Embedding Employability Framework

A Guide for DkIT **Draft 23/06/21**

Embedding Employability Framework – A Guide for DkIT

Contents

Introduction and Overview

This framework posits ways to embed employability within DkIT. Throughout, we recommend various enhancements at a modular and programmatic level. We hope the framework will confer benefits Institute-wide, although these initial recommendations are primarily aimed at curricular enhancement.

The framework comprises four stages, the first two of which represent the foundations for action to be taken at a later date. The latter two stages will need further attention upon implementation of the first two stages.

Inspiration is taken from the HEA's Framework Series ('Embedding Employability in HE'), with our four stages broadly corresponding to the HEA's scaffolding.

1. Firstly, we explore a definition of employability. We proceed to unpack its component parts and their relevance to DkIT. With the definition in place, we show how it relates to a model of graduate employability. This model functions as a lynchpin for the various strategies proposed throughout the framework, and shapes the nature of EE's advice to the Institute.
2. The second stage charts activities undertaken by EE to enhance employability across the Institute. Here, we suggest ways to use the data gathered in aid of the EE project to enhance employability practices across the Institute. We also outline a rating system to boost those practices' effectiveness. We also recommend at this stage a number of ways EE's strategies may be evaluated longitudinally.
3. The third stage indicates the various ways employability activities may be further developed in DkIT's context, in addition to offering suggestions for stakeholders across the Institute beyond academic staff. This stage also outlines future methods by which employability might become more ingrained at various levels of the DkIT student experience.
4. The fourth stage recommends procedures by which to review progress. Provisions will be outlined for sharing data internally and potentially externally. There are no specifics at the point; Stage Two's implementation will eventually provide the raw material for this stage.

The framework is a living document and will be subject to semi-regular revision.

Stage One: Defining Employability

Definition

To begin, EE wish to provide an employability definition that functions in tandem with our chosen employability model. Hillage and Pollard offer the following:

> Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work.[1]

[1] Jim Hillage and Emma Pollard, *Employability: Developing a Framework for Policy Analysis* (London: Dept. for Education and Employment, 1998).

Our concern is that the definition encompasses not just the skills and attributes that help graduates secure employment, but also recognises the concept's sprawl into areas not immediately within the individual's control. In trying to capture both individual responsibility and contextual circumstances, Hillage and Pollard strike the aforementioned balance.

Arguably no definition is ideal. An analogous definition by Yorke and Knight claims that employability is:

> a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.[2]

Its implicit move away from employment as an indicator of employability, along with its social and economic element has been praised.[3] This quality is lacking in Hillage and Pollard, and will be accounted for elsewhere.

There are of course some overlapping terms: 'skills' is common to both. Hillage and Pollard draw out one's capacity to market their abilities to employers; arguably, self-marketing could be folded into Yorke and Knight's 'personal attributes'. Nonetheless, that ability to translate one's skills into the language or behaviour sought after by the employer is more pronounced in Hillage and Pollard.

Hillage and Pollard's definition has slightly contrasting features. It is more individualistic, stressing personal autonomy, mobility, and realising one's potential (Yorke and Knight's 'beneficial' work is not necessarily fulfilling). Capabilities are not achievements; 'achievements' infers a greater degree of permanence. Hillage and Pollard use the more aptitudinal 'capability', which—correctly—hints that employability can diminish. Finally, Hillage and Pollard are more explicit about the role of context and circumstance. These two factors have a sizable part to play in our chosen employability model. Since a key determinant for us is the definition's relationship with our model, Hillage and Pollard's distinguishing characteristics allow for the greatest synergy between definition and model.

For now, Hillage and Pollard's terminology merits some further attention.

'Self-sufficiency' comes with many connotations; in the context of employability, it connotes a capacity to move between jobs with a minimum of disruption to the individual's living standards or their levels of self-esteem. Self-sufficiency also pertains to one's resilience when navigating the sometimes fraught transition from graduation to the labour market.

Furthermore, *moving* self-sufficiently resonates with the idea of the 'protean career', and a labour market where the 'individual rather than the organization takes on the responsibility for one's own career and for transforming one's own career path.'[4] While the protean career model has its limitations,[5] the likelihood of a non-linear, unstable career path

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[2] Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight, *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum*, Learning and Employability 1 (Heslington, York: Higher Education Academy, 2006), 3.

[3] Jane Artess, Tristram Hooley, and Robin Mellors-Bourne, *Employability: A Review of the Literature 2012 to 2016* (Heslington, York: Higher Education Academy, 2017), 10.

[4] Yehuda Baruch, 'The Development and Validation of a Measure for Protean Career Orientation', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 25, no. 19 (28 October 2014): 2703, https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.896389.

[5] Leach catalogues a host of factors that influence (or disrupt) the individual's agency over their career pathway. See Tony Leach, 'Graduates' Experiences and Perceptions of Career Enactment: Identity, Transitions, Personal Agency and Emergent Career Direction', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 20, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 60, https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2015.993872.

marked by variety and transition[6] compels the Institute to develop skills that will help graduates negotiate this environment. With self-responsibility and adaptability potential duties of the graduate throughout his/her lifetime,[7] DkIT is at least in part responsible for encouraging students to prioritise the development of these traits.

'Realising potential' touches on one challenge EE is keen to address: that graduates do not merely find work, but find fulfilling work.

'Sustainable' in this context references employment that meets the graduate's salary expectations but that also makes the best use of their skills. Perhaps another element to sustainability is the employee's capacity to sustain employment, but not necessarily by remaining in the same job. With current economic circumstances impelling mobility, 'employability' necessarily infers 're-employability' also.

Cultivating 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' is central to EE's advice, yet once again, the balancing of these qualities merits close consideration. Taken alone, the latter two constitute an earlier, 'narrower' version of employability that over-stresses the individual's volition and neglects both the labour market and personal circumstances.[8] EE will endeavour to provide for a greater range of influences on employability. Moreover, the question of knowledge, and its relationship to skill training, can be a contentious one in mapping out curricula. In tandem with education emphasising generic skills, EE will promote deep-learning of subject-specific knowledge as crucial part of the above-mentioned trilogy.

'The way [graduates] use those assets and present them to employers' relates to how the graduate imagines themselves in terms of their employability. How a graduate perceives their job prospects, and their ability to win over prospective employers, counts towards their employability.

Hillage and Pollard's definition promotes context as a key detriment of employability. They split it into two camps: personal circumstances, and the labour market. Regarding personal circumstances, class, gender, and ethnicity can all play a role in disrupting an ostensibly rational alignment between the graduate's attributes and skills with the demands of the employer.[9] Social class pertains strongly to DkIT, and methods to ameliorate how students' socio-economic background distorts their employability will factor into our recommendations.

The labour market environment exerts a huge influence on employability. This 'demand side' pertains to such elements as the 'extent of labour market demand [and] employer recruitment and selection practices'.[10] Macroeconomic factors such as stability and the national economy also play a role.[11]

Having addressed the definition's elements and posited some ways EE might act on its implications, we can segue at this point to a model of employability.

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[6] Karoline Strauss, Mark A. Griffin, and Sharon K. Parker, 'Future Work Selves: How Salient Hoped-for Identities Motivate Proactive Career Behaviors', *Journal of Applied Psychology* 97, no. 3 (2012): 580, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026423.

[7] Michael Tomlinson, 'Introduction: Graduate Employability in Context: Charting a Complex, Contested and Multi-Faceted Policy and Research Field', in *Graduate Employability in Context: Theory, Research and Debate*, ed. Michael Tomlinson and Leonard Holmes (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 5.

[8] Ronald W. McQuaid and Colin Lindsay, 'The Concept of Employability', *Urban Studies* 42, no. 2 (February 2005): 197–219, https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000316100.

[9] Tomlinson, 'Introduction: Graduate Employability in Context', 8.

