

Employability: Analysis of Enhancement Themes Materials

Purpose of this paper

1 This paper analyses information relating to employability that has been gathered during the national Enhancement Theme, Student Transitions, which ran from 2014 to 2017. It draws on material from the Student Transitions Map¹, an innovative, interactive tool that provides access to materials generated by institutions and students' associations in response to the Theme. This includes case studies, materials from Enhancement Themes Conferences, and other examples of practice.

Summary of findings

2 Analysis of the Student Transitions Theme materials identifies six key points about the Scottish University Sector's work on employability:

- Institutions continue to explore ways in which to provide students with opportunities to develop skills that are valued by employers. Such opportunities are provided at institution and programme level, in both subject-specific and generic forms, some making up a compulsory component of the curriculum and some an optional element. Work placements remain an important skills development opportunity for students, and where 'real-world' would be difficult to implement, institutions are exploring technological options. Institutions continue to encourage students to undertake voluntary and community-based work, and also create 'internal' work opportunities for students through teaching and peer mentoring schemes. Institutions also continue to explore ways of recording and recognising student participation in such opportunities.
- Institutions continue to work closely with employers and professional bodies to ensure that programme content and other skills development opportunities are relevant and valuable.
- Staff development is an important part of employability strategy for many institutions, and it is acknowledged that professional services staff (including, but not limited to, careers advisers) play a key role in enhancing students' employability.
- Employability intersects with Widening Access, another key concern for institutions, and this is reflected in initiatives specifically designed to enhance the employability of students from non-traditional backgrounds.
- Research projects are underway across the sector that touch upon employability in a variety of ways and will no doubt inform future work.
- As well as the various initiatives and research projects underway in institutions, there are several national and international projects on employability that have involved Scottish HEIs.

¹ www.studenttransitionmap.uk.

Summary of materials

3 Over the three years of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme, there were 56 institutional case studies submitted with links to employability, along with seven student commentaries. Eighteen of Scotland's 19 institutions submitted at least one case study under the employability topic. Twelve institutions submitted two or more relevant case studies, with four institutions submitting at least five. Detailed information about case studies related to employability are contained in two Appendices to this report. Appendix 1 details case studies submitted during the first year of the Theme (2014-15); Appendix 2 details case studies submitted during the second year of the Theme (2015-16).

4 In the third year of the Theme, institutions were required to produce multimedia resources relating to student transitions. While none of these related exclusively to employability, six institutions produced multimedia resources that included a focus on this important transition type. These institutions were the University of Aberdeen, the University of Dundee, Heriot-Watt University, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scotland's Rural College, and the University of Stirling.

5 In the third year of the Theme, institutions were also required to produce student commentaries on their Theme-related work. Seven of these related to employability. In addition to those indicated in the Appendices, student commentaries relating to employability were submitted by Edinburgh University Students' Association, Robert Gordon University (x2), the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and the University of Strathclyde.

6 Institutions were encouraged to collaborate where their interests overlapped. In relation to employability, the University of Dundee collaborated with the University of Aberdeen and Abertay University on a project about Open Badges.

7 Along with the case studies, the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme generated 42 employability-related contributions to Enhancement Conferences: the 2015 Conference included 14 papers; the 2017 Conference included 20 papers, two Pecha Kucha presentations, and six posters; and the 2018 Conference included four papers. The content of these papers, presentations and posters is included in this paper along with the case studies.

Analysis of materials

8 The following paragraphs provide detail on employability-related work undertaken as part of the Enhancement Themes, grouped by topic.

9 **Institution- and programme-level development** - Edinburgh Napier University used SFC funding allocated for employability-related projects to embark on a major, institution-wide programme of work that ran over three years. The project was managed across five related threads (student employability development, curriculum development, employer relations, student mobility, and monitoring/evaluation) and was credited with helping to raise the profile of employability in the institution. At Glasgow Caledonian University, attempts have been made to develop the international and intercultural perspectives of healthcare students to prepare them for the realities of the workplace. At postgraduate level, Robert Gordon University have developed a framework to support Human Resource Management students into employment.

