

SLICE – Employability – Contextual Statement

Preamble: Employability is a key issue for the university: the word appears on the cover of the prospectus. ‘Employability’ has accrued its own connotations and associations. The most useful understanding of the term is to emphasise that if students make the most of all the opportunities offered to them at university and have the ability to source and make the most of opportunities outside of university while they are studying, they will become more employable. The term ‘employability’ has to be used sparingly, or in a way that its use in the Warwick context does not imply a university as an employability ‘sausage –machine’. The latter notion runs the risk of setting employability up as, incorrectly, the antithesis of academic excellence.

Employability at Warwick University should be a unique experience providing all students with opportunities to develop their intellectual potential and their skills. Part of this experience should be the skills to understand and take ownership of their personal development in a way which will equip them for the rest of their life. This should be done in the context of advice and guidance around destinations such as employability and postgraduate study, whether such destinations occur immediately after graduation or after a number of years.

Although Warwick and its students have much in common with other universities and student populations, it is still unique. Whatever definitions of employability exist in Whitehall, academia or in the press, any notion of employability has to be set firmly within the context of its unique culture in order to speak to its constituents and stakeholders.

National context:

The relevant factors are:

- The government’s desire to increase the number of highly skilled graduates entering the work force and the target of 50% of 18-30 year olds experiencing HE by 2010.
- QAA Code of Practice: ‘The institution should ensure that its CEIG provision is designed to prepare its students for a successful transition to employment or for further study and for effective management of their career thereafter’.
- QAA guidelines on Personal Development Planning: providing opportunities for reflective learning, the development of self-awareness and the articulation of skills.
- The Roberts Review requirement that all PGR students have the opportunity to develop specific transferable skills to enhance their employability.
- Tuition fees have encouraged more of a focus on the tangible benefits of HE, including job prospects. This is likely to be more of a factor as and when fees rise.
- League Tables: employment, and especially graduate-level jobs, feature prominently in the Times and Guardian tables
- DLHE survey as required by HEAS which feeds into the league tables.
- Media coverage, generally seasonable and fuelled by the last two bullet points.

International Context:

- Notion of ‘internationalisation’: graduates who are culturally and internationally aware who can work anywhere and work with anyone
- International students in the UK wanted to work in the UK during and/or after their studies and the recent legislation which has made this easier
- International students wishing to return home: how they can be best prepared for their ‘home’ market.

Departmental issues:

Each course will vary in its intrinsic ‘employability’. Some will be vocational courses with formal placements (e.g. engineering, medicine), others will have fewer explicit links with specific occupations and not so many ‘employability skills’ in the curriculum. There needs to be a flexible and customised approach to departments in terms of enhancing employability.

Personal Development Planning:

This should be about an approach to the student experience and how they are developed, rather than something that is done to them.

Specific student groups:

Many groups of students have particular requirements regarding employability. These include: WP, International, PGs, mature. It is likely that any customised provision for these students will exist outside the curriculum.

Partnerships:

Any activities which are designed to enhance student employability should:

- Ensure consistency of approach and message (e.g. promote reflection, career management, certification of skills)
- Be easily accessible to students (i.e. web ‘portal’ for all opportunities)

Providers of extra-curricular Student Development opportunities include amongst others: SU, Careers, CSDE, Warwick Volunteers, etc

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