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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Future fit

Preparing graduates for the world of work



CBI on
higher education



Future fit

Preparing graduates for the world of work

CBI on
higher education





“We all know that graduates need to be equipped with the right skills to succeed in the workplace. Today’s labour market is bringing home to students the need to take personal responsibility for developing the skills and attributes that will help make them employable and their employers competitive. It’s also teaching them the necessity of presenting themselves and what they can offer to a prospective employer well. ‘Future fit’ highlights the role higher education institutions and employers both have to play in giving students the best possible opportunities to build, refine and articulate their skills. I hope the good practice in these case studies will inspire the university sector and employers to do that increasingly effectively.”

David Lammy, minister of state for higher education and intellectual property

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Foreword by Richard Lambert, CBI



We are not living in easy economic times. The class of 2009 will be leaving university and entering the labour market at the worst time for many years, when businesses are under pressure and unemployment is rising. The recession – and the resulting increase in competition for jobs – throws into sharper focus the imperative for graduates to have the attributes to succeed in the workplace. In addition to acquiring the strong academic and technical knowledge required for many roles, our graduates and postgraduates also need the employability skills and positive attitude that employers value in every new recruit.

Employers will train their employees to do their jobs but they expect graduates to have the broad range of abilities to make a smooth transition to the workplace. Graduates should be willing to learn and develop, bring new ideas and contribute to the business' development and future growth. The majority of businesses say employability skills are an important factor they consider when recruiting graduates and ensuring universities provide their students with the opportunity to develop in this area should be a priority.

Today graduates are not just competing for jobs with their counterparts from the university in the next county or city, but those from other countries and continents. The UK higher education system has a strong base on which to build, providing students with significant opportunities to develop employability skills. Many universities have developed their offering to embed these within their degree courses or, they have created special programmes and they are collaborating successfully with a range of businesses.

But this must be a joint responsibility – employers have an important role to play too. The case studies in this report show many businesses of all sizes are already implementing different approaches to help students develop before they enter the workforce. This is encouraging and we must ensure more undergraduates have the opportunity to experience the world of work – through work placements, summer internships and more contact with business during their studies – even in a downturn.

There are significant benefits for universities, employers and students themselves through increased collaboration. This report identifies steps which both universities and employers should consider implementing if they are not already. But there is one clear message: we must all – employer, university and student – raise our game.

It is encouraging to see that students are increasingly aware of what will help them succeed in the workplace but they must take the development of their wider competencies as seriously as they take their studies. Universities do not solely exist to prepare people for work but they do have a responsibility, and an increasing student demand, to provide opportunities to help develop their employability skills. And employers need to increase engagement with universities and offer high quality placements and work experience. Investing in ensuring our graduates are fit to take on the challenges they will face and make the most of the opportunities open to them will contribute towards enabling the UK to be well-placed in the future.

Richard Lambert
Director-general
CBI

Foreword by Rick Trainor, Universities UK



This second report from the UUK/CBI partnership illustrates how universities and business can work together to help equip graduates for their future working lives.

This work is more important, and perhaps more difficult, because of the current recession. But the story told by the report is a positive one. It demonstrates the breadth and depth of efforts to help graduates achieve a competitive edge in the job market, building on the many skills and attributes developed as part of the broader higher education experience. It shows how highly employers value UK graduates, who are excited by ideas, capable of challenging assumptions and most importantly, have the ability to keep learning. It demonstrates that many forward-thinking companies see working with students, whether in the workplace or on campus, as having a recognisable business benefit. UUK and the CBI want to spread that message, and the range of excellent practice this report captures.

Of course, many students already have experience of working. Increasingly, students enter higher education having already worked for a few years, and many students combine work and study. But universities can help even students who already have extensive work experience to develop their skills further to make them more attractive to employers. More generally, the case studies show how universities are changing the way courses are taught to build employability skills into the curriculum – for example by encouraging team working, problem-solving and using real-life case studies to illuminate theory. This report also shows how universities use embedded placements, credit-bearing career related modules and personal development planning to give their graduates the edge.

Doing this effectively depends on universities working closely with employers – harnessing their expertise to inform curriculum development and providing practical experience of working at graduate level. I am delighted to see that 84% of large businesses report they have links with universities, with a further 10% planning to develop them. For our part, universities are increasingly reaching out to business, and Universities UK and GuildHE's recent publication 'standing together' gives the name and number of the 'front-door-for-business' in every higher education institution in the UK.

It is heartening to see that over 80% of employers surveyed by the CBI are satisfied or very satisfied with the employability skills of graduates. Nine out of ten employers report that graduates have that all important positive attitude. It is also encouraging that students are generally aware of the skills employers value. But the case studies in this report show how we can build on our strengths, and learn from others' success.

There are considerable challenges: the recession has led to financial pressure on business and the university sector, squeezing recruitment and training budgets. There is no doubt that in many sectors, this year's graduates will be facing stiff competition for jobs. I hope this report will encourage universities and employers to redouble their efforts to ensure those graduates have the best chance. The investment is worthwhile, because we know that graduates at their best, with the right mix of skills, can have a transformative effect on the places in where they work.

Rick Trainor

Rick Trainor
Universities UK

Executive summary

“The importance of employability skills is now greater than ever in the current economic climate. Work placements are one way of providing a means by which these skills can be attained. We have seen the results and the value of this firsthand not just for Centrica but also for the valuable skills development that students experience while with us. In order to be well prepared for the upturn, we need to ensure that we are producing graduates with higher level skills and the employability skills which employers value in order to support the economy and meet the needs of business.”

Sam Laidlaw, CEO of Centrica plc, and chairman of the CBI Higher Education Task Force

Employability skills – the attributes that help people respond to the changing demands of the workplace and contribute positively to their employer’s success and their own progress have never been more important. This report highlights good practice by employers and universities¹ in helping students in higher education develop employability skills that will equip them for their working lives.

As the case studies in this report show, employers and universities are dependent on one another to prepare tomorrow’s graduates and postgraduates. The report shows how employers value the skills and attributes that graduates develop through higher education – fresh knowledge, critical thinking, the capacity to be excited by ideas and challenge assumptions. The report also shows how universities and business are going further than ever before to help graduates enhance their career prospects.

Wider access to higher education has increased the numbers competing for graduate-level jobs. More university students have already had experience of the workplace, working part-time or even full-time alongside their studies. The introduction of new models, such as Foundation Degrees, sees employers and universities collaborating to deliver programmes of higher education. These factors all change the landscape for employers, universities and students in meeting the needs of all to make sure UK graduates can compete with the best in our increasingly globalised economy. It is extremely important that students develop valuable transferable skills as part of their university experience, and the benefits are tangible.

There is a broad range of approaches to achieving this goal and many universities and employers are already taking action. This report identifies good practice and offers practical advice to those who want to do more.

Structure of the report

Chapter 1: About employability defines employability skills and sets out why they are important in today's global economy, especially at a time of economic difficulty. It looks at what employers want of the graduates they employ, how businesses are helping students prepare for their careers after graduation, what universities are doing to deliver these skills, and examines whether students' needs are being met. It also identifies gaps in provision.

Chapter 2: What works reviews the key themes emerging from the case studies, identifies the factors that have led to success and looks at the benefits for universities, employers and students. It makes recommendations for spreading the successful approaches of the companies and institutions featured and proposes action to be taken by higher education funding bodies and responsible administrations.

Chapter 3: Survey findings sets out and analyses the results of surveys undertaken for this report: a survey of 80 higher education institutions throughout the UK; questions in the CBI's second education and skills survey which was answered by 581 employers collectively employing over 2.5 million people – 8% of the total UK workforce – and a survey of over 880 students.

Chapter 4: Case studies explores what a range of employers and universities are doing to ensure undergraduates are ready for the world of work. The six employers range in size and sector from a 15-person marine technology company to a major supermarket with 150,000 UK employees. The seven universities also vary widely in geographical location, age, size, focus of activity and student profile. All the case studies offer practical ideas which could help other employers and institutions further develop their own programmes.

Chapter 5: Further information contains a list of sources for further information and advice.

“We took the bold step of undertaking a review to change fundamentally what we and others have simply continued to do for years. What we have done is demanding and challenges the current status quo in higher education but a strategic change of direction was essential to ensure our graduates have the necessary education and skills to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy.”

LJMU Vice-Chancellor **Professor Michael Brown**

Key lessons for universities and employers

Raising our sights and our game

- Perhaps the most important lesson to draw from the case studies and other material examined for this report is that universities and businesses need to maintain and increase their activity in developing employability skills in all students, despite the economic downturn and the pressure on budgets – including engaging with one another to ensure that as many students as possible are given the opportunity to undertake work placements or internships. History shows that investment during a downturn leads to success when pressures ease, and investment in employability is an investment in the future.
- Students, too, need to engage with this agenda from day one of their course – after all, most will have a working life of some forty to fifty years – and they need to understand how to articulate the employability skills they have developed as part of their course, as well as what they have gained from extra-curricular activities and part-time work.
- Schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers all need to help students understand that getting a degree is not enough on its own – the graduate labour market can be fiercely competitive. If they understand what employers are looking for and work to develop the skills and attributes they value, graduates will have an edge on the competition.

Raising students' awareness and commitment

- Although there are other valuable ways for students to acquire employability skills, a student who undertakes a placement or internship is immersed in the experience of being in a real workplace, finding out what it's like working at graduate level. This can help them understand more quickly what skills they need and how to apply their learning.
- Almost every employer specifically referred to the advantages students bring to the workplace, new ideas and enthusiasm, and the completion of projects for which there was a real business need. Businesses should be encouraged to continue to increase the number of placement opportunities available.
- Developing employability skills should be a core part of a student's university experience.
- Branding employability skills separately from the Careers Service makes sure students understand it is about acquiring and demonstrating transferable skills, not just about getting a job.
- Credits towards a student's degree from participation in work-related learning signal the importance placed on the employability skills and can be a very effective incentive. Participation in additional programmes increases when certificates and awards are used to raise the profile of employability-related programmes.
- Use of undergraduates to develop and design their marketing materials and campaigns, further encourages participation.

“Universities owe it to their students and themselves to prepare students for employment ... While the onus lies with the student to research these issues, universities could do more to empower students by building key competencies and core professional skills into programmes early in their degree.”

Syed Raza, a recent graduate at Talent Recruitment and Windsor Fellow

Developing successful employer-university partnerships

- When asked in a CBI survey what universities should prioritise, 82% of employers chose ‘improving students’ employability skills’, suggesting this should be a key focus for universities.
- Universities are already aware of the importance of developing good long-term relationships with businesses. Those that have enhanced the development of employability skills in their students have done so through building long-term relationships; including establishing employer advisory groups or equivalent mechanisms to ensure that employers can inform the university’s activities and curriculum.
- Many universities are keen to reach out to local and regional SMEs, where there is often an untapped source of employers who do not yet have links with universities. Smaller and local businesses may be able to share knowledge and experience through workshops and lectures, and also offer work placements. But the challenges of engaging smaller firms are clear, especially those without a dedicated HR function. There is a risk that SMEs may not be aware of the support for placements which is available from many universities, with the result that they are often under-represented in the provision of work placements and in other ways. One of our case studies is Yellowfin Limited, a small company whose Chief Executive took the initiative and is now providing one or two placements a year, an example of what can be done by SMEs to help students acquire employability skills.
- However, the interviews conducted for this report suggested that, while universities indicated they want more employers taking part in sessions on campus, either as part of the curriculum or in additional activities, by contrast, employers placed a lot of emphasis on work placements. Greater engagement, with both employers and universities actively seeking relationships, would help to ensure that the needs and expectations of each are better understood and met.
- The benefits flow both ways when these relationships are successful. Engagement with students on campus and work placements can significantly impact on the quality of the graduate recruits which businesses attract. There can also be savings in recruitment costs when a work placement is so successful that the student returns after graduation – and can then contribute immediately because they already know how the business works.

- As universities are competing for students who are becoming more demanding, those who are best able to explain to prospective students how they will help them prepare for the world of work have an additional selling point. Universities can also benefit from other advantages with increased engagement with employers, for example in research and innovation or workforce training.

Dedicated university resources are required

- Universities which set aside specific resources – staff and budgets – to engage with employers regarding employability skills has led to better relationships internally (between university staff promoting employability and other staff) and externally (between universities and employers).
- A dedicated resource makes it more likely that relationships can be brokered between employers and academic staff in faculties or schools. More activities can be organised and do not depend only on a few individuals with contacts, but spread the benefits across the whole university.
- Employers benefit too, through having a dedicated contact point and better co-ordination of activities. Students are better prepared and know what to expect from a placement or internship.
- Universities have found other ways to help students develop and identify employability skills. As well as bringing employers onto campus, many are developing the use of students’ Personal Development Plans to provide a framework for self analysis and the acquisition of skills where gaps are identified. The existence of students’ term-time and vacation working should not be ignored, nor should the increasingly common experience of students who have worked full-time before beginning their studies or who are studying flexibly whilst working. Universities and employers can assist students in understanding how all their workplace and work-related experience can contribute to their employability.

1

About employability

What is employability?

A modern, competitive economy needs workers who possess skills, knowledge and attitudes they can take to any work situation and have the ability and willingness to continually adapt and prosper in a changing world. Universities and employers have attempted to define a sub-set of skills, which we have referred to as “employability skills” as well as the specialist knowledge and skills necessary for a particular role.

Employability skills have been defined after extensive collaboration with business by the CBI as²:

A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy.

Employability skills include:

Self-management – readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.

Teamworking – respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, and awareness of interdependence with others.

Business and customer awareness – basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.

Problem solving – analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.

Communication and literacy – application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy – including listening and questioning.

Application of numeracy – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).

Application of information technology – basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.

Underpinning all these attributes, the key foundation, must be a **positive attitude**: a ‘can-do’ approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make these happen.

Frequently mentioned by both employers and universities is **entrepreneurship/enterprise**: broadly, an ability to demonstrate an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking. An individual with these attributes can make a huge difference to any business.

When graduates enter the labour market, businesses expect them to be able to draw on these employability skills. Definitions of employability skills used by universities often differ slightly from the CBI definition; in particular, they emphasise the skills that are acquired through higher education, such as research skills, managing complex information and critical thinking. But the interviewees in this report all recognised that the CBI definition encompassed most of the attributes they were seeking to instil in their students (in the case of universities) or looking for in their employees (in the case of employers). All participants made a clear distinction between these skills and what students needed to know to apply for a job, such as CV writing and interview techniques, although they recognised that the latter are also necessary in teaching students and graduates how to demonstrate that they possess the employability skills themselves.

Some organisations specialise in work placements/internships with SMEs, encouraging entrepreneurship. Shell Step is one, described at page 39. Another is Enternships.com, which has been piloted as a listing service by founder, Rajeeb Dey, advertising over 160 placements to approximately 4,000 students through the Oxford Entrepreneurs Network. In spring 2009, Enternships.com launched an online platform to match students and graduates looking for work placements with SMEs looking for entrepreneurial interns or “enterns”.

“I worked at Peter Jones Investments, a company that manages the business interests of the firms that Peter Jones of BBC’s Dragon’ Den has investments in, along with Peter Jones’ media interests. As an Entern in the firm, my role was varied, and reflected the diverse nature of work within a small business dealing with start-up companies in their infancy. I was instructed to get involved in all areas of the business, ranging from input into the design of a board game based upon one of Mr. Jones’ TV programmes, re-designing and rewording a website for one of Peter’s largest investments, to working with the team to review potential investments’ business plans and assessing their viability.

“My Enternship was the first time I had worked in an office environment and it acclimatised me to the social aspect of working life. I understood quickly that to truly benefit from the experience I would have to come out of my shell a bit and approach people I had never met, in order to both enjoy my time, and to learn more about the business. In addition, I have discovered that I prefer to work in a small team where my contribution does not go unnoticed, and my responsibility is greater.”

James Reid, politics, philosophy and economics student, Oxford University

Why employability matters

The purpose of higher education is not solely about turning out work-ready graduates for employers who can be plugged in from day one. The UK's universities also exist to drive forward the boundaries of knowledge, and aim to encourage intellectual curiosity in their graduates. Employers must also take some responsibility for training the graduates they recruit. Many graduates will enter the workplace at a young age and will not yet be fully formed individuals, for these people their higher education experience is often at the start of a much longer process of learning and developing. Students should be energised by different ways of thinking and learning to enable them to develop new skills in preparation for life at work.

But in the summer of 2009, the UK's higher education institutions will produce 400,000 new graduates. They will be entering the labour market at perhaps the worst time in a generation – highly developed employability skills, at the very least, together with experience of the world of work will be key in getting a foot in the door when it comes to securing graduate-level jobs or on the ladder towards one.

Work is a major part of most people's lives – so all universities have a clear responsibility to equip their students with the skills they need to succeed in the labour market. Many jobs require specialist or technical knowledge, but all jobs require generic employability skills. Students – undergraduate and postgraduate, UK and international – look to their universities to help them gain these skills alongside the specialist knowledge their academic studies supplies. This may mean different things for different groups of students. For example, many universities tailor support for international students, who face particular challenges in entering the workforce whether in the UK or elsewhere. Postgraduate students, on the other hand, may have an academic career in mind, or a research career in industry. Increasingly postgraduate programmes are designed to ensure that they encourage the development of a range of skills which will prepare students for the variety of paths their careers might take.

