Introduction
The recent downturn in the British economy, has affected graduate employability (see Gibb & Hannon 2007). As more students enter Higher Education, competition increases for both choice of course selection, and institutions students choose to study at (see Rae 2007). Thus, there has become an increasing demand for universities, to ensure they equip newly graduated students with the skills and knowledge to compete in an increasingly competitive employment market. Therefore, this project sponsored by ESCalate, sought to determine the key skills employers are seeking, in undergraduate students. This research project explored the relationship between a specific enterprise project run by students on Liverpool Hope’s undergraduate Enterprise Education Module.

Background
In a bid to raise the level of entrepreneurial practice, esteem and innovation in schools. Liverpool Hope University formed a partnership with Liverpool Children’s Services, to run a Dragons Den type project with 13 different primary schools, aimed at introducing entrepreneurship to schools. Second year undergraduate education students worked in groups of 4/5 to run a 1 hour after schools club for 6-10 weeks. The students were given a minimal outline of enterprise and business skills, via lectures and workshops prior to the project starting and were expected to take sole charge of the after school clubs from week 6 of their module.

Theory
Whitely (1995: 6) model of employability suggests enterprising behaviour can be characterised by the following skills;
- Problem solving
- Numeracy and computer literacy
- Written communication
- Presentation and negotiating
- Self-awareness and confidence
- Initiative and creativity
- Assessing work and achieving results

Investigation
Five graduate employers were interviewed, in a bid to gain an understanding of the key skills they seek in undergraduate students. 25 students were asked to complete a pre-study questioner, to assess the level of entrepreneurial skills they possessed. Furthermore, participant observations were carried out on 5 student groups. These observations along side, employer interviews, were used to assess the key employability skills students utilized and developed while running their school clubs.

Findings
- Most employers considered excellent communication skills, independent problem solving, attention to detail and creative thinking, to be the key attributes they sought in undergraduates.
- Most undergraduate students cited, enthusiasm, confidence and knowledge of the subject area., as the key skills, they felt employers were seeking.
- Most employers considered excellent communication skills, independent problem solving, attention to detail and creative thinking, to be the key attributes they sought in undergraduates.
- All employers agreed that poor proof reading was the biggest factor’s in preventing students from gaining an interview.
- All graduate employers suggested, most undergraduate students were not equipped with the skills to prepare them for employment.
- Most students felt the skills they had gained through running the school clubs, improved their employability skills considerably.

Conclusion
Graduate employers felt most undergraduate students, were not equipped with the relevant skills, upon leaving university to gain employment. The graduate employers interviewed for this study, felt this problem could be over come if a board creative curriculum, were put into place. Therefore, the incorporation of enterprise activities becoming embedded, into the Higher Education curriculum, may assist students in gaining the key skills graduate employers are seeking. Furthermore, upon analysing the pre-study questioner’s, it was revealed that the key skills undergraduate students felt were considered most desirable by employers such as, enthusiasm, confidence and knowledge of the subject area. This was in contrast to graduate employers, who reported they considered independent problem solving to be the key skill most sought in graduates. During participant observations, the undergraduate students were seen to exhibit the key skills employers most desired. This would suggest the imbedding of enterprise activities into HE curriculum, enables undergraduate students, to gain the skills employers are seeking.

References: