

# Enhancing Graduate Employability: a case study compendium

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# Enhancing Graduate Employability: context perspective and compendium precis

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At the turn of a new decade, employability looks set to remain a central, if contested, topic in higher education (HE) policy and practice. In an unprecedented period of intensive academic discussion and policy development around teaching excellence and graduate outcomes, employability is a key concept in differentiating the value of higher education in supporting graduates to succeed and flourish in the labour market and beyond.

There is also a very clear external context for this accelerated activity around employability, stretching past the intertwined strands of government policy and the focus of regulatory bodies. Many of the anticipated indicators of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' are now upon us: 5G, fully autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, quantum computing and artificial intelligence among them (Schwab, 2016). Technological advances of this order will increasingly impact on the future of work: forecasts of the evolution of the labour market over the next 10 years must acknowledge as their starting premise our uncertain knowledge of what all the jobs of the future will indeed be (Wilson *et al*, 2017).

Consequently, it's important to understand and anticipate what this topography means for HE and to consider how, now more than ever, HE providers can focus on this shift; to work in new ways, to collaborate, to provide fuller foundations for continuous learning and, ultimately, to provide a long-term commitment to ensuring continuous learning through initiatives that recognise and enhance employability as part of the curriculum. Such an accrual of graduate capitals is increasingly recognised as one of the most valuable responses to the climate of uncertainty and supercomplexity students face (Tomlison, 2017).

Notwithstanding the fact that the notion and definitions of 'employability' have shifted over time Williams *et al* (2015), even when interpreting the term largely at the level of 'skills development' the extent of the challenge facing HEIs remains considerable. When Advance HE's 2019 UK Engagement Survey asked students to assess the extent of their career skills development while on programme, their rating of 49% (Neves, 2019) continued a relatively modest figure which has remained stable over the last four years at 51% in 2016, 49% in 2017 and 50% in 2018). The benefits of actively engaging students in employability considerations from the earliest stages of their programmes are increasingly recognised but it would suggest, from this dataset at least, that there is much still to be done.

Correspondingly, employability does not sit alone. It is important to acknowledge the wider socio-cultural context, including fees, student and employer expectations, labour market variations, social mobility, government initiatives and policymaking. Is the right mix of skills and knowledge being delivered to make graduates successful either in business or within companies, not only at local or regional level but on an international platform? Are appropriate foundations being laid for those students who would wish to progress from HE to start their own business? While only 5% of first-degree graduates are self-employed six months after graduation (HESA, 2017), many graduates will work in

micro-businesses, pushing this figure closer to 9% (Ball, 2018). The clear implication is that provision for employability must increasingly open onto provision for enterprise education and development of entrepreneurship skills with clear signs that success for both students and their institutions can result from such a sustained focus. Lenton's (2015) economic analysis of the National Student Survey (NSS), for example, indicates a trend for high NSS scores to be returned by third-year students on programmes where successive previous cohorts have progressed to highly skilled employment or postgraduate study.

Accordingly, the present work seeks to position a group of timely and innovative case studies in this context of an increasingly theorised and rich notion of employability in HE. Arising from an Advance HE symposium held in the spring of 2019, these case studies are framed by a keen recognition of the wider external factors which now command increasing salience in employability discussions. There has been a wealth of research (eg Purcell *et al* [2012], Pennington *et al* [2013], Mountford-Zimdars *et al* [2015] Office for Students [2018]) that points to employability opportunities being impacted by gender, race, education, parental education, and, more recently, geography (Ball, 2019). Recognition of this wider context motivates the wide range of employability interventions and pedagogies reported in these case studies, each of which is concerned to show how students from all backgrounds and contexts can be supported to develop graduate capitals that will carry them into workplaces as shapers and influencers of their settings.

Four key principles of selection underpin the case studies presented in this compendium. First, we sought examples of engagement with employability considerations at programmatic level where case studies which report on innovations and interventions within the context of a single module or in a particular year of provision show recognition of how wider curricular and pedagogic arrangements might be flexed and developed in the light of the interventions and developments proposed.

Secondly, we looked to bring together case studies which serve to demonstrate how disciplinary differences impinge on the pedagogy of employability, yielding examples of student activities that are specifically relevant to academic subject and disciplinary identity.

Thirdly, we sought to gather case studies which collectively draw upon a range of employability models, frameworks and research traditions in recognition that no single model predominates and that multiple and nuanced approaches are required in order to address the complex employability landscape outlined above.

Finally, the case studies gathered into this collection consistently demonstrate a notion of the co-production of employability interventions and initiatives, recognising that these can only be realised by a community of actors and agents, both internal and external stakeholders. This notion was central to our view that employability initiatives should result in shared outcomes for all stakeholders and are realised by collaboration and participation in equal measure: employability is not something that is 'done' to students, but rather a collaborative formation of a disposition and aptitude for redeploying subject-based literacies and disciplinary thinking routines and approaches to contexts beyond the classroom: "Employers aren't interested in what your students know, they are interested in what they can do with what they know" (Norton, 2019).

With these principles of selection shared in common between them, the 19 case studies collected in this compendium are presented in three broad groupings. The first group serves to illustrate the catalysing effects that can be achieved by proactive engagement with employers and other stakeholders. Here, Adelle Hulsmeier reports on a productive collaboration between a drama and film department and a specific unit of a regional police force; Catherine O' Connor and Jess Sewter illustrate how the development of students' digital capabilities in partnership with stakeholders and in the context of placement settings can address skills gaps and contribute to graduate capitals; Rachael Telford and Glenda Martin highlight a fruitful instance of intra-university collaboration between an academic department in developing the online space in which students can explore graduate destinations and engage digitally with alumni and potential employers; and Clare Forder and Julie Fowlie illustrate how sustained and managed student engagement with the professional networking site LinkedIn has fostered positive and inclusive outcomes for students in an HE business school setting.

The second grouping of case studies particularly illustrates the productive application of theories and frameworks to employability interventions. Here, Elaine Watson and Tom Turpie furnish an example of the creative use of the 'DOTS' employability model (Watts, 2006) in a humanities discipline, its domains of 'Decision-making', 'Opportunity-awareness', 'Transition-learning' and 'Self-awareness' being applied to the subject area of history; Kelly Goodwin's exploration of a long-standing employability initiative shows how a more general pedagogic theory, in the form of Biggs's *presage-process-product* model (Biggs, 2003), has informed and underpinned practice. Moving from the application of models to specific frameworks and tools, Lisa Taylor's case study explores the incorporation of an online career development planning platform in the health sciences curriculum, while Lisa Clark's study charts the fruitful use of Dacre Pool and Sewell's 'Career EDGE' model in a business school setting (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). Helen Cook and Rosie Meade's study details a nuanced application of the Open University's own employability framework while Andrew Buglass and Hayley Jenkins revisit the ePortfolio as an online space for nurturing precisely those skills and attributes of enhanced employability and enterprise that employers are increasingly seeking. Finally, in this section on application of models and frameworks, Laura Brammar and Liz Wilkinson report on the effective implementation of the HEA framework for embedding employability in the sometimes neglected context of distance learning, and Richard Sant demonstrates the highly congenial use of a Creative Attributes Framework for eliciting and identifying both employability and enterprise dimensions of creative arts disciplines.

The third and final grouping of case studies offer sustained examples of the development of pedagogic approaches that maximise student participation in co-creating employability initiatives and learning opportunities. Yvette Wharton supplies an illuminating example of an employability-focused module that draws upon both the spaces and the staff of the wider university as a pool of practical placement experiences; Kate Daubney's study of 'extracted employability' directs our attention back to the crucial consideration that pedagogy for employability is most effective when germane to curricular and pedagogic regimes, reporting on a coherent and systematic attempt to embed employability across the curriculum of her institution. Charmaine Myers and Ian Glover report on the development and implementation of a pre-arrival online space to foster the engagement and employability-orientation

of Level 4 students, while Anne Owen and Angela Vesey evaluate the sustained application of experiential learning theory in the design of an immersive and highly practical employability component of a BA Youth Studies degree. Rounding off the collection, Derek Raine and Sarah Gretton demonstrate how the use of a worked example and elaborated scenario as the basis for a workshop can promote wider inclusion of employability considerations in curriculum design and development; Iwi Ugiagbe-Green explores the pedagogic importance of concepts of student self-efficacy and professional identity formation; and Jacqueline McManus and Catherine Taylor show how a highly immersive and performative workshop format has benefited successive student cohorts in accruing employer-facing graduate capitals and developing dimensions of employability.

Collectively then, these case studies represent a range of stimulating, theorised and creative responses to the challenges of embedding and extending employability in the full range of curricular and pedagogic arrangements that students experience. Patently, no one model or framework of employability will prove efficacious for all disciplines: all of the available evidence points to the fact that there is no panacea to the many varied challenges around employability. While there is much that can be learnt from the sector, and these case studies provide an account of a range of interventions, we would urge that any replication of models and/or frameworks is carefully planned and piloted. This is critical for initiatives to succeed, both in order to understand the hidden barriers within institutions but also to aid implementation. Implementation is a critical success factor (Fixsen *et al*, 2005) and implementation strategies are often overlooked, in particular when replication is involved as the methodology will not consider the subtle differences of a particular environment.

In concluding and making way for the voices of our compendium contributors, we would emphasise two key emergent themes. First, it is patent from all of the studies presented here that employer engagement remains critical to meaningful and sustained employability initiatives. Such engagement at a structural level is increasingly apparent in the sector in the form of apprenticeship provision and a continued rise in work-based learning provision. Mirroring this level of employer engagement in the experience of full-time undergraduate provision necessarily remains a more diffuse and multi-faceted task. Yet the need to persist with fostering effective employer and stakeholder engagement is attested not only by the current case studies but by a consistent research base and policy context – as recent research reports on STEM subjects such as the Shadbolt Review of Computer Science (2016) and the Wakeham Review (2016) attest.

While employer engagement is important per se, it is clear that these relationships must be a true partnership. As some of the case studies presented here show, there is considerable value in thinking creatively about employer engagement, seeking out those partners who are best motivated to co-create learning opportunities and who perceive alignment between student outcomes and wider workforce development including, in some cases, the future-planning and talent management of their own particular businesses and enterprises. Thus, we would urge practitioners and curriculum developers not to overlook those employers and external stakeholders who at first glance are not necessarily drawn from immediately adjacent or cognate areas to your discipline – not least if the evidence shows that a proportion of your graduates will find work within a much wider field beyond



that discipline (eg 18.3% of language graduates work as professionals in marketing, PR and sales, 16.9% of history graduates work as professionals in business, HR and finance: Prospects, 2019). Engaging employers throughout the design process as critical friends is important but we would also urge an approach that engages employers as advisers beyond course design and validation/ revalidation. It is necessary to have a detailed understanding of recruitment processes and the graduate market, not just a series of meetings at the course design stage in hopeful anticipation that the impact three years later will provide a positive correlation. This approach will also lead to a shared focus on how employers can collaboratively nurture and develop graduate recruits – not simply recruit them.

Finally, building on an emergent emphasis in the case studies, we would stress the increasing prominence of enterprise and entrepreneurship in assessments of graduate-level outcomes and student success. 2019 has seen the launch of the Advance HE Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education Framework in collaboration with five sector bodies: Enterprise Educators UK; the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship; the Small Firms Enterprise Initiative; the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs; and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. As the framework and its reception in the HE community are already demonstrating, enterprise and entrepreneurship education can now, more than ever, be readily aligned to employability. The skill sets and attributes now characterised as representing an enterprising disposition – creativity, imagination, adaptability, negotiation, persuasion, leadership are largely cognate with recognised employability skills and attributes and are increasingly as relevant for STEM, arts, humanities and social science students as they are business schools. Indeed, the nurturing in today's graduates of a creative and agile disposition towards a context of change might reasonably be seen as a core obligation of the HE student experience. Nor should the development of this mix of enterprising skills, abilities and the associated mindset, simply be confined to undergraduates: such qualities are, of course, necessary and relevant across the spectrum of HE, supporting the postgraduate student to retrain for a new occupation, progress into highly skilled employment, or the mature student to upskill within the context of a portfolio career. HE providers and practitioners will do well to keep sight of this convergence of enterprise education and employability in preparing graduates to enter a complex, multiple and fast-changing working environment. Likewise, there are signs that students will be best served where educational philosophies of employability and enterprise range beyond disciplinary and curricular boundaries: we live in a multi-connected world and must look at how we set and design our curricula to meet this changing environment. The future success of the sector and its students largely lies in responding creatively and flexibly to this interconnectivity, developing truly inter and transdisciplinary approaches to pedagogy and curricular design.

In the face of this complex and fast-changing picture, we are delighted to curate this collection of case studies which we consider hold out the promise of solutions, innovations and new departures in employability. Presented under the three broad groupings of *New Forms of Employer Engagement*, *Applying Frameworks and Models*, and *Curricular and Pedagogic Innovations*, the compendium offers readers, as it has offered us, the opportunity to learn and collaborate with colleagues from a range of

HEIs and gain insight into a wide range of employability initiatives and activities being undertaken across the sector in the UK and beyond. Some of the models, methodologies and interventions presented herein may be novel *per se*; others may be novel within a particular discipline or context. It is our hope that, both as models of current practice and as exemplars which may be productive of further discussion, debate and innovation, these case studies will go some way to suggest emerging directions for enhancing graduate employability at the start of the third decade of the 21st century.

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# New forms of employer engagement

# Working beyond end-point assessments to deliver employability experiences: the University of Sunderland's crime awareness student film projects in collaboration with Northumbria Police and its Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

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## Background

The University of Sunderland has a sustained (six-year) relationship with Northumbria Police's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). The collaboration affords undergraduates from BA (Hons) Drama and Film Production programmes the opportunity to work on live client briefs and produce films about complex category serious crime.

Northumbria Police have commissioned 23 films, which have been produced by approximately 500 students contributing as actor or filmmaker. All the films address key issues of crime including capacity to consent; sexual exploitation; domestic violence; cyber safety; modern-day slavery and male rape. These films provide dynamic, reciprocal drivers of crime planning, education and training to the police and invested partners from counselling services, law, healthcare, secondary, tertiary and higher education (HE)<sup>1</sup>

Synergistically, the project affords students the opportunity to engage with employability-focused assessments that have the opportunity to impact society. Students have gained specific awareness of the needs of the policing community, which has reciprocally provided an understanding of their signature pedagogies, showing how film can tackle important civic issues.

## Methodology

Methodologically, the work is informed by career EDGE and USEM models of employability. It acknowledges that employability is not the same as employment; offering learners experience of a professional working environment in advance of graduation. The project reacts to Harvey's (2005) recommendations that little knowledge of the workplace makes it difficult for learners to adjust upon graduation. By working beyond end-point assessments and engaging students in employment-level professionalism as part of the curricular process the project focuses on developing the skills of students into graduates.

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1 Invested partners include: Changing Lives, Sunderland counsellors, Slater and Gordon, healthcare professionals (eg GPs, GUM services, university wellbeing departments, Accident and Emergency Departments).

Via the career EDGE model of employability, the project attempts to capture opportunities to develop transferrable skills that go beyond the student's subject-specialism and offers opportunities to develop levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-confidence. Procedurally this links student learning with external 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1999) building the confidence of students as active participants working with professionals beyond the university.

Recognising the recommendations of the USEM model of employability (Yorke and Knight, 2002), the project acknowledges the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders. The decision to embed interactions with live clients reacts to the overwhelming evidence for the value of work-based learning experiences (Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin, 2011). Through networking with agencies on a client brief, experiential learning is embedded into the curriculum enabling 'authentic learning; where the outcomes of student learning have transferability into real-world settings' (Ashwin *et al*, 2015, p16).

## Approach

The project is embedded into the TV Drama and Digital Fictional Film modules, which are taught annually from September to January. The SARC team lead each year on setting the brief and its specific crime(s).

An initial meeting between academics and SARC outlines the boundaries and future intentions for the use of the films, alongside specific support students may need (technically and in relation to the identified issue). Integrating wider partners into the team to act as advisors and to provide specific details on the issues has been vital. Key to this is providing expert advice for students in order to help create believability within the films. A typical example was, when addressing the issue of male rape, Sunderland Counselling Service provided anonymous scenarios of real crimes so that these could be used authentically in the films.

As an ethical disclosure, the films are fictional and we operate an 'all persona fictitious' disclaimer. The people portrayed are not based on real-life people, but are informed by anonymised case studies and student-led research. The result is a non-intrusive research method, which is the most appropriate format when capturing vulnerable people that the students have no consistent interaction with. We ensure that we work alongside our health and wellbeing department to offer students support from a team of professionals, should it be required. Our partners are also experts in the field and have experience in training and counselling.

Up to four visits from partners are scheduled throughout the 15-week module. These visits allow for discussions about the issue, iterative feedback on drafts of work and exploration of client expectations. It is the synergy between all collaborators, which ensures that students are introduced and exposed to complex and challenging affective learning, which is beyond the immediate parameters of their academic disciplines.

After filming, an interim viewing is held for the students to receive formative feedback. The students then work on points for development before a summative assessment of their work takes place.

The films are finally screened before an audience of invited guests. There have been speeches from key industry figures including ITV's news correspondent Alastair Stewart OBE, Director of Policy Performance and Scrutiny at the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria Police Ruth Durham, and Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Bacon, who praised the students' creative efforts and promoted the importance of the films.

## Outcomes

The material collected to document the impact of the project consists of audience observations, partnership feedback and student evaluations. Currently, we have a lot of qualitative data available to us, but moving forward, we are keen to access quantitative data (eg stats, figures, leavers' destinations), in order to make comparisons to feedback and outcomes across disciplines and in relation to other modules.

Experiential learning has helped develop professional and transferable skills, with demonstrable impact on the employability of graduates. One BA (Hons) Drama graduate, now training with the Bridge Theatre Training Company, stated:

“The film has helped me progress into a professional industry and it is on my showreel for agents and casting directors to view. Without this opportunity my experience as an actor wouldn't be as broad.” (*Personal communication, 3 May 2019*)

BA (Hons) Film Production graduate and producer of *Damaged Goods* (2016), about sexual exploitation (now a videographer and editor in London), explained:

“Producing a film for Northumbria Police was perhaps the first time I got a taste for what it's like to work on a client's brief. It gave us a more 'real-world' experience while being in the 'safety-net' of the university environment. It helped lay the foundation to how I now approach my freelance work, with the added bonus of knowing the work serves a good cause.” (*Personal communication, 3 May 2019*)

The project has had a wider impact on the delivery of modules and programmes locally. Professor Arabella Plouviez, dean of the faculty, commended the project as an exemplar of good practice “which has led to other subjects developing cross-disciplinary and externally focused opportunities.” (*personal communication, May, 2019*)

One example of this was embedding SARC and its partners into performing arts modules that focus on theatre for social change and devised performance. Modular study of devised performance incorporated interviews with a range of SARC's partners in order to help students create a theatrical presentation on issues including domestic violence, suicide, missing people and dementia. The performance on domestic violence was linked to SARC's partnership with Gentoo and Barnardos.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Gentoo is a housing association that owns and manages more than 29,000 homes in Sunderland working to rehouse survivors of domestic violence.

Following this performance, Women's Aid approached the university with an opportunity for students to become ambassadors for women who experience domestic violence, and one BA (Hons) Drama graduate is now a Women's Aid ambassador, delivering training on domestic violence.

We were approached by a team of academics from the Sociology Department who were working on a project titled 'Be the Difference', which aimed to provide 90-minute taster sessions to more than 300 students in their first year at the university, relating to safety on campus. We created three distinct films to run alongside the workshops in order to address the issues of discrimination against appearance, religiosity and disability. Academics across the two faculties then identified reciprocal opportunities to share best practice, with academics from sociology undertaking peer observations of a range of drama lectures.

Beyond the context of the university, the films are regarded as "excellent for police training purposes" (*Isle of Jersey SARC Manager, personal communication, March 2019*) and our partners use "the footage while training, police, probation, social services and many voluntary sectors across all our working areas. Having such footage embedded in our training to raise awareness to frontline staff has been extremely powerful" (*Debra Cowey, Changing Lives service manager, personal communication, March 2019*). The work shines "a much-needed spotlight on important issues and is an asset in raising awareness" (*Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Bacon, personal communication, March 2019*).

At its maximum level of impact and through reflecting on the societal reach of these films, Police Crime Commissioner Dame Vera Baird said:

"The university has not shirked away from responding to our briefs by producing fantastic films on difficult issues. The films transmit messages in a way that we cannot and will be used by Northumbria Police to share far and wide." (*'Winners of powerful short film', 2019*).

Having recently won a CATE (2019) award for the project, we are interested to see what other areas of academic research may arise from the project, internal and external to the immediate parameters of the department. We are in conversations with SARC in order to attend conferences more specific to the sector of policing, while exploring opportunities to disseminate more widely the relevance and success of this collaborative work institutionally, initially by undertaking conversations with other departments (including criminology, health and wellbeing and careers) to see where other collaborations may take shape. We hope to develop more research into understanding the full impact of this project for the students, the university and its partners; particularly from a quantitative angle. Ultimately, we hope to improve awareness around the important role projects of this nature can play in the propagation of societal issues and the teaching of relevant employability activities within HE.



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## Closing the digital skills gap

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### Institutional and regional context

A core performance issue facing higher education is the political and market pressure to deliver strong graduate employment outcomes, both in terms of jobs defined as 'professional' and the level of salaries earned (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, November 2015).

In a national policy climate dominated by market discourse (Ashwin, Abbas and McLean, 2015) and which deems positive graduate outcomes as an economic necessity, Leeds Trinity University (LTU) has been examining how it responds to national and local policy agendas to address the significant digital skills gap in Leeds City Region.

Pertinent local policy documents, including Leeds Talent and Skills Plan (2017–2023) and Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy (2018-2023), locate universities as key stakeholders and solution providers to labour market issues. The work of Adams (2016) outlining policy realms – explaining, framing and forming – is notable in presenting a perspective on the way policy positions are established and resisted at local level. LTU sits firmly within an enterprise educational ideology, with a strong focus on students as future workers (Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2011) resulting in a clear position to establish a positive response to policy rather than resisting an impetus that draws criticisms of performativity and its impact on university education.

There are four notable aspects to LTU's approach:

- 1 LTU is situated within Leeds City Region which is facing a significant digital skills gap (Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership, 2016)
- 2 since the 1970s, LTU has embedded compulsory placements in all undergraduate degrees, working with 3,000+ employers to provide them
- 3 LTU is working with employers on initiatives to address the digital skills gap
- 4 LTU recruits a significant number of students from widening participation backgrounds.

## Embedding digital – our approach

An employer summit held at LTU in summer 2017 to consider addressing the skills gap resulted in three actions:

- 1 the introduction of a new BSc Computer Science designed in collaboration with local employers
- 2 a light-touch approach to digital through employer challenges for Level 4 students
- 3 development and piloting of digital skills pathways for Level 5 students as part of a HEFCE Catalyst Project.

This case study focuses on the third action and associated pedagogical considerations.

The development and piloting of digital skills was informed by three key employer messages – ‘everything is digital’, not just the labour sector market labelled ‘digital’; willingness to learn new skills was perceived as more important than already possessing particular skills; employers were open to recruiting students from any degree background. In other words, while the sector might be called ‘digital’, employers approach recruiting staff from a discipline-agnostic perspective.

The development and piloting of digital skills pathways involved LTU working with employers to design frameworks for four different inputs – introduction to programming, digital marketing, web design and online communities – before inviting industry experts to bid to design detailed content. This approach ensured employer requirements did not just inform content but were embedded and central to the way it was taught. Once content was developed, it was reviewed by student evaluators and, where appropriate, refined in line with their feedback. The content and concept of what we were trying to do was positively received by evaluators, with some helpful critical reflection to refine the approach.

