Beyond the subject curriculum;

how we can offer students more than mere excellent subject knowledge and help them leave college or university better equipped for life

Dr Julie Anderson

Dr Helena Mitchell

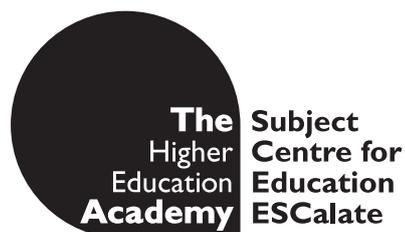# Beyond the subject curriculum;

how we can offer students more than mere excellent subject knowledge and help them leave college or university better equipped for life

Dr Julie Anderson

ESCalate, the Subject Centre for Education,
University of Bristol

Dr Helena Mitchell

Westminster Institute of Education,
Oxford Brookes University

The
Higher
Education
Academy

Subject
Centre for
Education
ESCalate

Acknowledgements:

Please note that an e-copy of this booklet, additional tables of data and further resources may be accessed through the ESCalate website, www.escalate.ac.uk/publications. To find it on the homepage please left click on resources and then go to escalate publications; go down to the Discussions in Education series where the booklet may be found with additional material and relevant urls on the right of the page under downloads.

Contents

For staff new to HE or FE or for any staff considering the employability agenda

This booklet and provides an argument and context for the employability agenda in Education in HE and FE, working with data from a project with Education students as well as some of the most recent literature, resources from workshops, conferences and events. As well as a short introduction to the topic, the booklet offers practical ideas and resources. It is therefore designed to be either read through or used piecemeal in conjunction with the ESCalate website (where additional resources and data are located) to provide support for those who have little or no experience of introducing employability into their teaching.

There is also a booklet for students by the same authors and based on the same work. This student booklet may be used by staff and many of the activities in that booklet not reproduced here would benefit from being used with a staff tutor/lecturer.

Both booklets are fully downloadable and photocopyable for classroom use. ESCalate requires appropriate acknowledgement of the authors and ESCalate on any resources copied. Where applicable, acknowledgement of the other sources of material, such as Higher Education Academy data and other Subject Centre resources should be clearly made.

The employability agenda is continually evolving and it is hoped that this booklet will also serve to stimulate colleagues to share their good practice and experience. Please get in touch with Julie.Anderson@bristol.ac.uk if you would be willing to share your own experiences for the benefit of colleagues. Articles published by ESCalate in the Newsletter attract a small payment for the contributors.

Introduction

How can we all enhance the student learning experience? Surely it is a given that when students come onto our programmes they will receive excellent subject content and will be well supported in their learning and education. But can we as lecturers, teachers and tutors offer more over and above our expert knowledge of a subject? Could we, for example, be helping them develop additional skills to help them gain better access to the careers they aspire to after their time with us?

"But our students all get jobs" I hear you cry! They may well do although from looking at First Destination statistics in general, whether they are all obtaining the graduate level posts they would ideally want may be another matter. In any case, although a clear one off definition of employability tends to be problematic, it is generally held to be about more than just employment. It is also about lifelong learning and an ever changing career which, as is well documented, is less and less likely to be within one company or post, or even one sector.

It is also a question of helping our students aim as high as they can. "Isn't that what the careers service offer?" Yes, most institutions boast highly skilled careers staff who are there to support the students too but with a few excellent exceptions, they tend to only be able to offer workshops and occasional support. What lecturers and teachers who work with the same cohort of students more regularly can offer is more sustained employability-focused work within courses, such as learning to work effectively as part of a team, leadership experience, regular PowerPoint and other presentation skills practise, that typically the one off careers service sessions cannot readily match.

If it sounds like additional work on top of an already hectic agenda then this booklet is not only offering a discussion of the issues involved but, for those interested, offers some useful resources and ideas to apply to existing programmes of work.

Background

With the widening participation agenda, the increasing numbers of students entering Higher Education, the introduction of student Personal Development Plans and the increasing focus of students as "customers" who may be concerned that courses will be instrumental in leading to a good career, there has been a growing debate about the issue of employability and its role within Higher Education and Further Education.

This debate is often presented as the polarisation of arguments about whether students should be studying purely for the knowledge and skills they will acquire on their degree course, as opposed to the ways in which the knowledge and skills acquired will enable them, as graduates, to gain successful employment (Knight, 2002:192). Within Education, the issue has been that, traditionally, courses have led to vocational qualifications. The majority of Education courses lead to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and their employability skills are clearly defined through the Standards for QTS. Not all students do achieve QTS, of course, and of those that do, many will move out of classroom teaching within three years (Robinson and Smithers, 2001). So it is readily argued that there is an employability issue even for those students.

Context

For the ESCalate project which underpins some of the content of this booklet, Dr Helena Mitchell and I worked with students on an Education course at a post -'92 institution in England. We wanted to discover how knowledgeable the students were about employability in general, and how far they thought that their course was enabling them to develop skills for employment.

We initially began by issuing questionnaires about their knowledge of employability to students on the course, and a self-selected group of students identified themselves as willing to participate in further research. This involved a card sort activity and then a focus group session with the two of us and the group of students.

In the focus group we asked them how our ongoing employability project work had impacted on them. We had already been in touch with local employers and were therefore able to relay their comments to the students too.

All who took part were undergraduate students, and included non traditional entrants who had left school some years earlier. Although the project was small scale, we suggest that most of the data we present here are readily applicable to Education students generally and across the different types of HE and FE institution.

Research Questions

The project was largely a scoping exercise and what we decided to explore was:

1.   What does employability mean to students and staff?
2.   Just how important do those teaching within Education believe it to be?

What does employability mean?

Definitions vary and are often confusing. In addition, the term employability has evolved considerably over recent years as it has become more centre stage.

In the literature, there is the idea of key skills (Dearing, 1997) notably communication, numeracy, ICT and 'learnacy' (the latter from Claxton 1998). Closely allied to these are notions of transferable or generic skills, learned in one context but able to be used, or 'transferred' to other contexts. Transferable skills may be further defined as context dependent or independent (Bridges, 1983). The development of such skills (which include communication, team work and problem solving, now embedded in University courses) does also challenge the notions that what undergraduates should be acquiring through their courses is primarily detailed subject knowledge and understanding only.