[10] Tony Gore, 'Extending Employability or Solving Employers' Recruitment Problems? Demand-Led Approaches as an Instrument of Labour Market Policy', *Urban Studies* 42, no. 2 (2005): 342.

[11] McQuaid and Lindsay, 'The Concept of Employability', 213.

The Model

With this holistic model taken from Clarke (figure 1),[12] EE hope to establish where DkIT might best focus its energies. Our goal is represented by the box on the right: graduate employability, relating both to short-term employment and longer-term career outcomes. Some categories are necessarily more within DkIT's sphere of influence than others; nevertheless, EE aims to offer advice for where DkIT might be a positive force even when mitigating circumstances are beyond the Institute's control. Overall industry demand is not something the Institute can control, but DkIT can help students cope and maybe surmount that lack of demand, and supply modular and programmatic adjustments where possible.

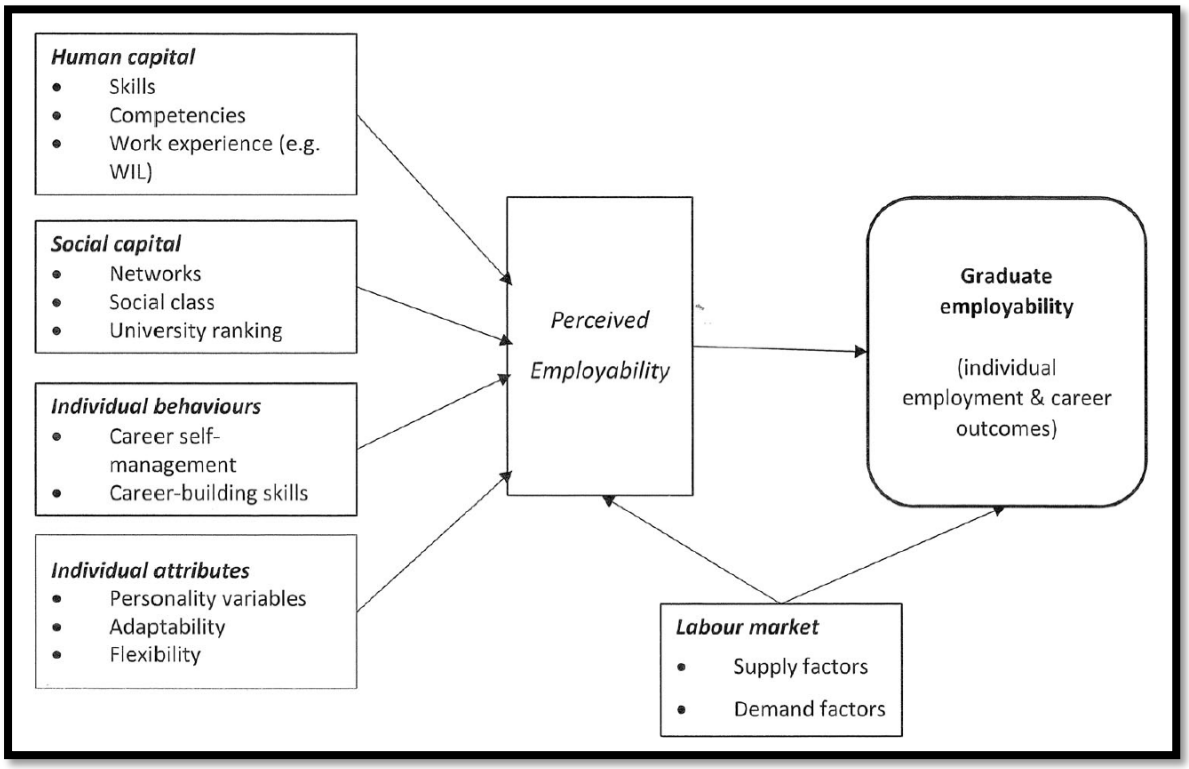

Figure 1. Clarke's model of graduate employability.

What follows takes the reader through each category of Clarke's model, intimating their relevance to DkIT, and also signalling some areas our more bespoke model (detailed later) addresses.

Human Capital lies within DkIT's ambit. It approximates Hillage and Pollard's 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' criteria for employability. Curricula, assessment, and programmes of study all contribute to this category, as well as promote 'higher order thinking skills, such as reflection and self-awareness'.[13] Demonstrably 'a core component', human capital nonetheless intersects with a host of variables, and cannot by itself grant employability.[14]

The *Social Capital* category includes networks, social class, and university ranking. This connects with 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' but also how graduates 'use those assets', as well as their 'personal circumstances'. To take each of the categories' elements in

[12] Marilyn Clarke, 'Rethinking Graduate Employability: The Role of Capital, Individual Attributes and Context', *Studies in Higher Education* 43, no. 11 (2 November 2018): 1931, https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1294152.
[13] Clarke, 1933.
[14] Clarke, 1931.

turn: DkIT can foster the networking element of a graduate's social capital. Networking is at least partially implicated in increased career prospects. Networking, understood by Forret and Dougherty as 'individuals' attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career',[15] has some bearing on one's career development. The precise nature of the networking behaviours (namely, 'maintaining external contacts, socializing, engaging in professional activities, participating in community activities, and increasing internal visibility') determines how beneficial they are in furthering the individual's career.[16] Regardless of economic background, EE wish to stress that these behaviours are learnable, and accessible to a diverse array of students.

Regarding social class: where DkIT cannot intervene—at least not directly—it can nonetheless engage in consciousness raising, and work to mitigate the more egregious effects of a graduate's circumstances. DkIT has a comparatively low percentage of students from affluent backgrounds and a corresponding preponderance towards those from disadvantaged backgrounds relative to the rest of the country.[17] In terms of employability initiatives, these figures would suggest that the number of students for whom this is an issue merits special consideration (addressed shortly in the modified model).

University status will potentially bolster employability across the board for DkIT graduates. The likelihood of the graduate's alma mater influencing an employer's decision-making lingers,[18] even if the importance placed on academic reputation (i.e. academic performance, programme reputation, and institutional reputation) is relatively low in terms of employability.[19] For now, boosting staff-employer engagement is likely to strengthen ties between the Institute and industry at a programmatic or departmental level, and curry favour with a number of regional employers on behalf of students. DkIT may also emphasise to students the objective value of their degree, regardless of the conferring institution. A good degree affords a route to high-skilled work specifically, as 'employers favour those with more prestigious credentials'.[20] Appeals to the Institute's relative standing might therefore represent a useful but perhaps secondary quality next to the value of a good degree, particularly to those graduates for whom highly-skilled work aligns with the realisation of their potential. Where DkIT may contribute is by promoting post-graduate opportunities aimed at shoring up and consolidating prior academic performance.

With *Individual Behaviours*, DkIT is in a position to instil good habits and incentivise students' adaptation of behaviours conducive to satisfactory employment. *Individual Attributes*, meanwhile, can be cultivated by a concerted and deliberate attempt on DkIT's part to demonstrate the value of personal evolution and attitudinal shifts that will enhance students' prospects in the labour market.

Clarke's *Labour Market* category includes 'Demand factors', which correspond to those found in the Hillage and Pollard definition. Overall industry demand is out of the Institute's hands, but DkIT can help students navigate that lack of demand. It also can follow

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[15] Monica L. Forret and Thomas W. Dougherty, 'Networking Behaviors and Career Outcomes: Differences for Men and Women?', *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 25, no. 3 (2004): 420, https://doi.org/10.1002/job.253.
[16] Forret and Dougherty, 430–32.
[17] 'Socio-economic Profile of HEIs', HEA, December 2020, https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/socio-economic-data-and-maps/socio-economic-dashboard-2018-19-enrolments/.
[18] Leonard Holmes, 'Competing Perspectives on Graduate Employability: Possession, Position or Process?', *Studies in Higher Education* 38, no. 4 (1 May 2013): 547, https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.587140; Artess, Hooley, and Mellors-Bourne, *Employability: A Review of the Literature 2012 to 2016*, 15.
[19] David J. Finch et al., 'An Exploratory Study of Factors Affecting Undergraduate Employability', *Education + Training* 55, no. 7 (1 January 2013): 697, https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-07-2012-0077. Note: Canadian study.
[20] Belgin Okay-Somerville and Dora Scholarios, 'Coping with Career Boundaries and Boundary-Crossing in the Graduate Labour Market', *Career Development International* 19, no. 6 (7 October 2014): 676, https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-12-2013-0144.

and even pre-empt sector-specific trends that can go towards informing programmatic and modular review.