The LTU second year placement module provided the vehicle for delivering the pathways. Placement module tutors were tasked with contextualising the pathways through alumni and placement case studies and almost 500 students across psychology, criminology and sociology, sport, business, journalism, media and humanities were part of the pilot. The content was taught through two delivery modes. Most students had two-hour workshops across 10 weeks, with a mixture of taught content and self-directed learning. Due to project timescale constraints and the large number of psychology, criminology and sociology students, these programmes had streamlined input through half-day sessions.

Although the project was designed to allow students to develop basic proficiency in a digital skill, the most important outcomes were viewed as developing confidence in trying something new and understanding the application of skills within a professional context. The project was viewed through the lens of graduate capitals (Tomlinson, 2017) – human, social, cultural, identity and psychological – as resources which bring key benefits to graduates. Focusing on the sector’s largely discipline-agnostic approach to recruitment, LTU used the project to question the role of ‘new’ skills in the development of graduate capitals. Tomlinson’s notion that his model could help strategically develop resources to enhance the transition to the labour market resonates with LTU, where two-thirds of

students have parents who did not attend higher education, and it allowed a holistic approach to employability rather than the atomised and silo perspective which may result from an attributes and degree-subject approach.

So, if human capital helps to bridge education and future employment, could the digital skills pathways be a mechanism for developing new and broader connections? Could introducing new skills encourage students to extend their networks and, therefore, social capital? Could engagement with new possibilities within study influence student dispositions and behaviours – their cultural capital – and give them the confidence to broaden potential employment horizons? Would input designed to develop understanding about the breadth of digital sector opportunities encourage them to invest effort in developing further towards this, thereby extending their identity capital?

## Outcomes, next steps and questions

Reflecting back to the questions around graduate capitals, it could be said there were positive outcomes but they were certainly not consistent across the broad sweep and progress to a positive position was often bumpy. Our key learning was that contextualisation to programmes through professional examples and alumni case studies was not a robust enough framework to develop connections around potential future benefits or to deal with resistance to learning a new skill for 'the sake of it'. Tutors who taught the content reflected that working to achieve the 'lightbulb' moment around the meaningfulness of the content required much greater initial focus, rather than relying on working through the content to achieve the connection to future application and potential career benefits.

This has led to reflection around policy implementation. The university-business dynamic is a positive means of addressing skills gaps but operationalising this agenda requires universities to consider the place, influence and importance of students as individuals who need to be empowered through choice in the curriculum and critical and transformative approaches to learning which shift the balance of power to learners (Harvey, 2000). Telling graduates what they need to be attractive to employers is not the same as empowering and facilitating them to achieve their career choices. Drawing on the work of Jackson (2016), who viewed a focus on key relevant skills as narrow and failing to embrace the complexity of work readiness, the learning from this project is that, even in the context of a particular labour market issue, working to a one-size-fits all approach to graduate skills and attributes should not be the defining factor underpinning professional development and workplace preparation. Students will, undoubtedly, develop a range of attributes throughout their university life but the focus on encouraging them to be open to new learning experiences and opportunities should be core to employability pedagogy. Developing work-ready graduates who are open to new learning experiences requires consideration of the learning process itself (Barrie, 2007 and Holmes, 2013) and how students position their learning in relation to their future (Bennett, 2012). Future vision of self, motivation and self-esteem, according to Bennett, are crucial to students developing their identities and "creatively exploring their future" (p27).

Taking account of these views, the digital skills project has led to a major review of our placement preparation provision and to us redefining what our core offer should be. This will, in the future, be enhanced by staff devising a dynamic and engaging way for students to shape personal professional development through in-module 'options', including content devised as part of the digital pathways but reshaped around problem-based learning, as our evaluation has suggested this will provide the best means of engaging and empowering students. Importantly, our intention is to provide this development in such a way that students will be allowed to access a minimum or the full range of options, with three key principles running through our approach:

- + **connection** – providing students with the means to extend their network and workplace opportunities, to connect themselves to future opportunities
- + **investment** – both in developing opportunities for students through our employer network and in developing student motivation to invest in their own development through the pursuit of achievement via our professional development offer
- + **enhancement** – of our professional development offer to impact positively on the outcomes and achievements of students through an offer which is engaging, supports the application of skills and is a real-world approach to problem-based learning.

In conclusion, while our case study is focused on a single institution and particular circumstances, there is an important broader consideration around the speed of response to labour market issues versus the need to embed that response meaningfully into the student journey.

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# Ulster University's collaborative partnership approach to enhancing the employability journeys of its sports students

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## Background

This case study details the partnership that exists between the School of Sport and the Employability and Careers team at Ulster University. In partnership a range of bespoke employability enhancing activities are delivered to our students. For example, UUCreate, an entrepreneur training programme, employability modules embedded within course modules, a graduate transitions programme, a student leadership team, a student employability portal and the careers hub. Alongside all of these is the bespoke Careers In Sport website ([www.ulster.ac.uk/careersin/sport](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/careersin/sport)), which was created to enhance and facilitate the employability journeys of students at five different stages of their employability development, from pre-entry students thinking about studying sport at Ulster, through to students who are studying on our degree programmes, are doing a placement year or have graduated. The website was launched in November 2016 with the support of the pro vice-chancellor for education and is currently in its second stage of development. The website has numerous sections, all of which are designed to signpost students not only to our school-specific opportunities but also those within Ulster University. Furthermore, the website contains a graduate destinations map, job role information and graduate profiles of our alumni. There is also a live chat feature so that there is a personal and interactive aspect of the website available to support students as they use the resource and plan their employability enhancing activities. The website provides a launchpad for the development of students' employability by targeting sports-specific and careers information for each type of student at their specific stage of their career journey. Staff can therefore also support students on this journey in a more equipped and focused manner. The Digital Marketing team are also able to provide Google Analytics so that usage of the website can be tracked and reviewed. Therefore, from pre-entry through to graduation, employability enhancement is a central part of the sports degrees at Ulster. Indeed, all of the employability enhancing activities are developed within an Employability Priorities Framework and respond to Ulster's Five and Fifty Strategic Plan as well as the university's Employability Strategy.

For example, Ulster's overarching Five and Fifty Strategic Plan showcases how Ulster plans to transform lives, stretch minds, develop skills and raise ambitions of our students while encouraging a diverse university community and enabling our students to make a lasting contribution to society. The website therefore contributes to the civic contribution element of the strategy as well as the global vision and academic excellence aspects. All of the employability resources and advice on the website support our students to become contributors to their local communities through work experience and volunteering. It also aids the planning and exploration of international opportunities to help them become more globally relevant and transferable. A central objective of Five and Fifty is employment

and widening access, and the Careers In Sport website is a tool which focuses on this and delivers exactly what the strategy aims to do by encouraging students “to develop workplace readiness balanced with lifelong skills and to help to improve educational attainment and ambition particularly from communities that have previously been disengaged” (p8). The partnership approach to developing and implementing the website also aligns with the Ulster University Employability Strategy (2018), which specifies that the institution should “foster and further enhance the development of active internal and external partnerships to support student and graduate employability” (p19).

## Approach

The Careers In Sport website was developed in response to student feedback that indicated a limited understanding by potential/current students of the career opportunities for sports graduates and how to develop towards different career options. Other reasons why a website was chosen was because students wanted a portable, easy to access resource that had various features, such as the live chat function that could be accessed anytime, anywhere. It was also believed to be the best way to present the graduate profiles for students to access and then contact graduates via LinkedIn. Support from a wider suite of stakeholders, including students, employers, alumni and postgraduates, was therefore used to create an effective and useful website resource for students. Furthermore, the website is designed to help support students and inspire them to develop their employability in a way that is meaningful and achievable. We gained a lot of professional knowledge from colleagues and academic literature in the field of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) and student feedback, crucially as students themselves indicated that they wanted a resource such as this to help them. Academic, pedagogic research was also used from resources available from Advance HE, particularly the Employability Toolkit (2014) and the professional knowledge which supports this resource. Research by Lisa Gray and Peter Chatterton from Jisc, and “Enhancing Student Employability through Technology” in particular, reflects the essence of what the website is aiming to achieve – employability development right from the beginning of the student journey and that active and real-world learning experiences can take place through the links with our graduates on this website. The extent to which learners rely on technology is well documented and, as such, the development of students’ digital capability requires serious consideration and suggests that universities must take account of the digital landscape where students learn. The Careers In Sport website responds directly to this challenge and encourages students to positively engage with various forms of digital resources. Speaking on how universities should support the development of students’ digital literacy, Jisc (2015) reminds us that:

Support should be progressive throughout the learning experience but providing this as early as possible (ie from pre-entry to induction) is critical for managing expectations and initiating the processes of self-assessment and personal development planning. Digital literacies need addressing throughout the learner journey at the transition points between different levels of study.



The website is therefore used with our prospective students by linking with careers teachers via their EdLink platform but also through the Ulster Careers Teacher conference and through our marketing events such as our student advice days. This is the first time that a website resource such as this has included the Advance HE Employability Toolkit in this manner and has been a resource which links directly to careers teachers.

## Outcomes

<b>Successes:</b>	The Careers In Sport website was a finalist in the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) national awards in 2017.
	The website has been embedded into careers guidance programmes for 24 schools and colleges across Northern Ireland.
	The resource has been showcased at 10 open day events (prospective students, parents, career teachers).
	The resource has been embedded as a learning and teaching resource into all undergraduate and MSc sports programmes at Ulster (induction, placement support classes and final year careers modules).
	The resource has supported the development of a new career development learning programme for year two placement preparation.
	Over 50 Ulster sports alumni have created case studies of their career journey so far.
	Eleven new sports alumni have joined the Ulster alumni e-mentoring programme as a result of this website.
	The website has been viewed over 6,000 times.
	More than 200 students have engaged with the online chat feature.

Throughout the process of creating the website, we have learned many lessons based on feedback from students using the resource. These lessons have been focused on website layout, content development and new sections of interest. It is also imperative that there is school and university support to realise the full potential of this resource for other subject areas at the university. Furthermore, the rollout of the resource needs to have the right team of highly motivated individuals so that momentum is maintained.

## Transferability

The Careers In Sport website was designed to be transferable. When the webpages were being designed, they were specifically created in a way that would keep the Ulster Careers information in the same place on the webpages (so that this didn't need to be redone each time a new website was created) but allow other subject areas at Ulster to tailor their specific sections and change the photos/graphics to fit their subject area. The project has been disseminated at a pro vice-chancellor-hosted learning and teaching event (November 2016) and Ulster Employability Conference (May 2017) as well as at a Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP) lunch and learn session. As a result, the Careers In Art version of the website was created and launched in September 2019.

<b>Positive outcomes:</b>	The partnership approach we have adopted has enabled a sustainable infrastructure for other schools/subject areas to also develop and manage their own content for their version of the website for their subject area.
	Careers In Art has been launched and Careers In Psychology is currently in development.
	The resource supports engagement with wider institutional priorities ie recruitment, placement, outward mobility and alumni engagement.
	The Careers In Sport website has been endorsed by our external examiners.

## Snapshot of some positive feedback

“The careers website made for the School of Sport is really interesting. A lot of students wonder what you can actually do with your degree after graduation however this website is awesome! It breaks down and provides many different types of careers a graduate sport student can work in and understands every student is different.”

*Year one sports student*

“I found it very easy to navigate and everything is laid out in simple and easy to find ways. It is nice that it exists to help students plan their future in a modern way.”

*Final year sports student*

“It is a truly remarkable piece of work, intuitively designed and easy to navigate and it does one great thing that we don't do enough – highlight the terrific experiences and adventures of our graduates.”

*Dr Paul Kitchin, lecturer in sports management, School of Sport*

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# Employability for all: how focusing on pre-professional identity formation can boost inclusivity

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## Background

This case study outlines how drawing upon pre-professional identity formation (Jackson, 2016) and two associated concepts: graduate capital building (Tomlinson, 2017) and ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) were applied to build a framework to better support students’ employability and career development. It also explains how LinkedIn was used as a practical mechanism to achieve this. Situated in a business school setting with a current focus on reducing differential outcome gaps between white and black and minority ethnic (BAME) students (UUK/NUS, 2019), it looks at recent debates within the employability agenda and suggests ensuring access to communities of practice, focusing on building capital and concentrating on identity development rather than a skills-based approach, is not only critical but more inclusive.

Employability is a difficult concept to characterise (Pegg *et al*, 2012). The literature in this area reveals many different definitions, ranging from ‘work-readiness’ (Archer and Davison, 2008; Mason *et al*, 2009); to ‘the set of achievements...that makes [students] more likely to gain employment and be successful...’ (Knight and Yorke, 2003, p5). Conversely, Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011, p564) maintain that the skills approach does not do justice to the complexity of ‘graduateness’, arguing instead for a focus on identity. Jackson (2016) also suggests that a skills-list approach is too narrow. She calls for redefining employability to include pre-professional identity formation so that students can develop an “understanding of and connection with the skills, qualities, conduct, culture and ideology of [their] intended profession” (Jackson, 2016, p926).

This approach allows for more agency within the employability context when compared to attempts to fit students into institutionally defined concepts of ‘work-readiness’ (Daniels and Brooker, 2014). It also encourages self-reflection, something we argue is vital to revising the pedagogy of employability (Fowlie and Forder, 2019b). Yet inherent in these arguments are assumptions that students are aware of the need and understand how to develop their pre-professional identity. Further, it assumes an equality of access to the contexts in which this development typically takes place (Barbarà-i-Molinero *et al*, 2017). Research shows how BAME students are very often subject to social disadvantage and structural inequality (Burke, 2015; Tatlow, 2015). In relation to employability and career development, these disadvantages and inequalities can be felt in areas such as access to industry contacts, understanding how to articulate experience or being in a position to undertake a placement (Smith, 2017).

To go some way towards combating this and to further underpin pre-professional identity development, we turn to Tomlinson's (2017) model of graduate capitals. Here, the "limited efficacy of skills initiatives on graduates' future employability" (p340), is reinforced. We follow the argument that the building of social, cultural and identity capital is increasingly imperative in familiarising students with the knowledge, dispositions and behaviours aligned to the workplaces they seek to enter (Tomlinson, 2017, p343). This dovetails well with Wenger's (2011) assertion that communities of practice inform efforts to create learning systems, connecting student experience to actual practice. Combining capital building with the exploration of an arguably under-used community of practice found among our Business School's alumni, we created the foundation for a project designed to support our BAME students' career development.

As a social media platform designed to support professional networking (Ryan and Jones, 2009), we saw LinkedIn as a logical means of bringing together identity development, capital building and connecting with alumni. While growing numbers of students use the site (Garcia, 2017), research has shown that undergraduates are likely to view it as something intended for those already in the workplace (Florenthal, 2015). Keen for our students not to risk missing out on its potential to act as a helpful resource in the areas mentioned above (Bridgstock, 2018; Slone and Gaffney, 2016), we sought to examine whether they held similar views.

## Approach

Predicting potential reluctance to use LinkedIn, prior to the start of the project we continued with the previous practice of connecting with recent graduates on the site ourselves. This was developed in an earlier study (Fowlie and Forder, 2019a) in order to create alumni profile sheets drawn from answers to a short questionnaire. We connected with 70 recent graduates and created 32 profiles, of which 22 were from BAME alumni. With permission to share these with participants, this provided a ready-made network for our students to begin exploring offline when ready and without yet having to create their own online profile. It assured them that people were ready and willing to connect, thereby moderating fears that no one would want to link with them and served as an introduction to how the site works. Importantly, it also familiarised participants with alumni they would later meet at networking events.

Mindful of not adopting a deficit model which assumed our BAME students needed to be 'fixed' in some way (Smith, 2017), we designed our project around a staff-student partnership model (Bovill *et al*, 2016). This allowed for participants to shape the content and direction of the intervention without expecting them to fit into a fully pre-determined programme of activities based on presumed student need. Following institution-level ethical clearance, this began with inviting Level 5 (second-year undergraduate) students identifying as BAME to participate in a broadly termed 'Career Development and Success' project. The response rate was low at 14% (n=35) but above the 10% target we had set to make the project viable.

To inform content and structure, initial baseline data was collected in January 2019 through a series of focus groups and analysed thematically to identify three core areas participants articulated as problematic: confidence; knowing how to stand out; not having any connections (compared to white students). In parallel, participants were introduced to the concept of pre-professional identity development. Although confident in guessing what this might entail, none were familiar with the idea. Further discussion sessions explored this in more detail, provoking debate on how working towards creating such an identity might contribute to alleviating the issues raised in the focus groups. To do this, participants proposed small group sessions on preparing CVs and cover letters, an introduction to LinkedIn and opportunities to network with recent graduates from their courses. A total of 21 students (62%) participated in at least one activity, with almost 50% attending three or more. This aligned well with the students' preparation for seeking and undertaking work placements or shorter-term internships and was viewed by participants as an additional means of learning how to develop their overall employability.

Between January and May 2019, 12 events were offered to participants, including those mentioned and with the addition of a LinkedIn profile photoshoot (through liaison with our Careers Service), a placements application masterclass, and a local placements fair. Other opportunities specifically for BAME students but provided by other organisations were also signposted, such as a creative industries' showcase event at a well-known national broadcaster's headquarters.

## Outcomes

The outcomes of this project are many and varied. Returning to Tomlinson's (2017) ideas of building graduate capital instead of focusing on possession of skills, we were able to focus on more inclusive approaches to employability and career development by understanding where our BAME students felt gaps existed in their own capital and providing means to address this. By engaging with Wenger's (1998, 2011) concept of 'communities of practice' we were also able to facilitate introductions to alumni through career networking events and new alumni networks through the examination of offline and online profiles. This opened up a new community to support participants' career exploration, providing the necessary element of agency in the process of identity development that we and others (Artess *et al*, 2017; Daniels and Brooker, 2014; Fowlie and Forder, 2019b) argue is more valuable in enhancing students' employability than the more restrictive possession of graduate skills or attributes.

Competing views are expressed in current literature around how students begin to develop their professional identities. Barbarà-i-Molinero *et al* (2017) for example, maintain that this begins as students are exposed to the world views, theories and skills embedded within their intended profession; whereas Bowen (2018) contends that there is a gap in our understanding of how students think about

becoming a professional. Our project answers this to some extent by showing how encouraging use of LinkedIn and networking online and in person with alumni enabled participants to start thinking more specifically about their professional identity. We noted an increase of 38% in the number of participants with a LinkedIn profile compared to those who had one before the start of the project. Similarly, we saw that over 50% of participants claimed connections with alumni at the end of the intervention compared to all who stated they had none at the beginning. With recent Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2017) data for 2016/17 showing a gap of 6% in full-time employment status between white and black and Asian (8%) students, encouraging practical means of identity creation, professional online networking, skills auditing and career exploration is vital to not only creating inclusive employability practices but helping students visualise themselves in their intended profession. At the end of the project, students were asked if participating had helped them. Their feedback shows how they have begun to explore and visualise their future careers and the pathways towards them:

“Meeting the alumni allowed me to understand that I can’t just limit myself to one job role, in one department. I have the ability to use my degree in a variety of industries and job roles.”

“Being part of this group gave me access to so many amazing opportunities and useful resources, and helped build my confidence.”

“The project has...helped me develop key areas within the recruiting process where I have struggled before...and helped me develop a [LinkedIn] profile which I’m now not afraid to share with potential employers.”

“The project has helped me open my eyes. Seeing other students exactly like me going through the same struggle has made me...not lose heart with just a few failed or rejected outcomes.”

“I would recommend [more students] being taught how to reach out privately to alumni for opportunities and to show independence and out-of-the-box thinking.”

Finally, while recognising the limitations of a small-scale project such as ours, we do suggest that this is a study that can be easily replicated within different disciplines and among different cohorts. The value of this approach is that it is driven by student need and retains inclusivity throughout, steering clear of assumed deficit models. As we prepare to embed the practice created further, we have successfully invited four other schools within our institution to collaborate with us. Developing the project on this far wider scale will allow us to look even more closely at specific issues relating to BAME students across the university. We will retain the specific focus on employability and continue using LinkedIn not only to practically fulfil the theoretical concept of pre-professional identity formation but also to boost student engagement.

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# Applying frameworks and models

# Putting historians into work. A discipline-specific example of embedding employability at the centre of the student lifecycle in Higher Education

**Elaine Watson**, Employability and Skills Officer, University of Stirling

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## Introduction

This paper will explore the development and delivery of a history discipline-specific employability module at the University of Stirling (UofS). The UofS aims to create an innovative curriculum and student experience that embeds employability practice from pre-arrival through to graduation (University of Stirling, 2016). This paper will focus on the creation and development of a specific employability-focused module, **Back to the Future – Putting History and Heritage to Work**, within the degree subject area of history and heritage in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. This is the first occasion at Stirling when a non-vocational subject area has blended the teaching of employability skills with the academic subject area enabling students to gain academic credit. This paper will explore the institutional context and frameworks used in the development of the course, explain how it works in practice and discuss the challenges and lessons garnered from three years of successfully and effectively embedding an employability module in the student lifecycle.

## Background

The University of Stirling was the first university in Scotland to devise and deliver credit-bearing employability modules to undergraduate students. The first modules, launched more than 20 years ago by the Career and Employability Service, were available to all second-year undergraduate students. These Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 8 modules, delivered by Career and Employability Service staff outside of the degree subject area, were studied by the students as an elective option. They were based on the Career Development Learning framework: DOTS model (Watts, 2006). This model remains as one of the most recognisable, robust, tried and tested frameworks within the employability landscape. “The value of the DOTs model lies in its simplicity, as it allows individuals to organise a great deal of the complexity of career development learning into a manageable framework.” (Law and Watts, 1977, 1996). As the Back to the Future module is delivered by history and heritage academic teaching staff and not career and employability specialists, it provides a clear structure to enable the blending of subject-specific material along with employability topics in a clear and easy to navigate format to achieve the desired learning outcomes for the module.

While the DOTs model has had its critics in recent years, and a wide range of other models have emerged (Career EDGE model, SOAR model to name a few), the DOTS model remains a firm foundation of much of the work that currently underpins employability pedagogy within many HEI’s across the UK and thus was the preferred model upon which to build the Back to the Future module.

Research undertaken at the University of Dundee confirms the value of such modules within the academic curriculum: “Partaking in credit-bearing careers education has an encouraging effect on the likelihood of a positive graduate destination as defined by HESA” (Higher Education Careers Service Unit, [HECSU] 2019). Additional benefits of employability and career learning through accredited modules points to “increased levels of confidence and a feeling among students who choose these modules of being more ready to graduate” (HECSU, 2019).

While the Career and Employability Service no longer offers employability modules centrally, an adaptation of this module has been developed and delivered by Elaine Watson (EW), the employability and skills officer within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities – the **Career Launchpad** module. This module remains an elective module available to all second-year undergraduate students across the faculty.

While elective modules such as this provide an opportunity to some students to undertake career and employability learning within the curriculum – for students of some subject discipline areas there can be difficulty in finding space in the ‘crowded curriculum’ (Dickinson and Griffiths, 2015) to elect to study options outside their degree discipline in order to gain the benefits that modules such as these can bring.

## Approach

To meet this challenge, academic staff in the department of History and Heritage developed a compulsory credit-bearing module in 2016 aimed at all second-year undergraduate history and heritage students. Working in partnership with the employability and skills officer in the faculty (EW), along with support from the Careers and Employability Service, and drawing upon the key features of the stand-alone model that had been tried and tested over many years, academic staff sought to blend academic learning and intellectual content from the students’ home discipline with career theory and practical activities.

The resultant *Back to the Future* module provides an additional and alternative avenue for employability learning that, importantly, may not have been available to students who are unable to accommodate the stand-alone version in their timetable. Catering for the needs of students who otherwise may miss out on the opportunity to benefit from such a module is an attractive proposition.

