for networking, negotiation skills, transferable skills, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, team working skills, taking responsibility, the capacity to make decisions, and the capacity to cope with uncertainty (Yorke and Knight, 2004a, p.5).

Yorke and Knight (2004b, p.5) provide an important analysis of this deeper view in terms of four interrelated components of employability:

- Understanding. This is intentionally differentiated from knowledge, signifying a deeper awareness of data and its contextual meaning.
- Skills. This term refers to skills in context and practice, and therefore implies the capacity to use skills appropriately.
- Efficacy beliefs, self theories and personal qualities. The connection of these to a sense of underlying purpose and value enables the student to feel that it is possible to make a difference in work. They also influence how the person will perform in work.
- Metacognition. This involves self-awareness, the capacity to learn through reflective practice, the capacity to reflect on learning itself, and so learn how to learn, and the capacity to regulate the self.

Employability, then, is a complex idea about how the four components above can influence life-long learning and life-long performance. It is evidenced in the 'application of a mixture of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skilful practices, and the ability to reflect productively on experience.' (Yorke, 2004, p.11). Stephenson's (1998, p.2) earlier concept of 'capability' exhibits a number of similarities to employability. In brief, capability is characterised by confidence in one's ability to:

- Take effective and appropriate action
- Explain what one is seeking to achieve
- Live and work effectively with others
- Continue to learn from experiences.

Employability should be seen in 'both/and' terms. It is about what makes for successful employment and is thus very much about maximising good consequences for the individual and society. It is also intrinsically a good, and therefore not value-free.

Employability involves:

- Reflectivity, including the capacity to reflect holistically and to learn.
- Responsibility, involving the capacity to identify and articulate self beliefs, and be responsible for these beliefs and their development.
- Connectivity, involving the ability to make connections between: experiences over time; the self and its core communities, including work; and the social and physical environment outside such communities.
- Innovativity, the capacity to both handle new challenges and create new opportunities. This recognises risk and initiative as an inevitable part of the work experience, summed up partly in the idea of entrepreneurship.

## 6. Ethics and employability

A useful starting-point for reflection on the connection of ethics to employability is Carter's (1985) taxonomy (Table 1).

<b>Personal qualities</b>	<b>Mental characteristics:</b> Openness Agility Imagination Creativity	<b>Attitudes and values:</b> Things Self People Groups Ideas	<b>Personality characteristics:</b> Integrity Initiative Industry Emotional resilience	<b>Spiritual qualities:</b> Awareness Appreciation Response
<b>Skills</b>	<b>Mental skills:</b> Organisation Analysis Evaluation Synthesis	<b>Information skills:</b> Acquisition Recording Remembering Communication	<b>Action skills:</b> Manual Organising Decision-making Problem-solving	<b>Social skills:</b> Cooperation Leadership Negotiation and persuasion Interviewing
<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Factual knowledge:</b> Facts Procedures Principles Structures Concepts		<b>Experiential knowledge:</b> Experience Internalisation Generalisation Abstraction	

**Table 1. A summary of a taxonomy of objectives for professional education (Carter, 1985).**

Carter argues for the need to develop personal qualities alongside skills. The way in which these qualities are characterised could be debated. Nonetheless, the divisions usefully help reflection on how the ethics of character relates to the professional's task. Firstly, the attitudes and values section is primarily about a valuing or respecting of the other, from ideas to persons, to the environment. Secondly, in the midst of the personality characteristics is what is often seen as a critical ethical virtue – integrity. Solomon (1992, p.168) suggests that integrity is not one but a complex of virtues 'working together to form a coherent character, and identifiable and trustworthy personality'. Thirdly, spiritual (not

exclusively religious) awareness refers to awareness of the self and the other, and the capacity to respond to the other, be that a person, group, environment or transcendent other. At the base of spiritual qualities is something about empathy, the capacity to reach out and identify with the other. At the same time, such qualities also invite us at least to reflect upon the connection between values and belief systems (in the broadest sense of systems of practice and belief that give core meaning to people). These aspects of Carter's taxonomy then give us respect or care, integrity, and empathy as three core elements of the ethical character, analogous to, but rather deeper than, the Rogerian triad of counselling or teaching attributes: of unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy (Rogers, 1983).

