The experiences and attitudes of graduates towards employability-related support in undergraduate degree programmes and the potential role for externally-facing student projects

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Case study ..... 

1. Why?

2. Research findings.

3. Consultancy projects

4. Key issues.
• A kaleidoscope of change for today’s graduates ….

Emerging economies
Alternative energies
Innovation
Financial crises
Genetics
Natural resources
Information sources
Communications …..
The premise ..... 

- Gap opening up ...

Global developments

Employer needs

Graduate capabilities

Widening gap?
The premise ..... 

- Gap opening up ...

Global developments

Bridging the gap: Opportunity for graduate development through externally-facing student projects

Graduate capabilities
The significance ….

• 2014: UK government all-party parliamentary group report “An Education System fit for an Entrepreneur”

• 2015: Priority theme for the Higher Education Academy HEA and Higher Education Funding Council England HEFCE


Student loans to cover costs of higher education
• HE as an investment

National Student Survey
• Student views increasingly important

Teaching and research
• Balance between the two under review
A widely accepted definition of employability has been given by the Higher Education Academy (2012):

- 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.

Selected highlights:
- chosen occupation ...
- more likely ...
- breadth of stakeholders ...
External partners ....

• Can add value across subject disciplines

• Understanding of how to apply the knowledge, skills, capabilities and experiences accrued during a degree programme, in the world of work

• Applies across the spectrum; from established organisations to new start-ups in the private, public and third-sectors:
  
  ✓ To survive and prosper, established large organisations are constantly evolving and finding new ways to do things

  ✓ Medium and smaller size organisations may need to act even quicker
Challenges that external partners face ....

Finance and budgets
Teamwork, working together, individual and group targets
Costings, pricing, research, plans, equipment
Customers, clients, suppliers
Employees and contractors
Idea, big and small
Positioning and psychology
Personality, characteristics and confidence
Attitudes
Leadership, creativity and innovation

Why?
Who?
When?
How?
What?
Where?
Case study …..

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Graduate survey

Employability as an aim for undergraduate degrees?

- Not directly
- Yes, but optional
- Yes, well managed

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Differences across the disciplines

Graduate survey - some highlights

**Benefits:**
- Better understanding of employer needs is considered the main benefit.

**Delivery:**
- Since 2000, more employability-related support overall but trend towards careers services and external speakers, with reduced inputs from departmental staff.

**Disciplines:**
- Engineering make much use of business, management and external speakers.
- Sciences involve careers services more.
- Humanities has the largest opportunity gap.
Employability benefits .... using the 3C’s

**Content**
Accumulation of relevant hand-on knowledge and networks ....

**Capability**
Direct application in a relevant employer context ....

**Character**
Work alone and in teams .....  

Case study ..... 

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Consultancy Projects

**Dissertation Report**
- 15,000 words
- Individual student
- Supervisor
- Research format

**Consultancy Project**
- 10,000 words report
- 2,000 reflective report
- Presentation 30 minutes
- Student team
- Supervisor & Client
- Research/business format
Table 1: Analysis of MALBM Dissertation and Consultancy Projects 2011 to 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2011/2</th>
<th>2012/1</th>
<th>2012/2</th>
<th>2013/1</th>
<th>2013/2</th>
<th>2014/1</th>
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319 students; 2 cohorts per year.  
57% chose the Consultancy Project  
43% chose the Dissertation Report
Examples of employability-related quotes made in consultancy project reflective reports

1. “… essential contribution for my future career …”

2. “…very good practical experience … enhance my skills … transferable skills …”

3. “… helped me improve my skills …”

4. “… stepped out of my comfort zone, and feel it has provided me with more confidence to enter the job market.”

5. “I learned so much through this project. It is because of this opportunity that I feel even more excited … working in this sector in the future.”

6. “… I feel more confident about my qualifications … greatest part of the programme.”
Table 2: Projections on demands for consultancy projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student numbers</th>
<th>Dissertation students</th>
<th>Consultancy students (1)</th>
<th>Consultancy Projects (2)</th>
<th>Clients identified By students</th>
<th>By team (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>250</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) The Consultancy Project take-up rate 50%
(2) Average team size on a Consultancy Project 2
(3) Clients to be found by Programme Team 50%
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Involving External Partners:

- Embedding the initiative into the curriculum.
- Delivery by a mix of academics and professionals.
- Cross-faculty liaisons.
- Finding project opportunities.
- Working in groups and as individuals.
- Output such as reports and presentations.