

Briefings on Employability 6

Good learning and
employability: issues
for HE careers services
and careers guidance
practitioners

Jeanne Booth for the Association of
Graduate Careers Advisory Services



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1. Introduction

This briefing is one of a series produced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT). Each has been written for a different audience concerned with student employability. (The titles in this series are in the 'Useful publications and websites' section.) The content was informed by the generous contributions of members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). AGCAS represents over 1300 careers guidance staff in 134 higher education institutions across the UK. The membership includes traditional 'old' institutions, 'new' metropolitan universities and smaller higher education colleges, with a further 200 associate members drawn from international institutions, FE Colleges and academic departments in universities and colleges.

The purpose of this briefing is to provide:

- A guide to student employability issues for HE careers services
- Practical examples of careers service strategies to enhance student employability
- Guidance on additional sources of information and advice

In addition, AGCAS is currently developing a web portal to a comprehensive and regularly updated range of resources to support careers service employability activities. These will include toolkits to assist careers services working with academic colleagues to address employability issues. The toolkits will be introduced during 2004 through a series of workshops supported by AGCAS. Briefings, Guides, Toolkits and other materials are also being added to the LTSN's Generic Centre website, which hosts ESECT's electronic presence – www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT.

The Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT)

ESECT brings AGCAS expertise together with that of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, the National Union of Students, the Generic Centre of the LTSN, the Centre for Recording Achievement and the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information. ESECT's approach includes:

- A description of employability that aligns it with academic values.
- An appreciation of the enormous contribution made by the 'co-curriculum', including careers fairs, skill-building modules, targeted support for groups disadvantaged in the labour market, and workplace learning options.
- An emphasis on the importance of the mainstream curriculum in fostering employability, regardless of the subject of study.
- An insistence that a concern for employability is a necessary part of efforts to widen participation in higher education.

Aligning employability with academic values and the mainstream curriculum, and linking it with the student's other activities, gives careers services a persuasive argument for engaging in a collaborative relationship with academic and other staff.

2. What is employability?

David Pierce (2002) recently interviewed heads of careers services for his overview of careers service strategies for employability. Although there were many examples of good practice on which to build, he concluded that the survey suggested that overall, employability was still peripheral to mainstream activity in higher education. It was also clear that no commonly agreed or understood operational definition of employability existed amongst Heads or across institutions. The Heads suggested at least five definitions:

- Ensuring graduates get jobs and measurable, to some extent, through first destinations surveys.
- Helping to prepare students for employment.
- Predominantly about gaining work experience.
- Synonymous with vocational.
- Equipping students with a defined range of 'employability skills'.

Implicit in most accounts of employability is the idea that it is about having a set of skills – sometimes called 'employability skills' – valued by employers. For reasons that are elaborated elsewhere (Yorke and Knight, 2003a, b), ESECT is not happy with the view that 'employability = skills'. Instead, it offers a working definition of employability as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.'

Three important points about the ESECT definition are:

- Possession of the appropriate set of desirable characteristics is no guarantee of employment. There are too many other variables including national and local economic health, availability of opportunities and demand/supply ratios for particular skill sets. Other factors such as the university a graduate attended, the number of UCAS points they possess and employer recruitment practices are also influential. For these reasons employability cannot be effectively measured using single performance indicators such as First Destination data.
- 'Skills' should not be construed in narrow terms.
- The achievements that lead to the gaining of a 'graduate job' are not necessarily the same as those required to succeed in it. Employability implies something about the capacity of the graduate to function in a job.

Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002, pp.16–17) suggest a similar view of employability and strongly argue that:

'Employability is, at heart, about a process of learning ... Employability has three focuses: development of employability attributes, self-promotional and career management skills and a willingness to learn and reflect on learning ... It is a process of learning that leads to individuals gaining and retaining fulfilling work.'

This suggests a dynamic process, an attitude or approach to assessing oneself in relation to opportunities and challenges and learning from experience. It emphasises that employability is not merely an attribute of the new graduate but needs to be continuously refreshed throughout a person's life. Mastering this process may be the key to maintaining employability in the face of rapid and radical change in economies and employment structures. As Peter Hawkins suggests (1999, p.8), 'to be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure' or as Charles Handy puts it, 'Employability is just another word for "look after yourself, mate."' (quoted in CBI, 1998, p.15).

Arriving at a precise definition is not important. Different stakeholders, such as students, their families, academics, small and large employers, and careers advisers, will have different perspectives. What is helpful is to provide opportunities for these different stakeholders to discuss with each other what 'employability' means to them.

3. Why is employability important now?

Both higher education and the graduate labour market are changing rapidly. Encouraged by economic conditions and a range of widening participation initiatives, the student population is growing and becoming more diverse: in age, background, previous educational experience, interests and ambitions. At the same time the nature of graduate employment is changing. In 2000 there were just 18,000 places on graduate recruitment schemes and 400,000 graduates (Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002, p.11). New kinds of companies and patterns of work are evolving. The globalisation of product and financial markets has increased competition, and a climate of continuous and rapid technological change has accelerated a sectoral shift from manufacturing to services. The economy is demanding increasing levels of knowledge and skills. Two million new jobs are predicted in the small business sector in the next ten years, and the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector will be a major driver of job creation in the UK. Increasingly, graduates are entering SMEs, competing for short-term or freelance contracts, or considering starting their own business.

Pursuing continuous professional development is becoming critical as the shelf life of specialist knowledge decreases. Already over a third of UK undergraduates are studying part-time (HESA, 2003), often while undertaking paid employment.

The CBI discussion document, *In search of employability* (1998, p.14), suggests three interrelated needs are converging:

- The need for individuals to thrive in the flexible labour market
- The need for businesses to survive and prosper in an environment of fierce global competition and economic change
- The need for an economically successful and inclusive society

How is HE responding to changes in the graduate labour market?

Harvey, Locke and Morey, (2002) highlight the increasing recognition by government, academics and employers of the impact that HE has on the economy, and that higher education institutions (HEIs) are moving well beyond the Dearing agenda (NCIHE, 1997) in addressing the challenges of globalisation, competition and the knowledge economy. They point to three broad areas of development within HE.

- More sophisticated understanding of the needs of employers and graduates in the modern workplace, and of the variety of attributes that they can contribute to employability.
- A wider debate on the nature of employability, informed by longitudinal studies of graduate employment and enhanced understanding of the factors that impinge upon employability, including those related to widening participation and employer recruitment practices.
- Growing awareness of the diversity of activities within HEIs and of changes in approaches. 'Increasingly, institutions are aware of the need to develop a long-term integrated strategy for employability that maximises links with employers, embeds employability in the curriculum, and makes closer links between central services and programme-based initiatives' (Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002, p.6).

