

# Employability statements

## A review for HEFCE by the Higher Education Academy of the submissions to the Unistats website (for prospective entrants from September 2011 onwards).

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### Introduction

This is a review of the new employability statements for the Unistats website<sup>i</sup> provided by English higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) with more than 500 learners at level 4 and above. It identifies exemplars from among the statements to provide an objective commentary to institutions on how the statements could contribute effectively to the forthcoming Key Information Set<sup>ii</sup>. The purpose of the review has been to:

- emphasise the strategic importance of providing good quality information;
- support institutions to reflect on their institution offer;
- advise HEFCE on the longer-term future of employability statements and provide a report to support HEFCE's decision making;
- review and comment critically on how HEIs have gone about presenting what they offer, and on the substance of that offer;
- give feedback to the sector on the exercise;
- highlight some examples of good practice.

The report is in five parts: part one describes the methodology; part two considers the review of 74 statements; part three reports on the outcome of two focus group comments on the statements; part four offers a commentary on specific elements of the statements and associated websites highlighting some exemplars; part five provides some concluding remarks with recommendations.

### Background

HEFCE invited HEIs and directly funded FECs to publish a short employability statement to help prospective students make informed choices for entry in 2011-12 on the support they provide to students to enhance their employability<sup>iii</sup>. The statement, limited to 3,000 characters, was published on the Unistats website in September 2010.

The purpose of the statement is to improve information available to prospective students and to help them navigate existing information. The statements should be written in an accessible way as they are primarily aimed at prospective students and should make what is on offer within an institution easy to understand, compare and navigate. Statements are not intended to duplicate existing information that many universities already provide through

their websites, but to make this easily comparable and accessible to students and to strengthen its profile and visibility.

HEFCE asked the Higher Education Academy to undertake a review of the type of information that has been published. The review examined both employability practice (the 'offer') and effective presentation (the 'message').

## Findings from the review

- The employability statements reviewed for this study are of variable quality. For example, although the majority have followed the HEFCE guidance, some exceeded their word count and others made no attempt to link the assertions they made to evidence. The review identified 50 of the 74 reviewed as of acceptable quality with 14 of these identified as being excellent.
- There is a lack of clarity about the intended recipients of the information in the statement. The target audience is potential applicants, but few are written in a way that speaks to this audience in a clear, jargon-free tone.
- Statements that have been provided in consultation with marketing personnel appear to be more accessible in that they appear less like institutional documents while speaking directly and with clarity.
- The small focus groups identified that university applicants use Unistats to help them in making their choices but in the main did not find that the information relating to employability was helpful.
- The focus groups of Heads of Sixth Form expressed concern about the level of complexity of the content of the statements and also their relative invisibility on the site.
- The statements have provided a 'shop window' into the employability developments available in an institution. Some providers have used this opportunity to clearly highlight good practice. The statements in themselves are limited, so it becomes increasingly important for potential students to be able to look beyond the 'shop window' by following weblinks to find information that is well organised and coherent.
- Some of the information provided through the links appears to demonstrate that some institutions have a sophisticated and well-developed framework for employability although for the majority the focus is on careers development centres and the services provided for students through these centres. There is little information about how employability is embedded within the curriculum. Employer involvement too is variable, although many HEIs do indicate they have strong links with employers.
- There are tensions inherent within the messages. Some statements appear to be written to provide a competitive edge, while others appear to have been written merely in response to the HEFCE requirement and the audience is not given full consideration. The time frame for development of the statements may have had an impact on the quality of content and presentation style.

## Part One: Methodology

HEFCE provided a database of all the employability statements uploaded onto the Unistats website; HEIs and FECs were categorised according to their mission group status (Russell Group, 1994 Group, Million+, University Alliance, and, where relevant, post-92 institutions and FECs providing directly funded higher education). Some institutions did not of course fit into a mission group. Other contexts were considered and cross-referenced, including the historical association of the HEI with employability development as highlighted in previous reports, former CETLs for employability and enterprise, and those involved in Higher Education Achievement Report developments. A random but representative sample of employability statements was scrutinised carefully in order to comment critically on how the sample HEIs and FECs presented their offer, and on the substance of that offer. The review was inevitably limited and some excellent practice may exist in other HEIs not included here.

