

Briefings on Employability 4

Encouraging the development of employability

A guide for busy senior managers
Mantz Yorke



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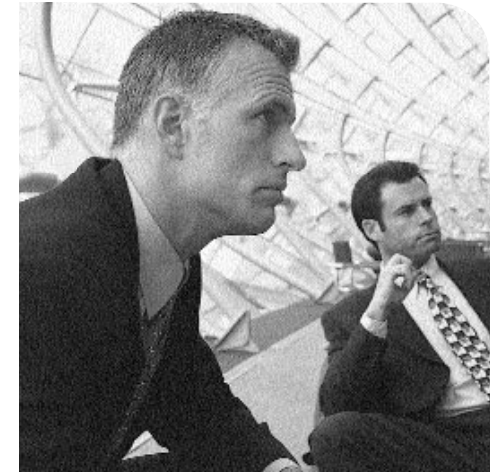


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Introduction

The Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team in England (ESECT), in collaboration with the UK-wide Generic Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network, is making available a range of resources that support the 'employability agenda' in the UK. This publication is for senior colleagues who oversee the responses of institutions to national policies that value the enhancement of student employability and who need to ensure that those programmes make a clear contribution to student employability. It is complemented by publications directed at educational developers, heads of department, careers services, student unions and LTSN subject centres.

This Briefing will be supported by a 'toolkit' which will contain further resources to help the shaping of policies to enhance student employability in ways that are consistent with other strategies – notably those relating to widening participation, to special needs and to teaching, learning and assessment.

LTSN Generic Centre and ESECT employability resources can be downloaded after navigating from www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT.

Key points

- Employability is a governmental priority for higher education in England, and is being promoted both nationally and regionally.
- Employability and good learning have a lot in common, and should not be seen as oppositional.
- Although a student's experience of higher education cannot guarantee a 'graduate-level job', the nature of that experience influences the chances of success.
- There is much that a senior manager can do to encourage colleagues to engage with employability and its implications for the student experience. There is a variety of routes into an engagement with employability.
- A commitment to employability needs to be backed up by institutional research to establish where initiatives are succeeding and where further developmental work might be needed.
- Some suggestions for senior managers regarding the way in which they exercise their leadership role regarding employability in their institutions are: *Understand approaches to change; Justify the need to engage with employability; Prepare the ground; Don't try to do everything yourself; Communicate effectively; Develop a shared commitment to employability; Generate some early successes; Consolidate and embed the gains.* These imply working collaboratively with various groups within (and, at times, beyond) the institution.

Employability is a national priority

The government has designated the development of students' employability as a policy objective for the higher education sector. HEFCE listed employability as one of the priorities for institutional learning and teaching strategies, and its Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) has implications for employability. The introduction of Foundation Degrees is a further expression of the government's desire that higher education programmes should support the labour market. The theme is supported at regional level, not least through the Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESAs).

The institutional aspect

Contemporary policy concerns in the UK are fair access, learning and teaching, special needs, student retention and completion, enterprise and student employability. Lifelong learning was a major concern a few years ago but has slipped from the upper reaches of the higher education agenda. Yet, since employability has lifelong implications, there is a logic to integrating lifelong learning with the contemporary concerns that have been mentioned. All of these policy concerns bear in some fashion on the ways in which an institution approaches curriculum design and implementation as regards employability.

Senior managers have broad responsibilities in respect of these policy concerns. They set institutional policy frameworks and are expected to be proactive in implementing them. Key challenges for senior managers are to be fully aware of the responsibilities of their managerial colleagues and to make sure that what they are doing dovetails with the work of their colleagues. An example might be the need to align activities related to 'enterprise' with those relating to 'employability', where these fall within the purviews of different institutional managers.

Senior managers necessarily rely on managers at departmental level to do a lot of the implementation, and hence a key aspect of the senior manager's role is to ensure that the conditions in the institution are supportive of departmental work.

Learning and employability

The perspective of this paper is that there is a considerable degree of overlap between the aims of supporting good learning and of supporting employability, and that it is a misperception to see these as being substantially oppositional. If the aim is to encourage both good learning in the discipline and achievements that are more 'generic' in character, then the chances of students' success in employment (and in life generally) are likely to be optimized.

Box 1 summarizes what researchers have found when they have asked what employers want in new graduate employees.

