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Employability – A Question of Responsibility

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CETH Conference 2010

Employability in the Curriculum



Developing employability
competences through personal and
professional development:

Employability - A Question of
Responsibility

John English & Chris Ireland

If we asked you ...



What issues concern you most
when dealing with your new
students?

You might come up with ...

- FE related issues / lack of preparedness
- Attendance and time management
- Independent learning – reading & writing
- Commitment and participation
- Family issues
- Feedback on work
- Generally understanding what is expected
- Self-belief/disbelief?

Our particular cohort Issues



- Ethnic mix/Cultural issues
- Age mix
- Male domination
- Entry qualifications
- Numeracy issues!

Ethnicity

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
White	23	36	29	35	34
Asian	38	28	36	29	42
Black	3	6	6	10	14
Other	2	2	1	3	5
Not Given	7	5	2	0	1
TOTAL	73	77	74	77	96

Age

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
19 or less	50	55	56	54	69
20-24	16	18	13	18	20
25 & over	7	4	5	5	7
TOTAL	73	77	74	77	96

Gender & Qualifications



Gender	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Male	52	54	40	46	61
Female	21	23	34	31	35
Qualifications	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Non A-level	19	18	14	24	34
A-level	54	59	60	53	62
Of which ≤ 200 UCAS	29 (53%)	30 (51%)	26 (43%)	17 (32%)	22 (35%)

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- Problem – Perception of Accountancy

Accountancy is all about numbers

WRONG

Wrong but why?

Accountants have to : -

- produce financial statements
- provide information for decision makers
- be critical thinkers
- write lengthy reports
- present to clients
- meet the competencies required by graduate employers

Prior to 2006 we adopted a 'bolt on' approach to skills development:
Data from 2005

Week	Topic	Attendance
1	Note-taking	78
2	Reading	56
3	Academic Writing	48
4	Assignment Planning	50
5	Review	30
6	Reflection	20

In 2006 we were asked to lead a new module and to consider how to solve the following issues

- Personal development planning
- Academic skills
- Vocational skills
- Professional Body requirements
- Reflective writing
- Regular use of formative exercises
- Enhance the personal tutor system
- Encourage placements
- Shift student focus from numeracy

So overall a fairly easy problem to solve



But how to address the skills issue?



Ask any lecturer to teach skills you are likely to get a reaction

Inform the students that you are going to teach them skills and you will probably get this reaction

Students' attitude – negative

Basic Skills and Key Skills – 7, 11 etc

Skills, skills and yet more skills

They “think” they have enough

Employability Conference 2006



Whilst looking for alternatives to the question of skills we discovered the work of Kubler and Forbes (2006) – Student Employability Profiles

I attended the Peter Forbes presentation at the 2006 employability conference in which he demonstrated the employability profiles and to quote a common expression “the rest is history”

Our solution was to embed employability



Into

AIO

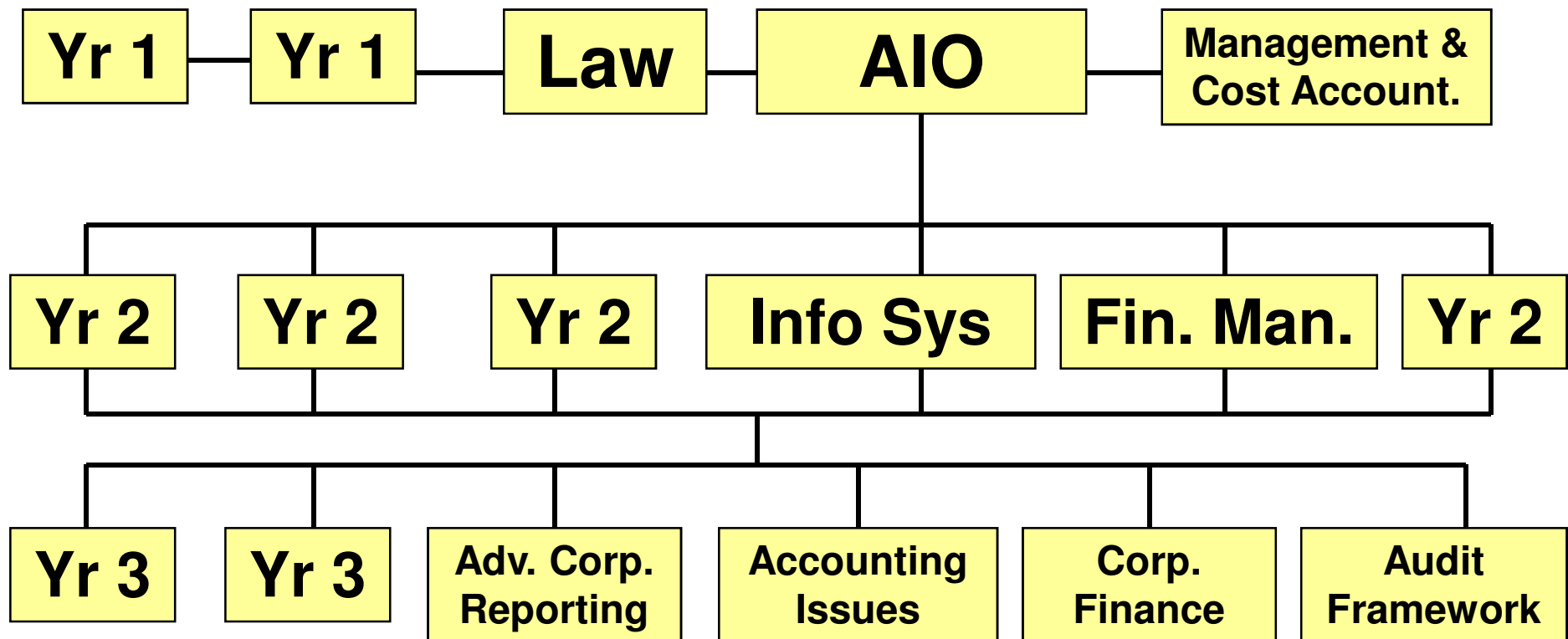
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Embedding employability but why?