Seventy-four statements were examined. It was possible to form a judgement about which statements appeared to be exemplars in providing information and links to information for use by prospective students when making their choice of higher education. Guidance provided by HEFCE on the statements provided the template for the review and the following elements were considered:

- the content of the statements – what was covered and how the audience was addressed;
- the extent to which the statement appeared inclusive and how institutions promoted equality through their employability activities;
- if it highlighted particular elements of the services the HEI offers for students throughout the student life cycle, including for postgraduate students and after graduation.

Those specific elements included in the review were:

- information and links on career planning and employment;
- evidence of opportunities and support for work experience and placements;
- signposting where information is available on professionally accredited/endorsed courses;
- support for the development of employability skills within courses;
- promotion of enterprise and entrepreneurship;
- opportunities for PDP and recording achievement;
- support for postgraduate and research students;
- opportunities for developing employability outside the curriculum.

We also considered whether information was provided for staff and for employers, to highlight how they can support students.

At the same time, two focus groups were held in January 2011. The first was with a group of heads of sixth-form provision across the Leeds North East Schools cluster group and the second was with a group of Year 13 students at Allerton High School, north Leeds, all of

whom had submitted applications through UCAS. The purpose of the focus groups was to elicit information about the experience of using the statements from the perspective of the consumer. The groups were asked to respond to a selection of questions relating to how they used Unistats overall and whether they had accessed the statements. They were asked to review some individual statements and comment on readability, intended audience, the nature of the information it contained, and its overall feel. Respondents were also asked to outline what would improve the statements, and asked to think about what sort of information they really wanted about the universities they or their students were applying to.

## **Part Two: The statements**

This section of the report provides a general overview of the statements reviewed and how institutions have addressed the requirements HEFCE asked for. The review used the HEFCE circular as a guide to identify what could be considered a good example of an employability statement with content in the range of categories as outlined by the guidance. Throughout the report we draw particular attention to selected providers that have produced statements with associated signposting that are above average for the sector as they appear to cover most bases but have strengths in particular elements.

In general, most HEIs have provided statements that meet the HEFCE requirements for providing information on how employability is supported within an institution. Many give the reader the opportunity to gain additional information by following weblinks to institutional webpages. Some do not use this opportunity. Twenty-three of the selected providers have produced a very basic statement (and in some cases offer no weblink to the provider website).

In some cases the statement is not well written, in relation to both how the target audience is addressed and the content. At the same time, weblinks lead to limited information on webpages. Many of the statements are written to market the university rather than address the audience. This is confusing to read and not effective.

Taking account of membership of different higher education mission groups did not highlight a diversity of approach. Those members of the University Alliance group that were reviewed provided average statements with weblinks to some very good webpages, although these could sometimes be presented more coherently. The Russell Group members reviewed vary, with some providing basic statements with no weblinks and one, the University of Oxford statement, although fairly neutral in its style, providing a link to very well-developed careers pages. The 1994 Group provides a mixed picture as does the Million+ group, with the latter having fewer exemplars. FECs have produced weak statements with only one, Wigan and Leigh College, providing an average statement with weblinks. Cross-referencing those selected with CETL developments in employability and enterprise and/or a longer historical association with employability development as well as contemporary involvement in projects such as Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) also appear unrelated to the quality of the statement, although some associated webpages may reflect a stronger institutional focus on the issue<sup>iv</sup>.

A number of the statements are well written and the audience has been considered, with an understanding of accessibility being a strength. Some have taken a novel approach to pulling together the information required; for example, the Bath Spa University statement is novel and speaks to the audience, the University of Bradford statement is very full but again is well written.