However, the student still bears responsibility for finding out what is likely to be expected once they move on from study, and other routes exist alongside the formal curriculum and the way it is taught: holiday and term-time working, and knowledge gained through family or other contacts often play a part. As the case studies illustrate, university careers services and many students' unions offer a huge variety of ways for students and new graduates to find out what employers are looking for and to gain relevant experience (see, for example, the Exeter University case study). Many students report they get a significant amount of help in

identifying and acquiring the employability skills from their extra-curricular activities while at university, as well as from their studies.

But the trend away from a traditional model of higher education where a student aged 24 or under devotes themselves full-time to their studies and completes their degree in three years presents a real opportunity and challenge to universities, employers and students. Many more students will have had previous or current experience of work. More students currently:

- Work part-time alongside full-time study
- Study part-time, with or without the formal support of an employer
- Enter higher education as mature students after several years in the workplace
- Have their first experience of higher education through a foundation degree
- Pursue an explicitly vocational course (but fewer take sandwich courses).

Demographic changes will lead to a declining pool of young students entering higher education which has led to universities developing more flexible provision. This has major implications for the way employability skills are developed.

The development of employability skills for a significant proportion of students is not just about introducing them to the world of work, as it might have been in the past – they also need to understand what skills employers value. If they are working, or have worked before beginning their degree course, some may have many employability skills already. But they need help to satisfactorily articulate the skills to a prospective employer, in particular if they lack confidence; this was identified by Glasgow Caledonian, Hertfordshire and Liverpool John Moores University as an issue for students from areas with traditionally low participation in higher education and/or low income backgrounds. Extra-curricular and co-curricular activity through which students traditionally gained employability skills may not be available to them, because they are working or have other responsibilities. This has implications for how universities work with their students to address employability, and how employers engage with the agenda.

The international economic downturn has made the acquisition of employability skills both more important and more difficult. More important because graduates looking for jobs at a time of higher unemployment and reduced graduate recruitment³ will need to convince prospective employers that they will be a productive

addition to the workplace. There is also a danger that employers currently providing work placements or engaging with universities in other ways will reduce these activities to focus on their core business. While some better off students may be able to replace paid internships or placements through volunteering or unpaid experience, students who can least afford to undertake unpaid work experience are likely to be hardest hit. The universities interviewed for this report – including Goldsmiths and Hertfordshire – were conscious of this danger. However, charities such as V Inspired are working to make volunteering more accessible to all young people. Volunteers have travel expenses reimbursed when they take part in voluntary work, which goes some way towards making it easier for those less well off to engage in volunteering activities with no additional cost to them.

Yet the CBI and UUK believe it is essential that current activities aimed at preparing graduates for the world of work are not reduced, whether traditional work placements or wider engagement between employers and universities. The work highlighted in this report and that being undertaken by many other institutions and employers is a valuable long-term investment in the future of the UK workforce. If the UK is to be ready to make the most of the economic recovery when it comes, this generation of graduates must have essential employability skills.

There are also short-term benefits for businesses in partnering with higher education institutions giving employers easy access to a pool of potential employees, and support with training activities, help with wider recruitment, and knowledge transfer partnerships. And as featured employers such as Sainsbury's and KPMG confirm, giving a student a work placement can mean a highly motivated short-term employee who can bring fresh-thinking to a project for which there is a business need. If the placement is successful and the student becomes a permanent graduate employee, substantial recruitment costs may be saved.

What employers want

Employability skills are a top priority for business. Over three quarters (78%) of the firms who responded to the CBI's education and skills 2009 survey⁴ said it was one of the most important factors when recruiting graduates, along with a positive attitude (72%) and relevant work experience/industrial placement (54%). The employability skills defined in this report are vitally important if graduates are expected not just to find their feet in the workplace but also to perform at a high level.

Employers invest heavily in training graduate recruits when they join their organisations, but there is also an expectation that they

manage themselves and be effective team players. Employers also expect graduates to have the basic skills to analyse numeric data, produce clear and structured written work such as emails, letters and reports and also understand the needs of customers. Graduates must be able to analyse problems and come up with solutions.

We should remember that not every workplace is a commercial business, but most graduates will work in the business sector at some time in their lives and so a basic understanding of what makes a business successful and customer requirements is very useful.

When questioned about the employability skills themselves, employers are generally satisfied, with over 80% saying they were satisfied or very satisfied that the graduates they had recruited in the last 12 months had a majority of the skills and most report that their graduates possess a positive attitude, with nine out of ten employers saying they were satisfied or very satisfied. But generally they are not overly impressed with new graduates' basic literacy and numeracy with only 30% of employers reporting themselves as 'very satisfied' with these skills. There is also an element of dissatisfaction (35%) in terms of graduates' awareness of business and customer issues and also in relation to the level of self-management skills which graduates possess (20%). This suggests there is room for improvement, but also employers recognise that they have some responsibility to develop these skills in the graduates that they employ.

When asked what three things universities should prioritise in relation to undergraduates, over three quarters of employers chose 'improving their employability skills', suggesting this should be a key priority for universities. The next highest ranking priority was 'work with employers to provide more work experience placements' (60%) suggesting that universities approaching business to discuss work placements for students might be pushing at an open door. The third highest choice was to 'raise the quality of graduates' with just under a half thinking this was an issue (46%), which indicates that employers still have concerns about the quality of the technical content of some degree subjects.

Degree subject was important for four out of ten (41%) employers. Some firms have concerns that in some areas students may be taking degrees which do not match with economic need and do not give them the tools to address the innovation and scientific challenges facing society today. The survey suggested this was a particular worry in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). This concern was also highlighted in our case studies, for example, Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer are experiencing skills shortages in areas such as food technology.

In September 2008, the CBI's Higher Education Task Force was established with participation from business and universities, to explore what business wants from higher education, how business and universities can best work together and how the sector should be funded to achieve this. This report forms part of the work of the Task Force, with a final report due later in 2009.

What employers are doing

The CBI survey results suggest that many employers are stepping up to the mark, showing an appetite to help students develop their employability skills. Many firms already have a relationship with a university – two thirds of all companies which responded currently have links with universities. Employers realise that providing work placements to students presents the business and the student with a number of benefits. The main attraction for businesses is when they come to recruit graduates and post-graduates as they value the relationship they develop with students and benefit from reduced recruitment costs.

The vast majority (84%) of large businesses (those with 5,000+ employees) in the UK have links with universities – and a further 10% of all businesses plan to develop links in the future. Employers are already helping students develop their employability skills – three quarters (74%) of companies who have university links do so to provide work experience placements for graduates. For many, this is part of their corporate social responsibility agenda, as well as an opportunity to gain advanced access to their potential graduate recruits.

The case studies in this report illustrate the diverse range of programmes and initiatives currently being offered and actioned in the business community. The most common approach is to provide a work placement, either for a period outside of term time (for example, a three-month summer placement) or through a one-year sandwich placement which is part of the degree programme. Many businesses are also active in other ways which help students to develop these skills. Survey results further support this and there are many different ways that firms can help students to help develop employability skills, such as:

- Providing summer work placements to students who then undertake a specific role in the business or work on a project, typically with pay or an allowance (see KPMG case study)
- One-year sandwich work placements which are a formal part of the degree course, usually taken in year two or three
- Shorter work experience placements of only a few weeks long, to provide a taster of graduate work and may not be paid but still provide students with an introduction to the workplace

- Programmes which encourage small and medium-sized businesses to take a placement student such as the Shell Step programme (see Shell case study)
- Work with local universities to share knowledge and experience through lectures or workshops
- Support for university programmes which encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Running skills sessions on campus which introduce students to the skills employers value and which help them develop these
- Interview training and application process support
- Contributions to careers advice services
- Contributions to curriculum content through involvement on advisory boards or directly through lecture support (see Yellowfin case study)
- Placement schemes which include a rotational programme allowing the student to experience different functions or divisions within the business
- Placements aimed at students studying technical subjects.

What universities are delivering

Together with comments received through the surveys and focus groups with recent graduates, the case studies illustrate that, alongside elements of the curriculum which help develop skills for employment, universities work in a range of ways to help their students acquire employability skills. Many universities are working with business, bringing them onto campus to lead workshops and provide case studies, as well as sending students out for work experience opportunities for periods from a day to a year.

One of the strengths of the UK's higher education sector is its diversity, and this report shows how this applies as much to employability issues as it does to other aspects of universities. There are many different approaches to helping students gain the generic skills that will help them find a job, contribute effectively and enjoy work. This reflects the diverse needs of today's students, now that there is such a range of ways in which higher education is accessed, and offers the chance to tailor the university's approach to specific needs.

Many universities recognise that helping their students develop employability skills supports their more traditional teaching, learning and research activities. The HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) survey of graduate destinations after six months

“The definition of employability we use is ‘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’. The definition is much broader than just finding a job. Employability is a curriculum issue and the acquisition of subject specific knowledge and employability skills are complementary and not oppositional. Preparing graduates for the ‘world of work’ is an integral part of our strategy.”

Professor Peter Jones, senior pro-vice chancellor,
Nottingham Trent University

– which measures what proportion of a university’s graduates are in work and at what level six months after graduating – is one of the performance indicators many prospective students look at.

Universities have many different ways of introducing students to employability, but they fall broadly into three categories: the development of the skills is integrated into the way the curriculum is designed and delivered (often with the involvement of employers and the university’s Teaching and Learning Centre or equivalent), through other on-campus experiences (such as special programmes often delivered with employers), or through an additional activity off campus in addition to their core studies. The first two of these categories are particularly relevant to the non-vocational degree subjects. Work placements (centrally brokered or devolved to departments) either focus on students undertaking vocational courses or can be spread more widely, and can take place during vacations or form a full-time year of a student’s course – either as the third of four years, or the second of three years, the former being the traditional ‘sandwich’ course.

But there has been a decline in the proportion and absolute number of sandwich courses over the last 12 years. In 1994/95, 10.5% of all undergraduate students were classified as being on a sandwich course. This proportion had dropped to 6.5% (116,000)

by 2006/07⁵. The largest decline was in engineering & technology where the number of sandwich course students fell by almost 8,000 (33%) during this period.

There are a range of approaches – and most universities involved in this report adopted more than one – including:

- An institution-wide employability policy or strategy, with a definition of what the university means by employability and how it will help its students acquire the necessary skills and experience (see Exeter University case study)
- Building employability skills into the curriculum through work-related learning – for example, using case study examples linking the subject knowledge to its application in the outside world
- Adapting the way the curriculum is taught and assessed – for instance, ensuring students have the opportunity to give presentations or work in a team, and rewarding the demonstration of employability skills
- Offering compulsory – usually accredited – modules designed to help students acquire employability skills
- Offering optional modules designed to help students acquire the employability skills, sometimes incentivised with credits or awards schemes – these may be sessions conducted by employers
- Offering foundation degree courses which directly address the development of employability skills via work based learning and other innovative ways
- Using the student’s Personal Development Plan to encourage analysis of and reflection on the employability skills. This approach needs to be underpinned by some means whereby the student can go on to acquire those skills they lack (see Liverpool John Moores University case study)
- Making paid work placements of up to a year a key part of the university experience, often with a network of contacts with employers at departmental or faculty level and/or centrally
- Encouraging students to undertake work placements (usually paid) or work shadowing (usually unpaid), often during the summer holiday
- Encouraging entrepreneurship, for example, by helping students to run their own businesses (see Cardiff University case study)
- Extra-curricular activity, often via the careers service or students’ union, such as analysis of skills gaps and the means to fill them – through workshops and volunteering opportunities.

In addition, careers services and students' unions offer a range of activities designed to help students apply for jobs. These involve specific skills such as CV writing, interview techniques and how to approach psychometric testing. These are not the same as the employability skills, but are designed to help students – for example, by producing evidence to demonstrate a competency.

This range and level of activity helps explain the confidence demonstrated by the 80 HE institutions (out of 132 UUK members) who responded to a CBI survey carried out for this report. Ninety-six percent of universities who responded thought it likely or highly likely that their graduates will acquire these employability skills as a result of their time at university. But, in a response that mirrors employers' concern, this dropped to 84% for business and customer awareness. There was also a lower result for application of numeracy (85%). This may reflect the nature of individual programmes, some of which are more likely than others to support the development of these skills.

There are, however, signs that some universities regard themselves as more instrumental in the acquisition of employability skills than others: over half (53%) agreed or agreed strongly that students should already have some employability skills before starting university, while 21% expect students to address employability issues largely for themselves, rather than relying on the university.

What students want and what they get

Students are increasingly undertaking paid work alongside/before their studies and so are already using some employability skills (whether or not they have ever heard them described in that way), but it is still important for universities to explain them, and offer students opportunities to develop them and articulate them.

Focus groups and surveys asked students and recent graduates what they needed. In some cases, this was with the benefit of hindsight about what had been good and bad in their university's approach to employability and how it had (or had not) given them an advantage in finding the right job and engaging constructively at work. Students' experience still varies very widely, depending on which institution they attended.

Generally, most students (78%) are confident they know what employers are looking for and recognise that employability skills, work experience and a positive attitude are important to employers. Students recognise that employability skills are viewed as the most important factor to employers when recruiting graduates. Just over two-fifths of students surveyed believed that it was themselves who had primary responsibility to develop these skills, but a large proportion also believes their university has a key role to play.

The majority of undergraduates are confident that they are developing most of these skills, but only a small proportion of students (18%) believe they fully develop their business and customer awareness skills during their time at university. This is consistent with the message coming from business.

Although many undergraduates are participating in specific programmes to develop employability skills, there is still a large proportion who want more. There is unmet demand for stand-alone programmes, internships, work experience and sandwich year placements. Over a quarter of students would like to see employability embedded as part of their degree course.

"Northumbria has a strategy for the development of employability as part of its student wellbeing strategy. This involves collaboration between academic schools and the careers employment service and covers key skills, work experience and career management skills. Each school has a specific action plan for employability and graduate employment benchmarks."
Northumbria University, responding to a CBI-UUK survey
 (October 2008)

Comments from the focus groups included:

"I think a proactive careers service is a really good idea, because I found in my first year holiday that all my friends would be disappearing off on placements, whilst I was unaware of what opportunities were available. I had no clue that these things even existed. If someone had flagged this up at the beginning of my first year then that would have been really helpful."

Recent graduate working at Innocent Drinks

"Employers rate experience highly. Experience is probably one of the most important things that a graduate can bring to the table. Qualifications you can always do, there's no time limit. If you're older as well you can still go and get a qualification. If you've got the right experience then that counts for a lot."

Recent graduate working at RBS

Graduates are aware of the benefits of acquiring employability skills:

"It opens doors so you'll be considered for a job. Now so many people go to university you have to differentiate yourself. What can you demonstrate to employers? It's down to the individual. Everyone's got key competencies."

Recent graduate working at Microsoft

Room for improvement

There is clearly a significant amount of engagement between universities and employers and examples of opportunities which exist for students to develop employability skills, so why is this report necessary?

First, it is clear that not every university has the same level of engagement with this issue. The survey of UUK members may have gathered responses disproportionately from the more active who have programmes they consider worth sharing.

The comments of recent graduates who took part in focus groups as part of the wider Higher Education Task Force and in our student surveys indicate that not all feel that universities helped them to understand and gain the employability skills to the extent that they wish or with hindsight, would have equipped them better for employment.

There are high levels of dissatisfaction among some students, who feel they are missing out on gaining vital skills, because no-one has suggested that they need to do more than focus on their degree course.

Student and recent graduate responses were often affected by the institution attended and the degree subject studied; while a certain diversity of approaches is to be expected between and even within institutions, and a lack of engagement by students themselves until very late on in their university career may affect the responses given, enough comments were made for it to appear probable that some HE institutions are not giving sufficient attention to helping their students identify and acquire the employability skills and competencies.

This student dissatisfaction is reflected in the wider business community where satisfactory is not seen as good enough. Even though the CBI survey reported that the graduates employers have recruited over the last 12 months possess a majority of the skills, there is evidence of other issues where satisfaction levels are significantly lower: only 8% of employers are very satisfied with graduates' awareness of business and customer issues, while only 14% consider graduates to possess the necessary level of self-management skills to a high level.

There are other issues that need addressing. While universities indicated they want more employers taking part in sessions on campus, either as part of the curriculum or in additional activities, by contrast, the employers placed a lot of emphasis on work placements. Small and medium sized firms may not feel that they have the resources to get involved on campus. There may be a mismatch in the methods universities and employers can use to help students gain employability skills.

Chapter 2 sets out recommendations for addressing these gaps, as well as for spreading the good practice identified through the case studies.