All subject areas

The Professional Skills Curriculum is a co-curricular programme open to all students at the University of St Andrews. Students engage with a suite of topics on skills valued by employers, and the topics are delivered through one of three formats: lectures, online workshops and practical skills sessions. Abertay University has a Principal's Award, which aims to support students to understand what is expected in the labour market and how their strengths and development needs relate to those expectations. The Award consists of core and elective elements and is assessed by an interview together with the submission of a CV and reflective log.

Medicine, dentistry, and pharmacology

The University of Aberdeen's Objective Structured Practical Examination (OSPE) uses multiple 'stations' to assess the practical, theoretical, communications and problem-solving skills of medical students. This assessment style is thought to contribute to a sense of professionalism among the students. At the University of Edinburgh, Student-Led Individually Created Courses (SLICCs) offer medical students a framework to reflect on the development of their personal, professional and academic skills during an appropriate co or extra-curricular experience that they arrange for themselves during their summer vacation. Student commentary reflected positively on this initiative. The Individualised Self-assessment to Enhance Employability (I-SEE) course is a non-credit bearing course for taught postgraduates in the Schools of Medical Sciences, and Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Aberdeen. The course has three stages - self-assessment, reflection and articulation - and includes assessments of academic writing and basic IT skills, along with psychometric testing and self-rating of other relevant employability skills. The University of Strathclyde incorporated experiential learning into their redesigned Pharmacy degree, with students required to participate in facilitated discussions and write reflections on their experiences. The inclusion of practical experience in the degree is a requirement of the General Pharmaceutical Council, and experiential learning tasks were designed with the support of practitioners. The School of Biochemistry and the School of Physiology and Pharmacology at the University of Bristol introduced a mandatory second year unit for biomedical science students. Entitled Biomedical Research, Employability and Enterprise Skills (BREES), it prepares students not only for the research project required in their final year, but also for graduate life.

Life sciences

The Department of Life Sciences at Glasgow Caledonian University developed a module entitled 'Skills for Professional Practice for Biosciences 2' aimed at the personal and professional development of students, noting that gaining student engagement was both critical to the success of the module and perhaps the biggest challenge.

Performing arts

Musical theatre students at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland are required to undertake an 'Artist in Development' degree strand that encourages them to reflect on, and develop, their professional identity during their studies. At the University of the Highlands and Islands, students on honours programmes in Popular Music, Music Business or Audio Engineering are required to complete a 20-credit module at SCQF level 10 which involves the analysis of their own skills, the development of a strategy for developing their skills, and the undertaking of a work experience opportunity which they must source themselves.

Law

Robert Gordon University has developed undergraduate development modules covering practical legal skills and have found that this initiative has equipped law students to deal more confidently with legal subjects, preparing them for their Honours year and beyond. Public relations, media, marketing and events

Degrees in Public Relations, Media, Marketing and Events at Queen Margaret University include a continual focus on employability, culminating in the fourth year with a module that includes a placement, portfolio development, and reflection.

11 **Workplace experience as part of an academic programme** - The School for Work-Based Education at Glasgow Caledonian University worked with the Faculty of Engineering, Environment and Computing at Coventry University to conduct research into the latter institution's partnership with Unipart Powertrain Applications. This partnership led to all students being able to undertake summer placements before going into their final year, and a fast track to professional registration. Institutions have used technology to support workplace experience where it would otherwise be impractical. The School of Engineering at Robert Gordon University uses a virtual oil rig and DART (Dynamic, Advanced, Responsive Training) technology to enhance students' readiness for the workplace, mitigating against the relative inaccessibility of offshore oil platforms. Heriot-Watt University has established the BSL Interpreter Repository (BSLIR), an online database of British Sign Language translations and offering students on the BSL/English degree insights into the kinds of scenarios they may encounter in their professional life.

12 **Opportunities to gain work experience within the institution (for example through teaching or peer support)** - Recognising the value of teaching experience to doctoral students, Queen Margaret University has developed 'Tips for Teaching', a support workbook for these students. At the University of Stirling, final year undergraduate psychology students teach statistics to second years, building their own independence and confidence, and are encouraged to engage in peer mentoring. This is in addition to the institution-wide STEER peer support scheme. The University also commissioned final year film students to make a film in which alumni discussed how the skills gained during their studies in Arts and Humanities led to their careers. The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh runs a peer-assisted learning programme that sees students mentor their junior cohorts.