The supply side in this context refers to higher education in general; it supplies 'higher-level knowledge and expertise' as well as 'human resources'.[21] Supply of human resources exceeds demand in several industries at the minute, not least of all because of the pandemic.

All of the above factors feed into the graduate's *Perceived Employability*. It loosely translates as one's confidence in his/her ability to secure meaningful employment. It includes subjective impressions students have of themselves, informed by what the students feel they are capable of, in addition to what they are actually capable of.

* * *

This model seems particularly apt in the context of DkIT on account of a number of distinguishing factors. It is not especially prescriptive, and facilitates embedding employability regardless of the programme or pathway's constraints. It allows for the individual lecturer's creativity and does not compel a particular approach. More than other models, it also emphasises 'perceived employability'.

Additionally, the model operates for the most part from a student's eye view. This POV helps orientate what can and cannot be done in terms of modifications to the model.

Relatedly, students' grasp of what the Institute does to boost their employability must always filter through their perceived employability. Whatever additional category we deem necessary, it should, if possible, be something that students recognise. This proviso informs the modified model, detailed shortly.

Arguably, the Institute can theoretically engage in action that boosts students' employability without the student ever being cognisant of the Institute's beneficence; the consequences are still positive for the student should the Institute's background processes boost graduates' employment opportunities. However, explicitness as to the actions that enhance employability should be made clear to the student in order that they can see for themselves the actions involved in successfully acquiring a job, or that lead to more fulfilling or preferable employment at a later date. Students may mimic or adapt such behaviour themselves post-graduation, engage in such behaviour on others' behalf, or otherwise factor it in to how successful job applications are made. The Institute's capacity to act upon and influence employer behaviour, moreover, should (in theory) boost the students' perceived employability. Ideally, it will positively influence the students' sense of the Institute's prestige, and feed into Clarke's *Social Capital* category.

The Model, v. 2

EE are in the process of evolving this model. The following iteration tailors it to DkIT specifically (see figure 2). Personalising the model will hopefully have the effect of highlighting DkIT's strengths relative to other similar institutes, account for contextual circumstances, better reflect the Institute's regionality and its student demographics, and aid in the model's efficacy and applicability to DkIT.[22]

[21] Tomlinson, 'Introduction: Graduate Employability in Context', 4.

[22] Sultana, moreover, cautions against undifferentiated models along these lines (his emphasis is on the provision of career management skills), stressing the need for sensitivity towards different contexts and groups of learners. See Ronald G. Sultana, 'Learning Career Management Skills in Europe: A Critical Review', *Journal of Education and Work* 25, no. 2 (1 April 2012): 243–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2010.547846.

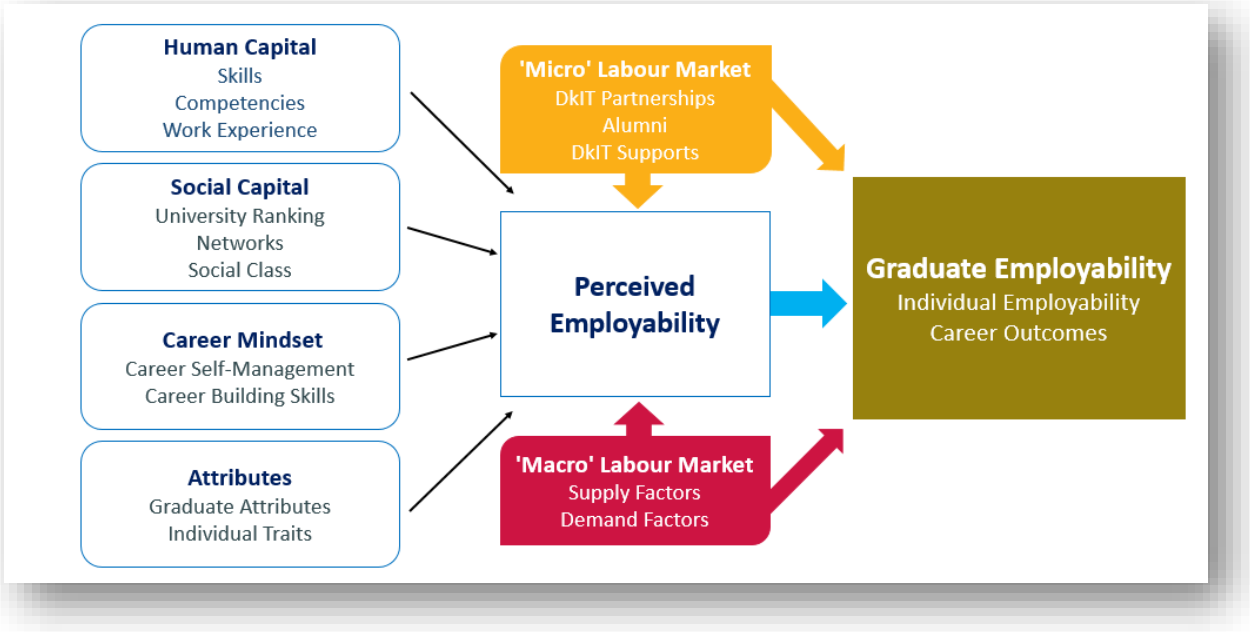

Figure 2. Clarke, revised to further accommodate DkIT.

Among the changes are an alteration of the *Individual Attributes* category. Clarke included 'personality variables' here, and two popular attributes for employability, which were 'adaptability' and 'flexibility'. We folded those more generic attributes into 'Graduate Attributes', which include 'adaptability' and 'flexibility', but also other characteristics endemic to DkIT. The rechristened *Attributes* category now comprises 'Graduate Attributes' along with 'Individual Traits', aiming for a synergy between attributes developed by the Institute, and singular qualities or characteristics whose combinations are unique to the individual. The change is partly a consequence of wishing to promote DkIT graduate attributes, but also to account more fully what local industry tells us it finds appealing in the Institute's graduates (see focus group consultations). Ideally, fostering the graduate attributes and traits recognised and requested most by employers will make our graduates more employable in the Northeast vicinity, where they are most likely to seek work.[23]

Clarke strongly associates *Individual Behaviours* with their relevance to careers.[24] We use *Career Mindset* as indicative of *Individual Behaviours* (Clarke splits *Individual Behaviours* into career 'management' and 'building').

A more significant change resulted in the new *Micro Labour Market* category. The lower *Macro* category now refers to broader, abstract trends, more or less out of any third level institute's hands (as well as the students'), but the 'labour market' on a micro-scale is a place where DkIT can act. It can boost the students' employability—and perceived employability—through its engagement with local industry.

To take each element of the *Micro Labour Market* category in turn: 'DkIT Partnerships' pertains to the extent and nature of the Institute's contacts, and how it harnesses these relationships to cultivate students' employability skills, and connects students and prospective employers. 'Partnerships' encompasses affiliations with industry, but it is also inclusive of non-industry partnerships, such as connections with the GAA or local schools. It

[23] Louth, Monaghan, Meath, and Dublin specifically. See DkIT Careers Service, 'DkIT Graduate Outcomes 2019: Executive Summary' (DkIT, 2019), 9.
[24] Clarke, 'Rethinking Graduate Employability', 1932.

can be regional, but it is not necessarily bound by geography. It can extend as far as necessary, and will hopefully accommodate any future TU arrangements. At present, it accommodates collaboration with other education and training institutions, taking in the DCU-DkIT Graduate School, NEFHEA, the Leinster Pillar II cluster/MEND cluster, and Cross-Border Partner Institutions. This new 'DkIT Partnerships' element also involves how the Institute markets these relationships to students, and their importance to their future careers. Students' perception of DkIT's reach in this context counts towards their perceived employability. Moreover, these relationships on occasion go beyond perceived employability, and create the conditions by which students are offered contracts.