What works

2

Key findings from the case studies

The universities and companies featured in this report illustrate the wide range of activity being undertaken. The key themes that emerge from the university case studies as having made a significant positive impact to the development of employability skills in students are:

- Leadership at a senior level
- Co-ordination across the university – possibly through a team, including academic staff, whose role includes responsibility for engagement with employers to address employability issues, or the involvement of the Teaching and Learning Centre or equivalent
- Close working with the students' union and the careers service, where the work is not already led by the latter, but a recognition that employability cannot be delegated to the careers service and needs embedding in the curriculum or in special modules
- Investment in methods to increase student participation, such as communication and marketing, or incentives – awards, certificates, or academic credits
- The use of reflective learning, building on students' personal development planning
- Additional effort to engage local and regional employers, regularly bringing them onto campus and involving them in core activities, as well as facilitating work placements
- Student and employer feedback is an important measure of success, and the HESA figures for six-month graduate destination were mentioned by every institution as a performance indicator – although all also said they would like to see measurements taken over a much longer period.⁶

Most of the universities interviewed said they felt their particular approach gave them a distinctiveness, or unique selling point, in their offer to potential students, in their relationships with their undergraduates and graduates, and in their wider engagement with local, regional and national economies. There are clearly a range of effective approaches in helping students develop their employability skills – but the core skills developed are common across all.

For employers, the quality of the graduate recruits they attract through their engagement with students on campus and through

work placements is a key test, together with the saving in recruitment costs when a work placement is so successful that the student returns after graduation – and is then in a strong position because they already know how the business works. In addition, almost every employer specifically referred to the advantages students could bring to the workplace, in terms of new ideas and enthusiasm, and the completion of a project for which there was a real business need.

Key themes emerging from the employer case studies as having made a significant difference to the benefits companies and students derived from work placements and other work-related learning:

- Bringing real-life problems for students to consider
- Finding real projects that challenge and engage the students
- A personal approach by a university, or a pre-existing relationship
- Regular participation, not just a one-off careers fair
- Support mechanisms, such as buddies or mentors, as well as line managers, for students on a work placement
- A process of induction, training and assessment for work placement students

For students themselves, the first measure of success is whether the work-related learning or work placement has helped them become more employable – in other words, if immediate employment is the path they choose, will they be in good quality employment related to their long-term career aspirations once they have graduated? The University of Surrey referred to analysis that suggested computer science students who had done a year's work placement got a better degree result, while The University of Hertfordshire's FIT programme suggests a similar effect. Increased confidence is widely mentioned by universities, employers and students as a beneficial outcome of work-related learning and formal work placements.

Spreading success

Investment in employability is an investment in the future. Perhaps the most important lesson is that universities and businesses must continue to increase their activity in developing employability skills in all their students, both work placements and other work-related

“When I went to my interview they were hardly asking me about my degree. They were asking me about confidence, how I react and leadership skills. That’s what gets you the job!”

Recent grauate in a CBI focus group

“Now I’m back at university I’m getting so much more from the lectures and seminars because I can relate all the theory back to everything I experienced practically on placement.”

**Student on work placement at the Grange Hotel (SME),
quote provided by Rate My Placement**

learning, despite the economic circumstances and the pressure on budgets. History shows that investment during a downturn leads to success when pressures ease. Students also need to avoid becoming demoralised; after all, many will have a working life of some forty to fifty years. A higher education is a long-term investment, but in the short-term graduates will need to work hard to ensure they have a competitive edge in a downturn. They should therefore ensure they engage with employability issues from day one of their degree course.

At a more practical level, it is possible to use the case studies to identify steps institutions and employers can use to build on what they are currently doing to prepare graduates for the world of work. There are also steps students themselves can take.

Universities who have not already done so should consider taking the following steps:

- Ensure they have a dedicated resource focussing on the development of employability skills. This can help draw in academic and other staff from across the university, whilst reporting to the management team is essential
- Undertake a process of reflection and consultation to consider what they are doing now and how it could be improved – for example, by involving the institution’s Teaching and Learning Centre to build employability into the curriculum, as some universities have already done – but activity should be tailored to the needs and ethos of each institution
- Use their dedicated resource to build long-term relationships with employers, including establishing employer advisory groups who can input directly on curriculum. It is particularly important for them to reach out to SMEs in the locality or region where there is an untapped source of employers able to share knowledge and experience through workshops and lectures, and offer work placements
- Regular feedback from students, former students/alumni, business and university staff on how well the university is fostering employability skills in its students
- Give their work on employability skills a distinctive brand, to ensure maximum recognition by students and staff and to avoid confusion with job-hunting skills
- Invest in marketing efforts to draw students’ attention to employability issues and the need to acquire the skills
- Reward students who make an effort to acquire employability skills – through academic credits, an award, certificate or other incentive

- Communicate with their students' union to discuss their approach to employability and get their buy in and support
- Encourage university staff to engage with business through consultancy, applied research and knowledge exchange. Those who contribute to the delivery of high quality work-related learning should be rewarded in the same way that teaching excellence and research are rewarded
- Stay in touch with their alumni beyond graduation, perhaps through continued careers advice and bringing them back to share their experience of the workplace with current students
- Develop mentoring programmes to help students prepare for work experience, potentially with final year students
- Take a more flexible approach to the time of year when they allow students to undertake short periods of work experience, so that employers are free to offer placements at times that suit and with a succession of placements throughout a year, rather than one student for eight or so weeks in the summer.⁷

Employers who are not already doing so should consider:

- Providing a range of work experience opportunities of varying involvement; from one-year sandwich placements to a few weeks work experience
- How they can help with work-related learning. While work placements play a major role for many employers and are seen by employers and students as enhancing employability, they are not the only way institutions and employers are addressing employability
- Regarding the business investment required as part of corporate social responsibility and engagement with their community
- Approaching the universities if they have not already been approached, so that they can find out what mutual benefits there may be in establishing an ongoing relationship: the vast student resource may hold significant benefits for their business
- In offering work placements, ensuring proper induction, management, mentoring, supervision and assessment for the student. Universities should be able to assist with finding a suitable match for the firm, especially for SMEs without a dedicated human resources department.

Students and prospective students who are not already doing so should:

- Think about employability before university, consider a university's activity on employability when making their choice of university
- Address employability issues from day one, taking up the opportunities that are offered, regarding the acquisition of employability skills as a key part of their university experience – not an optional extra
- Take steps to address employability issues if they feel that their university is not doing enough to help them undertake work-related learning or to gain the employability skills – for example by:
 - approaching organisations such as the National Council for Work Experience, their regional Shell Step agent, or Enternships.com, to find out about work experience opportunities
 - encouraging their students' union to hold relevant workshops
 - setting up student societies to organise events.

Action by Governments

Consideration could usefully be given to how to increase co-ordination on employability-related issues between institutions in England and Wales. The Scottish approach outlined in the Glasgow Caledonian University case study appears to provide a much greater sense of central drive and co-ordination which could usefully be emulated in both England and Wales. Other recommendations include:

- Government should continue to explore with employers and the HE sector the scope to increase internship opportunities in ways that don't replace or duplicate existing schemes.
- The government should consider supporting research into the comparative benefits of different types of work-related learning. This could include consideration of why sandwich placements are becoming less common, and whether a clearing house would be beneficial.
- The establishment of a system to measure the effectiveness of employability programmes should be considered. The current HESA six-month destination survey and the recently established 3.5 year longitudinal survey both measure employment outcomes, but they do not measure how successful an institution is in helping its students identify and acquire employability skills.

3

Survey findings

Three surveys were undertaken for this report. All invited views on the extent of employability skills, and the routes for graduates to acquire these skills on their way through university.

Survey of higher education institutions

In autumn 2008, Universities UK circulated a survey, drafted jointly with the CBI, to all its member higher education institutions. The survey asked for views on aspects of employability, including how students acquired skills and whether the institution was undertaking work with employers, and invited respondents to forward material suitable for use in a case study for this report. Eighty of UUK's 132 member institutions – which include almost every HE institution in the UK – responded, a response rate of 61%.

The overwhelming majority (97%) of universities thought it likely or highly likely that their graduates will acquire five out of the seven employability skills and a similar number (96%) who responded thought it very likely that these skills were developed as a result of their time at university. Universities felt that business and customer awareness and application of numeracy were poorer – with around 16% saying they were less well developed. This finding mirrors the dissatisfaction among senior executives from the employer survey.

Institutions were also asked to agree or disagree with a range of statements. The responses indicate:

- Almost all the universities agreed or agreed strongly that it is important for all their graduates to possess the listed employability skills, and only 6% thought it was only important for students from specific subject areas
- The majority (67%) of universities said they had a clear idea of what will help make their graduates employable
- Some universities regard themselves as more instrumental in the acquisition of employability skills than others: over half (53%) agreed or agreed strongly that students should already possess some employability skills before starting university, while 21% expect students principally to address employability issues for themselves, rather than relying on the university
- Ninety-four percent of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they had deliberately tailored their approach to teaching their students to help make themselves more employable, with 92% citing additional internally delivered programmes to help students become more employable. Almost all said they encourage students to take part in work experience to help them develop employability skills

- Ninety-eight percent of institutions have had regular contact with a number of employers specifically to help them address employability issues for their students. Every institution regarded the contact with employers as positive for the institution and their students

- Not every university has found this easy, 16% reporting significant problems in addressing employability issues with their students. But for those which have addressed employability almost all believe their students have benefited from their approach to employability, with significant achievements.

Survey of employers

The second CBI education and skills survey was conducted in November 2008 with results published in April 2009. Responses were received from 581 employers, collectively employing over 2.5 million people, or 8% of the total UK workforce. These firms came from a wide range of organisations, covering all sectors of the economy, including the public and private sector. The survey was completed by senior executives: in small and medium-sized companies, this tended to be the managing director, chief executive or chairman, while in larger firms it was usually the human resources director or equivalent.

The survey comes at a time when firms are facing tough economic conditions and provides an authoritative barometer of business opinion on key education and skills issues. Findings from the survey confirmed that businesses in the UK have strong relationships with universities. The majority (84%) of larger firms, with 5,000+ employees have links with universities – and 10% plan to develop links in the future.

Three quarters (74%) of companies who have university links do so to provide work experience placements for graduates – this is more important for companies in certain sectors (eg construction) where the practical nature of the workplace makes work experience very important. It is encouraging to see business playing its part to help graduates develop the skills which are the focus of this report. Businesses see a number of benefits from engaging with universities, the main one being the ability to attract high quality graduates and post-graduates.

The survey also suggests that small businesses are struggling to make links with universities. There are 4.3 million SMEs in the UK accounting for almost three fifths (59%) of employment. Findings suggest that a smaller proportion of these businesses currently have links with universities – only half of businesses with between 50 and 199 employees have university links, compared to 84% of the largest employers which responded.

When senior executives were asked to rank the most important factors they consider when recruiting graduates, employability skills came out on top (**Exhibit 1**). Students and universities should be aware that employers place a huge value on these skills, which will help graduates secure jobs after graduation, where competition is now higher than ever due to the economic downturn.

The survey results also confirmed the understanding that underpinning all of these skills, businesses also value a positive attitude: a ‘can-do’ approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make those ideas happen. These findings are consistent with findings from the previous year – businesses rank employability skills and a positive attitude at the top of their list.

Employers are very happy with the IT skills among graduates entering the workplace. It is also encouraging to see that businesses are generally satisfied with the degree to which graduates have acquired the majority of the other employability skills (**Exhibit 2**). But, satisfactory should not be seen as good enough. There is no room for complacency when relatively small proportions express a high degree of approval. There is also some dissatisfaction (35%) in terms of graduates’ awareness of business and customer issues (only 8% rate themselves as being highly satisfied) and also in relation to the level of self-management skills graduates possess (20% not satisfied), suggesting a need for improvement.

It is not surprising that businesses think universities should focus on developing these employability skills within the student population as a priority (**Exhibit 3**). When asked what three things they thought universities should prioritise, 82% of employers thought this was far more important than increasing the number of students graduating from university each year. It is also positive to note that businesses think universities should focus on working with them to provide more work experience placements, so if universities want to improve their engagement with businesses a good place to start would be in relation to arranging work experience. The potential to improve engagement in the small and medium-sized firms may be greatest, where 45% of medium firms currently have no links with universities.

Exhibit 1: Important factors considered when recruiting graduates (%)

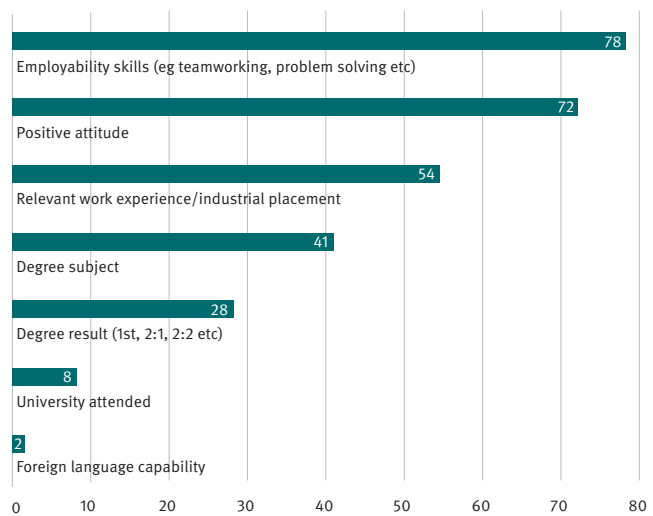
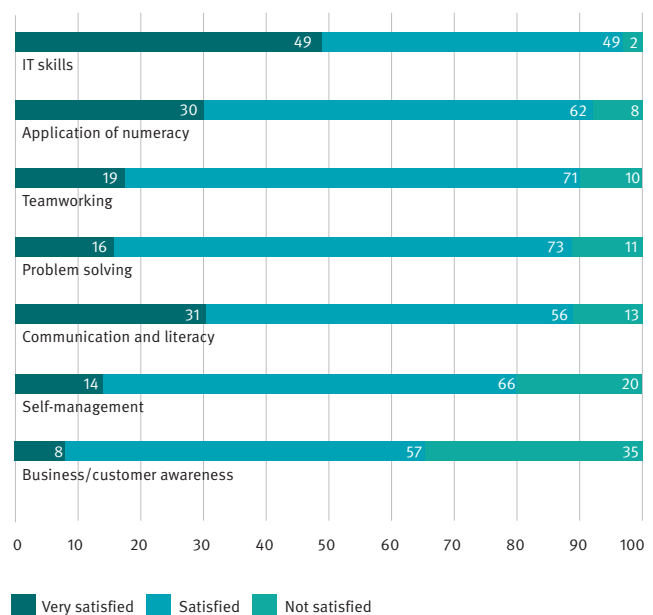


Exhibit 2: The level to which graduates are equipped with employability skills (%)



Survey of students

As part of this report, we conducted an online survey of undergraduate students to capture their views on employability. The survey was completed by a sample of over 880 students at 20 universities⁸ from a wide geographical spread.

The survey paints an encouraging picture with regard to students' appreciation and development of employability skills – but also raises a number of important issues:

- Most students are confident they know what employers are looking for – recognising that employability skills, work experience and a positive attitude are highly prized
- The majority of students feel they have well developed employability skills – but there are particular concerns with numeracy and business awareness
- Many undergraduates have participated in specific programmes to improve their employability skills – but there is still significant unmet student demand.

Three quarters (78%) of students feel confident that they know the skills an employer is looking for when recruiting – and when asked to say what they thought was of primary importance to employers when recruiting, the vast majority placed employability skills (41%) and having relevant work experience (33%) as the most important factors (**Exhibit 4**). This encouraging finding indicates that most students are generally aware of what employers are looking for and of the value placed on these skills by employers.

According to the sample of students who completed our survey, work experience or an industrial placement was viewed as the second most important factor to employers when recruiting graduates. In line with this finding, the education and skills survey showed that after 'possessing a positive attitude', 54% of employers valued relevant work experience/industrial placement when recruiting, suggesting that students and employers both recognise the benefits of undertaking some work-based experience in addition to their course.

Exhibit 3: What should universities prioritise in terms of undergraduates? (%)

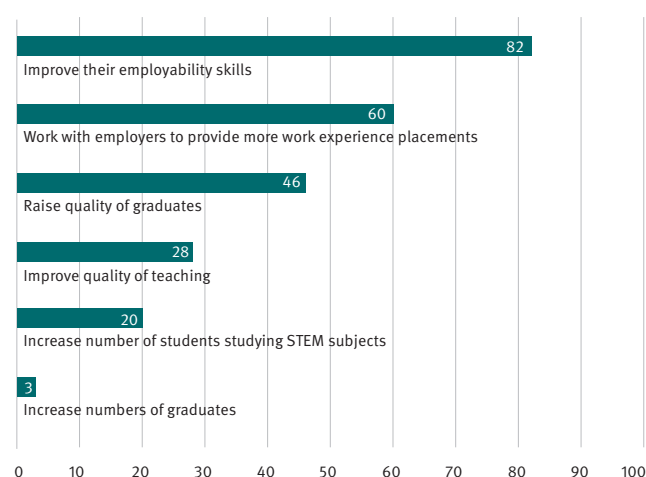
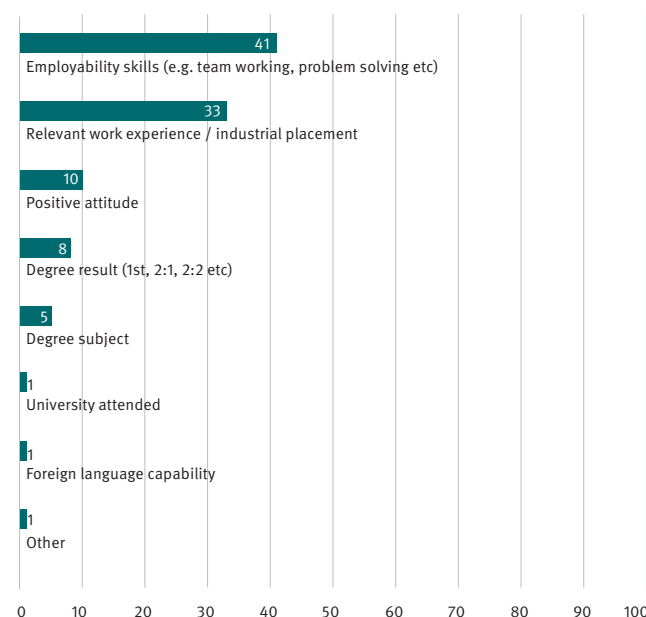


Exhibit 4: Factors which students think employers value most when recruiting graduates (%)



When asked who was primarily responsible for the development of their employability skills (**Exhibit 5**), just over two fifths (44%) of students felt it was themselves, a third (32%) felt it was their university and 16% their school or college. So while the majority of students are taking responsibility for their own development, many believe the institutions at which they study have a key role to play. While it is vital that more students themselves take ownership of their own skills development needs, it is also essential that universities and employers work together to ensure that they facilitate courses and opportunities which will make the development of these skills more readily available and accessible regardless of the course being studied.

