

Employability Statement and Strategy 2009-2014

INTRODUCTION

An important strand of Aberystwyth University's mission is its stated intention to "respond to the changing needs of society for skilled, educated and employable graduates". The body of research into employability, supported by political and economic imperatives, now makes a compelling case for the employability agenda to be seated at the heart of the University's strategic thinking and operational practices.

Within the context of the academic development and scholarly activity provided by its research and programmes of study, Aberystwyth University is committed to providing opportunities for its students to develop skills and attributes which will enhance their employability. This strategy lays out a framework that recognises that employability enhancement is an institution-wide responsibility consistent with academic learning and for embedding the employability agenda firmly within the student experience at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

DEFINITION

Employability can be seen in many different terms and it is crucial to the success of this strategy that there is a shared and informed understanding amongst both staff and students at Aberystwyth.

Employability has been defined by the CBI as "*a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace - to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy*"¹.

This interpretation differentiates it from 'employment' (which is too vulnerable to labour market vicissitudes), emphasises that it is probabilistic (and is about helping an individual to increase his/her chances of success rather than guaranteeing that success) and, in its inherent flexibility, recognises that it is made up of a number of characteristics and capabilities which will vary between individuals and occupations. In an HE context, these are the capabilities which will make a student or graduate more likely to gain graduate level employment.

What makes an individual employable, broadly speaking, is what makes them personally effective and Yorke and Knight's USEM model, supported by both theory and empirical evidence, is widely used to analyse those characteristics²:

¹ Time well spent: embedding employability in work experience. CBI, March 2007

² See 'Employability Characteristics' on page 5

Understanding of subject and broader situation

Skilful practices in subject, employment and life

Efficacy beliefs and personal qualities (the extent to which individuals feel that they might be able 'to make a difference')

Metacognition (encompassing self-awareness and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action)

USEM correlates with 'good learning' and, being permissive rather than prescriptive, is tacitly consistent with much that already goes on in HE - one of the tasks now is to make the tacit more explicit. It is important to recognise that the skills and attributes required by employers of graduates will change over time, however, and that the university's approach to their development will have to be reviewed and revised over time also.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Aberystwyth's approach to enhancing employability is based on a developmental model which emphasises the importance of individual responsibility for learning, personal development and career management all being at the heart of the student experience. Students need to be aware of how their employability is being developed through the curriculum, through work experience, through extra and co-curricular activities and through reflective practice, and they need to accept personal ownership of that development.

Aberystwyth University believes that educating for employability enhances the quality of the student learning experience, improves the effectiveness of its teaching and more generally contributes to the achievement of its wider strategic aims. Aberystwyth therefore aims to develop an 'education for employability' that is not only clearly articulated and focused in its approach, but structured and supported to ensure equitable integration into the student experience.

STRATEGIC AIMS

Employability skills and attributes will be developed through a combination of the content of each programme of study that is undertaken and the methods of learning, teaching and assessment that are encountered. Contributory, too, will be any paid or voluntary work that is undertaken and an individual's involvement in, and contribution to, extra and co-curricular activity.

There is no single employability strategy that will be appropriate across all programmes of study because discipline contexts, student recruitment patterns and probable labour markets differ for each programme. The preferred framework for employability is one that encompasses, integrates and reinforces four primary activities across all years of a programme within a culture of reflective practice supported by personal development planning (PDP) activity:

- 1) Learning, teaching and assessment approaches
- 2) Work experience (paid or unpaid)
- 3) Career and personal development learning
- 4) Extra and co-curricular activity

AIM 1: To develop and promote employability enhancement as part of the Aberystwyth student experience and culture

- 1.1 Ensure a common understanding of employability attributes amongst staff and students and identify the desired characteristics of the Aberystwyth graduate
- 1.2 Support fully the institutional commitment to employability articulated in the University's mission statement
- 1.3 Market enhanced employability positively as part of the institutional brand image
- 1.4 Foster a wider institutional culture of active and reflective learning, self development and employability enhancement
- 1.5 Work with academic and non-academic departments and the Guild to co-ordinate opportunities for enhancing employability
- 1.6 Recognise and support the differing needs of individual student groups
- 1.7 Launch and promote an Aberystwyth Award recognising student contribution and achievement