Our own argument is that there is no real reason why university courses should not enable students to acquire both subject knowledge and a range of key or transferable skills. Indeed the National Audit Office (2002) stated that almost all HEIs do build key employment skills into the curriculum. As Jenkins (1989) notes, universities and their staff 'do have a responsibility…to help students develop skills (and knowledge) that will be valued in the workplace….and that will allow them to manage their careers in an ever-changing employment market.' (SEDA Paper 89, 1989:2) This resonates with Sills' definition of employability:

It is not just about getting a specific job as a graduate but focuses on how their range of skills and qualities enhance the potential for success in a range of life-long employment, paid or unpaid, and including self-employment.
(Sills, Margaret. Power Point presentation, Academic director of the Subject Centre for Health, talking at the Burlington Group, London, Kings College, 22 July 2003)

As noted above, recent work on definitions of employability has become more complex and sophisticated, a meshing of different threads. The USEM (understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, students' self-theories and personal qualities and metacognition) model (Yorke and Knight, 2002, drawing on Bennett, 2000) brings together subject knowledge, a range of skills including key skills together with personal qualities and notions of metacognition. The latter is defined as a focus on student awareness of their own learning including reflecting on their own capability. It is also about students' metcognition, their ability to articulate what they know in a way that employers and others can relate to. Of course the precursor is an awareness of what they've acquired, through reflective learning. As they become increasingly aware of their own development, this must help in the development of others.

Hence:

Employability goes well beyond the simplistic notion of key skills, and is evidenced in the application of a mix of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience. (Yorke, 2004:11).

Knight and Yorke's emphasis on the complexity of the concept, and the need to avoid the terminology of competence as opposed to reflectiveness, highlight critical aspects of the argument. According to Moon, the notion of graduate employability has moved far beyond the skills agenda, with the focus upon reflection underpinning all elements of the student's programme (Moon, 2004). With the importance of reflection or 'reflective learning' central in a range of vocational programmes such as those in ITT, employability is far from being an addendum but more a central component through which student learning is defined. This leads us towards the definition that 'employability derives from the ways in which the student learns from his or her experiences.' (Yorke, 2004:6).

Contextualisation of employability

The notion of employability was provided with a major impetus by the publication of the 1997 Dearing Committee Report emphasising the need for programme specifications to state intended outcomes for student learning detailing not just knowledge and understanding but also the key skills of communication, IT, and learning how to learn. In addition, Dearing highlighted the need for graduates

to leave University with an understanding of methodologies and the ability to undertake critical analysis, as well as with subject specific knowledge.

Academic conceptions of employability have also, of course, been influenced by employer views of graduate attributes which highlight the importance of personal communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills amongst others. (Knight and Yorke, 2004, Mentor Communications Consultancy, 2002). More recently again, employers in the CIHE (Council For Industry and Higher Education) Policy Forum identified the following competencies as being specifically desirable:

- Cognitive skills – problem solving and information handling
- Generic competencies – communication, influencing, organisation and interpersonal skills
- Personal capabilities – desire for improvement, initiative
- Technical ability
- Business or organisation awareness
- Practical and professional skills – continuous professional development

(Website: http://www.cihe-uk.com/ – accessed 25 August 2005)

Although employers in general may view graduates as a 'key source of talent' who can bring great benefits to employment, the cost of recruiting and employing them is relatively high. According to the CIHE, employers want:

- Better targeting and more cost effective graduate recruitment
- Reduced risks in recruitment from a wider range of subject disciplines
- Better graduate retention through improved selection

The creation of ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team) was a HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) response to the shortfall identified in student acquisition of these skills according to both employers and HEFCE's own research. ESECT's approach, working within what was the LTSN (Learning and Teaching Support Network, now the 24 Subject Centres working within the Academy, York) has been to concentrate on embedding employability into the undergraduate curriculum. Within some Subject Centres the focus on employability very swiftly achieved a high profile with the creation of some practical resources. Some of these, made available freely across subject centres and through ESECT, have been useful as a basis for the data collection undertaken as part of this project, and the authors of this booklet gratefully acknowledge their source.

Employer views on employability have tended to emphasise the pragmatic, sometimes placed within a negative interpretation emphasising that which graduates do not have. An example is the communication and time management skills which employers say they require. Yorke's argument that this reflects cultural dissonance is interesting; even in vocational courses such as Initial Teacher Training there are variations in culture and expectation between school and university; how much greater is this dissonance likely to be in non vocational contexts? The support for induction provided by the employer must also play a central role in preparing graduates for success in employment.

Such variations in interpreting employability may also relate to the paradigms employed by individual disciplines, as well as the evolving nature of the concept of employability. Thus projects including the HEQE (Higher Education, Quality and Employability)

Project run through the DfEE during 1998-2000 demonstrated different approaches and interpretations of employability and PDP development, whilst in contrast the embedding of Key Skills within undergraduate degree courses across disciplines is described by Jenkins (in Fallows and Steven, 2000).

The ESCalate project context – background

It was within such variable notions of employability that this research project was undertaken. Non-vocational undergraduate courses in departments of education are becoming more common, and the project focused upon students enrolled on degree courses in Educational Studies and Early Childhood Studies at one post-'92 institution. Both courses are modular joint honours courses, hence both subjects have to be combined with another. The University undergraduate programme at the research institution provides for a large range of subject combinations across the institution, but many students choose to combine Education and Early Childhood Studies (sometimes but not necessarily as a precursor to formal teaching training).

As stated earlier, the project team of Helena and myself wanted to ascertain whether employability was a topic that mattered to undergraduate students and to academics. For the students, with their courses not leading to clear career paths upon graduation, did they demonstrate pre-determined ideas of what employment destinations they might choose on graduation? What were their views of the employability offered by their courses?

In the case of academics, did they appreciate the need for their students to consider employability issues through their course or did they feel that

should be covered by others, such as the careers service at the institution?

It should be mentioned here that one further factor relating to employability as an issue is the ease with which graduates are able to find employment within their chosen sector. Within education as with Health Sciences (Sills, 2003) there are many employment opportunities. These may not all necessarily be at graduate level however, and command graduate salaries. Destination data from recent graduates of both the courses used in this research showed some students on completion of their course clearly entering posts which did not require graduate level qualifications.

