



**Report on Teaching and Learning Summit
16th-17th May 2012**

'Learning for life and work: re-configuring employability for the 21st Century'

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The Teaching and Learning Summit on Employability (*Learning for life and work: re-configuring employability for the 21st Century*) was jointly coordinated by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). The summit was held at the MacDonal Hotel Manchester and brought together people with varied experience of and expertise in educational and labour market research, graduate recruitment, and embedding and delivering employability, enterprise support and culture change across the higher education sector. Delegates included; practitioners, experts, employers, senior managers, students and policy makers. (A list of delegates is attached as Annex 1).

1.1. Aim of the summit

Employability is high on the educational and political agenda; however, desk research conducted to inform the summit¹ identified a number of significant issues. There is inequality in terms of provision of and resource for employability support. Technology, demography, the environment, globalisation, societal changes and social mobility all impact on employability, this together with expectations (internally and externally) creates anxieties, tensions and pressures. Engaging students and employers with employability remains a challenge and defining what is meant by employability is as much of an issue today as it was 30 years ago. Attitudes, cultures, expectations, engagement, support and training are all issues that need to be addressed to ensure quality employability support for all students.

The summit aimed to; provide a forum for debate of pertinent issues, key themes, trends and perspectives, inform the development of a framework to enable higher education providers to realise strategic and long term change, and create an agenda for action to support higher education providers. A variety of resources and activity were used to achieve the aims including; summit briefings, delegate perspectives, case studies of good practice, inquiries, debate, presentations, and group discussions.

1.2 Content of the report

Section 2: summarises the issues discussed at the summit and the key themes that emerged.

Section 3: outlines recommendations for action.

SECTION 2: ISSUES AND KEY THEMES

Delegates discussed and debated issues highlighted by the summit briefing papers which were developed by Fiona Hill and Maureen Tibby (HEA Academic Associates). Key findings were synthesised by Professor Stephen Hill (Dean of Teaching and Learning Innovation, University of Gloucestershire) which informed the summit agenda.

¹ Hill, F. (2012). Briefing paper: *national policy context and HEI strategies for student employability*. In: HEA Teaching and Learning Summit on Employability: Manchester, 2012. York: HEA and NCCPE

Tibby, M. (2012). Briefing paper: *employer and student perspectives of employability*. In: HEA Teaching and Learning Summit on Employability: Manchester, 2012. York: HEA and NCCPE.



- lack of clarity as regards the concept of employability
- lack of student engagement with employability
- training and resource issues for staff involved in delivering employability support
- the need for Careers Services to work in partnership with academic programmes
- how to encourage and develop employer engagement in curriculum development
- barriers in provision of and access to work experience
- students' lack of awareness of SMEs and some sectors
- students' lack of access to relevant/associated information
- employers confusion with the range of employability awards and their value
- the challenge of assessing the impact of employability provision

A number of key themes emerged which were taken forward in group discussions.

2.1 Engaging students with employability

The summit briefing papers highlighted that engaging all students in the employability process and encouraging them to access careers support remains a challenge, and students from disadvantaged educational and socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to participate. Whilst the majority of HEIs now offer extended enterprise education and support, only a very small percentage of students access this. Students and employers' value work experience in enhancing employability and many employers expect applicants to have relevant work experience. However, finance, mobility and family issues, peer pressure, lack of relevance of the opportunity, and lack of flexibility in length and timing remain barriers to students accessing work experience. Limited opportunities and networks in some sectors create a challenge for HEIs in ensuring equality of access to these opportunities for all students and sourcing sufficient quality opportunities.

There was broad agreement that as well as understanding the barriers to student engagement, it is essential to recognise the diversity of the student body and develop strategies to engage the disengaged and encourage ownership by making employability supportive, relevant and fun. To engage students, staff must also be engaged and supported with quality training and resources. In addition, transition from higher education to employment is a process which should involve student engagement with employers and work related learning.

An example of a strategic approach to employability and collaborating to 'make change happen' was provided by the University of Gloucestershire.

