Defining and developing your approach to employability

A framework for higher education institutions

Doug Cole and Maureen Tibby

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1. Context

Introduction

In 2012, a Teaching and Learning Summit on Employability was jointly co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). The Summit provided a forum for debate and created an agenda for action to support higher education providers. A key recommendation was for the development of a framework to support higher education institutions (HEIs) in embedding employability. I am delighted to introduce *Defining and developing your approach to employability,* a framework which has been developed by the HEA and informed by feedback from those in the sector.

As employability is a university-wide responsibility, this resource has been designed to engage a diverse range of people and is deliberately concise to promote accessibility and encourage ownership and use. As a result, reference to and discussion of academic literature has been kept limited although a number of key models and resources have been suggested and readers are directed to further reading and resources to support them.

The framework is not intended to be prescriptive, indeed, as Knight and Yorke (2003) reflected:
"The complexity of employability and the variety that exists in curricula in UK higher education mean that no single, ideal, prescription for the embedding of employability can be provided. Embedding has to be undertaken with reference to the curricular context." (p2)

The framework provides a process for reflecting on and addressing employability provision in a systematic and holistic manner and can be adapted and used as appropriate. It seeks to stimulate and facilitate discussion and offer support to those addressing the challenge of embedding employability and engaging colleagues and stakeholders with this process.

The questions developed within the framework complement and are intended to be used in conjunction with the HEA publication *Pedagogy for employability* (2012), which focuses on approaches to developing employability in the curriculum, and includes a selection of case studies to illustrate the enhancement of student employability in a variety of settings and disciplines.

Maureen Tibby
Academic Lead - Employability, Higher Education Academy

Employability: the context

> Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development. (HEFCE 2011, p5)

In developing and implementing effective employability strategies, HEIs need to consider; what their interpretation of employability is, how it can be translated into practice, how students and staff can be engaged with this, current practice and gaps in provision, and how to monitor progress. To support them in doing this, they need a flexible framework that they can apply which provides a process for discussion, reflection, action and evaluation.

Colleagues are encouraged to consider the models presented in this document when defining the concept of employability and use these as part of their reflective discussions. Models can be particularly useful when seeking to not only define a concept but also to then articulate this to a range of audiences from academics to students to parents. A model can support reflection on current practices and consideration of potential gaps in provision. It can provide a rationale or point of reference upon which current provision can be assessed and outcomes identified and agreed. Models may also be adapted and interpreted to meet the specific subject needs and are therefore not intended to be prescriptive and followed without full consideration as to how appropriate they may be within an area of the curriculum.

It is important to stress that consideration should be given to not only what is taught but also about how it is taught through the pedagogies employed in the classroom and lecture theatre. This should allay some fears that the employability agenda may add to an already pressurised workload. By following the process suggested in this framework and sharing best practice more widely; resource can be utilised more effectively instead of creating additional workload.

It is essential that students' are engaged with employability to foster and develop a culture of progression and life-long learning. Long-term success will depend on students' ability to recognise their own personal, academic and career development achievements and needs throughout their lives. HEIs are in a position to set them on the right path to begin this journey.

Employability - what it is

- It is a lifelong process.

- It applies to all students whatever their situation, course or mode of study.

- It is complex and involves a number of areas that interlink.

- It is about supporting students to develop a range of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attributes and attitudes which will enable them to be successful not just in employment but in life.

- It is a university-wide responsibility.

- It is about making the components of employability explicit to students to support their lifelong learning.

Employability - what it is not

- It is not about replacing academic rigour and standards.

- It is not necessarily about adding additional modules into the curriculum.

- It is not just about preparing students for employment.

- It is not the sole responsibility of the Careers Department.

- It is not something that can be quantified by any single measure. (Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey is a measure of employment not employability.)

Employability: definitions and models

Dearing (1997) linked employability to the acquisition of skills for life. He recommended that higher education focus on key skills which were the 'key to the future success of graduates whatever they intend to do in later life' (p133). Skills identified included: communication skills, numeracy, information technology, learning how to learn/personal development planning, problem solving and team working.