Research Design

The research, focused primarily on students, was designed to be a mix of quantitative and qualitative in order to gain the greatest understanding of student conceptions of employability. In addition we chose to research an eclectic mix of staff (both academic and support/administrative, familiar with working on degree programmes) views on employability.

Initially, with the students, data were collected through questionnaires that were designed to elicit student knowledge and understanding of the concept of employability together with their perception of how well their course was enabling them to develop a range of employability attributes. The questionnaires were based on those devised by the Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences based at the University of Plymouth, designed for use with undergraduate students studying these disciplines. We adapted them to ensure they included specific questions relating to the two courses on which the Education

students were enrolled. Of the 200 questionnaires given out to the undergraduates, 127 were returned, which represented a response rate of 63.5%. Only four of the returns were spoiled, through the misunderstanding of some questions. The detailed analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaires is presented on the ESCalate website (www.escalate.ac.uk); we just refer to the key findings here below.

The positive response to the questionnaires, and the data which they provided gave us a basis to investigate student views on employability and the employability potential of their courses further through focus group research. Seventeen students who had indicated in the questionnaires that they were willing to be involved in such further research were contacted and invited, by email, to participate. Four of those invited sent apologies, and of the remaining thirteen, three students attended. All three were mature students, two enrolled on joint honours in Education and Early Childhood Studies, and the third on a course comprising Education and another subject available in the modular programme. This initially seemed a disappointing turn out and may have reflected some uncertainty over venue over which we had no control but more likely, reflected something of student perception over the importance and relevance of the issue of employability to them. In fact, as it turned out, it seemed that particularly rich data were gathered as a result of it being a small, intimate group.

The focus group had been structured to begin with an employability card sort, enabling the students, working together, to decide on the their definitions of employability. The card sort was initially designed by the Biosciences Subject Centre and Generic Centre. The card sort provided a range of statements that define employability *(and may be*

seen on the ESCalate website and is produced in full in the accompanying student booklet), which participants are required to discuss and to categorise. Working in this way provides a more non threatening approach than some and yet enables discussion and reflection on employability issues. The exercise proved a useful ice breaker, and led to a follow up conversation with semi structured interview questions to probe further in particular how much they felt their course was preparing them for future employment. We audio-taped the discussion, having asked the participants for permission to do so.

The final student data collected for the project was a workshop presented by the University's careers centre staff, again utilising invitations given to students who had expressed an interest in being involved. Throughout the project we received strong and unequivocal support from the careers centre, for which we were most grateful.

Findings: questionnaires

The initial set of data was gathered, as mentioned above, through the distribution of 200 questionnaires of which we had 127 returned. The questionnaires were designed to establish student choices with regard to their courses, and to ascertain their knowledge of employability and its relevance to their employment opportunities after graduation. Students were provided with statements about the value and currency of their degrees and asked to state how they felt about each.

Conclusions from data gathered in the questionnaires

The majority of respondents thought that their degree would substantially improve their job prospects. In addition a majority felt that their degree qualified them for a range of job prospects/careers. Most however, also felt that they would need more vocational training after graduation.

Asked about whether they thought career guidance should be an important part of the curriculum, the vast majority mostly agreed. Just 18 said they either disagreed or were neutral about it.

Asked whether they believed the course should include skills useful for employment, most thought it should with only two saying they disagreed.

Data from the questionnaires therefore strongly supported the notion that Education and Early Childhood Studies students at this institution believed that their courses should help to prepare them for employment, with 74% stating that careers guidance should be part of their degree course, and 71% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their degree will qualify them for a range of job opportunities. This was a very useful starting point from which to examine further undergraduate understandings of employability.

The 127 students were also asked about the extent to which they expected to develop 25 named skills through their Education course. These named skills included oral presentation skills, teamwork and problem solving as well as 'education subject knowledge', which arguably should not be defined as a skill. The list was again based upon the questionnaire from the Subject Centre for

Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences; the identified 'skills' adjusted to reflect those contained within the learning outcomes specified amongst the transferable skills for the undergraduate modular course at the University.

The respondents provided clear data, quantifying the extent to which they expected to develop these 'skills' to a **greater, moderate, lesser** or **'not'** extent. As previously there were no more than four 'spoilt' or missed votes for any of the 25 named skills.

Again, the data are presented on the ESCalate website in detail but in summary it appears that both career planning and reflection are not considered by student respondents to be particularly well developed as part of their two courses at that time.

The student replies from the card sort

The card sorts offered opportunity to explore some of the student perceptions in more depth.

Positives
Statements from the cards that were definitely agreed with, sometimes strongly, included that employability is:
- For undergraduates for all ages
- Skills for life
- About creating a learning environment which develops student employment related attributes
- What employers want
- About equality of opportunity
- About helping students recognise and develop their strengths and weaknesses and
- About meeting the economic requirements of society

Also noted was that employability is about creating a learning environment which enhances student skills.

Also broadly positively accepted was that employability is about:
- Initiating CPD activity with students
- Academics understanding how to help their students become employable
- Getting a work placement and learning about the world of work
- Covering key skills and having the right skills for the market place
- Meeting standards set by professional bodies
- What the paying customers expect
- Benefiting from part time and casual and voluntary jobs.

Neutral statements
Things that the students were generally more ambivalent about, stating that they neither disagreed or agreed, were that employability was about keeping the graduate market buoyant, a challenge to the traditional concepts of HE, the job of the HEI about encouraging involvement in student clubs and societies and 'social engineering'.

Disagreed with
Things the students most strongly disagreed with were the statements that stated that employability is:
- The responsibility of the students union
- The responsibility of the careers service
- For the less capable students

They also disagreed or were neutral about the suggestion that employability is about compensating for disadvantage, the latest fad or not related to the academic process.

There was much uncertainty about the statement that employability is part of the contract between the HEI and the student.

Interesting statements
Statements that resulted in a particularly broad range of responses – from strongly agree to disagree were those that said employability is the responsibility of the individual student; about doing a vocational course; about citizenship; addressing the agenda of the current government.