The second element in the *Micro Labour Market* category is alumni. The focus group interviews consistently attested to the value of graduates engaging with current students. Among the ways they help motivate current students is how they exemplify success post-graduation. Students, too, would appear to be more inspired by a graduate than by an anonymous company representative, or even a more prodigious speaker.

The third element is 'DkIT Supports'. These include the Access Office, participation in The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), College Connect, Student Finance, scholarship programmes, and other provisions that enable several demographics to navigate third level education. Various supports consolidate financial well-being and mental health, which are conducive to perceived employability and mitigate against impediments outlined in the *Social Capital* category.

Micro directs attention towards aspects that DkIT can contribute to in a more direct manner than the more aloof macro considerations. Even so, some overlap necessarily occurs between the new category and Clarke's initial groups. Even though 'DkIT partnerships' is in a sense located in the 'Demand factors' aspect of the *Labour Market* category (there would be no partnerships without local demand, or at least without mutually beneficial outcomes for both the Institute and the third party), it is worthwhile distinguishing the local and national in this context, owing to the Institute's capacity to effect positive change on the students' behalf that would be less likely to occur without the Institute acting as intermediary and facilitator.

Further to this, the *Micro Labour Market* category loosely relates to both the *Human Capital* and *Social Capital* categories, specifically the 'work experience' in the former and the 'networks' in the later. The emphasis here would nonetheless appear to be the student's *individual* work experience and personal network (as distinct from what the Institute facilitates). The *Micro Labour Market* category highlights those elements on the Institute's side. Again, overlap exists; however, the Institute's capacity to form relationships with others and act as a conduit for students to access employment still merits distinction from what the students are capable of themselves, especially given contextual factors that may mitigate against DkIT's typical demographic (these include a high number of students who are first-in-family apropos of third level education). The 'partnership' element then relates to the quality and quantity of third-party engagement. Alongside this, the Institute's success in marketing this element to students and demonstrating its efficacy plays into students' perceived employability. The students' perception of an isolated host HEI that cannot access major employers in the field is unlikely to bode well for the students' prospects with those employers or those of a similar pedigree. If their alma matter appears insignificant to employers, then their qualification from that Institute is likely to be devalued in their eyes.

* * *

The model has limitations, but nothing that cannot be circumvented with interventions elsewhere. The model perhaps does not fully accommodate the employers' perception of the student, or the college, and its role in graduate employability. This is due to the model mostly

staying within the purview of the students' perceptions. Yet, the absence is not pronounced; arguably, it links to 'University Ranking' in the *Social Capital* category, which accommodates students' feelings about their HEI's status, but also to an extent reflects potential employer biases that students may not be aware of.

However, the relative ranking of colleges according to national metrics is only one contributor to employers' perceptions. Impressions formed by employers as a result of their interactions with students have a knock-on effect on future placements and internships, affecting future students' employability and employment. Industry's perception of DkIT as a supplier of topflight employees will therefore boost graduate employability. It is possible that a mirror reflection of the Clarke model from the employers' perspective may help shine a light on this factor; the 'perceived employability' lens would be instead from the employers' perspective as directed at DkIT graduates, rather than students' and graduates' perception of their individual employability.

It should be stressed that even in its DkIT-tailored version, a model like this is purposely broad, and primarily will be used to help outline the terrain EE will explore in its bid to embed employability. The four left-hand categories suggest the boundaries within which DkIT may positively influence graduate employability. Some more precise methods for doing so are detailed in the next stage.

Stage Two: Review and Mapping

Process

What follows outlines a process for how employability might be embedded within the curriculum. It is currently pitched at programmatic level,[25] however, it is possible the process may ultimately take place at a different stratum in the Institute's hierarchy. We aim to provide a methodology for further embedding employability where it exists and encouraging its adoption where it is omitted. At the same time, we endeavour to uphold staff's autonomy and freedom to approach this project in ways that best suit their circumstances.

The process is also intended as a means to develop graduate attributes within a syllabus, and to reflect the Clarke framework detailed above. These emphases will encourage individual lecturers to approach modular review from the perspective of attributes in addition to employability.

The process is activity-focused. It is intended to make employability concrete for students, rather than an intellectual conceit. Our aim is to promote the students *doing* something towards their employability.

The process broadly adheres to curriculum auditing, which 'offers a way of testing how and where employability-related learning is incorporated into curricula – and where there might be gaps'.[26] For our purposes, 'auditing' is a rather severe term with an aura of legalese; EE intend for the following process to be conducted by the individuals who elect to adapt modules according to our advice. We mean to ensure that—as much as we hope responsibility will be shared—individuals' duties are all elective and discretionary, and as much as possible, amenable to the personal strengths and interests of individual staff members.

Overview

The process comprises four primary stages with various subdivisions. Each will be looked at in turn. The four primary stages are *collecting*, *collating*, *recommending*, and *reviewing*.

[25] Recommended over the modular by Yorke and Knight. See *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum*, 7.
[26] Yorke and Knight, 9.

1. The first stage involves collecting information. A member of staff, perhaps a programme leader, needs to know what activities individual lecturers are already engaged in as regards employability. We recommend collecting this data using a Microsoft Forms survey. It is a box-ticking exercise that also allows for more detail should the lecturer wish to provide it.
2. The second stage is collating the data. At this juncture, programme heads identify patterns, and assess the quality and quantity of employability activities. How far this escalates up the academic hierarchy may be dependent on contextual factors.
3. The third stage is offering recommendations for modular revision. Changes should take place by consensus among all the lecturers concerned.
4. The last stage involves storing the data to share internally and potentially externally. It will show the extent to which individual departments and Schools are embedding employability year-on-year, and by extension, DkIT as a whole. It will also allow people to plan, and provide for concrete aspirations to be met with every cycle of the process.

The Survey

We will now investigate this four-stage process in more detail. For *collecting*, we recommend gather data through a survey (figure 3).

Survey Qs and Content	**Choices**
Introduction. One line on employability. Survey's purpose ('we want you to' etc.) Its importance to DkIT / programmatic review. The results' destination. One survey per module.	N/A
Your School	School list (choice – single answer)
Department (branched from previous question)	(choice – single answer)
Year	(choice – single answer)
Module Title and/or Code	Text answer.
Which of the following activities does your module engage in?	Comprehensive list (choice – multiple answers)
If you would like to provide further details on your implementation of any of the above activities, please do so here.	Text answer.
Should the above list not capture all the ways you embed employability in your module, please provide us with as much information as possible on the additional activity/ies that you use to enhance your students' employability.	Text answer.

Figure 3. The survey.

We recommend lecturers answer these questions at each interaction of the cycle. After a short number of questions identifying the School, department, etc., staff choose activities from a pre-established list drawn from the focus groups, surveys, and any other best practices that the EE team have identified. The lecturers are then encouraged to provide more detail, both on the activities that are and are not listed. Completion time should be approximately 3–4

minutes, and longer depending on how much staff want to elaborate. The survey is linked to here. Circulation would be via email.

Using the Data

Yorke and Knight outline how answering questions such as those listed above can act as a precursor to a curricular audit. It is possible to learn from staff responses whether particular activities appear in their modules, the activities' relationship to analogous approaches in prior or later modules, unnecessarily duplication, and whether the core modules offer progressively more challenging tasks that build on prior learning.[27]

Yorke and Knight's questions target the *effects* of various employability activities (i.e. teamwork as an effect of a particular activity) (see figure 4).[28]

	MODULE								
ASPECT	A1	B1	C1	D1	E1	F1	A2	B2	Etc.
Computer literacy									
Political sensitivity									
Team work									
Etc.									