For careers services, which have always been concerned with employability, and are long acquainted with debates concerning 'bolt-on' or integrated activities, the challenge is for stronger collaboration with a broad range of colleagues across institutions, disciplines and academic departments. There is much good practice on which to build, including well-established career management modules, but whilst these are usually seen as a legitimate responsibility of the careers services, strategies for employability have to be shared by the whole institution and owned by a range of contributors.



Highlighting the drivers for employability

How are careers services to persuade colleagues to share responsibility for employability? One approach is to present employability as an important aspect of key institutional concerns and priorities, as well as a national and European policy concern. The list below highlights some of the external drivers that might persuade colleagues to take employability seriously.

The Dearing Report

The Dearing Report asserted that global competitiveness requires that education and training should enable people to compete with the best. It recommended that all institutions should identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes help students to become familiar with work and support them in reflecting upon such experience. The European Commission takes a similar line in terms of European competitiveness (EC, 2003). (The Dearing Report can be downloaded from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hcareersservicereview/report.shtml>)

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Institutional Audit

Quality assurance mechanisms analyse how each university measures up to the benchmarks for university-wide employability and whether procedures to address this are integrated into the curriculum. The current arrangements for Developmental Engagement are expected to give way to Institutional and Subject Trails which will assess whether statements made at institutional level are reflected at the subject level. See the *Handbook for Institutional Audit (England)* at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/inst_audit_hbook/institutional_audit.htm

QAA Code of Practice for Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG)

The Code requires institutions to ensure that 'they are meeting students expectations in respect of their preparedness for their future careers and that they are producing graduates equipped to meet the demands of the employment market.' For further information see <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/COP/COPcex/contents.htm>

Harris Review of HE Careers Services

(<http://agcas.csu.man.ac.uk/Harris/menu.htm>)
The Harris Review's 41 recommendations covered the HE sector, HE Institutions, HE Careers Services, the QAA, HEFCE, AGCAS, Careers Services Unit (CSU), the Guidance Council and the Learning Skills Council. *Modernising HE careers education: A framework for good practice* (UUK and SCOP, 2002) provides guidance on developing CEIG policies and practices in accordance with the recommendations of the Harris Report. It concludes that CEIG plays a key role in employability, student support services, widening participation, student retention, lifelong learning, and external links with employers, and recognises the need to embed approaches to CEIG into the academic curriculum and the broader student experience. This report is available from <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/bookshop/>

The First Destination Survey and

Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education

The publication of the HEFCE employment performance indicator (2001) on the employment outcomes of graduates and its successor, the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education survey (DLHE) will provide more detail on the quality of the jobs entered by new graduates.

Progress Files

By 2005/6 all students in higher education are to have access to a Progress File that consists of two parts. Part One is a transcript, described as a record of their learning and achievement, and Part Two, a means by which an individual can 'monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development', referred to as Personal Development Planning (PDP). The Centre for Recording Achievement, an ESECT partner, has national authority in this field. More details at www.recordingachievement.org

League Tables

University league tables published in the broadsheets and publicised in the tabloids highlight the success (or perceived failure) of institutions and individual disciplines to lead to appropriate graduate employment destinations.

Students as Customers

Students (and families) are increasingly demanding an adequate return on their investment. This is particularly important for the widening participation agenda as individuals persuaded of the benefits of education – including 'a good job' – expect to see them realised.

Greater Competition in the Graduate Jobs Market

The increase in the numbers of graduates alongside a decrease in traditional 'milk-round' recruitment activity require students to become much more skilled at finding and securing quality opportunities.

Demonstrating Contribution to Regional Skills Needs

Government regionalisation policies are requiring institutions to address local employment issues. *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003a) and *21st Century Skills* (DfES, 2003b) follow a European trend in wanting to see the development of more distinctive regional identities and economies. Generally, regional analysis demonstrates that higher education brings benefits for the local economy and the community. Continued benefits are predicated upon availability of higher-level skills. Foundation and honours degree graduates are therefore of considerable significance to regional well-being.

Equal Opportunities Legislation

Updates to equal opportunities legislation – including the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 which came into force from September 2002, and the amended Race Relations Act 2001 – require public bodies, including universities, to take a proactive approach to racial equality and disability. For more information see the Disability Action Team website – www.natdisteam.ac.uk – and the Commission for Racial Equality website <http://www.cre.gov.uk/duty/index.html>

Widening Participation

The widening participation agenda is a particularly important driver for employability issues because if students find themselves at sea in the graduate labour market, then their fate will discourage others, particularly those from groups without a tradition of participation in higher education. When the HEFCE writes to universities and colleges in 2004 asking them to revise their widening participation strategies, it will make it clear that a concern for employability needs to suffuse the new strategies. In the longer term it is likely that HEFCE will incline more towards the Welsh practice which requires institutions to submit annual employability audits and plans (Harvey, 2001).

Which arguments have most sway?

Evidence from careers services suggests that the 'meeting the needs of the economy' argument tends not to hold as much sway within HEIs as that of league tables or requirements that might affect results of teaching quality reviews, such as the Code of Practice for CEIG or introduction of Personal Development Planning. One Head of Service describes how she used a 'carrot and stick approach.'

'I wrote a paper on implementing the Careers Education, Information and Guidance Policy which formed the basis of our discussions with departments. The university had an agenda on Personal Development Planning which we were saying we could help support them in implementing. I was also producing information on the destinations of graduates from widening participation backgrounds who were finding it harder to establish themselves in graduate level careers and mentioned the proposed changes in FDS (now DLHE) that would focus on gradueness of jobs.'