2.2 Developing a framework for employability provision

Approaches to delivering employability varies, it can straddle curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities which may impact on perceived coherence and relevance, and ultimately the engagement of students. Some HEIs have a well-developed framework for employability, which permeates the whole institution, and links to their learning, teaching and assessment and other strategies, while in others the main focus rests within one section, often the Careers Department.



Studies suggest that students lack understanding of the skills employers' want². Is this due to lack of information and engagement with employability support or are there misconceptions about the definitions of these skills? Research suggests that even amongst employers, definitions of key attributes and their ranking vary in importance. Many studies have tried to identify the employability skills employers want but are these accurate and representative of all employers and sectors? What is an employable graduate in 2012 and are the current definitions of employability broad enough? Measuring impact of employability strategies is problematic as assessment of support is often based on short term impact or employment success; there has been less focus on or a commitment to assessing the longer term impact of employability support.

The consensus was that there is a lack of clarity in how to adopt a coherent approach to addressing employability and considerable cultural barriers and that applying a benchmarking framework to evaluate and inform strategy would support HEIs. Building on an approach to culture change developed by the NCCPE³ (a self-assessment model called the EDGE tool) the framework might focus on three core areas; purpose, process and people and explore the following;

- Clarifying purposes and definitions through discussion and reflection including definitions of employability, rationales, models and themes, practice in each School or Faculty.
- Review and mapping: i.e. coordination systems, what is working well, where are the gaps and how will these be addressed?
- Strategies for evaluation, quality assurance and measuring impact; these are essential in order to evaluate the way in which different approaches may benefit different students, sectors and disciplines.
- Appraisals, reward and recognition; these are crucial in supporting and motivating staff. Up-skilling, CPD and training are essential. To engage students, staff must also be engaged, understand the relevance of employability and be confident in delivering support.
- Reviewing the engagement of students, academic and support staff and external stakeholders and employers in the shaping and execution of employability strategies

2.3 Creating a research base to inform employability provision and support

The briefings identified a number of areas where additional research is required to inform and influence employability support including; barriers to student and employer engagement, clarifying concepts of employability, impact measurement strategies, and resource and training needs of staff.

Delegates concluded that there is a need to *create and debate*. A great deal of data exists, but what does it mean and what is its significance as regards employability? How can it inform and support policy and practice and what else is needed? The group identified a number of areas where additional research is necessary;

² Tibby, M. (2012). Briefing paper: *employer and student perspectives of employability*. In: HEA Teaching and Learning Summit on Employability: Manchester, 2012. York: HEA and NCCPE

³ <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support/self-assess>



- Professional development and support for staff is essential, but there is also the need for a coherent literature source to inform this support.
- There should be a focus on theories underpinning employability
- There should be a focus on researching effective strategies to engage employers.
- There is a need for sociological analysis to tease out issues and concepts around employability.
- Additional research should be conducted into barriers to student and employer engagement with employability and work experience with a view to developing strategies to address these.

2.4 Theorising employability for academic practice development programmes

The general consensus was that models for addressing employability are often presented without the theoretical roots and underlying value positions exposed and explored. This can disengage academics from the debate. A number of proposals were suggested;

- Engage academics by providing a synthesis of literature and a framework to interrogate it.
- Create a project team to explore thinking about employability that affects academic practice.
- Examples of the literature to review should include;
 - Career decision making.
 - Learning: perspectives on experiential learning, the way learning is situated in specific contexts and how learning is applied and connected between contexts.
 - Work and Society: how work is conceptualised as economic and social exchange.

With a specific focus on postgraduate level CPD programmes, and the professional skills framework, academic staff would be supported and enabled to evaluate this literature, synthesise it in relation to their subject and integrate these perspectives into their academic practice.

Following this review, key questions and issues for different stakeholders could be identified and used to drive forward change within the sector.

2.5 Recognising and utilising good practice: an appreciative enquiry approach

There are a range of resources and good practice available that can support HEIs to develop and embed quality employability support. *Pedagogy for Employability* (2012)⁴ offers approaches and ideas for embedding employability into teaching and the curriculum, and highlights a range of good practice. *The Review of good practice in employability and enterprise development by Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*⁵ celebrates the wealth of good practice that emerged from the employability and enterprise-related Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs).