Figure 4. Yorke and Knight's template.

While this approach has a raft of positives, EE instead recommend using the activities themselves, rather than their outcomes. This recommendation is predicated on a desire for greater transparency as to what staff request of the students. Multiple staff may imbue their CA with team-work, but the exact approach would remain obscure. Moreover, the obscured method may be repeating across modules; such homogeneity would slip through the cracks if the precise activity is not accounted for by the survey questions. Moreover, an effects-focused approach leaves excess latitude for the individual staff member to characterise the effects of their CA according to subjective criteria. Staff may attest that students are acquiring political sensitivity from a particular module, however, their criteria might be quite broad, and not align with what other staff would consider a true development of that strength. For these reasons, EE recommend leading with the activities. Their learning outcomes may ultimately differ, but cataloguing the activities themselves will provide greater detail to the programme co-ordinator, and allow for more focused recommendations when revising modular content.

Knight offers two 'real life' examples elsewhere, looking at modular level and programmatic level,[29] the latter of which approximates EE's recommendations more closely (a simplified version of Knight is found in Figure 5). Knight looks at larger programmatic review here, and specifically at employability. The structural overview is particularly edifying, and roughly corresponds to EE's recommended approach. Knight is obviously quite broad, however; EE does not anticipate flexibility as to the breakdown of lectures, tutorials, and seminars per module.

[27] Yorke and Knight, 10.
[28] Yorke and Knight, 10.
[29] Peter Knight, *Being a Teacher in Higher Education* (Buckingham; Philadelphia, PA: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 2002), 153, 176.

Learning, teaching and assessment activities	*Modules*			
	100 T1	100 T2	100 T3	Etc.
Lectures	✓		✓	
Seminars	✓			
Tutorials	All modules offer students opportunities to consult tutors on a one-to-one or small group basis, according to student preference.			
Workshops		✓	✓	
Problem Working	All modules engage students on problem-working activities, which vary within and between modules in complexity and the amount of scaffolding provided.			
Structured work in peer groups	✓	✓	✓	
Self-directed peer group work		✓		
Group projects		✓		
Structured independent study			✓	
Self-directed learning				
Web-enhanced teaching		?	?	
Web searches		?	?	
Practical work		✓	?	
Critical commentaries				
Essays	✓		✓	
Set reading	✓		✓	
Etc.				

Figure 5. Knight's table of learning, teaching and assessment methods in the key modules of an undergraduate programme (simplified).

Figure 6 shows hypothetical aggregated data, inspired by Knight's table. The columns are modules that staff provided survey responses for. Activities occupy the left column. Activities are drawn at random from the best practice examples found in the focus group interviews.

	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5	Module 6
Peer Learning	✓		✓			
Careers Workshop		✓	✓			
Mentoring Programme						
Industry Guest Speaker		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Written Assignment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Online Exam		✓		✓	✓	
Unique Activity			✓			

Figure 6. Basic survey results.

In this scenario, module 3 already embeds employability (in using five of the seven activities listed), ergo, it is not the most likely candidate for more employability activities. Module 6 features only one employability activity. In other words, it is fertile soil for embedding new activities. No module uses a mentoring programme, suggesting it be brought under consideration when staff review modular content. The written assignment is a well-represented activity. Students are potentially getting too much of it, because every module surveyed uses it. It is a candidate for replacement by another, alternative employability activity. The Unique Activity is perhaps tailored to a particular module. Its potential for adaptation should be logged along with the rest of the findings.

We assume that greater diversity of employability activities increases overall employability. The greater variety the students are exposed to, the more adaptable (in theory) they become. The diversity of experience adds to the sum total of their skills, but also prepares them for a broader range of tasks. This consideration motivates EE to recommend a greater number and greater scope of employability activities. Some activities, moreover, are more effective at instilling employability than others.

Programme co-ordinators might prioritise some activities over others. EE wish to make the decision-making process for staff as easy as possible. We propose a ranking system be put in place to help staff decide on the precise activities to embed within their modules. The ranking will be predetermined, and influenced by a range of parameters, including:

- Student-employer proximity
- Timespan of student-employer proximity
- Relevance to real-world duties/responsibilities
- Relevance to job application skills
- Explicit connection to graduate attributes

The relationship of form to content can be issue here in terms of what represents an employability activity and just an activity. The form itself might be neutral—say, an essay—but the content may relate to employability. We will likely prioritise forms that compel certain content. An internship, for instance, insists on proximity between student and employer.

	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5	Module 6
Activity A						
Activity B						
Activity C						
Activity D						
Activity E						
Activity F						
Activity G						
Activity H						

Figure 7. Activities hierarchised according to their relevance to employability. Darker greens are most relevant.

We recommend when choosing activities that staff draw from higher ranked options first. There are a number of ways the ranking might be indicated. One possibility is a heat map, indicting the activities' relevance according to shades of green (see figure 7). This

visual has the benefit of being easily understood at glance. The heat map should very much indicate a gradient. A host of variables dictate the activities' relevance to employability, and the allocation of rank should not infer that the demarcations are fixed and definitive. Dark greens are approximately more effective, and pale greens are approximately less effective. While the heat map should prove useful, there are other ways of showing this information. It may be appended to an activity list available elsewhere.

Regardless of the exact ranking system, that some activities are more employability-friendly than others should be made plain in documentation, and given a range of options, staff should aim to draw from the activities classed as most valuable. 'Placement' would almost certainly be Activity A. The rankings also might help decide the extent to which new activities become embedded. If one dark green option is not feasible, two paler greens might be considered. Quantity can help balance out quality.

EE want to give staff as much choice as possible in deciding how they approach enhancement of their modules. It might be purely from an employability perspective, but also from an attribute perspective. The latter may add another layer of detail to the activities' description (see figure 8). Each activity might potentially be coded with the attribute it best flatters. Provisionally, we have called the attributes C1, 2, and 3, and T for the emergent technical capstone.

C1: Confident
C2: Communicative
C3: Collaborative
T: Tech-Driven

Each activity corresponds to the development of one or more attributes. These can be difficult to isolate, but some are clearly conducive to a particular capstone's development. 'Group-work', for instance, clearly favours 'collaboration'.

	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4
Activity A C3	✓			
Activity B C2		✓	✓	✓
Activity C C1; C2	✓	✓	✓	
Activity D C3			✓	
Activity E T; C1	✓	✓		✓
Activity F T			✓	✓

Figure 8. Survey results, plus graduate attributes.

When staff arrive at their totals gathered from the Forms survey, they can gauge how much the attributes are represented in tandem with the activities. It might be obvious that Collaboration is underrepresented, which is the case in the above scenario. This absence may be a factor in deciding what activities to embed in advance of the next cycle. The activity's relevance to employability may also be factor in helping to decide the approach that best addresses staff's needs.

The Clarke model too may inform how activities are classified. This additional layer will help tie up all the different facets of Embedding Employability (see figure 9). Setting aside the *Labour Market*, Clarke's model indicates four broad categories that impact employability: *Human Capital*, *Social Capital*, *Career Mindset* née *Individual Behaviours*, and *Attributes*. The latter are covered by the coding system outlined above. For the purposes of the table (and not to lose the career emphasis), we continue to use *Career Mindset* as indicative of Clarke's *Individual Behaviours*.

We might use this additional layer of coding to indicate which model category the activities align with best:

HC: Human Capital
SC: Social Capital
CM: Career Mindset

It could be the case that a certain cluster of modules show a marked absence of career mindset activities (see scenario below), in which case, we recommend drawing again from the darker greens that are tagged CM.