The review highlighted a number of issues that suggest presenting the statement posed a series of challenges for institutions. For example:

- The statement is supposed to be 3,000 characters long but some are longer with one being 3,000 words.
- Several statements note that the university careers service is 'matrix accredited'. It is unclear what a prospective student would know about this standard and yet many of the institutions that provide a broad range of information advice and guidance are often accredited and possibly offer a higher standard of service to their students. As such this could be spelt out more to students as a differentiating issue.
- Some statements have signposting within them – either through highlighted words, paragraphs/bullet points, section headings, etc, but provide no hyperlinks to a website. Some provide a link to the university website and the reader then has to find the employability section on the website and this is not always well signposted.
- Some HE providers have seen the statements as an opportunity for 'window dressing' and have provided links to highlighted elements of the provision they offer. In these cases the statement itself is fairly bland and can read like a prospectus, but the weblinks that provide the detail would prove of interest to prospective students. Examples are those provided by Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Hertfordshire and the University of Southampton.
- It is clear that some statements have merely been a vehicle for summarising what an HEI has invested in for some time. The webpages appear well established with a lot of information. These are often the best sites. Others have indicated they plan to do something new, which may be in response to the requirements or because of the renewed focus on graduate outcomes and employment. Some of the latter group present statements that are limited and not written for the intended audience. Some webpages seem new and bespoke and possibly are newly set up to capture what is required.
- Some webpages supporting careers and employability development are limited in their usability by the very nature of the university website. While some appear dynamic and student-friendly, others are much more sober and appear limited by the overall structure and operability of the website.
- Most of the statements highlight elements of support the HEI considers a strength as well as meeting requirements for the Unistats site. Some of these offer exemplars around one element of their provision; for example, good weblinks to enterprise pages such as those provided by the University of Winchester, Royal Holloway, the University of Portsmouth, the University of York and Coventry University. Others have interesting provision around placements such as Kingston University, and the University of Nottingham recruitment agency may be of interest to some students.
- Quite a few statements make a lot of the employability support they offer specifically for international students. This information may have more relevance to some universities than others.

## Part Three: How user groups have responded to the statements

This section combines the responses from focus groups of Heads of Sixth Form and Year 13 students. While the focus groups were only able to provide a snapshot of reactions, responses align with our own findings.

### Accessing and using the employability statements

All participants in the groups had heard of Unistats, knew how to log in, and consider it an essential component of the applications process. Students are given guidance about what the Unistats site offers to potential applicants during Year 12 when the preparations for university application begin. Unistats appears to be used for very specific purposes, which include:

- looking at the grades required for particular courses by particular universities;
- using the information as a basis for selecting the best combination of HEIs to apply for;
- looking at the staff-student ratio;
- trying to find out how many hours of teaching they would get a week;
- seeing how many graduates get jobs.

The students reported that they also looked at individual HEI websites for this information, and it was not always forthcoming.

None of the teachers were aware of the employability statements until the agenda was set with the topic as an item for their meeting where the HEA member was attending. Some had then reviewed the site and found that the statements were not immediately visible and could really only be stumbled on by chance. Given that all present were experienced sixth-form leaders, it is likely that this would be replicated across the country.

The students were asked if they had looked at the statements, and they all said they had, but on probing it was evident that they thought that this meant just the statistics on graduate destinations/employment data. When it was explained to them what was meant by 'employability', none of the concepts were unfamiliar to them and they all agreed that HEIs should play a role in this. They were interested in placements and internships. However, when we looked at the actual employability statements, none knew they were there, and this included their first- and second-choice institutions.

One student did know a lot about employability, because she had been to a presentation at an open day, and during her interview for a place at the Central School of Speech and Drama, all this was explained to her.

The student group opted to look at one particular university in London as this was one student's first choice. They thought the language of the employability statement was dry and that this was written for "whoever is monitoring them": this was not felt to be written for sixth-

form students. They thought it was missing its target audience. One student said she thought it read like an OFSTED report. They felt that this statement suggested that this particular university was trading on its reputation, because the emphasis is on how employers regard it as excellent, rather than on what it does to enhance the learning experience.

The group also looked at a statement this HEA review had considered an exemplar. This was for Bournemouth University (no one had applied there). The students liked this statement and felt that it was more “appealing”. This was because it was clearer and written more directly, used less jargon, and was more succinct. When asked what would make the statements more useful, the response was for more course-specific material as at this stage of their educational life they felt that the course they were choosing was the most important thing.

### **What sort of information should universities be giving?**

Students cited the following as being important for their choice:

- content of course;
- facilities that the university has to support the learning, especially if the course is practical;
- needs to be in a lively urban area;
- cost of living;
- what sort of jobs people get after their studies;
- research – are there opportunities for postgraduate study?

When asked to rate the importance of employability on a scale of one to ten, the response overall was “about eight”.