The general consensus was that;

⁴ http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/employability/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012

⁵ http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/EEL_CETLs_review_report_Jan2011.pdf



- Stakeholders can be engaged with employability and supported through resources, guidance tools, partnerships and collaboration. HEA should continue to support this.
- Good practice in employability must be encouraged, marketed and disseminated internally and externally.
 - HEIs should review why certain strategies are effective and determine how they can be adapted for use elsewhere.
 - HEIs should create a non-threatening environment where the focus is on strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results.

SECTION 3: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS and ACTIONS

3.1 RESOURCES - to support HEIs in developing their approach to employability.

ACTION:

The HEA to develop a resource; *'Embedding Employability: defining and developing your approach'* to provide HEIs with a framework to effectively develop and implement their employability strategies. This will also focus on the challenges of 'culture change'.

3.2 RESEARCH - to explore the thinking and theory which underpin employability.

ACTION:

The HEA to commission research into the thinking and theory which underpin and inform employability. This should lead to an 'academic rationale' for employability development, having implications for; staff development frameworks, quality assurance, impact assessment, the content of certificates in higher education teaching and learning, and strategies for engaging students and employers. Follow up research will be conducted into barriers to student engagement with employability and work experience.

3.3 INFLUENCING POLICY and PRACTICE.

ACTION:

- Academic Lead - Employability to liaise with the HEA PVC Network to harness their support in influencing policy and practice on employability.

- The HEA to develop an on-line publication from the summit 'Perspectives on Employability 2012' to encourage reflection and debate in the sector.
- The HEA to organise a follow up employability summit (May 2013) for policy makers and stakeholders to inform on progress in achieving the key actions outlined in this report.

3.4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - to support academics and HEIs to implement effective employability provision.

ACTION:

- The HEA will form a working group to explore the “architecture” of thinking about employability that affects academic practice. The group would consider the theoretical basis for employability required to incorporate it into level 7 CPD programmes for academic practitioners.
 - The HEA to provide guidance, strategies and frameworks through its professional development programmes, to support HEIs and subject communities to implement their employability provision. The HEA to review the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) to encourage engagement with employability.

3.5. PROJECT GROUPS.

ACTION:

A number of project groups were also proposed by delegates. These included; *accrediting work-based learning, engaging employers and alumni in the curriculum, measuring impact of employability support and developing (with the NUS) a national accredited employability award.*

The HEA will liaise with colleagues to take this action forward.

ANNEX I Delegate List

Arti	Kumar	University of Bedfordshire
Helen	Higson	Aston University
Val	Butcher	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Elaine	Payne	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Terry	Wareham	Centre for Development of Learning and Teaching
Alison	Price	NCEE
Ruth	Lawton	Birmingham City University (BCU)
Lorraine	Dacre Pool	University of Central Lancashire
Peter	Sewell	University of Central Lancashire
Lewis	Coakley	National Union of Students (NUS)
Helena	Lim	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Ruth	Mewis	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Douglas	Cole	Buckinghamshire New University
Jeff	Waldock	Sheffield Hallam University
Gill	Frigerio	University of Warwick
Erica	Morris	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Mark	Ratcliffe	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Alastair	Robertson	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Paul	Manners	NCCPE
Maureen	Tibby	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
David	Owen	NCCPE
Karen	Scopa	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Carl	Gilleard	Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR)
Rob	Ward	The Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA)
Sonia	Hendy-Isaac	Birmingham City University (BCU)
Jane	Artess	Higher Education Careers Services Unit
Ann	Pegg	The Open University
Andrew	Power	Higher Education Academy (HEA)
Paul	Redmond	AGCAS/University of Liverpool
Stephen	Isherwood	Ernst & Young
Max	Wakefield	University of Bristol
Ally	Campbell	University of Gloucestershire
Laura	Bellingham	The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
Wendy	Burns	Higher Education Academy (HEA)



Stephen
Phil
Helen

Hill
Gravestock
Howard

University of Gloucestershire
University of Gloucestershire
Higher Education Academy (HEA)