

Thinking...

CIHE-HE Academy Employability Competences Review

CIHE Policy Forum
February 2009

The Policy Forum was presented with the findings from a review and update of the CIHE-HE Academy list of 6 guiding employability competences developed for the Student Employability Profiles project.

The findings have revealed a growing emphasis by employers on the need for graduates to demonstrate a range of competences which will equip them to work in a global environment, in different countries, in multi-cultural teams, be innovative and have strong language skills.

Present Position

In 2003, CIHE developed six guiding 'employability' competences, following consultation with the CIHE Policy Forum of HR professionals. These six competences and their indicators, whilst not all encompassing, identified key qualities observed in individuals that add value and help transform organisations.

The competences are:

- Cognitive skills
- Generic Competences
- Personal Capabilities
- Technical Ability
- Business and/or Organisation Awareness
- Practical and Professional Elements

These CIHE competences are a key element in the portfolio of some 59 student employability profiles developed for CIHE and the Higher Education Academy. In the profiles, the work related skills that may be developed through the study of particular honours degrees are mapped against the competences and their indicators. The profiles themselves continue to have value for students, academics and employers and notably from autumn 2008 have also been available on the UCAS website for use by pre-university students and their advisers.

The Need

The context within which the competences are applied has altered significantly in the last few years with, for example, increased interest in enterprise and leadership skills, emphasis on corporate social responsibility, the issues of sustainability, the social impact of organisations and a greater focus on customer facing skills. In addition there is now an established pattern of students taking a wide variety of jobs on graduation, with only a minority joining graduate specific schemes.



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The Review

Five CIHE employer members were approached for this review: BAE Systems, KPMG, Microsoft, National Grid and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Discussions took place around the following questions though at the same time the opportunity was taken for a wider discussion on the place of graduate recruitment and development in the organisation's overall approach to human resource development. Common factors include:

- Each organisation has competency frameworks that are at the heart of staff recruitment and development.
- Graduate level behavioural competences are derived from corporate, global wide competences.
- 'Technical' and behavioural competency frameworks go hand in hand and the defined capabilities in both cases are necessary for success.

Questions

1. How much do employers care about the CIHE competences?
2. How would they define their value?
3. How do the CIHE generic competences inform employers that graduates of different backgrounds/subject areas have robust basic abilities that are worth investing in?
4. How objectively do the current generic competences apply across business functions? (i.e. are they truly generic?)
5. What value could/do they add to the level of confidence in the recruitment process?
6. How helpful are they in finding/developing links to the graduate recruitment process?
7. Which, if any, elements help define the capability of students from particular disciplines and link to successful careers?
8. How do the competences make the curriculum more recognisably work relevant?
9. How are the competences:
 - Assessable and consistent?
 - Accessible to internal and external consumers?
 - Supporting the documentation of learning (PDP etc.)?
 - Adaptable, flexible, resilient?

Initial Findings

All were comfortable with CIHE's existing set of competences. They have stood the test of time. Some new emphases are now in currency which it may be useful for the CIHE competences to reflect. For graduates, these include the ability to:

- acquire the knowledge base and practical expertise necessary for their particular professional role.
- conform to the disciplines of the profession they are entering (engineering, project management, procurement)
- work to the highest standards of ethics and integrity.
- work in multi-disciplinary teams and, in some organisations, multi-nationally.
- have the drive and passion to succeed.
- be sensitive to external and internal customers.
- innovate constantly and identify new opportunities.

The following are examples of competences sought from graduate high flyers in more than one case:

- flexibility
- resilience
- analytical, cognitive skills
- risk assessment skills
- passion and drive
- continuous personal development
- support for others

Wider Implications

For Higher Education

- Given the central importance of competences to staff recruitment and development, is there a need to further promote understanding of this within HE and to suggest how greater transparency and consistency of language might be sought?
- Most of those interviewed felt there was a clear distinction between graduate applicants who had been supported by their institution in their career planning and employability development and those who hadn't. Applicants unable to understand, evidence and articulate their capabilities are not likely to succeed in finding work they want.
 - Opportunity for CIHE and the HE Academy to actively encourage the use of student employability profiles (with their competences) in PDP and career management skills programmes?
 - Consult with QAA on the place of competences in subject benchmark statements?
 - Develop further dialogue with UUK Europe Unit to assess the feasibility of building competences and skills profiles into Bologna.

For Employers

- Uncollated evidence indicates that there are a number of employers using the CIHE/HE Academy student employability profiles alongside their competence frameworks as tools to help graduate recruitment.
- What about the many employers who do not use competency frameworks, including many of the larger SMEs?
- Is it time to drop the word **employability** in favour of **capabilities** as a term that better encompasses the gamut of knowledge, skills and experience sought by employers, not just skills per se?

Attachment

The updated competences are listed in Annex A.