Box 1. Typical findings from research into employers' 'wish lists'

Lee Harvey and colleagues (1997) found that employers want graduates with knowledge, intellect, willingness to learn, self-management skills, communication skills, team-working, interpersonal skills.

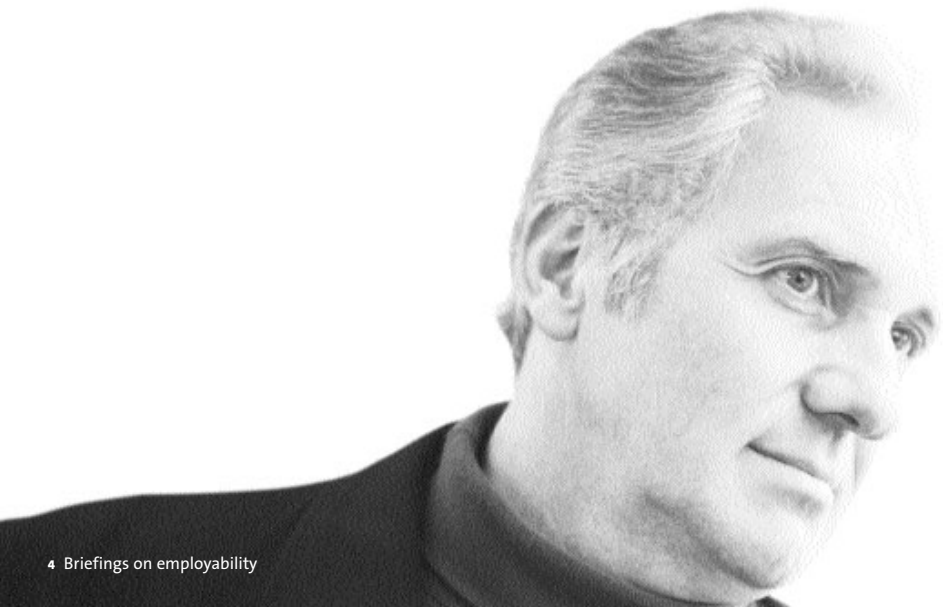
Research reported by Mantz Yorke found that small enterprises especially valued skill at oral communication, handling one's own workload, team-working, managing others, getting to the heart of problems, critical analysis, summarizing, and group problem-solving. Valued attributes included being able to work under pressure, commitment, working varied hours, dependability, imagination/creativity, getting on with people, and willingness to learn.

John Brennan and colleagues highlighted the significance of initiative, working independently, working under pressure, oral communication skills, accuracy, attention to detail, time management, adaptability; working in a team, taking responsibility/making decisions, planning, coordinating and organizing.

Such research underpins the ESECT definition of employability as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. Discussion of this and other possible definitions can be found in *Employability in higher education* (see 'Finding out more' at the end of this paper).

Notice the phrase 'more likely to gain employment...' Higher education can improve the supply of graduates with achievements valued by employers but it is well understood that the labour market does not operate equitably and that some groups of graduates face persistent disadvantage. However good it is, higher education cannot completely resolve

demand problems of this order. It can, perhaps, lessen the degree of disadvantage, which has been the aim of a number of programmes that have targeted 'at risk' groups of students and have worked with them to strengthen their claims to employability, over and above the contributions being made by the mainstream curriculum. Nor can higher education do much about economic cycles and problems in particular regions and economic sectors. Yet the belief that employers and academics both value some similar kinds of achievement (such as problem-solving, communication, learning how to learn) implies that it is right to take employability seriously, even if the demand for highly-skilled graduates is sometimes low and often favours certain subsets of graduates.



Four routes into the promotion of employability

There are many ways of approaching the task of enhancing student employability. This section addresses four of them: wherever you start from, it is likely that you will need to engage with the others.