	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4
Activity A C3; HC	✓			
Activity B C2; CM				✓
Activity C C1; C2; SC	✓	✓	✓	
Activity D C3; CM			✓	
Activity E T; C1; HC	✓	✓		✓
Activity F T; SC; HC	✓		✓	✓

Figure 9. The survey results, accounting for the Clarke categories and graduate attributes.

What activities are prioritised would clearly be up to the programme leaders. Certain parameters may take precedent. The *Career Mindset* absence, however, might be deemed more urgently in need of redress than any particular attribute. This priority may be emphasised by students' feedback, employer needs, the staff themselves, or a combination of all.

	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4
Activity A				
Activity B		✓	✓	✓
Activity C	✓	✓	✓	
Activity D			✓	
Activity E		✓		✓
Activity F			✓	✓

Figure 10. Survey results aimed at finding ways to diversify assessment and close gaps.

As an alternative to using all this data, there are simpler ways to engage with this process. The data may be stripped of reference to graduate attributes or the Clarke framework (figure 10). It may be aimed purely at locating gaps in the activities, underused activities, and the modules most open for revision. In the scenario below, Activity A is absent, and bar a lone instance, Module 1 does not use employability-related activities.

Incorporating activities according to their relevance to employability, the attributes, and the framework would be much more surgical and targeted, but this blunter approach will still have positive results, albeit more diffuse ones. The spartan approach therefore is not especially nuanced, but crucially, there would still be a net benefit for the students if recommendations based on it were implemented. Moreover, stripping away extra data might be preferable depending on relative levels of staff engagement. Both versions are likely to have their pluses and minuses depending on context.

Chain of Events

Having looked at how the collected data might be used, the following revisits the original four-stage breakdown of the process from a less abstract perspective. While the precise timeline is still to be decided, the beginning of Semester 2 is a likely choice for when the cycle should begin. Staff at this point have Semester 1's modules under their belt, and will be in a position to prepare modules due for delivery in the next academic year.

i. Share the staff survey, covering modules in both semesters. Respondents' replies form the raw material for collation. It is possible that students might be engaged at this point. In addition to easing pressure on staff, the students will gain experience using Forms, extracting data, and report writing, and gain exposure to the concept of employability. Simple and straightforward instruction for how to arrange the data should mitigate against any issues. Students are in essence being asked: which activities are taking place and where; which are being used most; and which are being used least.
ii. Generate statistics in Forms. Identify gaps, modules missing employability features, and over- and underrepresented activities. Even a glance, the Forms results will show common and uncommon activities, and their spread across degree pathways. A brief summary of the findings would not need to be much longer than a page, with a longer appendix for all the unique activities and context provided by individual lecturers on their use of the listed activities.
iii. Prepare a brief internal report, highlighting potential changes (module and staff permitting).
iv. Arrange staff meeting (Teams), and circulate optional activities and courses of action. The options would be purely elective. Individual lecturers would consent to additional employability activities in their modules, proportionate to their module's capacity to accommodate changes, and the lecturer's own preferences as to which new activities to embed.
v. Adjustments should be made at modular level, but should take account of the programme to which the module contributes.

The survey cycle then would kick in again following the review stage.

Even after one cycle, data available would likely show positive change, and after a number of years, statistics would show the extent to which programmes evolved. Positive results could be made known externally.

Procedural Considerations

Changes made according to this process will place demands on certain staff members at different stages. EE endeavours to keep such demands at a minimum, and to ensure that the process is as transparent as possible as to the various duties required for the process to achieve its goals. The following considerations are worth bearing in mind:

- Information should be fed through a common source. The process requires an individual or individuals to send the survey email, liaise with the students who will be doing the collating, moderate the staff meeting where the findings are discussed, and then save the data for future reference, as well as to compare and contrast with other departments and Schools. This person might self-nominate. Moreover, the individual might transfer responsibilities over to another at different stages of the process in order to lighten the workload.
- Alterations to modules should be negotiated as a group, with an even distribution of responsibilities spread across all lecturing staff. In both theory and practice, staff should not have to do anything they do not want to do; staff enthusiasm for and trust in the fairness of the project are paramount. Perception of a shared responsibility (and commensurate shared workload) among the staff will aid in yielding rich data and result in concrete modular change.
- Activities should all have a corresponding resources section in an expanded toolkit. EE will ensure that staff do not enter into new activities blindly, and can access resources to aid in their implementation of modular change. The first phrase of this provision of resources is the Assessment Toolkit, with more resources expected as the project evolves.
- A semi-regular review of activities should be put in place to account for new/revised/retired modules; new and exiting staff; and to align with evolving industry expectations.
- Data should be used to evidence positive structural change. Empirically verifiable changes to modules will be invaluable in terms of gauging the project's success from a staff perspective. Other provisions will need to be put in place to assess student and graduate perceptions of the employability project in the mid- to long-term. The latter perspective will be needed to ascertain how successful the EE project has been in terms of its consequences for graduates. The questions asked of graduates will require some consideration in terms of *employability* specifically, rather than *employment*.

Activities Database

Regarding the activities themselves, our intention is for them to each have a point of reference on a dedicated website or database. The activities range from complex structural changes at programme level, to small, one-off changes that staff can integrate with relative ease and at short notice into a given module.

Our aim is to help programme co-ordinators and individual lecturers refine and develop their modules' content to dovetail with employability skills for the students. Again, we are keen to avoid either/or scenarios. Employability and subject-specific content will ideally harmonise. Module content should obviously satisfy, say, the needs of professional accreditation bodies, while simultaneously promoting the broader skills that will facilitate the student's movement within the job market.

The website/database will comprise an activities library, which will catalogue a host of activities and provide advice for how they might be incorporated at a modular level.

Activities Library	**Parent Categories**	**Activities (several for each parent)**	**Information Provided for each Activity**
Assessment	*Written* *Oral* *Blended*	*Written* Activity 1–10, 12, 14 *Oral* Activity 5, 6–9, 11–19 *Blended* Activity 10, 12, 16, 20–29	**Content** • Relevance to employability; • relationship to graduate attributes; • varieties; • combinations; • further reading. **Tags** For example: PowerPoint; Collaboration (peer-to-peer); Tech-Driven; Communication (verbal); Communication (written); Interactivity; F2F; Student Q&A; Confidence (oral); Networking; Career Self-Management. **See Also**... Links to other activities.
Attributes	*Communicative* *Collaborative* *Confidence* *Tech*	*Communicative* Activity 6, 8, 9–15, 20–23 *Collaborative* Activity 1–2, 3–7, 9, 10–14, 20. *Confidence* Etc.	
Misc.	*Curricular* *Co-curricular* *Extra-curricular*	Etc.	

Figure 11. Database.

Initially, staff will be able to search for activities through three major categories: *Assessment*, *Attributes*, and *Miscellaneous*. Assessment pertains to both formative and summative approaches. *Attributes* uses the capstones as the parent categories. Each capstone has activities geared towards its development. *Miscellaneous* captures otherwise unclassified activities logged in the Microsoft Forms survey responses. Eventually, these may progress to the *Assessment* and/or *Attribute* categories, when it becomes possible to provide them with the same amount of supporting information afforded the established activities. Importantly, the categories' activities are not mutually exclusive. Several activities will appear in each category.

Entering through *Attributes* (shown below) will reveal a series of headings and subheadings on how a given attribute may be developed through activities. While some of these will overlap with those found via *Assessment*, not all will.

Activities Library	**Capstones**	**Collaborative Activities**
Assessment	Confidence	• Student-faculty • Peer assessment • Group work • Third party (external) • Co-curricular (library, student services, clubs and societies) • Role-play • Formative discussion • Peer mentoring • Consultancy project
	Collaboration	
Attributes		
	Communication	
Misc.		
	Tech	

Figure 12. Following the pathway of Attributes → Collaboration → Collaboration activities.