While acknowledging Dearing's recommendation, Hillage & Pollard (1998) suggested that employability should also be considered in terms of knowledge and attitudes. ''In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment.''' (p2).

They proposed that employability consisted of four elements:

- employability assets (knowledge, skills and attitudes);

- deployment (career management skills, including job search skills);

- presentation (job getting skills, e.g. CV writing and interview techniques);

- personal circumstances (family responsibilities and external factors impact on whether someone can make the most of their 'employability assets', e.g. opportunities in the current labour market).

Bowden et al (2000) emphasised that employability should not just be concerned with preparing graduates to be successful in the labour market but also about preparing them to contribute to society as a citizen. They defined employability as a set of graduate attributes; 'the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen' (par 1).

Knight and Yorke (2003) not only proposed a definition for employability but also a framework for embedding it into the curriculum. Their definition is widely quoted and still used today: ''A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.'' (p5). They suggested that there is a close relationship between employability and good learning and stressed that employability results from a blend of achievements in four broad areas. They represented this in their **USEM model of employability**, one of the best known and respected in the area of employability. Their model proposes four inter-related components of employability:

Understanding (of disciplinary subject matter and how organisations work);

Skilful practices (academic, employment, and life in general);

Efficacy beliefs (reflects the learner's notion of self, their self-belief, and the possibility for self-improvement and development);

Metacognition (complements efficacy, embraces self-awareness, how to learn and reflection. It encompasses knowledge of strategies for learning, thinking and problem solving, and supports and promotes continued learning/lifelong learning).

Knight and Yorke say they developed this model 'in an attempt to put thinking about employability on a more scientific basis, partly because of the need to appeal to academic staff on their own terms by referring to research evidence and theory'. (Knight & Yorke, 2004, p 37.)
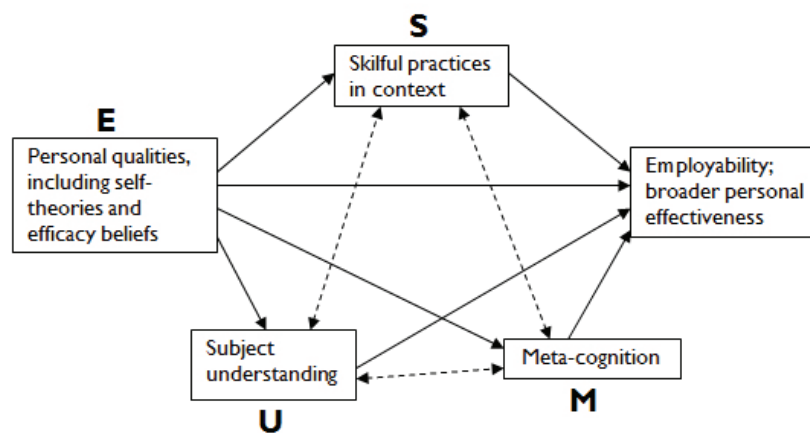
The USEM model provides a framework for thinking about how to embed employability into the curriculum and acknowledges the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders must be taken into account. It also encourages us to reflect on the way curricula includes assessment that develops the student's efficacy and metacognition and relate this to the development of subject knowledge and professional skills that are transferable to the practice context.

While acknowledging the relevance and strength of the USEM model, **Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007)** suggest it has a weakness in that it is not as accessible to non-experts in the field (particularly students and parents) in explaining exactly what is meant by employability. Their model, The CareerEDGE model of Graduate Employability, seeks to address this:
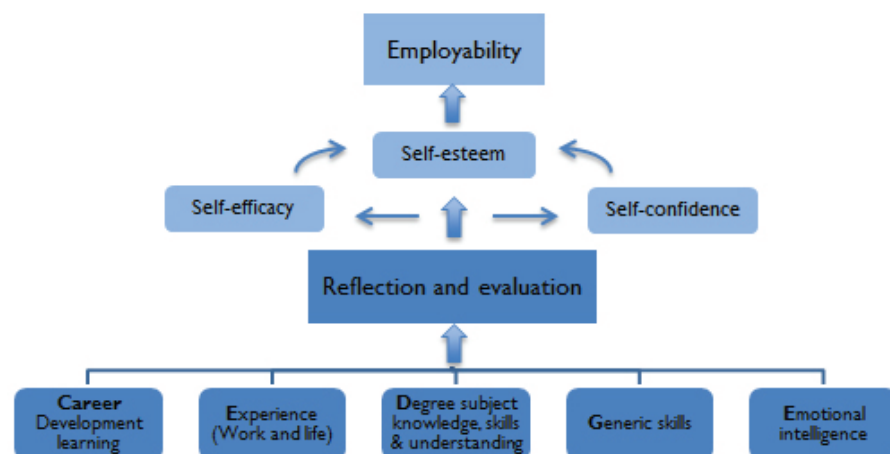
Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007)