1. Learning environments

Critical to the enhancement of employability is the learning environment experienced by students. Employability can be built into curricula in a number of ways:

- Employability through the whole curriculum
- Employability in the core curriculum
- Work-based or work-related learning incorporated as one or more components within the curriculum
- Employability-related module(s) within the curriculum
- Work-based or work-related learning in parallel with the curriculum

Useful gains can be made from freestanding modules focusing on aspects of employability, but the gains are likely to be greater where the opportunity is taken to use the subject discipline as the locus for learning of a more generic kind. This paper therefore concentrates on employability in core curricula, whilst acknowledging that it is difficult to get pedagogic coherence when there are many optional and elective modules. Some work-based or work-related learning frequently takes place relatively independently of the academically-driven parts of the core curriculum. The view taken here is that any appraisal of a programme in which employability is a priority should consider the way that employability is being fostered through the variety of learning opportunities that are available in the co-curriculum – that is, in those aspects of the higher education experience that lie outside the formal curriculum – but always with an eye to ensuring that these extra-curricular opportunities should be widely taken up and not confined to a privileged minority.

Knight and Yorke (2003b) highlighted four areas of significance for student learning that have implications for the development of employability:

- Students' approaches to learning in general
- Students' approaches to actual studying when undertaking a particular task
- Whether the environment experienced by students is generally rich in opportunities for learning
- The degree to which the curriculum is internally consistent or 'aligned' (Biggs, 2003).

The institution has explicit responsibilities in respect of the last two, and some implicit responsibilities in respect of the first two (in that staff are in a position to influence students in their approaches to learning and studying).

Although the institution cannot directly influence what students learn, it can organize learning activities in such a way as to increase the chances that they will develop the kinds of attribute listed in Box 1. Attention is therefore directed explicitly towards curriculum design, and in particular towards the programme as a whole rather than to individual programme components, such as modules.

2. Assessment

A curricular focus on employability implies a need to rethink the associated assessment strategy.

Some kinds of performance are not amenable to being graded with the robustness that is desirable when students are to be 'labelled' with an overall grade-point average or honours degree classification. Hence, unless there is a curricular requirement to include demonstrations of – say – professional behaviour (as in the cases of teaching or social work, for example), there is a tendency not to include them, or alternatively to give them a weighting that trivializes them in the eyes of students. Students, reasonably enough, will calculate where they need to direct their efforts to maximize their personal gain, and act accordingly. Assessment is well known as a powerful driver of student behaviour.

Whereas a self-contained programme in a particular discipline might have the scope to revise its approach to assessment (and more detailed suggestions regarding this can be found in Knight and Yorke, 2003a) the same may not apply so strongly in the case of an institution-wide modular scheme in which the exercise of choice has few restrictions. However, when a student embarks on a programme involving a combination of subjects, their experience of assessment is likely to be a somewhat haphazard consequence of module choice, rather than the kind of structured experience it can be in the core modules of a single honours programme (which is tantamount to a self-contained programme). For an institution operating a modular scheme, then, there is a need to address the assessment of employability – and assessment in general, for that matter – at an institutional level.

3. Personal development planning

Personal development planning (PDP) is a set of processes that are valuable in their own right, in helping students to acclimatize to the expectations of higher education and to encourage them to think ahead. PDP also gives rise to a product – a portfolio of achievements – that can act as a resource-bank of achievements which, appropriately used, can help a graduate in the search for employment. If it is to optimize the chances of student success, PDP is likely to require an institutional approach that brings together academic departments and student support services (particularly specialists in generic study and learning support, and the careers service).

A fully coherent PDP scheme will ensure that the following are provided:

- Guidance that addresses generic learning and study needs
- Guidance on how to address subject-specific learning needs
- Guidance on career planning and job seeking
- Support for, and guidance on making and maintaining, portfolios that will sustain strong claims to employability.

In many institutions this is a novel challenge because, although there may be informal contacts between various parties with an interest in PDP, and collaboration between some of them on particular projects, there is seldom a history of them coming together to see how the experiences of students following particular tracks or pathways of study can be effectively supported. The demarcation of responsibilities differs from institution to institution, although there is often a bifurcation between generic student support on the one side and programme-specific concerns on the other, which is reflected in senior managers' spheres of responsibility.

4. Quality assurance and enhancement

The quality assurance procedures adopted by an institution – whether initial approval or periodic review – offer an important route into the issue of employability in curricula, since they are expected to deal with key questions about the curricula under consideration. The definition adopted at the beginning of this paper is too broad to be useful in the analysis of curricula: a more 'granular' approach to employability is offered in Appendix 1 in *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum* (see 'Finding out more', later).

