SLICE/Employability Recommendations (1ˢᵗ draft mid July 07)

NB Needs yet to link in to/draw on Sean's paragraph.

The unique contribution of a university, to the lives of those who encounter it, lies in the way it facilitates new connections, new confidence, and new opportunities. This tacit connectivity is lived out in a variety of ways: seeing connections within and across subject areas and thus developing one's understanding; seeing brand new connections and innovating; making new connections with people and places and more. However the fragmentation of the core aspects of student and academic life which systematically takes place within the formal initiatives and structures of university life actively works against the goal of mapping, promoting and maximising this connectivity. That is a fundamental and systemic problem in an institutional world whose major teaching programmes and cutting-edge research activity are both overwhelmingly discipline-specific (a tendency that is arguably generic and world-wide but is also particularly acute in the UK with its tradition of single-honours undergraduate degrees). So we face a fundamental dilemma which Warwick could arguably be not only a UK but world leader in addressing. On the one hand the core components of 'employability' – namely knowledgeability about academic subject areas; skills; extracurricular activities; and personal wellbeing – need to be understood holistically in terms of how they come together differently across the student population and their departments, and how they develop across time. On the other, our everyday academic practice and our students' everyday engagement with learning both militate continuously against that.

The inter-departmental SLICE group concerned with Employability has worked over a period of 5 months and members share the view that Employability must be considered in this connected sense. Whether the recipients of these employability opportunities are the students of the university, academic staff, or administrative staff, continued fragmented provision is likely to lead to stymied potential and frustration (and pointing to the examples of those few who somehow overcome this fragmentation to develop integrative understandings and ways of acting by the time they graduate does nothing to overcome those outcomes for the rest). Communal and individual success, in all its forms, stems from confidence, competence and a sense of commitment to oneself and to others. Working together to achieve creativity and innovation in the curriculum, a better understanding of what employability and entrepreneurship means, and a research rich learning environment requires a better understanding of what our students do, what they learn, how they develop, and where that enables them to go in life as differently well-rounded graduates.

Warwick staff therefore need to know how their students engage with life and learning on campus and how this changes over time, how their life needs and goals change over time. They need to know this rigorously and systematically, through research, in order that the connectivity between life and learning can be fully explored and facilitated across the diverse campus. Pursuing a rigorous longitudinal and connective strategy for understanding what learning and university life mean for student futures would be a

distinctive example of a research-led teaching environment which reaches out to the similarities and necessary differences across campus and beyond.

Consequently we recommend that the University considers: (*Taken mainly from Jay's notes)

1. Working with a broad notion of employability and entrepreneurship which encompasses the connectivity between learning, extra-curricular activity, wellbeing and long-term success.

2. Joining up the variety of opportunities for students which are currently scattered across the University (Careers, CSDE, Warwick Skills, Warwick Volunteers, SU activities, etc) to devise a common approach to how we help students and staff see the employability benefits of taking part in certain curriculum & extra curricular activities.

3. Establishing an effective 'ownership' focus in order to improve structures & processes to support debate, decision making, planning & co-ordination (and avoid the fragmentation that occurs through the current committee and working group system and potential duplication/competition for students' engagement across different initiatives).

4. Developing a longitudinal understanding of how what Warwick does helps students, and crucially if/how that student perception of 'relevance' changes over time. A number of members of the SLICE group have piloted questions which explore facts about curricular and non-curricular activities, opinions about content usefulness, opinions about personal characteristics and employability and satisfaction issues. In order to develop this work a rigorous review of existing research tools and academic knowledge in respect of knowledgeability, employability and well-being would be required. Further work may, therefore, be developed along the following lines, with these different elements being mutually informative and longitudinal:

   a) Firstly, that IER could be invited to bid to look at the notion of the student experience and how it affects employability – in particular developing/unpacking the kinds of things on the Academic Satisfaction Survey, and piloted departmental questionnaires, asked 1,2, 5 years on.

   b) Second, the Psychology department might be approached to do a separate piece of work on employability and entrepreneurship (broadly defined) including the broader sense of wellbeing.