Findings: Focus Group

Interestingly, the focus group definitions of employability did not coincide with those identified above from the card sort. In fact, there was some confusion about what was implied by the term 'employability', as well as an admission that career planning was far from a priority for these students. This was reflected in the comment below:

Personally I don't know exactly what I'm going to do when I leave so I can't say yes they are going to help me or no they're not. They are helping me as a person giving me better skills as a person, to understand a way of looking at different things and respecting other peoples' wishes more I think

We asked:
What do you consider a generic employability skill?
I think quite a few transferable skills I have got here, definitely.

Could you name, to be more specific, something you feel you've got now that you perhaps didn't have when you started with the course?
Patience. No, I think also that I……. time management.

Further discussion about future career options produced the following response:

I can't make that decision until I know I'm going to get my degree. The two just don't slot together for me at the moment.

This could be attributed to the fact that the group were all mature students and all commented on the expansion of HE, leading to more opportunities for non-traditional students such as themselves.

Moving on, a fascinating comment came when we were told:

We (two of the focus group students) were talking to a first year the other day and talking to her about her modules and we ended up talking about how we got here and she was saying the same thing…she was sure somebody was going to come up to her and say look we've made a real big mistake and you really shouldn't be here.

This led to some discussion about confidence and the skills that mature students bring to the workplace when they graduate. Such statements might be attributable to mature student angst but they also indicate that there may be some issues about the 'learning culture' (Knight, 2002:164) of the courses, which may need to be further addressed and we make brief reference to self efficacy issues later in this booklet.

Discussion

An appropriate learning culture should surely be supportive of student progression which leads through their course towards graduation. The use of PDP (Personal Development Planning) is supposed to help students to take control of their own learning and to identify their goals beyond successfully gaining credit from individual modules. They may also indicate an awareness (conscious or otherwise) that factors leading to success in work and life include those which may be described as 'non-cognitive' (Knight,2003), including attributes such as self-esteem, behaviour and peer relations.

Issues about culture continued to surface during the focus group, with all three students stating that, when they were younger, higher education had never seemed an option for them. For their children however, it was different. One told us:

> *My five year old she told me the other day she was going to University.*

Issues about future careers had been avoided. When this topic was pursued, one respondent gave the following reply:

> *I'm just constantly changing my mind depending on which module I'm doing. And I'm just constantly changing which career I'm going to go for.*

This last comment emphasises the difficulties which can be particularly attributed to employability issues on modular programmes (Yorke and Knight, 2004) in which 'slow learning' (Claxton, 1998) such as critical thinking competence cannot necessarily be gained within one module. It also resonates with evidence provided by graduates through the First Destination Survey, accessed through the careers department at the university where the data were collected, which stated that students do not engage with their careers service early enough in their programmes of study and limit their opportunities for personal and skills development.

Indeed, this failure to engage with careers issues sufficiently early was reinforced through our third tranche of data collection with students which involved the careers service presenting a workshop on employability to which all students on the Education and Early Childhood Studies programmes were invited. The workshop programme was based upon the data gathered from the questionnaires and the focus group. Individual email invitations were sent to all students who were also offered a complimentary tea as part of the workshop which

we had (naively) hoped would encourage attendance. Of more than 200 students invited, only three attended (two of the focus group attendees, and one other, a traditional student).

With the two members of the careers department, and ourselves, we outnumbered the student participants! Again, this we felt was a finding worth noting: that employability as an issue would seem to be very low down on the students list of priorities.

Employability and staff colleagues

The failure to engage with employability as an issue was mirrored by some of the responses from a group of 13 administrative and academic staff who were asked to complete the employability card sort on a separate occasion, that of the ESCalate Subject Centre Awaydays event for that year.

Some told us that they found it an interesting exercise, appreciated the activity and felt it helped them consider the issue in a fresh way. Interestingly this was a more typical response from the administrative staff as it became obvious that in general, academic staff did not perceive employability as a particularly important issue for students in education departments.

In tandem with the response from students therefore, it seemed clear that considerably more work would need to be undertaken in order to raise the profile of employability – with both students and academics.

Conclusions

In answer to our original questions, the data suggest that the degree courses in the institution used for the data collection are having variable success in equipping their graduates for employment, both upon graduation and later. In addition, it became clear that the term 'employability', as in the literature, had a multiplicity of meanings for our respondents, but few of those meanings are particularly engaging for them.

Despite the low level of student interest at the time, the continued increase in numbers in HE required by government must impact on the availability of employment opportunities on graduation. Grice and Gladwin, working on employability within another discipline, highlight the issue thus:

> *as participation in higher education continues to increase, new graduates may find the employment market more competitive. Consequently, students will need to be confident that their investment in higher education, and the associated debt, will be of benefit to them and they may be influenced in their choice of institution and subject by the career prospects on graduation. (Grice and Gladwin, 2003:4)*

As a follow up to this initial data gathering, materials relating to employability were embedded within the first year of the undergraduate courses at the institution and further data collection on student response was initiated. This is aimed to highlight student and staff awareness of the need to consider University courses as part of a lifelong learning perspective.

Project relevance for programmes in 2006/7

Assuming you are a new lecturer, or are someone currently not doing anything specific in terms of employability and PDP (Personal Development Planning) at present within your course, how might you start in the light of our project and literature?

If thinking programme or school wide, an employability card sort may be a good starting place to gauge opinions and start discussion, as we found in the project outlined above.

Card sorts have been increasingly used in learning and teaching in higher education and business over the past two decades and when starting to research this issue, working with the then Generic Centre and ESECT, now all part of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Helena Mitchell and I used the card sort extensively within the project and with colleagues away at workshops and seminars, most recently at the UCET conference in November 2005. They always stimulated discussion and were a useful tool not least because of their capacity to raise awareness about aspects of employability which colleagues may not previously have considered. They also encourage:

- Reflection;
- Discussion with others on differing as well as similar views;
- Reviewing of opinions and priorities in the light of discussion.

The card sorts originally used by colleagues from the various Subject Centres including ESCalate for Education, have been developed and are now more sophisticated. Some of the card sorts we would recommend may be accessed online.