The point was made that although these statements are clearly important, no one knew they were there and they are not immediately accessible. They did not know where to find them, and they did not know how broad and varied the whole concept of ‘employability’ is. They would like the statements to be simple, with no jargon. For example, they wanted an explanation of what ‘entrepreneurship’ is. They inquired about PDP – why is this important? If something is so important why is it so hidden from the intended users? They would like the statements to be written in language that appeals to them. They thought that the voice of a graduate speaking to them would be much more meaningful than “this policy-laden language”.

The student response was echoed by the teachers. The teachers stressed the importance of the statements and the data that lie behind them, but they were unanimous in asserting that they were not accessible to 16- to 18-year-olds. Students would need to be guided through them by a member of staff, or special sessions explaining how to use them would need to be incorporated into the UCAS support programme on offer in the schools. It is likely that this will be introduced in the four schools represented.

## Comment on the focus groups responses

Although the focus groups were selected randomly and were not necessarily representative, nevertheless they provided an immediate and tangible reaction to having a raised awareness of the presence of the employability statements on the Unistats website. The site itself is obviously used to aid student choice in their HE applications, and for these groups awareness of the statements was low. They recognised, however, the value in the statements provided that they were clearly written and explanatory for students and could be considered in the context of all the other issues that they deem as relevant to making their applications. The student review of good and less good examples of statements appeared to reflect the findings of our own scoping.

## Part Four: Exemplar statements and associated webpages

This part of the report considers some of the detailed content covered within the statements and by following highlighted weblinks. The report references some examples where the content of the webpages indicates a positive approach with particular reference to the 14 institutions that could be considered as exemplars. These are noted below in Annex 1. The HEFCE guidance had asked institutions to ensure the statements covered selected services and approaches and a summary of some of these are considered here.

### Inclusivity and diversity

There are variable approaches taken to recognising the needs of different students with some statements formally recognising equality and diversity issues as well as providing links to bespoke webpages. Good examples are those provided by the University of Salford and The Open University, whose statements and webpages are sensitive to the needs of their own students. Others such as Bournemouth University, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), the University of the West of England (UWE) and the University of Reading provide information identifying support for particular student groups. The University of Reading pays particular attention to supporting disabled students on placements. The University of Manchester has provided a bespoke website for disabled students on placement and this is referred to by other HEIs such as the University of Leeds.

The University of the West of England takes a unique approach in highlighting an Employability and Diversity Programme designed to help students from groups under-represented in the graduate labour market to overcome some of the barriers they might face when competing for graduate jobs.

It is important to differentiate the information prospective students may require about career options prior to entering HE from that required by undergraduate and postgraduate students. Some particularly good examples of webpages offering co-ordinated careers development centres with information for a diversity of learners include those provided by Leeds

Metropolitan University, London Metropolitan University, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), Liverpool John Moores University, the University of Reading and the University of the West of England. Features that make them stand out are that the websites are clearly formatted and often have differentiated pages for prospective students, current undergraduates, postgraduates, employers and staff and navigation through the webpages is easy. Some have separate graduate pages as the university provides a service for alumni three to four years after graduation.

A few institutions such as LJMU, Leeds Met and the University of Bradford have pages for prospective students. In general these pages also have links to information about courses and general prospectus information as well as information on other student services.

The University of Reading has an interesting interactive Career Unlocker tool that could be used by prospective students as well as undergraduates, while the UWE site has some very good pages for prospective students that provide the links between services for prospective and current students including access to guides that support students in making career choices on their Myfuture website.

On the whole statements are weak in their support for postgraduates and in general the focus is on postgraduate researchers rather than those on taught postgraduate courses. A typical example for PG researchers is that provided by Oxford Brookes University, who offer a two-day programme for researchers, but further support is often provided for research postgraduates within a broader range of development opportunities such as that provided by the University of Nottingham Graduate School. Many of the sites link to Prospects or the Vitae website for further career development options for researchers. The University of Chester provides a Graduate Head Start programme, which includes a 20-credit Masters-level module in Business and Professional Development, a five-week work placement with a graduate employer and an intensive European Computer Driving Licence course, and access to tailored one-to-one career coaching is offered to postgraduates. Many of the 1994 mission group HEIs provide similar types of support for postgraduate research students. An interesting development offered by CareersLondon is the GradClub, which postgraduates can join for a fee. Overall there appears to be a dearth of support for taught postgraduate students, which reflects the findings of the HEA-run Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).