AIM 2: To embed employability into the academic curricula and activity of each academic department

- 2.1 Establish responsibility for delivery of the strategy at departmental level, review the development of employability attributes within each programme of study on a periodic basis and develop departmental employability action plans
- 2.2 Contextualise and embed ongoing skills and attribute development relevant to the world of work into curriculum content and organisation and subject learning, teaching and assessment methodologies
- 2.3 Embed a structured programme of employability and career development learning in all programmes of study
- 2.4 Develop centralised high quality e-learning resources to support skills development within the curriculum
- 2.5 Utilise institutional quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms to ensure consistency and coherence of employability enhancement

AIM 3: To fully utilise personal development planning (PDP) to encourage students to reflect on and monitor their learning and development

- 3.1 Develop and promote eAPPR (*rename*) as the vehicle for managing personal and employability enhancement across a modular curriculum over the course of an individual's programme of study
- 3.2 Support personal tutors in the effective promotion and delivery of eAPPR and the encouragement of reflective practice
- 3.3 Encourage understanding of and support for eAPPR through the wider university community

AIM 4: To strengthen partnerships between faculties/departments and the Careers Advisory Service, Commercialisation and Consultancy Services (CCS) and the Aber-Bangor Skills Centre (A-BSC)

- 4.1 Promote centralised services offered by the Careers Service (advice and guidance, employability and careers education and occupational and employer information), CCS (facilitation of linkages with public and private sector organisations) and A-BSC (identification of the training needs of individuals in these organisations in North and Mid Wales) to support department-based initiatives
- 4.2 Develop service level agreements between academic and non-academic departments and the Careers Service and CCS

- 4.3 Attach careers consultants, based in the Careers Service, to each department to deliver subject-specific employability education, information and guidance and to work with departments on curriculum development

AIM 5: To provide and promote high quality work related experience and learning across all disciplines

- 5.1 Develop a generic and accredited work experience module for adoption, and optional development, by academic departments and to replace the Work Experience Award
- 5.2 Actively promote opportunities provided by the Year in Employment Scheme (YES), GO Wales Placements and Tasters, departmental and postgraduate placements, and academic exchange and enterprise and entrepreneurship programmes
- 5.3 Establish a placement development and support network to share best practice across all departments

AIM 6: To enhance levels of employer engagement

- 6.1 Expand and co-ordinate local, national and international networks of employers who will support the University's initiatives and offer student and graduate opportunities
- 6.2 Foster communication between departments and relevant employer groups (eg. professional bodies) to inform curriculum development
- 6.3 Develop a database of alumni willing to work with the university to support employability and other initiatives

IMPLEMENTATION

This employability strategy will be implemented through a series of annual institutional action plans devised and monitored on behalf of Academic Affairs Committee by an Employability Steering Group and supported by annual departmental action plans.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of the employability strategy will be subject to the usual internal and external quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms, including periodic review and the annual monitoring of taught programmes, as well as annual reports to faculty.

Employability Task and Finish Group
11 May 2009

EMPLOYABILITY CHARACTERISTICS³

The skills, understandings and personal attributes that contribute to an individual's employability include, but are not limited to:

Self-management - readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning

Teamworking – respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, and awareness of interdependence with others

Business and customer awareness – basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty

Problem solving – analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions

Communication and literacy – application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy – including listening and questioning

Application of numeracy – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae)

Application of information technology – basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines

Underpinning all these attributes, the key foundation, must be a **positive attitude** - a 'can-do' approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make these happen

Frequently mentioned by both employers and universities is **entrepreneurship/enterprise** - broadly, an ability to demonstrate an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking

³ Future fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work. CBI and UUK, March 2009