- Bolting on skills had previously failed
- Embedding is confirmed by Wingate (2006) who suggests
 - “to enable students to achieve the complex level of learning, an embedded approach with a long term developmental approach would also be desirable.”
 - “that Universities should focus resources on educational developmental initiatives, which enable staff to effectively enhance student learning.”
- Brown(2009) claims “it is not enough for universities simply to teach the curriculum, employability skills must be foremost”.

But not in isolation



Assessments 50/50

- Portfolio of evidence based on the students'
 - Personal evaluation of the 27 employability competences at the beginning and at the end of the module
 - Consideration of their strengths and development opportunities and reflection on each exercise during the throughout the year
 - Final reflection on at least four key development areas as indentified through the module
- Group Presentation based on the module lectures linked to business related areas – structure, finance, accountancy, ethics, Government influence, supply and demand.

How did we develop the AIO program?



- Sandwich years were introduced in our degree program in 2002 when our first student went on a placement
- So we decided to use a theoretical placement company called G.R.Adco Ltd that the students would initially apply for a placement position.
- All students would be accepted by the company and given a series of interesting 'graduate' style tasks to participate in throughout the year.
- Placements have risen to around 25 students per year
- This focus on placement is supported by much literature

Literature



- Koh and Koh (1999) - National Service impact on male degree performance
- Gracia and Jenkins (2003) - final year performance and placement
- SurrIDGE (2008) developed and quantified these ideas in his research
- Ward (2006) - placements impact on the students' achievements

What sort of content have we included?



- Employability competences self review
- Essay writing
- Learning styles
- Individual Learning Profile
- CV and Covering letter exercises
- Professional Body Business Game
- Business Meeting and Report writing
- Strauss Pricing Exercise
- Flintoff Accounting Analysis
- University presentation

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Why did we develop the AIO program in this way?



- The Bedford Committee(1986) - Graduate inadequacies (supported by Patten and Williams 1990 and ICAA 1994)
- CPA Australia (2002) - equipping graduates for professional practice
- Bowden and Masters (1993) - classroom concepts and the workplace {supported by Crebbin (1997), Wiggin (1997), Yap (1997) and Yasukawa (1997)}.
- Key development areas indentified are critical thinking, communicating at various levels with various audiences, team working and solving business related problems.