13 **Institutional provision or facilitation of extracurricular activity** - The University of Aberdeen has a student-run Science Journalism Society that publishes its own magazine. The Society and publication are owned and run by students with the support of staff. Edinburgh Napier University's Business School runs a programme of extra-curricular activity entitled 'Get on Board', in which students were encouraged to gain places on the boards of local charities, voluntary sector organisations and public bodies. Scotland's Rural College runs an All Campus Sustainability Programme. This is an extra-curricular, project-based programme open to students of all disciplines and at all levels of study at SRUC's six campuses. Students work alone or in a group to develop a project that improves sustainability in the campus buildings or grounds. Health Science students at Queen Margaret University can participate in voluntary activities aimed at providing activities relating to health and science for school children.

14 **Documenting skills development** - At Edinburgh Napier University, academic staff in Life Sciences worked in partnership with Academic Support Services, as well as employers, to develop a Skills Passport to help students develop key skills associated with employability. Computer Science students at Heriot-Watt wishing to enter the games industry are encouraged and supported to develop a portfolio demonstrating their

programming skills. The University of Aberdeen's Students Taking Active Roles (STAR) Award is an employer-sponsored initiative that aims to recognise and encourage students' participation in extracurricular activities. At the University of Edinburgh, Class Reps and School Reps who reflect on and share their work through blog posts have their posts reviewed by a member of EUSA staff, and then receive Open Badges to digitally recognise and accredit their work. Robert Gordon University ran a dedicated, branded initiative aimed at engaging final year students in individual proactive careers conversations. Alongside this, the RGU Students' Union developed a leadership programme and student portfolios of extra-curricular activity.

15 **Building relationships with employers** - Dundee Business School at Abertay University has established the Innovation for Global Growth (IGG) initiative to strengthen links between businesses, students and public service institutions, viewing employers as partners in business education. The University of Edinburgh's Edinburgh Exchange Event provides a forum in which businesses and the University can discuss areas of common interest relating to graduates' transition into the workplace, exchange ideas, and learn from each other about supporting the development of the attributes which make the strongest students and the most effective graduate employees. The Department of Psychology at the University of Strathclyde fosters an ethos of community by actively bringing together students, alumni, staff and a range of employers. The aim is to equip undergraduate students with a sense of the range of opportunities available after graduation, and the skills and attributes they will need to exploit those opportunities. Gray's School of Art at Robert Gordon University has worked to merge traditional handmade skills with digital skills, responding in part to industry need. In response to input of employers - in particular, SMEs - Abertay University established the Abertay Enterprise Framework as a way of integrating a broad spread of business skills into students' cognate area of study. The University of Edinburgh's VETSET2GO project, run in partnership with the University of Nottingham, aimed to define and support the development of key employability capabilities in the veterinary profession, ascertaining client expectations. The University of Aberdeen's Career Mentoring Programme matches employer mentor volunteers with student mentees for six months to develop their professional skills, knowledge and attitudes and support students as they transition into the world of work or postgraduate study.

16 **Building relationships with professional bodies** - Outwith Scotland, The Textile Institute recognises the importance of student engagement with professional bodies, and encourages students to attend seminars, conferences, and networking events. Scotland's Rural College offers a degree in Rural Business Management, and this programme was accredited by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in 2014. Grow Careers Scotland - an annual event bringing together influential organisations within the horticulture industry to inform people about horticultural careers - is run by the Scottish Branch of the Chartered Institute of Horticulture, with Scotland's Rural College as the major partner. Many SRUC students attend the event.

17 **Staff development** - The University of Edinburgh participated in an HEA-funded, collaborative project that supported institutional staff to undertake short placements with external organisations. Among other benefits, this offered those staff - and the wider institution - to gain an understanding of students' post-education work environments. Glasgow Caledonian University's CUSP (College University Subject Partnership) emerged from a Careers Summit hosted by the institution's College Connect programme, allowing careers service staff across the two sectors to share intelligence and good practice.