4. Employability skills and career management skills

There are multiple 'wish lists' of employability skills and much confusion about how these relate to 'key', 'core' and 'transferable' skills. The notion of 'transferable' skills in the 1980s suggested that skills learnt in one context could be fairly readily transferred to another. However, Bridges (1983, cited in Yorke and Knight, 2003) suggests that higher order 'transferring skills' might be required. That is 'those skills that enable a person to select, adapt, adjust and apply (his or her) other skills to different situations, across different social contexts and perhaps similarly across different cognitive domains.' The Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) recommended key skills of communication, numeracy, use of IT and 'learning to learn'. What 'transferring skills' and 'learning to learn' have in common is the idea of 'meta-skills' that are essential if people are to use their other skills and attributes effectively'. Careers services argue that the same principles hold true of career management skills'. As one head of service writes:

'Employability has many definitions ... All those I am aware of indicate the intimate relationship between employability and key skills but are fundamentally predicated on the essential element of individual career management skills. In other words, key skills are vital but the dividend of those skills may not be fully realised by the individual unless they are contextualised in a way that is meaningful to them. And it is the future development of their career after university and beyond which has the most resonance for the majority of our graduates and their parents. Career management skills must therefore be a vital component of any employability strategy.'

Following analysis of five years of employer surveys, Hawkins (1999) suggests a useful checklist of employability skills, the first of which – self-reliance skills – embraces career management and willingness to learn.

- **Self-reliance skills** – self-management · self-awareness · pro-activity · willingness to learn · self-promotion · networking · planning action
- **People skills** – teamworking · interpersonal skills · oral communication · leadership · customer orientation · foreign language
- **Generalist skills** – problem-solving · flexibility · business acumen · IT/computer literacy · numeracy · commitment
- **Specialist skills** – occupational skills · technical skills · understanding commercial goals · company-related expertise · strategic planning skills

Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) usefully articulate the different kinds of skills graduates require by suggesting that employability development has three foci:

Development of employability attributes; Development of self-promotional and career management skills; Willingness to learn and reflect on learning.

Thus career management skills are an integral part of employability. To remain employable, graduates need the self-promotional skills to get work, the knowledge and skills to carry it out successfully, and the ability to develop, learn, adapt, and go on getting work in a constantly changing environment. However, as careers practitioners emphasise and as stressed in the White Paper *21st Century Skills: realising our potential* (DfES, 2003b), skills are not just about work and economic goals, but about lifelong learning, and the opportunity to achieve potential, broaden interests and gain personal fulfilment.

How can students develop employability skills?

Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) emphasise that:

'...ultimately, employers want graduates who can help them deal with change, and it is not sufficient for HEIs and graduate applicants to simply list the skills they developed during study. Enhancing employability requires a holistic approach, integrating knowledge, work experience, and technical and interactive skills development and reflecting on how these can meet the needs of a flexible organisation.'

They categorise employability-enhancing activities within HEIs into four main areas:

1. Enhanced central support for students and graduates in search of work – usually via careers services.
2. Embedded skill development within the programme of study either through modifications to curricula to make development more explicit or to accommodate employer inputs.
3. Provision of work-experience within or external to programmes of study.
4. The enabling of reflection on and recording of experience, skill development and achievement – alongside academic abilities – increasingly through progress files and in particular, PDP.

The last is a particularly important role for the careers services, experienced as they are at helping students and graduates to identify and articulate skills developed as a result of paid and unpaid work experience and other achievements, including family roles.

The ESECT papers in the Perspectives series and the papers in the Learning and Employability series (listed under 'Useful publications and websites') provide a large amount of information about ways in which these employability-enhancing activities are being advanced in England. Rather than duplicate them here, we concentrate on ways in which careers services can be prominent in employability-enhancing work.

5. Students facing disadvantage in graduate labour markets

There is evidence that the groups facing greatest disadvantage in the labour market are those without a strong tradition of participation in higher education (Blasko, Z., Brennan, J. and Shah, T., 2002). Higher education alone may not be able to redress imbalances in labour markets, but it can identify groups of students most likely to experience disadvantage and provide additional support to help them present themselves to best effect in the labour market.

AGCAS plays a leading role in developing information materials and disseminating good practice to members through Task Groups addressing the needs of part-time students, older graduates, those with disabilities, and those from ethnic minorities through, for example, special projects like MERITS (Minority Ethnic Recruitment Information Training and Support) – www.agcas.org.uk/merits. Individual careers services have also developed excellent diversity resources, notably the University of Westminster, Fusion website – www.wmin.ac.uk/careers/ – and University of Manchester and UMIST – www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk

6. How can careers services and practitioners make an impact?

Is the increased importance of enhancing student employability, as one careers services Head suggests, 'an opportunity to do what we've always been doing but perhaps gaining greater recognition (and funding) for it', or does it also call upon career practitioners to extend their expertise into fresh fields? Probably a bit of both.

This section looks at the kind of activities careers services are engaging in:

- working at institutional level
- with academic colleagues at programme or course level
- with students.

However, careers services also emphasise that their link with employers carries with it the opportunity and responsibility to address issues of inequalities in recruitment and selection procedures and argue the business case for diversity. The contraction of traditional graduate recruitment has tended to make blue-chip companies opt for even narrower targeting of favoured institutions. Some global recruiters are halving their 'hit list' and strengthening relationships with their target universities. Careers services working in new universities are conscious that whilst some of their students have excellent employability skills, they may experience significant discrimination on the part of some employers.

Smith (2003) writes in his briefing for employers in this series, that the number of graduates from lower socio-economic groups is likely to rise and:

'...the transition to work for these groups may be complicated if they do not learn how to make good claims to the skills, qualities and achievements that employers seek. Many universities and colleges are already targeting 'at risk' groups to help them present themselves to best advantage. Employers have their part to play as well, particularly by recruiting openly and fairly.'

Whether working with senior management, academic staff or students, practitioners have suggested the following advice from experience:

- Use the right language. Don't think that because you are engaged to talk to academic staff that you have to give them all the theoretical positioning behind skills and employability – you may turn a supportive audience, thinking you can help them, into an aggressive one that can't wait to see the back of you. Listen to them, hear the language they are comfortable with, and the issues that are important to them.
- Networking is definitely not just for students. Careers staff can be particularly effective networkers because so much of the information they have is valuable to others. Only this way can you find the champions you need to help, find out where the real power lies, and understand the public and private agendas of your institution.

6. How can careers services and practitioners make an impact?

At the institutional level

Establishing common understandings

Discussing different stakeholders' definitions of employability is a good starting point for collaborative activity³. AGCAS members suggest some important points to bear in mind when discussing definitions of employability with students and those who teach them.