Career Development learning
Experience (work & life)
Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills
Generic skills
Emotional intelligence

The CareerEDGE model is valuable in that it can be used to explain the concept of employability to those new to the subject, and to students and their parents as well as appealing to academics. It will therefore be a useful tool for those involved in employability activities and support. It can also be used to develop a way of evaluating employability that can be adapted for use at different stages and with different groups of people. It has been successfully used by many HEIs to support their employability strategy and process.

The CBI and Universities UK (2009) *Future Fit: Preparing Graduates for the world of work* indicated a move away from a focus primarily on skills to one that also incorporated an emphasis on graduate attributes and attitude and highlighted the importance of enterprise education:

"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."

The skills included: self-management, team-working, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication and literacy, application of numeracy, and application of IT, underpinned by a 'can-do' approach and demonstrating relative innovation, creativity, collaboration and intellectual risk taking.

Bridgstock's (2009) employability model offers a slightly different conceptual model of graduate attributes for employability which stresses the importance of career management skills. She argues that employability involves more than possession of the generic skills listed by graduate employers. In a rapidly changing and competitive economy, graduates must also be able to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process. Her model emphasises that:

"Career management skills and knowledge are essential to employability in that they play a large part in determining which, to what extent, in what manner, when and where, generic and discipline-specific skills are learned, displayed (e.g. in applying for a job) and used." (p 36)
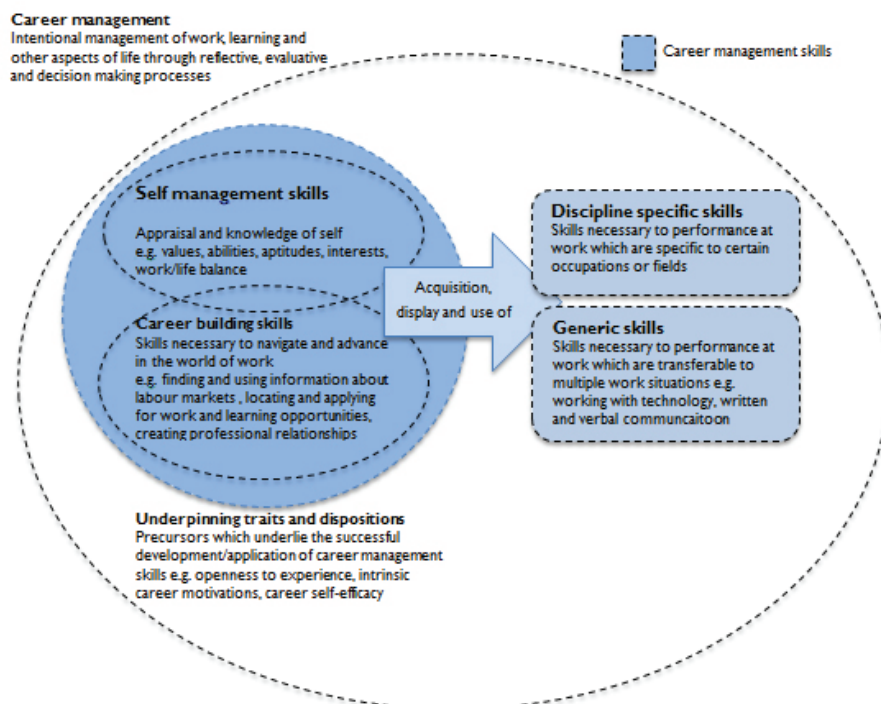
The CBI/NUS (2011) focused on how to engage students' with employability and encourage them to take ownership of their employability development from the start of their university journey. They produced a resource which not only provided a definition but also focused on the relevance of employability and practical ways in which students could enhance their employability. As well as stressing that employability consisted of a range of skills, attributes and knowledge, they also stressed the importance of a positive attitude which underpins and is at the centre of employability.