To achieve this discipline focus, *Back to the Future* uses the overarching theme of ‘public history’ and a structure based on combining key employability skills (CV writing, production of online profiles, self-reflection and awareness) with a focus on the six core job sectors in which history graduates in the UK are most commonly employed – heritage, museums, archives, education, historical consultancy and media (Banner, 2010). Public history, the guiding theme, refers to both the range of public forums (museums, heritage sites, TV and film) and activities (community history and archeology, genealogy) in which the past plays a central role and a conscious practice or strand within the history discipline (Jordanova, 2006, pp126-149). The debates and theories current within public history, particularly in regard to the role and use of the past in the present and future, provide the

module with a theoretical strand that connects all the job sectors discussed in the module. By doing so, we ensure that the module is not just practical, but has an intellectual rigour and clear connection to the student's broader history programme.

The module is structured around a pairing of academic lectures and professional talks by guest speakers. Through the lens of public history, the academic lectures provide a focused discussion of each of the six job sectors, exploring the development of each sector and key issues for a modern professional working in that field. The lecturers also signpost key contemporary and historical debates on the ways in which the past is used in each area of work. The tutorials feed off this discussion, using allocated primary and secondary sources and questions to encourage the students to discuss key contemporary issues related to each sector and to consider the range of skills required in each field of work. The academic lectures are complemented by talks by guest professionals given by representatives of each sector. These are intended to provide the students with direct and current insights regarding the job sector, drawing on the speakers' own personal skills, values and experiences, as well as potential networking opportunities.

The student's achievement of the learning outcomes of Back to the Future is judged through three innovative assignments that combine practical careers skills training, with a test of their discipline-specific skill set (see Appendix 1. Learning Outcomes and Appendix 2. Assessment). These include a critical review of online materials from archives and museums, in which the learners demonstrate their engagement with the theoretical theme of the module, and practical assignments that allow them to combine self-reflection with other employability skills (CV writing, career development plans etc), and aim to provide the students with experience of the career decision-making, as well as the application process.

## Outcomes

Student feedback on the module so far, coordinated by Tom Turpie since 2018, has been very positive, with end of semester evaluation surveys on a par with, or better than, other history modules (see Appendix 3. Module Evaluation), while the module has been consistently well received by the external examiner, who commented in 2019 that the module provides "exactly the sort of authentic assessment that will have purchase with employers".

Moving forward, we plan developments that respond to student feedback from 2017-2019 (expanding the discussion of non-vocational and academic careers with history in particular) and to guidance from other career practitioners (integrating alumni and industry/employers into the module). These latter developments are intended to enhance the currency, relevance and practicality of the module.

This model of delivery has been found to be workable within the curriculum for history and heritage students, providing positive feedback from academic staff, students and external stakeholders. Building on this, the Modern Language department at Stirling have developed a similar model – **Languages for Employability**, using the same approach of blending subject learning (in this case, language learning) alongside employability learning. This module has now completed its second run and we are looking forward to moving forward with its ongoing development. Additionally, we are currently exploring other

subject areas within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities that may be able to adopt this approach. Likely subject areas that could adopt the framework are politics and English studies as the structure of the module could be adapted to fit these subject areas with minimum alteration.

Going forward, it is of interest to find out what the impact of this module has been on the students who have studied it. Future plans to track the students via the **Careers Registration Questionnaire** (Higher Education Academy, 2018) that is used by the University of Stirling to look at the career development of students at each stage of their undergraduate studies is one area of future potential focus. Additionally, the destinations of students upon graduation via the results of the national **Graduate Outcomes Survey** (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019) may be a source of information in relation to the longitudinal benefits of embedding of employability within the curriculum in this way.

## Appendix 1

### Learning outcomes and employability skills

<b>LO1</b>	Show an understanding of how history and heritage inform various aspects of economy and society.
<b>LO2</b>	An understanding of how historical knowledge, understanding and skills inform specific professional sectors and areas of employment.
<b>LO3</b>	An understanding of how changing politics, priorities, policies and technologies can impact on these sectors and their use of history and heritage.
<b>LO4</b>	A knowledge of the qualifications, skills and values associated with a number of specific job sectors and the academic and practical career pathways associated with these sectors.

This module offers opportunities to develop the following employability skills.

<b>Work-related learning</b>	Guest lecturers from business and industry (private/public/third sector)
<b>Reflective practice</b>	An opportunity for students to reflect on their skills development and how they have developed knowledge and understanding within the module. Opportunity to articulate reflections either verbally or in written format.
<b>Career planning development</b>	Career planning and job hunting CV preparation

## Appendix 2

### Assessment

Description	Weighting	Employability skill sets
<p><b>Assignment 1:</b> Critical review of online public-facing archive/museum material (max 1,500 words, excluding footnotes and references)</p>	35%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>{Analysing and investigation</li> <li>{Critical thinking/reflection</li> <li>{Constructing an argument</li> <li>{Planning and organising</li> <li>{Discipline knowledge</li> <li>{Written communication</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assignment 2:</b> CV and LinkedIn profile (CV – max 2 pages; LinkedIn profile (max 500 words, excluding footnotes and references)</p>	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>{Planning and organising</li> <li>{Written communication</li> <li>{Presentation and design</li> <li>{Knowledge of employability and professional profiling</li> <li>{Self-reflection and understanding</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assignment 3:</b> Job study and career development plan (max 1,500 words, excluding footnotes and references)</p>	35%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>{Critical thinking/reflection</li> <li>{Investigating sources</li> <li>{Planning and organising</li> <li>{Time management</li> <li>{Written communication</li> <li>{Knowledge of professions</li> <li>{Evaluating argument/debate</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assignment 4:</b> Oral contribution in tutorials</p>	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>{Spoken communication</li> <li>{Evaluating</li> <li>{Discipline knowledge</li> <li>{Critical thinking/reflection</li> <li>{Constructing argument</li> <li>{Responding to questions and asking questions</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3

### Student evaluation forms

Answer to question; Overall, I am satisfied with my experience of the module  
(1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree)

Back to the Future; putting History and Heritage to Work	Division of History and Politics average (other pre-honours modules spring semester)
<b>2017</b> 2 Average. <b>79.5%</b> of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement	1.46 <b>94.16%</b> of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement
<b>2018</b> 1.6 Average. <b>93.1%</b> “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement	1.76 <b>89.93%</b> of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement
<b>2019</b> 2.1 Average. <b>80%</b> “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement	–



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# The power of employability-driven curricula to achieve higher education internal and external strategic drivers

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## Background

The United Kingdom (UK) higher education (HE) sector is facing multiple competing challenges and undergoing significant change (Universities UK, 2018). Regardless of this fact, the need to recruit students remains constant.

University recruitment strategies consider student choice, recognising that many students invest in a university education to improve their employment prospects (Bhola and Dhanawade, 2013; QS Top Universities, 2015; Orsier, 2019). The employability agenda is a crucial part of the new university agenda (Chertkovskaya, 2013) fuelled by the gap between what is learned at universities and valued by employers (CBI, 2018); the demand for higher-level skills (CBI, 2018; Universities UK 2018; Wade, 2018); clarity about which graduate skills are needed for success and specific employment positions (Cavanaugh, 2018); government policy stipulating that HE must meet future skills needs considered critical for global competitiveness and the preparation of 'all' young people for the changing world of work (CBI, 2018). Universities need to evidence that graduates have the relevant employability skills (Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guile, 2011) and future employment outcomes impact heavily upon the mechanisms through which HE is judged (DLHE, LEO, NSS, Graduate Outcome Survey, student satisfaction, engagement and experience agendas, league tables, TEF, student choice, recruitment and sustainability).

Student employability is factored into all UK institutional strategic plans. However, HE is a marketplace with clear 'product differentiation' impacting upon the value each institution places on the employability agenda (Stoten, 2018). Universities are also composed of multiple loosely linked faculties, departments and supporting services each with autonomy over their own practices and each department's culture can impact upon whether teaching is valued, rewarded, supported and funded (Gibbs, 2010). A disparity exists between academic views over the legitimacy of the employability agenda (Stoten, 2018), interpretation of strategic plan objectives can vary and the importance of pedagogy for employability can become diluted at the level of the individual academic responsible for curriculum design and student learning. If academics disengage, operating models to bring about change in educational practices to prioritise employability become less clear, with resources often lacking as are learning needs analysis at organisational, departmental, team and individual levels.

Considering the wide-ranging impact of undergraduate (UG) employability, one has to question why this pedagogic agenda is not the most imperative and heavily invested, nurtured and monitored directive from a strategic perspective for all UK institutions. It is therefore the purpose of this longitudinal case study and ongoing PhD to demonstrate the value of employability-driven curricular at the UG unit level to achieve HE internal and external strategic drivers.

## Approach

As a reflective teacher, I have distributed a student questionnaire over a 10-year period for the purpose of understanding how unit-level teaching can be improved (action research). This has also allowed me to determine if adopting a student employability focus as the foundation upon which teaching, learning and assessment activities (TLAs) are constructed helps an academic to demonstrate attainment of institutional strategic plan objectives.

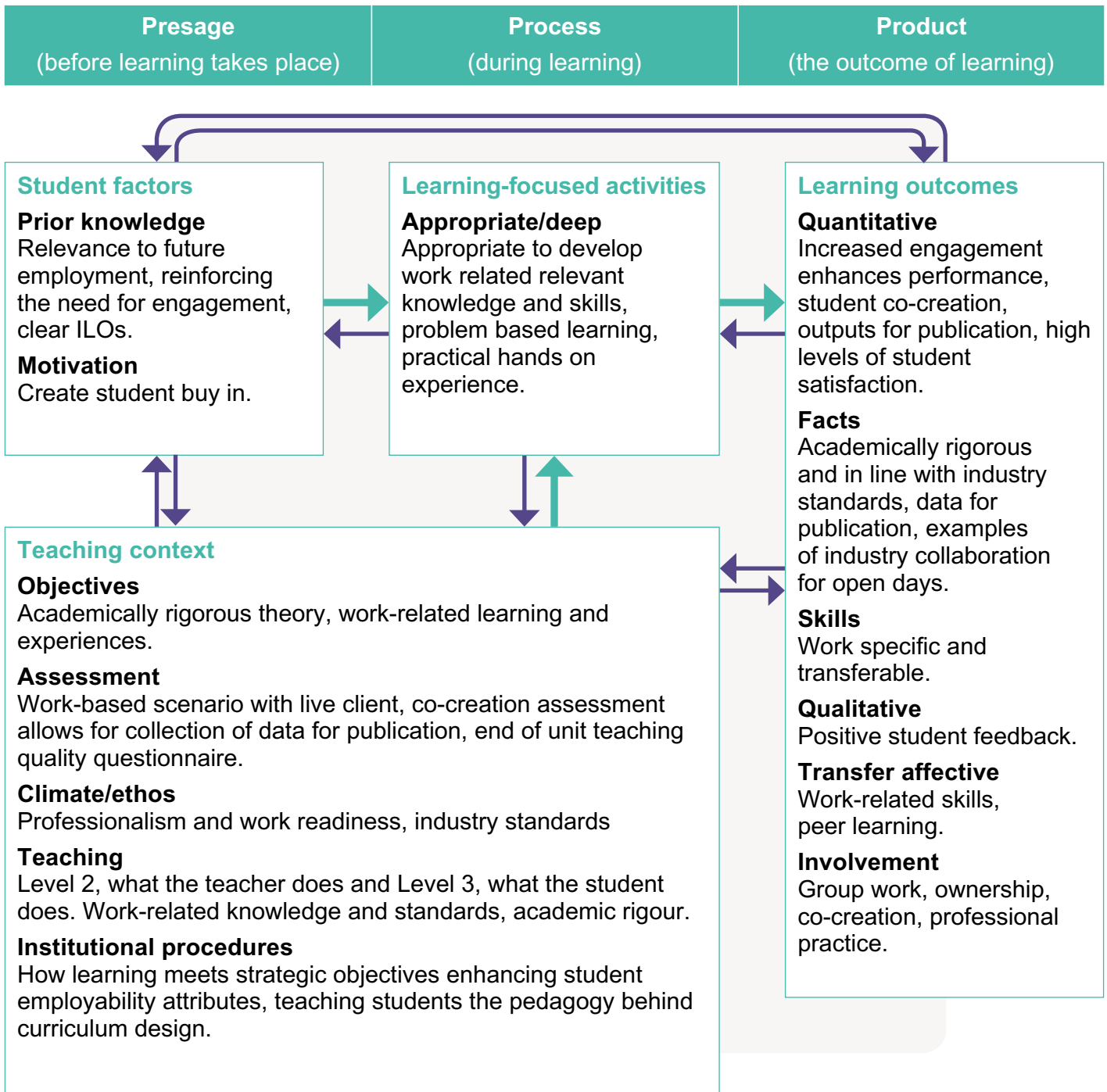
A continuous mindfulness of potential opportunity for research data collection is essential. Teaching and assessment that is creative and innovative allows for the creation of discipline-specific and pedagogic outputs.

A constructivist approach where knowledge is created by the students' learning activities has been adopted with constructive alignment as the main principle applied to ensure TLAs directly address intended learning outcomes (ILOs) (Biggs, 2003a; Biggs and Tang, 2011). Didactic lectures have provided the academic underpinning and, to encourage engagement, students are taught the relevance of the theory to the world of work providing purpose and meaning to learning: when students can connect educational material to the outside world, you create buy in (Wolpert-Gawron, 2019). Workshops, where skills acquired align to industry needs and standards, incorporate problem-based and experiential learning and allow students the opportunity to apply theory to practice. This encourages the development of work-specific and transferable skills. Local businesses and individuals with obvious links to the discipline were contacted for involvement during the assessment process.

According to Biggs (2003b), conceptual change takes place when 1) objectives are clear eg the relevance of the theory as required for a specific profession. When students have a clear sense of the goals of the unit and the work-related standards they have to achieve and there is a felt need to engage the task appropriately and meaningfully, deep learning is achieved (Biggs, 2003b; Gibbs, 2010; Biggs and Tang 2011); 2) students are motivated eg engagement will develop their curriculum vitae through authentic assessment working with a real client/stakeholder; 3) students feel free to engage with the task eg problem-based learning and, finally, 4) students can work collaboratively and in dialogue with others eg group work in preparation for authentic assessment and peer assessment.

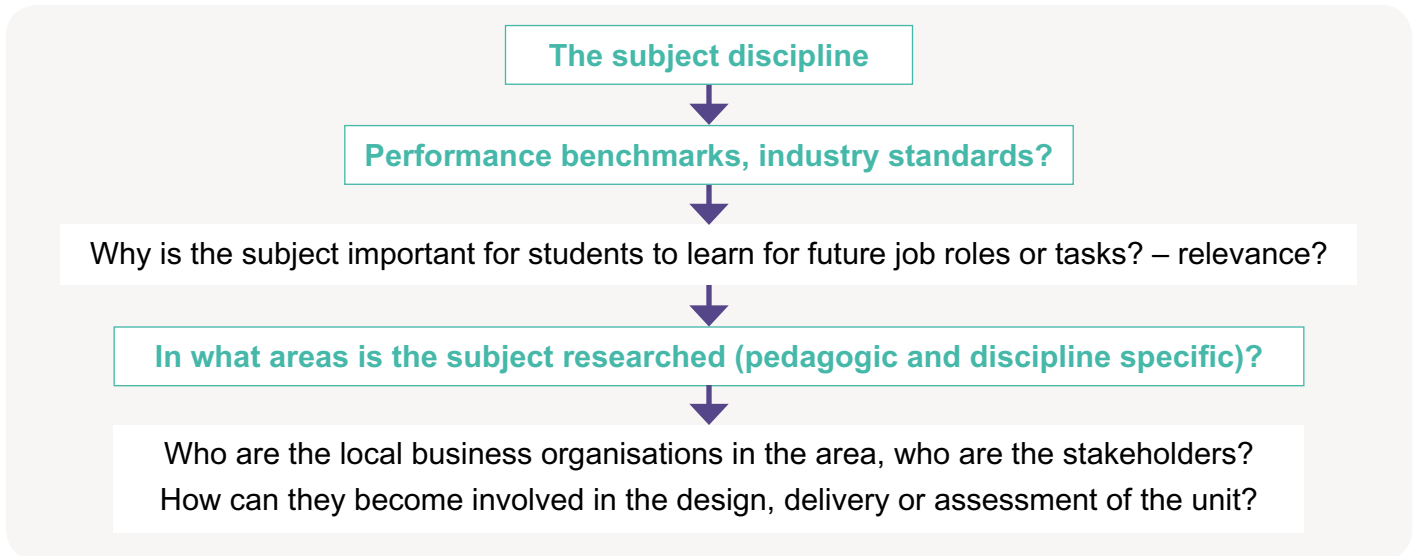
The constructivist 3P model of learning and teaching devised by Biggs (1987) adapted to include approaches to learning (Dunkin and Biddles, 1974) illustrates the value employability can have when included as a concurrent theme (Figure 1). This model incorporates teaching artefacts and factors, all of which interact with each other and assessment is holistic in that it is a part of the pedagogical model. The general direction of effects is indicated by the darker arrows, the remaining arrows indicate how employability factors connect to all aspects of the system.

Figure 1.0: The 3P model of teaching and learning (Biggs 2003b)



In order to encourage academic engagement with the 3P model and employability as the focus, curriculum design considerations need to be kept simple (Figure 2.0). The simpler the explanation, the simpler the product, the more likely it is that the output will be useful to others (Bjornard, 2019).

**Figure 2.0: Simple discipline considerations to inform curriculum construct**



## Outcomes

I propose that the use of pedagogy for employability at the unit level can evidence attainment of HE strategic drivers without the loss of tradition concepts associated with HE such as critical thinking, research and academic rigour. Employability should not be considered to be excluded from such concepts; they enable each other and can produce the following impact:

**Table 1.0: End of unit questionnaires. N = sample number, Y = years of investigation**

Question	N	Y	Findings
Unit satisfaction level (Likert scale 1 – 10 where 10 is best.	426	10	Average: 76.8%
Has the approach increased your interest in the subject?	244	6	97.5% – YES, 23% of 223 comments included reference to work-related learning
What aspect of the unit delivery have you enjoyed the most?	406	10	67% (283) of the 406 comments identified the work-related practical as their favourite (67%)
Did you enjoy the assessment with a live client/stakeholder?	426	10	94.8% – YES
Has your level of understanding increased?	426	10	98.1% – YES
Has the work-related learning increased your confidence?	323	8	98.8% – YES
Do you understand the units' relevance to future employment?	184	5	97.6% – YES
Do you feel better prepared for employment?	184	5	96.8% – YES

*Student recruitment, student experience, opportunities for work experience and institutional reputation:* evidence of students working with industry to industry standards is used during university open days to demonstrate institutional commitment to the student employability agenda. Students working with the wider community impacts upon identity development and student integration into HE and wider contexts (Evans, Muijs and Tomlinson, 2015). In addition, such activity places the work of the university directly into the heart of the local community.

*REF, co-creation, research-informed education and the PhD:* co-creation has collated sufficient data for three discipline-specific papers, two pedagogic papers, two conferences (BASES HoD Forum, Advance HE Symposium on employability) and informs the PhD.

*TEF:* examples of sustained positive student feedback, external examiner feedback (2019) promoting work undertaken as 'Gold Standard' and evidence of industry involvement are being used to support TEF applications.

*Student engagement, feedback and satisfaction:* Mid Unit Semester Evaluations (MUSE) use a Likert scale from one to five where one is best. Unit scores achieved range between 1.1 and 1.4. Students have awarded me nine 'You're Brilliant Awards' over an eight-year period for high standards of teaching and embedding employability into the curriculum. Table one includes data collected via end of unit questionnaires. Due to the duration of collection, student sample sizes range between 184 and 426. Questions posed aim to evaluate the employability-driven approach to learning and responses are consistently overwhelmingly positive.

*Graduate employability attributes:* work-specific knowledge and transferable skills are developed through real-world student engagement, teamwork, peer assessment, research activity, practical skill acquisition, data analysis and working with clients/stakeholders. Students state clearly that their confidence has improved, that they understand the relevance of the unit to future employment as well as improved preparation for the workplace (see Table 1).

In my experience, the application of pedagogy for employability at the unit level is a strategically powerful and frequently underused tool which deserves greater respect, recognition and allocation of resources. The principles of application of this type of learning are transferable across disciplines and will be vital for the survival and sustainability of some courses. If viewed as a high impact pedagogical strategy, this agenda could enable institutions to achieve strategically, not from the top down, as is frequently the case, but from the unit level up. To develop this work further, data collected needs further analysis and dissemination via research outputs. Completion of the PhD will add credibility to claims made. As a department leader for education enhancement, the underlying principles will be used to mentor new academics with the hope of positively influencing the metrics where employability is included and through which HE programmes are judged.

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# MyEvolution – from curriculum to career

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## Background

The importance of employability to the wider economy has been highlighted in the literature (Bridgstock, 2009), stating that universities need to be nimble to prepare students for a changing workplace (Clarke, 2017). Employability is a complex and fluid process (Harvey, 2001; Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Yorke, 2006) yet a skills approach is commonly used within policy formation (Holmes, 2001). The new graduate outcome survey may provide a more nuanced approach to what student success means, but does not entirely capture or measure the complexity of employability.

The pedagogic approach to employability used within this project supports the integration of employability with teaching and learning from day one. A lifelong and lifewide learning approach to employability assists the transition from studies to employment (Bridgstock, 2009; Pegg *et al*, 2012; Storer-Church, 2019) which is not always addressed within employability initiatives (Tomlinson, 2017).

Employability attributes, professional values and statutory requirements for professional registration/ revalidation need to be evidenced (Whitehead and Brown, 2017). However, students lack confidence in developing portfolios and self-awareness and management (Bridgstock, 2009) and there is a big gap between employer expectation and what graduates actually deliver (Isherwood, 2019).

The employability themes and issues presented in the employability literature provide the rationale for this project: to develop an evidence-based individualised tool for students to use from day one of their studies and into employment. This project recognises the complexity and importance of employability and continuing professional development in professional careers (Taylor, 2016). The framework for embedding employability in higher education ([www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education)) was used to guide the evidence-based case study process for this project.

## Approach

A stakeholder approach has been adopted throughout this project (the stakeholders being students, academics and employers) to ensure that the viewpoints of each were captured in the development of the employability tool. Although the focus of the project has been on health sciences pre-registration higher education students – the broad concepts of employability and career development have underpinned and directed the development of the tool, thereby making the tool generically relevant beyond the health sciences community.

Focus groups were conducted and questionnaires were distributed to capture and triangulate multiple viewpoints on attributes, qualities and activities that enhance the employability of a health sciences student or graduate. Thematic analysis was conducted, and employability domains were

generated, providing a framework to construct the employability tool. This tool provided an evidence-based, collaborative and coordinated approach to employability (Cole and Tibby, 2013) for students to use throughout their studies and into employment.

The results of a pilot and evaluation of the employability tool stated it was very useful, but needed to be in a more accessible format and combined with other portfolio-type activities which students are required to engage.

In response to the feedback, a website was proposed for students and professionals to provide a platform (MyEvolution) for users to record, showcase and progress their careers. The heart of MyEvolution is the portfolio builder which includes six areas of development for users to reflect, build and rehearse their employability evidence. Icons representing the six areas of development will be highlighted to students on module resources/presentations, thereby making employability that is usually implicit within the curriculum more explicit for students. The icons facilitate the link between the theory that students are learning in the classroom to their individual employability. Additional features of the website enable users to link and encourage networking and information sharing digitally, which is reported as important for career success (Bridgstock, 2019a; Bridgstock, 2019b).

MyEvolution has been market tested in three phases;

*Phase one* – proof of concept focus groups and interviews establishing whether the proposed website would be potentially beneficial to students and health professionals.

*Phase two* – focus groups and interviews discussing the wireframes that were developed based on first phase of market testing, giving more of a look and feel to MyEvolution as a website, but without the full functionality.

*Phase three* – product development of MyEvolution itself and user testing of the fully functioning MyEvolution.

MyEvolution will be piloted with student users from autumn 2019, and the icons embedded in the curriculum content, to make explicit the link between the theory presented in the classroom to a student's individual employability and career development.