18 **The role of professional services** - Robert Gordon University's Careers & Employability Centre provides 'My Career Toolkit', an online employability resource created to support students and recent graduates with in-depth, interactive careers support on all areas of career planning, job search and the application process. The University of

Aberdeen's 'Achieve' site offers undergraduates a range of resources to develop and enhance their academic and professional skills throughout, and after, their studies. Resources are grouped into academic, professional, IT and library skills.

19 **Employability initiatives aimed specifically at students from non-traditional backgrounds** - Queen Margaret University's employer mentoring programme, aimed primarily at widening participation students, links third and fourth-year students with mentors who are professionals in their field in a year-long partnership to assist students in career planning and enhance their employability. The Strathclyde Skills Award aims to support students by giving them the opportunity to reflect on their extracurricular experiences and articulate how these can contribute towards their career aspirations after graduation. Any undergraduate student across all four faculties is eligible to register and apply for the Award, but it is particularly aimed at students from a Widening Access background and those studying non-vocational courses, as both groups are traditionally less prepared for the graduate labour market.

Research projects

20 Preparedness for the workplace is a key area of research and often draws on the experience of recent graduates. Abertay University conducted a 15-year study of sports graduates; this provided some insights into graduate preparedness for work or postgraduate study, and was also believed to have enhanced the employability of a student partner who collaborated on the research project. Glasgow Caledonian University, in partnership with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, has conducted a year-long project examining recent physiotherapy graduates' perceptions of what had prepared them for practice. Robert Gordon University conducted research into the perceived 'work-readiness' of fashion graduates by surveying and interviewing alumni and asking about the skills they had developed during their studies. Follow-up work identified the importance of digital skills in the workplace from the employer point of view. A student-led project at the University of Strathclyde has resulted in an enhanced understanding of the skills and graduate attributes that former postgraduate research students perceive as valued by employers. The project explored previous students' perceptions of the strengths and skills gained during their experience that helped them to secure employment, as well as the support they accessed during their studies when preparing for their transition beyond academia. Recommendations following this study include further training and support for students in areas where there are perceived skills gaps, and training for supervisors in supporting the personal development of postgraduate research students.

21 Other research focuses on students' experiences of work and work-based learning. The Careers Service at the University of Aberdeen led research to discover and understand the kinds of activities undergraduates had engaged in over the 2016 summer vacation, finding that 58 per cent of students spent the summer in paid employment. The Faculty of Science at the University of Strathclyde conducted research to examine what was available to students in terms of placements and what obstacles might be preventing students from participating.

22 Other research focuses on specific skills linked to employability, examining how effectively these are embedded in academic programmes. Research was conducted at Abertay University into staff experiences of engaging students in assessed group work, and how the emerging narrative exposes the disparate views of students and employers regarding graduate skill sets. The University of Strathclyde conducted a study of skills development among undergraduate chemical engineering students, with the aim of eventually examining how the skills developed during a semester-long group project were used once students entered the workplace.

23 The Open University in Scotland conducted a four-year, sector-wide project entitled 'Back on Course' that offered early leavers from seven universities the chance to reflect on their experience and next steps into positive outcomes.

24 The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland examined the potential for identity conflict in music students and graduates whose careers include both performance and teaching.

25 A project team at the University of Glasgow has developed a database of innovative case studies. These provide a useful insight into the benefits and challenges in enhancing employability, from both the student and the academic perspective.

26 The University of Edinburgh, in partnership with AMOSSHE, undertook a project that aimed to explore ways in which students can be helped and encouraged to develop tools for career resilience.

27 **National and international projects** - The Saltire Scholars Undergraduate Internship Programme gives undergraduate students with huge potential and ambition - most of whom may not otherwise have access to such opportunities - the chance to experience the working environment of highly successful firms or high-growth entrepreneurial companies at home and abroad. The programme is open to all penultimate year students at Scottish HEIs, and each institution with participating students contributes funding to the programme. The University of Strathclyde was a participant in the project 'Crafting Employability Strategies for HE Students of Languages in Europe'. This was a two-year Erasmus+ funded collaboration between partners from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland and the UK. The aim of the project was to create a resource for practitioners working with Modern Languages students, enhancing employability by engaging them in work-related activities as part of their academic studies.