- Start with inviting your audience's own definitions. Different departments will emphasise different aspects and the language they use to do so will be revealing. To some degree it may not matter if the definition of the Art and Design faculty is different from that of Maths or Social Sciences. What matters is that it is theirs, that they've identified and discussed important issues to determine it, and that they are prepared to work to achieve it. Despite disciplinary differences, careers services are finding quite a lot of commonality in definitions but variety in expression.
- Similarly, most students will have some experience of employment, at the very least in part-time or holiday jobs, but others may have significant experience from a variety of positions. Many part-time students, who make up over a third of undergraduates, are working. Funding for university business and incubation services has led to a small but increasing number of graduates starting their own business. Students' families will also influence their view. To engage students, any discussion of employability and appropriate enhancement strategies needs to acknowledge their aspirations and build upon their own experiences.

Developing institutional employability strategies

Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) conclude that HEIs have a significant role in preparing students for the world of work and should develop a strategic, institution-wide approach to employability, ensuring that a very senior manager has overall responsibility. Internal and external quality assurance mechanisms will increasingly require evidence of a strategic approach, and the 2004 invitation from the HEFCE to write new widening participation strategies will give a strong impetus to action on employability strategies. This provides an excellent opportunity for careers services to take a central role as few others can claim a similar level of experience working with employability issues and an institution-wide brief. However, it is not without its perils and those who are attempting it warn that political awareness and skills are vital.

Engineering commitment to an institution-wide strategy will require interaction with the Corporate Plan, Learning and Teaching Strategy, Marketing Strategy, Human Resource Strategy, Widening Participation Strategy, Business Reach-out Strategy, as well as with the Students' Union. That doesn't just mean reading the documents but influencing their development, enthusing and informing those who are intimately involved. Careers services emphasise the need to persuade others of how the employability strategy can help meet their agenda, not only to guarantee support at the highest levels of the institution but to ensure that, once that support has been achieved, something actually happens.

The questions a strategy might address include:

- Is there a student entitlement to employability support and if there is, how is this to be delivered?
- Who leads employability development and who manages the work?
- What is the balance between academic departments and central services?
- How is employability dealt with in other relevant strategies?
- How is employability work to be securely funded as an activity in the longer term?

The approach of an individual institution will be influenced by its history and mission; whether it has a regional, national or international focus; the labour markets it seeks to serve and the importance of partnerships with employers and other education providers, including schools and FE Colleges. For these reasons, careers services suggest it is not good enough to try to import examples of strategies that have been developed elsewhere.

Although individual institutional strategies may turn out to have lots of similarities, it is the process of working out a strategy that is most valuable – don't attempt to bypass it!

Nevertheless, the four aims of the new employability strategy offered at Nottingham Trent University may provide a good starting point for others:

1. Ensuring the employability agenda is integrated into the broader mission of the university and its learning and teaching strategy. This might include publication of clear policy on CEIG and statements on the institution's objectives for employability, student entitlements and responsibilities.
2. Enabling HE programmes to demonstrate that they are meeting the career planning needs of their students. This might include a clear reference to career management skills in learning outcomes, opportunities to participate in career planning activities and to construct a Personal Development Plan.

3. Producing employable graduates who are competitive within the regional, national and international labour market and capable of contributing economically, socially and culturally to the wider community. This might include demonstrating close collaboration between academic staff and employers, awareness of employment destinations, and developments in the labour market.
4. Promoting understanding and mutual support for the distinctive and complementary roles of careers services, along with academic and other appropriate staff, in developing resources and services related to CEIG. This might include ensuring that organisational structures and processes encourage and support collaboration.

Contributing to internal committees

A starting point in developing institutional strategies is to raise the profile of the careers services through membership of and contribution to institutional committees and working groups. This will also help you to work out how the internal structures of your university operate and who holds power and influence. With limited resources this can help you to focus on the committees that give maximum leverage. Careers services suggest that it is important to be seen to contribute to the following – the names may differ but it is likely that you have similar bodies: Teaching and Learning Committee, Student Services Board, PDP Strategy Committee, Work-based Learning Committee, Student Retention Group, Widening Participation Strategy Group. At school, faculty or programme level many careers services offer to present the data from the First Destination Survey and this is an effective starting point for discussion of employability issues.

Helping with Progress Files

All institutions are required to offer new students the opportunity to engage in Personal Development Planning (PDP) by September 2005. They were also required to provide a means of producing a transcript recording student achievement by 2003 and careers services may like to check how far this acknowledges extra-curricular activity. Some careers services suggest PDP may be the key to finding a good fit between the work of careers services and academic departments, and as such may attract institutional support. An adviser at Luton University (Kumar, 2003) describes how the careers service is providing practical solutions to meet the requirements of Progress Files.

'Building upon active membership of working groups, I contributed to the design of core Personal, Professional and Academic Development (PPAD) modules in Year 1 of almost all subject fields. These are like extended induction modules, introducing new students to the conventions of studying their discipline in higher education and developing a range of key skills. I negotiated a dedicated careers session within these, ensuring students receive key messages early enough to add 'career value' to their entire HE experience. It is currently university policy that Progress File requirements will be met through the PPAD modules at Level 1, leading onto Core Personal Development Planning (PDP) modules at level 2, which are mostly being developed as field-related or customised variants of our generic Career Development Module. We are currently working with some academic staff to design these and will be jointly delivering the pilots in 2003/4. Eventually all programmes of study will be required to show that their students have opportunities for PDP and will graduate with a full transcript of skills.'

The Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) provides further guidance on Personal Development Planning and a range of useful resources⁴. Careers services should check whether their institution is a member of CRA as this secures entitlement to a range of additional resources and benefits.

Helping the institution engage with regional issues

Universities are increasingly keen to demonstrate their contribution to the regional economy. You may be able to help them do so by linking pilot development of employability initiatives to the key sectors identified by the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action. Every English region has published a FRESA which is usually available from your Regional Development Agency website. It maps the skills base and shortages and proposes a strategy for development, often targeting specific sectors for project work, course development and other initiatives. For example, in the East Midlands, key sectors are health care, advanced level engineering, creative industries and ICT, and there are funding opportunities for innovative skills and employment projects addressing these sectors. Participation in these helps the regional profile of the university and can bring extra cash into academic departments⁵. With the publication of the National Skills Strategy (DfES, 2003b), regional development agencies and Learning and Skills Councils will be developing regional and local implementation plans that will provide further opportunities and challenges for universities.

6. How can careers services and practitioners make an impact?

Working with academic staff at course or programme level

This section outlines some of the approaches careers services are taking to promote careers education as a key means of enhancing student employability, and the ways in which they are helping academic colleagues to think more broadly about the skills that students develop on their courses.