- Go to www.heacademy.ac.uk/1669.htm for: What is Employability? Staff development tool for higher education colleagues considering employability for the first time (for staff)
- Go to www.bio.ltsn.ac.uk/issues/employability/ CardSort/index.htm for: Electronic Employability Card Sort for Students includes guidance for tutors (developed by the Higher Education Academy Bioscience Subject Centre)
- Go to www.physsci.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/ employability/notes.pdf for: Electronic Employability Card Sort for Students includes guidance for tutors (developed by the Higher Education Academy Physical Sciences Subject Centre)
- Sheffield Hallam University has produced an adaptation of the Academy Card sort; for more information go to www.heacademy.ac.uk/2560.htm

Some colleagues have also used employability audits. Professor Ian Hughes of the Higher Education Academy Bioscience Subject Centre produced an audit tool that Helena and I used at an event. It can be easily adapted for use in Education to help with curriculum development and can be accessed through the subject centre website at www/bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/issues/ employability/resources.htm

Employability in the curriculum

ESCalate works across three sites and our colleagues at St Martins College, Lancaster, the site that currently supports the ESCalate ITE work (Initial Teacher Education) now has employability embedded in their courses having created a *Skills & Employability Spine*. An edited version of what they

have produced is reproduced here by kind permission as one example of an approach that may be a useful one to adopt or adapt.

This spine attempts to integrate a range of key generic elements essential to the delivery of modern undergraduate programmes in a way that secures a consistent student experience and avoids unnecessary duplication, for example of lifelong learning skills and techniques of analysis and enquiry.

Programmes at this HEI specify mandatory modules to include the requirements of the *Skills & Employability Spine* with an element of student choice included.

The rationale behind this is that the student body in HE is becoming increasingly diverse in response to widening participation strategies and there is therefore an obligation on HEIs to ensure that all students are able to succeed in the programmes to which they have been admitted. In addition, graduates from lower socio-economic groups are more likely than affluent students to get poorer quality jobs and it is increasingly recognised that graduate employability is based on a complex 'set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes' (ESECT definition of 'employability' from Yorke 2004). Thus, improving the achievement of diverse student groups also requires HEIs to consider how graduates can be equipped with the skills and attributes to be effective in the changing world of work.

These linked imperatives form the rationale for the Skills and Employability Spine. The underpinning theory is that successful strategies are those that increase students' personal networks, contact with tutors and sense of belonging.

Outcomes of the Skills and Employability Spine

Upon completion of the relevant modules, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the skills for effective learning in higher education
- Seek, find, evaluate and use information appropriate for the level of the programme
- Use information technology confidently as appropriate for further study and future employment
- Identify their priorities, constraints, values, skills, motivations and personality in the context of career decision-making*
- Demonstrate knowledge of work and study opportunities for graduates that takes into account the learner's subject, the structure of the graduate labour market and an understanding of how to maximise their opportunities within it*
- Demonstrate knowledge of the main information resources for careers and an ability to use these to research opportunities*
- Demonstrate the ability to articulate the general, subject specific and transferable skills within their programme and the sorts of skills that can be developed from other activities including an understanding of how skills deficits can be addressed, and an appreciation of the importance that employers place upon skills and attributes*
- Make and implement career decisions, and review and adapt developing plans*
- Demonstrate knowledge of the recruitment and selection methods used by graduate opportunity providers and be able to present themselves and their skills and abilities to opportunity providers*.

* Adapted from the Learning outcomes for careers education in: AGCAS Careers Education Task Group (2005) Careers Education Benchmark Statement AGCAS.
   http://www.agcas.org.uk/quality/docs/careers_education_bs/cebs_text_final_Dec_05.pdf (accessed Jan 2006)

Skills and Employability Curriculum

	Cognitive Skills	Generic Competencies	Personal Capabilities	Technical Ability	Business / Organisation Awareness	Practical elements
Competency descriptors	• Work with information • Handle a mass of diverse data • Assess & draw conclusions • Identify and solve problems	Transferable key skills: • Work with others • Communication skills • Number skills • Planning & organising • Influencing skills • Interpersonal sensitivity	• Self-awareness • Independent learning • Initiative • Adaptability/ flexibility • Decision making • Leadership • Tolerance of stress	Ability to apply and exploit information technology: • ICT skills • Knowledge of technology relevant to field of study	• Commercial awareness • Understanding of organisational culture • Financial awareness	Critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice, reflecting and reviewing own practice: • Professional development & expertise • Professional image
Level 1	• Information fluency • Academic reading & writing • Referencing	• Time management • Working with others • Oral communication (group discussion/oral presentation) • Written communication (essay writing/report writing) • Basic number skills/interpretation of data	• Identifying strengths and weaknesses • Learning styles • Personal motivation	• Basic ICT skills • Using the Internet to seek relevant information • Use of Blackboard for on-line tutorials and group forums	• Orientation within SMC • Personal financial management • Work placement (if applicable) • Preparation for work placement	• Awareness of professional practices in relevant field of study

Skills and Employability Curriculum

	Cognitive Skills	Generic Competencies	Personal Capabilities	Technical Ability	Business / Organisation Awareness	Practical elements
Level 2	• Research skills • Critical thinking & Analysis	• Working with others • Interpersonal skills • Problem solving • Planning & managing small projects • More complex forms of communication	• Reflect on learning and achievement • Action planning • Explore career options • Decision making • Leadership skills	• Further development of ICT skills • Maintain knowledge of key trends in technology as it relates to field of study	• Fieldwork learning / work experience • Organisational culture understanding and sensitivity	• Reflect on outcome of professional practice • Identify develop-mental needs • Professional image
Level 3	• Extended academic writing • Use scholarly reviews & primary sources	• Communication to specialist & non-specialist audiences • Managing people & resources • Decision making in complex contexts • Sensitivity, openness to diversity	• Project planning & leadership • Initiative / personal responsibility • Effective self management • Tolerance of stress	• Experience of using modern technologies • Maintain knowledge of key trends in technology as it relates to field of study	• Links with employers • Preparation for employment or further study • Job search strategies • Recruitment & selection skills	• Ability to undertake training of a professional nature • Ability to identify breadth & depth of professional knowledge needed

Recent research has identified a range of course design features that contribute to graduate employability (Knight & Yorke 2003): adopting approaches to learning that develop students' capacity to find things out for themselves and learn independently; the opportunity to develop and practice subject specific and generic skills in challenging situations across the learning environment; embedded and frequent opportunities to reflect on their learning and actions; work experience; learning environments that give students a sense of control over, and relevance in, what they are learning; the opportunity for careers education and guidance and close involvement with employers.

