

The Quality in Education Centre

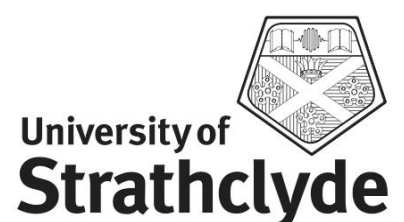
# Baseline study of employability-related activities in Scotland's colleges

## ***Summary Report***

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## **Acknowledgements**

The research team would like to thank all those who completed the surveys, the staff of colleges who provided the case studies and all participants in the seminars and workshops, the feedback from which was invaluable in the completion of the study. Each case study was rich with examples of good practice covering multiple aspects of employability development. However, in this summary report only short extracts from case studies have been included to provide illustration. The full report contains greater detail for each case study.

## Overview of findings

### Provision of activities to develop employability skills and attributes

- Providers report strong support for the development of employability skills and attributes, including core and 'soft' skills, both as discrete units and embedded within course provision alongside other learning goals.
- Career education and guidance, including employment seeking skills, are addressed to a lesser extent than 'employability' through the inclusion of discrete units or embedded in other course units. While some providers include specific units in courses, student development in these areas is often addressed through central student services. Advice and guidance is most likely to be provided at the pre-exit stage of students' programmes although it is important while students are on-course. Post-exit guidance is least likely to be supported, with colleges indicating that obtaining progression information was difficult.
- Enterprise is the least likely aspect to be addressed, either in relation to business start-up or as a focus in developing enterprising skills and attitudes. College staff indicated that there was a need for clarification on what was meant by enterprise and enterprising approaches and how they might be incorporated into other units.
- There was strong support at institutional level to provide resources to enable students to reflect on issues related to employability, with course providers reporting wide use of personal development review and planning, though a wide range of terms was used to describe this.

### Underpinning issues

- Extensive involvement with employers was reported at institutional and course levels. Employers were involved in course boards and advised on content and course development. While employers provided work experience and contributed to courses as guest speakers, few were involved in more in-depth roles with students such as mentoring and target-setting and review. Some colleges reported that it was difficult to engage with some employers; this varied between sectors and geographical location.
- The majority of senior managers reported the existence of college-wide policies in relation to career education, with the service being subject to standard quality audit processes. The majority reported service-level agreements with Careers Scotland, though satisfaction with the service varied.
- About half of the senior managers reported college-wide policies in existence relating to employability and enterprise issues, while others reported that these were currently being developed. This was more likely to be addressed at curriculum manager or team level and be reviewed through course and programme review procedures.
- Some examples of collaboration between colleges on a geographical or disciplinary basis were identified but this was not widely reported. Employer and cross-college collaboration in the modernisation of HN units was noted.
- The most important issues for staff development were: understanding employability and enterprise issues and how to incorporate them into courses and units alongside other curricular goals; and updating college staff with relevant workplace knowledge and skills and awareness of the present day job market.

### Emerging issues

- Developing employability is seen as the core activity of colleges but it is important that the term is defined broadly, encompassing the full range of development from very specific vocational skills to personal effectiveness.
- 'Embedding' is challenged as an appropriate term and a key task for colleges is not 'embedding' employability and enterprise but making them explicit and visible for both staff and students.
- A common framework for the further education sector would assist development and provide a strategic approach.
- The development of appropriate performance indicators would be beneficial both to measure success and to emphasise the priority to be given to these developments.
- Labour market intelligence, consolidated and presented to colleges in a format which directly relates to further education provision and employability activity, would be welcomed.

# Summary Report

## Introduction

1. This is a summary of a baseline study into employability-related activity in Scottish Colleges undertaken by the Quality in Education Centre of the University of Strathclyde on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council. The study comprised desk research which reviewed recent literature in relation to a range of educational developments in employability; surveys of senior managers and heads of departments/faculties in Scottish colleges; case studies of practice in relation to employability; and a series of workshops with representatives of the further education sector. The study was carried out between April and October 2006.
2. The full report is available from the Scottish Funding Council website: [\(Link\)](#)