## Outcomes

The impact of MyEvolution from the market testing feedback is that it offers an authentic and efficient tool for users to support their employability and career development from day one, as reflected in quotes from the market research report below:

“Many felt that MyEvolution would offer many advantages to both students and professionals, and help to avoid the duplication and disorganisation that can exist in relation to the training, CPD, appraisals, revalidation and collecting of evidence.”

“The portfolio was very well received, but the other functions of MyEvolution were also well received and positioned this as a tool for life, not just for the student life stage.”

The results of the piloting and market testing support the rationale for the development of MyEvolution, having a potential impact on a number of employability themes that have been reported within the literature.

The need for universities to be nimble and encourage a fluid process with employability is supported with MyEvolution, encouraging organisations and users to take individualised and personal responsibility for employability and career development. Employers are interested in what students can do with what they know and have experienced – MyEvolution provides a platform for students to rehearse and build confidence in reflection and self-awareness relating to their employability. MyEvolution provides a useful framework to support and direct employability conversations between academics and students from day one. The use of the MyEvolution icons in the curriculum resources reinforces the importance and relevance of employability to both academics and students. The use of a single employability tool provides consistency in the approach to employability that encompasses the key features suggested in the literature, thereby maximising employability potential. The opportunity to rehearse the process of professional registration and networking assists the transition from student to professional. The lifelong/lifewide learning approach to employability is supported in the design and application of MyEvolution. The digital connectedness opportunities that MyEvolution provides is not only beneficial for the user and their networking but also provides an online vehicle for higher education institutions to keep connected with graduates, which has increased priority with the graduate outcomes survey at 15 months post graduation.

Overall, MyEvolution has the potential to impact positively on the student experience – offering an individualised employability platform, linking the curriculum to the individual's employability and career. Although originally developed for health sciences students and professionals, the concept and content of MyEvolution is underpinned by generic employability and career development principles and can be applied to other student/professional groups.

## Next steps

- + finalise and pilot MyEvolution with all University of East Anglia School of Health Sciences (HSC) pre-registration students autumn 2019
- + roll out MyEvolution external to HSC.

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# Taking the leap – employer collaboration to improve graduate employability

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## Background

Newcastle University Business School (NUBS) is ranked within the top 1% of business schools worldwide, holding triple accreditation from EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System), AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and AMBA (The Association of MBAs). NUBS aims to become a globally renowned business school delivering excellence in the areas of 'The Future of Work' and 'Leading on Leadership' to develop leaders for a future they can shape. This is to be achieved through its mission of vibrant collaboration by driving excellence in research, innovation and education to create opportunities for students, staff and partners to shape business and society in future (NUBS, 2019).

To achieve the mission, a key challenge for NUBS is to develop graduates who are fit for the future of work and provide employability opportunities to prepare students for careers of the future and those that don't exist yet, as well as preparing them to manage and solve problems that aren't even known about yet. This will also help to improve the perception of education systems not supplying enough skilled people into the labour market (UKCES, 2008). Therefore, the development of softer and more transferable skills, knowledge and attributes becomes imperative in making students employable (Higher Education Academy, 2016).

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007, p280) define employability as "having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful" and a belief within NUBS, and particularly within the MSc Global Human Resource Management (GHRM) programme, is that employability through live projects within a social context is crucial in embedding employable skills/attributes (Yorke and Knight, 2006). In addition, teaching also aims to develop student autonomy in order to enable students to take responsibility for their own learning (Graham, 2017) and, ultimately, future development.

The UK has been suffering from skill shortages as well as employability skills gaps for a long time (TUC, 2006; Simms, Hopkins and Gamwell, 2013) and both NUBS and the GHRM teaching team recognise it is vital that higher education develops opportunities to transform the practice of employability skills development.

While graduate employability skills development is a school-wide issue, this case study focuses only on the GHRM postgraduate programme and adopts the CareerEDGE model of employability aimed at developing value-added graduates upon course completion.

The GHRM programme is underpinned by a graduate skills framework and, for several years, has embedded career guidance, personal reflection and reflectivity, extra-curricular activities as well as networking events to support the development of such skills (in addition to Master's level teaching). However, the academic year 2018-2019 saw the introduction of the option for students to apply to

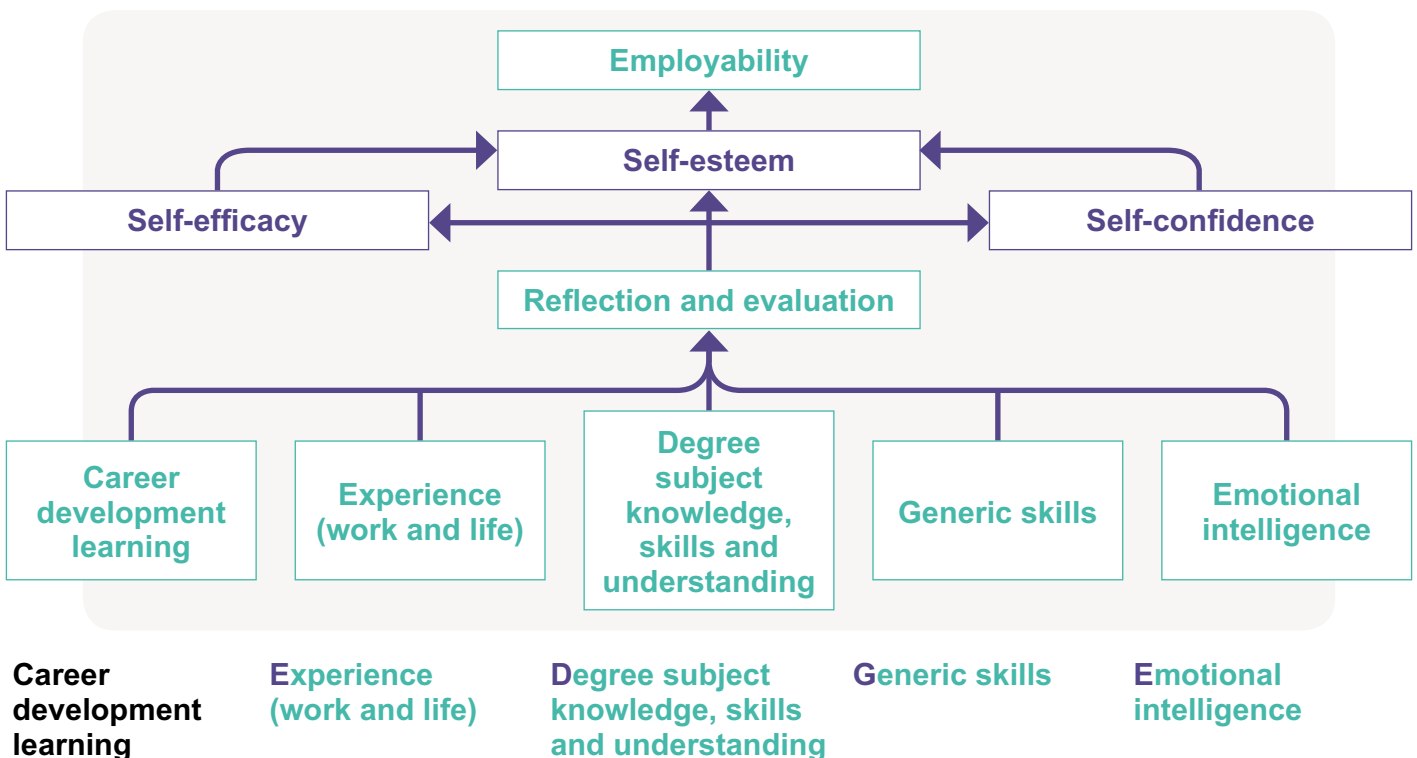
undertake a practice-based project where students work in groups with live organisational data on an employer specified project. The aim of the project was to: provide the opportunity to undertake a theoretically-informed analysis of a live HR-related business issue(s) and consider practical implications thereof.

The module was designed to support the development of graduate attributes by enabling real-life work experiences, which allow students the opportunity to improve personal HR skills and capability as well as researcher skills.

In addition, live projects are supervised by scholarly practitioners with previous industry experience as well as academic for pedagogy capability to support students during the process. Working on live projects in groups prepares students for the complexity of the world and work (Jackson, 2011) in which achieving project aims, goals and outcomes are imperative for business success.

The CareerEdge Model (below) guided the design and implementation of the GHRM practice-based project, allowing the teaching team to focus not only on subject knowledge, skills and understanding but to ensure that students are given opportunities to reflect and evaluate their experience throughout the project. This is in order to develop the self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence crucial for the transfer of learning as well as their own ability to recognise and articulate capabilities (Moon, 2004; Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007).

### The career EDGE model of graduate employability



(Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007)

## Approach

Who was involved in the project and what did this look like? What was the time frame for the intervention?

The practice-based project was designed in order for students to integrate understanding of a wide range of materials covered across GHRM programme, to apply these to a 'live' business problem, formulating proposals and recommendations for HR management action. This project also provides the platform for students to practice using graduate skills/capabilities developed and necessary to the workplace.

Using the CareerEdge model, the module involved a conference day where employers visited NUBS and students to showcase the practice-based project available at the company and answer any questions students may have.

Following this, students made an application to be involved in a live project, submitting a 500-word outline of what they could bring to the project, what strengths they possessed relative to the practice-based project and what skills they use to work successfully in a group and with an external client. Submission of the application took place in December and students were selected by the teaching team based on their application outline, 100% attendance and achieving an average of above 60% in grades.

Students were allocated to groups and nominated a client at the start of Semester 2. Students were required to declare any potential conflicts of interest with any of the 'live' business project/client organisations. In addition, students could highlight a preferred client choice.

Seminars were held during February to cover the project process as well as how to work effectively in teams. Additionally, site visits were undertaken with each group and their appointed supervisor to meet the client and key stakeholders and learn more about the company prior to beginning the project.

Three key pieces of assessment were designed to meet the module learning outcomes including:

Assessment Element	Weighting	Description
Research proposal	30%	3,000-word extended project outline
Report	50%	7,000-word management research report (MRR) in accordance with CIPD requirements
Presentation	20%	15-minute video recorded presentation of the practical implications and recommendations of the MRR in a style suitable for "client" HR professionals and business executives

Client groups provided access to undertaking initial primary and secondary research to assist in developing individual research proposals and subsequent group research activity. At this time, a gatekeeper was agreed as one point of contact and one student was selected in each group as a spokesperson. A confidentiality agreement was completed by all students and their supervisor and copies provided to each client. Furthermore, each group received two hours of group contact time with their supervisor prior to proposal submission.

Topics that client groups offered included:

- + implementing a reward and recognition programme across the company
- + evaluating the impact of a leadership development programme and making suggestions for future improvements
- + introducing wellbeing initiatives across the company
- + investigating how to ensure diversity and inclusion across the organisation with a focus on LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender)
- + designing a graduate scheme relevant and attractive to future graduates in four departments – HR, Finance, Marketing and Sales.

Moving forward, a network of employers is being gathered to expand the opportunities available to students with a future focus of internships through employer collaboration.

## Outcomes

Although the projects have not yet been submitted and marked, key findings and messages from the process to date demonstrates that this is a very popular alternative to what is traditionally known as a research-based dissertation, with over a third of students applying for the project and being successful.

Students have suggested they enjoy real-life contact with a live company and are learning more about the business world, especially during site visits and through secondary desk-based research, organisational data and primary data collection.

An unexpected outcome from the introduction of this module shows that some students used their initiative to speak to the client about undertaking a placement/internship and to date, three students have been able to achieve this.

Clients commented that they have been very impressed with students and their work and show great enthusiasm for the results.

Anecdotal evidence highlights that students feel they have developed confidence in working and liaising with an employer and particularly enjoyed the primary data collection phase. While anecdotally, comments have been made that this was 'stressful' given it is the first time that many students have undertaken primary research, there has been agreement that this experience was very rewarding when connected to a live project at an existing company.

In addition, students have highlighted that they feel their analytical skills, problem-solving, resilience, adaptability, ability to work effectively within teams and decision-making skills have all been developed and enriched – of which are all NUBS key global graduate attributes.



Comments were raised about the fairness of the average grade of 60% and some students mentioned that they felt they may be less employable if they opted for a traditional research-based dissertation by missing out on employer collaborations. Therefore, to ensure parity within the cohort it has been agreed for 2019-2020 that the 60% average grade is removed and all students must submit an application for either the traditional or practice-based project highlighting why they want to study that particular mode of dissertation, what they can bring to the process and what future research methodology training they may require.

Moving forward, it will be interesting to evaluate how well students have performed and there has been recognition within the teaching team that not all student groups worked in the same way. Some groups fell behind predetermined deadlines for collecting and analysing data and producing work for supervisors to read. Furthermore, the module was designed and implemented very quickly and further depth and detail within the handbook is required for 2019-2020.

As this is the first iteration of the module and client-NUBS relationship, the teaching team will be holding meetings to evaluate the whole process and make further developments for the next run of the module.

This case study aims to provide other institutions and teaching programmes with insight into how to create and build a live practice-based project to develop graduate employability and key graduate skills and attributes.

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# The Open University's Employability Framework: making sense of employability for multidisciplinary students

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## Background

We already know that employability is a key driver for many students when choosing their degree and that there are identifiable career pathways for graduates in many specific subject areas. However, identifying short- and long-term outcomes for graduates with multidisciplinary degrees is an area of higher education that is currently under-researched and inadequately conceptualised, despite increasing recognition that multi-/interdisciplinary solutions are an effective way to address key global challenges (Lyall *et al*, 2015; UKCES, 2014; Department for Education, 2018).

Although it is recognised that specialist subject knowledge is important for some sectors (such as manufacturing and engineering), the development of graduates with future-proof, non-discipline-specific skills is becoming increasingly important for graduate recruiters (Grey, 2019). For example, the CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Annual Report (CBI, 2018) highlights that nearly three-quarters (74%) of the businesses surveyed would prefer a mixture of academic and technical qualifications, or that they view all qualifications equally. The report also suggests that an overwhelming majority of businesses (79%) regard a 2:1 undergraduate degree (or above) as a good measure of academic ability, but that the attitudes and aptitudes that enable graduates to be effective in the workplace are the most important factor for employers when recruiting.

From a curriculum perspective, the Open University (OU) has embraced a multidisciplinary approach since its inception in 1969. The BA/BSc (Hons) "Open" degree was the only degree qualification offered by the OU for over 30 years until named degrees were introduced in 2000. This unique qualification remains the OU's largest degree in terms of student numbers and module choice, enabling students to construct a personalised qualification from a wide range of undergraduate modules across all faculties, and resulting in a flexible study path that focuses on personal interests and/or career-related skills.

In an account of his time as the university's first vice-chancellor during the 1970s, Walter Perry (Perry, 1976) captures the conflicting arguments in relation to multidisciplinary degrees, where critics of such degrees argued that:

...a student who has a free choice of courses that [s]he can take credit for is liable to end up with what has been called 'a miscellaneous rag-bag of credits' – a second rate degree with no internal coherence.

In contrast, proponents of multidisciplinary degrees (on which the foundations of the Open University were based) were of the following view, which is supported to this day by employers and academic communities alike:

“...a student is the best judge of what [s]he wishes to learn and that [s]he should be given the maximum freedom of choice consistent with a coherent overall pattern. They hold that this is doubly true when one is dealing with adults who, after years of experience of life, ought to be in a better position to judge what precise studies they wish to undertake.” (Perry, 1976)

Although we know that many OU students are not studying for vocational reasons, there is little doubt that universities across the sector must explore whether, and how, the majority of students are developing the right mix of employability skills and attributes that they will require for the future of work. Not only is this important for statutory reporting such as the Teaching Excellence Framework, but, whatever their study motivation, all students will benefit from being able to recognise the personal and vocational gains achieved through their studies, which in turn will support student success and enhance the student experience. Institutional research shows ‘that’ for more than a third of OU students, their study goal and personal definitions of a successful outcome are not to obtain ‘a graduate-level job’ but to develop confidence and skills, to prove to themselves that they can study, or to simply enjoy learning for its own sake and therefore enhance their contribution to society. These factors are equally important to many other students and need to be recognised in any consideration of ‘employability’ skills and attributes.

However, despite recent advances in pedagogic approaches to employability, tracking detailed progress and employability gains becomes increasingly more complex when students are given the opportunity to study in a multidisciplinary way and can personalise their learning by selecting modules across a wide range of disciplines, as in the case of the OU’s BA/BSc (Hons) Open degree. This case study outlines how the OU is assessing the extent to which employability skills are developed by students through this multidisciplinary approach, and how this evidence-informed methodology can provide an opportunity to enhance the embedding of employability skills throughout the student journey.

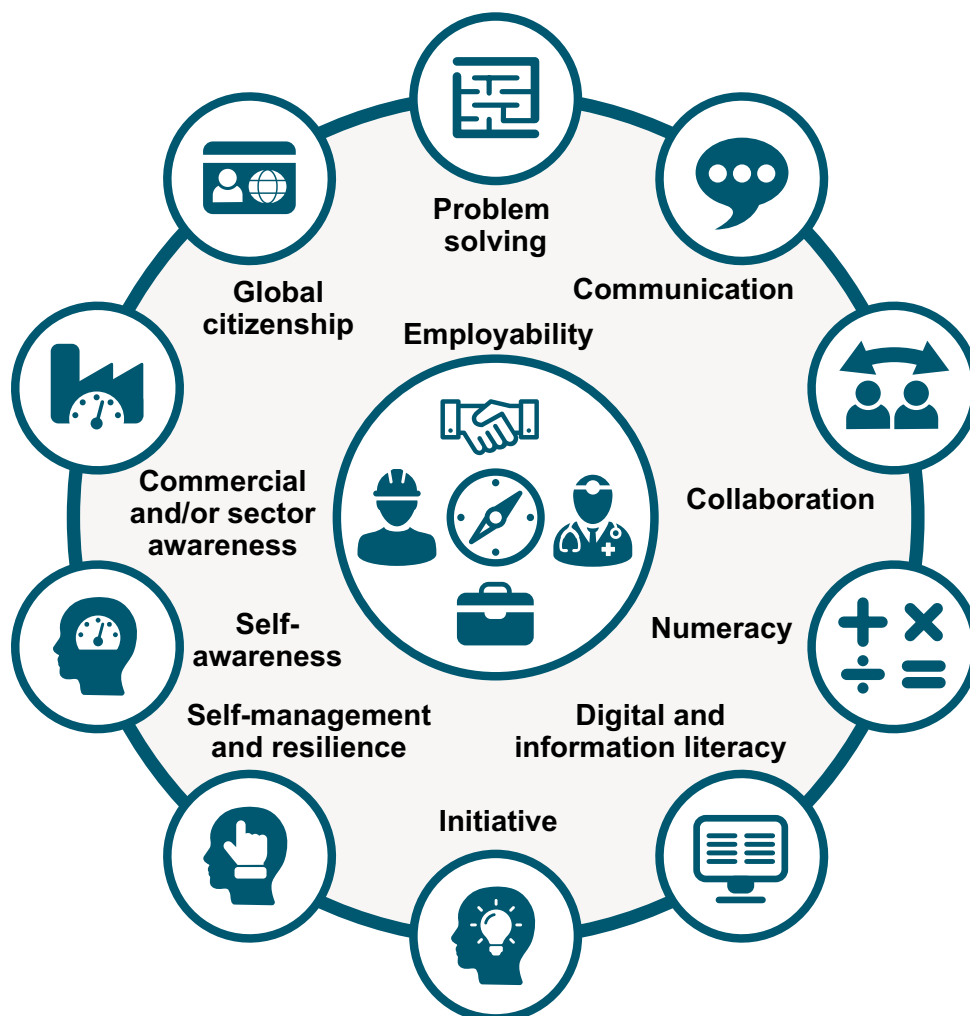
## Approach

The Open University’s Employability Framework (Figure 1) is a tool for embedding and making explicit employability within the curriculum and provides greater transparency in terms of the way employability is developed through a student’s journey at the OU. The Framework draws on key research pieces as well as pre-existing institutional and external frameworks (CBI/NUS, 2011; Australia, 2013; Clifton and Kellett, 2017; HEA, 2016, 2017).

The Employability Framework encapsulates the core employability skills and attributes needed by OU students to help them in their personal and career development, by enabling them to recognise, develop and articulate these skills and attributes they have gained through their formal (and informal)

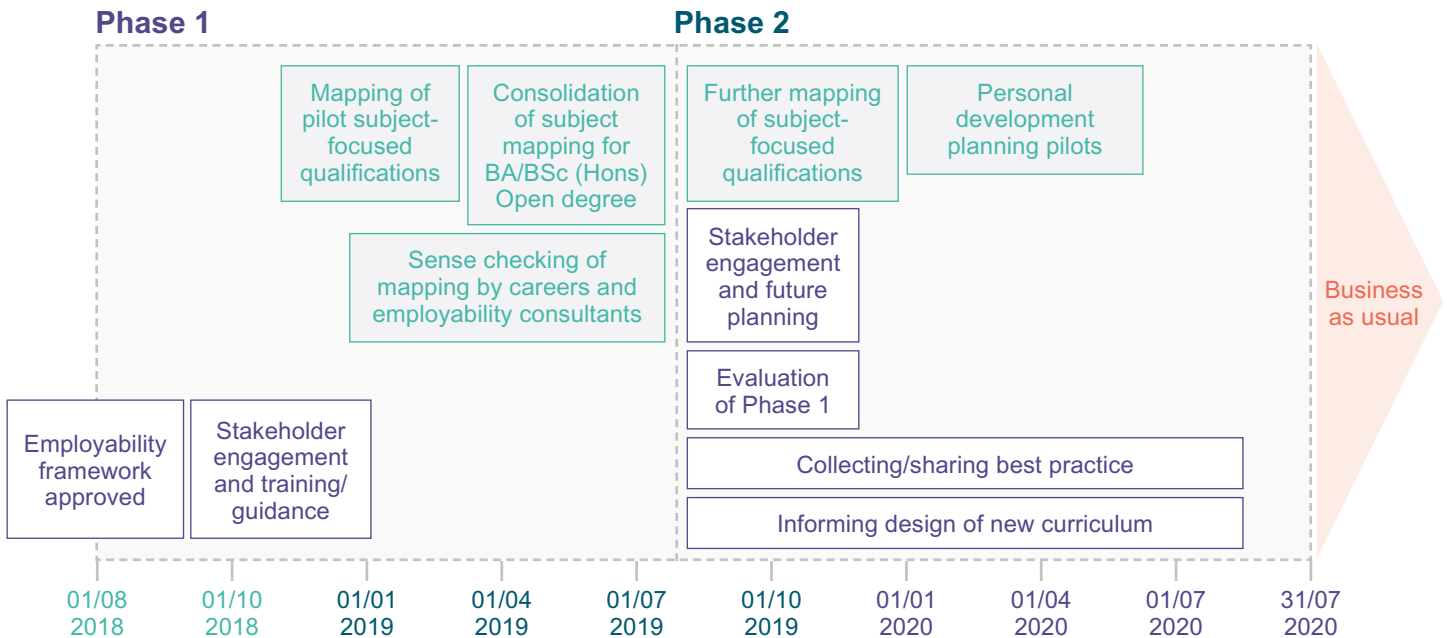
learning. It has also been developed to provide a mechanism by which employability activities can be evaluated effectively and to be used by curriculum teams to design materials that enable students to achieve this, throughout all levels of study.