In addition, there is a strong emphasis in the research literature (e.g. Ward 2001) on ensuring that skills and employability are embedded in programmes such that they have meaning and relevance for both students and staff. In other words, students develop skills and capability for graduate employment in the context of their own subject discipline.

Module for employability

In addition to the above example of one way of working – from ESCalate associates at St Martin's College – and as a direct result of the ESCalate project outcomes discussed earlier, we were concerned that employability as an issue was being recognised as increasingly important across the sector but that many students and staff in HE and FE were still failing to engage with it effectively.

One reason given was a lack of resources and so ESCalate linked up with the Physical Sciences Subject Centre to repurpose some work they had done with their own careers service at University of Hull, and together produce an employability module.

This free resource may be used by students themselves and/or used by you as staff to import into your programmes of work. It is an interactive course with personal study dimensions which aims to be flexible, accessible and engaging.

This repurposed module is relevant to anyone wanting to enhance their career in Education broadly defined, regardless of age, level and mode of study.

The module is:
Comprehensive: encompassing where the student is now in terms of their perception of their skills and experience and taking them forward to look at their possibilities.

Task-based: a course of multiple parts, most sub-sections involve reflection or an appropriate small research activity.

Augmented by web resources, software, paper-based resources and we hope, an interactive discussion board.
It is made up of 14 sections.
They include:

Section 1– Where are you now?
Tasks to assess where you are in relation to choosing your next step after graduation.

Section 2 – Where do you want to be?
Information on employment, postgraduate courses and other options.

Section 3 – Getting the balance right
Information and advice about aspects of jobs that can impact on life outside of work.

Section 4 – Skills audit
Exercises to encourage you to discover where your skills and motivations lie.

Section 5 – Skills development

Work on improving presentation skills; advice on how to go about improving other skills.

Section 6 – Searching for opportunities

Information on where to look to find information about job vacancies or postgraduate courses or work placements.

Section 7 – Building up your contacts

Information about who you can get in touch with in order to find out more about your chosen career, from your careers adviser to people already doing the job that you are interested in.

Section 8 – Doing your research

Information that you need to find out about an employer or course and how to obtain this.

Section 9 – Making applications

Different styles of CVs and application forms and receive advice on how to sell your skills effectively. There is an activity to create two styles of CV and the opportunity to practice filling in an online application form.

Section 10 – Interviews

Advice about the interview process along with some videos of sample interviews.

Section 13 – Application outcomes

Information and advice for both successful and unsuccessful applicants.

Section 14 – Where to go from here

Information about how to organise the final year in order to be ready for the next step upon graduation.

As of summer 2006, it is available as a downloadable zip file that can be imported into Blackboard Learning System™ (Release 6). We aim to have versions compatible with WebCT and Moodle in due course. We also provide direct access to the material in a form that does not require a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) system. This will be available on the ESCalate website from late summer 2006.

Personal Development Planning

Strongly linked with employability issues is PDP and so after referring to it briefly earlier, we return to it now.

A definition of PDP which has become widely accepted is that it is a structured, supported process undertaken by an individual:

- To reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and
- To plan for their personal, educational and career development.

Institutions were to aim to have transcripts available for students for the academic session 2002–3 and to have provided PDP opportunities for all students by 2005–6. However, although all institutions should therefore now have a PDP policy in place, we are aware that this has not always happened, for whatever reasons.

ESCalate therefore commissioned Janet Strivens, from University of Liverpool and Senior Associate Director, Centre for Recording Achievement[1] to write about the latest PDP developments.

---

[1] *CRA is an educational charity originally established – as a project – in 1991 whose purpose is 'to promote awareness and understanding of recording achievement processes as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment'*

She told us that many institutions have chosen to embed the PDP process into the curriculum through designated credit-bearing modules. Other institutions see PDP as an overarching entitlement best delivered through a tutorial or mentoring system.

The CRA noted that HEI staff saw the PDP initiative as being essentially about supporting the development of the self-identity of the learner. The model of PDP which received widespread support from practitioners was as a process of:

- Thinking ahead and planning, using both critical rational thinking and imagination
- Doing something and being more aware of what is being done
- Recording these observations and perceptions
- Reviewing/reflecting on actions and their effects
- Evaluating and making judgements about self and the effects of own actions
- Engaging in conversation with a teacher/tutor and/or peers in order to discuss/challenge experiences, perceptions and judgements
- Using this personal knowledge as a resource to inform future actions.

(Please see www.escalate.ac.uk/2619 for Janet's full report of which the above is an edited version).

If your institution is still implementing a PDP policy, the University of Wolverhampton is one institution that has developed an online e-portfolio (www.pebblepad.co.uk) that you may like to look at

for further ideas and more information. The ESCalate Summer 2006 Newsletter has an article about its use written by students with their tutor Julie Hughes (www.escalate.ac.uk/2610) with a further article planned in the Autumn. Please as ever keep as eye on the ESCalate website for details. In addition, the Higher Education Academy has produced Guides for Busy Academics which focus on PDP and these are available from www.heacademy.ac.uk/PDP.htm

Student Profiles

The Academy's Subject Centres – including ESCalate – have participated in the compilation of Student Employability Profiles working with the Academy York and CIHE (referred to earlier in relation to employer data). Claire Rees, the senior careers advisor at the University of York, has produced an informative guide about this work which may be accessed through the Academy website and a list of all of the profiles which have been produced and links to the relevant Subject Centre websites can be viewed at www.heacademy.ac.uk/2174.htm

Claire writes that each profile identifies skills that can be developed through the study of a particular discipline based on subject benchmark statements developed by UK higher education academic communities and copyrighted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). These skills have then been mapped against input from CIHE Employer membership regarding the employability skills, competencies and attributes which they valued when recruiting.

The guide is designed to facilitate the use of the profiles by suggesting ways in which they can be used to:

- Inform curriculum design
- Support the delivery of employability skills development in undergraduate students
- Enhance the understanding of prospective students and their parents as to the value of degree level study
- Communicate more effectively with employers (especially non-cognate) in a shared language, the skills that students are likely to have developed with degrees in particular subjects.