Each activity will be given a code, along with content that informs staff about the nature of the activity from a host of perspectives. More detail on content is provided in the Toolkit documentation. Regarding the code, a simple numbering and letter system should suffice. For instance, an essay = 1, a presentation = 2. Specific variants would be signalled by a letter; for instance, 1a = essay plan, and 2a = oral-only presentation. Unique activities eventually re-categorised as either *Assessment* or *Attribute* are likely to move under one of the existing number classes, and be given a letter to signal that they are variants. Coding in this manner may reside in the purely administrative side of the database. Should a document be used to write the initial content, references to activities and their variants using codes might facilitate easier searching and cross-referencing for the content manager. The end-user will ideally work off a tagging system.

Such a tagging system would be aimed at maximising searchability. Ideally, each activity will be tagged, allowing it to link to all other activities similarly tagged. Tags will be drawn from a number of identifying markers that capture the relationship of the activity to EE's employability model and related outputs. For instance, activities will be tagged according to the attributes and sub-attributes they help support; the aspects of the Clarke framework they correspond to; and other endemic features. Our intention is that staff can easily see all available options for a given tag or series of tags, and create the exact combination to target the precise qualities they wish to bring to their teaching.

Each activity will have a 'See Also' section that lists hyperlinks to related activities, or activities that complement or otherwise pertain to the activity. This feature is supplementary to the tag system, and may possibly substitute for it depending on the tagging system's feasibility.

Graduate Attributes as Learning Outcomes

How attributes may play a role in module design will be outlined in due course.

Stage Three: Action

Overview

In advance of the above process being submitted for adoption, EE has compiled a series of considerations aimed at laying the groundwork for future work on the project. We outline various contexts, obstacles, and opportunities that pertain to employability at DkIT, and make recommendations for how they might be addressed. Each issue is broken down into background and recommendations.

Career Mindset/Management

Background

Career management skills are 'the abilities required to proactively navigate the working world and successfully manage the career building process, based on attributes such as lifelong learning and adaptability'.[30] As the 'burden of responsibility for one's career has shifted from the organization to the individual',[31] networking has accrued greater importance.

[30] Ruth Bridgstock, 'The Graduate Attributes We've Overlooked: Enhancing Graduate Employability through Career Management Skills', *Higher Education Research & Development* 28, no. 1 (1 March 2009): 34–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360802444347.

[31] Forret and Dougherty, 'Networking Behaviors and Career Outcomes', 420.

Recommendation
EE wishes to stress career management skills at an early stage in students' degrees, with networking taking centre stage. This interest in putting employers on students' radar corresponds to EE's desire to bridge the gap between graduation and employment.

The Precariat

Background
Students are faced with the prospect of joining the 'precariat'. This social stratum denotes a cluster of economic conditions such as involuntary part-time labour, short-term and zero-hours contracts, and unpredictable earnings, but also comes with a host of personal ramifications, including simmering insecurity, overqualification, underachievement, and a lack of occupational identity.[32]

Recommendations
EE would like to address this by promoting proactive behaviours among students and recommending consciousness-raising initiates among staff. EE will attempt to acclimatise recent graduates to the potential for underemployment and short-term compromises for long-term gain. This market trajectory's implications for graduates need emphasis at multiple stages of their degree. Regular exposure will help ensure that students make the mental, if not behavioural, leap towards active engagement.

How graduates spend time *between* employment will factor into EE's recommendations. EE wishes to draw students' and graduates' attention to these interstices between unemployment and employment, and foster individuals' ability to close this gap as soon as possible. We also wish to promote ways to make the most of these fissures so that the individual's eventual return to work carries with it renewed employability. EE recommends cultivating, rewarding, and facilitating enthusiasm on students' part, and instilling in them a sense of personal worth, regardless of unsuccessful applications and interviews. Graduates must balance optimism and realism about their employment prospects, otherwise, what they are capable of and the employment they engage in will remain misaligned, to the graduate's detriment.

Demand

Background
Related to the previous topic, labour market demand counts as a major factor towards employability.

Recommendations
Closer involvement of employers in skill-building and training programs has been mooted as a solution.[33] In the context of the Institute, more input from employers on the precise skills worth developing will likely boost graduate employability in the short-term by creating a closer match between graduate competencies and local demand.

Moreover, EE's cognizance of demand-side considerations will be important in bolstering graduates' perceived employability. A focus on individuals' attributes can neglect the impact of hostile labour market conditions; instead, personal deficiencies come to explain

[32] Guy Standing, 'Meet the Precariat, the New Global Class Fuelling the Rise of Populism', World Economic Forum, 9 November 2016, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/precariat-global-class-rise-of-populism/.
[33] Gore, 'Extending Employability or Solving Employers' Recruitment Problems?', 343.

why an individual is unemployed.[34] Graduates must be aware of larger economic forces at work in order to retain perspective and confidence in their own abilities and the value of their qualifications. It will not always be graduates' fault they cannot secure work where they want it. To this, one might add the need for graduates to be highly attuned to labour market fluctuations, to regularly check job postings on a host of online fora, and to act upon opportunities with a short shelf life.

EE would be interested in consolidating and expanding upon current relationships with employers. Stronger ties will afford programme designers the opportunity to embellish their core content with material directly pertinent to their students' future prospects in the region. Many employers claim to support staff in their continuing professional development, with approximately 75% of the 760 employers surveyed by the HEA in 2018 providing in-company training.[35] EE contends that DkIT would benefit from best practice advice in this regard, and the potential alignment between said programmes' content and department-specific activities.

Perceived Employability and Self-Perception

Background

Veld, Semeijn, and van Vuuren consider perceived employability to be an employee's subjective sense of their own chances within the labour market.[36]

Recommendations

A graduate's perception of themselves as worthy of employers' attention merits action by EE. Willingness for mobility and for training and schooling correlate positively with perceived employability,[37] suggesting that EE cultivate, reward, and facilitate enthusiasm on students' part for such interests and activities.

In tandem with laying the groundwork for the interval between education and employment, EE considers mental health primers a viable post-graduation enterprise. Its goal would be to bolster the mental reserves necessary for a job market buffeted by the pandemic. Pilot studies have shown that a well-honed, single-session workshop on emotion regulation strategies and skills for coping with stress is capable of generating a host of positive outcomes.[38] Meanwhile, occasional follow-up surveys may also reinforce ties with alumni—a resource EE wishes to develop rigorously.

Social Disadvantage

Background

DkIT hosts students from disadvantaged backgrounds to a greater extent than most of the country's HEIs.

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[34] Colin Lindsay and Amparo Serrano Pascual, 'New Perspectives on Employability and Labour Market Policy: Reflecting on Key Issues', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 27, no. 6 (1 December 2009): 952, https://doi.org/10.1068/c2706ed.

[35] HEA, 'Irish National Employer Survey: Final Report', January 2019, 5, https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/21-01-19-J8961-Irish-National-Employer-Survey-Final-Report.pdf.

[36] Monique Veld, Judith Semeijn, and Tinka van Vuuren, 'Enhancing Perceived Employability: An Interactionist Perspective on Responsibilities of Organizations and Employees', *Personnel Review* 44, no. 6 (2015): 867, https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2014-0100.

[37] Veld, Semeijn, and Vuuren, 876.

[38] Emily E. Bernstein et al., 'A Single-Session Workshop to Enhance Emotional Awareness and Emotion Regulation for Graduate Students: A Pilot Study', *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 10 November 2020, 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2020.09.008.

Recommendations

There are of course aspects of the personal dimension that the years spent at DkIT cannot rectify, but DkIT can nonetheless attempt to ameliorate some of the deleterious effects on employability caused by familial prejudices and biases. Personal disadvantage might be tackled at several levels—among them, a redoubled emphasis on network building and communicative skill.

The effects of social class and other gradations of inequality might be alleviated by promotion of societies, student-run sport clubs, and other outlets conducive to inter-class interaction. Access to resources, reading material, on-site technology, etc., as well as cultivating networking opportunities will also help net beneficial outcomes. No doubt many staff are acutely aware of these issues already; discretion nonetheless conspires to suppress open discussion, while students themselves may misrepresent themselves because of perceived social stigma.