**Figure 1. The Open University's Employability Framework**



Eight faculty-owned undergraduate qualifications were chosen to pilot the mapping of employability skills and attributes embedded within the OU's curriculum. The content of each of the core modules within those qualifications was mapped against the 10 elements of the Employability Framework by associate lecturers (OU tutors). The outputs were then reviewed by careers and employability consultants, as part of a quality assurance process, to provide an assessment of 'well met', 'partially met' and 'not met'. It was made explicit that there was no expectation that every module would contain every element of the framework but that there should ultimately be sufficient coverage across each level of the qualification. The project timeline is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. The mapping project timeline**



In addition, a bespoke mapping exercise was undertaken for the BA/BSc (Hons) Open degree to pilot an evaluation of core employability skills and attributes for students studying a selection of modules across different subjects and faculties. This involved consolidating the outcome of the mapping exercise for all the core modules included in the eight undergraduate qualifications into a skills matrix (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Methodology used to consolidate level of skills development across all pilot qualifications and modules mapped against the OU's Employability Framework**

Qualifications	Module	Problem solving	Communication	Collaboration	Numeracy	Digital and information literacy	Initiative	Self-management and resilience	Self-awareness	Commercial and/or sector awareness	Global citizenship
Qualification 1	Module 1	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
	Module 2	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
	Module 3	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
Qualification 2	Module 1	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
	Module 2	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
	Module 3	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
	Module 4	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met	Well met
etc	etc										

Well met
  Partially met
  Not met

A set of sample Open degrees was then created from the mapping work to demonstrate if/where Open degree students may experience gaps in the development of their core employability skills and attributes. By identifying these gaps, appropriate resources can be identified to help students fill those skills gaps. For example, students could be directed towards specific careers and employability related articles, badged open courses or specific modules that will help them develop specific skills.

## Outcomes

At the time of writing, this work is still progressing and evolving. However, the project team have already demonstrated that the methodology adopted is an effective way to assess the core employability skills and attributes achieved by a student at a module level. This can then inform the further development of embedding employability across either a subject-specific or multidisciplinary qualification in the following ways:

- + recommend revisions to module content where appropriate
- + collate best-practice to inform short- and long-term curriculum decisions
- + provide guidance and support for curriculum teams to further embed employability within the curriculum and ensure compliance with the employability framework
- + generate summaries and advice relating to employability, personal development planning and module choice, allowing both the student and the OU to track how each individual study journey is developing
- + adoption of employability framework and methodology as business as usual
- + inform the development of PDP pilots and longer-term student-facing tools to support employability.

One of the remaining challenges in implementing this approach is how to present the relevant module-generated employability analysis to students. The Chartered Management Institute has highlighted the important role that universities can play helping students to reflect on and maximise the skills they have acquired through their courses, as well as through additional activities such as part-time work, voluntary positions and community or social projects (CMI, 2018). Where employability is embedded and explicit in the curriculum, making students aware of the skills they have acquired is relatively easy for qualifications where there are a limited number of core modules. However, for multidisciplinary Open degree students, who can choose from over 300 modules across the OU's curriculum, a more automated and data-driven approach is required.

In summary, the key messages arising from this project are as follows:

- + pedagogic approaches to assessing and embedding employability tend to focus on specific discipline areas
- + tracking detailed progress and employability of students studying across different subjects is complex and challenging
- + to maximise the development of specific elements of the employability framework, a mechanism is required to identify and address any employability gaps identified in an individual student's journey
- + although there is a recognised need to be authentic to each individual discipline, multidisciplinary approaches can also be contextualised effectively.

Despite these challenges, findings from the work undertaken to date suggest that the methodology used could ultimately prove to be a useful approach to assess and enhance the embedding of employability throughout the student lifecycle, regardless of the subject/discipline(s) studied or method of delivery.

## Acknowledgments

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# Going digital: introducing ePortfolio to promote digital literacy in ITE

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## Background

In September 2017, the University of Sunderland rolled out the new virtual learning environment (VLE), Canvas, for its first year. Up to this point, the PGCE Post-Compulsory Education Training (PGCE PCET) programme had worked solely as a paper-based programme whereby trainee submissions were in the form of a hard-copy assessment file of evidence. Canvas provided the opportunity to 'go digital' and follow other initial teacher education (ITE) programmes which have implemented digital portfolio systems. It also meant we could respond directly to government and Ofsted priorities of digital literacy.

In particular, Ofsted encourages teachers to "develop further the use of information learning technology so that it complements and enhances learning as well as giving learners wider access to learning resources and teachers' support" (Ofsted, 2014, p9). However, we believe there is a disconnect between required standards and the reality in classrooms and training for teachers; this is highlighted by the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group's (FELTAG) 2014 report and reinforced by the Jisc eAssessment Survey (Roads, 2016) which stipulates a 50% rise in eAssessment across the sector but with little positive impact on student digital literacy (FELTAG, 2014).

Some of the key questions we ourselves asked before starting the project were:

- 1 How can we encourage trainees to engage in a **regular reflective practice** (ETF, 2014; Pollard, 2014)?
- 2 How can we help improve **digital literacy** of our trainees? (This is to do with skills and competencies (White and Cornu, 2011).
- 3 How can we develop a programme that **mirrors the requirements of the profession** (House of Commons, 2016)?
- 4 How can we encourage a **professional mindset** ready for professional formation and further study Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2017)?

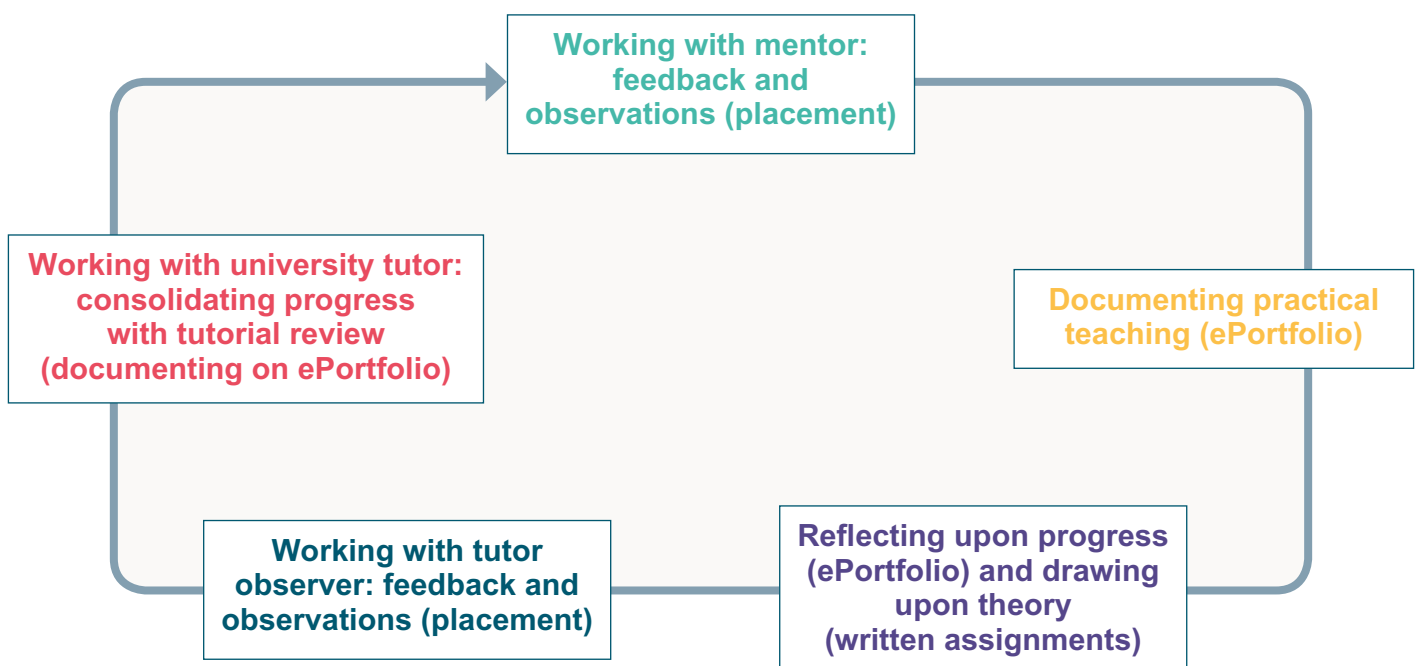
Part of our framework builds upon ideas presented by Beetham and Sharpe (2013) whereby a blended learning model includes "learning as behaviour, learning as the construction of knowledge and meaning, and learning as social practice" (p25). This supports our overarching philosophy that trainees should have the tools to teach in a modern education environment; an environment where their students will be preparing for a future in a society that will look very different to today as technological advancements develop at an increasing pace. Therefore, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) need a foundation of digital skills so they can react and adapt to future changes in society and their classroom environments.

## Approach

This work builds upon previous research by Mellor *et al* (2015) which considered how the ePortfolio might offer a ‘kick start’ and a virtual ‘space’ to articulate and develop students’ ongoing skills (including transferable skills) and qualities both within formal higher education (HE) music learning and music-making outside their formal study. The blurring of boundaries between the formal and informal spaces was also commented on favourably by the students in that they could develop the ePortfolio off the university campus with the option to work at their own pace, thereby modelling a more differentiated pattern of workspace and place mediated by technology. “It’s about learning, and the emphasis is less on ‘employ’ and more on ‘ability’ (Harvey, 2018) to develop a ‘revolutionary agency” (Kallio and Smith, 2017) to forge their own pathways beyond HE.

In the first iteration of the Going Digital Project (2017/18), an ePortfolio template was designed for the full-time PGCE students (Jenkins, 2017) to adopt as their own and populate with evidence of their practical teaching, which aligned to a large proportion of the programme. It encouraged students to use the ePortfolio as a host for ‘professional proactive reflective practice’ (Gregson *et al*, 2015) as seen in Fig.1. ePortfolio training for staff and students was embedded into the curriculum and modules were redesigned to follow a digital model. More specifically, it was implemented across the two practical teaching modules on the full-time programme (2017/18) and part-time programme (2018/19). This was evaluated following focus groups with students (n=25) and suggestions for improvement were taken forward into the research design for 2018/19.

**Fig.1 ePortfolio reflective practice cycle**



The second iteration of the project was developed following a review of the previous year, this included changes to the template (Jenkins, 2018) (see Fig 2), training structure and extending to the part-time PGCE PCET Programme (stage one) at our partner colleges (Gateshead College, Bishop Auckland College, East College Durham and Durham Sixth Form Centre). An important part of the review was to improve the design and delivery of assessment templates for both full-time and part-time programmes, formalise training for students and staff on the editing and uploading of content and consider the timeliness of this training based upon student feedback. In total more than 150 staff and students have been trained in the past academic year, and summative assessment has been transformed for modules across two programmes.

Fig.2 PGCE PCET 2018/19 ePortfolio template (Jenkins, 2017)

There will be further developments going into stage three of the Going Digital Project whereby all stages of the part-time PGCE PCET will be using the ePortfolio as a form of assessment. The end of stage two will provide an opportunity to reflect and evaluate the use of the platform for the part-time programme with leaders from the partner colleges. It also provides an opportunity to act upon student feedback and the pre- and post-course digital skills audit to measure impact.

## Outcomes

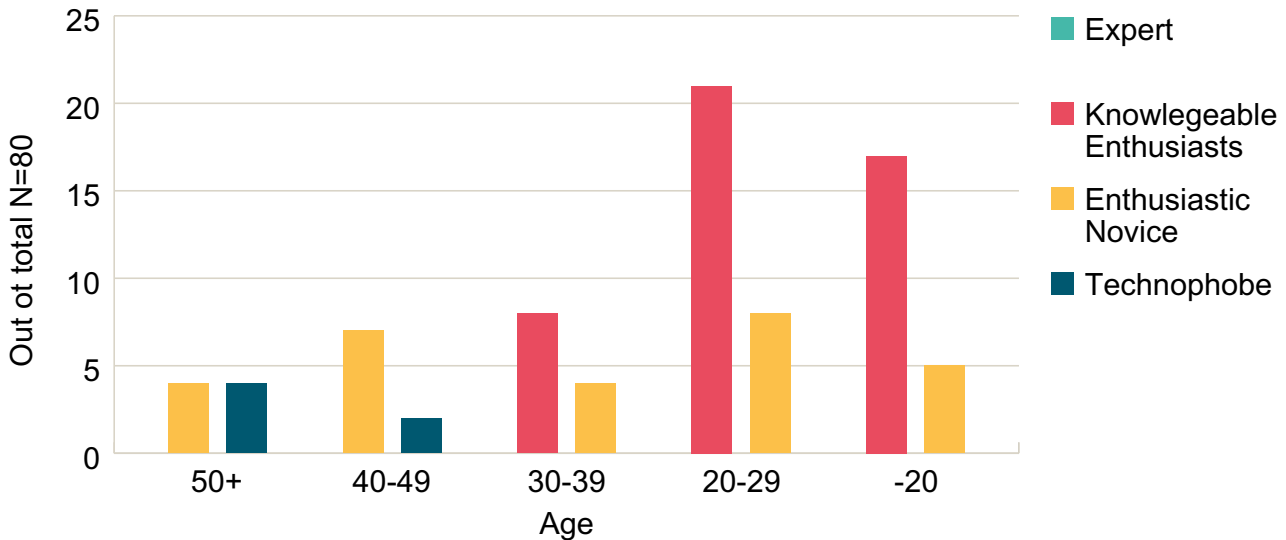
Before introducing ePortfolio, full-time students (n=80) were asked to complete a Pre-Intervention Self-Assessment of Digital Skills (2018/19), developed from the Jisc eAssessment Survey (Roads, 2016). Interestingly, no students rated themselves as 'Experts' (see Table 1) and there was a direct correlation between older students giving themselves a lower assessment of their skills (see Fig.3) in contrast to 57% (n=46) rating themselves 'Knowledgeable Enthusiasts'.

**Table 1 Pre-intervention self-assessment of digital skills (2018/19) data table**

Age	Expert	Knowledgeable Enthusiasts	Enthusiastic Novice	Technophobe
50+	0	0	4	4
40-49	0	0	7	2
30-39	0	8	4	0
20-29	0	21	8	0
-20	0	17	5	0
<b>% Total</b>	0	57.50%	35%	7.50%

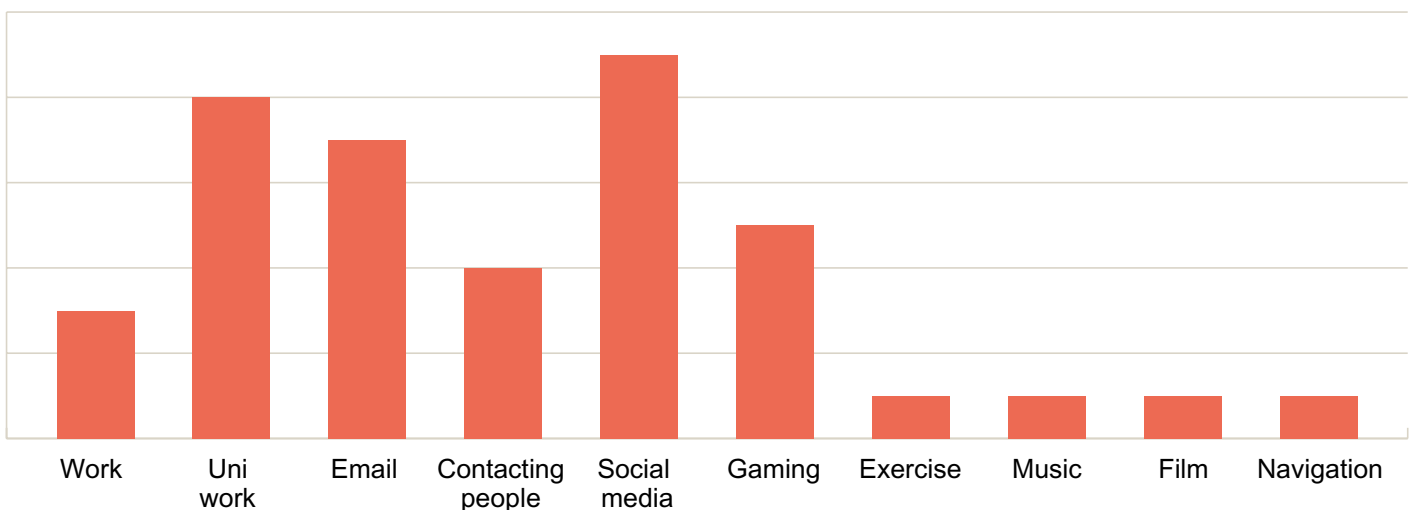
They were also asked what they were mainly using technology for (see Fig.4), and it was clear that students were mainly 'digital consumers' or 'digital visitors' as opposed to 'digital residents' (White and Cornu, 2011).

**Fig.3 Pre-intervention self-assessment of digital skills (2018/19) data graph**



These changes in assessment to a more digitally focused assessment also helps develop students' employability and digital literacy skills. Graduates now have the ability to take their Practical Teaching ePortfolio to job interviews, where they have been received positively by employers, and have key digital skills to use in their classrooms with their students.

**Fig.4 What do you mainly use technology for?**  
**Pre-intervention self-assessment of digital skills (2018/19) data graph**



This is further supported by feedback from students in response to the Post-Intervention Self-Assessment of Digital Skills Audit (2019/19). In response to the question, **Q12b Do you think using ePortfolio and Canvas has helped improve your technology skills at all**, student responses have been mostly positive and demonstrative of the journey of confidence they have embarked upon:

“I have been able to develop skills by using things, such as embedding links and scanning in documents, in order to create an online profile instead of having paper-based folders. Canvas has aided my improvement, as it has been more of an organisational planner, keeping me up to date with deadlines and resources that have assisted me with written work.” [Q12:S13]

“I found it hard and pointless at first but now understand its importance, it has also helped me use Google docs and Google drive which helps within my workplace.” [Q12:S17]

“It has given me more insight into a professional profile which I can continually develop.” [Q12:S55]

There is always a need to keep improving things (see student ideas for development in Table 2) and focus groups with students and conversations with staff are a regular occurrence to make the assessment process smooth, manageable and effective.

**Table 2. Post-intervention focus group (2018/19) data table**

<b>Code N=25</b>	Q13 We really value your ideas and opinions. Do you have any suggestions how we might develop ePortfolio or the use of technology further on the PGCE PCET programme for future trainees?
<b>FG:S21</b>	As a mature student I felt at a disadvantage. As a result I decided to enrol in a computer course which was independent of the university. This was limited but helped me gain a little confidence to try using ePortfolio on my own. I think I avoided using it because I lacked confidence, the first time I used a computer was 1992 and this was very limited access and I haven't had to use computers to this extent in my work or study. I would have liked access to additional support classes, similar to those in English for ESOL students, as computer technology is for me, like a speaking a different language. While I can see the benefits of technology both in study and when qualified, because I have never had the training before, I didn't have these skills.
<b>FG:S14</b>	The layout could be easier and there could be a streamlining of certain pages, it would be more beneficial to have more live documents as it takes up memory uploading the same files after being updated multiple times.
<b>FG:S2</b>	Enabling to embed spreadsheets for tracker and it would be useful to combine it with LinkedIn in some way.
<b>FG:S8</b>	Is there a way we can have a blog/reflection page? I know it isn't an assessment but I would quite like to just free-write about my experience over time. Even add pictures of marking and wall displays?

Therefore, there is still some work to do to improve this further going into stage three of the project. As a result of the journey so far we consider the following:

- 1 it is clear there has been a shift from students being 'digital visitors' to 'digital residents' (White and Cornu, 2011). However, there is a clear divide regarding mindset; students who are enthusiasts in contrast to those who only feel comfortable sticking within the boundaries of the template given (Mellor *et al*, 2015)
- 2 in their teaching practice, the majority of students tend to stick to technologies they know and have used themselves in previous education or work. Very few have the confidence to innovate, so how do we encourage this in future (Beetham and Sharpe, 2013)?
- 3 there is still a long way to go before embedding technology is seen as more than a box-ticking exercise by staff, students and mentors in the FE sector – the question is how can we continue to try and change this mindset (Barrett, 2004)?
- 4 for the tracking of trainee progress, it is an excellent tool but we need to work harder to ensure we are encouraging and supporting students to keep on top of updating their work on a regular basis, rather than just for assessment points (Pollard, 2014).



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# Delivering employability learning to a global classroom: The Careers Group, University of London and University of London distance learning programmes

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## Background

How can employability learning be effectively delivered to a markedly diverse distance learning student cohort located across the globe?

This question is what motivated The Careers Group, University of London and the University of London flexible distance-learning providers as they collaborated on enhanced careers and employability support to the institution's distance learning programme students.

The Careers Group (TCG), founded in 1909, is the largest higher education (HE) careers and employability service in Europe. It is widely recognised as a centre of excellence in careers and employability support for HE students and graduates. TCG provides a range of HE careers services to member organisations within and beyond the University of London, including UCL, KCL and many others, supported by a small central team within the University of London. TCG also produced the award-winning *Enhance Your Career and Employability Skills* MOOC on Coursera in 2014.

The University of London (UoL) is the oldest distance-learning provider in the world and provides distance and flexible learning programmes with member institutions (eg QMUL, LSE) to over 50,000 students based in 180 countries. Many of UoL's distance-learning students are studying law, finance and business programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Since 2018, colleagues from TCG and UoL Student Experience have collaborated on a project to enhance employability support for the distance learning cohort.

This project presented many unique challenges. Distance-learning students, particularly trans-national students undertaking distance education, may have comparatively more complex employability-related motivations for studying a course than traditional undergraduate students (Butcher and Rose-Adams, 2015, Mellors-Bourne *et al*, 2015; Caddell and Cannell, 2011). Furthermore, as this cohort of distance learners are based across the globe, any employability support needs to account for very different labour markets, cultural expectations and norms about notions of career and employment, in addition to varying levels of work experience and what Tomlinson (2017) describes as the five types of graduate capital. There is also some evidence (Tunnah and Peeran 2019) from institutions which specialise in distance-learning provision, that while distance learners who balance work, family life and study often have strong resilience skills, they require more support in terms of how to promote themselves to employers.

In order to meet these challenges, it was important that we approached the project with a clear definition and theoretical understanding of employability and a relevant framework to underpin our practice and evaluation. We decided on Yorke's (2006) definition of employability as it encompassed the breadth and diversity of this cohort's experiences: "A set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." (Yorke, 2006, p8)

The life-long learning aspects of employability are also particularly pertinent to flexible distance learners who may be approaching their studies at various stages in their life. This emphasis is reflected by Oliver (2015) who describes how both students and graduates can "discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes" (Oliver, 2015, p59) needed for work.

We chose to use the HEA framework for embedding employability (HEA, 2016) as the three core themes of inclusivity, collaboration and engagement informed the design and delivery of our employability provision. Furthermore, the framework's recommended four core stages of embedding employability, from agreeing a definition to finally measuring impact, was useful to this project and its future development. One of these future developments is a new common employability module we are developing. This could be delivered alongside, and potentially embedded within, a diverse range of curriculum programmes, hence our eagerness to relate our work to the HEA framework, as one of six thematic areas which span the student cycle.

## Approach

We decided to use a blended approach of remote one-to-one careers consultations, webinars and online interactive resources as outlined in the table below.

### Our approach

Mode of delivery	Beneficiaries	Facilitation required
<b>Individual one-to-one career consultations</b> – 20-minute appointments delivered via Skype or telephone and pre-booked on an online system	Students on specific PG programmes	Careers consultant and video calling platform eg Skype or telephone
<b>Group webinars</b> – based on a range of career-related topics including ‘Ramp up your resume’ and ‘Negotiation skills’. The webinars are hour-long and highly interactive eg live polling, chat functions. And delivered twice a day to cover the widest range of time zones	Students on specific PG and UG programmes	Careers consultant and webinar platform eg Blackboard Collaborate
<b>Online interactive learning resources</b> – complementing the webinars and reflecting common employability issues which arise in the one to one careers consultations, eg interview skills, career decision-making	All students on PG and UG programmes with via VLEs	Careers consultant and learning technologist using interactive Articulate software
Employability module of PG Certificate of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education – TCG produced the specific employability module content for the PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching offered by UoL distance learning programmes	UoL PG Certificate of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education students, many of whom are teaching staff at the various overseas UoL Teaching Centres. Many UoL distance and flexible learning programmes are delivered via these Teaching Centres	Production of learning materials and supplementary resources on the VLE for the PGCertTLHE

The three guiding themes of the Embedding Employability HEA framework; inclusivity, collaboration and engagement, informed our blended approach to delivery in the following ways:

**Inclusivity:** by providing flexible provision that can be accessed remotely, we mitigate the barriers that time-poor students with work and family commitments may face in seeking to access traditionally delivered careers support.