Providing input into academic programmes

Aligning employability with academic values and the mainstream curriculum is the core of the ESECT approach, and many academic staff will be attracted by connections between employability and disciplinary values. Demonstrating the ways in which incorporating employability skills into academic programmes will help to make their students more independent learners (and save them time!) is a particularly powerful argument.

An AGCAS member offers the following observation: **'As far as selling employability to academic staff goes, the key in my view is to emphasise that graduate employability includes higher-level cognitive skills including critical thinking, problem-solving etc.'**

Both careers services and academic staff suggest that a key factor in successful integration into course programmes is the ability to connect with the subject and to meet the needs of both the students and academic staff. The University of Westminster offers an example of developing key intervention points in the context of a Maths programme: **'Building on a workshop in the first year, I run a careers workshop for second year Maths students, timed to coincide with project presentations from the finalists in the year above. One of the lecturers helps me run the workshop which focuses on their choice of third year project and skills they could develop. The students then go and look at the poster presentations produced by the finalists and we follow this with discussion of the skills (academic and transferable) that are demonstrated by the projects and their relevance to future graduate level work. In their third year I run two careers workshops and include a session on how they can use their project as part of their self-marketing strategy. Feedback from the students has shown that these activities have increased students' self-awareness of what they have to offer employers.'**

Over recent years many careers services have been involved in developing and delivering careers education either as an integral part of subject provision or as distinct accredited modules. A range of good examples of both are contained, together with comments from careers services, in the AGCAS Resource Directory for Higher Education – *Careers and Personal Development in the Curriculum* – available from www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT. Examples of practical strategies can also be found in Yorke and Knight (2003a).

Employability audits, skills mapping, learning outcomes

All academic programmes have to articulate the outcomes developed. This is required by both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Academic staff will be concerned about how their programme measures up against the relevant subject benchmarking statement – obtainable from the QAA website – <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/english.pdf>. Some careers services are offering to help academic staff to articulate their learning outcomes in ways that will demonstrate how they are preparing their students for employment.

At Royal Holloway University of London:

'College departments are producing skills maps which are intended to define the skills that our students are developing from certain courses. This is partly for the purposes of Progress Files and PDP but also to try to identify tangible outcomes from courses. Career Development Seminars expand this theme and careers services 'build a bridge' between employer requirements and students' achievements gained from academic, extra-curricular and work experience.'

At the University of Central England:

'The careers advisers here have produced something called Delivering Employability – which is a resource for helping academic staff to embed employability skills in the curriculum. We have taken each of Peter Hawkins's (1999) list of Employability skills (*The Art of Building Windmills*) and come up with suggestions for where in a course it might be integrated and how – if possible – it might be assessed. We have also compiled a list of resources that could be used to help develop or facilitate learning for each skill. We then train staff in a one-day workshop in how to use it – it just sits on their bookshelves otherwise.'

Some helpful (and short) reading, with some useful ideas on helping academic staff to see much of what they already do in the light of employability, is contained in the ESECT briefing, *The contribution of learning, teaching, assessment and other curriculum projects to student employability* (Knight, 2003).

Developing partnership agreements between the careers service and schools or faculties

Some careers services are using partnership agreements to promote understanding and mutual support between careers services and academic staff and encourage collaborative effort to develop employability resources and services. The University of Durham careers service uses this approach as a means of promoting employability and raising awareness of what they do. Their partnership agreement process involves a careers adviser and a member of course team agreeing a joint strategy and action for CEIG. This includes activities in all three years and arrangements for annual review and evaluation. The agreement is 'signed off' by the Course Leader and the Head of the careers service and presented formally to the course committee.

Providing consultancy

Partly to capitalise on their expertise and partly as a means of making limited resources stretch further, careers services are increasingly acting as consultants and helping to build the capacity of others to enhance employability. This can involve producing resource packs and running staff development sessions with academic staff.

The Careers Advice and Employment Service at Nottingham Trent University has worked with the Centre for Academic Practice to produce a tutor resource pack for their career planning module, 'Pathways to Success'. The module is accredited with ten points and was taught by careers advisers in a number of faculties prior to preparation of the resource pack. Academic staff wishing to deliver the module as an assessed part of their curriculum must attend staff development provided by the careers service. The Faculty Link Careers Adviser provides continuous support and guidance to the course team.

Many careers services allocate named careers advisers to provide consultancy support for specific academic programmes, alerting colleagues to careers resources, occupational profiles and the AGCAS 'Your Degree in ... What Next'® series as well as opportunities for work placements. Some services have developed specific pages for academic staff

on the careers service website linking to other web resources they might find useful, and others, like Staffordshire University, have developed comprehensive directories of internal and external sources of information and materials.

Facilitating links with employers

The contacts careers services possess can be used to help academic staff when they need employer insight into module reviews, for presentations to students, or to provide input on departmental staff development days. An example from the University of Warwick:

'During the spring of 2003, the university has been conducting a thorough appraisal of the undergraduate curriculum and as part of this exercise, has solicited views from recruiters of undergraduates. Fourteen recruiting organisations and one sector skills council attended an afternoon seminar with members of faculty responsible for the review. This symposium considered the relative merits of breadth, depth, subject knowledge and skills in our curriculum and in employers recruiting needs. It also looked at the value of work experience and extra-curricular activities in developing employability.'

Academic staff often report being taken totally by surprise by the number of vacancies the careers services may handle or the amount of the information they have on what graduates from their discipline do. Few others within the institution possess the extent of business and employer liaison that can be used, in practical and visible ways, to enhance links between the university and the world of work. The University of Reading offers some examples:

- Providing a recruitment service including running fairs, advertising vacancies, holding recruitment presentations and interviews on campus, and advising employers on recruitment strategies.
- Involving employers in delivering careers education through careers events and with developing career management skills in the curriculum
- Listing local employers in a database that enables them to receive speculative applications from students seeking graduate vacancies or work experience placements
- Providing local employers with the opportunity to advertise local temporary or part-time work through its job-shop.

Smith's briefing paper for employers (2003) is worth consulting to see what advice ESECT and the LTSN Generic Centre have been giving to employers.

6. How can careers services and practitioners make an impact?

Working with students

Many careers services report difficulties in getting students to commit to careers activities. We've probably all been through the experience of clinching a superb employer presentation and the embarrassment when few students turn up. Integrating employability activities into the core assessed curricula is a key route to encouraging commitment and ensuring that the practical benefits of participation are emphasised. One practitioner advises that: **'...course outcomes are a powerful tool with some students. We can help students to recognise the importance of developing academic and personal skills to succeed in HE because this influences their likelihood of employment. So sell this message and demonstrate it via involving employers, alumni etc, but don't preach it. We need to devise ways that students draw this conclusion themselves.'**

The final sentence emphasises the need for careers services to deliver, or help others to deliver, imaginative sessions that build upon students' own experiences and use teaching techniques that encourage active student involvement. The AGCAS resources and training courses provide lots of ideas on how to do this.

