# Employability

## What are employability skills?

The Dearing report[1] broadly identified keys skills that students need to develop during their courses. 'Employability skills' is a term commonly used to provide a more detailed definition of the key skills. The main areas that are highlighted as being beneficial to employers and, therefore, to graduates starting and continuing in their careers include:

- problem solving skills
- communication skills
- analytical skills
- data analysis
- critical appraisal
- time management
- team working

The employment market is increasingly more competitive for new graduates as greater numbers of students undertake Higher Education courses. Employers are looking for graduates who have more to offer than simply a good degree. Those graduates who stay within the scientific community will be required to have skills beyond the laboratory. In today's environment they will need skills that will allow them to communicate effectively with both customers and other team members, and to adapt rapidly to a changing environment. Many graduates will use their science degree as a route into a wide range of unrelated professions from accountancy, management training, to working in the City. During their degree they will have needed to develop a range of transferable skills in order to succeed in these areas.

## How can employability skills be developed?

Students need to develop an early awareness of the importance of these skills and the impact on the work place and the need for forward career planning. A reflection of the value of early career planning is shown by the move many departments are making towards the introduction of career modules. These modules can help students in a number of ways and are particularly advantageous when introduced early, at a time when students are considering individual module choices. Often students will reach the end of the course only to discover a particular career option has been restricted by an inappropriate choice of modules. Initiating forward thinking can lead to an informed choice of optional modules depending on how specialised or general they see their future career path. Clear advice on job applications, interview techniques and presentations can offer students a strong advantage. Making students aware of the skills considered desirable can also help the student to gain more from their degree. Frequently students are unable to secure limited work placements during their course. Careers modules can help to

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clarify to students the advantages of undertaking voluntary work or work shadowing to obtain experience of the workplace and further develop the key employability skills. The Centre has produced a number of resources[2] for developing employability skills including the Online Employability Resource[3] which can be run from within a VLE. All the Centre's resources are freely available for use in UKHE.

The need for students to successfully plan ahead, thinking about their future careers, whilst maximising their own personal development, is reflected by the introduction of Personal Development Planning[4,5] (PDP). Although a variety of student progress files[6] do currently exist, PDP is more focused towards skills development, including employability skills. The widespread use of PDP will aid graduates in presenting evidence of the transferable and personal skills that employers seek. From 2005 it has been compulsory for all Higher Education institutions to implement some form of a student progress file, part of which must include PDP. Although the formats of these files may vary slightly, the key factor will be to allow students to monitor, reflect and build on their personal development.

## References


1. Sir Ron Dearing, National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997 <www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/dearing/>
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3. <www.heacademy.ac.uk/physsci/home/projects/jisc_del/employabilityproject>
4. <www.heacademy.ac.uk/physsci/home/pedagogicthemes/pdp>
5. <www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/pdp>
6. <www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/default.asp>



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