The guide is designed to act as a starting point and to inspire staff to consider how you can adapt the material for your own use. Case studies are used to illustrate 'real-life' use of the material and suggest different applications. The reader is also signposted to other resources available from the the Academy Subject Centres, the Academy York website and other relevant organisations.

For Education, Peter Forbes headed up the profile work – working with myself who in turn was advised by Stephen Ward, Head of Education and Childhood Studies at Bath Spa University and BESA (British Education Studies Association) colleagues. Together we took the example of a student in Education Studies as a fairly typical education student.

The full profile created with tables of competencies etc may be found on the ESCalate website. As a shorter example, the list below demonstrates what the Education Studies student is likely to graduate with.

Firstly of course, they should have the ability to manage their careers – but also:

- Understand theoretical knowledge and research evidence about the processes of learning, including some of the key paradigms and their impact on educational practices
- Understand aspects of cultural and linguistic differences and societies, politics and education policies, economics, geographical and historical features of societies and contexts, and moral, religious and philosophical underpinnings and their effects on learning
- Understand their own and other education systems, and the underpinning value systems
- Understand the complex interactions between education and its contexts, and relationships with other disciplines and professions
- Analyse complex situations concerning human learning and development in particular contexts, including their own learning
- Accommodate new ideas concerning globalisation relating to education systems and issues such as social justice, sustainable development, peace education, social inclusion and the knowledge economy
- Provide well argued conclusions relating to these main global issues
- Reflect on their own value systems, development and practices
- Question concepts and theories encountered in their studies
- Communicate and present oral and written arguments

- Use Information and Communication Technology
- Interpret and present relevant numerical information
- Work with others, as a result of the development of interpersonal skills, to demonstrate the capacity to plan, to share goals, and work as a member of a team
- Improve their own learning and performance, including the development of study and research skills, information retrieval, and a capacity to plan and manage learning, and to reflect on their own learning.

Education Studies is concerned with understanding how people develop and learn throughout their lives. It facilitates a study of the nature of knowledge, and a critical engagement with a variety of perspectives, and ways of knowing and understanding, drawn from a range of appropriate disciplines. There is diversity in Education Studies degree courses but all involve the intellectually rigorous study of educational processes, systems and approaches, and the cultural, societal, political and historical contexts within which they are embedded.

Graduates in Education Studies will be able to participate effectively in a number of constantly changing discourses around values and personal and social engagement, and how these relate to communities and societies.

Education Studies provides an academic foundation for practitioners in formal and informal contexts and phases of education, and provides a framework for understanding aspects of human development. These contexts and phases encompass a diverse range of people including community workers, education administrators, health workers, human resource managers, those who care for and educate children of all ages, librarians and information management professionals and other professional educators.

The majority of education graduates enter teaching, whether directly after their degree or following a few years' experience in other jobs. Jobs providing support for children, young people and adults are also popular options. Examples include advice worker, careers adviser, counsellor, education administrator, lecturer, learning mentor, social worker, training and development manager and youth worker.

As stated earlier, the above is taken from a profile for a student on a particular course or programme but we hope may be a useful starting point for adapting for any Education course and in due course other profiles for other education degree courses may be available.

Self Efficacy

In the student booklet we offer an edited copy of the ESECT self-efficacy questionnaire which we mention here as it is a further resource staff may also find useful.

We included it because a component of employability is self-belief that one can affect situations through one's actions. Evidence from pilot work from an ESECT project indicated that there are a number of students whose self-efficacy could possibly be enhanced. An edited/adapted self-efficacy questionnaire (SEQ) is offered in the student booklet as an individually-focused activity but it could easily be used as a group activity with a tutor/seminar group of students. The questionnaire should help the students in developing their self-knowledge and as we note in the student booklet, the value of this could be enhanced if you as staff can offer to discuss the outcomes with them. Further information is in the student booklet and more on the background of the work may be found is on the web page www.heacademy.ac.uk/2313.htm.

Conclusions

The ESCalate project which started the work that underpins this booklet suggested that on the whole students undersell themselves and are too modest. This may be regarded as an admirable trait in some respects but when it comes to students obtaining suitable jobs after their graduation, it may not be helpful in an increasingly competitive market. What was also very obvious from the project was that students typically do not engage with employability issues early enough.

We hope that this publication will help you identify what your course/programme may be equipping your students for so that you might be able to highlight this to students and help them develop and enhance their skills and abilities further from the start.

As we stated earlier, the Education studies profile contains many elements that will be common to other education courses and we hope will aid reflection in terms of your own course.

The online module is also offered to be used as a whole or in part and there are many other resources – from the card sorts to the various questionnaires that are available to use and are easily accessible through the website links given.

We would strongly encourage you to start thinking about this as early as possible. One quote from the careers services staff at our project institution was that:

> *Feedback from graduates…indicates that they fail to engage …early enough in their academic programmes. This probably limits their use of opportunities for personal and skills development, may restrict their vision of the career opportunities available and means that they don't give sufficient time to how to communicate their skills and aptitudes to prospective employers.*

The employability agenda is ever changing. This booklet is aimed at new or recent staff new to the issues it raises – but further resources are always being developed and we would particularly welcome Education staff with more experience getting in touch and offering support. A new ESCalate 'Experience Exchange register' is currently being created to facilitate the more effective exchange of expertise and consultancy and we would particularly welcome colleagues offering employability knowledge getting in touch and going on the register so that there is more sharing of good and excellent practice and therefore a better student experience offered to our students.

References and Bibliography

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service (AGCAS) www.agcas.org.uk

Association of Graduate Recruiters www.agr.org.uk

Bennett, N., Dunne, E. and Carre, C., (2000) Skills Development in higher education and employment Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press

Blackford, S. Burdass, D. and Assinder. S. (2006) 'Student Employability – whose job is it?' *Centre for Bioscience Bulletin 17, Spring 2006* pp6-7 (from Education Committee, Bioscience Federation)

Brennan, J. (2003) book review of Paechter, C., Preedy, M., Scott, D. and Soler, J.