## 6.1 Respect

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Respect is the basic ethical attitude. It involves inclusivity and unconditionality. May (1987) notes that these are basic to the idea of the professional, summed up in the idea of the promissory covenant. The UK medical profession as a whole, for instance, aims to be always available and not to demand conditions, such as ability to pay, for treatment. Nonetheless, as May also notes, there is need for a specific contract to ensure appropriate and equitable treatment.

## 6.2 Integrity

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Integrity is more complex and dynamic than congruence, involving several aspects:

- **Integration** of the different parts of the person: emotional, psychological and intellectual. This leads to holistic thinking, and an awareness of the self alongside awareness and appreciation of external data.
- **Consistency** of character and operation between: value and practice; past, present and future; and in different situations and contexts. The behaviours will not necessarily be the same in each situation, but will be consistent with the ethical identity of the person.
- Taking **responsibility** for values and practice. Without accepting responsibility for ethical values and for response, neither the individual nor the profession can develop a genuine moral identity or agency.

Absolute integrity is impossible to attain. Hence, an important virtue is humility, the acceptance of limitations, of weakness as well as strengths (Robinson and Dixon, 1997, p.341). Equally important therefore is the capacity to reflect, to evaluate practice, to be able to cope with criticism and to alter practice appropriately. This capacity to learn means that integrity should not be seen as simply maintaining values and ethical practice come

what may, but as involving the reflective process, such that values can be tested in the light of practice and either appropriately maintained or developed. This is very close to Aristotle's intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, the capacity for rational deliberation that enables the wise person to reflect on his or her conception of the good and to connect this to practice. Failure to maintain integrity gives rise to conflicts of interest and values that can lead to termination of employment (Sims and Brinkmann, 2003).

## 6.3 Empathy

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The third Rogerian attribute, empathy, is closely connected to the virtue of benevolence, and enables the professional to identify with the other. It does not mean total identification, but rather enables an appropriate distance between the self and the other. Such a distance is necessary if the other is to be understood, and if the professional is to operate impartially and effectively (Robinson, 2001, p.56). Like *phronesis*, empathy is critical to the connection of attitude, value and practice. Both enable and support imagination, creativity and openness, and both mediate appreciation and care of the other. In turn, qualities such as imagination can affect awareness of the other, and thus the development of empathy. Such virtues and capacities enable holistic thinking and practice, and thus effective engagement with the ethical issues at the heart of the professions and business.

Respect, integrity and empathy are important in developing character and identity, built around what Mustakova-Possardt (2004, p.245) refers to as critical moral consciousness. She sums this up as involving four dimensions: 'A moral sense of identity, a sense of responsibility and agency, a deep sense of relatedness on all levels of living, and a sense of life meaning or purpose'. These core elements of ethics resonate strongly with Yorke and Knight's (2004b) four components of employability, deepening the third through reflection on broader value and belief systems, and related to the fourth, with self-awareness and self-regulation essential for the development of integrity and autonomy.

Several things might be said in summing up the more deliberative approach to ethics and noting how it relates to employability:

- It is essentially a learning experience, not the application of inflexible principles, and thus relates directly to reflective practice.
- It has a strong social aspect to it. The idea of integrity can be used of a person or an organisation (Armstrong *et al*, 1999). Also, no-one can embody all the virtues. They are more likely expressed and distributed within a group or team. Ethics itself is seen as increasingly collaborative, that is not simply about the individual working out a moral dilemma, but about how responsibility is shared.
- The stress on virtues, empathy and so on is essentially one which looks to the development of ethical autonomy, not ethical prescription. The person is responsible for the reflection, commitment to, and development of, whatever values

they hold, and any response.