**Collaboration:** our project was a collaboration between the careers and employability expertise of practitioners and managers at TCG and the Student Experience expertise of the UoL distance and flexible learning team. UoL technologists and International Student Voice Group representatives also helped shape the content.

**Engagement:** we engaged with academic colleagues based in international institutions, including associated teaching centres, via the employability module of the PGCertTLHE, as well as with programme providers, on the appropriate tone and content of the employability delivery.

## Outcomes

The combined student population of the three postgraduate courses which the remote one-to-one appointments and the majority of the webinar programme is aimed at is 5,277.

In terms of outcomes, while the engagement numbers are low compared to the actual size of the potential cohort, the evaluation data from those students who have engaged is very positive. Resource and capacity factors meant that we could only offer a small number of one-to-one appointments each week, yet those one-to-one appointments slots were regularly fully booked in a matter of minutes, indicating high-level engagement for the provision which was offered.

Between January 2018 and September 2019 there have been 198 individual remote one-to-one careers consultant appointments and 25 webinars, with 1798 registrations and 1445 unique students registering for at least one of the webinars. This means the engagement rates for the one-to-one career consultations is 4%, although 100% of the available appointments were fully booked, while webinar engagement is 27%.

Key highlights of the evaluation survey data include:

### *One-to-one careers consultant appointments evaluation*

- + average shift from 5.63 to 8.38 (on a scale of one to 10) when asked “Before the session how clear were you on your career ideas, plans or next steps?” and then “After the session how clear were you on your career ideas, plans or next steps?”
- + average response of 9.14 (on a scale of one to 10) when asked “How likely are you to recommend a one to one careers consultant appointment?”

### Webinar attendee evaluation

- + 97% agreed that “I’ve learned something that will help me manage my career more effectively in the future’ and 90% reported an increase in confidence in this topic. 92% agreed that ‘the delivery method of the webinars was appropriate.”

This project has taught us much about the universality of some career-related issues as well as the distinct employability challenges faced by different cohorts within different global contexts, namely:

- + students across boundaries and professional settings share similar concerns around self-presentation, confidence and the need for self-reflection
- + students experience – career challenges which are pertinent to their specific cultural and geographical context, around issues of gender and good governance for example
- + many students are using their higher education qualifications as an indicator of their intentions to refocus their career trajectory in a specific direction, responding to local labour market needs
- + many students are keen to gain qualifications from a reputable TNE higher education provider to illustrate their openness to international labour markets.

We look forward to expanding our remote provision to these distance learners to help them gain maximum employability learning benefits from their higher education experience, regardless of their setting. This expansion includes online small group discussions and the development of our new online common employability module, which would be offered alongside a diverse range of distance learning UG programmes and which will include reflective practice and self and ipsative assessment. Our focus will be on ongoing continuing professional development and effective professional self-presentation in the context of distinct labour markets.

We hope that the lessons we have learned will help other higher education colleagues working with the employability needs of distance learners.

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# The Creative Attributes Framework – an expression of employability and enterprise for a creative curriculum

**Richard Sant**, Head of Careers and Employability, University of the Arts London

## Background

The development of the Creative Attributes Framework at University of the Arts London (UAL) was undertaken over a two-year period beginning with a 2014 Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded project entitled “re-claim”. The aim of the project was to express employability and enterprise in an art and design setting. It was driven by the need to agree on the meaning of employability and enterprise, particularly in the context of embedding employability in the curriculum. A working group was established and a consultation process involving academics from across the institution took place. The process was iterative and collaborative in nature, with the purpose of co-creating a new framework. One of the main underpinning principles was that employability development is already an integral part of the creative curriculum and not an ‘extra’ that has to be inserted by cutting out core subject teaching. It was agreed that the emerging framework should not be based on a deficit model; neither as a deficit in the curriculum nor for the individual. It was also agreed from the outset that the model would not be a set of skills; partly because the number of skills required within each subject area is potentially limitless. Skills are also highly subject to change, particularly in the context of a rapidly developing creative industry.



## Approach

Informing the process of identifying skills and attributes in the curriculum was the development of a profound understanding of the destinations of leavers of creative higher education (HE) institutions. Academics' own knowledge of the industry (many of whom were drawn from the professional arts arena) and their connection with their graduates was fundamental. This was backed up by data provided by the institution's destinations (DLHE) data and by the important cross-institutional research undertaken by Linda Ball and Emma Pollard 'Creative Graduates Creative Futures' (Ball and Pollard, 2010). The emerging picture from this large-scale longitudinal study revealed how complex the working patterns of creative graduates can be. Many are involved in more than one economic activity and some up to four at the same time. This may range from part-time jobs, freelancing and short-term contracts to creative start-ups, portfolio development and exhibiting. This complex mix of activities results in a blurring of the boundaries between enterprise and employability. Furthermore, where graduates are employed it is often in the context of small entrepreneurial micro-businesses, which adds to the blurring of these boundaries. Another implication of complex working patterns is that

graduates are required to showcase, pitch and explain their work on an ongoing basis. This can be in a freelance capacity, or in a workplace setting where proposing ideas and designs is a part of daily activity. Finally, constantly developing and changing working environments – such as those found in the creative industries – require strengths and qualities that allow an individual to survive and thrive. Overcoming obstacles and setbacks is an inevitable part of the journey. Creative graduates are not strangers to operating in such a dynamic environment as it can be argued that art and design pedagogy is itself rooted in ambiguity (Orr and Shreeve, 2018). Indeed Barnett (2007) claims that a role of the university itself is to enable students to ‘live through uncertainty’.

A framework for employability and enterprise in a creative curriculum was needed that could synthesise all these themes and surface the skills and attributes already in the creative curriculum that uniquely prepare graduates for their creative futures. The resulting model, developed through a process of iteration with students and staff, identifies three core employability capacities for creative graduates. The three capacities which relate to the different aspects of creative careers listed above are:

- + making things happen
- + showcasing abilities and accomplishments
- + navigating change.

Each of these core capacities is unpacked into three underpinning attributes (as demonstrated in the diagram below), making a total of three overarching capacities and nine creative attributes:



‘**Making things happen**’ is an expression that captures the action orientation needed to seek out opportunities. It encapsulates professional experience; internships, work experience, or applying a creative practice in the community. An associated attribute is ‘enterprise’. This can be understood

in the recent Quality Assurance Association guidelines on Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (QAA, 2018). Here enterprise is presented as the mindset that seeks out opportunities and acts on them. Sector research (Highfliers, 2018) points to the importance for students and graduates to seek out professional experience, suggesting that graduates who have no such experiences outside of their degree are less likely to gain an interview. In the creative sector, this is arguably equally important whether the individual is employed or self-employed. Associated attributes described under this capacity are ‘proactivity’ which underlines the importance of initiative-taking and ‘agility’, which in start-up terms (Anderson, Lim, and Joglekar, 2019) represents the ability to pivot as circumstances change.

**‘Showcasing abilities’** addresses how graduates are required to pitch and explain work on a regular (sometimes daily) basis. The attributes of both ‘communication’ and ‘connectivity’ surfaced here underline the reciprocal nature of communication. The framework encourages two-way communication; listening as much as speaking, and contributing to online discussion as much as presenting. Another important attribute listed here is ‘storytelling’ which positions instrumental activities such as CV development as an art form, or as a type of self-narration.

**‘Navigating change’** is the capacity to overcome setbacks and thrive. It’s about encouraging students and graduates to remain open, curious and self-efficacious. Efficacy is a much-discussed topic in the context of employability (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Knight and Yorke, 2004) but here the framework also draws on ideas of entrepreneurial self-efficacy as discussed by Newman *et al*, (2019) and originally by Chen Greene and Crick (1998). A third attribute named here is ‘resilience’. Employability practitioners – whose role it is to support the careers and entrepreneurship of creative graduates – will be very aware of the setbacks graduates face, whether from interview rejections or struggling to start businesses. Resilience here may be described as a matter of the availability of external resources or the supportiveness of a given context as much as it an individual characteristic.

While the development of all these attributes can be identified across the creative curriculum, how they manifest may vary substantially according to context. For example, how a fashion management student showcases their accomplishments may be very different to how a fine artist does the same thing. Showcasing can take place in many ways including business pitching, CV writing, portfolio development, exhibiting etc. By reflecting on how each attribute operationalises in different contexts reveals the practices and skills that underpin them. The clustering of attributes into three core capacities and their operationalisation into practices and skills contributes to the grounding of attributes in a way that prevents them from being viewed as abstract or idealistic.

Ultimately, the purpose of the Creative Attributes Framework is to give students and graduates the personal and professional development they need to succeed in the creative industries. The UAL Careers Department’s message is “Make a living doing what you love”. This mission links self-actualisation as originally described by Maslow (1943) or the much more recent idea of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2000) with satisfying creative work. Making a living doing what you love underpins the Creative Attributes Framework, along with all the work of the Careers and Employability team at UAL.

## Outcomes

The Creative Attributes Framework is now used as the definitive model for employability and enterprise at UAL and is embedded in the curriculum through validations and revalidations. The Careers and Employability team draws on it to express the learning developed through extracurricular activities, as well as supporting academic teams to reflect on employability in their course design. The sections below highlight several ways in which the framework has contributed to the development of employability and enterprise at UAL.

### Profile raising

As an institution that uses visual approaches for visual learners and staff, it was seen as important to find a way to represent the Creative Attributes Framework in a visual way. A series of illustrations of the framework was commissioned from recent graduates and has toured the university in the form of an exhibition. The image (*opposite*) shows 'Curiosity' by illustrator Bee Osterman. The exhibition has raised the profile of the framework and at the same time the wider work of the Careers and Employability team.



Illustration: 'Curiosity' by Bee Osterman

### Embedding in the curriculum

At first sight, this could be perceived as tautological because the pedagogical underpinning of the framework is based on the idea that these attributes are already embedded in the curriculum. The intention, therefore, has been to enable teaching staff to help students realise that they are already developing these attributes through their courses. To help with this, a collection of course-related case studies has been developed. These online materials show how individual courses are using the framework in different ways. For example, one case study created by BA (Hons) Film and Television at London College of Communication (LCC) shows how the course prepares students for rapid change.

Recently the university has released a new assessment framework. Work is ongoing to produce staff-facing materials to demonstrate how the Creative Attributes Framework aligns with the new criteria.

### Student facing developments

A pilot online platform called MyCAF has been developed, which allows students to self-evaluate and reflect on the attributes they feel most confident about, and those that they are most interested in developing. The tool also signposts to resources and learning opportunities (both online and within the university) to enable learners to structure their ongoing employability and enterprise development.

## Beyond creative education

Although the Creative Attributes Framework is positioned as an expression of employability and enterprise for art and design, many colleagues from other institutions and disciplines have commented on how the emphasis on action, communication and resilience may have a universal application beyond the creative context.

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# Curricular and pedagogic innovations

# Developing transferable employability skills by embedding practical application of theory into a module

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## Background

The nature of work and the future patterns of employment will require sound subject-specific skills but these need to be underpinned by a range of transferable skills (Universities UK, 2018). Transferable skills are often referred to as soft or employability skills and include communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity and analysis (Universities UK, 2016). How these are developed or embedded within degree programmes can be challenging. However, it is possible to design modules that do have a clear focus of developing these. Lifestyle Management, a core module in the final year of our Physical Activity and Health degree, was adapted to focus on developing transferable skills. Many students graduating with this degree go into employment requiring graduates to work with people to elicit behaviour change to increase physical activity. In many cases, this will mean working with people with diverse social and health needs and communicating with external agencies. The subject knowledge and theoretical aspects needed for this are covered in earlier modules on the programme. However, there are few opportunities within the programme to apply these to a non-student population or other than from a purely theoretical perspective. To develop the module the CareerEdge model of employability was used (Pool and Sewell, 2007). Following consultation with a local authority employer operating a dedicated Health and Wellbeing team, skills required for employment were identified and mapped to the module. The particular focus was to develop two components of the EDGE model, generic skills and emotional intelligence.

## Approach

The Lifestyle Management module focuses on students working with real people to elicit behaviour change, with the purpose of building upon subject knowledge, but also developing a range of soft skills. Skills identified are listed in table 1.

**Table 1. Skills Identified by employer**

Work independently	Problem solving
Supporting others	Organisation
Collaboration	Flexible thinking
Emotional intelligence	Adaptability
Communication – verbal and listening	Professional skills – attendance, punctuality, preparation, confidential.

To facilitate this the module is linked to the university's Healthy Working Lives initiative to increase the physical activity of university staff. Working with staff allowed students to engage in a real-world situation, within a safe supportive setting.

Nineteen students registered on the module, 11 sport and exercise students and eight from other departments electing to take the module as an option (two social science and six mental health nurses). The module has 10 hours of lead lectures, one practical class and ad hoc client fitness testing sessions based on the availability of staff. In week three of the semester students in pairs (sport and exercise with non-sport/exercise student) began working with their clients; meeting them weekly for nine weeks; during this time they helped support clients to make behaviour changes. Clients were 20 staff who were recruited through a university-wide call out for Get Fit in 2019. The module was subsequently assessed via a case study in which students outlined and justified the behaviour change processes they had used. From week five of the semester all students were required, in their pairs, to attend debrief sessions. These timetabled sessions took place every second week and were designed to provide ongoing support. These were included to ensure students had the chance to ask questions and also enabled the module tutor to check that what they were doing with their clients was appropriate. This also provided a safety net for both students and their clients. Face-to-face contact with staff has been found to be rated by students as one of the most valuable forms of support, especially when embedded within the curriculum (Hockings *et al*, 2017).

## Outcomes

Challenges through the module included students having to show fluidity in their thinking in order to understand and be sensitive to individual client needs; ability to adapt to changing demands and circumstances such as clients missing meetings or being unable to undertake recommended intervention programme as a consequence of ill health. There were some polarised perspectives of students on the worth of the module and the requirements to undertake independent work. However, the vast majority of students were positive about the module. Aspects emphasised included working and supporting staff to make lifestyle changes, for some it was the applied practical aspect they liked, regarding this as '*playing to their strengths*.' Also, the fact this was a real project rather than one made up for the module, which has been the norm in other modules, meant that a number of students highlighted that they could use the Healthy Working Lives project to enhance their CVs. Some students also, through self-reflection, identified aspects of themselves that they needed to work on, eg "I need to be more confident"; I talk too much, I need to listen more." Feedback from staff was also very positive with the majority reporting an excellent experience, many reported being fitter and healthier, others saying that it should be run again next year or even that it should run throughout the year.



However, it is recognised that the project was not without challenges. The main issue experienced was poor attendance, although this was a minority of students and mostly on the part of students who were taking the module as an option. From conversations with students it transpired that almost all of the mental health nursing students were working full time. This meant that their time in university was very limited, resulting in the students effectively removing themselves from opportunities for learning and developing the intervention programmes with their staff clients. These students did not attend debrief sessions and were therefore unable to obtain support and advice; staff clients were let down and other students working with them had to shoulder more responsibility. Examination of end of module grades reveals that the more frequently students attended debrief support sessions the higher their grade, although there was individual variability within this. This is not unusual as previous research has underscored the relationship between attendance and performance (Kassarnig *et al*, 2017).

Key messages from feedback and observation of the module suggests that it is necessary to give a very clear outline of expectations and organisation at the start of the module with this needing to be reiterated throughout the semester. This was possible to do for those students who attended debrief sessions but not for those who chose not to attend. The timetabled debrief sessions throughout the semester provided a clear structure for ongoing support. Students who engaged with these were able to take on board suggestions and act upon them and probably made them a little more fluid in their approach to their clients. For the students, the aligning of the applied component of the module to the university's Healthy Working Lives initiative meant the students had something tangible to add not only to their CVs but also in job applications and interviews. For the students, this made their work real with concrete outcomes of seeing their clients achieve their goals. Three of the students were subsequently able to emphasise this when they applied for employment in lifestyle change projects.

One area that needs to be considered is the assessment undertaken. The case study provides a clear focus for the students to demonstrate their understanding of theory and their ability to interpret and apply this. However, a review of the module will consider if it is possible to assess some of the process of working with clients across the semester and whether the inclusion of some aspect of self-reflection should be considered. This would allow students to reflect personally on the development of the highlighted transferable skills. Also under review will be the weekly organisation of the module. Coordination of a large number of staff and student diaries to arrange client meetings was problematic. In the future, the possibility of having sessions timetabled will be explored.

However, it is evident that stepping away from the usual classroom lecture format allowed students to develop and hone a variety of transferable skills. For some, this was a challenge, especially at the beginning, but it did help develop their confidence and allow them to apply their knowledge and skills. University staff were supported to achieve beneficial lifestyle behaviour changes and, by aligning the work undertaken by the students to the Healthy Working Lives project, the module was able to contribute to the university maintaining its gold award.

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# Extracted employability: the employability value of what is taught

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## Background

In 2016, senior managers at King's College London decided to embed employability in the curriculum. This was to be phased in through a pilot focusing on new programmes and, later, for all existing programmes through periodic programme review. In the pilot process, specific goals of increased interaction with King's Careers and Employability and the development of employability-led learning outcomes were set.

However, from the outset of planning, several issues arose, many of which reflected King's identity as a research-led institution and the diversity of academics' perceptions about the value and appropriateness of embedding employability in the curriculum. Firstly, senior faculty academics did not agree on what employability meant to them and their subjects, despite discussing research, the HEA framework<sup>1</sup> and HEA student employability profiles<sup>2</sup>. Nor did they agree on what it meant to embed employability in programmes at King's. This made consensus impossible.

Secondly, there was considerable anxiety about 'embedding' employability, reflecting perceptions that employability content would:

- + be forced in where it didn't belong
- + not be academically rigorous
- + not be relevant or interesting to students
- + occupy valuable curriculum time.

Thirdly, when we drafted an institutional set of graduate attributes against which programmes and students could set goals and measure progress, typical of best practice in the sector<sup>3</sup>, test students felt strongly that they were neither empowering nor enabling, but instead created benchmarks they might fail to meet, disincentivising engagement.

Finally, in other embedding employability practice, content is added to the curriculum and is often optional or students can avoid engaging with it. Any solution developed at King's had to benefit all students, supporting inclusion.

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3 Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services. *Phoenix: Defining Graduate Attributes*. June 2016.

In that context, with the pilot process built, I had to create a rationale and approach to embedding employability that supported the new process but met all the challenges outlined above and, in particular, felt bespoke to King's and its academics. No existing model or framework adequately met those challenges, so innovation within those parameters was the only solution. The timeframe was tight: two months from final approval of the new pilot process to launch for the new academic year.

## Approach

If “teaching employability is not my job!”<sup>4</sup> then the only solution was to embed while avoiding adding employability content – accredited internships, problem-based learning, or skills modules – to the curriculum. “Added Employability” doesn't suit every subject, and it only engages academics who see a connection with what they teach, and usually students already engaged with career and employability development. Furthermore, unless the content is core and assessed, then not all students will reap the benefits. Part of King's new pilot process required writing employability-led learning outcomes, so any solution had to enable that also.

Ongoing evidence from the Institute of Student Employers demonstrates that the majority of recruiters aren't looking for graduates of a specific subject<sup>5</sup>. Higher education transforms students into highly employable recruits. But students and academics struggle to capture consistently or articulate effectively what that transformation is – particularly in non-professionally-aligned programmes and disciplines – or what the concrete gains of employability through curriculum are.

More worryingly, employers still feel that there is a ‘skills gap’ between what they want and what new recruits can demonstrate<sup>6</sup>. Careers service interventions indicate that gap is partially a reflection of students' lack of awareness and inadequate language to identify and articulate what employability assets have developed through curriculum learning.

So I proposed that the approach should not focus on adding content but instead on extracting and surfacing what is already developed in the curriculum. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statements provide the backbone to all academic curricula in the UK, and reference aspects of the wider and longer-term value of learning the different subjects. Although the HEA Student Employability Profiles also draw on the Statements, the King's approach needed more emphasis on the employability value of knowledge gain – to reflect the research-led culture – and to be ownable by academics rather than being a careers tool. Positioning it as the employability value of curriculum in and of itself, rather than how to use curriculum to achieve career and employability goals, was a subtle but important distinction.

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4 Academic colleagues frequently made this point.

5 Hooley, T *et al* (2018) ISE Annual Student Recruitment Survey 2018. London: Institute of Student Employers.

6 Gordon, S (2018) ISE 2018 Development Survey. London: Institute of Student Employers. See also QS Global Skills Gap Report 2019. [www.qs.com/portfolio-items/the-global-skills-gap-report-2019/](http://www.qs.com/portfolio-items/the-global-skills-gap-report-2019/)

While the terminology for non-specialist aspects of curriculum varies – transferable, generic, employability, soft – there is considerable commonality across the Statements, and I drew this out in four key areas:

- + **Knowledge**
  - The ability to learn in-depth and to develop lifelong learning agility
  - Source, means of gaining, wider context
- + **Attributes**
  - Qualities, values, behaviours
  - Reflecting awareness of Self, Others, and Context
- + **Skills**
  - Subject-related
  - Transferable: cognitive, practical, communication, specialist, career management
- + **Experience**
  - Of applying knowledge, attributes and skills gained and developed through academic and co-curricular contexts

This generated a core reference list of all the employability assets drawn from all the Subject Benchmark Statements, what I call a KASE Framework of Extracted Employability. The core list includes more than 80 attributes, cross-referenced with the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Student Employers and the World Economic Forum, and over 200 different transferable skills. Unlike the HEA Student Employability Profiles, the core list is completely independent of subject area, which means it supports bespokeability, interdisciplinarity and multi-functionality by multiple users. For example:

- + academic partners at subject, programme, course or topic level can surface the KASE of their teaching, creating structurally unavoidable engagement for students with employability through richer language for learning outcomes that accurately reflects the delivered curriculum
- + employers can draw on academically rigorous language to align recruitment competencies and priorities
- + students can build a tool appropriate to co- and extra-curricular activities to track their learning gain and professional development
- + careers professionals can apply the tool to co- and extra-curricular services to connect them to curriculum and career choices.

## Outcomes and impact

Some of the outcomes of the Extracted approach to embedding employability were required to meet new processes at King's, while others offer more holistic opportunities.

*Examples of KASE Framework:* academics in the School of Bioscience Education have created a Framework that also supports common year one delivery across multiple programmes, articulating commonality and difference in curriculum. Modern foreign languages capture both 'learning' and 'doing' the language in frameworks that include Study Abroad experiences.

*Employability-led learning outcomes and assessment:* one interdisciplinary PGT programme expanded its original four verbs for programme level learning outcomes to nine after developing its KASE framework. Through King's upcoming revised programme review cycle (2019-2021), academics will review approaches to assessment aligned to revised employability-led learning outcomes, diversifying assessment choice through the wider language of skill development.

*Tracking learning gain:* King's Careers and Employability uses its own innovative, bespoke learning gain reflection tool, which includes focusing on employability. In 2018-19, a third of students had progressed in their understanding of their employability after a single guidance interaction with the service from either little understanding to some or some understanding to actionable understanding.

*Employers:* King's Careers and Employability is working with employers to develop a series of role profiles as templates for students to connect their curriculum employability development with potential career choices. This also supports employer engagement in programme innovation.

*Wider applications – internal:* King's Careers and Employability has created KASE Frameworks to support student reflective learning gain through our wide range of co-curricular awards, enhancing their reputation as an extension of academic learning and not 'added on' to university experiences. Placement years from 2020-21 will be supported by student-created KASE Frameworks that enable them to tailor and reflect on specific professional learning gain alongside curriculum objectives.

*Wider applications – external:* I am now applying the concept of Extracted Employability to school and further education curricula, to support Gatsby Benchmark 4 in the Statutory Guidance on careers support in schools: Linking Curriculum Learning to Careers. Currently school and FE curricula do not attempt to capture the employability value of knowledge-based qualifications, but doing so would fundamentally support all young people to understand how the existing school curriculum helps them prepare for employment at any level. This would move away from the traditional perception that academic qualifications are purely knowledge assets, and enable young people to make the connection between learning and work.

