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## Enlisting your Careers Service to Support and Develop Student Employability

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**W**hat is employability?... In the Learning and Employability Series of papers being produced by the Learning and Teaching Support Network Generic Centre (2003), employability is defined as 'a set of achievements, understanding and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations'. Higher Education Careers Services work in a variety of ways to help students to identify and articulate their existing skills, pro-actively plan their development and communicate their skills, knowledge and personal attributes in applications.

**What do Careers Services do?...**Typically they:

- Are staffed by trained professionals who work with students throughout their courses.
- Normally offer continuing support after graduation
- Provide careers education, information, advice and guidance which helps clients to make decisions about their future and manage the education-work transition.
- Liaise with employers, collecting and publishing vacancy information, arranging employers' visits

to the institution and providing information about the institution to employers.

- Provide information and advice about postgraduate study and funding, taking time out, and a wide range of occupations, employers and vacancies.
- Work with and through academic departments to deliver career management skills.
- Provide expert commentary on graduate destinations, labour markets and preferences.

**What support is available to students?**...Careers Services provide a range of services to students from all departments and in all years of study. Careers Advisers work extensively with individuals, from support for those with no idea about what their next step might be and help with the different stages of the application process to advice and information for those who have already graduated. Careers Services also provide a range of workshops and events such as employer fairs, conferences focusing on particular areas of work, and insight courses or skills sessions offering students the opportunity to work with employers and young managers. Most Careers Advisers will also work with students in a range of academic departments - building contacts with academics in those departments and providing support to students.

The Careers Service in each HE Institution plans and develops services which meet the needs of its students. These case studies illustrate the range of support offered:

- At the University of Birmingham, a Careers Adviser runs a session for first year Mathematics and Statistics students in conjunction with an employer, looking at personal development planning, skill development and employability. Students are encouraged to make use of personal development planners through the tutorial system and further talks by the Careers Adviser. Employers and alumni also give talks and run drop-in sessions within the School, focusing on opportunities for Mathematics and Statistics graduates.
- The University of Westminster offers a programme delivered at all three undergraduate levels, strongly supported by academic staff. In the first year, a workshop introduces students to the idea of career development. This includes a skills analysis exercise and introduction to the online part time jobs service. The careers input forms part of an assessed core module, and is supported by online material. In the second year, the Careers Adviser runs a workshop with an academic from the Maths department, focusing on skills development (both transferable and academic) during the previous year and discussing third year project choice and its relevance to their future careers. During the afternoon, students have a chance to see the third year project

displays and discuss the skills utilised. Final year sessions include an assignment and focus on skills development and the relevance of student projects plus work on applications and interview techniques.

- Manchester Metropolitan University use online career development learning - developing and delivering accredited, subject specific, self directed learning through partnership with academic departments. Students assess their skills, values and interests, relate them to available careers, develop appropriate career goals and formulate action plans that work towards those goals. Students are especially encouraged to seek and recognise the value of their work experience and extra-curricular activities and to record the skills developed during this experience
- Anglia Polytechnic University has an employer mentoring scheme matching second year students with experienced professionals from local companies. The mentors provide a career related voice of experience for the students, giving a small amount of time regularly.

**Benefits of working with your institution's careers service...**Your institution's careers service provides you with a reservoir of expertise to enlist in developing your students' employability. Services pride themselves on being "client centred" - and that applies to academic colleagues too. The case studies illustrate a non-prescriptive approach to employability development, instead offering workable solutions that are negotiated with and specific to your institution or academic unit, and indeed to your particular student cohort. Careers Services also have an extensive national professional network, which means that, where appropriate, there is excellent opportunity for the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

If you do not already work in close concert with your careers service, you will almost certainly find them very receptive to your approach.

#### Reference

- [1] Harvey, L 2003. *'Transitions from higher education to work A briefing paper'*. LTSN Generic Centre. <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?id=18410>