(Eds) (2001) *Knowledge, Power and Learning London*: Paul Chapman in Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning 5 (2)

Bridges, D. (1983) *Transferable Skills: a philosophical perspective* Studies in Higher Education, 18 (1) 43-51

Centre for Recording Achievement www.recordingachievement.org.uk

Claxton, G., (1998) *Hare Brain Tortoise Mind,* London, Fourth Estate

Cooper, S. (2003) *Skills For Success: The Personal Development Planning Handbook.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Cottrell, S. (2003) *Skills For Success: The Personal Development Planning Handbook.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) www.cihe-uk.org.uk

Crust, G. www.bestvalueHE.org.uk resources for students and staff

Dearing, R. *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education,* 1997 http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/dearing

Denzin, N, K. (1989) *The Research Act* Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall.

Doyle, M (undated) *A reflexive critique of learner managed learning* http:www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002420.htm accessed 04/06/2004

ESCalate – the Subject Centre for Education, www.escalate.ac.uk

Fallows, S. and Steven, C. (2000) *Integrating Key Skills in Higher Education,* London, Kogan Page

Fenwick, T. Questioning the Concept of a Learning Organisation in Paecheter, C., Preedy, M., Scott, D., & Soler, J. (Eds) (2000) *Knowledge, Power & Learning* London: Paul Chapman

Gough, D. A., Kiwan, D., Sutcliffe, S., Simpson, D. & Houghton, N. (2003) *A systematic map and synthesis review of the effectiveness of personal development planning for improving student learning: provisional summary* published on-line by the LTSN Generic Centre: www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre accessed 04/06/2004

Graduate Prospects www.prospects.ac.uk

Grice, D. and Gladwin, R. (eds.) (2003) *Developing Employability Skills* LTSN Physical Science Subject Centre

Hawkins, P. (1999) *The Art of Building Windmills: Career Tactics for the 21st Century.* Liverpool: Graduates into Employment Unit

HEFCE (2002) *Successful Student Diversity. Case Studied in learning and teaching and widening participation,* Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England

(The) Higher Education Academy and the Council for Industry and Higher Education 2006. *Student Employability Profiles: A Guide for Higher Education Practitioners.* York: Higher Education Academy.

Higher Education Careers Services Unit www.hescu.ac.uk

Holmes, L. (2000) '' Questioning the Skills Agenda'' in Fallows, S & Steven, C *Integrating Key Skills in Higher Education London:* Kogan Page

Jackson, N. (2002) *Guide to Curriculum Design:* Personal Development Planning, first draft York: LTSN Generic Centre, web resource (www.ltsn.ac.uk/generic centre) accessed 10/10/2004

Jenkins, A. (1989) *Linking Skills, academic and disciplinary concerns,* SEDA Paper 89

Jenkins, A. (2000) It's a long hard road in Fallows, S. and Steven, C. *Integrating Key Skills in Higher Education* London: Kogan Page

Kubler, B. and Forbes, P. (2006) *Student Employability Profiles: A Guide for Employers.* London: The Council for Industry and Higher Education

Knight, P. T. (2002) *Being a Teacher in Higher Education,* Open University Press Mentor Communications Consultancy, (2002), Skills That Count

Light, G. & Cox, R. (2001) *Learning and Teaching in HE:* The Reflective Professional London: Paul Chapman

Lucas, U., Cox, P., Croudace, C. & Milford, P. (2004) 'Who writes this stuff?': Students perceptions of their skill development. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 9 (1) p55-68.

Moon, J. (2002) and (2004) in *We seek it here…,* ESCalate Discussion series 2005

National Audit Office, (2002) *Improving student achievement in English higher education* HC486, NAO

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in a Learning Society* (The Dearing Report). London: The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education

Paechter, C., Preedy, M., Scott, D. and Soler, J (Eds) (2002) *Knowledge, Power & Learning.* London: Paul Chapman

Purcell, K. and Hogarth, T. (1999) *Graduate Opportunities, Social Class and Age: Employers recruitment strategies in the new Graduate labour market* London: Institute for Employment Research.

Quality Assurance Agency (2000) Policy Statement on a Progress File for Higher Education London QAA http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progfilehe/guidelines/policystatement/contents.htm (accessed 19/11/04)

Robinson and Smithers, (2001) *Teachers Leaving* Centre for Education and Employment Research

Schirato, T. and Yell, S. (2000) *Communication and Cultural Literacy* (2nd ed). London: Sage.

Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action.* New York: Basic Books

Sills, M. 2003 *Employability* LTSN Health Sciences and Practice

Ward, R. (2001) Developing and Implementing Institutional Policy on Personal Development Planning in Ward, R. & Jackson, N. Eds *Personal development planning: Institutional Case studies.* York: Learning and teaching support network.

Yorke, M. and Knight, P., (2002) *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum* Learning and Employability Series LTSN/ESECT

Yorke, M and Thomas, L. (2003) Improving the Retention of Students from Lower Socio-economic groups. *Journal for Higher Education Policy and Management,* 25 (1), pp. 63-74

Yorke, M., (2004) *Employability in higher education: what it is – what it is not* Learning and Employability Series LTSN/ESECT

Yorke, M. and Knight, P.T. (2004) J*udging and communicating achievements: Learning and Employability Series.* York: Learning and Teaching Support Network

ESCalate @ Bristol

We have a continuing policy of responding to consultation and advice. We invite you to participate in shaping ESCalate's future direction and activity.

please contact us at:
ESCalate
University of Bristol
Graduate School of Education
35 Berkeley Square
Clifton, Bristol, BS8 1JA UK

Tel: +44 (0)117 331 4291
Fax: +44 (0)117 925 1537
Email: heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk

We are

Dr Tony Brown: Director
Dr Julie Anderson: Academic Co-ordinator
Liz Hankinson: Administration and Finance
Teresa Nurser: Projects and Publicity
Jane Tuffill: Information and Design

This is one of a series of discussion papers commissioned for ESCalate

ESCalate @ St Martin's

Centre for the Development of Learning and Teaching
St Martin's College, Lancaster
LA1 3JD UK
Tel: +44 (0)1524 384232
Email: escalate@ucsm.ac.uk

ESCalate @ Stirling

University of Stirling
DAICE, Institute of Education
Airthrey Castle, Stirling
FK9 4LA UK
Tel: +44 (0)1786 467942/49
Email: escalate@stir.ac.uk

The Higher Education Academy

Subject Centre for Education ESCalate