The survey results indicate a widespread confidence among students that they are developing employability skills while at university (**Exhibit 6**). The majority felt they had developed most of the employability skills referred to in this report.

But there are clear areas where improvement is needed. While the vast majority of students are confident that their time at university will help them develop self-management (95%), communication & literacy (93%), teamworking (92%) and problem solving (90%), business awareness and numeracy require greater focus. A significant proportion of students (38%) did not feel they had developed these skills while at university and only 18% of students thought they had fully developed them. This was mirrored by employers, suggesting scope for development of this skill, not just in business orientated courses but also in less vocational or business focused subjects where these skills may not be as seemingly relevant or as easily embedded in the course content.

Numeracy is also a cause for concern – nearly a third (29%) of students did not feel they had acquired or expected to acquire adequate numeracy skills. Again this suggests more courses could include basic modules on numeracy skills required for the workplace.

Exhibit 5: Who is primarily responsible for helping students acquire employability skills (%)

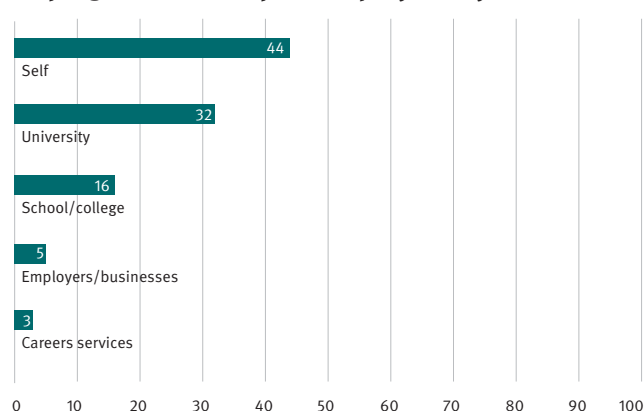
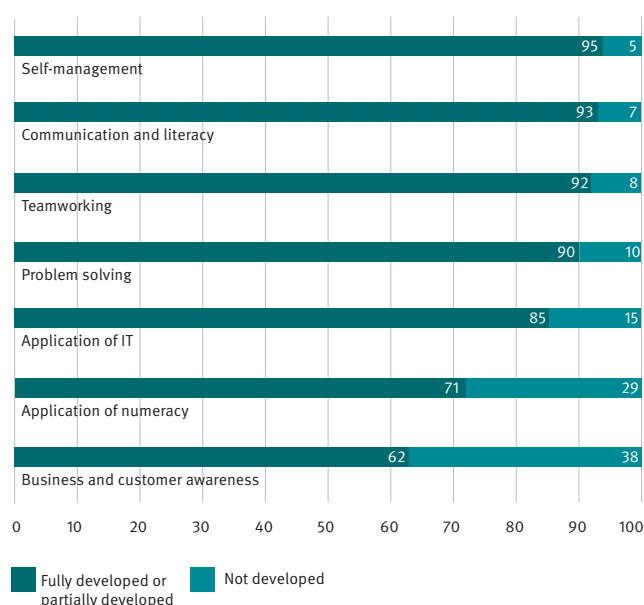


Exhibit 6: Proportion of students who felt they had developed employability skills while at university (%)



Employability skills can be developed through a variety of means – and many students are taking advantage of part-time work, internships, work experience placements and sandwich years, alongside their studies to do this (**Exhibit 7**). But, while most students are both confident that they are gaining employability skills and feel that their university course is an effective means to achieve this, there is a strong and often unmet demand for specific programmes to address employability.

Two fifths (42%) of students feel skills development has been explicitly addressed on their course – but more could be done, with a further 28% feeling that this is something they would like to have been offered. There is stronger unmet demand for special, stand-alone employability programmes (just 11% are currently involved or expect to be – but a further 35% would take the opportunity if they could), internships (30% do so, 34% would like the opportunity), short periods of work experience (28% and 33% respectively) and sandwich years (15% and 23% respectively).

A minority of students do not, however, appear keen to take these opportunities even if they are available. On average, 11% of students were offered at least one of these programmes but did not take up the offer.

The vast majority of students who had undertaken a specific programme to help develop their employability skills found them either very useful or quite useful in helping them understand the skills they would need to help secure work after graduation (**Exhibit 8**).

But it is clear that in a minority of cases these programmes did not hit the mark. It is clearly important for universities and employers to ensure their courses, placements and programmes effectively addressing the need to develop employability skills – but equally, they need the full participation and commitment of students to succeed.

Exhibit 7: Proportion of students who have or would like to undertake one of following programmes while at university (%)

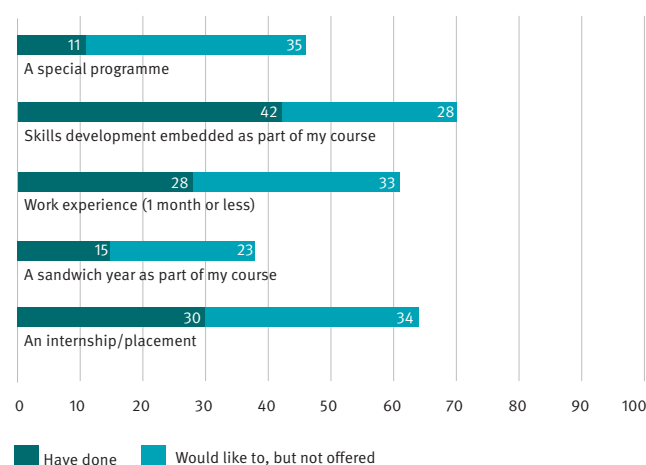
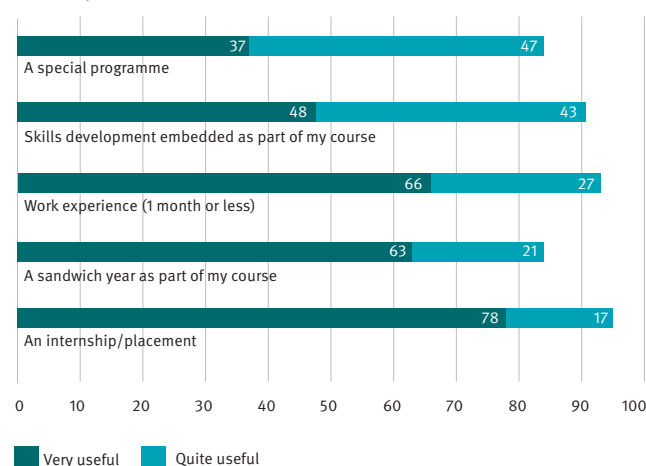


Exhibit 8: Proportion of students who had undertaken a programme finding it useful or very useful (%)



Case studies

The case studies included in this section of the report include examples of current practice which could help other employers and institutions further develop their own programmes. The participants include a range of employers and universities to demonstrate what is being done to ensure undergraduates are ready for the world of work. The employers range in size and sector while the universities also vary in terms of their approach to addressing employability as well as their geographical location, age, size, and student profile.

University of Surrey: 26
Giving students a competitive edge for the future

Centrica: 28
Helping students build in employability skills as part of their basic toolkit for life

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Involving business at every opportunity

Yellowfin: 32
Everyone in business should be engaging with universities

Goldsmiths, University of London: 34
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Shell and Shell Step: 36
Placements need to be as close to real life as possible

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Getting the employability message across through creative marketing

Sainsbury's: 42
Students often bring an interesting new perspective and dimension

Glasgow Caledonian University: 44
Work-related learning is everyone's responsibility

KPMG: 46
Work placement students add real value

Liverpool John Moores University: 48
Degrees with the 'WoW factor'

Marks & Spencer: 50
Getting and giving – a head start in graduate recruitment

Cardiff University: 52
Employability is such a powerful agenda that universities can't hide from it



University of Surrey

Giving students a competitive edge for the future

The University of Surrey operates from a campus close to the centre of Guildford and has about 12,600 students. Around a quarter of students are aged 22 or over when they start their degree course.

The university has a clear approach to employability which is set out in its vision statement. Students are encouraged to acquire life and work skills alongside their academic achievements. The university continues to develop and strengthen activities which allow students to develop these skills which will help them to stand out from the competition and make a valued contribution to society.

Why employability matters

Surrey has been seeking to give its students employability skills for as long as it has existed, even before it gained university status in 1966. Preparing people for work was an important role for the 19th century institution from which the university traces its origins. Dr Russ Clark, Head of Careers Service says the university believes preparing students this way can give them a competitive edge for their future:

“Basically, we have a real world outlook. Yes, we are an academic institution, but we recognise that academic excellence must exist in combination with the need to equip our students to play a constructive role in the world. We don’t believe there’s a conflict between giving our students excellent academic preparation and practical experience for the world of work; instead, we aim for balance. At Surrey, we live, think and breathe employability. Everyone owns it.”

Focus on professional training placements

Seventy percent of Surrey’s undergraduates participate in ‘professional training’ or workplace based skills development, which is usually undertaken as the third year of a four-year course. This training is open to students of all subjects, even those not traditionally regarded as vocational: for example, those studying politics have obtained placements as political researchers and in public affairs consultancies, psychologists have worked as assistant psychologists in the NHS and in mental health settings, and sociologists in market and social research.

In some cases the training is a compulsory part of the degree and counts as a credit towards the student’s final degree result. Surrey is also looking at introducing a new award for those who participate, but, as Dr Clark says:

“The main incentive for students is that undertaking the professional training will make them more employable. Many of our students choose Surrey because they already have an eye on the world of work; they see university as part of the continuum of their lives, not as a three-year pause.”

Arranging a year’s paid work experience for several hundred students a year is no small achievement, requiring the maintenance of good relationships with a wide range of employers, by size, sector and geography – some 15% of work placements are overseas. The placements are arranged by each department’s senior professional training tutor (a member of academic staff) and professional training administrator. For most placements, undergraduates apply in competition with their counterparts across the country to firms offering suitable opportunities. That virtually every student who wants a place gets one indicates the strength of the work Surrey puts in to help its students stand out from the crowd.

While students are employed in the same way as any other employee, the university does draw up an agreement with the

Key points:

- Seventy percent participation in professional training as the third year of a four-year course
- Academic staff involved in building employer relationships and in monitoring work placements during the year
- Degree programmes contain significant content relevant to the acquisition of employability skills
- Additional support from the Careers Service, SCEPTR (the Surrey Centre For Excellence in Professional Training and Education), and the students’ union.



employer to ensure the professional training tutor or other academic staff under their supervision can visit the student up to three times over the course of the year. Before students begin their placement, departments hold induction sessions, assisted by the Careers Service and by students who've already been through the experience. The assessment process throughout the placement is closely monitored to ensure a worthwhile experience for every student. Problems are rare, Dr Clark says:

"Students want to do these placements – they understand it will be a challenge, and that doesn't deter them. Recently, I met a student who had chosen a placement in Japan. At first he was terribly homesick, but he knew for his own benefit that he had to see it through, and he did – including learning the language. He told me he was really glad he had stuck it out."

Other work-related programmes

With such a long-established focus on employability, year-long professional training is not the only work-related programme available to students:

- Degree programmes themselves are designed to provide significant content relevant to the acquisition of employability skills;
- Students' personal development planning provides an opportunity for reflective learning;
- The careers service is engaged in the delivery of workshops and careers fairs, bringing large numbers of employers and students into regular contact as well as enabling them to hone their job-seeking skills
- SCEPTR, the Surrey Centre For Excellence in Professional Training and Education, runs a number of programmes to help both academic staff and students maximise the benefits of Surrey's approach
- The Students' Union runs the DAVE project (Development, Accreditation, Volunteering and Employment) which offers sessions on time management, teamworking, leadership, project management etc, to help students prepare for their placement.

Measuring success

The results of Surrey's approach can be clearly seen. Last year, more than 80% of students were either above average or very satisfied with the professional development value of their placement experience. HESA's destination statistics show Surrey has the most consistent graduate employment record in the country: the university is always within the top three for getting its students into employment or further study within six months of completing their



"I have developed both personally and professionally; I really enjoy working. It has helped me to grow up and learn how to meet deadlines. I get a proper feel for what goes on in the real world."

Natasha Foster

degree. In addition, Surrey's computer department has produced an interesting analysis that suggests those who do professional training get a better degree result; similar evaluations are now planned across other sectors of the university. Russ concludes: "I'd encourage every institution to provide students with opportunities to develop work-related skills in a practical setting, whether through the students' union, volunteering, paid employment, curriculum-based initiatives or through the particular route Surrey has chosen. It takes a long time to arrive at a Surrey-style programme with such high availability of year-long placements for students on every degree course, but it is worth the effort."

www.surrey.ac.uk/professionaltraining

Centrica

Helping students build in employability skills as part of their basic toolkit for life

Key points:

- Building links to universities so business leaders share knowledge and experience
- Paid summer work placements to undertake specific projects for which there is a business need
- Mid-way and final presentations and assessments
- Giving the company access to talented and motivated students for graduate recruitment.

From its headquarters in Windsor, Centrica operates a range of energy businesses in the UK, North America and Europe, including British Gas.

As well as sourcing and supplying gas and electricity, the group offers a range of home energy solutions and low-carbon products and services. It employs about 30,000 people across the UK.

Sharing knowledge

CEO Sam Laidlaw, believes universities and employers have a responsibility to engage with each other to help instil the employability skills in today's students:

"Employers need to be more open to university approaches. It doesn't just have to be students coming to us either. At present, we are working on linking Centrica's executive team to universities (often the university they studied at themselves) where the leaders of our business can share their knowledge and experiences with undergraduates. This isn't too complicated to do and it helps students build in these skills as part of their basic toolkit for life."

Summer work placements

For the last three years, Centrica has offered a formal undergraduate work experience scheme; this replaced previous ad hoc arrangements.⁹ Placements typically last for ten weeks during the summer following a student's second year. The range of jobs to which placements are attached is extremely broad, covering the full remit of the business – from a small engineering project, through the maintenance cycle on a power plant or servicing boilers, to customer service. Numbers have grown each year – from 12 in 2006 to 53 in 2008.

Head of the recruitment and graduate programme

Matthew Berry says:

"Coming into the work environment can be a complete shock for many students, because during their course, many haven't heard directly from an employer, and they've had limited exposure to such things as team working or selling an idea to a group. Placements provide undergraduates a great opportunity to get a practical taste of work and begin to put into practice some of their theoretical learning."

When identifying suitable projects for the students, Centrica staff aren't prescriptive about the actual job the student will be doing. Instead, the emphasis is on identifying an area of the business where a needed project can give the student a challenge. For example, one student coordinated a supplier review project. The project involved reviewing supplier spend across the whole organisation and analysing patterns of use and supplier performance. Initial decisions on supplier performance based on the analysis were made which were followed by face-to-face review meetings to assess suitability for continuing the relationship. Following this piece of work, Centrica has a reduced supplier base for recruitment with a group of suppliers who better understand our business and people needs. Contracts were also rationalised during this process and the company expects that in the next 12 months this will deliver a £100,000 reduction in spend.

Students are hired a year ahead – at the end of their first year – and can choose a broad area where they wish to work, such as finance, engineering, IT or general management. They are then matched to projects through mutual discussion during the recruitment process.

Centrica informs careers services at all universities about opportunities for students and its recruitment work has a strong online presence. The company has also undertaken profile-building work with about a dozen universities. Regardless of where a student comes from and how they heard about the work placements, there is a single point of entry into the application process via Centrica's website.

Support, induction and assessment

The company pays students a market rate for the ten weeks of work, and funds their accommodation, ensuring they're living in a group with other Centrica work placement students. Students are expected to move location as the placement requires, so this arrangement increases mobility while reducing the likelihood of isolation.



"The responsibility and trust placed in you to direct your projects creates an exciting and rewarding work experience."
Randall, summer placement student 2008

"A positive experience due to the calibre of the student and the way they responded to the challenges they were given."
Centrica line manager

Centrica makes it a key priority to ensure students are supported during their placements. There is a standard induction process for all students and halfway through their placement they give a short presentation for which they receive a score and valuable feedback. About half of all summer placement students return to graduate roles following a successful placement. As a company operating in a traditionally male-dominated sector, Centrica recognises the benefits of a diverse workforce in enabling it to relate better to its UK-wide customer base. It has worked to attract a range of applicants to work placements, and in 2008 a third of recruits were female, with a fifth from an ethnic minority.

