

Graduate employability as a set of complex achievements

A view of employability

We see employability as a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.

Three sets of research findings illustrate the point.

1. Lee Harvey and colleagues (1997) found that employers want graduates with knowledge; intellect; willingness to learn; self-management skills; communication skills; team-working; interpersonal skills.
2. Yorke (1999) found that small enterprises especially valued skill at oral communication, handling one's own work load, team-working, managing others, getting to the heart of problems, critical analysis, summarising, and group problem-solving. Valued attributes included being able to work under pressure, commitment, working varied hours, dependability, imagination/creativity, getting on with people, and willingness to learn.
3. Brennan and colleagues (2001) highlighted the significance of: initiative; working independently; working under pressure; oral communication skills; accuracy, attention to detail; time management; adaptability; working in a team; taking responsibility and decisions; planning coordinating and organizing.

We argue that achievements such as these are highly compatible with academic values: there need be no tension between employability and higher education.

This is consistent with the recommendations of the EC's expert group looking at higher education/research relations in the European Research Area (Knight, 2003). It proposes that researchers should have a set of core competences:

- ▶ Reasoning, appropriate to the topic and tradition of enquiry; critical thinking, problem-setting and problem-solving of various kinds.
- ▶ Creativity/curiosity.
- ▶ Team-working and collaboration.
- ▶ Information handling, including interpretation and evaluation.
- ▶ Working across subject boundaries – multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary practices.
- ▶ Managing projects and leading: being entrepreneurial, whether in self-employment or when working for with-profit or non-profit enterprises.
- ▶ Ethical practice.
- ▶ Dissemination, including writing for various audiences, making presentations, participating in conferences, fora and panels.

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