Positive attitude
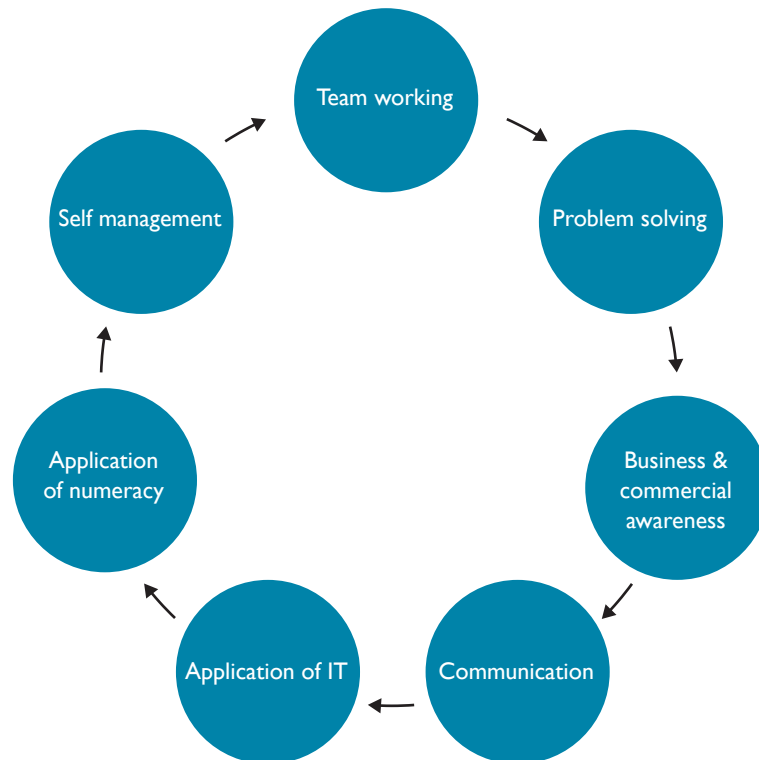
Over the last 20 years, definitions of employability have shifted from demand-led skills sets towards a more holistic view of 'graduate attributes' that include 'softer' transferable skills and person-centred qualities, developed in conjunction with subject-specific knowledge, skills and competencies. However, defining and embedding employability remains challenging. There are also other models and definitions within the literature which you may wish to consider in your discussions. These can be found in the HEA employability resources www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability

2. The framework

Introducing a framework for employability

Stage 1.
Discussion & reflection
'Creating and defining a shared point of reference'

Goal: A defined, cohesive and more comprehensive approach to employability

Stage 2.
Review / Mapping
What are we doing / not doing?

Stage 3. Action
How do we share and enhance exisiting practice?
How do we address 'gaps' in provision?

Stage 4. Evaluate
What does success look like & how is it measured?
How can we enhance practice further?

Using the framework for defining and developing your own approach

- This framework is designed for anyone who is involved with employability.

- It can be used at a range of levels from senior management to academic departments, course teams and the student union.

- The previous pages should be used as a starting point for discussions.

- Staff could consider utilising existing opportunities such as departmental, faculty, school or department meetings for these discussions.

- In terms of translating this process and discussions into practice, subsequent plans should be applied at course level with mapping conducted across the duration of the course.

- Discuss Stages 1 and 2 and plans for Stage 3 in your initial meetings.

- The aim of the example employability action plan (page 12) is to provide a simple record of each department's/area's approach that can be potentially shared internally and externally as appropriate and used to target further support and resources where needed. This is just an example and can be adapted and changed as appropriate.

- For each of the stages outlined please use these questions as a starting point for group discussions. Please feel free to add to, delete, or edit these questions as you see fit to meet your own specific needs.