Further information

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Appendix 1

Case studies submitted during the first year of the Theme (2014-15)

Institution	Title	Student Commentary
University of Aberdeen	Individualised Self-assessment to Enhance Employability (I-SEE) in postgraduate students	
	The Role of Career Mentoring in Graduate Transitions	
Abertay University	Community Links - placement opportunities for students on Sociology-based programmes	
	Work-Based Simulation as an enhanced Work Placement	
	Dundee Business School Undergraduate Business & Management Placement	
	Principal's Award for Employability	Yes
University of Dundee	'Last days of disco' - exploring the use of an innovative teaching method to support students in the transition from student to primary teacher	
University of Edinburgh	Research Master's in Biomedical Sciences	
	Peer Support: Developing our Student Leaders	
	Edinburgh Exchange Event	
Heriot-Watt University	Games Industry Portfolio	
	Designing 'Live' - A series of one-day design Charettes bringing together HWU students of different disciplines and stages	
	British Sign Language Interpreter Repository (BSLIR)	
University of the Highlands and Islands	Early warning alert system for poor writing skills in degree students	
Open University in Scotland	Taking learning to the workforce: innovative approaches to work-based learning	

Institution	Title	Student Commentary
Queen Margaret University	Third Sector Internships Scotland (TSIS): Internships that make a difference	
	Employer mentoring programme: Developing confidence and boosting graduate job prospects	
	Professional Communication Placement	
	Health and Social Care Academy	
Robert Gordon University	My Career Toolkit	
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	Promoting health and well-being as part of transitions through the Modern Ballet	
	Preparing Students for Employment in the Musical Theatre Industry	
SRUC	Enhancing employability through assessed work placements	
	Grow Careers Scotland	
	Raising Awareness of Employment Opportunities in the EU	
University of St Andrews	The Saltire Scholars Undergraduate Internship Programme	
	The Professional Skills Curriculum	
University of Stirling	Flying Start Leadership Programme	
University of the West of Scotland	The Dwell Project and Time Spent on Campus	

Appendix 2

Case studies submitted during the second year of the Theme (2015-16)

Institution	Title	Student Commentary
University of Aberdeen	Aberdeen CityLab! Where the city is the classroom	
	Aberdeen University Students' Association Leadership Academy	
	LEVEL-UP! Student-led Conference	
	Student-led Careers Conference in the Medical Sciences	
University of Edinburgh	Student-Led Individually Created Courses (SLICCs)	Yes
Edinburgh Napier University	Transitional practices within the Employability & Opportunities Team - Supporting student's transition into Higher Education	
Glasgow Caledonian University	Careers Summit/CUSP (College University Subject Partnership)	
	Postgraduate transition towards employment in college lecturing: A European Snow sports internship mentoring collaboration	
	Supporting student transitions to real clinical decision-making situations in cardiopulmonary practice	
Glasgow School of Art	Design domain	
Open University in Scotland	Learning in practice: enhanced support for work-based learners	
	Third Sector Internships Scotland (TSIS): Developing work-based learning opportunities to enhance the employability of Scotland's university students	
Queen Margaret University	Providing volunteering experience for Health Science students	
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	Enabling and supporting students through transitions to professional practice: Arts Leadership and Fundraising	
	Recruitment - Audition/Interview Preparation Courses	
SRUC	Careers Information, Advice and Guidance at SRUC's Ayr Campus	
	All Campus Sustainability Programme	

Institution	Title	Student Commentary
	Accreditation of BA Rural Business Management by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)	
University of St Andrews	Students becoming staff - overcoming challenges for postgraduates who teach	
	Transition through Collaborative Programmes at the University of St Andrews: Study Abroad Internship (Student Transitions)	
University of Stirling	Computing Science - Big Data Dragons' Den Event	
	Arts and Humanities - Transition to fourth year and beyond - The Final Year Conference	
	Making the Most of Master's Legacy Project: supporting postgraduate students to develop and transition to work.	
	University of Stirling Management School - What are the key challenges that students face when applying for internships? A study focusing on undergraduate Students at the University of Stirling Management School	
University of Strathclyde	Towards professional competence: supporting student placements in an undergraduate speech and language pathology programme at the University of Strathclyde.	
	First year community placement	
	Embedding industry engagement to improve employability	

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