Some HEIs have taken an approach that identifies employability development as one aspect of the attributes that their students will graduate with. An example is the University of Leeds model where the *Leeds for Life* scheme encourages students to make the most of their time at university and supports them through the use of PDP to get the most from their studies. Being employable and career planning are elements of this. Similar approaches have been taken by Goldsmiths, the University of Sheffield and the University of Southampton.

## Support for students in making career choices and decisions

From the information in the statements and the associated weblinks it appears that most HEIs place responsibility for employability development with careers centres. Some indicate that there are advisers and co-ordinators across the campus associated with particular

courses and programmes. As noted most of these centres have organised their webpages with information identified in the statements.

Standard careers services on offer include: one-to-one and group advice and careers guidance; individual appointments with careers advisers sometimes offered online and/or as e-guidance; employer fairs and careers events held by the institution and/or in conjunction with other regional universities or other companies; job shops – some providing in-house employment opportunities, but others acting as recruitment agencies; employer/guest speakers events; employment skills development workshops; and mentoring opportunities.

## Employment opportunities

Most of the statements provide links to websites providing information about employment opportunities for undergraduates and graduates. These may involve different elements. For example some provide an employment recruitment service: these appear to be commercial enterprises that involve developing links between employers and the university students/graduates. Jobs are advertised through the university website.

Employment services include the 'Jobshop' provided by the University of Huddersfield and the University of Derby's Student Employment Agency. A more commercial approach is developed by Leeds Met. They provide a recruitment agency for students and graduates. They have pages aimed at employers and also for staff internally who may be looking to recruit students to casual positions. They apparently advertised 160,000 jobs last year. They have some interesting new videos loaded on the pages on how to find a job and different elements of job hunting. Providing jobs on campus is also a service other institutions provide such as that at Manchester Metropolitan University – Jobs4students – which is run by the Student and Graduate Opportunities Team, part of MMU's Careers & Employability Service. The University of Leeds has a job link organised in partnership with the Students' Union.

There are many websites that provide information on employment preparation. This could include information documents/leaflets on CV writing, job applications, interview techniques and so forth. Bournemouth University, for example, has extensive resource links to sources of information. They also have bespoke webpages with videos providing more detail, although these can only be accessed through the student portal.

Liverpool John Moores University, which has a well-established approach to employability development, provides an excellent example of the type of support that can be made available to students for employment preparation. They offer a timetabled series of workshops any student can access, which includes career development, job hunting, CV writing, application writing, interview preparation, presentation skills, information on assessment centres, psychometric testing, self-awareness and presentation skills. Some workshops are targeted at particular discipline groups such as STEM or Psychology students. They also offer information on organisational awareness and self-employment. This approach is taken by others too such as the University of Bradford and the University of Reading.

## Supporting the development of broader employability skills, qualities and attributes

Employability skills development is a feature of most of the career planning centres. Some of the institutional websites provide detailed information for students on how to develop their employability skills with the support of the institution and/or through their learning programme.

Manchester Metropolitan University is developing a cross-institutional approach toward embedding employability in the curriculum. They indicate on pages for staff that this is part of the quality enhancement approach to teaching and learning.

The Open University has some very well laid out pages to help their students explore what employability skills their learning programmes will develop and how students can articulate these and further develop them. The webpages are easy to navigate and very informative without being overwhelming. The webpages for the University of Bradford students are full of detailed and interactive information on employability skills. There are developing e-skills pages and students can also access the student portal for further information on graduate destinations. These pages make career planning easy to access and navigate.

An exemplar of online support is provided by the University of the West of England. The myfuture@UWE website is an interactive site providing information on skill development, career planning, and some case studies on work experience and employment. It is well organised and easy to navigate.

The University of Derby 'Skill Builder' provides opportunities for students working/volunteering in partnership with the Students' Union to undertake activities to help build skills and be able to pull this together to be articulated as part of the University HEAR.