If quality assurance processes make student employability one of their specific foci, and ask programme teams in some detail about how what they are offering contributes to this end, this might point up areas in which provision could be enhanced. To use quality assurance effectively in this respect does, however, imply that those engaged in approval and review have a developed understanding of the concept of employability and how it applies to the discipline(s) under consideration.

A consideration of the role of quality assurance, in particular, takes the paper into the territory of institutional learning and development.



Leadership for employability

You don't have to be 'the institutional expert'

The academic leadership commitment to employability has to be associated with sufficient institutional sponsorship if it is to be taken seriously. This does not mean that a senior academic has to be 'the institutional expert' on employability, but rather that such a person has to understand enough about what it implies to take the role of 'institutional champion' (and the role has to be sustained if it is to be effective) in respect of development and implementation. This is where acquaintance with the resources being made available on the ESECT website is of value, as is McNair's (2003) draft paper for an expert seminar on employability (sponsored by the LTSN Generic Centre), which focuses on 'traditional' entrants to higher education and includes illustrations from Derby, Paisley and Exeter universities. Other senior managers in the higher education system may be valuable sources of information and can act as 'sounding boards' in respect of ideas under development.

Others may well have the specialist expertise that can be drawn upon for curriculum and staff development. The view of employability that underpins this paper carries implicit messages about the way that student learning might optimally be facilitated – active learning, enhanced formative assessment, and so on. Some staff will already be well acquainted with the kinds of expectation that follow a commitment to employability; others will be less so, implying a need for appropriate staff development activity if the pedagogic processes are to be optimally effective and efficient in the development of employability. It should be noted that those in managerial positions, especially heads of department and deans, may need to develop their own professional understanding of what is implied in a commitment to employability, how this might interlock with other policy initiatives (such as widening participation, special needs, and learning and teaching), and how it might also impact on the pedagogic practices of other colleagues.

Being strategic implies doing institutional research

It is common for institutions in the US to possess offices of institutional research which are tasked with providing information for managers' evaluative and planning purposes. This can involve analyzing existing data or gathering new data as required. The more sophisticated offices engage with policy analysis and assist managers with the weighing of options.

Institutional research is less well developed in the UK. Institutional research activity is pursued, but this tends to be unsystematic with an ad hoc character that is driven by external imperatives. The contemporary interest in the retention of students is one example, having been given considerable impetus by the publication of institution-level performance indicators. The use of institutional research in support of the development of employability could, for instance, involve analyzing data on student demographics and outcomes, researching students' experiences of 'in-house' provision (much as student satisfaction surveys do, in a more general way), and researching students' experiences of placements in work environments.

Institutional research has other purposes, too, such as providing information for self-studies and for the support of bids for grants and contracts.

You do have to be strategic

If employability is seen as a 'bolt-on' extra to curricula, then its promotion within the institution is perhaps more a tactical than a strategic matter. Where employability is seen as suffusing curricula (which has wide-ranging implications for learning environments, pedagogy and assessment), strategic planning becomes much more important. Without it, the development of employability-sensitive learning opportunities could become a matter of chance, depending on the extent to which particular groups of staff and individuals were actively engaged in its promotion. A strategic approach does not imply that developments have to be identical, and any multidisciplinary institution has to be responsive to its intra-institutional constituencies' characters and aspirations. The principle of subsidiarity is important here, with the managerial imperative being to find a balance between tightness and looseness that optimizes the effectiveness of both the overarching framework and local adaptation.

Managing change and innovation

Whereas it is relatively easy to develop curricula and processes that support employability, and to get them formalized in documents, it is the commitment of colleagues that will determine whether the changes 'stick', as Fullan (2001) reminds us. If proper attention is not given to the human aspects of change and development, then even a brilliantly conceived response to the challenge of employability will be at severe risk. A truism of relevance here is that it is generally wise for senior managers to work with the grain of the institutional and/or departmental culture rather than against it.

The promotion of change has a pragmatic – rather than perfectly ideal – aspect, since the politicization inherent in an institution implies that decisions (and, one might add, the consequential actions) need to be based on 'informed judgment of what is possible, what is acceptable, of what is justifiable and of what is defensible in the situation' (Buchanan and Badham, 1999: 206). In one of the classic books on contract bridge, S.J. Simon (1945: 90) puts it thus: the aim should be 'The best result possible. Not the best possible result'. In other words, whilst the senior manager might envision a preferred approach to the promotion of employability, this might not fit with the approach preferred by a department or programme and hence there would be a necessity for some pragmatic, yet principled, rapprochement.

