The Open University

Employability for Scotland

Pete Cannell, OU in Scotland

Looking forward to 2020

- 70 per cent of the workforce of 2020 has already completed compulsory education (Leitch Report 2007)

- Should we be talking about employability in the context of those already in the workforce?

Rethinking the relationship between HE and the workplace

- Much of the current debate about employability in the UK, and elsewhere, focuses on the transition of young full-time students to the world of work and makes the assumption that graduates enter employment with no working experience and with skills deficits
- The boundary between the domain of university study and ‘the world of work’ remains firmly in place.

Taking a student/employee perspective

- More than 70% of OU students are in work
- Janet Lowe's study of college students identified complex interaction of employment, study and domestic/ caring roles

- Importance of the ULR network in Scotland

OU Scotland employability study

- Based on over a 1000 respondents
- Students identified communication, team working, problem solving, interpersonal skills and time management as important employability skills
- Least important, students suggested, were vocational skills, management and technical and practical skills
- Students suggested that they were able to gain communication skills, self-motivation/initiative, IT skills, problem solving skills, team working skills and literacy skills through their HE study

Further evidence

- Students concerned that their study was valued and appreciated - more than sponsorship or immediate material incentives.
- In a previous study of students making successful transition form pt college study to OU study commented on the importance of being in an ‘OU workplace’
- Very strong evidence of students switching direction in response to changing circumstances

Barriers to work that I'd really like to do

- 45% identified 'few local jobs',
- 44% identified 'lack of relevant qualifications',
- 38% lack of confidence,
- 40% lack of job specific skills,
- 31% family and care commitments.

Case study 1: OU curriculum change

- Introduction of work-based DipHEs
  - Including: Analytical Sciences, Business, Business Information Technology, Computing and its Practice, Early Years, Financial Services, Health Sciences, ICT, Leadership and Management, Operating Department Practice, Paramedic Sciences, Working with Young People
  - Design Principles include: employer and sector input, 50% work based learning, progression routes from HNC where appropriate, progression routes to honours
  - Development of negotiated DipHE

Case study 2: working with the care sector

- Meeting the regulatory needs of supervisory staff in the care sector
- Combining work place groups with distance learning materials
- Flexibility in delivery – flexibility in the development of materials and working across conventional faculty areas to meet the needs of participants

Case study 3: Making Your Experience Count

- A 30 point SCQF level 7 course
- Designed to reflect on and incorporate previous learning at work, develop HE learning skills and plan for future study
- Online materials can be studied by individuals but also adapted to workplace delivery

Findings

- Part-time distance learning with a strong student support model can be combined with work based learning
- Work based groups (formal and informal?) have particular strengths in peer support and motivation
- HE study helps to accredit skills and develop confidence
- *Compare Harsthorn and Sear (2005):*

  who argue for the integration of basic skills (literacy, numeracy and attitude to work) with enterprise skills (eg. innovation, risk, autonomy) and sector specific skills (eg. work context knowledge, creativity and specialist knowledge).

Changes required?

- A sharper focus on life long learning and the value of HE
  - Recognition that this means greater use of flexible pt learning
- Developing notions of work-based learning
- Recognition of the importance of broad curriculum
- Developing understanding of the synergy between employer designed training and HE provision for those in work

Particular contribution of part-time supported open learning

- Flexibility in time and place
- Scaleability
- Transferability
- Development of confidence
- Enabling new directions
- Facilitating peer support
- Engendering a learning culture

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