Helping students to find part-time work, vacation jobs and work experience

Most universities now have student job shops, either as part of the careers service or the students' union. Linking employability activities with helping students to earn money has provided a particularly persuasive tactic to get them engaged, as has helping them find high-quality work experience. Of course, a core part of any careers service's employability activity has to be helping students to reflect upon and articulate what they have gained from any experience, paid or unpaid.

Staffordshire University is developing a Work-Volunteer-Learn website which includes exercises to help students make connections and build an online personal development portfolio. The website of the National Centre for Work Experience – www.work-experience.org – is also a valuable resource for students and staff. Check, too, the AGCAS website – www.agcas.org.uk – for the resources that the Work Experience and Learning Task Group are compiling.

This is also a key area where careers services can help to develop the capacity of others to advise students. Job-shop staff and employers with limited experience of supporting placements will often welcome guidance on how to help students identify and develop their employability skills.

At Leeds University, student placement is an explicit feature of the University's knowledge transfer strategy – <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/about/stratplan/knowledge.htm>. In addition to the role of placement in developing employability skills, the University emphasises its role in supporting business. It offers businesses a complete menu of student placement possibilities, from hiring students for a few hours per week using Joblink (a joint venture between the careers services and the students' union) through to short projects and internships to full sandwich year placements.

Getting to know the students' union

Student unions have a wide range of resources and ways of getting students involved and many careers services have developed useful working relationships with them. The National Student Learning Programme aims to disseminate key skills among students through peer-based training – www.nusonline.co.uk/nslp/. Student Volunteering UK works to support, promote and develop student-led community based volunteering in universities and colleges. Their publication, *The Art of Crazy Paving*, (Speakman, Drake and Hawkins, 2000) illustrates how students can use volunteering to provide the skills and experiences needed in work. See also www.Studentvol.org.uk

Employability Awards

A number of organisations provide opportunities to work towards accredited awards. Students are often attracted to these because they offer additional evidence of their skills in the form of certificates or awards recognised by employers. One example is currently being piloted by the College of St Mark and St John and the University of Exeter (Hosker, 2002): 'We set out to develop an award that would provide a standardised framework against which 'employability' could be measured. The key was to find a format that employers would recognise.' 'The Employability Award' (see Hosker, 2002) has five units:

- Career and personal development planning: the reflective practitioner.
- Working safely in the workplace.
- Improving the customer relationship.
- Working with others.
- Improving own learning and performance.

Accredited work-related learning programmes for students (Lang and Millar, 2003) is a useful guide to different awards available outside the mainstream curriculum (downloadable from www.itsn.ac.uk/ESECT).

7. Extending careers service expertise further

Many careers services describe their role as a dual one – looking inward towards the institution and its students and outward towards employers and the world of work. The enhanced importance of employability provides opportunities for careers services to move out from the edge and into the centre of their institution and, at the same time, calls for further development of their external role.

Becoming a source of information about labour markets

Even though destination statistics have many weaknesses, they provide careers services with a lot of information that can be useful to departments' thinking about the match between the programmes they offer and what their graduates actually go on to do. Work on the 'New Typology of Graduate Destinations' currently being undertaken by Peter Elias and Kate Purcell' is likely to become increasingly influential as a means of illustrating the types of occupations entered by new graduates. The typology uses five categories for graduate occupations – traditional, modern, new, niche and non-graduate.

Discussing graduate destinations can highlight the different roles that graduates have, the impact of widening participation issues, and the necessity for shared responsibility for employability. These contextual issues are important. At the time of writing, one university is advertising a vacancy for a Head of Employability, responsible for their careers team. The purpose of the job, as specified, is 'to improve the employment rates for our students and make a material difference in two years with continuing improvement thereafter by focusing specifically on helping students gain employment.'

As part of the widening participation initiative, 'Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression', Connexions Services are expected to track destinations of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including their rates of entry into HE. When the HEFCE writes to universities and colleges in 2004 asking them to revise their widening participation strategies, it will emphasise that a concern for employability needs to suffuse the new strategies. Careers services are in a position to track achievements in the graduate labour market and provide information to inform and evaluate widening participation strategies.

First destination and other survey data can be used to make an important contribution to regional labour market information*. The consortium of East Midlands University careers services compiled information on the destinations of graduates from their institutions demonstrating that the region, like many others, has a problem with retaining graduates. Although a few

years old now, the survey is repeatedly cited in documents relating to the regional economy and the skills requirement of key sectors. The report can be seen at <http://careers-2.lboro.ac.uk/emu/>. A comprehensive study to inform efforts to retain and recruit graduates for the benefits of the regional economy was commissioned by the Higher Education Regional Development Association South West. The executive summary report, *Choices and transitions: a study of the graduate labour market in the southwest* is available from www.herda-sw.ac.uk/publications/GLM_exec_summary.pdf

Connecting with pre-university experience

Careers services have pointed out a greater need to understand the messages students are receiving at school, how Progress Files are being used, and changes to the 14-19 curricula (See Ward and Pierce, 2003 for some pointers.) In order to achieve this, and to help students build upon pre-university experience and deliver informed pre-entry guidance, more careers services are becoming involved in activities targeting school students⁹. In partnership with the institution's widening participation teams, careers services are contributing to university summer schools for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and are presenting sessions in schools highlighting routes to popular occupations. With the growing convergence of widening participation and employability issues, and the focus upon raising aspirations and achievements of young people, the careers services role becomes increasingly important.

The same can be said of students in FE colleges, whether at pre-university or HE level. Many careers services have long been involved in supporting colleges offering franchised courses, and this is likely to increase with development of Foundation Degrees and the forging of new vocational routes as a result of the National Skills Strategy (DFES, 2003) and 'Aimhigher: Partnership for Progression' activities. One of the recommendations of the Harris Review, which many careers services are currently addressing, was the importance of enhancing connections with local Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships.