- Further case studies of good practice are available in the HEA publications *Pedagogy for employability* (2012) and *Review of good practice in employability and enterprise development by Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning 2011.* These can be accessed from the HEA website: www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability

Stage 1: Discussion and reflection

Creating and defining a shared point of reference with your colleagues and stakeholders

1. What does 'employability' mean to you, your team and stakeholders?

Considering the information in the previous pages and drawing on your experiences and guidance from your HEI can you agree a working definition? (Further discussion materials are included in appendix 2.)

- Has your institution defined what employability is and their expectations of how you should address this at course/department level?

- Is there an institutional employability strategy that you can access and use?

- Has your institution identified the knowledge, experiences, skills, competencies, attitudes, attributes and behaviours that they want their graduates to be able to demonstrate?

- Who are your stakeholders?

- Are you and your colleagues aware of the expectations of students as regards how you can support and enhance their employability?

- Are you and your colleagues aware of the expectations of employers/professional bodies as regards your graduates' employability?

- Who can support you?

2. Addressing employability responsibilities and activity

Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- How should employability be addressed: through the curriculum, co-curricular activity, extra-curricular activities or all of these?

- What elements of employability can you/should you support and develop in your course programme/at department level?

- How are students engaged with employability?

- Do you have a process in place for effective employer engagement?

- How can you engage with professional bodies to inform disciplinary-oriented practices?

- Are you aware of how career management can support the employability process?

- Are you aware of how work-based and work-related learning activities can enhance employability?

- Are you aware of how enterprise education and entrepreneurial activity can support the employability process?

- Do you have a process in place for students to reflect on, record and articulate their academic and personal development planning (PDP), Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), etc.)?

Stage 1: Key issues to consider

1. Ensure you are aware of your institution's strategy and support for employability

- This will influence and inform how you integrate employability, what you prioritise, who you work with, resources and support available and actions to be taken.

2. Involve all stakeholders

- Having identified stakeholders, involve all of them in your reflections especially the students.

3. No single model

- Recognise that the intention is not to prescribe a model but to model a flexible and collaborative approach to the integration of employability.

4. Ownership: employability is a university-wide responsibility

- This requires a combined effort, working in partnership with other institutional services and departments, e.g. all schools of study, careers centre, enterprise and business departments, placement support, students' union, student support services, library and information services, etc.

- This should also involve working with external partners, e.g. alumni, employers, professional bodies, etc., as appropriate.

Stage 2: Review and mapping

Using agreed points of reference identified at Stage 1, consider these questions and issues:

1. Using the definition/model you have either adopted or created at Stage 1; reflect on;

- Which specific features of employability you currently address and to what extent (i.e. subject specific skills development, subject knowledge and emotional intelligence, generic skills development, personal development and self-efficacy, work experience, work-related learning, enterprise education).

- Is the timing and focus right, given the students' needs and development trajectory at university and beyond?

- Do you share good practice internally? Do you collaborate with colleagues?

- Could you share work more effectively across the institution and how?

2. How do you audit your course programme/your work for employability?

- Do you currently map against an agreed list of graduate requirements, i.e. knowledge, skills, attributes?

- Is employability referred to in the course programme/department strategy and made clear to students and staff?

- How is employability reflected in the course learning outcomes?

- How is employability assessed and/or validated?

- How is the impact of employability activity and support measured?

  - Do you use a range of assessments beyond summative, i.e. formative or ipsative? (How you measure how far each student has developed personally.)

3. Do the students understand how their employability is being enhanced?

- Are the students aware of how they are enhancing their employability? Is employability explicit or implicit?

- Are the students encouraged to take ownership of the employability process?

- Do the students understand how their learning is transferrable?

- Can the students effectively engage in a range of external environments, i.e. in the workplace?

  - How are they prepared for this, supported and encouraged to reflect on outcomes?

- Can the students reflect on and articulate their development?

  - Is the HEAR and/or a PDP process used to encourage students to reflect on and articulate their development in terms of employability?

  - How is feedback collected from students to ascertain development and impact?

