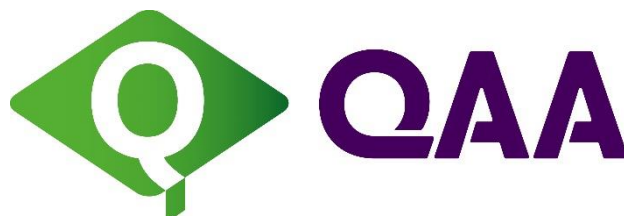


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**UNIVERSITY
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Identifying the Innate Employability Value of your Academic Curriculum

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to this short presentation which introduces you to how, as an academic educator, you can identify the innate employability value of your curriculum. This is one of the resources we have developed for our toolkit to support inclusive employability development through curriculum, which is a QAA-funded collaborative enhancement project between City, King's College London and the University of London. I'm Kate Daubney, a former academic and a former head of several university careers services, and I was one of the leads for this QAA-funded project to develop the Toolkit. In this video I'm going to outline the core principles behind the idea that every academic discipline and all academic programmes innately develop employability in students. At the end of this presentation you can find a link to my peer reviewed research and work on this subject if you want to find out more.

Whatever our role in higher education – or even outside it – it's likely that we can all agree on these three statements. That it would be great if:

- Students enjoyed their degree, and benefitted from it in the longer term
- Students could tell employers just why studying your subject made them a great future employee
- In a highly uncertain economic landscape, students' experience of higher education maximises their chances of employment.

In fact, this is entirely possible and already happening. But there is more we can do to make these statements a reality.

In the UK, we have what is often described as a 'subject agnostic' graduate recruitment market. In other words, a significant majority of employers do not have a preference for a particular subject area when they look to recruit graduates from UK universities. At the time of making this recording, this is typically 80 to 85% according to annual surveys conducted by the Institute of Student Employers.

In fact, from the point of view of students on any programme, this is a really beneficial type of employment market to enter, because we can conclude that employers are, broadly speaking, interested in a lot more than the academic knowledge that students gain during their degree. And that opens up opportunity for all students.

But if you are an academic educator, that may puzzle or even concern you. As educators we often frame the learning and curriculum we deliver in terms of knowledge gain. Does that create a gap for students between what they are aiming to achieve in their degree and the world of work they are going to enter? Is it more difficult for students to see the connection between subjects they have loved and careers which are entirely unaligned to those subjects? Certainly, political rhetoric often suggests that degrees in certain subjects are less useful for graduate employment.

Fortunately, it is not actually the case that only some subjects are useful or relevant to graduate employment, because what we mean when we talk about the employability value of a degree or curriculum is all the other value that also exists alongside the development of knowledge and understanding.

A good example of this is the frequency with which high numbers of students from very diverse academic subjects get recruited successfully into careers and sectors which appear

entirely unconnected or are not aligned by profession or discipline, for example History graduates being recruited into careers in tax audit, as well as to work in more apparently aligned careers as archivists or heritage specialists, for example. This is the evidence of a 'subject agnostic' graduate recruitment market.

While as a scholar of your subject, you might be quietly disappointed by a change of direction for your graduates, in fact we can also be hugely encouraged that this transition happens, because it demonstrates that there is quite a lot that is innate to the study of every subject that endures far beyond the degree and has immense value in other contexts. That love of subject isn't lost, and it endures in many and diverse ways which are really valuable to the student. So how does that happen? Why do tax audit firms want History graduates? More generally, how is it that diverse graduates are attractive to a diverse range of sectors and employers?

If we break this particular example down we might quickly identify that the transferable skills of being able to source raw evidence, identify cause and effect, construct narratives or demonstrate forensic attention to detail - to name just a few - are as important and innate to history as they are to tax audit. And likewise that the attributes of curiosity, taking the initiative, having a questioning mindset and managing uncertainty are just a few of the core attributes that are innate to history and essential for tax audit. These aren't the transferable skills and attributes of teaching and learning, but those which are fundamental and innate to what it means to be a scholar of History. This is true of every subject. And they are exactly the same transferable skills that employers are looking for.

I describe this as the innate employability value of academic curriculum, which is true of every single subject whether professionally aligned or not, at any level of study or specialist focus. Which means that when we talk about employability in addition to knowledge and specialist skills, as the value of attributes, transferable skills, and experience, we are thinking not of this as a substitution or replacement for knowledge and understanding, but rather as an enhancement. We don't think of employability as something which is developed instead of knowledge, but something which is developed as well as knowledge. The academic rigour of all curriculum is protected and intact.

So what does this mean in practice? Well, it can help bring a different lens to our understanding of what is happening within curriculum learning. Knowledge gain and the development of understanding are powerful indicators to an employer that a graduate is capable of picking up knowledge and understanding in depth, particularly of new things they haven't encountered before and particularly of things that they are interested in. But learning outcomes at programme or module level can often focus more on the demonstration of that knowledge gain than of the many and richly diverse transferable skills that are also developed in gaining that knowledge. We can often see that in the relatively limited language of transferable skills that are used to write learning outcomes.

But when we start to surface all those different transferable skills that are developed innately through our subjects, we give ourselves new, richer and more diverse language to write learning outcomes with.

And learning outcomes written in that richer language demonstrate both knowledge gain and different transferable skills. It's not a question of these being better or worse learning outcomes, but more a question of enabling the student to better understand and recognise through learning and assessment how their academic study develops so much more than knowledge gain and understanding.

This also has implications for aligned assessment. How different might our assessment approaches be if we gave students the opportunity to apply those more diverse transferable skills and attributes, and not just demonstrate their knowledge and understanding? It might offer a different way for them to demonstrate their aptitude and grasp of the subject that would also have enduring value in future workplace contexts.

But it is key that we articulate all this to students. Employers often talk about the skills gap, but it is partly a gap in awareness and understanding, and not quite as much about graduates not actually having the skills. In fact, to be for example a historian and complete a degree requires our students to demonstrate a huge diversity of transferable skills. But we rarely talk about a degree or a subject in that way so it is no wonder that our students don't know how to do that either, particularly to employers.

So if we surface, recognise and articulate those skills to students, and enable them to recognise and articulate them, apply them through learning and assessment, and understand how they might translate them into other contexts including work, then we are doing much more to enable students to realise the value of their education, while keeping our curriculum as rigorous and relevant to our subjects as we need it to be.

So how does this help us when we are trying to develop student employability inclusively through curriculum? I think of it like walking the high wire with two safety nets. We know that developing employability through curriculum is the most inclusive way that we can guarantee reaching every student, and we might do this by creating targeted experiences through which students develop employability using deep approaches to learning. That's our first safety net. When we also recognise and articulate to students the attributes and transferable skills innately developed in all our subject areas through all curriculum learning, then we are being even more inclusive. That's our second safety net. We are enabling the student to derive value from all aspects of their curriculum, whether they have a career plan or not, whether they know what they want to do after graduation or not, whether they are even ready to think about their employability. That gives every student a foundation to articulate the value of their degree beyond the university, whatever they choose to do next.

Thank you for watching and I hope you found this video useful. You can find all the resources for inclusive employability development through curriculum in our Toolkit, funded as a QAA Collaborative Enhancement project at this link. And you can read more about my approach to surfacing the employability value of curriculum in my peer-reviewed journal article ([Daubney, K. \(2022\), ""Teaching employability is not my job!": redefining embedded employability from within the higher education curriculum", *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 92-106. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-07-2020-0165>\)](#)