Employability what is it?

Employability is about having capabilities, and the self-belief in these, to take your first steps out of education, whether that be into academia or the wider world of work, then maintain, develop and be successful within your chosen path, or moving into new opportunities to fulfil your potential.

Employability can be a difficult concept to define – it is multi-dimensional. Employability is not just about students making deposits in a bank of skills, it is a synergistic combination of personal qualities, skills of various kinds and subject understanding. The real focus is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing you as a learner. Employment is a by-product of this process.

Employability so what do you need to do?

Succeed in your studies
Subject understanding/knowledge is important. Although 70% of graduate positions are not subject specific, that still means that 30% are, with your subject specific skills and/or technical abilities an important factor in recruitment. More generally you will, through your course, already be developing lots of transferable skills that will be enhancing your studies, but also highly relevant to other contexts. Succeeding in your studies shows a certain aptitude for learning, with the ability to learn the key to future development and ability to progress in your degree, employment and life.

On a more pragmatic level, your degree classification may be one of the few things from which recruiters can practically base their decisions on your ability to learn.

Thinking about your career
Understanding yourself and the options open to you enables you to consider what may be a good fit for your next steps. This can help you ensure that you are working toward your future in your way. Through this awareness you can better understand what you need to be successful in the future, including the skills and attributes that you will need and why. This will enable you to guide your own development, search effectively for opportunities and better articulate to others your choice of path.

Get experience
This can help your career thinking through testing what you like or don't like, what you are good at, or those things that do not suit you as well. Getting experience will help you to explore the options that you are considering so that you can make informed decisions. Through experiences you are able to develop and deploy your knowledge and skills which is important in giving you the confidence in yourself as you move forward.

Tell your Story

This is about drawing on the things above to understand, and be able to articulate confidently, what you know and can do, how you have developed and used these things and how this relates to who you are and what you want to do. Through your authentic understanding of your journey and yourself, you are better able to present yourself, enabling you access to the future you want, through things such as networking, applications interview or assessment centres.

So what are Employability/transferable skills?

Employability skills have been defined after extensive collaboration with business by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) as:

> *"A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy."*

Employability skills include:

- **Self-management** – readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self- starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/ reflective learning.
- **Team working** – respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, and awareness of interdependence with others.
- **Business and customer awareness** – basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.
- **Problem solving** – analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.
- **Communication and literacy** – application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy – including listening and questioning.
- **Application of numeracy** – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).
- **Application of information technology** – basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.

Employers look more positively on students who have developed a range of practical skills and knowledge. You also need a **positive attitude**: a 'can-do' approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make these happen.
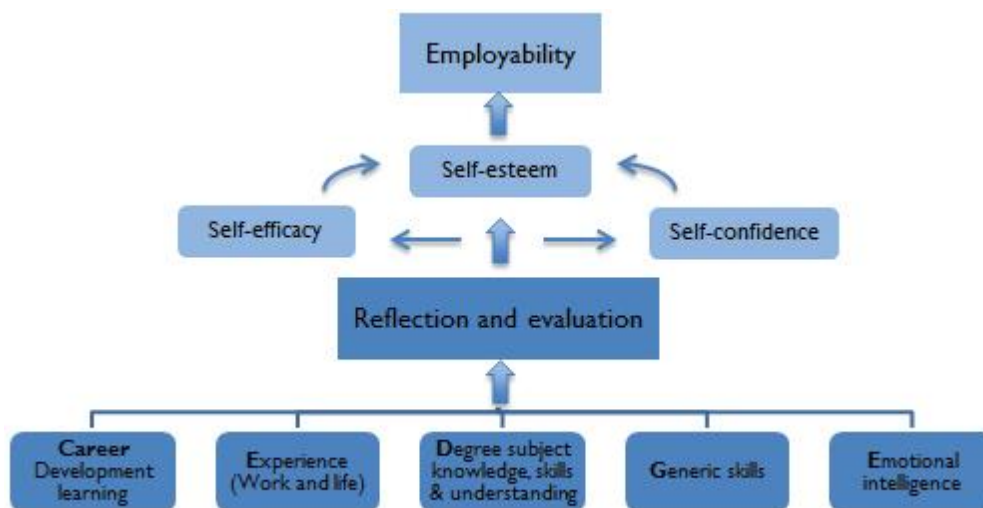
Frequently mentioned by both employers and universities is entrepreneurship/enterprise: broadly, an ability to demonstrate an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking.

An individual with these attributes can make a huge difference to any business.

You can develop these skills in many ways, often as you're just doing the things you enjoy, in your leisure time! You can also develop your skills and practical experiences more pro-actively by making

the most of what's available at Warwick: volunteering, involvement in clubs and societies, taking up work experience or summer project opportunities outside of your course, as well as doing the best you can in your degree itself.

The really important thing is that you don't disregard anything you do as being unimportant or not a relevant example! If you also learn how to articulate (describe & explain) the skills you have developed, explaining the circumstances in which this took place and reflect on the learning process, you will be in a much better position when it comes to applying for jobs of postgraduate courses and in interviews.

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007)