4. Are there any gaps in provision?

- Identify gaps found through Stage 1 discussions by mapping current provision against your own shared and agreed definition or model of employability.

- Do you utilise the support of colleagues from across the institution?

  - Careers centre, enterprise unit, business unit, placement support, part-time job shop, library and information services, student union, etc.

- How, when and to what extent do you involve the careers team in the curriculum?

- How could you seek to develop students' emotional intelligence and their ability to work with a range of different people beyond their usual peer groups?

Stage 2: Key issues to consider

1. Language
Is there a shared understanding of the terminology of employability - by both colleagues and students?

2. Ownership
Are all colleagues engaged, with each member taking some of the responsibility?

3. Sharing good practice and collaboration
Employability is a university-wide responsibility; collaboration supports a culture of employability.

- Is there a collective awareness of employability support available across the institution?

- How do you access support?

- How do you access and share good practice with colleagues (internally and externally)?

- How do you engage with and work with alumni, the community, employers, professional organisations, third sector employers, voluntary organisations, etc., to support students' employability?

Stage 3: Action

Translating Stage 2 into activities, actions and outputs

1. How can you address any 'gaps' identified from your Stage 1 and 2 discussions?

- How will you address, prioritise and embed these?

- What sorts of timescales will this involve?

- Who will be responsible and how will you engage colleagues?

- What will the proposed outcomes be?

- How will you monitor progress and measure impact?

- Do other departments already offer similar activities that you could use as a point of reference?

- Who can support, internally and externally?

- Do you have staff training/continuing professional development (CPD) needs which require addressing and, if so, who can support this?

- Do you have resource needs that require addressing, if so, who can support with this?

2. How can you share and access best practice?

- How will you let others know what you are doing?

- How will you disseminate good practice?

- Do you involve students in disseminating good practice?

- Do you utilise peer mentoring to engage students with employability activity and support?

- How will you find out what others are doing (internally and externally)?

3. Who can support you?

- Are you aware of activities available at your institution which support students' personal development beyond the curriculum?

- How effectively are co-curricular and extra-curricular activities promoted to students?

- Is support potentially available from industry or professional practice, either in terms of advice, training or additional resources?

- Which professional organisations can support you with good practice, resources, funding, and training?

- Are colleagues aware who can help them internally (e.g. careers centre, business unit, enterprise unit, students' union, etc.)?

Stage 3: Key issues to consider

1. Research and scholarship

- Gathering evidence to document the results of your work is essential as part of the review process.

- If you have been successful in activities that sought to develop reflective practice with a student group how could you record this and share it across the institution and possibly disseminate externally?

  - This may also provide you or your colleagues with opportunities for scholarship or research which can then be shared internally, externally, or published.

  - Are you aware of support for disseminating good practice? i.e. HEA funding.

2. Engaging with and involving employers to support employability

- Do you and colleagues optimise the opportunities for including 'work-based' and 'work-related' learning activities for each year group?

  - Research has shown that work experience is valued by graduate recruiters and enables students to link their study to the world of work, develop confidence and enhance key employability skills and attributes.

  - Live design briefs, industry competitions, case studies, simulations, role plays, discussions, presentations, workshops, mentoring, etc. are all ways to involve employers directly with students on campus.

- Recognise the full range of benefits to be gained from both 'work-based' learning and 'work-related' learning; this will strengthen the overall employability provision for the students.

- Involve alumni.

  - With the pressures of league tables recording employment outcomes only six months after graduation, alumni case studies and stories may provide a more longitudinal view of 'success' in relation to 'employability' as an ongoing, lifelong concept rather than merely a single measure.

  - Students value the opportunity to engage with alumni.

Stage 4: Evaluate

Measuring impact, sharing and research outputs

1. To what extent do you have a defined, cohesive and comprehensive approach to employability?

- What evidence do you have for this?

- Are all colleagues in your department/course area aware of the approach to employability and fully engaged with this?

- Are students aware of your approach to employability?

- Do you utilise the support of colleagues from across the institution?

- Do you engage employers and the support of external organisations?

2. What evidence do you have that your work was effective?

- What are your measures of success? (Directly linked back to Stage 1.)