Some providers highlight career development modules on their webpages that are available for on-course learners to access. Many of these are elective modules that provide academic credit. The University of Chester and Southampton Solent University offer Curriculum Plus programmes that provide employability development modules that can run alongside less vocationally or professionally orientated programmes.

London Metropolitan University provides this type of support and UCLAN have an extensive range of modules including an e-learning Certificate in Career Planning. Similarly the University of Leeds offers a wide range of ten- and 20-credit electives through the Careers Centre to help develop and plan future careers. All electives are designed to complement the main programme of study.

## Opportunities for PDP and recording achievement

PDP is identified as being a means for recording achievements and reflection for career planning by a number of institutions. Some highlighted examples include those where PDP is introduced early on. For example, the London School of Economics (LSE) notes that PDP is introduced pre-entry, while others, such as Durham University, the University of Surrey,

Kingston University and the University of Winchester, note they highly encourage the use of PDP. Some specifically mention the use of e-portfolios, such as the University of Chester, LJMU and MMU, and the University of Winchester mentions the use of PebblePad. The FECs are particularly keen on mentioning the tutorial support they offer and the use of PDP to support employability development.

### **Real-world experience, placements, internships**

Many of the webpages include opportunities and support for work experience and placements. Some of the information supplied indicates that the onus for organising these lies with the student rather than the HEI. Many provide placements that are integral to the programme of study and/or provide lots of support to obtain work experience, internships or placements. There is a range of different models. Some highlighted include industrial placements and internships offered by De Montfort University and sandwich programmes at Loughborough University. Some HEIs suggest all students are encouraged to obtain work experience and offer support such as that by Sheffield Hallam University and Staffordshire University, who use placement officers based across the university to support students. The FE colleges also highlight the support they offer for work placements, which appears one of their strengths. This information may prove of interest to prospective students particularly around how these placements are organised, what implications there may be for fees, how they can fit work experience in alongside their discipline-focus studies and so forth.

The University of Reading identifies the value of 'real-world' experience and as well as elective modules designed to support career planning and development there are webpages with information on employers offering work experience – either as placements, vacation work, volunteering or work abroad. The University of Leeds careers service identifies placement tutors in every faculty and also links to national schemes such as the STEP scheme, which is an independent company providing graduate placements. UWE use the services of Gradsouthwest to support students to find placements, while Goldsmiths use Careers London for similar.

The University of Huddersfield has some very well laid out pages on work experience with supporting resources, and Bournemouth University raises an expectation that students will get a placement in their second year and provides information on how this can be taken forward including access to professional development advisers and employability co-ordinators.

### **Co-curriculum awards, volunteering and employability development outside the curriculum**

The development of co-curriculum awards seems to be a growing area and reflects the report by the 1994 Group in this area<sup>v</sup>. HEIs are offering awards that they organise themselves or in partnership with students' unions. There are a variety of models offered. Some provide access to a range of work experience opportunities, which may include volunteering, work placements, mentoring, study support and so forth. Others encourage students to gather together information themselves towards an award. There are some

models of universities setting activities that students have to achieve to accumulate points towards a final award. These are also often endorsed or judged by employers. Some good examples include those provided by the exemplars, particularly Bournemouth University, Goldsmiths, MMU, UCLAN and the University of Derby, but others are also of interest. Examples are a range of Graduate Passport schemes (the University of Southampton, the University of Winchester, Northumbria University), and the award schemes at the University of Birmingham and Durham University. The University of Salford has an award, as does the University of Sheffield, which builds on the latter's reputation for providing high-quality volunteering opportunities.

## **Professional, vocational elements and employer involvement**

All the statements identify in a generic way that they have links with employers. Many websites, particularly those offering recruitment and employment opportunities have bespoke pages for employers. Some statements are more detailed than others on employer links relating to employer input on courses or professional accreditation, e.g. LJMU and UWE. The statements by themselves and through the webpages do not provide detail of curriculum planning for employability, but one HEI, MMU, has identified the work it is developing in this way.

Employer links are maintained through a variety of mechanisms, including recruitment fairs and career development days. A good example of an HEI bringing in employers as guest presenters is that provided by Bournemouth University. They have a full programme of events students can attend on several occasions each week. Bournemouth highlights its developments with the Sector Skills Council Skillset and this is also a feature of Goldsmiths' courses. Working with Skillset and other colleges and employers, Goldsmiths has developed a Skillset Media Academy, which includes Masters-level programmes recognised for quality and standard within the media sector.