The importance of attitude

The work placement programme allows the company to tap into a much bigger pool of talent, but this isn't the only reason for providing placements. Centrica's experience is that individual students who put in the time and effort to find undergraduate work are usually more motivated. By giving them the opportunity to work at Centrica, the company believes it enters into a relationship with some of the brightest graduates before its competitors, which often leads to their recruitment as graduates. The students also help raise the company's profile to their colleagues back on campus, while placement projects offer the business a valuable opportunity to engage with universities and help students build their employability skills. The enthusiasm Berry feels for the programme is apparent:

"When we started, we were worried about whether students would have the skills and knowledge to deliver on challenging projects. But the key ingredient is the student's attitude. Centrica line managers have been amazed: if they haven't managed a student before, they often expect them to be a passenger, but that isn't how it is at all. It's very rare that a manager doesn't want to do it again."

And his advice for other employers wondering if they can offer work experience to students?

"Be clear what you're trying to achieve, but once you know your goals and have the structure in place, it isn't that hard to do, so don't be scared of trying it. The most difficult thing the students find is moving from an educational environment where there's lots of direction to the less structured and more ambiguous workplace, so you have to support them through that. But – even though it's competition for Centrica – I'd really encourage other employers to do it. Don't miss out on this great talent pool!"

www.centrica.co.uk/careers

University of Hertfordshire

Involving business at every opportunity

With three campuses in Hatfield and St Albans, The University of Hertfordshire has 23,000 students, including 18,000 undergraduates. Apart from 2,000 international students from over eighty-five countries, many of Hertfordshire's students are recruited from the east of England and north London. Only half of students are in the traditional 18-24 age group, while a quarter study part-time. The university works with four local further education colleges to offer foundation degrees.

Key points:

- Extensive employer consultation and engagement to determine what employers want from graduates and build long-term relationships
- Bringing employers onto campus for training, recruitment activities and knowledge transfer partnerships as well as for student-focused events
- Offering internal and external work placements and work experience to two thirds of students from a wide variety of academic disciplines, plus a wide range of workshops and courses
- Encouraging staff entrepreneurship and business engagement.

The vice-chancellor's Head of Policy, Alix Green adds:

"Our employer groups inform the curriculum content, so that employability is built into the student's time here. Employers and alumni teach within our curriculum and deliver extra sessions too. We offer career development support to Hertfordshire graduates throughout their working life, and that means our alumni help teach our students the necessary transferable skills and tell them why this agenda matters."

Why employability matters

Director for graduate employment, Anusha Everson, arrived nearly three years ago, with a background in business, including having run her own small company. Her role is to help Hertfordshire students and employers meet each others' needs: she also looks at the needs of the wider economy and relates them to what happens with the university's graduate employability and employer services:

"When Professor Tim Wilson became vice-chancellor in 2003, the university used the opportunity to think about Hertfordshire's responsibility to give all our students the skills employers require, in the context of our being an important part of the local economic infrastructure. We've consulted students, former students, business and government on what that meant and how it could be delivered."

Hertfordshire has just revised its definition of employability skills, a process it undertakes every year. The university used students to consult employers on the definition, and Everson says this is typical: if something needs doing for the university, students are often the first port of call. This means they are given the chance to practise their skills for real, in a work-like situation: "We ask a lot of our students, and they live up to it," she adds.

Engaging with business

Hertfordshire's approach extends to offering wider services to businesses. For example, the MacLaurin Building, where Graduate Futures (Hertfordshire's graduate recruitment and career development service) is based, is offered to employers to run interviews, and university staff will help with the recruitment and assessment process, right up to short-listing and interview.

University staff also work with Business Link, Train to Gain and Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce, running workshops, seminars and networking sessions for firms, with a focus on how to identify the right graduates for an organisation, how to keep the asset they represent and get a good return on that investment. The company might in return give time or equipment to help students develop employability skills. In short, the university involves employers at every opportunity.

"I've developed an impressive portfolio of skills and will gain my Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development accreditation through my placement. I now have a great CV based on real work experience for a global organisation."

Emily Rogers, industrial trainee, Pfizer, BA (Hons) human resource management, Business School

Knowledge transfer

The university is doing what it can to try to help firms continue their graduate recruitment during the economic downturn, pointing out that if they do, they may discover a gap when the recovery comes. Hertfordshire is providing more forums where businesses are brought together with potential skills providers to foster innovation and investment in training. This approach is based on the university's experience of facilitating knowledge transfer partnerships and providing expertise to employers who could not have found or funded the expertise themselves.

To do this, staff have taken an innovative approach and they are encouraged to act as role models to students. Staff entrepreneurship and consultancy is encouraged, in the belief that this helps widen networks which can then be made available to students, as well as setting teaching in a real-world context and informing research activity.

Acquiring employability skills

There is a wide range of opportunities for Hertfordshire students to identify and acquire the necessary skills. Work experience (brokered centrally, as well as with placement officers in faculties) can last from one day to a whole year, and extends beyond the expected vocational courses to every department and every course. Some work placements are accredited. Everyone who wants a placement is currently able to have one, about two thirds of students. Work placements may become more difficult to find in the current economic climate, so the University is looking for more internal and innovative work experience opportunities.

One group the University has been particularly concerned should be able to access work experience is the 7% of its students who declare a disability. Work has been undertaken to educate employers in seeing past a candidate's impairment to their abilities and to help disabled students approach employers – for example, being clear what reasonable adjustments will be required if they are taken on.

Graduate Futures and the university's enterprise team also provide advice, written information, DVDs and online tools, together with a large number of events: training days, business breakfasts, "spotlight on" events with successful entrepreneurs, recruitment and careers fairs, employability seminars for alumni as well as current students, along with chances to become aware of "soft skills" such as negotiation. And then there is learning through fun: UH Angels, a Dragons Den-style pitch for a local business or alumni to invest money jointly with the university; a workshop on self-presentation delivered by an image management consultancy, social networking sites and Second Life.

An innovative way in which Hertfordshire students can develop and measure their employability is through a programme designed by Professor Ben Fletcher, head of psychology. The FIT (Framework for Internal Transformation) programme takes innovative approaches to developing personal skills. The main emphasis is on self-awareness. There is evidence that students who use the programme achieve better exam results and can become more employable.

Measuring success

Everson sees the benefits of the university's engagement with employers, (from a London marketing company to the NHS) – include greatly increased confidence in students who are the first in their family to enter higher education – and ongoing relationships with employers. Hertfordshire's success could be emulated through a similarly systematic approach – Everson says:

"Prioritise what to do; you may already have programmes and steps in place that aren't labelled as being about employability, but are still opportunities you can make the most of. Break the task of spreading employability throughout the institution into small steps so it doesn't feel so huge, and you can achieve amazing things.

"If you can help employers, alumni, students and staff to see the benefit of participating in your work-related programmes – and create passion about employability in all those groups – that will help you to come up with a way of making the work rewarding. And remember that your students are far from helpless. This is about giving direction and guidance, but not doing everything for them. We are about delivering opportunities and experiences that create adaptable graduates who will contribute confidently to the world they live in."

www.herts.ac.uk

Yellowfin

Everyone in business should be engaging with universities

Founded in 1999, marine engineering company Yellowfin Limited develops and produces revolutionary marine drive systems for powerboats, improving handling and dramatically reducing fuel consumption. Fifteen people work in its waterside offices and workshop overlooking the Solent at Southampton.

Making a difference

Anne Duncan, Yellowfin's chief executive, and a holder of the Queen's Award for Enterprise Promotion, believes even the smallest companies can make a difference to students' understanding of the skills businesses need. She explains why employability matters: "I'm very concerned that students get to know what it's like working in a company, it helps them to understand what's going to happen when they graduate. If they come into the workplace totally unaware of business, it can be a big stretch for them. I think it's very important to encourage business and education to link up."

Duncan believes her local universities are strongly focused on employability issues, although not every university is doing as much, and she acknowledges the difficulties:

"Unless a university actually has someone from a company going in and telling them what's wanted or liaising with them, I'm not sure how easy it is for them to engage with employability issues. Not everything can be taught, so new graduates will always have to be trained once they're in the workplace – but universities and companies can help students to acquire many of the skills they need."

Encouraging entrepreneurship

The Hampshire Economic Partnership (HEP) Innovation and Enterprise Group (which Anne chairs), has worked with all four universities locally – Portsmouth, Southampton, Southampton Solent and Winchester to help universities understand how best to engage businesses. Anne lectured on entrepreneurship and innovation at Southampton's management school, and allowed Yellowfin to be used as the basis for a project. All four universities worked together for the first time in response to a HEP initiative, bringing students together for three days for a boot camp, at the end of which local business people judged the projects presented to them and awarded a prize. This challenge has been a great success, getting businesses and students working together, particularly to promote innovation and help students start new businesses and has become an annual event.

Key points:

- Chief executive working with local universities to share experience and encourage entrepreneurship and the development of employability skills
- Universities and companies need to work together to help students to acquire the skills they need
- Smaller firms have a role to play – buy in from the top is key – but many need support to identify how they can best support students
- Not all universities are doing as much as they could to help students develop vital employability skills.

The University of Portsmouth also runs an annual Enterprise Challenge, a competition that invites all Portsmouth students to identify and develop an idea with commercial potential: Duncan has helped with this. There have been a number of successful start-ups from both these initiatives, including Rachel Lowe with her Destination taxi-based board game, now available in seven countries.

Summer work experience

In addition the Chief Executive's wider contact with students, Yellowfin has provided summer work experience for undergraduates for the last three years, though the size of the company means only one or two places are available. Students have worked in design or marketing, and have come either via existing contacts at Southampton and Portsmouth universities or through their recently established recruitment sites: In one case, a student's university (Newcastle) made a direct approach; the design student was such a success that Anne asked him back for a second summer. He worked on designing the joystick for the drive system, particularly on the ergonomics and ease of use for customers, and how Yellowfin branding could be incorporated. Anne says he made a valuable contribution to the company and produced a good design, but perhaps his greatest learning curve was the number of iterations necessary before final acceptance of a design.



"I'm very concerned that students get to know what it's like working in a company, it helps them to understand what's going to happen when they graduate"

Anne Duncan, Yellowfin's chief executive



Students are paid, the amount being set on the advice of the university. They are also given a full induction programme, like any regular employee. This covers who's who, what the company does, its work culture and a presentation on the product. The student and their line manager agree a programme and targets to achieve, and this is monitored throughout the placement. Anne emphasises that the students undertake real work:

"We measure the success of a placement by whether the student comes up with something you can actually use. Some will be more successful than others, but all of them are working on projects where they can make a difference."

Seeing the benefits

The benefits to the company, while not huge, are worthwhile: Yellowfin is contributing to education and business partnership, and getting closer to students. All students, she says, should have an idea what it's like to work in a company. Anne sees what she does as "something we're doing in a good cause – an investment in the future, if you like."

Anne is an enthusiastic advocate of the principle that companies should be doing more to engage with universities and provide work placements for students: "I think everybody should be doing it, no matter what size of company, it's really worthwhile, and is one way in which smaller companies can benefit from the reach they have into their local community."

She advises businesses to use an academic or careers contact if they have one, but if they're not sure how to go about it, to go to the recruitment section of the local university's website and post placement details there:

"The application process is very simple, there aren't a lot of forms to fill in or anything. You do need someone in the company who will work very closely with the student, so they get clear guidance, because they are after all likely to be young and the workplace is new to them. It's no good just telling them what to do and leaving them to it. But if you recognise that, you can make it work very well, and the company and the student both gain from the experience."

www.yellowfin.com

Goldsmiths, University of London

Giving graduates ability and adaptability

Goldsmiths, in Lewisham, southeast London, is a constituent college of the University of London. It has about 8,000 students of whom about 4,000 are undergraduates. A high proportion are over 21 when they begin their degree course, and a fifth are from socio-economic groups 4-7. Goldsmiths' Professional and Community Education (PACE) department runs a wide range of return-to-study and access courses, including part-time and evening courses.

Key points:

- The "Goldsmiths 3D Graduate" based on personal development planning
- Incorporating employability skills into the curriculum and student assessment, with the support of academic staff
- Giving graduates the abilities and adaptability they need to get not just their first job but the next and the one beyond.

Embedding employability

While employability had always played a part in the college's strategy, in 2006 this was formalised in the Goldsmiths 3D Graduate concept. This builds on students' personal development planning, sets out the attributes the college believes are characteristic of the Goldsmiths' graduate, and helps students acquire and speak about them.

The aim of the 3D Graduate concept is that it should be embedded in what students do and what the College does, so that in reflecting on its curricula, both are thinking about skills agendas and the significance of skills. The most significant part is that students will be encouraged to reflect on what skills they have, what they are picking up from their courses and also to think about how that relates to careers and employment. Dr Philip Broadhead, pro-warden (students and learning development) explains:

"We want them to be thinking 'I want to do this, but in order to do it, I'll need a particular range of skills, so I'll take that option instead of this one.' The website we've established takes a student all the way through and creates an online portfolio which they can produce for applications and interviews."

Assessment and curriculum

The College considered establishing a separate employability skills programme, but decided it would be better to incorporate the development of the skills in what the students at Goldsmiths were already studying. The university identified some programmes which have a professional orientation and have professionally accredited learning. But beyond this many programmes have within them a large range of transferable skills – 'employability' or soft skills. The university wanted to make sure students were benefiting from this and were aware they'd got these skills. So for example, if a student gives a presentation in a seminar and responds to questions, or leads a discussion, those skills will be of considerable importance to them in the workplace.

Staff also spent some time defining the skills they thought they were giving students, and undertook a fundamental re-examination of the way students are assessed. Now the aim is that student assessment reflects these defined skills, and this is in turn reflected in the way staff approach the curriculum. Broadhead reports:

"We haven't been too prescriptive, so departments still get the opportunity to do things their own way, provided they've identified how they can link their curriculum to the themes. We do still emphasise that the student experience is one of education, not training, and that the academic elements of the degree remain of key importance. After all, if we just train our students to be ready for a





“Many media degrees offer either an understanding of the theory, or basics of the practicalities. I chose Goldsmiths because it gives you both – a knowledge of what you are doing, and the skills to actually do it. Training in industry standard formats and equipment, as well as techniques and theory, truly put you ahead of the game.”

Faraz Osman (BA in media & communications)

particular job, and that job disappears or changes, where are they left? But what we’re doing through education is to give our graduates the abilities and adaptability they need to get not just their first job but the next and the one beyond.

One thing Goldsmiths identified very strongly from employers consulted when designing the college’s approach was the value attached to teamworking. As a result, more group working on projects is being incorporated in every curriculum. This hasn’t been entirely straightforward: more group working means the college has had to think about its estate, because students now need spaces to work in groups. Making these changes does have implications and ramifications.

It’s clear that one way students at Goldsmiths become 3D graduates is simply to engage with the way the curriculum for their particular course is now being taught. There are others including:

- Volunteering programmes run through the student union, but by a postholder funded by the college. The student union was prominent in the formulation of the new approach and is active in promoting it
- However the university reports a lack of availability of good quality placements, whether for the summer between second and third years, or for a whole year, and makes the other ways of acquiring the skills even more important. But, a significant number of students work as well as study, something the college is keen to take account of, acknowledging that any job is an opportunity to pick up valuable skills, even if it’s not at graduate level.

Measuring success

Although Goldsmiths finds that measuring whether graduates have jobs just six months after graduating isn’t appropriate for many arts graduates (who may take several years to find the appropriate role), Dr Broadhead says staff know from their own experience and from employers’ feedback that Goldsmiths students do get jobs. And there are, he adds, other advantages: the whole institution has benefited from reflecting on what skills are intrinsic to the programmes it teaches. Academic staff want their students to be successful, so the college’s approach encourages them to see getting a good job as an important outcome for students in addition to whether they master the academic demands of the discipline. But, the real test of success will be whether Goldsmiths students continue to succeed in a period of downturn and greater competition for jobs. Broadhead is hopeful that its 3D graduates will be able to demonstrate they have the right mix of knowledge and skills to do so. Broadhead believes reflection and consultation have been crucial to the success of the changes Goldsmiths has made:

“For anyone wishing to undertake a similar exercise, I believe they need to spend some time reflecting on their existing curriculum and how they can build on what they already deliver. Then they should identify – with the help of students and employers – which parts need further development. It’s important not to run headlong into changing things, without working out first what you need to do. I hope very much that’s what we’ve done.”

www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/3d

Shell International

Placements need to be as close to real life as possible

The Shell Group is a global energy and petrochemical business, operating in more than 110 countries and employing approximately 104,000 people. About 9,000 of these work in the UK, primarily in London, Cheshire and Aberdeen.

Nimai Swaroop, regional marketing manager – Europe & Africa, recruitment explains Shell's approach to employability:

"Shell has good partnerships with a range of universities, working with careers advisers and academics. This is partly about promoting our internships as part of our marketing for graduate recruitment. But we also want to add value to students more widely, so we undertake skills sessions, interview training seminars, career presentations, and so on, in a number of institutions."