Annex A: CIHE-HEA Graduate Employability Competences

EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCES	COMPETENCE CLUSTER	BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS
<p>COGNITIVE SKILLS: The ability to identify, analyse and solve problems, work with information and handle a mass of diverse data, assess risk and draw conclusions. (Analysis, Attention to detail, Judgement).</p>	<p>ANALYSIS</p> <p>ATTENTION TO DETAIL</p> <p>JUDGEMENT</p>	<p>Relates and compares data from different sources, identifying issues, securing relevant information and identifying relationships</p> <p>Accomplishes tasks through a concern for all areas involved, no matter how small.</p> <p>Determines the most appropriate course of action and draws conclusions that are based on logical assumptions that reflect factual information.</p>
<p>GENERIC COMPETENCES: High level and transferable key skills such as the ability to work with others in a team, communication skills, listening & questioning, written communication, influencing, planning and organising, having interpersonal sensitivity. (Influencing, Interpersonal sensitivity, Listening, Planning and Organising, Questioning, Responding, Teamwork/Working with others, Written Communication).</p>	<p>INFLUENCING</p> <p>INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY</p> <p>PLANNING AND ORGANISING</p> <p>QUESTIONING</p> <p>TEAMWORK / WORKING WITH OTHERS</p>	<p>Influences others by expressing self effectively in a group and in one to one situations</p> <p>Recognises and respects different perspectives and appreciates the benefits of being open to the ideas and views of others.</p> <p>Establishes a course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a specific goal. Plans proper assignments of personnel and appropriate allocation of resources.</p> <p>Uses an appropriate approach to questioning in order to gain information from which to draw conclusions and/or assist in the making of decisions.</p> <p>Builds and develops appropriate relationships with academic staff, peers, colleagues, customers and suppliers at all levels within an organisation. Shares information, advice and suggestions to help achieve common goals. Works cooperatively and effectively in multi cultural and multi disciplinary teams.</p>
	<p>LISTENING</p> <p>RESPONDING</p>	<p>Shows by a range of verbal and non-verbal signals that the information being received is understood.</p> <p>Summarises and asks questions that ensure common understanding and perspectives. Shows empathy, efficiency and self awareness in dealing with other people's concerns and perspectives.</p>
	<p>WRITTEN COMMUNICATION</p>	<p>Expresses ideas effectively and conveys information appropriately and accurately</p>

<p>PERSONAL CAPABILITIES: The ability and desire to learn for oneself and improve one's self-awareness – lifelong learning philosophy, emotional intelligence and performance. To be a self-starter and to finish the job (Achievement orientation, Adaptability/Flexibility, Creativity, Decisiveness, Initiative, Innovation, Leadership and Tolerance of Stress, Lifelong learning and development, Personal development).</p>	<p>ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTATION Maintains and inspires a results-driven approach, focuses on results and critical performance indicators. Develops and maintains relationships with people whose assistance and cooperation maybe needed.</p> <p>ADAPTABILITY / FLEXIBILITY Maintains effectiveness in a changing environment. Is open to new and /or different ways of doing things. Displays willingness to modify own preferred way of doing things. Able to change own priorities or behaviours to meet other's expectations.</p> <p>CREATIVITY Generates and/or recognises how best practice and imaginative ideas can be applied to different situations</p> <p>DECISIVENESS Makes decisions and takes action</p> <p>INITIATIVE Identifies opportunities and is pro-activity in putting forward ideas and potential solutions</p> <p>INNOVATION Sees situations from multiple perspectives. Creates solutions to problems using new or unique methods and processes.</p> <p>TOLERANCE FOR STRESS Maintains performance under pressure and / or opposition.</p> <p>LEADERSHIP Takes responsibility for the directions and actions of a team. Expresses confidence in others' ability to be successful. Displays a willingness to delegate responsibility and provide coaching to develop others abilities.</p> <p>LIFELONG LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT Develops the skills and competencies of self, peers and colleagues through learning and development activities related to current and future roles. Takes advantage o professional development opportunities. Continues to learn and develop theories and principles. Seeks out new learning experiences</p> <p>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT Maintains an up to date personal development plan and takes action to ensure personal development takes place.</p> <p>TECHNICAL APPLICATION Has experience of using modern technology including web based developments and applications</p> <p>TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE Develops and maintains a knowledge of key trends in technology</p>
<p>TECHNICAL ABILITY: For example, having the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern technology. The ability to apply and exploit information technology (Technical application, Technical knowledge).</p>	

<p>BUSINESS AND ORGANISATION AWARENESS: Having an appreciation of how businesses operate through having had (preferably relevant) work experience. Appreciation of organisational culture, policies and processes through organisational understanding and sensitivity. Ability to understand basic financial and commercial principles (Commercial awareness, Financial awareness, Resource Management, Organisation understanding Organisational sensitivity).</p>	<p>COMMERCIAL AWARENESS Understands the economics of the business. Understands the business benefits and commercial realities from both the organisation's and the customer's perspectives. Uses organisational assets in a proper manner</p> <p>RESOURCE MANAGEMENT</p> <p>FINANCIAL AWARENESS Understands basic financial terms used in organisations and is able to construct and maintain simple financial records.</p> <p>ORGANISATION UNDERSTANDING Understands the organisation's work environment, internal politics, business objectives and strategy</p> <p>ORGANISATIONAL SENSITIVITY Is sensitive to the effect of his or her actions on other parts of the organisation and adopts a mature, direct and up front style in dealing with conflict. Treats people with respect and courtesy.</p>
<p>PRACTICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ELEMENTS: The critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice, reflecting and reviewing own practice on an ongoing basis. Practice continuous professional development and expertise and project a positive, strong professional image at all times. Participate in and review quality control processes and risk management (Image Process operation, Professional expertise, Ethics, Integrity).</p>	<p>IMAGE Presents a strong, professional, positive image to others at all times. This image is consistent with all people (colleagues, management and peers, customers etc.).</p> <p>PROCESS OPERATION Begins, controls and concludes a complete process or procedure.</p> <p>ETHICS Uses appropriate professional standards, procedures and policies when taking actions and making decisions. Identifies ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest situations and takes action to avoid or prevent these.</p> <p>INTEGRITY Adheres to professional codes of conduct and principles upholding the good reputation of the professional body at all times. Takes responsibility for own work, including problems and issues</p> <p>PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE Keeps up to date with developments in own areas of professional specialisation. Applies a breadth and/or depth of professional knowledge.</p>