A novel approach to engaging students with employers is through the MMU Mentor Match Scheme. It is designed to enhance the employability of MMU students and recent graduates (within three years of graduation) by enabling them to access the experience, knowledge and expertise of someone who is working, or has worked, in an occupation that interests them. Many of the mentors who contribute their time are MMU alumni and include lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs, health professionals and business people from a wide range of sectors.

Some HEIs use 'live', work-related projects as part of the curriculum or as stand-alone modules. An example of the latter is provided by UCLAN, whose range of elective modules includes the development of projects that relate to real work situations. Anglia Ruskin University provides this type of support, and Bath Spa University provides a programme of employer mentoring for students who want to enhance their links and network with employers.

The WoW programme at LJMU is a very good example of how courses and careers support can be co-ordinated to benefit students' understanding of the world of work. As well as the detailed workshops provided by the careers development centre every programme is designed to develop key transferrable skills and has an element of work-related learning, plus they provide students with an employer-validated WoW certificate.

Most HEIs run workshops and events that bring students and employers together (e.g. the University of Huddersfield and the University of Derby). These developments often reflect the discipline field and links with professional bodies and organisations supporting student transition into work.

## **Enterprise and entrepreneurship development**

Promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship is also an area that some HEIs highlight more than others. The majority of statements and weblinks identify general opportunities for self-employment development, but some statements and websites provide more detail of opportunities for young entrepreneurs and business support schemes. Some of these are through bespoke websites that link to business development units and incubator sites. Bradford College has an Enterprise Academy, which provides support for developing student ideas. The Russell Group universities generally provide enterprise and entrepreneurial support through their Business departments and can provide bursaries and seed corn funding for students with ideas. Some of the post-1992 universities offer this as an area of expertise with good examples provided by Sheffield Hallam University (on social enterprises), the University of West London, Royal Holloway and the University of Lincoln. Some offer access to elective modules that include leadership and management and team working modules such as the Future Leaders programme at Oxford Brookes University.

Some HEIs make more of their focus on student enterprise development rather than generic employability development. This is most often related to the overall mission and ambition of the institution and the programmes and courses on offer. For example Goldsmiths and Bournemouth University have many creative arts graduates and there may be more focus on them to be self-employed. As such they have well-developed enterprise programmes on offer, while UCLAN provides strong support to small business development through a business incubation facility.

London Metropolitan University Student Enterprise Society has over 700 members. Its business-to-business activities include a specialised site devoted to business creation and support, consultancy and individual professional development, and career enhancement services.

## **Staff information**

It is worth noting that on many websites career development centres provide resources and information aimed at their own academics to help with the development of employability within the curriculum. Some sites indicate that faculty-based staff exist to support particular discipline or subject areas.

## Commentary on the website details

- As noted, the review highlighted that the statements in themselves varied in their content and following weblinks provides an indication of how HEIs vary in their approach to different elements of employability and career development.
- Most careers centres highlight a 'statement of service' often as part of student services (but this may also be linked with matrix accreditation). An important point is that although formal it spells out the HEI responsibilities towards students. This could become an increasingly common development in the context of 'students as consumers'.
- Some HEI webpages provide a link to an external source of information. This may be the Prospects<sup>vi</sup> website, which provides additional information such as on particular careers and labour market information, CV writing, assessment centre advice and other guidance. Some provide weblinks to particular supporting guides and online self-assessment tools such as the Prospects career planner, Targetjobs, Windmills and Adult Directions.
- Others rely on links to regional university association careers services such as Gradsouthwest, the University of London careers service, Yorkshire graduates, and the Graduate Vacancy Partnership North West (currently suspended). Some of these associations may become less viable in the changing landscape, but any evaluation of the effectiveness of their services could be considered.
- Many HEIs promote their work with students' unions, in particular work around volunteering. How these arrangements are developed within an institution and the effectiveness of these routes particularly on collaborative models around university award schemes would be worth considering further. This may be particularly relevant as quite a few of the university co-curriculum type awards seem to be new and/or under development.
- Many websites show links with disability rights advice sites, Prospects pages on discrimination and advice for students with disabilities and from BME groups, while some also have their own developed pages with this information. The University of London careers service has a separate website for supporting diverse students into employment. These sources of information could be highlighted more.