Rosie Andrew of the University of Plymouth provides an insightful description of the development of a model for improving career guidance with partner colleges. Her article (Andrew, 2003) addresses improving relationships, training partners and agreeing a Code of Collaborative Practice. Also useful is the HEFCE publication, *Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects* (2003), downloadable from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2003/03>

Connecting with work experience at all levels

Over recent years, careers services and guidance practitioners have been refining the ways in which they support students to respond to the changing nature of the HE experience and the world of graduate employment. Many have been involved for many years in supporting work experience and placement tutors on traditional sandwich programmes. Changes in student finance arrangements have forced more students to take on part-time work. Careers services have responded by developing ways of helping them to make the most of their work experience. As more students leave their job-hunting until after graduation, careers services have developed facilities, including online services, to extend guidance to diplomates and graduates. The challenge presented by supporting good learning and employability is not merely that of aligning academic values and the mainstream curriculum but of doing so in ways that can support the different points at which work experience and HE may converge. This means consideration of how careers service knowledge and expertise

can inform course development and offer support to HE students at all stages in the curriculum and in the workplace. In addition, as HE responds to the requirement to provide for continuous updating and professional development, careers services will have a valuable role to play in providing guidance to graduates further on in their careers.

8. Conclusion

Peter Hawkins has, in a memorable phrase, suggested that 'to be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure.' The worlds of work and of learning are changing so quickly that HE and careers service professionals need to adapt constantly to ensure they can equip graduates to survive. Not just survive but thrive. The essence of employability is to empower entrepreneurial learners with the ability and confidence to respond flexibly and creatively to challenging environments, make a positive contribution to their communities, and fashion their own pathways to personal fulfilment.

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Useful publications and websites

- AGCAS www.agcas.org.uk
AGCAS is currently developing a web portal to a comprehensive and regularly updated range of resources to support careers service employability activities. The web portal will be directly accessible from the AGCAS home page.
- AGCAS Directory: *Careers & Personal Development in the Curriculum* www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT
- Phoenix*, the Journal of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services. Articles freely available from the Publications section of www.agcas.org.uk
- ESECT
Perspectives Series
Available in electronic format from www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT
- Employability and students' educational experiences before entering higher education* – Rob Ward and David Pierce
- Transition into higher education: some implications for the 'employability agenda'* – Mantz Yorke
- The undergraduate curriculum and employability* – Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke
- Employability and transitions from higher education to work* – Lee Harvey
- International perspectives on employability* – Brenda Little
- ESECT Briefings on Employability
Available in hard copy and electronic format. Order forms and electronic copies can be found at www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT
- Are your students Employable?* – Kate Lester and ESECT colleagues
- A briefing for employers* – Hugh Smith and ESECT colleagues
- Encouraging the development of employability: A guide for busy senior managers* – Mantz Yorke and ESECT colleagues
- A subject community perspective on supporting the development of employability* – Rob Ward, David Pierce and ESECT colleagues
- A briefing for Heads of Department (2003, forthcoming)* - Lee Harvey and ESECT colleagues
- The contribution of learning, teaching, assessment and other curriculum projects to student employability* – Dr Peter Knight and ESECT colleagues (2003, forthcoming)
- LTSN Generic Centre Learning and Employability Series (Guides)
Available in hard copy and electronic format. Order forms and electronic copies can be found at www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT
- Employability in higher education (Publication: Sept/Oct 2003)* – Mantz Yorke
- Employability: judging and communicating achievements (Publication: Sept/Oct 2003)* – Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke
- Embedding employability into the curriculum (Publication: Sept/Oct 2003)* – Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight
- Recording, Reflecting and Action Planning for Employability (2003, forthcoming)* – Jenny Moon
- Widening participation and employability (2003, forthcoming)* – Geoff Layer

The Quality Assurance Agency www.qaa.ac.uk
Includes information on subject benchmarking statements and requirements for Progress Files.

Institute for Employment Studies
www.employment-studies.co.uk/index.html
Good source of useful summary reports on wide range of employability issues including information on specific academic disciplines. Also publishers of *Labour Market Information for Higher Education Institutions: a Guide*. (Maginn, A. and Dench, S.) Report 363, January 2000, 1-85184-292-6.

The Keynote Project
www.leeds.ac.uk/textiles/keynote/
The Keynote Project focused on Key Skills, Graduate Employability and Life-long Learning. While the project was grounded in the discipline-specific areas of textiles, fashion and printing, the outputs form a valuable resource for all students, staff and employers. These include online Audit of Key Skills, Good Practice Guide, Personal Development Planner, Resource Pack, Work Placement Guide

Modernising HE careers education: A framework for good practice
Guidance to enable higher education institutions and other HE providers to develop their careers education, information and guidance (CEIG) policies and practices in accordance with the recommendations of Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services (the Harris Report), DfEE 2001. <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/bookshop/>

Directory of Employability Resources
Information for academic staff in higher education who wish to enhance their students' preparedness for work. Written by Rod Oakland and downloadable from www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT

Access to What? Zsuzsa Blasko, John Brennan and Tarla Shah, (2002) Bristol: HEFCE. This report is concerned with the improvement of employment prospects of students from 'socially disadvantaged' groups. An investigation of the transition from higher education into employment of graduates from three groups was undertaken: (i) ethnic minorities, (ii) lower social-economic groups, (iii) mature students. Downloadable from <http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/index.htm>

Employers in the New Graduate Labour Market: Recruiting from a wider spectrum of graduates Full report of a project commissioned by HEFCE as part of the Innovations in Higher Education Programme, conducted by Kate Purcell of the Employment Studies Research Unit at the University of the West of England in partnership with Council for Industry and Higher Education. <http://www.cihe-uk.com/publications.htm>

Fair Enough? Report (2003) Universities UK
The 'Fair Enough?' project looked at universities admissions policies and tried to assess which qualities in an applicant were good indicators of success at undergraduate level. In addition to 'intellectual skills', this study of six universities highlighted abilities to self-organise and work independently as well as motivation to learn, and interest in the chosen subject. <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/bookshop/>

www.actiononaccess.org.uk
For information on widening participation and employability and Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression.

Notes

¹ Yorke and Knight (2003b) has a useful discussion of core, key and transferable skills.

² The AGCAS Careers Education Task Group is currently preparing materials to provide guidance to practitioners on careers education and employability.

³ ESECT has developed a useful card-sort exercise to facilitate this. A summary of the academic and educational theories underpinning employability is contained in Yorke, M. and Knight, P. (2003b) *Employability in Higher Education*. Both can be downloaded from www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT.