Academics respond differentially to change. The challenge for those with managerial responsibilities is to encourage a positive engagement with necessary change – something that requires more than merely 'talking the talk'. On Simon's principle, it is worth aiming for an outcome which colleagues can tolerate, rather than striving for an outcome that is closer to everyone's ideal (which is usually unrealizable). If a reasonably broad commitment to change cannot be gained, then implementation is seriously at risk.

Klein and Sorra (1996) suggested that the following factors are likely to influence the commitment of colleagues:

- Perceptions of the institutional climate
- The perceived validity of the innovation
- The incentives or disincentives that are present
- The capabilities of those who are expected to implement the innovation
- The 'fit' between the innovation and the values of those involved
- The perceived advantages and disadvantages to themselves of engaging in the implementation process.

The more positive each factor is, the greater the chances that commitment will be given and that the implementation process will be effective. If any factor is perceived to be strongly negative, then this could be sufficient to outweigh any positive factors elsewhere. For example, if colleagues believe that, as is the case with 'core' or 'key' skills, employability has no proper conceptual underpinning (despite the argument advanced in other papers on the ESECT website), or if they place their academic emphasis heavily on the subject discipline – employability not being a significant component of their educational value systems – then the implementation of curricular initiatives designed to enhance employability may be fatally compromised from the outset. Whether the innovation 'works' or not, there will be feedback effects on the factors that govern commitment, and hence future effectiveness.

Much of the literature on organizational change and development relates to industrial and commercial bodies in which chief executive officers exert considerable authority and power. The increasing pressures on institutions to 'behave corporately' do, however, give some of the points from this vast literature a resonance that they might not have had in earlier times, though translation into the world of higher education needs to be accompanied by plenty of caution and a preparedness to make adjustments. The points set out below are probably well understood by most senior managers. The justification for including them is twofold: first, they might offer the occasional new insight to even the experienced senior manager; second, they may have more to offer the less experienced manager.

Leadership for employability

1. Understand approaches to change

Trowler et al. (2003) summarize five theories about change – the technical-rational; resource allocation; diffusionist; continuous quality improvement; and complexity-based – and a range of considerations that apply in respect of each. For example, the technical-rational theory uses engineering as its guiding metaphor, and assumes that a well-designed intervention will cause the desired change to take place. The trouble is, of course, that a change introduced ‘from the top’ is likely to become attenuated as it is interpreted (perhaps misinterpreted) by members of the complex human system that makes up a higher education institution.

None of the theories listed by Trowler et al. probably ‘works’ in a pure form where institution-wide change is being sought. However, each has something to offer the change-agent. The skill of handling change lies in knowing which theory is being called on at any particular time, why it is the most appropriate for the purpose in hand, and in being able to operate in a range of ways appropriate to the circumstances in such a manner that this does not compromise the integrity of the promoter of change. It is here that the work of Trowler et al. is particularly useful.

2. Justify the need to engage with employability

A precondition for innovation or change is that there is an identifiable need that is related to the institution’s mission (or, perhaps, that might change the institution’s mission). If the institution is to make a feature of employability, there is a need to make the case for it. The development of employability (certainly in the broad sense adopted by ESECT) is justifiable in terms of (i) supporting good learning; (ii) enhancing students’ chances of obtaining appropriate employment; and (iii) helping students to develop proficiencies that will be useful in life generally. This broad perspective on employability is congruent with the UK Government’s Skills Strategy, which points out that ‘learning and skills are not just about work or economic goals. They are also about the pleasure of learning for its own sake, the dignity of self-improvement, the achievement of personal potential and fulfilment, and the creation of a better society’ (DfES, 2003b para 4.1).

Since the development of students’ employability is a policy objective of the UK Government, institutions are expected to respond: hence, there is a strong external rationale for action. The primary challenge for the institution is to find a way of responding that is consistent with academics’ expectations. The alignment of employability with good learning offers a rationale with which many academics would be reasonably content.