In addition, Shell provides some students with a £500 personal development award – first or second year undergraduates apply via Shell's website, which Swaroop says can be a good way of getting students to think about their career aspirations.

Key points:

- Skills sessions, interview training seminars, career presentations, a £500 personal development award, paid internships and sandwich years
- Every student intern has a supervisor and a mentor
- The Shell Step programme encourages small to medium-sized businesses to take a student for an eight week summer placement, working through university agents at regional level.

Summer internships

Internships for UK undergraduate students have been offered for about ten years – normally, there are about 40 in the UK and 140 across Europe. A successful internship can lead straight into graduate employment and is one of three routes into Shell at this level.¹⁰ The number and the mix of opportunities depends on Shell staff identifying projects each year, as the company recruits to the roles it has available. These cover the whole of Shell's business: commercial disciplines such as human resources (HR), finance, sales, and technical disciplines such as engineering and allied support roles. Some placements last a year as part of a sandwich course, but Swaroop says there are fewer of these than there used to be. Most internships are for eight weeks and pay is benchmarked against Shell's competitors. Applications are done online followed by an interview.

Induction and support

Once interns arrive, there is a well-established induction programme. In addition, every student has a supervisor (to line manage them day to day) and a mentor (to give softer guidance). The supervisor makes sure the intern has a clear understanding of what the objectives and timelines are for the project.

Shell wants students to gain firsthand experience, and to be exposed to real life projects. Every intern gets a particular project to manage, for which they are accountable. This allows students to transfer the skills they've learnt through study into a working environment, put theory into practice, and develop work-related skills. Swaroop says:

"Since 2005, the programme has been fully assessed, whether it's eight weeks or a whole year. If it's a long placement, there'll be a mid-project review, and then at the end the intern gives a presentation on the project they've completed, and this is used to assess them against our selection criteria – capacity, achievement, relationship (CAR), and where appropriate, technical. Provided they meet the criteria, we'll offer them graduate employment, and they don't have to apply again. About 25% of our graduate intake have done an internship."

New minds and fresh thinking

There have been challenges, but the rewards are clear. Getting good candidates is very competitive, because there is a high volume of work experience recruitment in the UK, especially within large companies. But the company believes internships are very worthwhile: a premise of the Shell brand is creative thinking and problem solving, new minds and fresh thinking help. Interns can challenge the ways Shell do business, actively contribute to



decisions, and bring a fresh perspective to bear on an existing problem. Often, some of the best ideas come from a mix of people and backgrounds.”

However, he is not sure that all students understand what employers are looking for – even if they have the skills, they may not know how to show an employer that they have them, Swaroop says: “But universities are now looking at the softer skills required, given the complex and challenging nature of today’s international businesses. The students Shell attracts tend to have the confidence needed to apply their skills in a global context. That’s probably because of the way we have positioned ourselves and targeted students to get the segment we’re looking for.”

Shell Step

Perhaps Shell’s biggest contribution is the national Shell Step programme, a social investment programme created in 1986. Shell Step encourages small to medium-sized businesses to devise projects suitable for an undergraduate to undertake during an eight week summer placement.

In 2008, over 600 students undertook a work placement through Shell Step. Swaroop has some advice for other employers thinking of following Shell’s example or those of the many Shell Step partners in offering work experience:

“Shell has done research on the characteristics graduates look for in an employer of choice, and these include a challenging work placement or job, work-life balance, and opportunities for personal development. A key learning point for us has been that we need to offer placements as close to real working life as possible, so they have to be genuine projects that meet a business need as well as giving the intern something interesting to do.”

www.shell.co.uk/careers

“I joined a group-wide IT project as a project analyst for a Trading Business. I started a real job from day one. The experience was far greater than I hoped, as I didn’t expect to have full ownership of a project and interact with people in different levels of management.”

“The work set was genuinely needed and at the level expected from graduates. I not only gained great learning, but also felt useful and gathered insight as to what would be expected from me in the future.”

Recent Shell interns’ experiences



“A degree is not enough and if you want to become more employable, skills including communication, teamwork and problem-solving can be thoroughly evidenced by the practical experience you have witnessed and been actively a part of on placement.”

Shell Step work placement student
quote provided by Rate My Placement

Shell Step: students and business in step

The national Shell Step programme is a social investment programme created in 1986. For the past five years, the programme has been managed by Step Enterprise Limited on behalf of Shell UK, the UK Government, the Scottish executive and Scottish Enterprise. Shell Step encourages small to medium-sized businesses (and community and social enterprises with fewer than 250 employees) to devise projects suitable for an undergraduate to undertake during an eight week summer placement, and to offer these through universities designated as Step agents. In 2008, over 600 students undertook a Shell Step work placement, selected from the 4,000 who applied.

The programme has the dual aim of communicating to small business managers the huge impact an undergraduate can have on their business while encouraging undergraduates to consider starting a career in the small business sector. Over the past 20 years, Shell Step has delivered in excess of 22,000 projects within small businesses throughout the UK, saving and making companies thousands, or in some cases millions, of pounds.

A wide range of projects is possible, depending on the needs of the companies in the area served by each Shell Step agent. Examples include designing and implementing a website, creating a database, improving internal communications, devising marketing strategies or new processes, undertaking market research, assessing efficiency or production methods, and creating user manuals for new products.

Employer and student both receive significant support through the programme. The university agent helps the employer by matching students who apply for the programme to the vacancies available, passing on applications from students (not just those from their own institution but any from the relevant geographical area) and arranging contracts. The employer conducts interviews, makes the decision who to appoint, and provides a £200 a week training allowance, which is paid to the student by Shell Step.

For the student, the Shell Step agent provides three days of training during the placement:

- An induction session to help with preparation
- An interim review to ensure the project is progressing as planned
- Training on how to prepare a final report and presentation.

Additional support and advice is available if students need it, while the company is expected to assign a mentor for day-to-day advice and support.

Afterwards, the student writes a report on their placement and is entered into the Shell Step awards, which have local, regional and national heats. Chris Haigh, a project management student at Warwick University, won the 2008 Shell Step award. His placement was at Cressall Resistors Ltd, where there had been problems of inaccurate communication and training for key factory processes, leading to inefficiencies and waste. Chris produced seven standard operating procedures which saved the company an estimated £6,000 a month. He then went on to develop a bespoke product for a Saudi Arabian contract opportunity which won the business an account worth up to £2m.

www.step.org.uk

University of Exeter

Getting the employability message across through creative marketing

The University of Exeter has about 15,500 students, of whom 11,300 are undergraduates. There are three campuses, two close to the centre of Exeter and the third at Penryn in Cornwall. Almost a third of the university's undergraduates are recruited from the south west.

Communications and marketing

It's difficult to miss employability at Exeter. Although the Careers and Employment Service (CES) is tucked away in a mews building on the Streatham campus, there are carousels of information on employability and careers in every academic building, often outside lecture theatres. Advertisements for events and opportunities are on lamp-posts across each campus and in the student newspaper. On the employability pages of Exeter's website, a series of podcasts – made by students for students – contain snippets of useful information, such as Top tips many graduates wish they had known. Ian Hodges, director of the Careers and Employment Service, explains Exeter's approach:

"We're constantly on the lookout for opportunities to get our employability messages across, and our communications and marketing is evolving all the time. We haven't bought in expertise, just learnt as we've gone along, but it succeeds because our emphasis is on engaging with students from day one and keeping it fresh. We believe it's important to use students themselves to help produce many of our materials – while bringing skills to the task, they benefit by gaining real work experience."

Key points:

- An evolving and innovative marketing strategy to get employability messages across to students
- An annually produced Employability Matters handbook for every student, together with a synopsis for academic staff
- Ninety-five percent of students taking part in volunteering, vacation work, internships or part-time work, in strong collaboration with the Students' Guild (the students' union).

Why employability matters

Hodges says that Exeter has understood the importance of employability skills since the CES was founded in the mid-1960s. But there has been a growing recognition at the university of the importance of equipping its students for life after they leave, which has led to more staff being involved in the work on employability, including many outside the CES. Exeter's employability policy dates back to 2000, and represents a consolidation on paper of what the university wants to achieve. A deliberate choice was made to promote employability as a concept, rather than the CES itself or the other units that contribute to the work.

Comprehensive training programmes

Employability officer, Dr Dawn Lees describes what's available to students:


"Over 95% of Exeter students take part in volunteering, vacation work, internships or work part-time alongside their course. Different schools in the university provide placements but it varies according to subject area. If a school doesn't provide anything, there is an accredited independent work experience module which any student can opt to do as part of their course."

Exeter is the Shell Step agent for the south-west peninsular, and promotes the opportunities for placements with small and medium enterprises to its own students as well as more widely. The university was the Shell Step agent of the year in 2008. It also runs a 20-week graduate business placement scheme for new graduates living in the area. Lees says:

"CES works centrally to offer sessions on softer skills such as leadership and negotiation, which employers come onto campus to deliver. In addition, employers come to give presentations on their company, and we offer three hours' in-depth training on how to perform well at interview, which includes a practice interview. There's a chance to learn some practical skills, too – such as British sign language or first aid."

Incentives

Most sessions are open to all students, although some – such as the interview experience – are aimed at penultimate and final-year students. Sometimes participation is incentivised. For example, over 400 students submitted their CV in return for a chance to win an iPod Touch, giving CES staff an opportunity to comment on their CVs and provide feedback. Exeter's Chancellor, TV presenter Floella Benjamin, plays a part too, choosing who should receive a career development award from among penultimate and final-year undergraduates who have submitted an application setting out their career plans and how they would use the £1,000 prize to further these.



"I just wanted to write and register my thanks for the mock interview you set up for me yesterday ... the interviewer from PriceWaterhouseCoopers gave me so many tips. Not only was it great practice... it was really interesting to hear about the 'behind-the-scenes' perspective. I understood what the interviewer (any interviewer) is looking for specifically with certain questions, the best way to frame my strengths, how to present my weaknesses."

Third year English student

And most recently, in October 2008 the university launched The Exeter Award to encourage participation in extra-curricular activities and achievements by providing official recognition and evidence of attendance at skills sessions and training courses, participation in sporting and musical activities, and engagement in work experience and voluntary work. Over 2,700 students have signed up for the first year of the award, which will enable them to show employers what they have done.

Partnership with the students' union

Lees says that Exeter's students' union – known as the Students' Guild – is integral to the success of the university's approach. The guild is separate from the university, although it does receive some funding for particular activities, such as The Works – a one-stop-shop for students to access information on part-time work, training and opportunities. The guild also collaborates with the CES on marketing and design of materials, and has, for example, helped with recruiting students to the Exeter Award.

Measuring success

Hodges says there have been significant changes as a result of Exeter's focus on employability; the last HESA survey showed a higher percentage in graduate-level employment. The academic staff have a greater awareness of why employability is important.

They also have a very good relationship with a large number of employers, who provide sponsorship, lead sessions, conduct practice interviews, or attend events, fairs and evening presentations. Some employers sit on the CES board."

Ian has some advice for others thinking of following Exeter's example:

"A comprehensive approach to employability does need to be adequately resourced. Each university's situation is probably unique, but good support from senior management is necessary to enable the grassroots work to take place. And it's definitely worth putting in the work required to engage the student union."

We're constantly on the look-out for new ways to help our students gain the skills and experience they need. Recent additions are the university internship scheme – where Exeter itself employs students as interns on particular projects – and the work we do with alumni to tap into their expertise and support, which we're now developing into a mentoring scheme. It's hard work but it's definitely worth it when you see how your students benefit.

www.exeter.ac.uk/employability

Sainsbury's

Students often bring an interesting new perspective and dimension

Sainsbury's is one of the big four supermarkets, with 785 stores across the UK, also offering a wide range of non-grocery items, online ordering, and financial services via Sainsbury's Bank. Over sixteen million customers shop at Sainsbury's every week and about 150,000 people work for the company. Following good trading results from Christmas 2008, Sainsbury's is considering creating jobs at a time when many other companies are under significant economic pressure.

The company has been offering work experience placements for about ten years and last year offered 25 places, a mixture of short placements lasting eight weeks in the summer and full-year placements starting in September. In future, the company would like to focus more on the longer placements. Head of leadership development, Sue Round explains the scheme's benefits for the company:

"The main reason is because it helps us get sight of the best candidates early on: about 10% of those we take onto our graduate entrant scheme have already done a placement with us (last year, that was six out of 56 graduates). The other – more altruistic – reason is that we see providing students with experience of working life as part of our wider corporate responsibility."

Because the company is often looking for very specific knowledge and skills – such as product technology or supply chain management, much of Sainsbury's recruitment targets particular universities and disciplines. Graduate entrants don't work in every area of the business and Sainsbury's is primarily looking for students who already know they want a career in a particular aspect of retailing.

Sainsbury's advertises the scheme via different media – directly to universities, via exhibitions, campus fairs and websites. Teams of staff from the business's different function areas work closely with universities to ensure they understand which students are likely to have the knowledge Sainsbury's needs.

Summer placements are available in logistics, information technology (IT), product technology, online, human resources (HR), commercial and buying. One-year placements focus on product technology and development, together with own-brand marketing. The emphasis for the students is on developing business skills such as project management and business influencing. Students are based at the London Store Support Centre or in a distribution centre across the country. Each placement ends with a performance review and an offer of a place on Sainsbury's graduate training scheme for some.

Every student undergoes an induction process, which includes a period working in-store so they may appreciate "what the business is all about". After that, they go to the division they've opted for, so they can learn what that aspect of the job is really about. Line Managers report that, if they come back as a graduate trainee, they are ahead of the game.

There are challenges – not so much with the individual students, but with filling all the vacancies in the areas where there are skills shortages, such as buying and food science. Universities do not always manage to anticipate far enough ahead where demand for employers will lie – but the students themselves add real value to the business, through fresh thinking, passion on sustainability and sourcing, and often an interesting new perspective and dimension.

As with all its staff, Sainsbury's analyses application data to see the demographic characteristics of the people it is recruiting to the placements and the graduate scheme, and as Peter Burnham, company occupational therapist explains:

"We do an adverse impact analysis on the different aspects of diversity to check that our assessment tools operate fairly for everyone. The pool isn't always as diverse as we'd like, because for various reasons university students don't reflect the population as a whole. When we work out what needs to change, then we target our activity accordingly – so for example, we are looking to work with various disability organisations to make sure disabled graduates get a fair opportunity to demonstrate their abilities."

Round encourages employers thinking of offering work placements: "Definitely do it – and, if you can, offer students a one-year placement, as that's where there's highest demand, with more and more universities incorporating work experience into their degree courses. With a whole year available, students can build up a portfolio of relevant experience in different business areas."

www.sainsburys.co.uk/graduates



"I took on real projects and loved working with a variety of people from suppliers, the marketing team and product technologists to develop new concepts. The work is fast paced, hands-on and hugely rewarding."

Nicole, product development placement



"With so much change in the supply chain there were lots of opportunities for me to get involved in really exciting projects while meeting a wide variety of people. It also helped me with my degree on my return to university."

Will, supply chain placement

Key points:

- A mixture of paid summer and one-year sandwich work placements, mainly in support roles with a short period in-store
- Placements are targeted at students studying relevant technical subjects with an eye on recruiting them as graduates
- Graduates who've undertaken a placement are seen as "ahead of the game".

Glasgow Caledonian University

Work-related learning is everyone's responsibility

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is Scotland's fifth largest university, with about 16,000 students on its modern campus in the centre of Glasgow and a further 2,000 on its campus in Oman, studying in seven academic schools over the areas of business, health, science and technology.

Integrating employment and higher education

In 2007, the Scottish Funding Council provided four years' funding to all Scottish universities to support the employability agenda.¹¹ GCU identified the need to enhance their students' employability skills by embedding work-related learning activities in programmes across the whole curriculum, in non-vocational as well as vocational subjects. It therefore launched a new project based at the Caledonian Academy, the university's academic support unit.

This Real WoRLD (Realising Work-Related Learning Diffusion) project is managed full-time by Sabine McKinnon, lecturer in employability. Based on research evidence and staff expertise, it aims to integrate the worlds of employment and higher education by addressing employability at three levels:

- Institutional level through a strategy for work-related learning
- Programme level through the curriculum
- Academic level through innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

Embedding employability

To fulfil this aim, there is an effective partnership between academic and support staff, programme boards, the Careers Service, and student and employer representatives. All schools are being encouraged to embed work-related learning activities into their programmes, to use innovative approaches in learning and teaching and to engage with employers on a regular basis. Many do this already but the university's 2015 vision highlights its ambition to provide all students with work experience by 2015, rising from 50% in 2005.

The first phase of the project has been to identify existing good practice in work-related learning and other employability related activities at the university, and then to find out from employers of GCU graduates what they are looking for and whether GCU is providing it. Phase 2 is to use the results of the scoping exercise to pilot innovative approaches to work-related learning across a wider range of subjects, while phase 3 is to develop guidelines and generic performance indicators to ensure that the employability strategy is sustainable across the whole GCU curriculum.

Why employability matters

An emphasis on employability skills is not new at GCU. The university was founded in 1993 from the merger of two institutions with a long tradition of focusing on practical vocational knowledge. A significant proportion of undergraduates (29%) come from low participation neighbourhoods, and more than a third are mature students (over 20) when they start their degree. As McKinnon says: "A lot of GCU's students have worked already, so we don't have to tell them what it's like in the workplace. But the challenge is to show them how to be independent learners who know how to learn without constant guidance and then to translate that into getting – and being confident in doing – a different type of job as a graduate."