Let's look at some of the exercises



- Business Meeting and Report Writing
- Strauss Pricing Exercise
- Flintoff Accounting Analysis

Business Meeting and Report Writing



- Students participate in a 'board' meeting to discuss and resolve a number of Company issues
- Typical competences that the students would explore are:

Organisational Understanding	Written Communication
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- However using the competency grids this could be extended to the following:

Adaptability/flexibility	Decisiveness
Commercial Awareness	Influencing
Interpersonal Sensitivity	Listening

Business Meeting and Report Writing



- What do the students think?
- What do the students say?
 - Judgement - In my History A-level ... I was advised not to make judgements and to stay unbiased, so I didn't support either side of an argument and this worked as I got an A-grade. In this exercise I realised that I must evaluate the arguments and come to a decision rather than sit on the fence. I am going to try to turn a past weakness into a strength'
 - Leadership – 'I had a disastrous experience at school when being forced to be team captain and we lost badly This task shows that I can do it (leadership) but I know I can develop my leadership skills even further'

Strauss Pricing Exercise

- Students must help a client price a new product and produce a series of budgets to inform the process
- Typical competences that the students would explore are:

Technical knowledge	Team Working
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- However using the competency grids this could be extended to the following:

Analysis	Financial Awareness
Commercial Awareness	Decisiveness
Leadership	Planning and Organising
Tolerance for stress	Image

Strauss Pricing Exercise

- What do the students think?
- What do the students say?
 - “When I discovered we had to do presentations my heart skipped a few beats and I was hit with nerves. Could I fake illness to get out of doing them? – the formative process ... has really helped me overcome the fears of presenting and I am finding ways of managing the stress.”
 - “Ever since starting school I have never enjoyed taking the lead or taking responsibility for a task. I felt quite pleased when my team asked me to be a team leader as this gave me the opportunity to get over my fears and take control of a situation”

Flintoff Accounting Analysis

- Students analyse a client's manual accounting records then attempt to persuade them to use software instead.
- Typical competences that the students would explore are:

Technical knowledge

Written Communication

- However using the competency grids this could be extended to the following:

Achievement Orientation

Professional Expertise

Organisational sensitivity

Creativity

Judgement

Influencing

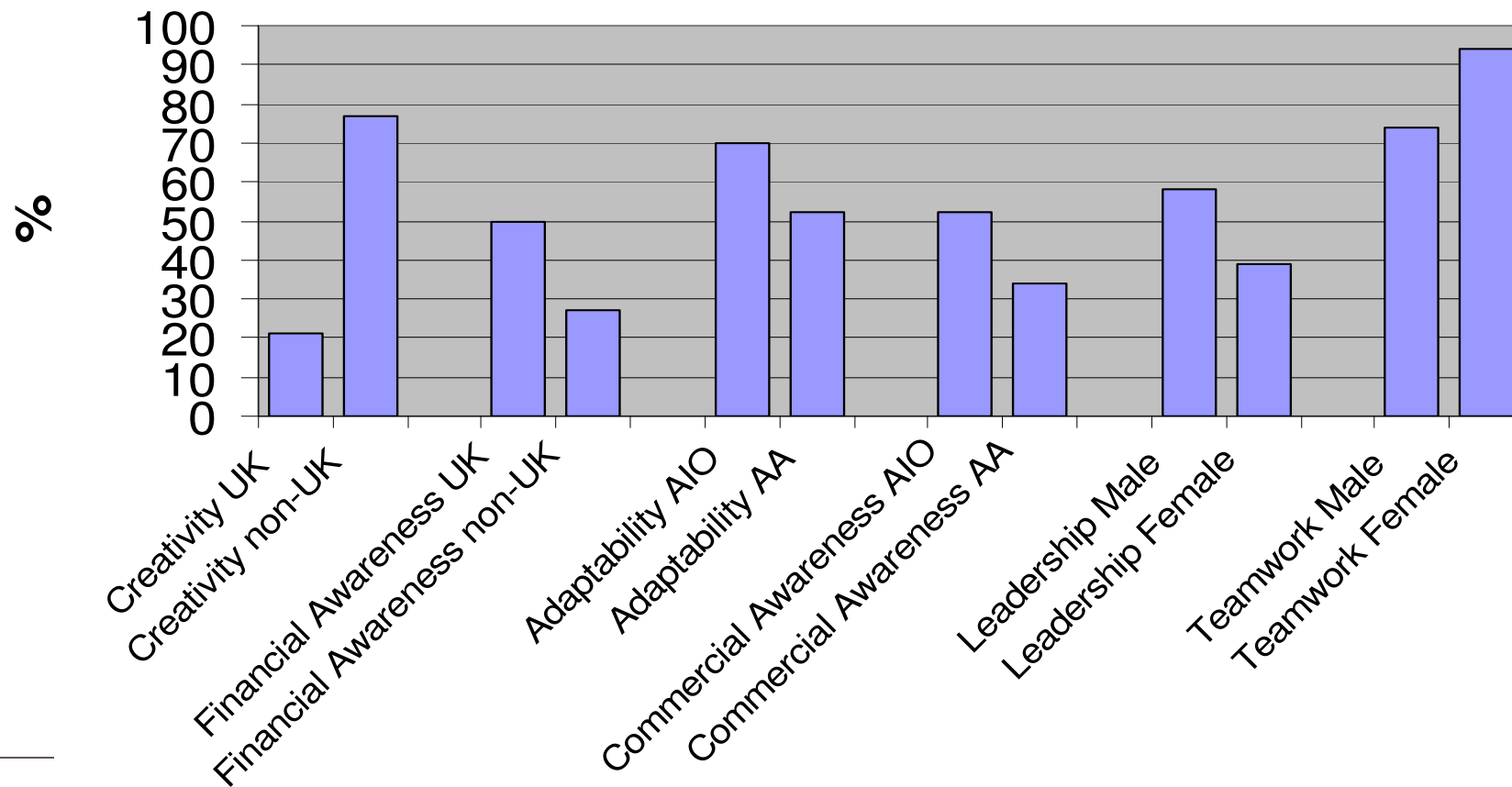
Flintoff Accounting Analysis

- What do the students think?
- What do the students say?
 - Influencing - “In the past I have never been good at influencing people’s decisions, but I really enjoyed this task of advising Andrew Flintoff to change and use electronic accounts”
 - Professional expertise - “When I was writing the letter I had to draw on things I had learnt in Financial Accounting ... I struggled with this and had to go back over the things I had learnt to enable me to apply it in a practical way”

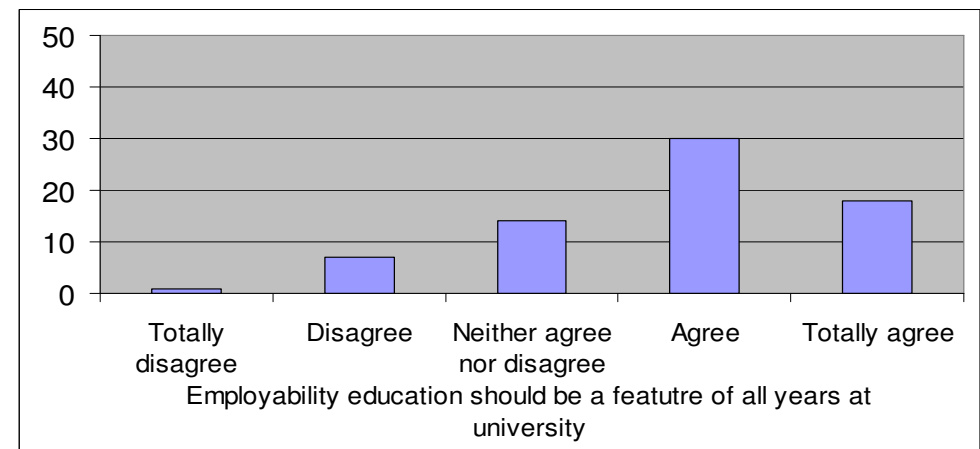
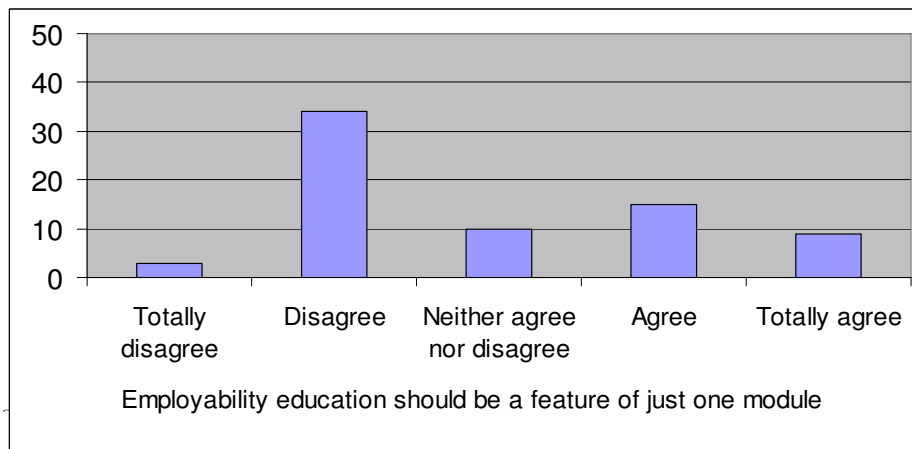
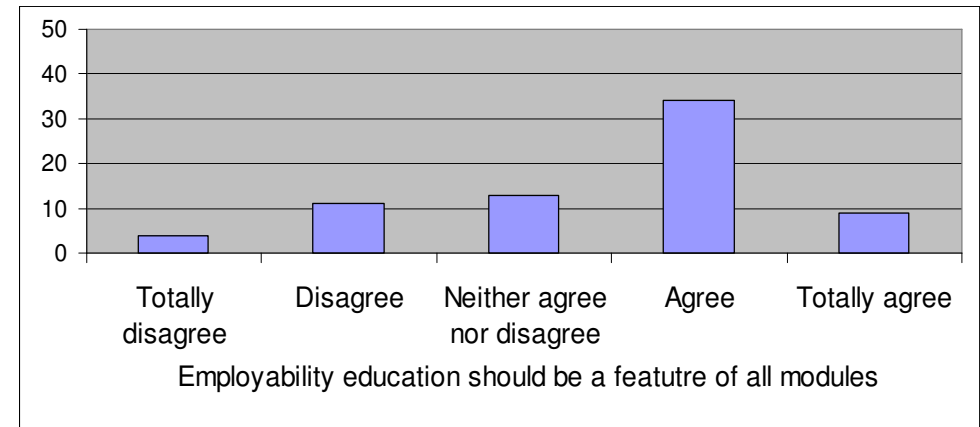
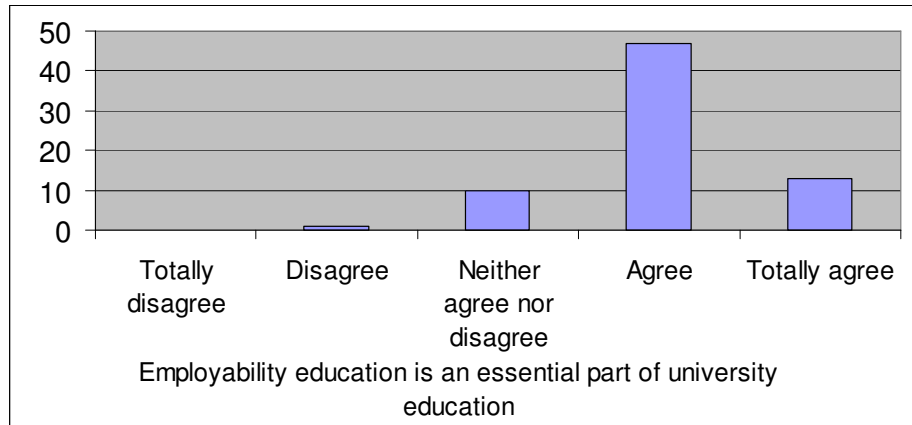
The way forward?