- Whilst there is an implied sense of normative moral development, this is not the same as a normative ethic. The latter would demand adherence to one view of ethics. An idea of moral development rather looks to how the person can develop, as Bauman (1993) would have it, both responsibility for one's own values and responsibility for the other. Responsibility can itself be seen as a virtue.
- The development of such agency and moral identity is always in relation to social structures and the very different values systems that are part of anyone's personal or professional history. Development of moral autonomy therefore demands working through how one relates to the different value systems. To do this demands an awareness of these value systems, the capacity to enter into a dialogue with them, and the capacity to both appreciate and challenge them. In terms of moral development, this means moving away from an unquestioning acceptance of moral norms to a critical appreciation of how they relate to other moral perspectives and to particular situations. It is precisely the intertextual dialogue emerging from all this which enables the development of a moral maturity that can handle difference and ambiguity (van der Ven, 1998; Kohlberg, 1984).

The focus on character, deliberation, practice, identity and agency enables the professional to identify core values that give meaning and purpose to his or her work, ranging from professional autonomy to inclusive care. At the same time it enables the professional to handle creatively the very diverse values embodied in different stakeholders within a particular community and beyond. Handling such plurality is, of course, at the heart of global ethics. Such ethics are fired by a common concern for global issues such as poverty and the environment. However, in handling such concerns it becomes crucial to be aware of, and respond appropriately to, the many different value and belief systems that can be embodied in any complex global situation.

In all this, competence and care are not opposites but are both morally necessary for the professional. It is a moral imperative to maintain standards and thus competence, just as it is an imperative to treat others with respect. Ethical attributes such as empathy and integrity enable value-centred decision making and also enhance competence. Empathy is central to data gathering in depth, and is thus important, for instance, for medical diagnosis that takes into account the whole person. Even the core Aristotelian ethical virtues of temperance (the capacity for moderation, balance and self-control), courage, and justice (the capacity to be fair and to give equal respect) are important for making balanced decisions or for communicating those to stakeholders. These are precisely virtues of the 'mean', avoiding extremes. Hence, critically thought-through ethics should, ideally, lead to good practice in every sense.

## 7. An ethical framework

Ian Hughes (2004) noted the importance of developing for students 'a coherent framework within which to set ethical and sustainability issues during lifelong learning.

Such a framework is important for several reasons.

- It provides a means of systematic ethical reflection, and thus a tool for both the student and also the professional to develop practice.
- It enables the person to develop ethical autonomy. Here it is not important for the person to accept a particular framework, but rather to develop, and test through dialogue, their own.
- It enables the development of holistic thinking in which the ethical framework (as process) and ethical content are not seen as separate. If the framework is enabling autonomy and the development of responsibility, then it is embodying core values.

Such a framework is best related directly to any general decision-making process, so that ethics is located in everyday business or professional reflection. Typically this will enable ethics to be part of proactive decision-making process, such as a project management protocol (Armstrong *et al*, 1999, pp.91–118). Some of the important elements of such a framework include:

- Data gathering
- Value reflection
- Responsibility analysis
- Planning in the light of resources and constraints
- Implementation.

**Data gathering** is the necessary setting out of the situation and all its aspects. More often than not this requires more than one person, because any situation might be very complex, and because one person will, for many possible reasons, have a partial perception.

**Value management.** Reflection on values arises naturally out of intertextual dialogue, and begins with value clarification. This can develop in several ways.

- The recognition of common and different values, both within the organisation and outside.
- The need to handle conflicting values. Some apparently conflicting values are in fact capable of being held together, whereas others may preclude mutual operation. Yet other values, such as autonomy and 'best interest' in medicine, need to be constantly monitored.
- Where there is dialogue about different values, this will lead to exploration of the



justification of the value, and thus the nature of any belief or value foundation.

- Reflection on why values are held will reveal a range of reasons both conceptual and affective (Cowan, 2005). It is at this point that it becomes important to be aware of the underlying strength of feeling which may be fuelled by psychological, cultural or religious experiences. This reflection can take place in any situation and concern local community issues; multicultural issues in and beyond the community; and multinational issues – for instance, in the developing world. Dealing with a complex ethical issue may well necessitate the development of skills in conflict resolution that enable different parties to work through ethical feelings as well as concepts. There are, therefore, links between personal and moral development and the acquisition of interpersonal management skills.