⁴ See www.recordingachievement.org. There is also a large range of useful material in the Personal Development Planning area of www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT

⁵ See www.graduatesyorkshire.info and www.graduateadvantage.co.uk for examples of RDA funded projects.

⁶ Available at www.prospects.ac.uk and from Higher Education Careers Services

⁷ For more information see the Graduate Labour Market Forum at www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/glmf

⁸ For more ideas see Maggin, A and Dench, S, (2000) *Labour Market Information for Higher Education Institutions: a Guide*. www.employment-studies.co.uk/index.html

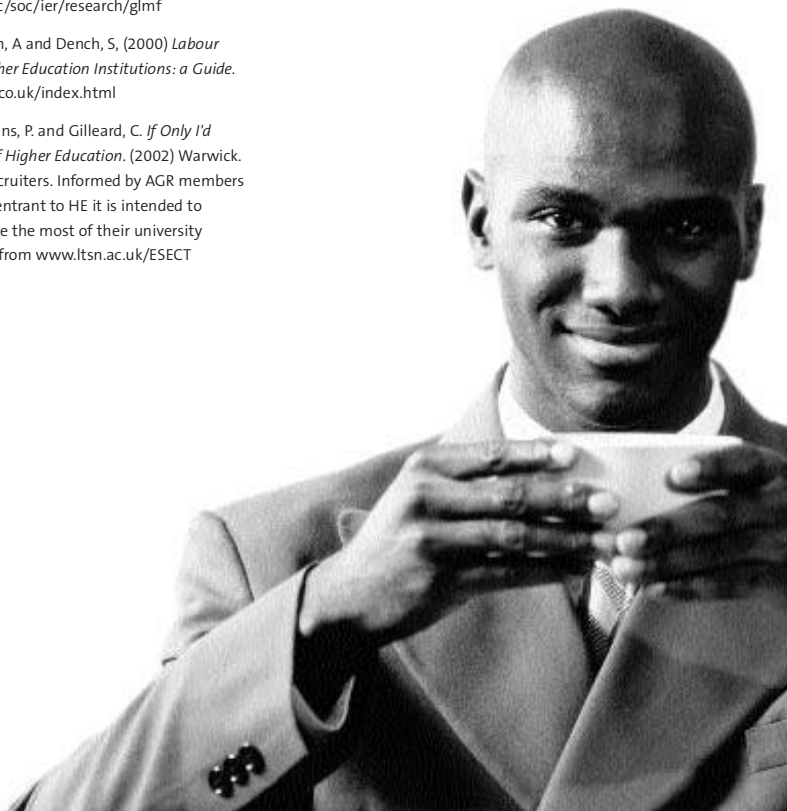
⁹ A useful resource is Hawkins, P. and Gilleard, C. *If Only I'd Known: Making the Most of Higher Education*. (2002) Warwick. Association of Graduate Recruiters. Informed by AGR members and aimed at the younger entrant to HE it is intended to encourage students to make the most of their university experience. Downloadable from www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT

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Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) is the professional association of careers services and careers practitioners in higher education. Its 134 institutional members include the careers services of all the universities and most of the major degree-awarding colleges in the UK and Ireland, as well as over 1,450 individuals concerned with the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance to HE students and graduates in the UK and overseas. The association was established in 1967 and is a registered charity. Its activities include:

- Supporting members in their work with HE students and graduates and the provision of high-quality careers guidance and careers education within the academic curriculum.
- Managing the production of comprehensive careers information including commissioning a wide range of publications, researched and written by members and published on the web and in print by Graduate Prospects.
- Encouraging professional development and high standards. AGCAS requires institutional members to work towards accreditation against the matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services and provides high-quality professional training and development opportunities including Postgraduate, Diploma and Certificate courses in conjunction with the University of Reading.
- Monitoring and enhancing graduate employability. AGCAS supports its member services in the collection of information concerning their graduates. Destinations data is published annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and, is used by government, educationalists and employers to make informed decisions about graduate output. AGCAS is also involved in specialist research and offers a commentary on emerging trends and employment opportunities for graduates.
- Liaising with external organisations and facilitating communication between members. AGCAS maintains links with a wide range of government, professional and employer organisations and aims to be the voice of members in discussions relating to the guidance and employment of graduates.

AGCAS members share professional practice through AGCAS-link and over 20 different discussion lists, a quarterly journal, Phoenix and a monthly e-newsletter, ARENA.

For more details see www.agcas.org.uk

This briefing has been produced as part of the HEFCE funded ESECT project. While the focus of the project is on England, the important points and lessons in this briefing may apply equally to AGCAS services elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. AGCAS commends it as essential reading for all its members.

Sponsors

LTSN Generic Centre

Assessment, widening participation, e-learning, employability – these are just some of the issues which concern everyone in higher education today. No one person or institution has all the answers, and yet plenty of answers are out there. Within the UK's higher education institutions, there are some excellent learning and teaching practices. Many of these practices are common to a number of subject disciplines and are easily transferable. The LTSN Generic Centre aims to broker this expertise and promote effective practices in learning and teaching across all disciplines.

The LTSN Generic Centre team is just one part of the much larger Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN). This larger network includes 24 Subject Centres whose role it is to address learning and teaching issues specific to their subject areas.

To find out more visit our website at www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre

Graduate Prospects

ESECT is grateful to Graduate Prospects for sponsoring the publication of this guide.

Formed by Universities UK (formerly CVCP) in 1972, Graduate Prospects is now a multimillion-pound turnover business in the graduate and postgraduate recruitment market. Each year its trading arm covenants its surplus to the charity (HECSU), which in turn redistributes around £1m of funds back into the HE sector in general and careers services in particular.

Graduate Prospects not only supports financially the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) but works in partnership to produce careers information products for students and graduates, and engages in robust and relevant research, such as *Careers Services: Technology and the Future* (2001) and *Careers Services and Diversity* (2002-3).

Graduate Prospects produces the Prospects Series of commercial publications, and the sector's leading graduate employment website, www.prospects.ac.uk (3,727,060 page impressions, 227,637 unique visitors – March 2003 ABC-E audited). The website is also home to the UK's official postgraduate database of 17,500 taught courses and research programmes, as well as *Careers Advice for Graduates*, careers information, advice materials, and information about part-time and temporary vacancies.

Graduate Prospects also owns the National Council for Work Experience and its associated website, www.work-experience.org, the UK's official central source of information on work experience.

To find out more about Graduate Prospects, visit www.prospects.ac.uk