The urgency of enhancing students’ employability is likely to vary with the institution. In those in which the completion and employment indicators are high, the reaction is likely to be ‘Where’s the problem? Our students are succeeding anyway.’ However, if students feel that they are being pedagogically short-changed (perhaps because academics are devoting considerable attention to their research), then another aspect of government policy – ensuring the quality of the students’ learning experience – may gain the practical clout of students’ action, strengthened by the proposed national survey of graduates’ opinion regarding their programmes.

For other institutions, a commitment to employability may be perceived as attractive to the body of students that it sees as forming its intake. It may also be seen as contributing to institutional survival: the provisions of the recent White Paper on higher education (DfES, 2003a) portend considerable upheaval in English higher education (particularly for the new universities and colleges), and institutions are having to re-evaluate how they should position themselves in the market. For some institutions, a reshaping of their academic portfolios is likely to be an urgent priority.

3. Prepare the ground

Someone in the institution has to have the authority (derived from their track record and personal characteristics) that enables them to champion, sustain and protect whatever exploratory and developmental work is necessary. Where employability is concerned, there may be a need for a team to establish how the various sections of the institution construe employability, how they are approaching the development of employability in their students, what they are currently achieving, and what they think they ought to be achieving in, say, five years’ time. This implies some institutional research activity in order to establish baselines, and it is wise to ascertain colleagues’ feelings about what they are currently doing before suggesting courses of action. It may be necessary to commission an existing group of staff (such as an educational development unit) or a cross-institution group to conduct this kind of work – but any such group needs to be sensitive to the need to bring the wider academic community ‘into the loop’, and keep them aware of what is going on.

In order to ground an innovation firmly, it is generally a good idea to pilot it and to evaluate the pilot work in order to build up an internal evidence base that can be examined against whatever external evidence is available. Academics are, in general, cautious about innovations that are parachuted in – and not unreasonably, since there are many examples of innovations that have not wholly lived up to the prospectuses of their advocates (modularity/semesterization and total quality management being two rather different examples). Academics need to be reasonably convinced that any change is worthwhile and that they have the personal and institutional resources to make it work.

The development of students’ employability is something that is essentially institution-wide. Where changing practices to enhance employability involves more than tinkering at the edges of curricula, it is likely to involve both academics and support staff since curriculum change could well require some reconfiguring of the way that institutional resources are provided. For example, less use might be made of lecture rooms, and more use might be made of resource-based learning in conjunction with small task-defined groups. (Problem-based learning, for example, is one approach that demands a move away from traditional modes of engagement in lectures, seminars, tutorials and laboratories or studios.) Hence institutional managers need to have a considerable appreciation of what is involved. This may necessitate, as part of the groundwork, the establishment of a senior staff development programme, perhaps involving facilitators who have a considerable understanding of the issues at stake and of institutional cultures.

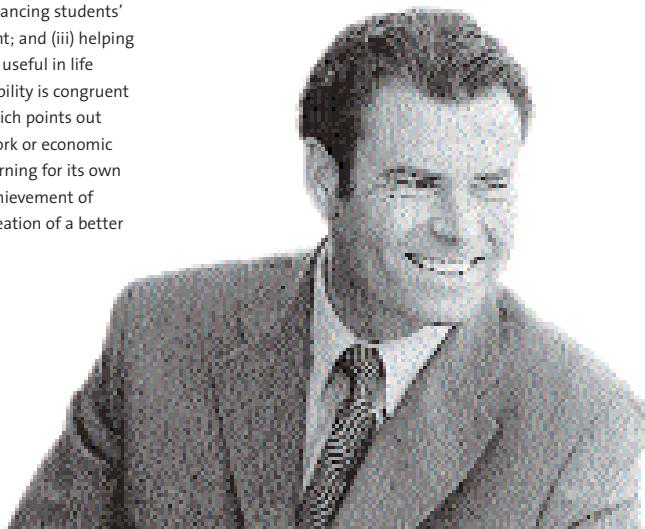
4. Don’t try to do everything yourself

A lone champion of change (even a very senior manager) is rarely able to have widespread influence across an institution. For any innovation to run deep and wide in an institution, there is a need for the various parts of the institution to be engaged – in other words, for a team-based approach to be adopted both to whatever groundwork is needed and to subsequent implementation. Some thought needs to be given to the composition of the team, since it needs to include not only those with formal power but also those with ideas to contribute (not necessarily the same people). The team also needs to include people with complementary capabilities, since the need for particular capabilities fluctuates during its work: creativity may be needed from time to time, but there are other times when the capacity to slog through work is vital. Any team needs people who can work well together as professionals. (They do not have to like each other greatly, but they do have to co-operate effectively.)