- Students are still developing we have only just started the process
- Employability competences need to be regularly revisited not just in AIO but across the whole course
- The current exercises can only address limited issues
- New materials and ways to gain engagement need to be developed especially for the those who need it most
- If we could wave a magic wand what areas would we ask to solve?
 - time management, planning and organisation, commercial awareness and life long learning

Selected Comparisons of Competency Importance Ratings



Employability in the curriculum



Are we getting there?

This is an extract the best portfolio produced from one of this year's cohort



- “...I have made some big **personal developments** since starting university... these I personally think **came from completing this portfolio** but I have to say it has not been easy. The portfolio has been one of the **hardest tasks** I have ever been a part of ...
- The best thing about this portfolio is that it **hasn't felt like an assignment** ... it has really **felt like a journey** where I opened myself up and 'identified' my deepest weaknesses to make myself better which is something I **never would have done**
- ... After everything I have been through with this portfolio I think that **the mark I will receive isn't important as the way it has changed me as a person is far more valuable.**”

Are we getting there?

This email extract was received from a 2009 graduate a few months ago:



- “I wanted to tell you about the management diploma ... It is obvious to me that my fellow graduates (on the scheme) did not have the benefit of these sessions at their universities. The diploma has a massive emphasis on personal development using regular self assessments and reflective logs Although I whinged at the time, the logs have made this task almost second nature to me ... My work is issued to my peers as exemplary; it is acknowledged by my mentors and reported back to the managers of the company.

Are we getting there?

This email extract was received from a 2009 graduate a few months ago:



- It would probably be a good time to say ... how valuable your module, words of wisdom and help was in getting me here – thank you John.
- I only wish that I could give back some words of wisdom in **how to get your students** to buy in to the **concept of PDP and soft skills** because they are definitely **the key to getting onto good graduate schemes** and becoming well rounded **professionals** – just like you said they would."

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