

Abstract 5C

Contrasting employability interventions

Presenter: Steve Draper, Psychology

This talk will compare and contrast some current employability related interventions at GU with a view to bringing out the virtues of each and identifying the underlying dimensions by which we might evaluate them. The aim is to stimulate discussion of the issues, and someone associated with each intervention has indicated that they will attend to further support this.

The longest running is Professional Skills in psychology; This is a fully embedded 10 credit compulsory module delivered in the third year that covers the theory and simulated practice of job interviews, personnel selection, and the production of a large portfolio. It is taught in a large lecture class, highly valued by students by the time they apply for jobs, and is clearly scalable; but it is not clear how it could be transferred to other disciplines. The Graduate Skills Programme is a college wide scheme focussing on generic skills, and despite being optional has already drawn in nearly 400 students in its first months. Employing Arts and Humanities took 15 students in its first year of being taught as a for-credit honours option. It approaches employability as in part an intellectual issue of understanding one's discipline critically and in relation to a wider context.

The dimensions for comparison to be used here are

- a) Scalability;
- b) Low level vs. high (graduate) level skills;
- c) Whether the content is discipline specific;
- d) Whether the scheme is delivered as part of the degree programme or as a "bolt-on".

In addition, a key concept is that HEIs need to support not one but two transitions: specialising from school to a single discipline, and then generalising from single-discipline to general skills. Lumping "study skills" and "employability skills" together may obscure the fact that these two are in important ways exactly opposite processes.

This talk explores different interpretations of graduate attributes (the conference's theme). In two of the three schemes discussed, students develop highly personalised responses which on one view is the essence of theme 4: Enquiry Based Learning (taking the same general aim as other students, but working out one's own route to it). Particularly in large enrolment schemes, there are technologies to support this (theme 5) e.g. Mahara for recording student reflection; besides the appropriateness of using Moodle to manage self-paced learning for non-embedded approaches to employability.

Outcomes: Think better about the multiple issues affecting the utility of employability related interventions