**Responsibility analysis.** Recent research in family social policy and families has noted the importance of negotiating responsibilities in developing and maintaining ethical meaning (Williams, 2004). Finch and Mason (1993) concluded that a majority of families did not work from principles or any predetermined value base. Rather, they negotiated responsibility and through this developed ethical reputation and identity. A similar approach can apply to this phase of decision-making. Firstly, it involves identifying the stakeholders in any situation. Secondly, there is an analysis of the stakeholders in terms of power and responsibility. This enables a full appreciation of constraints and resources in the situation. Thirdly, responsibility can be negotiated. This does not simply look to the development of goods for all stakeholders. Rather, it accepts the premise of mutual responsibility and enables its embodiment. Hence, it enables a maximisation of resources through collaboration, and the development of ethical identity which can include all those involved. Negotiation skills are therefore important.

**Planning and implementation.** The final two elements of the framework require reflection on options and consequences in the light of values and different responsibilities. Only at this point are values embodied and responsibilities worked through and owned in practice.

Of course, the deadlines of work mean that embodiment of values cannot be 'perfect', and the fitting of values to practice will be a matter of ongoing reflection. Nonetheless, the use of a framework that is understood and accepted by colleagues can enable rapid critical reflection for the immediate situation.

Clearly, such a framework may not be used in detail for every situation. Moreover, the experienced reflective practitioner may well use the framework without consciously working through it in a serial way (Eraut, 1994). However, it provides a means of making ethical sense of any situation. It embodies and reinforces a view of ethics that is dialogic, participative, collaborative and transformative, and therefore directly relevant to employability.

The framework also provides an important tool for teaching and learning in any context:

- Through it the student can practise ethical reflection, value management, intertextual dialogue, and planning.
- Based on such practice, focused in cases, scenarios, group presentations, and role-play, students can identify and begin to develop skills and virtues such as empathy, and listening skills, negotiation and conflict resolution skills, phronesis and, ultimately, integrity (Megone, 2002). Empathy, for instance, can be developed through intertextual dialogue, whilst integrity can begin to be developed in working through the whole framework in role-play (Robinson and Dixon, 1997). Such virtues and their related skills are universal but can only be learned in practice, and thus in the particular (see Gaita, 2000, p.xxix).

Reflection on the ethical framework then further deepens the connection between ethics and employability. Value management stresses the importance of, and shows a way of attending to, values and beliefs. In a pluralistic society with concern for protection of beliefs as part of human rights, this is becoming increasingly important (Robinson, 2005). Responsibility analysis shows how negotiation at any level is not value-free, and can be used effectively to share responsibility and to develop moral identity. Planning and implementation underline the need for collaboration in embodying ethical outcomes.

## 8. Ethics and employability in the curriculum

There are many ways in which ethics can be related to employability in the curriculum. I will focus just on three areas: practice reflection, professional learning, and the non-professional curriculum.

### 8.1 Practice reflection

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It is important to make connections with ideas such as reflective practice. Some ethicists would find this difficult and want to make clear that the two are not the same. Regardless of that debate, it is possible to build upon some clear connections between them. Lyall, for instance, notes that Donald Schön focuses on values and ‘appreciative systems’ – overarching theories which supply meaning to any situation – and the roles of the professional and others involved (Lyall, 2001, p.171). Moreover, Schön usefully refers to the ‘talkback’ – the articulation of the different phases of reflection – that provides the basis for adjusting future practice, and argues that the professional should treat the client as a reflective practitioner.

The connections to reflective practice can be developed in different ways:

- Ethics can be embedded into Personal Development Planning (PDP) files. Increasingly a part of the reflective development of the student, these are important in making connections with the different aspects and areas of learning.
- Ethics and values could be developed as part of the service learning (through volunteer modules) and citizenship curriculum (Annette, 2000). Once more, this is about practice reflection.
- Life-plan or careers modules are being increasingly developed for particular disciplines, and are frequently the mechanism for developing the PDP. Ethics reflection is developed easily through reflection on vocational values.

## 8.2 Professional learning

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Professional bodies increasingly act as drivers that ensure ethics is a key part of being fit for purpose and practice. The development of professional learning is exemplified by the work of the IDEAS (Inter Disciplinary Ethics Across Subject disciplines) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Leeds. The Centre has developed links between Philosophy, Theology and many professional courses including Law, Engineering, Medicine, Healthcare, Social Work, and Biomedical Sciences, and involves:

- Theme teaching. Ethics is developed throughout the professional curriculum, so that the ethics theme is progressed with each year, leading to a final year ethics project.
- Team teaching. Ethicists, practitioners and faculty staff work together to support intertextual dialogue and reflection on cases.

