



Queen's University
Belfast



Introducing Employability and Skills

Preparing our students
for the future

www.qub.ac.uk/EmployabilityandSkills

Introduction

By producing highly-skilled graduates and postgraduates, universities play an important role in providing the talent and intellectual resource that drive and sustain a modern, knowledge-based economy.

In a world characterised by uncertainty, if universities are to ensure that their graduates can not only cope with change but drive it, then they must regularly review their understanding of the skills needed by their stakeholders and how they can best develop this skills set in their graduates. This leaflet introduces the University's Employability and Skills Policy for 2008 to 2011. It describes the influences that have shaped it, how this translates into the skills, qualities and attributes that students must develop, and the initiatives the University is taking to ensure that it continues to produce sought-after and well-qualified graduates who will become the leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs required for national and individual prosperity.

The Influences

In developing its new Employability and Skills Policy, the University has had to take account of the views of a number of stakeholders in higher education, including Government, nationally and regionally, employers and professional bodies, its own academic staff and professional careers advisers, as well as parents and students.

Ensuring present and future national prosperity is one of the key responsibilities of Government so its forecasts and predictions of medium- and longer-term skills needs have had a major influence on the evolution of the University's Policy. Government has identified

globalisation as the biggest challenge facing developed, western countries and locally, in Northern Ireland, we must respond not just to increased competition from emerging economies but reduce the reliance on the public sector as a source of employment. Ultimately this means that we must increase levels of innovation, creativity, enterprise, management and leadership capability.

Employers are the most immediate consumers of our graduates. We know that employers want "economically valuable skills". Relevant technical skills, expertise and know-how are still important whether we are producing engineers, doctors, film-makers or teachers. Increasingly, however, employers are looking for the complementary skills that allow people and business not just to function but to thrive and flourish: team working, problem solving, communication, creative thinking.

Last but not least, the Policy has been informed by the views of parents and students. This is a generation of students who have experienced primary and secondary education characterised by unprecedented technological change, increase assessment of their abilities and competitiveness. These are students who know that they will need to distinguish themselves not just through academic excellence but by evidencing initiative, energy, polish and flair.



What does this mean in terms of graduate skills?

How does this knowledge of the opportunities and threats facing the nation, employers and individuals translate into a skills set that graduates must possess? Based on its review, the University believes that all students, through their academic programmes and through high-quality extra-curricular activities, should have the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate:

Intellectual and cognitive skills, which include being able to:

- identify, analyse and solve problems by prioritising tasks, coping with complexity, setting achievable goals and taking action;
- work with information and handle a mass of diverse data, assess risk and draw conclusions;
- apply subject knowledge and understanding from the degree pathway.

Professional attributes and attitudes which include:

- possessing high-level transferable skills such as the ability to work with others, to communicate (orally and in writing), to influence, and to negotiate and resolve conflict;
- displaying interpersonal sensitivity, global and cultural awareness, and moral and ethical awareness;

- valuing learning and professional and personal development, and having the ability and motivation to learn for oneself and improve one's self-awareness and performance;
- demonstrating confidence, motivation, and staying power; being adaptable and flexible; demonstrating initiative and creativity; the ability to cope with stress.

Technical skills which include being able to:

- demonstrate the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern technology;
- apply and exploit information technology.

Business and organisational skills which include being able to:

- appreciate and understand how businesses operate, for example, through having had experience of the workplace;
- appreciate organisational culture, policies and processes;
- develop the ability to communicate (orally and in writing) within a business context;
- understand basic financial and commercial principles;
- appreciate and demonstrate enterprise and innovation.



Practical elements where applicable and according to the degree pathway which include being able to:

- demonstrate critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice;
- reflect on and evaluate one's own practice;
- participate in and review quality control and risk management.

How will this be achieved?

It is clear that graduates develop high-level intellectual skills – it is intrinsic to achieving a good degree. However, the skills set needed goes well beyond what can be covered in even the best and most challenging of academic programmes. The University has taken a radical, ambitious and comprehensive approach to skills development: it will be embedded in academic programmes, and throughout degrees, students will be advised and guided about career choice. On top of this, students will now be able to take advantage of the University's new Degree Plus initiative which recognises that the transferable skills, abilities and experiences that will equip them for high quality, challenging employment will be achieved through academically excellent degree programmes *plus* participation in worthwhile, rewarding and enjoyable extra-curricular activities. The Employability and Skills Policy seeks to draw all these strands together:

- Opportunities for students to develop and practise skills will be embedded throughout degree programmes. Formal and informal assessment of skills development will provide students with feedback on their progress. Graduate recruiters, employers and professional bodies will continue to be involved in curriculum development.
- Students will receive careers information and guidance from pre-admission, admission and induction, and throughout their time at the University. Right from the beginning, students will be reminded of the need to start thinking about their eventual career choices. This CEIG (Careers Education, Information and Guidance) will be integrated with skills development within academic programmes so that there is a complete, seamless package.
- Personal Development Planning (PDP), which is a national requirement for all students, requires them to plan and reflect actively on their academic, personal and career development, whether this development comes through their academic programmes or extra-curricular activity. Students are also encouraged to see this as good preparation for workplace appraisal and continuing professional development. The University's implementation of PDP has been commended as one of the best in Europe.



- Degree Plus will provide the opportunities for students to develop skills through a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as part-time work and work experience, volunteering, enterprise support programmes, student business competitions, certified courses in languages and career management, membership of clubs and societies and international travel and study. Students will be able to work towards formal accreditation of their Degree Plus activity.
- There is a structured Personal Tutoring system which sees new undergraduates assigned to a Tutor who will encourage, guide and support them in their academic courses and employability and skills development.
- Central support services, which include Academic and Student Affairs, Student Plus, Research and Regional Services, Information Services, and Marketing, Recruitment and Communications, will work together to provide a vibrant, coherent and integrated portfolio of extra-curricular activities for students, and appropriate support for University Schools.



Examples of activities at Queen's which will be accredited under Degree Plus

Are you coming out to play?

Business Education Initiative (Certificate in American Business Practice)

Certificate in Career Management and Employability Skills in one of the following:

- Career Development
- Commercial Awareness
- Insight into Management
- Tutoring-In-Schools

Certificate of Attendance at Careers Events (at a minimum of 6 events in any one academic year)

Certificate/Diploma in Youth Ministry

Enterprise Competitions

The Headstart Programme

Language and Culture Courses

Membership of Students' Union Council or Staff Student Consultative Committee

Officer Training Corps qualification

Part-time work on and off-campus (not exceeding 15 hours per week)

Queen's Employability and Skills Award

Working with Geography

Sports coaching and volunteering

European Computer Driving Licence

Officer of Clubs and Societies

Certificate in Languages for Special Purposes (French/German/Spanish for Business)

Education and Skills Development

Queen's University Belfast
University Road
Belfast BT7 1NN
www.qub.ac.uk/EmployabilityandSkills

This publication is also available in alternative formats on request, including large print, Braille, tape, audio CD and Daisy CD. For further information, please contact the University's Publications and Website Unit on +44 (0)28 9097 5332.

CDS N111485