Any recommendations put forward as part of this project are intended to be class-blind. Various new supports may, however, disproportionately benefit those whose professional development has been compromised by personal circumstances. It is of paramount importance to us that we facilitate as much as possible these students' perceived employability so that it has the potential to match that of students from more financially comfortable backgrounds. We wish to empower and mobilise lower income students' own hard-won skill set, and for them to recognise the value of their personal experience in terms of their employability. This is not just for moral reasons, but also for economic and employment-orientated reasons. Being able to differentiate oneself in a homogenised talent pool is especially important on account of shrinking demand in a number of sectors, and the overabundance of graduates seeking work.

Cultural Fit

Background

While this quality has long been on recruiters' radar, Brown and Scase argue that acceptability has assumed greater significance owing to companies' growing need for 'team-players' as control within organisations becomes more decentralised. The criteria for 'acceptability' rest upon a certain savoir faire and chemistry with an organisation's culture.[39]

Another factor is the growing importance of employees' after-hours decorum. The net effect has been to increase the 'significance attached to social as well as academic qualifications'.[40] Demand for such social and emotional skills is poised to grow across all industries.[41] Social media in its various manifestations is used increasingly as a screening tool by employers,[42] but employers also are increasingly hiring through social media.

Recommendations

EE can potentially help develop a student's social presence as part of a suite of techniques aimed at maximising their appeal to recruiters. Graduates' extended online presence can help

[39] Phillip Brown and Richard Scase, *Higher Education and Corporate Realities: Class, Culture and the Decline of Graduate Careers* (London: UCL Press, 1994), 105.
[40] Brown and Scase, 105–7.
[41] 'In aggregate, between 2016 and 2030, demand for social and emotional skills will grow across all industries [...] by 22 percent in Europe'. Jacques Bughin et al., 'Automation and the Workforce of the Future', McKinsey, 23 May 2018, https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce.
[42] Lauren Salm, '70% of Employers Are Snooping Candidates' Social Media Profiles', CareerBuilder, 15 June 2017, https://www.careerbuilder.com/advice/social-media-survey-2017.

or hinder recruitment. We can infer from this that developing a student's professional presence online merits EE's attention.

Skills vs Knowledge

Background

Cameron attests that the 'general ascendancy of skills in today's educational thinking' has resulted in 'what people *know* when they leave school, college or university [being] seen as less important than what they can *do*.'[43] Outcomes, skills, and competences have moved to the centre of curricula—influences on this shift include employers' disinterest in graduates' specialised academic knowledge and their preference instead for flexible workers with generic skills.[44] However, how generic the skills should be poses questions, as does the value of the skills themselves.

Teaching generic skills is not necessarily conducive to the graduate's eventual employability, with the result that new employees still need inducting into their job's specific duties. In an Australian-based study focused on one such generic skill—professional writing—the authors conclude that it is 'difficult, if not in practice impossible, to identify writing requirements of professional areas in any generic sense, and that these are often unique to specific professional areas, organisations, and workplace roles'.[45] Another category of generic skills is critical thinking, the teaching of which would also appear to be ineffective when taught in the abstract or when disconnected from domain-specific knowledge and practice.[46] As Ericsson and Pool attest, 'there is no such thing as developing a general skill. […] You don't train to become an athlete; you train to become a gymnast or a sprinter or a marathoner or a swimmer or a basketball player'.[47] Tricot and Sweller suggest that generic skills of any sort, despite their superficial appeal, do not engender the advanced cognitive performance conferred by domain-specific knowledge. Curriculum and syllabus designers ergo might best serve students by employing techniques favouring the acquisition of domain-specific knowledge.[48]

Recommendations

This will have implications for the design of employability or entrepreneurship modules, or even individual lectures, which would benefit from a strong emphasis on case-studies and applied, discipline-specific content and assessment. Employability modules would likely require branching into sector-specific content.

What Constitutes an Employability Skill?

Background

[43] Deborah Cameron, *Good to Talk? Living and Working in a Communication Culture* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 127.
[44] Cameron, 128.
[45] Tim Moore and Janne Morton, 'The Myth of Job Readiness? Written Communication, Employability, and the "Skills Gap" in Higher Education', *Studies in Higher Education* 42, no. 3 (March 2017): 603, https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1067602.
[46] Daniel T. Willingham, 'Critical Thinking: Why Is It So Hard to Teach?', *Arts Education Policy Review* 109, no. 4 (1 March 2008): 21, https://doi.org/10.3200/AEPR.109.4.21-32.
[47] Karl Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool, *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise* (Boston New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 60.
[48] André Tricot and John Sweller, 'Domain-Specific Knowledge and Why Teaching Generic Skills Does Not Work', *Educational Psychology Review* 26, no. 2 (1 June 2014): 281, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-013-9243-1.

Given the number of permutations expected of recent graduates, what skills count towards a given student's employability can be difficult to ascertain. What skills are relevant to employability depend on the sector, as well as the employer, and potentially extend to even more minute levels, such as the departments and teams within a business. Employers want different skills, not just in kind, but also in terms of their durability—some preferring short-term skills to fill gaps in their workforce, others desiring skills relevant in the long-term. What constitutes 'work-ready', then, and what skills to foster, becomes a challenge for programme designers and module coordinators.[49]

Recommendations
EE aims to provide an adaptable framework flexible enough to accommodate each department's vagaries, but that remains undergirded and strengthened by Institute-wide foundations. Owing to DkIT graduates' propensity to stay within the locality,[50] EE will promote robust dialogue between regional employers to ensure that graduate skills and attributes align with local needs.

Explicitness

Background
Recalling Hillage and Pollard, 'for the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context'. The ability to recognise and communicate one's employability is no small feat.

Recommendations
EE aims to convince students to 'show you know'. How graduates package their skills and communicate them to potential employers represents an aspect of employability the EE team feel DkIT can address. Dedicated resources for recent graduates might be one approach the Institute can take to ensure graduates can externalise or make explicit their abilities. EE, moreover, wishes to introduce this mindset as early as possible, at a minimum during the students' second year, so that job-searching, a capacity to self-market, and an ability to communicate verbally, orally, and in writing begin early and have time to develop before the graduate's job search begins in earnest.

Personality traits combined with a capacity to evidence and demonstrate worthiness (whether based on skills, qualifications, or otherwise) represents a further cornerstone of employability. Persistence, patience, and proactivity will boost the graduate's chances in the labour market. How students navigate rejection and criticism will matter as much as their eventual behaviour as an employee. EE can promote character development up to point, but in the short-term, may simply recommend behaviour conducive to success. This behaviour, moreover, might stand in marked contrast to the graduate's natural inclinations; adopting behaviour need not correlate with internalising its tenets. This 'performed' aspect might also have implications for CV writing and interview skills.

Accustoming students to various market standards represents another goal of EE. Ideally, graduates will outgrow the strictures of college assessment. Students must internalise quality standards for their work and evolve beyond a dependence on 'marks, grades, rubrics,

[49] James Robson, 'Graduate Employability, Employment and Skills in the Covid-19 Labour Market', Department of Education, University of Oxford, 15 Dec 2020, YouTube video, 29:29, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=jQ3DvSa4GLY.
[50] DkIT Careers Service, 'DkIT Graduate Outcomes 2019', 9.

explicit criteria and markers'.[51] As with much else in the EE initiative, we see assessment design as one way to cultivate this mindset.

Stage Four: Monitor, Evaluate and Measure Impact

EE looks forward to the trialling of the aforementioned processes, at which point it will be in a position to gauge successes and areas that need further work.

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[51] David Boud et al., 'Introduction: What Is Evaluative Judgement?', in *Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education*, ed. David Boud et al. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 1.

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