- Have you developed relevant benchmarks of success?

- What feedback do you have from students?

- What feedback do you have from stakeholders?

- What feedback do you have from colleagues?

3. How have you assessed impact?

- Have you used: surveys, focus groups, online questionnaires, qualitative feedback?

- How rigorous is this process?

- How do you utilise feedback to inform practice?

4. Are you actively engaging with alumni in relation to your approach to employability?

- If yes, how do you measure impact and build on good practice?

- How do you share success/approaches to work with alumni, with your colleagues?

- If you are not engaged with alumni, reflect on barriers to engagement and how you could start to address these.

5. Sharing impact and disseminating good practice

- Have you considered sharing good practice with colleagues internally and externally?

- Have you considered opportunities for further research and possible publication?

- Are you aware of support available from organisations such as HEA to develop and disseminate good practice?

Stage 4: Key issues to consider

1. Is your approach sustainable?

- Can you do this next year?

- Can you continue to build on good practice?

- Can you continue to utilise existing contacts?

- Can you continue to utilise existing resources?

- What changes to your approach might you have to make and why?

2. How do you use results developmentally?

- Do you feed into further work and work collaboratively across the department and beyond?

3. Do you share, disseminate and access good practice?

- Sharing internally and externally may help others who have a need but have no existing resource.

- Equally, learning from others can enhance your practice and provision.

- Do you utilise opportunities to disseminate good practice?

- Are you aware of support available - from professional bodies - to do this?

4. Does your approach reflect a cyclical process?

3. Developing your action plan

Employability action plan: areas of good practice

Complete using the key questions outlined in the stages sections and your institutional and/or departmental strategy on employability where appropriate. Please edit this document to meet your specific needs.

Course/Area of practice: Date:

Module / Area name	Evidence of good practice	How will you share this with others?	How will you sustain and build on this?	Support required
1.				
2.				
3.				

Employability action plan: gaps/areas for further development

Complete using the key questions outlined in the stages sections and your institutional and/or departmental strategy on employability where appropriate. Please edit this document to meet your specific needs.

Course/area of practice: Date:

Gaps identified	Actions planned	Expected outcomes	Timescale and review date	Person/people responsible	Resources and support required
1.					
2.					
3.					

Appendix 1. Resources to support

The HEA Learning and Employability Series

These are intended to support HE staff in enhancing student employability. The publications will also be of interest to colleagues new to the area as well as those who are already engaged in developing employability and who wish to broaden their understanding of the topic. The HEA has updated and reissued a number of titles from the first series of *Learning and Employability*, originally published by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT).

Series 1

- *Employability and higher education: what it is – what it is not* (Mantz Yorke).
- *Employability: judging and communicating achievements* (Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke).
- *Embedding employability into the curriculum* (Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight).
- *Entrepreneurship and higher education: an employability perspective* (Neil Moreland).
- *Employability and work-based learning* (Brenda Little and ESECT colleagues).
- *Pedagogy for employability* (The Pedagogy for Employability Group).

Series 2

- *Work-related learning in higher education* (Neil Moreland).
- *Employability for research postgraduates* (Janet Metcalfe and Alexandra Gray).
- *Employability and part-time students* (Brenda Little).
- *Ethics and employability* (Simon Robinson).

Pedagogy for employability 2012 (HEA)

This guide constitutes a revised and updated version of the *Pedagogy for employability* publication first published in 2006. This original publication was produced under the auspices of the HEA and the ESECT, and formed part of the Learning and Employability Series, a set of publications offering guidance and information to staff in higher education institutions involved in the enhancement of student employability.

Review of good practice in employability and enterprise development by Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLS) 2011 (HEA)

HEA undertook a review of the outcomes of these CETLs on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to identify and disseminate good practice. The report provides a repository of resources and highlights exemplars to support and inform HEIs to enhance their practice.

All of the above and additional employability resources can be accessed through the HEA discipline www.heacademy.ac.uk/disciplines and employability pages www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability

Appendix 2: references and further reading

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Contact us

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York
YO10 5BR

+44 (0)1904 717500
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk
www.heacademy.ac.uk
Twitter @HEAcademy

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