5. Communicate effectively

Paper communication, though relatively easy, suffers from a number of drawbacks: it is usually impersonal, and carries the risk of being seen in terms of the exercise of power. Electronic communication suffers from similar disadvantages, and websites have to be fairly compelling if they are to achieve what their constructors hope for. (When there is a plethora of sites to look at, and time is limited, a website has to offer something really worthwhile if it is not to be ignored.) To be effective, communication often requires more than information transmission – engagement with others, arguing for an idea against competing ideas, and the willingness to listen to the views of others who may hold their views just as strongly as you do. Engagement with employability could be enhanced through discussing papers on the theme (such as those on the ESECT website), sharing the outcomes of institutional research activity (see above), and workshop-type activities based upon what is going on in pioneering departments.

Success in communicating depends on using language that is relatively straightforward, and is preferably not saturated with ‘bureaucratese’ or other jargon. (As an example, ‘metacognition’, which has gained a fair amount of currency in higher education, is nevertheless ‘jargonistic’ to some colleagues.)



Leadership for employability

6. Develop a shared commitment to employability

Higher education institutions do not fit well into 'command and control' and 'technical-rational' models of organization even when the management chart seems to suggest that this is the operational reality. In practice, groups of various sizes have considerable freedom as to how they conduct their work. Developing a shared commitment involves negotiation and compromise, and some willingness to move outside custom and practice – that is, individual and organizational 'comfort zones'.

A shared commitment implies neither clone-like behaviour nor commonality of view – indeed, a shared mind-set can be a liability in a mature organization. Recognizing the autonomy of academics, the principle of subsidiarity should obtain, under which institutional components are permitted to interpret the broad expectations in the light of their own norms and values, but within negotiated limits so that 'ownership' is developed at the same time as coherence with the broad expectations is maintained. The possibility of a productive creative tension exists, but a balance has to be struck between cohesive advance and a tolerance for divergence and creativity.

7. Generate some early successes

A lot can be achieved with a series of relatively small activities – the 'low pain, high gain' approach. The managerial skill lies in determining where the ratio of benefit to effort is likely to be high. Successes that are relatively small in scale can be celebrated and are likely to help to generate momentum for subsequent work: as another truism has it, success tends to breed success. For hard-pressed staff, this might be the optimal way of increasing the sensitivity of curricula to employability. There is little to be gained – indeed much to be lost – by overreaching in the pursuit of change.

If the intention regarding the development of employability-supportive curricula is to be more ambitious, then subdividing the proposed development into manageable chunks has a similar advantage to the 'low pain, high gain' approach in that it also offers the possibility of establishing early successes. Phasing the programme of developmental activity, with markers or 'milestones' established to index progress, helps to focus attention and maintain manageability whilst moving things on.

8. Consolidate and embed the gains

'Chunking' the development plan runs the risk that, once a section has been completed, the gain is left to lapse as attention shifts elsewhere. The need is for achievements to be retained and built into future phases. The history of educational innovation is littered with successes that were not embedded by the time that their funding ran out, and consequently faded from view.

There is a need for the ongoing appraisal of practices and achievements, in the interests of enhancement (as all the 'quality gurus' assert). The temptation is always there to proclaim success too soon, or to take success in a few components as indicating the success of the whole development. Adopting a 'continuous quality improvement' approach minimizes the risk of resting on laurels. After all, a garden quickly reverts to a weed-strewn patch if it is left untended.

If pilot work has been reasonably successful, then the innovation has gained a toehold within the institution, even if adaptations have been needed in the light of experience. The 'rolling out' of the innovation across the institution requires sustained commitment, especially on the part of the person who is responsible for championing it. If the momentum is lost, then regaining it is difficult. Many worthwhile developments in higher education have faded away because sustained commitment was lacking, and/or something else demanded attention.