"Because of the profile of our student body, our students are typically very focused on their future careers, they have come to GCU with a clear goal of getting a good job at the end of their course, and that is the criterion for choosing their area of study. That makes them critical consumers. To some extent, what we are doing is a response to the market."

Work-related learning

There is already a wide variety of work-related learning activities in the different schools and programmes – including work placements, internships, mentoring schemes, and job-shadowing externally – along with the widespread use of case studies and client-based project work in teaching. Academic staff are encouraged to use examples from their own research and

Key points:

- A centrally-funded four-year project to integrate work-related learning and employability at institutional, programme and academic levels
- A wide variety of opportunities through academic schools and programmes, the Caledonian Academy, the Careers Service, the student union and other extra-curricular activity
- Every student to have access to work experience by 2015.

consultancy activity. GCU has recently established an Applied Knowledge Exchange Unit to sell the university's research expertise to the outside world, not just to increase income but also so staff and students can contribute to the wider application of academic knowledge. Some work placements (even those not related to vocational courses such as nursing and social work where practical experience is compulsory) carry academic credit.

- Extra-curricular activities include the Caledonian creates showcase for design students
- the Caledonian Club where students are trained – and paid – to encourage school students to consider higher education
- Entrepreneurial initiatives with Scottish Enterprise
- Participation for Law students in the Innocence Project, seeking to overturn wrongful convictions
- The Student Leaders Programme, where students work as mentors and volunteers.


The work of the Careers Service complements what the academic staff are doing, by providing specific support to students. For example, the Careers Service holds discipline-specific employers' fairs where employers are invited onto campus, not just to identify placements and graduate jobs, but also so that students and staff can keep up-to-date with what employers are doing and shape their studies, teaching and research accordingly.

In April 2008, GCU adopted a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. This identifies employability as the second of three major goals the university wants to achieve. GCU has redefined the criteria for promotion to reward excellence in teaching and learning, rather than basing promotion on research alone.

Recently, the university has been chosen as a partner with the University of Glasgow and the University of St Andrews in a major £2m project on work-related learning funded by the Scottish Funding Council, called Aiming University Learning@Work. One of the project's pilots is currently taking place in GCU's division of psychology, where staff are investigating how work-related learning can be embedded in non-vocational programmes.

Measuring success

McKinnon accepts it can be difficult to measure the benefits of the changes GCU is implementing, but is in no doubt there will be a long-term impact for students. All employability and work-related activity is evaluated, and feedback from students is very positive. HESA's six months destination data shows that 95% of GCU graduates are in employment.



"We have been working with graduates from Glasgow Caledonian University for a considerable period of time and we have always found them to be valuable members of the team who have been well prepared by the University for the challenges of the working environment."

David Langdon, quantity surveyor

McKinnon is keen to pass on what GCU have learned – in particular that there is no conflict between work-related learning and the university's other aims:

"Work-related learning is based on the same principles as any good learning and teaching in HE. It's about the process of learning, not just the content. Taking this approach does not dilute the subject matter of a degree course, and doesn't have to be confined to vocational subjects – though you have to be more creative in the less obvious ones, and recognise that there's more than one model."

"But work-related learning is everyone's responsibility, not only that of the Careers Service, and thinking has to start early in every student's course, not just a few weeks before they leave. It does require extra commitment, and a new approach."

www.gcal.ac.uk

KPMG Europe

Work placement students add real value

KPMG is a leading international provider of professional services including audit, tax, financial and risk advisory. In the UK, over 10,000 partners and staff work in 22 offices, stretching from Plymouth in the south-west of England to Aberdeen in north-east Scotland, and from Cardiff to Ipswich.

Sara Reading is senior manager of graduate recruitment. In her experience, universities vary in their approach to employability: “Some are very welcoming, and keen to involve businesses like KPMG in the curriculum, while others still want their students to focus on their immediate education, rather than life – and employment – afterwards. That can leave students without much understanding of how business works, or how to apply the skills they’ve learnt to real-life situations.”

KPMG is keen to help students address employability issues more widely. At universities near KPMG offices, staff provide sessions on subjects such as completing application forms and succeeding in interviews, and some partners talk less formally to students on accountancy and finance courses at universities with whom they have a personal link.

In 2008, across the country, KPMG took on 750 entry-level graduates, about 150 of whom had completed a summer work placement with the firm at the end of their second year at university. The firm also has a small number of students doing a one-year business placement as part of a sandwich course. While KPMG takes students and graduates from any university (last year, its recruits came from over 80 universities), it targets 20 universities in particular, working closely with their careers services.

KPMG finds the work placements a valuable recruitment tool, believing that able students who might otherwise go to a competitor think of applying for a graduate job with KPMG because of the availability of a work placement first. The firm takes students for eight weeks in the summer on a first come, first served basis, provided they’ve successfully completed about 75% of the graduate recruitment process.

The range of jobs open to work experience students is exactly the same as for graduates: KPMG has 26 entry routes, the majority in audit, but there are many variations in that broad category. When applying, students can opt to spend their placement either in audit or elsewhere. If the placement they ask for has been taken, they’ll be offered an alternative office or discipline. Pay is set competitively at about three quarters of a graduate salary.

At the start of their time with KPMG, all students undergo initial induction giving them a basic introduction to the business, its

Key points:

- Highly sought after paid summer work placements, with some one-year placements
- A recruitment tool to attract potential graduate entrants, nine out of ten return as graduate recruits
- Every intern given a mentor and senior manager to provide coaching and advice.

processes and standards. The department where a student is based will usually have its own induction process too. Every student is given a mentor and senior manager to provide coaching and guidance. Although students are expected to undertake low-level tasks, they also get the opportunity to take on real responsibility from the start and to learn more about the management of the organisation - for example by shadowing or assisting a senior member of staff, or by taking on a specific role in a project.

Nine out of ten students who do a work placement with KPMG return as graduate entrants, although this isn’t guaranteed – it’s subject to formal feedback from the department where they worked, together with a final interview. The few students who don’t choose to continue with a graduate entry application after a work placement are also followed up to make sure the placement experience was still a positive one.

The timing of the placements can be a problem as Reading explains: “Students come to us in the summer because that’s what fits in with their studies. However, the summer is a quiet time for us, and that stops us offering more places: we limit the number we take so there’s enough for each individual to do, because we want to make sure the time students spend at KPMG is valuable to them as well as to us. January or February would be better, but usually that would interfere with exams. I’d be keen to explore with universities whether we could offer placements at a different time of year, even if that meant they were shorter.”



Will Chamley spent the summer of 2007 in the transaction services department at KPMG. He worked on a couple of projects, including the £300 million refinancing of a Scottish-based whisky distillery business, performing basic financial analysis as part of the due diligence process. Will says of his experience:

“I was fully involved with the analysis of the data provided, which helped me understand what makes a successful business and in which areas key issues arose for the banks to consider. After the analysis, I assisted in the presentation of the report, including the necessary information for client examination. The report and regular contact with the client taught me the importance of client relationships, and how the whole team could assist in the process.

“For a student, a structured internship is extremely valuable. I’ve felt my experiences at KPMG have given me a grounding of accountancy and inter-personal skills. It has also been useful to maintain relationships after the internship, from informal career advice to a few pints!”

Benefits

The benefits for KPMG are clear. KPMG believes it gets the best students applying to come to KPMG and part of that is because KPMG offer the summer placements. Once they’ve found KPMG and know they’ve got that opportunity, students stop looking. And once they’ve done the placement, they tend to act as ‘campus ambassadors’, telling their friends and the next year’s intake about what KPMG does and what it’s like. Not only that, but while they’re with us, they make a real contribution – by the end of six weeks, they’re adding value as a significant member of a team working for a client.

Reading is clear that other employers should follow KPMG’s example in engaging with universities and students:

“Our experience is that it wins on every count. It’s a very strong way of promoting graduate vacancies, especially as every student who has a positive experience of working at KPMG and tells someone else about it is doing our marketing for us. The students who do work placements get a head start as graduates, too, knowing how departments work as well as where the coffee machine is. And obviously they gain valuable experience and insights, too.”

www.kpmg.co.uk/careers

Liverpool John Moores University

Degrees with the ‘WoW factor’

Key points:

- Employer-verified World of Work (WoW®) programme available to every student, enabling them to build up a portfolio detailing how they have acquired eight key graduate skills and a certificate of higher level WoW skills
- Review of every curriculum to build in employability and work-related learning
- Ready-for-work job application skills and employability advice
- Strong relationships with local, regional and national employers and a brokerage hub.

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) has over 20,000 undergraduate students and 4,000 postgraduate students, studying in six faculties spread over three sites. The average age of undergraduates when they begin their degree course is 25 and 45% of LJMU’s students are drawn from Merseyside.

Why employability matters

LJMU’s origin in a number of technical colleges means it has always provided highly successful vocational courses and placed an emphasis on skills relevant to the workplace, building strong relationships with local employers. Its most recent initiative, the World of Work (WoW®)¹², takes to a new level the university’s focus on offering all its students the opportunity to acquire employability skills.

Terry Dray, director of the Graduate Development Centre (GDC), explains why LJMU decided to adopt this approach: “WoW is LJMU’s response to both a series of influential reports advocating the need for universities to take more seriously the employability of students for the benefit of the local, regional and national economy, and to detailed conversations with the employers with whom we have a relationship. We’re also very aware of the need to provide positive outcomes for our students, who are investing heavily in their education. The final factor is that we want to differentiate LJMU in the marketplace, and we believe that our approach is a very attractive one for potential students.”

The world of work

While some schools and programmes had for a long time delivered a good mix of subject skills, graduate skills and work-related learning, the arrival in 2000 of Professor Michael Brown as vice-chancellor and chief executive provided an opportunity to connect the university’s whole curriculum even more closely to the world of work, building stronger relationships with employers. This has culminated in the WoW scheme.

The WoW process will mean different things to different students, it expects every student to develop and reflect on the eight transferable graduate skills the university has identified, alongside their subject skills, and, to a greater or lesser extent, undertake some kind of work-related learning. The eight essential graduate skills are: analysing and problem-solving, teamworking and interpersonal skills, verbal communication, written communication, personal planning and organising, initiative, numerical reasoning, and information literacy and IT skills.

The whole institution is signed up to this approach, so by the time all 400 plus of LJMU’s programmes have been reviewed, even a student who concentrates solely on their academic course will have spent time identifying and reflecting on the development of the skills. The conversations they have with their academic tutor or faculty skills support officer and the work-related learning – placements, masterclasses and so on – offered by their subject will all help them develop the skills. Their personal development planning and LJMU e-portfolio allows students to reflect on and record what they’ve done.

“And alongside that there’s the voluntary WoW programme or process that will help them to identify the extent to which they’ve developed higher level world of work skills, which we divide into three themes: self-awareness, organisational awareness, and making things happen.

Employer accreditation

The WoW process has four stages, and is delivered primarily in the GDC. Stage 1 begins with a 90-minute web-based employability skills gap analysis. This is followed by a group or one-to-one workshop conversation with a WoW delivery team careers adviser or trainer to agree an action plan to address the gaps identified. Stage 2 is a programme of development workshops, so students can understand what the missing elements mean and how to acquire them. In Stage 3, students are asked to write a profile: if this doesn’t demonstrate that they have all the skills, they can go on to acquire them – for example, through a placement, voluntary work, or a further workshop. The final WoW stage, stage 4, is a one-to-one filmed interview with a local employer partner.



“... a strategic change of direction was essential to ensure our graduates have the necessary skills to succeed. A key ingredient is the advice and backing that we receive from our advisory board. This panel, not the university, has and will continue to determine the WoW skills, ensuring they match the requirements of today’s knowledge economy.”

Professor Michael Brown LJMU vice-chancellor

If the employer is satisfied that the student has demonstrated they possess the higher level WoW skills, a WoW skills certificate will be awarded. This practical employer involvement and verified is, Dray says, one of the things that makes WoW unique.

Ready for work

Running alongside and in between WoW is a parallel programme, Ready for work, which helps students to acquire the skills necessary for the job application process – such as CV writing, form completion, managing selection centres, and understanding psychometric testing. In addition, students have access via LJMU’s 3 main campuses to a team of employability advisers offering career information and advice sessions and to WoW delivery team advisers and trainers who offer one-to-one confidential guidance.

WoW is still in its pilot year, but the university’s ultimate aim is that it should be available to every student, offering what Dray calls “a flexible, bespoke mass offer”. In other words, it is available to every student, whatever their subject of study, undergraduate or post-graduate, but it is possible for every student to tailor it to identify and fill their own employability skills gaps.

WoW and LJMU’s other work-related programmes are only possible because of the strong relationship the university has with employers, in public, private and third sectors. As well as a local WoW Employer panel which meets regularly and provides the WoW Stage 4 interviewers, LJMU has an advisory board of leading employers and business experts to comment on and shape the university’s skills agenda.

Measuring success

LJMU believes its approach to employability is already giving its graduates an advantage, and the HESA destinations of leavers survey (2006-07) seems to bear this out, showing 89% of LJMU graduates are in employment or undertaking postgraduate study within six months of graduating. While Dray acknowledges that as half of students come from a disadvantaged low-income background and many students already work part-time alongside their degree course but they will move into a different level of job after graduating.

And Dray’s advice to another university that wants to enhance employability skills for its undergraduate students? He is clear that preparation is key:

“Try to be as well-informed as you possibly can be by listening to the broadest range of employers, rather than just a chosen few, so that you’re clear on what your ultimate destination is. Diversity in this case really is to be recommended. And it’s obviously extremely important to have senior strategic commitment or buy-in from across the university.”

www.ljmu.ac.uk/WoW

Marks & Spencer

Getting and giving – a head start in graduate recruitment

If in the last 20 or so years you have – like millions of UK shoppers – found yourself in a Marks & Spencer's store, you may have encountered a student taking a year out from their degree course to work alongside the company's 68,000 UK employees. M&S provides year-long placements for undergraduates to work in-store or in a variety of technical and design roles on the retailer's business placement programme (BPP), and Linda Graham, graduate & BPP manager, is clear about why they do it:

"We like to offer the students a real insight into the world of work – it fits well with our corporate social responsibility. But the business definitely benefits too: the students will often bring a fresh perspective. Most importantly, having them in as undergraduates means we get a headstart on our future graduate recruitment – because we've already spotted some really talented people who we hope will come back and work for us later."

Work placements

The number of placements varies slightly from year to year – in 2009, the target is about 30. The majority of students work in stores, learning about and taking part in retail management, but there are opportunities in human resources (HR), food technology, IT and design too. Students have usually completed two years of their degree before they arrive.

Activities to promote the programme to universities include an open day for university careers advisers, emails to placement

officers, attendance at the National Work Placement Exhibitions in London and Birmingham, and advertising. It's then up to students to apply online.

From this point on it's a very similar process to the company's graduate recruitment, just 12 months earlier in the student's course. BPP students must have the basic skills, because they're taking on a real live job, so they go through the same assessment as the graduate recruits. M&S also want them to know what's involved, so before they start, all the students will spend a day at their training store to meet the team and a day doing the role they'll be in, to make sure M&S is right for them."

Once a student arrives to do the placement, there is a two-week standard induction process where they meet other new recruits and form a network group. Students receive relevant training programmes and leadership courses. In addition, there are courses they can take as part of their development – for example, those in retail management could learn about business competencies, while those in HR would acquire interviewing skills.

"The BPP students are treated exactly the same as our graduate recruits – they're full employees from day one, in a management role. It is very demanding, but we only take people in whom we can see the right potential and who have shown us during the assessment process that they want to succeed."

Students are paid a competitive salary which is linked to the job and recognises the full-time contribution M&S expects them to make during their year with the company.

While BPP students may well be living away from home, they're not on their own. M&S designates some stores as training stores, making sure that store and line managers have the necessary skills and providing support for them. A training store will then have a mix of BPP students and graduate recruits working at it – anything from two to six.

Performance management

Every student has their own personal development plan, with reviews at six and 11 months. Continuous performance management through weekly reviews and active feedback, along with assessments as part of every training course, enables everyone to identify what has worked well and where improvements are possible or necessary. Stores are also regularly assessed to make sure the training they're providing meets the required standard.

A high proportion of BPP students receive an offer to return to M&S as a graduate recruit when they've finished their degree course. They'll then become part of a group of about 200 – but with the benefit of already having spent a year with the company.

Key points:

- Paid one-year placements – primarily in training stores, but also in technical and design roles
- Continuous performance management and each student has a personal development plan
- Scheme quality-marked by the National Council for Work Experience.



"I've acquired the kind of skills and qualifications, not to mention the business acumen, a person wouldn't usually have till a year after they've graduated. Put simply, I've got a massive headstart in the job market."

Hiren Bagdai was studying business economics at the University of Westminster when he became a BPP student on the M&S commercial management scheme

Real benefits

The work placements make a difference to the students: the year's placement gives them hands on technical training and leadership training. They get guidance on how to do their role, shadowing an experienced manager or attending a workshop before being asked to consolidate their learning by putting it into practice and showing the company what they can do. Their confidence increases after the first few weeks, as they begin to understand what business is about and often their grades will go up when they return to university for their final year.

