

Centre for Excellence

# in Teaching and Learning for Employability (e3i)

Key findings of the documentary analysis of validation documents (06/07)

## Key findings of the documentary analysis of validation documents (06/07)

Below are selected examples of some of the key findings of the documentary analysis of validation documents from all four faculties. The findings are grouped according to the elements of the Sheffield Hallam University Employability Framework.

	<b>Employability Framework element</b>	<b>Examples from validation documents</b>
1.	<b>The progressive development of autonomy</b>	<p>An example of supported but self-directed learning can be found in the H&amp;W documentation where it is noted that the course has a focus on developing autonomous practice in clinical supervision skills. In this way, the students are supported in developing their clinical skills yet are able to exercise autonomy in terms of making judgements based on clinical needs and the situation they are in.</p> <p>There are however some instances of narrow interpretation of the term autonomy. One example is the approach of progressively reducing the number of direct tutor support as an approach to developing autonomy. Where this is done without adequate alternative support for the learner, reducing the number of guided hours is not guaranteed to support the autonomous learning model.</p>
2.	<b>The development of skills</b>	<p>Courses often emphasise particular skills depending on the subject studied - for example placing an emphasis on referencing and literacy, but not numeracy. Employers will be looking for a good balance in the skills which graduates have, which is likely to include numeracy skills, as well as literacy and communication skills. While courses may not associate their subject matter with some of the transferable skills immediately, they could still consider those as core part of the employability provision for every student.</p>
3.	<b>Personal development planning</b>	<p>Validation documentation often suggests PDP is integrated within the student module experience. It would be helpful to include information clarifying the ways in which PDP is addressed, as it is often the approach to PDP which determines how effective provision is likely to be.</p> <p>Evidence from the validation documents indicated that PDP delivery was most successful and productive when</p>

		<p>there was involvement from all stakeholders - teaching staff, central department, employers and peers - this is the most effective approach as it allows students to benefit from the expertise of employability professionals (the careers service) and from the viewpoint of prospective employers, giving them an insight into the real world of work.</p> <p>In some creative courses, the creative portfolio was considered as PDP provision. A broader reading of the PDP process is necessary as the creative portfolio is likely to be focused on the subject specific, and less likely to focus on developing the transferable, soft skills and attributes required for employability.</p>
4.	<b>The inclusion of activities which are similar to those required in external environments</b>	<p>Some of the best examples came from courses which had direct employer engagement in curriculum design and delivery; examples are: guest speakers from industry, employer participation in curriculum design, working to industry standards, live projects, attendance at events and activities run by professional bodies, networking.</p> <p>The support for such activities however is varied - in some cases students are expected to make links with employers, yet there is no evidence that the course provides support in this respect. In other cases the course teams actively organise this, using their own established connections with industry.</p>
5.	<b>Students' explicit reflection on their use of knowledge and skills</b>	<p>Most references to reflection are in relation to PDP with far fewer references to be found outside of this.</p> <p>In many cases there is overwhelming emphasis on the tool for reflection (ex. journals, e-portfolios, blogs etc.), while less is said regarding the pedagogical approach adopted to support the reflective activity through the use of the tool (ex. reflective models can be used such as Baxter Magolda's reflective model, Chris John's model, Gibbs' reflective cycle). Since the reflective tool delivers learning only where it is supported by a robust pedagogical approach, both of these aspects need to be given equal consideration within validation documents.</p>
6.	<b>The encouragement of career management skills (CMS)</b>	<p>Career management skills learning seemed to be most fully addressed where there have been strong collaborative working relationships with the careers service and central department in general, as these services hold the largest amount of resources and expertise on CMS. Workshops organised collaboratively with careers advisers, face to face sessions with</p>



		advisers, employer participation events are all ways of learning CMS which were evidenced as working well in CMS provision.
7.	<b>Engagement with work related learning</b>	<p>There is much evidence demonstrating that students are well supported and prepared for their placement experience. The most successful approaches seem to be those which start this preparation from the first year of study and gradually introduce elements of placement preparation, taking into account students' progression through the course and increasing interest in employability.</p> <p>However there is little evidence regarding how the workplace supervisor (employer) is engaged in providing guidance and support prior to and during the placement. Where the WBL experience is a '<i>three way agreement</i>' (Boud and Solomon, 2001) between placement supervisor, workplace supervisor and student, consideration is needed of the responsibilities of each of these three stakeholders in the WBL process.</p>
8.	<b>Preparation for specific professional areas</b>	Aspects of provision which contribute to preparing students for professional areas were accreditation from professional bodies, registering students with professional bodies, designing the curriculum according to employers' needs, undertaking client sponsored projects. On the one hand designing the curriculum with employers' needs in mind (ex. using industry briefs) is very positive, as it gives students the realistic experience of the world of work. Care is needed to ensure that provision does not become too narrow in catering for the needs of particular employers/businesses, and that briefs are kept open enough.
9.	<b>Engagement with activities with a specific enterprise focus</b>	Engagement in activities with an enterprise focus is the least considered section out of the entire employability framework. Frequently it is the case that there are a number of examples in the documents which have the potential to develop enterprise skills in students, yet they are not identified as enhancing enterprise in learners. Examples are: working on live projects, networking, seeking opportunities to apply for external commissions. The enterprise element of these activities needs to be articulated in course planning documents, module handbooks, and made explicit to students, so they would be able to articulate these themselves in job interviews/ CV writing.