

The development of skills



This is an Employability CETL resource which draws upon existing good practice in the faculty of Development and Society (D&S). It comprises examples of good practice, questions which teams can collectively consider and discuss as well as recommendations for addressing the employability agenda when writing for validation. It draws evidence from evaluative work on validation documents submitted by course planning teams in 2007 and is intended primarily as part of a pack for teams preparing for validation.

Examples of good practice

The following are the key categories of employability skills:



(Hind and Moss, 2005; Hawkins, 1999)

As these are transferable skills, they are considered relevant in any employment context. Similarly, as part of effective employability provision they could work well in the curricula of all academic subjects.

Critical thinking, part of 'thinking skills', is often linked to the culminating dissertation in courses. It would be just as applicable however at levels 4 and 5 of an undergraduate course. An early emphasis on critical thinking would prepare students for the challenges of their final year dissertation.

Learning study skills (key skills) at university could be a challenge as it can easily take second stage in the impending demands on students to learn a number of new skills and abilities. A passive approach of making study skills resources available to students through Blackboard therefore may be

less effective, as students can easily overlook the possibilities or not attach the necessary importance to them. Actively promoting awareness of support mechanisms on the side of the tutor is likely to be more successful. Active liaison on the side of tutors with the Education Guidance service and Study Support services can also be effective.

Real Estate courses look at the possibilities of internationalising the student experience which arguably enhances a number of employability skills in students such as adaptability, confidence, self-awareness, initiative, the ability to be proactive and the willingness to learn etc. (MSc Real Estate Investment and Management, 2008: 7).

A good example of addressing group working skills comes from BA English, English and History and English Language courses (2007: 13). These courses have an assessed group work component as part of the programme of study. This approach is a good example not only of addressing group working skills but also of enhancing a range of people skills associated with graduate employability, including interpersonal skills, communication skills, persuasiveness, teamwork and leadership.

Enterprise skills are a relatively new addition to the skill sets necessary for graduate employability (Moreland, 2006). While their prominence in academia is still emerging, enterprise skills come top of the list for many employers.

There are some good examples of integrating enterprise skills within the taught curriculum. Sustainable Development students are expected to demonstrate innovative thinking. Similarly in Construction and Real Estate courses there is an emphasis on innovative thinking and problem solving which are developed through 'innovative role play and advanced simulations' (MSc Real Estate Investment and Management, 2007: 31). This is a particularly good example as it uses a work-related learning approach and evidence suggests that enterprise skills are best developed within a work-based learning environment (Moreland, 2006).

Other examples of good practice come from BA Hons English, English and History, English Language, which collectively make reference to the need for students to develop and demonstrate 'creativity, decisiveness, initiative' (BA Hons English, 2007: 13). These examples are discussed primarily in the context of academic study. It would be useful to integrate approaches to teaching and learning enterprise skills in the humanities which use a work related/work based learning approach, as demonstrated by

Construction and Real Estate courses (MSc Real Estate Investment and Management, 2007). Opportunities for this could be accessed through work placements, voluntary work, engagement with the Student Union, or engagement with the Venture Matrix amongst others. Engagement with the Venture Matrix is a particularly good opportunity as it is currently actively seeking opportunities to involve social enterprise ventures, such as could originate in the humanities disciplines.

The Graduate Diploma in Youth Work (2007: 71) and Early Childhood Studies (2007: 3) routes have integrated leadership and management skills into their core module provision and through encouraging participation in volunteering and peer mentoring. Once again these are good examples of integrating enterprise skills.

Questions to consider/ discuss

- How could academic staff proactively raise awareness in students of both the resources and support mechanisms available to students in improving study skills?
- How could active liaisons between academic staff and study support/ education guidance services help to raise awareness of the importance of study skills?
- Are there potential benefits for enhancing employability skills through internationalising the student experience (for example through the use of placements abroad, exchange programmes etc.)?
- Are there opportunities to encourage work-related activity which encourages students to understand and participate in social enterprise?

Recommendations for addressing the employability agenda when writing for validation

In the area of employability, the skills development discourse is broader than key skills and further includes people skills, thinking skills, self-reliance skills, enterprise skills, project management skills (Hind and Moss, 2005; Hawkins, 1999). All subject areas have the potential to offer development in all of these skills areas. This potential and intent could be demonstrated by making explicit where (in which modules) the skill will be addressed, as well as through which pedagogical approaches (e.g. group work, learning abroad, special workshops collaborative with central department etc).

When writing for validation it would be useful to make direct reference to enterprise skills. Skills such as creativity, decisiveness, leadership and management are recognised in research literature on employability as enterprise skills. While they are referred to in the validation documents, there could be a more direct reference to them as contributing to students' broader understanding of enterprise (awareness of how a business operates, awareness of the individual's own capability to contribute to a business or organisation). Enterprise skills are

highly valued by employers and shaping the discourse in this way could contribute to preparing students for the world of work.

References

1. Hawkins, P. 1999, *the art of building windmills: career tactics for the 21st century*, Graduate into Employment Unit.
2. Hind, D. & Moss, S. 2005, *Employability skills*, Business Education, Sunderland.
3. Moreland, N. 2006, *Entrepreneurship and higher education: an employability perspective: Learning and Employability Series 1*, The Higher Education Academy, Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team.

References to definitive documents

<https://staff.shu.ac.uk/fds/workStudents/quality/defDocs.asp>
[Accessed 20th February, 2009]

1. MSc Real Estate Investment and Management/MSc Real Estate Construction and Development, DELIVERED IN WARSAW, validated May 2007
2. BA (Hons) English, Revalidated May 2007
3. Graduate Diploma in Youth Work, validated April 2007
4. BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies/BA (Hons) Children and Playwork/BA (Hons) Childhood Studies, revalidated April 2007