## Part 4: Recommendations

Institutions might consider some of the following for making the employability statements more attractive to potential students:

- Ensure that employability statements are written for the intended audience and that this focus is reflected in the appropriate use of language.
- Use the statements as an opportunity to provide accurate information on how the institution will support employability development. This can include providing links to coherently developed employability pages on their website. The information should cover a range of topics and concerns that students may have. This may include: how the institution will support the development of skills and attributes for future employability; what services learners will be able to access and what they can expect to develop through their courses/studies; how they might help themselves and how

an institution will, for example, support and recognise extra-curricular activities; and the access given to employers, work experience, placements and getting part-time jobs.

- The statements and their associated links should provide explicit information for supporting those who may experience difficulties in certain job markets such as disabled students, some BME groups, mature students, and also how learners may be able to access particular professions. Consideration should be given to the needs of taught postgraduate students.
- Consider the potential for developing a coherent and comprehensive institution-wide framework for employability.
- Good practice should ensure that current students are actively involved in the development of an employability framework and that developments respond to the findings of local and national student surveys.
- Institutions may want to consider developing a local user group of potential applicants and their teachers in partnership with local schools and colleges to test key information sources.

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<sup>i</sup> [Unistats](#) is an official website that allows search and review, and compares official information about universities and colleges in the UK, and the subjects they offer. It includes results from the National Student Survey – where more than 220,000 students give their views about the quality of their higher education experience. The information on Unistats is provided by: the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); the FE data service; and the National Student Survey (run by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)). HEFCE owns the Unistats website and has contracted UCAS to manage the delivery and maintenance of the website on its behalf.

<sup>ii</sup> HEFCE (2010) *Public information about higher education: Consultation on changes to information published by institutions*. 2010/31. Available from: [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10\\_31/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_31/) [accessed 14 June 2011].

<sup>iii</sup> HEFCE (2010) *Employability Statements*. Circular letter number 12/2010. Available from: [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2010/cl12\\_10/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2010/cl12_10/) [accessed 14 June 2011].

<sup>iv</sup> The HEAR trial institutions are: Aberystwyth University; Goldsmiths, University of London; Keele University; Newcastle University; Newman University College; Northumbria University; University College London; University for the Creative Arts, Canterbury; University of Derby; University of Gloucestershire; University of Greenwich; University of Leicester; University of Manchester; University of Northampton; University of St Andrews; University of Wales Institute, Cardiff; University of Ulster and York St John University.

<sup>v</sup> Norton, T. and Thomas, H. (2009) *Beyond the Curriculum Opportunities to enhance employability and future life choices*. 1994 Group's Student Experience Policy Group. Available from: [http://www.1994group.ac.uk/documents/public/Publications/BeyondTheCurriculum\\_Nov09.pdf](http://www.1994group.ac.uk/documents/public/Publications/BeyondTheCurriculum_Nov09.pdf) [accessed 14 June 2011].

<sup>vi</sup> Graduate Prospects is the commercial arm of [HECSU](#) (Higher Education Careers Services Unit), a registered charity owned by [Universities UK](#) and [GuildHE](#).

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## Annex 1: Exemplars

Overall, the following providers have produced statements with associated signposting that are above average for the sector:

- BOURNEMOUTH UNIVERSITY  
<http://studentportal.bournemouth.ac.uk/career/ges/index.html>
- GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/careers/>
- LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/careers/>
- LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY  
<http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/WoW/students/96213.htm>
- LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/employability/>
- MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/>
- UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE  
<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/futures/index.php>
- UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD  
<http://www2.hud.ac.uk/careers/>
- UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND, BRISTOL  
<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/careers/>
- THE OPEN UNIVERSITY  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/careers/index.php>
- UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS  
<http://careerweb.leeds.ac.uk/>
- UNIVERSITY OF READING  
<http://www.reading.ac.uk/careers/>
- UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

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<http://www.derby.ac.uk/careers>

- UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD  
<http://www.careers.brad.ac.uk/>

These institutions appear to cover most bases, but have strengths in particular elements.