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# From academic content to professional practice in an hour: a holistic discipline-specific teaching and learning model to support employability

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## Background

This case study reports on an innovative pre-arrival online model that has been developed to support transition into higher education (HE) from a learning and teaching perspective, by offering a short immersion in the subject that places disciplinary at its heart, both in how the subject is taught at Sheffield Hallam University and how the tools of the discipline are used professionally. This supports transition into the academic aspects of the student's course but also encourages early thinking about transition beyond graduation and into the world of work.

It is widely acknowledged that the employability of undergraduates is a contemporary focus and measure for the HE sector. A particular challenge for non-vocational courses is how do we assist learners to link often abstract concepts from their discipline area to professional practice in the world of work? Therefore, this theoretically informed but pragmatic approach has been developed to give new HE learners an authentic context to a topic from their subject discipline, supplemented with a selection of authentic tasks to apply this knowledge while drawing on their own experiences with these activities mirroring approaches of applied learning (Beard 2010; Herrington *et al*, 2014; Kolb, 1984). Finally, the link to professional practice is provided through video interviews of professionals who put the topic into a real-world context.

Although the concept of pre-arrival online space is not an original one, the linking of a subject-specific theme with applied tasks and then onto professional practice is a unique approach. The model is intended to support the learner to start making sense of often abstract academic concepts and apply them in familiar situations of their own home city/town environment and, more importantly, within their own experiences (Freire, 1995). The intention here is to give the learner that early sense of confidence with their studies. By using components of authentic learning these learners begin to put a common discipline topic or theme into practice, hence starting to engage in real-world situations or simulating them to heighten their relevance and meaning (Herrington and Oliver, 2000). The well-established models of employability (Knight and Yorke, 2003; Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007) cite how early subject understanding is supportive to learners' self-efficacy and their employability development.

## Approach

The pre-arrival online model was developed using the university's virtual learning environment (VLE). It is acknowledged that other platforms would have been more versatile and indeed accessible for the (as yet) unregistered learners. However, the rationale for using the VLE was to acquaint the learners



with the learning environment they will be using as part of their course. Once learners had logged into the VLE using a guest login, they were welcomed by a 60-second video that provided images of the university, the city and current students. The ambition was to give a brief overview of the university's relationship to the wider community and to say that the institution embraces diversity in all its various guises. Building on this, learners were then invited to watch a video, in which a lecturer from their course gave a short appraisal of a topic/theme specific or central to their discipline. The rationale for taking a discipline-specific focus was determined by the experience and feedback from colleagues at the University of Reading, who reported that some (science) students did not see the relevance when engaging with generic activities as part of their online induction model (Shahabudin *et al*, 2018).

A pilot of this online pre-arrival activity was carried out at the start of the academic year 2018-2019, with the Department of Sociology. It was decided that the theme of social inequity would be employed for the first section of the model, which was named Orientate. The topic of social inequality, along with a basic introduction to common research methodologies drawn upon by sociologists, was decided upon as the theme as it is central to the course. More importantly, it features greatly in first-year assessment tasks, therefore the topic as a feature of this early learning and teaching delivery was paramount to the design process (McTighe and Wiggins, 2004). The Orientate section of the model was delivered in a short video by the head of sociology; this also included learners being requested to actively note-take.

In the second section, titled Apply, learners were invited to apply the theme/topic from the Orientate video, in this case social inequity and research methods, and apply them to three set tasks. At the end of the Apply section, learners were encouraged to reflect on their findings of each task(s) and to consider their motivation for their selection of task or tasks, in the hope of turning their experiences into learning and promoting reflection (Boud *et al*, 1985).

In the third and final section of the online model, learners were encouraged to watch two short videos (approximately four minutes each). These videos showed interviews with professional practitioners, who described the relevance of social inequality in their own work context and how their organisation uses data to inform their service delivery. This Connect section linked the academic topic from the Orientate section to professional practice. The purpose of this Connect section was to provide a social and professional context for the learners of the non-vocational course in sociology to gain an understanding and appreciation of their discipline in practice. Thus, as Lizzio (2011) observes, it provided a platform that facilitates the students' ability to concentrate on their early ambitions and vocational intentions.

## Outcomes

The guest login for the pre-arrival induction model was sent to 62 pre-registered sociology learners two weeks before fresher's week. However, there was understandable doubt about whether whether or not any of these learners would engage with the activities. Therefore, it was deemed prudent to carry out a second pilot that involved using the same format of Orientate, Apply and Connect with another group of learners. As a result of this uncertainty, the activities were delivered to 42 education studies

learners, on day two of their course as part of welcome week induction. Although, the Orientate section remained much the same as the online version, with the only change being a different topic – the Purpose of Education. By taking advantage of the face to face environment, learners formed groups to work on the Apply section. It was hoped that this early collaboration would create an initial sense of belonging (Wilcock, 1999) to their course and peers. In the Connect section, the learners continued to work in their groups to develop their findings from the Apply section. This cooperation of learners saw them present their discoveries and initial conclusions to educationalists, all of whom were external to the university environment. It would appear that this adaptation of the transition model has had positive consequences for the group of learners, as course leader Dr Manuel Madriaga observes:

“The induction activity has created a broader sense of course identity that is more profound than in previous years as friendship groups have formed beyond seminar groupings.”

Furthermore, service evaluation revealed that the learners recognised how this model had built up their confidence to present themselves to professional practitioners in a credible way and were developing their discipline knowledge from the get-go. This supports the notion of students enhancing their graduate capitals (Tomlinson, 2008). A student that engaged with the welcome week activities reported that:

“We received a lot of compliments [from the employers] when we presented our ideas which made us grow in confidence. It was a new experience of working with the academic side and using it in a practical way.” – *Level 4 student (second day of their course)*.

Equally, our preliminary apprehensions around potential non-participation of pre-arrival learners with the online model proved to be unfounded as over half of learners who received the site login engaged with the Orientate section, 71% with the Apply section and slightly less than half with the Connect section.

It is anticipated that these online and welcome week activities will assist learners to prepare and progress into their mandatory work-based module at level 4, where they carry out live authentic projects. In many instances these live projects are offered by the employers that feature in the Connect sections of the online and welcome week activities. This ensures that the Connect phase continues into the learners’ undergraduate journey. The learners will also experience further real-world work experience in their second and final years of their course. Therefore, learners that do not engage with the pre-arrival activities will not be disadvantaged, as further opportunities will be available throughout their whole degree programme.

Academics recognised the connection of the pre-arrival and welcome week activities with the whole course ethos of employability development, which fostered good engagement from these staff.

“The pre-arrival activities help students undertake various tasks that are then discussed in terms of academic and employability skills. This helps students begin to focus on the importance of applying their learning to real life, particularly in relation to their own future employability. This is a theme that runs throughout our course.” – *Dr Karl Baker-Green, head of sociology*.

It has been acknowledged by course teams that this format can be adopted by any discipline area. This has promoted further commitment from the academic community with an additional six disciplines taking up this approach in 2019/2020. A toolkit to support these activities is currently under development.

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# Doing is believing: the role of reflection, rehearsal and performance in developing student possibilities

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## Background

Our approach seeks to address how we enable our students to frame their claims to employability by effectively reflecting on and communicating, their skills, knowledge and attributes, to yield positive outcomes for employability. It is based on our belief that learning within the curriculum should be receptive to the fact that students may find it challenging to identify, reflect on and rehearse knowledge, skills and attributes from their course and life-wide learning, and articulate the value of their experiences. The purpose of our approach is to developing students' capacity to reflect on and confidently articulate the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes to enhance their graduate employability.

This Nottingham Trent University (NTU) case study relates to an aspect of learning and teaching that enables students to synthesise learning from across their degree experience, as the synoptic assessment of the BA Youth Studies degree in the School of Social Sciences at Nottingham Trent University, in the level 6 module 'Transition and Practice'. The purpose of the synoptic assessment, which is now an integral part of all undergraduate courses at NTU, is to enable students to make connections between different learning across their modules and to demonstrate their ability to integrate and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding for future transition. Through this module, the students are encouraged to develop a critical understanding of key theoretical concepts such as professionalism continuing professional development, evidence-based practice, reflective practice, employability and career transition. As part of the assessment process, they are required to apply these insights to the personal project of presenting 'self' as well as to a critical analysis of services offered to young people. Students build on their understanding of the principles and application of reflective practice and other key concepts to which they have been introduced at previous levels of study. They also explore specific strategies to enable them to manage their own and young peoples' transitions and career development.

## What are our aspirations for our students?

- 1 to synthesise learning from undergraduate and life experiences to construct personal, viable and aspirational future possibilities
- 2 to reflect upon, and articulate critical views around subject and 'self' through a range of communication media
- 3 to develop personal belief, confidence and self-efficacy in respect of their ability to manage future transitions for employability.

## What knowledge and principles inform this approach?

- 1 our approach is predicated on the idea that students' belief developed through skills development and critical thinking can make a difference to their ambition, aspiration, and attainment
- 2 diversity of student characteristics, particularly with regard to ethnicity and socio-economic background, has been a key feature of the BA Youth Studies course since its initiation. We need to take account of this context
- 3 through the pedagogies of youth studies, our students familiarise themselves with the literature and debates concerning social and cultural capital and its relationship to graduate employability
- 4 our approach is based on the premise that it is possible for students to develop a personal toolkit to identify and overcome social, psychological and emotional barriers to their own personal and professional development.

## Theoretical frameworks and models informing our approach

A range of interdisciplinary approaches to reflection have enabled us to frame our learning and teaching for this module.

In introducing students to the theory and application of reflective practice we have drawn on a number of theoretical perspectives. Particular reflective models we have used are Gibbs (1988), Johns (2013), Argyis and Schon's (1974) triple loop learning, Fook and Gardner's (2007) models of critical reflection, and Thompson and Thompson (2008), 'heart', 'head' and 'habit' constructs. In supporting students to identify and rehearse the presentation of skills, knowledge and attributes, there has been a particular focus on collaborative learning and peer feedback. Techniques used here include the model of problem-based learning as practised by McMaster's University, Miller and Rollnick's motivational interviewing (2012) coaching including STAR, and narrative/storytelling approach with a focus on enhancing student personal performance. We have also drawn on a range of theoretical concepts underpinning Youth and Transition.

## Methods and delivery

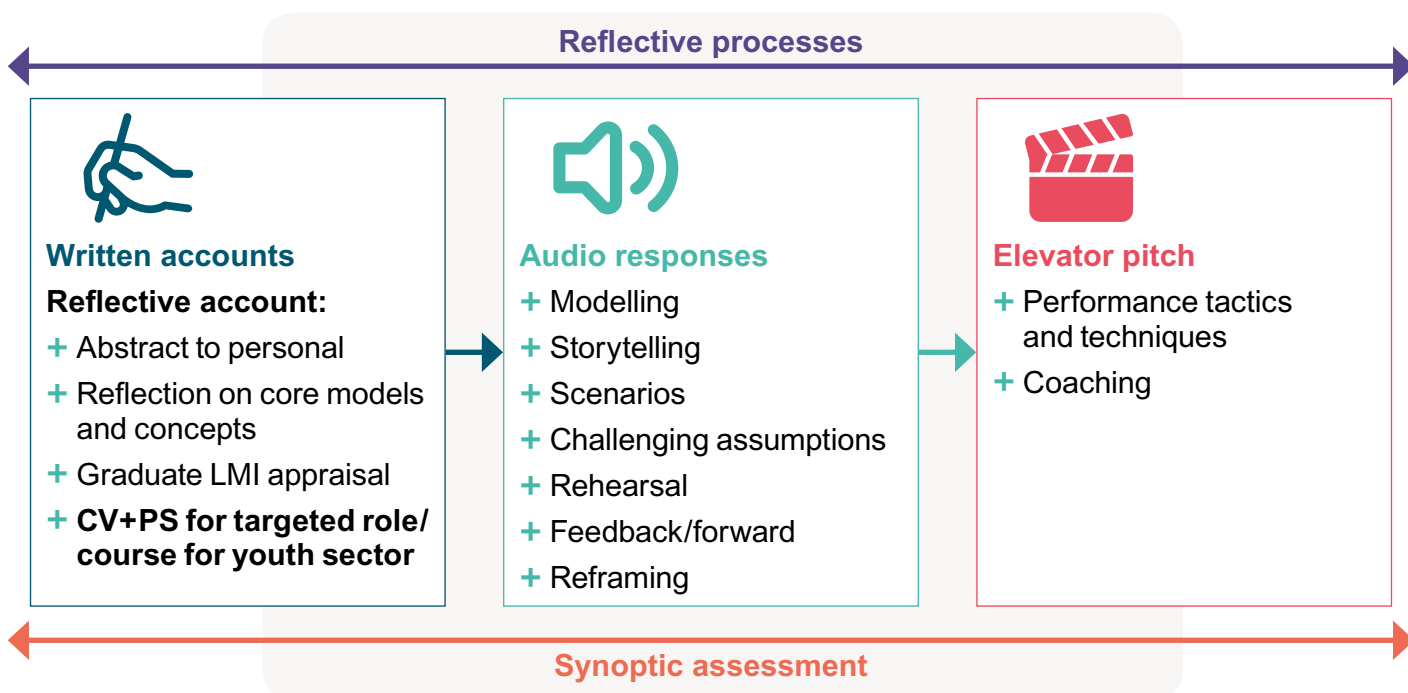
A non-standard delivery model has been adopted for this module to take account of its 'atypical' nature and the fact that students have directly used module learning to support their own successful career transitions in their final term. Teaching is delivered from October to March. The delivery pattern of this module has been deliberately designed to 'frontload' a larger proportion of student learning into Term 1 of the final year, with three hours a week lecture time in Term 1 and two hours a week in Term 2, with additional tutorials. This also enables students to complete the assessment tasks earlier in their final year, to spread the burden of assignment completion. This is a positive response to previous student feedback about the scheduling of assessment tasks.

Formal lectures are in the main facilitated by the two module leaders with guest inputs from the employability team and visiting employers from the youth sector. These lectures are supported by workshops and individual and paired coaching tutorials to enable students to achieve the assessment tasks. Students are expected to participate in all the additional learning support offered through this module, including small group and one-to-one coaching support to enable them to maximise success. These smaller sessions provide the students with valuable formative feedback from both tutors and their peer group to enable them to evaluate their formative attempts at assessment, particularly the performance aspects, for example, the audio recorded competency responses and the video recorded elevator pitch. Students also have the opportunity to record these in class time. They are set regular tasks and reading between lectures, and a learning room is central to resource support.

## How do we assess learning?

The assessment of the module is in three stages outlined below. For each stage, students are expected to apply the knowledge and understanding acquired in the previous stage. Stage one assessment, the written tasks, are completed by the end of Term 1, and students can and do capitalise on tutor feedback to apply learning to stages 2 and 3 of the assessment. The reflective reports, which are completed by the end of Term 1, account for 50% of the total module grade. The CV, personal statement, audio-recorded responses and elevator pitch combine as a portfolio for the second half of the module assessment. There are a number of opportunities for formative tutor and peer feedback throughout the year. Clear criteria for each part of the assessment are shared in advance and supported by thorough assignment briefings, assessment tutorials and mentoring.

## What did we do?



## What are the outcomes?

A range of evidence points to substantial impact on all those involved in this module: students, teaching staff and academic colleagues.

Student module evaluation is particularly positive, indicating not only a high degree of satisfaction with different module learning and teaching approaches but, crucially, valuable learning for the future. Indicative quotes from separate respondents include:

“This is totally transformational”

“It pushes you to achieve your best by using different methods”

“The interactive lectures were very helpful...really helped me to complete the assessment tasks”

“I enjoyed every aspect of the learning and it is very relevant to the future”

Further evidence of positive impact was evident in the optional NSS questions asked by NTU relating to ‘career’ with 100% of module respondents agreeing that “As a result of my course I believe that I have improved my career prospects” (2018). It has also been pleasing to see successive years’ DLHE data ‘Graduate Prospects’ steadily increasing for the course since the initiation of this module.

Module leaders find that the students are highly engaged in this module and the attendance is very good throughout the year. It is not surprising that module achievement has been consistently high across successive cohorts.

There have been significant gains for teaching colleagues involved in this module. Academic staff who are now engaging collaboratively with students to translate their experiences of learning to employment and next steps, enrich their understanding of their learners’ experiences and the needs of the curriculum. Students have the benefit of a discipline expert to enable them to see the relevance and connection of learning to employability. This approach has also been shared as a case study with both the academic and professional career guidance communities both within the university and beyond.

## What have we learnt?

Effective application of innovative assessment strategies is necessary for personalised and inclusive learning, based on a better understanding of challenges faced by both facilitators and learners in the teaching. This approach has demonstrated that there is value to be gained for both learner and academic in positioning this learning within the discipline. The case study has proven that the curriculum has a key role to play as a vehicle to move students from reflection to performance, and there are a range of creative possibilities for personalised, inclusive approaches to student learning, to build confidence and self-belief among our student groups. The value is proven for students: ‘Doing is Believing’

## What next?

We have a number of considerations for the future, including the possibility of exploration of more effective harnessing of employers and our own alumni into employability learning in the curriculum, particularly considering the power of narrative/ storytelling from graduate to student. We also need to consider how the model might be 'scaled up' to work with very large student cohorts, possibly by an increased role for peer mentoring for the performance aspects of assessment.

Aspects of this learning and teaching approach have been used with a range of diverse undergraduate and postgraduate students in a variety of disciplines and contexts, to promote students' reflexivity, self-confidence and self-efficacy. For example, we have recently used this approach working with undergraduate students at a partner university in Mexico with a group of international business students who succeeded in delivering their elevator pitches in both Spanish and English!



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# Embedding employability: developing a workshop

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## Background

In this case study, we look at the creation and delivery of a workshop on embedding employability. This case study serves two roles: as an account of how the workshop was developed from the feedback of participants, and as a way of disseminating the workshop resources on employability that we toured as part of our 2017 Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) award.

The natural sciences undergraduate programme at Leicester comprises interdisciplinary modules delivered by a scaffolded form of problem-based learning (PBL) that we call problem-based tuition. This approach is delivered by a team of five teaching-focused staff with specialist input from around 50 research academics. The structure, developed over a number of years from various influences (Raine, 2019), allows us to integrate employability into the delivery of the curriculum throughout the programme, which was the basis for our CATE award. A principal aspect of pedagogy that underlies this integration is authentic assessment. This aspect of the programme is transferable to other disciplines, and to contexts that are not necessarily problem-based.

Employability is a major policy concern throughout the sector. The purpose of the workshops, which were funded by the CATE award, was to raise awareness of our approach with a view to impacting the delivery of employability at a programmatic level, and not as a tick-box exercise or bolt-on extra. Based on a survey of the employability literature published by the HEA (Artess, Hooley and Mellors-Bourne, 2017), we developed a tool to implement and evaluate the development of skills across a degree programme.

## Approach

Since we were promoting active learning, we wanted the workshop to centre around a relevant problem. For the workshop to have an impact, we needed it to be independent of discipline. Based on a scenario developed previously for our annual PBL summer workshop, we set up the problem of a fictitious department that taught in a traditional manner, with emphasis on high-level content delivered by lectures and essay-type examinations, and with little regard for the inclusion of skills in the formal curriculum.

The scenario involves the department of cryptozoology, a five-star research department, but with modest NSS, retention and employment statistics, and a like-minded external examiner. The university does not wish to jeopardise its success in attracting research funding, so there are limited pressures to increase undergraduate recruitment, but there is little funding for additional staff. Thus there are no obvious drivers for change beyond the (unacknowledged) failure to prepare the students for employment outside academia. The workshop participants are provided with the current curriculum, which ranges over a wide range of subjects drawn from most disciplines, both humanities and

sciences (although one delegate complained there was not enough economics). The problem for the workshop participants (working in groups) is to come up with a strategy for the department to address the employability agenda in a revised curriculum, based on a sharing of experience.

Participants were first asked to consider whether they would recommend the programme in cryptozoology to the child of a friend or relative. When we trialled the workshop it seemed a little too obvious that, if the child needed the qualification to provide any prospect of future employment, the answer would most likely be no. We changed the initial address by the head of department to a more vigorous and reasoned defence of the status quo (in terms of academic rigour and training students for research) to promote more interesting initial discussions.

To give some background for participants we provided a lecture on authentic assessment based on Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown (2014). We also developed a matrix that lists the HEA scales (attributes) of employability in rows, with columns to describe a three-stage student journey from awareness to progression to application. The matrix can be filled in to chart the development of skills across the curriculum. It is important that the stages do not necessarily represent years of study. To make the appearance of the matrix less forbidding, the scales were grouped under three headings (individual, group and outward facing). Feedback from the workshops suggested these were rather arbitrary and helped to clarify that a better division would reflect aspects of learning theory. The final version is shown in the table below. Working in groups, participants were then encouraged to think about a revision to the curriculum for cryptozoology that would address the development of one or more attributes. This produced useful exchanges of views which highlighted the transferability of many aspects of employability. From the recognition that most of these attributes were those of the successful academic researcher, as well as the general graduate, we were able to demonstrate the advantages of embedding these skills in gaining traction with academic colleagues.

To illustrate experiences of embedding, we had two short videos made for us by staff at UCL and Portsmouth, and a video giving the view from a careers service. We followed this with a brief description of the natural sciences programme at Leicester, focusing on the way employability was embedded through problem-based tuition and authentic assessments, and including a longitudinal study of the self-reported growth of students' confidence and competence. Some of the feedback suggested there should have been more about other programmes, but we felt that the exchange of views among delegates was more valuable than more presentations. Feedback after the first workshop made us realise that to make the most of this we should ask participants to move around after the mid-way break.

The final section of the workshop was intended to be group presentations on the way forward for the department of cryptozoology but became a more or less lively Q&A. Eventually, we realised that a better ending would be to report on the department five years into the future, where extensive use was being made of research-based and problem-based learning, with online video material to replace many of the lectures and a variety of authentic assessment (the HoD having taken the opportunity to retire). This enabled us to integrate the contributions from delegates and to project some of our own ideas on working with colleagues to embed employability.

## Outcomes

As far as possible we took free-form comments on the workshop into account as we went along, as in the examples above. Participants were not asked for a satisfaction rating, but a satisfying number provided very positive comments on the value of the workshop anyway.

The workshop was based on developments in the natural sciences programme which demonstrated the benefits of a programmatic approach to employability through authentic assessment (growth in confidence in skills through the programme and feedback from graduates in employment) and issues (addressing the limited articulation of skills by students). Did we have any impact? It became clear that some of the delegates attended just to find out what we were doing, which we hope they found useful. We asked delegates to complete a questionnaire on what they think they might do as a result of the session, and on the usefulness of the matrix. Many respondents claimed they would use some of the ideas to inform their own delivery or planning, and more than half said they were more likely than not to use the matrix. Given the pace of change in HE, it is unlikely that the workshop will have led to any immediate transformations, but as part of the project, we plan to follow this up to see what impact there may be in the longer term.

Materials and a guide to the workshop will be available on the Leicester University Natural Sciences web site [le.ac.uk/natural-sciences/educational-projects](http://le.ac.uk/natural-sciences/educational-projects)

### Table: The matrix based on Artess *et al* (2016)

The matrix is used for planning purposes; a more user-friendly translation is presented to students. Each entry would be a relevant activity.

Affective	State	Explore	Apply
Confidence, resilience and adaptability	.....	.....	.....
Experience and networks	.....	.....	.....
Behaviours, qualities and values	.....	.....	.....
Enterprise and entrepreneurship	.....	.....	.....
Self, social and cultural awareness	.....	.....	.....
Reflection and articulation	.....	.....	.....
Internationalisation	.....	.....	.....
Psychomotor			
Career guidance and management	.....	.....	.....
Attributes and capabilities	.....	.....	.....
Specialist technical and transferable skills	.....	.....	.....
Knowledge and application	.....	.....	.....
Meta-level			
Concepts and models	.....	.....	.....
Policy related	.....	.....	.....