The company gains, too. For example, one of the projects that a business placement student worked on was the on-boarding website used by new graduate and BPP candidates. This now provides all the information that a new recruit could want before they start with M&S, and has won an award.

Graham recommends work placements to other employers: "M&S has definitely benefited from the new outlook our students bring to the business. Work placements are a great way of getting students to work alongside the company, and enable you to recruit them as graduates in the future. It's also worth seeking advice about how to do it properly – consider getting the quality mark from the National Council for Work Experience, as we've recently done".



Cardiff University

Employability is such a powerful agenda that universities can't hide from it

Cardiff University's campus close to the centre of the capital of Wales is the place of study of 20,593 undergraduates and 6,213 postgraduates. As the university's own website points out, this makes it the size of many small towns, making it a potentially daunting task to influence the behaviour of so many students, not to mention the 6,000 staff.

Why employability matters

But that has not prevented the university addressing employability issues. As Les Rees, director of careers and employer services says, the Careers Service has for decades been helping students demonstrate the skills employers want, although in the early days, the focus was very much on working with career consultants on what sort of jobs they should be applying for and the application process itself. Employability has become much more high profile in recent years, not least because of the impact of student debt. Students and their parents or other sponsors all want to know what the return on their investment is going to be.

For Cardiff, that has come alongside an awareness that the university needs to think about its place as part of the wider community and the wider world. Universities can't avoid the fact that the first destination of graduates is a key performance indicator. It became clear that if Cardiff University was to become the world-leading university it wanted to be, it must compete with others on where its graduates are employed by developing students with the skills demanded by employers, while at the same time remaining focused on its research performance.

For a long time Cardiff has had good links with employers at all levels, from those providing basic work tasters for Cardiff students to the big graduate recruiters coming into the university for presentations and so on. They were telling the university what the issues were from their perspective and the university was keen to strengthen these employer links further.

Career management skills and partnerships with business

The university's academic schools are now encouraged to run an employability programme for students at departmental level. The programme has been badged CMS or career management skills, and is made up of a menu of workshops, many about job hunting but others covering softer skills. Some schools incentivise student attendance by awarding a certificate for completion of all six CMS modules. In other cases, completion of the modules counts towards a student's degree.

Schools are encouraged to develop good relationships with employers, to facilitate greater contact and a two-way flow of

information. Some schools actively broker work placements for their students, while others just encourage students to find them.

Cardiff sees itself as research-led and focused on its vision to become world-leading. World-leading universities are those that develop strong and lasting collaborations and partnerships with business, commerce and the community, while still meeting the increasing expectations of students. Cardiff believes it is merging the two aspects very successfully, with year on year more students moving into key positions in industry and government and the social capital sector. However it is not resting on its laurels, and is aiming to do much more.

Julie Hepburn, deputy director of the careers service, gives more detail of its approach: "We have a programme called 'Skills 4 U', through which employers come and run sessions, often alongside a careers fair, on practical job hunting, communication skills, commercial awareness and so on. This is in addition to a huge amount of information and advice that students can access through the careers service."

Another employability initiative which Cardiff students have access to is Graduate Opportunities Wales (GO Wales), a pan-Wales initiative with programmes based in all the higher education careers services in Wales. Funded by the Welsh assembly government and the European Union, the project incorporates work experience, funding for training, and promotion of graduate jobs in Wales. For students and graduates it provides the chance

Key points:

- Recognition that universities are competing on graduate job destination as well as a research
- Department-based employability (career management skills) modules for every student
- Practical programmes run by the Careers Service and GO Wales, offering skills-based training and paid/unpaid work placements
- Courses, volunteering and entrepreneurial activity encouraged by the university and the Students' Union.



to gain practical experience and make informed career decisions. Employers can use it to access graduate skills, subsidise their recruitment and training, resource specific projects and advertise graduate vacancies.

GO Wales is a well established and highly valued programme. Work experience projects are agreed with all parties at the outset, and opportunities are advertised, with applicants undergoing a formal recruitment process. Students and graduates are recruited by the company and given a formal induction, with their progress monitored throughout their placement period and feedback given at the end. Work tasters (up to two weeks unpaid) involve elements of shadowing while placements (up to ten weeks paid) require the completion of specific project outcomes. In 2008 Cardiff provided 250 students and graduates with work experience opportunities, and advised a further 500.

Entrepreneurship and volunteering

Cardiff encourages entrepreneurship, too. For the last two years, ‘student enterprise’ has supported students in becoming more enterprising. It runs a series of enterprise skills workshops, on aspects of business such as commercial awareness and teambuilding, as well as supporting a student-led enterprise society which provides marketing opportunities for students with micro-businesses, including a Christmas market. And last year there was the innovation challenge, which involved 170 students spending a week trying to create as much value as possible from a mystery object.

In addition, Cardiff’s Students’ Union hosts two relevant programmes. The student development unit runs parallel courses on subjects such as presentation and team working, which

complement the activities of the careers service and student volunteering Cardiff, a charity run by Cardiff students and based at the Students’ Union, provides volunteering opportunities in a wide variety of different projects.

Measuring success

Les Rees is sure the opportunities for students are having a beneficial effect: the evidence suggests that a placement or other work experience increases students’ chances of getting a better job. The HESA figures for six-month graduate destinations seem to bear that out.

And Les’s advice to another institution thinking of addressing employability issues in more depth?

“Get on and do it. It enriches your students and therefore it’s bound to enrich the university too. Employability is such a powerful agenda that universities can’t really hide from it. And there is a wider benefit in terms of reputation. After all, it can be no bad thing if people are beating a path to your door for graduates.”

Julie adds:

“Before you do anything, get someone really senior to back you. Buy-in from the top is crucial – here, it’s meant doors have opened across the university.”

www.cf.ac.uk/carsv

References and glossary

1. The terms ‘universities’ and ‘HE institutions’ are used interchangeably to refer to universities and colleges of higher education in the UK.
2. Set out in Time well spent: embedding employability in work experience (CBI, March 2007)
3. The Association of Graduate Recruiters bi-annual survey (February 2009) found that overall graduate vacancies are down 5.4% on 2008, but some sectors - such as engineering and food and drink – are recruiting more graduates and the downturn is not as pronounced as in 2003, nor as bad as in 1991 and 1992, when vacancies fell by 32% and 14%.
4. The detailed results are set out in Chapter 3.
5. “Students in Higher Education”, HESA
6. HESA is currently carrying out a second longitudinal survey of the destinations of graduates (from the 2004-05 cohort) 3.5 years after graduation is currently in train, following on from that carried out in November 2006 which related to the 2002-03 cohort, and may answer some of the universities’ concerns.
7. This was mentioned by one employer, but since it might significantly increase the number of work placements available, it is considered worth putting forward as a recommendation.
8. The majority of respondents were from three universities: Glasgow Caledonian, University of Swansea and Hertfordshire University. The survey should not, therefore, be viewed as representative of the UK student population and their experiences of higher education but it does provide a useful insight into students views on employability
9. Separately, and generally for those with NVQs and GCSEs rather than degree qualifications, the company takes on 1000 apprentices a year.
10. Alongside the standard recruitment process and an intensive 5-day business challenge at a residential centre.
11. In Scotland, work on employability and higher education is co-ordinated by SHEEN (the Scottish Higher Education Employability Network), a joint initiative of the Higher Education Academy, QAA Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Universities Scotland; regular meetings are held which include a representative from each of the 20 Scottish higher education institutions.
12. WoW is a registered trademark.

Sources of information and advice

CBI – The Confederation of British Industry

The Confederation of British Industry is the UK's leading business organisation, speaking for some 240,000 businesses that together employ around a third of the private sector workforce. The organisation is also the UK's official business representative in the European Union, which generates more than 50% of regulation affecting British firms.

www.cbi.org.uk

020 7379 7400

UUK – Universities UK

Universities UK is the major representative body and membership organisation for the higher education sector. Members are the executive heads of UK universities. Together with Higher Education Wales and Universities Scotland, UUK works to advance the interests of universities and to spread good practice throughout the higher education sector.

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

020 7419 4111

DIUS – the government Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

The government Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills brings together functions from two former departments - science and innovation responsibilities from the Department of Trade and Industry and Skills, further and higher education from the Department for Education and Skills.

To build a dynamic, knowledge-based economy the new department will draw together the nation's strengths in colleges, research, science and universities.

www.dius.gov.uk

020 7215 5555

AGCAS – Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services

AGCAS is the professional association for higher education (HE) careers practitioners, using the expertise and resources of its membership for the collective benefit of its members, HE careers services, their clients and customers, and the sector overall.

www.agcas.org.uk

0114 251 5750

AGCAS Scotland – Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Scotland

(Same as above but covering the Scottish Higher Education System.)

www.agcasscotland.org.uk

AGR – Association of Graduate Recruiters

The AGR is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting employers in all aspects of graduate recruitment.

www.agr.org.uk

01926 623 236

ASET – Association for Sandwich Education and Training

ASET is the professional body for placement and employability staff. It has been at the forefront of developments in sandwich courses and other forms of work placements, in higher and further education, for more than 25 years.

www.asetonline.org

0114 221 2902

BERR – Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

BERR works to ensure business success in an increasingly competitive world. Its role is to boost productivity and keep the UK competitive and an attractive place to do business, especially in tough economic times, as well as to help companies succeed overseas and to bring foreign investment to the UK.

www.berr.gov.uk

020 7215 5000

BCC – British Chambers of Commerce

The BCC is the national body for a powerful and influential network of accredited chambers of commerce across the UK – a network that directly serves its member businesses and the wider business community.

www.britishchambers.org.uk

020 7654 5800

Business Link

Business Link offers instant access to clear, simple and trustworthy information to businesses - providing information on managing finances, pay, tax, and international trade.

www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/home

0845 600 9006

CRAC – Career Development Organisation

CRAC is the independent, charitable organisation dedicated to career development and active, career-related learning.

www.crac.org.uk

01223 460277

CRA – Centre for Recording Achievement

CRA is a national network organisation and a registered educational charity. It seeks to ‘promote the awareness of recording achievement and action planning processes as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment’.

www.recordingachievement.org
01942 826761

CIHE – The Council for Industry and Higher Education

CIHE works to foster close working and understanding between business and higher education so that world-class learning and research can improve the international competitiveness of both sectors and the capabilities of graduates and those already in the workforce.

www.cihe-uk.com
020 7383 7667

DELNI – Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland

DELNI is an intermediary body between the Northern Ireland executive and the higher education sector in Northern Ireland. The aim of the department is to “promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy.”

www.delni.gov.uk
028 9025 7777

Directgov

Directgov is the official website for UK citizens providing information, advice and guidance on education and learning, mortgages, debt advice, citizen’s advice, transport, environment etc.

www.direct.gov.uk

The Enhancing Graduate Employability Project

The Enhancing Graduate Employability Project was carried out by Oxford Brookes University. The project investigates how the employability skills of students can be enhanced via curriculum interventions.

www.enhancingemployability.org.uk
01865 484270

ECU – The Equality Challenge Unit

The ECU supports the higher education sector to realise the potential of all staff and students, whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, or age, to the benefit of students, higher education institutions (HEIs) and society.

www.ecu.ac.uk
020 7438 1010

GO Wales

GO Wales offers higher education students with European Union citizenship and graduates the chance to gain a head start in today's job market. Services for graduates include work placements, jobs, careers service and work taster. GO Wales also offers advice to employers on how to recruit and retain graduates.

www.gowales.co.uk
0845 225 60 50

Graduate Advantage

Graduate Advantage offers students paid summer internships, graduate placements, part-time placements and employability training. It offers employers free front-end recruitment for anything between four weeks and longer term 12-month placements.

www.graduateadvantage.co.uk
0121 204 4767

Graduate Prospects

Graduate Prospects is the UK's leading provider of information, advice and opportunities to students and graduates.

www.prospects.ac.uk
0161 277 5200

HEA – The Higher Education Academy

The HEA aims to support the HE sector in providing the best possible learning experience for all students.

www.heacademy.ac.uk
01904 717500

HECSU – the Higher Education Careers Service Unit

HECSU works for the advancement of education of students and graduates of any establishment of HE by supporting and assisting the work of the careers advisory services.

www.hecsu.ac.uk
0161 277 5248

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEFCE distributes public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges. In doing so, it aims to promote high-quality education and research, in a financially healthy sector.

www.hefce.ac.uk
0117 931 7317

HEFCW – Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

HEFCW distributes funds to support education, research and related activities at twelve higher education institutions, including the teaching activities of the Open University in Wales. It also funds higher education courses at further education colleges.

www.hefcw.ac.uk

029 2076 1861

HEPI – Higher Education Policy Institute

HEPI was established in November 2002, to ensure higher education policy development in the UK is informed by research knowledge and experience.

www.hepi.ac.uk

01865 284450

HESA – The Higher Education Statistics Agency

HESA is the official agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education.

www.hesa.ac.uk

01242 255577

Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Leadership Foundation for Higher Education provides a dedicated service of support and advice on leadership, governance and management for all UK universities and higher education colleges.

www.lfhe.ac.uk

020 7841 2822

National Association of Student Employment Services

The National Association of Student Employment Services is the professional representative body for practitioners from all styles of student employment services - including those in students' unions, careers and personnel offices.

www.nases.org.uk

0151 794 4629

NCGE – National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship

NCGE's goal is to influence and inspire an increase in the number of students and graduates who give serious thought to self-employment or business start-up.

www.ncge.com/home

0121 503 2233

National Council for Work Experience

National Council for Work Experience disseminates information and good practice aims to encourage and support the development of quality and standards across all forms of work experience and to encourage more employers to provide placement opportunities. It currently focuses these activities on students during degree programmes in further and higher education.

www.work-experience.org/ncwe

NUS – National Union of Students

NUS is a voluntary membership organisation which makes a real difference to the lives of students and its member students' unions.

www.nus.org.uk

0871 221 8221

ONS – National Statistics Online

The ONS produces independent information to improve understanding of the UK's economy and society. Reliable and impartial statistics are vital for planning the proper allocation of resources, policymaking and decision-making to ensure a fair society.

www.statistics.gov.uk

0845 601 3034

NIACE – The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

NIACE encourages adults to engage in learning of all kinds.

www.niace.org.uk

0116 204 4200

Prospects

A national organisation specialising in meeting local needs, the principles of equality and the diversity which underpin all our activities. Prospects works in partnership with clients in the public, private and voluntary sectors and develops specific services to meet the needs of the individual and help achieve the objectives of our organisational customers.

www.prospects.co.uk

020 8315 1500

QAA – The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

QAA was established in 1997 to provide independent assessment of how higher education institutions in the UK maintain their academic standards and quality.

www.qaa.ac.uk

01452 557000

QAA Scotland

(See previous but covering the Scottish Higher Education sector)

www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

0141 572 3420

Rate My Placement

Rate My Placement is the UK's leading undergraduate resource for students, universities and employers involved in work placements and internships

www.ratemyplacement.co.uk

0118 940 2500

Scottish Executive

The Scottish Executive is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Scotland, including health, education, justice, rural affairs, and transport.

www.scotland.gov.uk

08457 741 741

SFC – the Scottish Funding Council

The SFC distributes more than £1.6bn to Scotland's colleges and universities for teaching and learning, research and other activities in support of Scottish government priorities.

www.sfc.ac.uk/index.htm

0131 313 6500

Skill

Skill is a national charity promoting opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of impairment, in post-16 education, training and employment.

www.skill.org.uk

020 7450 0620

TARGETjobs.co.uk

TARGETjobs.co.uk provides graduate jobs, recruitment and careers which can all be found on its website as well as job hunting tools, careers advice, information on work experience and other career-related information.

www.targetjobs.co.uk

UKCES – The UK Commission for Employment and Skills

The UKCES aims to raise UK prosperity and opportunity by improving employment and skills. It benefits employers, individuals and government by advising how improved employment and skills systems can help the UK become a world-class leader in productivity, in employment and in having a fair and inclusive society.

www.ukces.org.uk

01709 774 800

Unistats

Unistats is the official website to help you make an informed choice when deciding which university or college to apply to, by allowing users to compare job prospects, student satisfaction and more.

www.unistats.co.uk

Volunteer Centre Network Scotland

Volunteer Centre Network Scotland provides a network for all wanting to take up volunteering opportunities in Scotland. The network is made up of 32 volunteer centers operating out of 60 offices.

www.volunteerscotland.org.uk

0141 876 9555

Volunteering England

Volunteering England works to support and increase the quality, quantity, impact and accessibility of volunteering throughout England.

www.volunteering.org.uk

0845 305 6979

Volunteering Wales

Volunteering Wales provides volunteering opportunities for young people across Wales.

www.volunteering-wales.net

Welsh assembly government

The Welsh assembly government is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Wales – including the economy, health, education, and local government.

www.wales.gov.uk

0300 0603300

Windsor Fellowship

The Windsor Fellowship is a unique organisation that runs personal development and training programmes targeting talented black and Asian students in the UK.

www.windsor-fellowship.org

020 7613 0373

The Year in Industry

The Year in Industry is the UK's leading student placement expert providing high-quality, paid placements for students in their gap year before or during their degree course.

www.yini.org.uk

www.cbi.org.uk

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