Exerting leverage

The senior manager can exert leverage on the institution in a number of ways, including:

- incorporating employability into developmental activities (such as 'awaydays') for senior staff;
- developing institutional policy (bearing in mind the potential connectivity of employability with other institutional policy initiatives);
- encouraging developmental activity at departmental (or other academic organizational unit) level – here colleagues such as National Teaching Fellows may be able to contribute particular expertise;
- seeing that employability is placed on the agenda of the academic board (or similar body) in the institution, and ensuring that discussion is given adequate time;
- working with those responsible for quality and standards to see that employability is given appropriate consideration in approval, monitoring and review activity.

Appendix 1 adds to these suggestions. It also, by implication, has messages for heads of department, programme leaders and module leaders.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing again that the task of the champion of employability is not to 'hard sell' employability to programme teams. Rather, it is to engage with teams in such a way that they reflect on what employability might imply for their practices, and that they develop these practices in the light of reflection. This is, after all, no different in principle from normal quality enhancement activity. If there is a difference, it lies at the level of detail – in this case, the focus on employability.

Finding out more

There is a growing body of writing on employability which deals with it in varying degrees of detail: a lot of recent material developed by ESECT and by the Generic Centre can be found on the ESECT website (www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT) and following through the links. ESECT is committed to working collaboratively on employability with a range of networks outside the LTSN, and senior managers may find it helpful to know that further resources will derive from this.

At the time of writing, the ESECT website includes *inter alia* the following:

Perspectives

- *Employability and students' educational experiences before entering higher education*
- *Transition into higher education: some implications for the 'employability agenda'*
- *The undergraduate curriculum and employability*
- *Employability and transitions from higher education to work*
- *International perspectives on employability*

Personal Development Planning

- *Using PDP to help students gain employment*
- *Connecting PDP to employer needs and the world of work*

Strategies for Employability

- *Enhancing employability: a long term challenge*

The LTSN Generic Centre is shortly to publish its Learning and Employability series of Guides, of which the first three are:

- *Employability in higher education*
- *Embedding employability into the curriculum*
- *Employability: judging and communicating achievements*

Book-length treatments of employability-related themes can be found in Bennett et al. (2000), and in two forthcoming volumes by Knight and Yorke (2003a; 2003c). McCaffery's (2003) forthcoming book on management may also be of more general interest.

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Appendix

Steps towards the promotion of employability

1. Use all possible opportunities to discuss what is meant by employability (a useful starting point is *Employability in higher education*) and how programmes can contribute to its development. Do not forget the significance of the co-curriculum.
2. Ensure that employability is written into programme specifications.
3. When designing them, make sure that new module and programme proposals are appraised in terms of their contribution to student employability.
4. Ensure that the contribution to employability of (a) the programme and (b) the main constituent modules is spelt out in student handbooks, on websites, in assessment and teaching plans, and in recruitment material.
5. Ensure that there is a variety of assessment methods in a programme.
6. Stress the importance of curriculum alignment (Biggs, 2003). In practical terms, make sure that modules – certainly core modules – have learning goals that are aligned with the programme specification; that teaching and learning methods mesh with the most important learning goals; and that assessment is aligned with goals and methods.
7. Encourage the basing of student projects on problems that can be represented as contributing strongly to claims to employability.
8. Use the government's progress files initiative to highlight the complex achievements that employers value, and which have often been rather neglected because they have resisted affordable and reliable assessment. Encourage colleagues to help students to translate their achievements into employer-friendly language.
9. Apply the concept of 'tuning' to existing curricula, since this has considerable potential as a powerful 'low-pain, high-gain' way of enhancing student employability.
10. Use existing approval, review and evaluation systems to highlight employability issues. A senior manager will be likely to address these issues in broad terms, and might gain an understanding of how employability is being addressed in the institution from, *inter alia*, student feedback data, annual monitoring reports, quinquennial programme reviews, and in accreditation procedures. There is always an opportunity to place employability on the relevant agendas.
11. At the institutional level, ensure that enhancing student employability through the curriculum and co-curriculum is evidently a concern for instructional and education development units, for careers services and other student support groups including, where possible, student unions.
12. In England, institutions are expected to show how their widening participation strategies and their teaching and learning strategies are sensitive to the mission to enhance student employability. This might imply making employability a quality enhancement priority.

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