## 8.3 The non-professional curriculum

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Ethics can be introduced as part of a broader approach to the non-professional curriculum. In History or English, for instance, historical and literary narratives provide an important focus for reflection on values and ethics, contrasting different ethical perspectives within the narrative. These in turn can be contrasted with the underlying values of contemporary narratives. The value base of the subject and the ethics of academic study and research can also be part of reflection, and both of these can be focused into the PDP. Once attention is given to the ethics of research, scholarship, and learning, and to the values of higher education, students then are able to reflect not on some distant concept of work in practice, but on their present practice, and their fitness for that. As Wiener (2005) has shown, it is possible, in disciplines such as History, to focus on the practice of the profession of historian, enabling the student to think in terms of

developing the skills and moral awareness related to that profession. Finally, global ethical awareness can be developed through networking across the curriculum, linking global issues both to discipline reflection and to the practice of the institution (Collins, 2005).

These approaches can be used in combination. The School of Applied Global Ethics at Leeds Metropolitan University, for instance, has developed one undergraduate scheme in Development Studies which involves the following:

- An introductory applied ethics module in the first year.
- A series of seminars in the second year which focus on critical thinking and specific ethical issues, and involve a broad teaching team.
- A final year project which embeds ethics in professional decision-making.
- An underlying PDP module throughout the three years that ensures the continued development of reflective skills focused on employment.
- A further underlying module on global citizenship.

The scheme uses team teaching, and requires staff development, in order to ensure that the ethics theme is integrated into all the modules, taking its place alongside other essential themes. A similar development in the Leeds Metropolitan Business School has identified four key themes: Ethics, Globalisation, Enterprise, and Change. Each module leader articulates how these are developed in the course, and the articulations act as the basis for ongoing pedagogical reflection and development.

All of the approaches outlined above can be adapted for short courses in continuing professional development.

## 9. Conclusion

In a world of super-complexity, pluralism, and global awareness, professions and corporations increasingly have to focus on responsibility, accountability, and the development of the moral perspective. Attention to this in the curriculum and in professional development helps to develop in students:

- The capacity to work creatively with professional codes of ethics, such that they are not used legalistically.
- The capacity to articulate and effectively embody professional values.
- The capacity to engage in dialogue and debate with value and belief systems within, and outside, the community of practice.
- The capacity to challenge values, respectfully and appropriately.
- Responsibility for ethical awareness and response. In this, ethics is seen as a learning process, not something preformed, to be applied to situations.

- The capacity to negotiate responsibility, and to work with different groups, respecting their value and belief systems.
- Moral identity, and ethical and intellectual virtues such as integrity, empathy and wisdom, in the workplace and beyond.

The development of these elements deepens and broadens reflective practice and critical thinking, enhancing both employability and vocation in the broadest sense. The framework of reflective practice in turn anchors ethics, ensuring a rigour that is intellectual, affective and practical.

## Biography

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Educated at Oxford and Edinburgh Universities, Simon Robinson entered psychiatric social work before being ordained into the Church of England priesthood in 1978. After spells in the Durham diocese, he entered university chaplaincy at Heriot-Watt University, and the University of Leeds, developing research and teaching in areas of applied ethics and practical theology. In 2004 he joined Leeds Metropolitan University. Ongoing research interests include: religious ethics and care; professional ethics; ethics in higher education; spirituality and professional practice; corporate social responsibility; and ethics in a global perspective. Books include: *The Social Responsibility of Business*; *Ethics in Engineering*; *Agape, Moral Meaning and Pastoral Counselling*; *Case Studies in Business Ethics* (ed. with Chris Megone); *Living Wills*; *Spirituality and Healthcare*; *Ministry Amongst Students*; *Values in Higher Education* (ed. with Clement Katulushi).

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## Enhancing Student Employability

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

One of many definitions of employability that has underpinned the work of the Higher Education Academy and ESECT is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability.htm)



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

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

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

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

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

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