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# A critical perspective of employability: an exploration of the work readiness of undergraduate accounting/banking and finance students

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## Background

The Wilson report (BIS, 2012) recommends that universities increase opportunities for students to acquire relevant work experience during their studies by means of 'sandwich' degrees and internships. The High Fliers (2013) report explained that 30% of graduate positions at the UK's four largest accounting firms were expected to be filled by graduates who had already worked for their employer. The category 'already worked for employer' was classified by High Fliers (2013) as a graduate having completed either an internship, industrial placement or vacation work at their current employer.

The High Fliers Report (2019) explains that the 'Big four' accounting firms represent four out of the top five graduate recruiters in the UK. In 2018, 4,524 graduates were recruited into graduate accounting roles by December 2018. The same report states, "Accounting and professional services firms have the lowest ratio of placements to graduate jobs, making it harder for students interested in these areas to get relevant experience before they apply for graduate roles" (p22). Therefore, work readiness is of high priority for employers (Keep and Mayhew, 2004) and an influencing factor in the selection of employees (Chillas, 2009).

The scope of this case study is adopt work readiness as a critical perspective of employability and as a critical lens through which to explore the experiences of a cohort of second-year accounting/banking and finance students in 2018/19, many of whom are applying for summer internships, year placements and other forms of relevant work experience during the academic year.

## Approach

A phased approach will be adopted to explore the concept of work readiness and apply it as a critical lens through which to explore, “the level to which students are perceived as posing attitudes and attributes’ that enable them to be prepared for success in the workplace” (Caballero and Walker, 2010)

We will adopt a participatory, two-stage approach involving students, employers, employability officers, careers consultants, graduates, workplace mentors and alumni to explore work readiness.

The first stage to our approach is about evaluating students’ work readiness, through their own lens. We acknowledge that not everyone starts on the same level-playing field and seek to explore what that looks like within the cohort.

The second stage is an exploration of what we term the ‘work-readiness gap.’ That is the difference between what the employer perceives as the required work preparedness for their job. (This is outside the scope of this case study.)

This case study focuses on the baseline findings of the first stage of the project; an exploration of the current micro context of work readiness of a cohort of second year accounting/banking and finance students.

The initial methodology for baseline results of stage 1 of the project;

- 1 conduct an (ongoing) critical literature review on work readiness
- 2 explore second-year undergraduate accounting/banking and finance students’ professional skills awareness, work experience and self-efficacy through a questionnaire.

## Outcomes

### 1) Brief literature review (professional accounting/services context)

Knight and Yorke's (2003) definition of employability, as "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (p5), is widely cited. A critical question to be asked within the framing of employability in this way is, do the set of achievements referred to make it more likely to gain employment and be successful? Given the subjective nature of employment, the unconscious and conscious bias that is widely cited in the literature, should employability be framed as a normative concept? We propose that work readiness is a critical perspective of employability should be used to reframe employability.

Work readiness, although a relatively new construct, is defined as, "the level to which graduate students are perceived as possessing attitudes and attributes that enable them to be prepared for success in the workforce" (Caballero and Walker, 2010). Although regarded as a new and emerging construct in the career development literature, it is widely accepted as a selection criterion that predicts graduate potential in the workforce (Casner-Lotto and Barrington, 2006; ACNielsen Research Services, 2000; Hart, 2008).

Work readiness is perceived by the employer, who has the power and authority to decide who is best prepared for success. Internships are treated as proxies for "appropriate attitudes and dispositions" (Cook et al, 2012, p1758), who go on to explain that the initial stages of recruitment assess a candidate's ability to demonstrate particular ways of working, behaving and "ultimately, being" (*ibid*).

We suggest that in framing employability, we need to recognise the discourse of "organisational professionalism" (Evetts, 2009); a form of occupational control in which the employer determines whether the prospective employee is 'work ready.' It is this context of occupational control, that Mats Alvesson (2001) terms "identity regulation". Hanlon (1994, 1996) explains the process is "rhetorical professionalization," where organisations transform individual trainees into disciplined and self-disciplining organisational members whose work goals, language, and lifestyle come to reflect the imperatives of their employing organisation (Covaleski *et al*, 1998, p293).

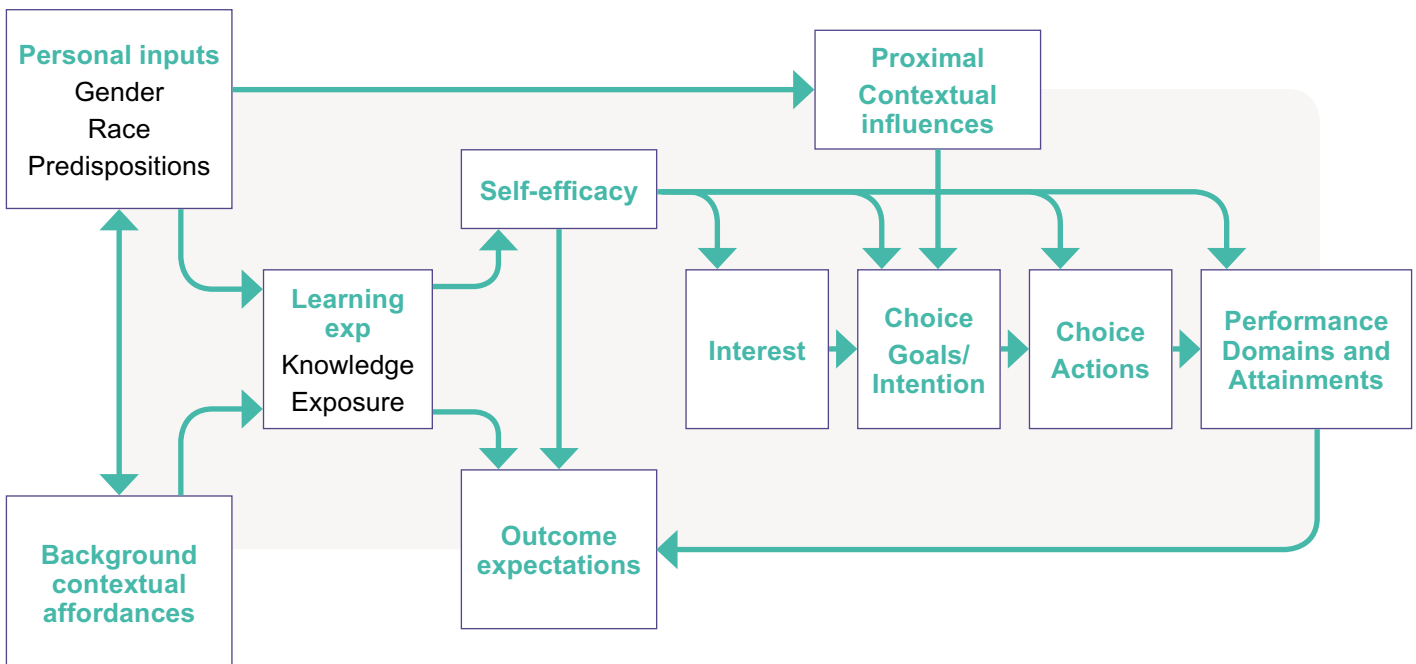
We therefore conclude, that at the micro-level, work readiness is developed through the formation of professional identity (Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2001), professional skills awareness and development (Sin *et al*, 2012) and self-reflexive understanding of the individual (Brown *et al*, 2004). Work readiness development is transient and relational, depending on the individual; the student, their environmental influences; university, friends and family and their desired destination ie employer.



The theoretical underpinning of work readiness through the lens of the student self is social cognitive career theory (SCCT), which is a relatively new theory that is aimed at explaining the inter-related aspect of career development. The theory considers personal goals, self-efficacy, behaviour, outcome expectations and goal as integral to success in one's career. SCCT was developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett in 1994. The theory is based on Albert Bandura's general social cognitive theory, an influential theory of cognitive and motivational processes.

**Figure 1. Social cognitive theory model of choice behaviour.**

From "Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance," by R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, and G. Hackett, 1994, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45, p. 93.



Accounting/banking and finance students develop their work readiness in multiple domains, all of which have competing logics; university (knowledge/education), placements and internships (efficient specialised labour, with a focus on productivity and economic returns) and professional bodies (authorised with moral authority) etc. They are motivated to enter communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in order to go on and have successful careers. The competing 'proximal contextual influences' means that it is a challenging space for students to navigate, in order that they develop the set of achievements needed to be successful in the workplace.

## 2) Exploration of micro-level (individual) work readiness

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data on the main work readiness themes identified in the literature as important at the micro level; prior work experience, professional identity, professional skills, self-efficacy.

We surveyed second-year undergraduate accounting/banking and finance students during the academic year 2018/19, we received n=84 unspoiled questionnaires, therefore our sample represents 72% of the total population (n=117).

**Table 1. A summary of ethnicity and gender of the second year undergraduate accounting/banking and finance students who completed the questionnaire.**

	Total	Asian	Asian British	Black African/ Caribbean	Black British	English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British	Mixed	Other	White other
Total count	84	25	5	4	2	31	4	3	10
Male	46	18	5	1	2	15	1	1	3
Female	38	7	0	3	0	16	3	2	7
Male %	54.8	72.0	100	25.0	100	48.4	25.0	33.3	30.0
Female %	45.2	28.0	0	75.0	0	51.6	75.0	66.7	70.0

## Data analysis

We ran non-parametric regression analysis (Mann-Whitney U Test in SPSS), on the data collected in the questionnaire. We grouped BAME categories together, to identify relationships in the ordinal and nominal data (the questionnaire used Likert scales for students to evaluate their “confidence”, “perceived fit into their chosen career”, “professional skills”, “prior work experience” and demographic data).

The results from the questionnaire suggest that the constructs of work readiness (are often impacted by gender and ethnicity. We indicate where we may draw statistical inferences from some of the results, although most of the results are unique to our sample. These are denoted with corresponding p-values (which are stated if statistically significant at 95% confidence level only).

Below is a summary of some of the headline findings of each theme;

### **Prior work experience**

- + 50% of students (n=20 female, n=22 male) had gained some work experience during their course
- + black and minority ethnic (BAME) students were less likely to have work experience before starting their course
- + only 7% of black students had prior work experience (p value = 0.033)
- + 60% of Asian students and 51% of white students accessed their prior work experience through their social network
- + One in five students (20%) who had some prior relevant work experience before going to university were “extremely confident” that they would fit into their chosen career.

### **Professional skills**

- + BAME students found it more difficult than white students to access resources that they felt they needed to develop their professional skills and capabilities (p, value 0.002)
- + BAME students were more inclined to say that their course had not provided them with opportunities to develop the professional skills needed for their chosen career when compared to white students.

### **Professional identity**

- + BAME students are less confident that they know what it is to be professional in their chosen careers compared with white students (p value, 0.0046)
- + female students are much less confident than male students that they will “fit” into their chosen career (p value, 0.0046).

### **Self-efficacy**

- + 12% of all students were “extremely confident” (male n=7, female n= 3) that they would “fit” into their chosen career
- + 82% of female students suggest that they have the professional skills required for their chosen career compared with 77% of male students
- + 93% of male students compared with 90% of female students stated that their course had provided opportunities to develop professional skills
- + 50% of male and 50% female students agreed that university had improved their professional skills.

## Summary

We conclude from our data analysis that BAME students have less confidence and lower work readiness than white students. They are far less likely to have prior relevant work experience and find it more difficult to access resources to help them develop their professional skills. A high proportion of female students think that they have the professional skills required for professional work and their chosen career but are less confident than their male counterparts that they will fit into their chosen career.

Differences in levels of work readiness at an individual level cut through intersections of gender and ethnicity. However, we also note that, within BAME groups, black students are the most disadvantaged and need the most support in the development of their work readiness.

## Further developments

Future planned activities for Stage 2 of the project include:

- 1 focus (intersecting) groups
- 2 semi-structured interviews with employers who reject LUBS accounting/banking and finance students to better understand the work-readiness gap
- 3 development of a work readiness enhancement framework (WREF) in co-production with (Laidlaw and Q-Steps) scholars working on the project that uses a traffic light system to evaluate students' work readiness
- 4 a cross institutional pilot (with a regional post-1992 university) to refine WREF
- 5 development of a toolkit with personalised structures of support for students on accounting/banking and finance courses who are trying to access internships and placements.

We suggest that our conversations with students regarding their career management needs to be reframed, in order that they acknowledge the identity work that needs to be done by students to gain the achievements that are valued by employers so that they are perceived as being prepared for success in the workplace. We need to be honest about the identity regulation employed by employers when applying their perception(s) of who is best prepared for success and reframe the employability discourse to acknowledge the power that employers have in determining, in this context, the desired attitudes and attributes of graduates.

## Special thanks

This two-year project is partly funded by Q-Steps program ([www.qstep.leeds.ac.uk/](http://www.qstep.leeds.ac.uk/)), enabling the recruitment of a Q-Steps scholar to undertake quantitative data analysis full-time for four weeks. The project was also partly funded by the Laidlaw Scholarship ([www.laidlawscholars.com/](http://www.laidlawscholars.com/)) scheme, funding the recruitment of a Laidlaw scholar for two years (working full-time for six weeks per year).

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# Acting up for graduate interview success: a forum theatre approach

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*'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players...'*

*(Shakespeare, 1969 I.II:138)*

## Background

Employability and social mobility are key policy issues in the marketised and expanded landscape of higher education (HE). However, both issues are contested in the academy with concerns about a hegemonic neo-liberal perspective of higher education that is strictly instrumentalist (Rosa, 2013), and underpins social mobility with notions of meritocracy and 'character building' (Bailey and Spohrer, 2018).

This case study explores an approach to employability and social mobility that draws on theories of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1990) and social justice (Fraser, 1997) to work collaboratively with students preparing for a placement or job interview.

The majority of University of West London (UWL) students are first-generation higher education participants from low-income black and minority ethnic backgrounds. A quarter of them have dependents. A UWL career readiness survey of first-year students in 2017 (AGCAS, 2017) showed that in spite of being only half as likely to have access to pre-university information advice and guidance (IAG) as the national average, UWL students felt confident about applying for jobs. However, in the experience of UWL careers team, students' confidence seems to diminish once they encounter graduate placement and job interviews. One result of these findings was the idea of introducing interactive forum theatre interview workshops with students as a possible way of improving their confidence and skills in this area. In 2017/18 UWL careers team piloted forum theatre interview workshops with students.

Forum theatre was developed by the Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal in the 1960s, as part of his school of theatre known as the 'Theatre of the Oppressed,' where various types of oppression affecting communities and societies are examined on stage. In this type of theatre, the actors first perform a short play; afterwards, a 'facilitator' invites the audience to suggest solutions to the problem that has been presented. At this point, the audience members become 'spect-actors' (spectators – actors). Rather than the passive observers of a drama (Jackson, 1995) the audience takes part in the play and suggests changes to the original performance. To help them do this, a character called the 'Joker,' explains the rules (Boal, 2002) and sometimes challenges the spect-actors (Jackson, 2002). After the performance the audience decides on their own version/rewrite of the original play: the actors' original portrayal of an event or the alternative, put forward by the spect-actors, to resolve a problem. Boal was influenced by his fellow Brazilian, Paulo Freire, whose seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, explored the nature of oppression, particularly in education (Freire, 1990).



Freire advocated 'problem posing' education, with both teacher and student becoming "jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 1990, p61). Freire moved from the notion of teacher as the depositor of knowledge (like an oppressor) to the belief that students should be trusted to engage in critical thinking and work in partnership with their teachers.

Boal was exiled from Brazil by a military dictatorship. During his exile, he travelled to Europe where he noticed that although overt oppressions of brutality, such as state police on the streets, were absent, some people had a 'cop in the head' (Boal, 1995) – the absorption of insidious external social oppressions.

## Approach

We felt that forum theatre could be appropriate to use in the field of job interviews with UWL students. In an interview, the power lies in the dynamic between the interviewer – described by Holmes (2013) as an 'employment gatekeeper' – and the interviewee. The participants in an interview situation could be (crudely) compared to the oppressed protagonists (the interviewee) and the oppressor antagonist (interviewer) in a Boalian drama. Forum theatre in the context of interview performance also addresses the issue of internal oppressions: the internal 'cop in the head', (Boal, 1995) that can affect 'performance', and subsequent success, at interview.

In 2017/18, UWL careers team piloted some 30 forum theatre workshops across academic disciplines, resulting in excellent feedback from participants, and favourable outcomes.

Having tried this approach with promising results, we wanted to test it further to demonstrate its effectiveness in successfully improving the confidence and success of first-generation HE students at interview. In the academic year 2018/19, we undertook a small research project, funded by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), using the following methodologies:

- + **quantitative:** analysis of career readiness survey and National Union of Students UWL segmentation data of 'What's on Students' minds' (NUS 2017 a,b). See Figure 1
- + **qualitative:** delivery of forum theatre workshops to two separate student cohorts – a group from the BSc Social Work course and one from the BA Fashion Business and Branding course. A total of 35 students participated in the study
- + **qualitative:** each workshop was followed by a semi-structured focus group designed to elicit in-depth feedback about participants' experience of, and feelings about, the forum theatre process. This was digitally audio-recorded, professionally transcribed and then analysed using Nvivo software as a data management tool
- + **ethics:** the project adhered to the ethical standards of the British Sociological Association in developing a responsible research relationship with students, including an explicit verbal and written agreement, guaranteed anonymity and the option to opt out at any stage of the research.

During the forum theatre workshop careers consultants took the roles of:

- + joker
- + interviewee
- + interviewer.

During the drama, the 'Joker' invited our student participants ('spect-actors') to stop the action at any point where they felt that the interviewee was saying or doing something inappropriate and to suggest a better action or response. The action was then re-enacted with the students' responses. There was time for discussion about what worked or didn't work, with the 'spect-actors' facilitated by the 'Joker' to work in partnership with the actors to create a drama that demonstrated strong interview technique.

The interview workshop format aimed to follow Boal's forum theatre principles in that it:

- + presented a 'story' with which the audience could identify
- + directly acknowledged the issue of power (between the interviewer and interviewee), while showing that this can be changeable
- + was not didactic, as it allowed for discussion about the initial authoritative narrative
- + provided a 'safe space' for rehearsing reality, where participants could reflect upon strategies for change.

(Babbage, 2004).

A focus group was set up after each forum theatre workshop to find out how helpful the students found it. We wanted to know how successful it had been in helping to prepare for a placement interview, what they had learnt, how it compared to previous help with interviews and how confident they felt about approaching interviews after the workshop.

## Main Findings/Themes

Focus group participants reported that they:

- + had little or no access, prior to HE, to reliable sources of formal 'cold' professional IAG, and no access to informal 'hot' information about jobs and careers through their social networks of family and friends (Reay, David and Ball, 2009)
- + were confident when applying for jobs in the retail, catering and care sectors but daunted when applying for graduate-level placements and jobs, particularly at the interview stage
- + enjoyed the participatory parity and ethos of forum theatre – describing it as 'fun and engaging'
- + felt that it helped them develop long term confidence through collectively learning about interviews.

Some of the useful feedback we received:

“I don’t think I’ll forget a lot of the things that we’ve learnt today because I acted on them. So...it’s something that [I will] immediately put into [place when] I am in interviews.”

*(Focus group participant 1)*

“I did see things that you did during the interview that were seen as wrong. I saw myself do that ... when I had an interview...I never really thought about it ...that might be not the right way to go. So it was ... good to see little things that I do that might not be appropriate at that moment. It gives me a point to work on and maybe not to do that again.”

*(Focus group participant 2)*

Graduate job interviews require a level of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) rarely available to working-class students (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). However, we are not trying to give students something they are lacking – the ‘deficit model’ –which focuses ‘...on the assumed deficits of individuals rather than structural issues’ (Whitty, 2016, p79).

Rather, we aim to challenge the ‘cop in the head’ (Boal, 1995) by using the group’s collective knowledge and experience to collectively learn ‘the rules of the game’ (Boal, 2002) of interviews. In using Boal’s forum theatre, we are drawing both on Freire’s theory of dialogic ‘circles of culture’ (Freire, 1990), and the social justice principles of ‘participatory parity’ and ‘recognition’ (Fraser, 1997).

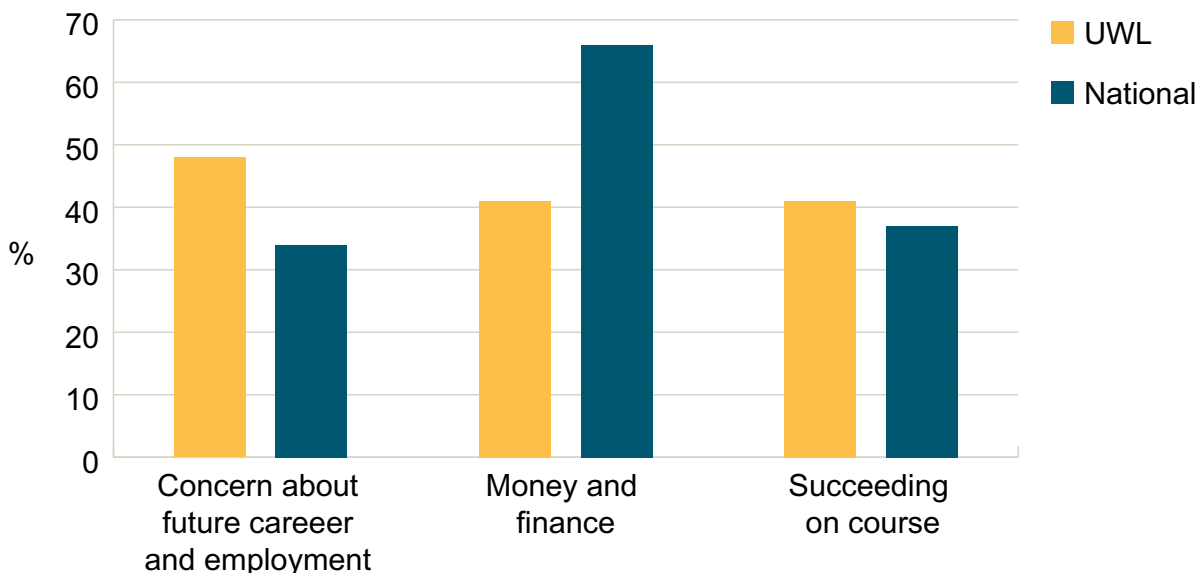
## Results

The success rates for forum theatre interview workshops continue to be positive:

- + twelve out of the 14 fashion business students who participated in the forum theatre workshop obtained a placement (compared with two out of 14 the previous year)
- + all 21 social work students who participated in the forum theatre workshop obtained a placement (previous year’s data unavailable).

These rates of success are important given how concerned UWL students are about their career prospects. Analysis of segmentation data on ‘What’s on Students’ Minds’ when they are at university (NUS, 2017 a, b) shows that for UWL respondents – the majority of whom are not white and middle class; many of whom have dependents – their future career was the top issue above current money and academic concerns.

**Figure 1. What's on students' minds: top three**



(Source: NUS Insight Student Segmentation 2016/17)

We believe that the success of these workshops is contingent on adhering to Boal's original ethos that forum theatre challenges oppression and promotes social justice.

"In 'Theatre of the Oppressed' reality is shown not only as it is, but also more importantly as it could be. Which is what we live for – to become what we have the potential to be."

(Boal 2002 p6)

## Conclusion

Forum theatre is now our standard way of delivering interview workshops. Careers team members have no formal training in forum theatre and use their professional training in careers guidance and group facilitation. Some report being more comfortable with certain roles than others – either the 'Joker', interviewer or interviewee. In each workshop, we learn enormously from our students.

We anticipate that our use of the theory and practice of forum theatre will be of interest to others working in the field of HE employability, and are currently developing resources, such as a script and video clips, to share with colleagues in other services.

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