## The context

3. In October 2004, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)'s predecessor bodies, the SFEFC and the SHEFC, published *Learning to Work* (SFC 2004), a discussion paper about how Scotland's colleges and universities can help to enhance learners' employability. In subsequent dialogue with stakeholders, there was agreement that employability should be a specific focus for quality enhancement in the college sector from 2006-07.
4. In *Learning to Work* (SFC 2004), employability is defined as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations'. Employers want pro-active people who can take responsibility; who can contribute to the success of their organisation; who can understand the work ethic and who are able to reflect on and evaluate their personal performance. It is recognised by all stakeholders that well-developed 'soft skills' are essential for employability, and this is reflected in the priority given to employability activity in policy and practice.
5. However, *Learning to Work* also recognises that definitions of employability vary, according to who is defining it, what their interests are and where their influence lies. Broadly speaking, employability relates to an individual's chances of progressing into and through the labour market successfully, according to what they choose to do.
6. *Employability: Implementation Plan for Learning to Work* (SFC 2006) gives details of the actions the Scottish Funding Council will take to support the implementation of the ideas presented in *Learning to Work*. It recognises that, in some ways, college provision addresses employability quite explicitly and the curriculum is largely geared towards preparing learners for specific jobs and professions. The report also indicates that most learners are already in work, defining 'work' as part-time, full-time, casual, or work-related learning. Many courses run on the basis of developing 'generic' abilities, such as working in teams. But enhancing employability is not a discrete activity to be undertaken in isolation of the rest of the learning experience: rather it should be one of the outcomes of effective learning and teaching.

7. In April 2006, Phase 1 of the *Scottish Executive's Review of Scotland's Colleges* (SEED 2006) identified some key issues for Further Education, such as the embedding of employability skills and attitudes into the curriculum; giving learners opportunities to gain work-related experience during their studies; allowing learners to develop enterprise and self-employment skills; supporting learners to reflect on and record achievement; providing career guidance and supporting learners to develop career planning skills.
8. Employability and Enterprise is being addressed in schools through the *Determined to Succeed* Programme (SEED 2002) and *Enterprise in Education*. This Programme, aligned with *A Curriculum for Excellence* (SEED 2004) which has introduced a programme of curricular reform in schools, will contribute to the embedding of employability and enterprise in schools. This is now focusing on '*enterprising teaching and learning*' rather than one-off events or separate activities.
9. Enterprise and employability have received attention for some time in Scottish universities. They have made considerable use of the work generated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through its funding of the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team (ESCET). The results of this work are now available on the Higher Education Academy Employability and Enterprise website ([www.heacademy.ac.uk/Employability.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/Employability.htm)). Progress has also been made and support materials are available through the Enhancement Themes initiative, which has addressed employability as one of its themes. This initiative is part of the HE Quality Enhancement Framework which is based on partnership working between the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, QAA Scotland, the Higher Education Academy, and the National Union of Students, Scotland ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/default.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/default.asp)).

### **The focus of the study**

10. In commissioning the study, the activities identified by the SFC as supporting employability, in the broad sense, are those highlighted by the SEED Review referred to in paragraph 7, namely:
  - the embedding of employability skills and attributes (including 'soft' skills and enterprising approaches) into the curriculum and into the learning process
  - opportunities for learners to gain work-related experiences during their studies
  - opportunities to develop enterprise and self-employment skills
  - support for learners to reflect on and record achievement (for example, using personal learning plans)
  - support for learners to develop career planning skills
  - provision of career guidance.

The research therefore sought to identify the extent to which these activities were reported as occurring in colleges.

11. The SFC further identified 'underpinning' issues in relation to the above practices which are seen to develop employability. These were:
  - the extent to which employers are engaged in the process
  - the extent to which there are institution-wide strategies in place to embed and evaluate these practices
  - the extent of, and potential for, collaboration on a disciplinary, geographical or other basis

- any specific implications for staff development and the steps that colleges have taken to address this.
12. It was noted that SQA specifies core skills in their awards and that the majority of provision in colleges consists of units, programmes and awards of the SQA. The study therefore took account of the use of SQA units.
  13. Additionally, consideration was to be given to support provided at the stages of the learners' journey: that is, at pre-entry, induction, on-course, pre-exit and post-exit stages.

## **The research**

14. The desk research informed the development of the surveys of colleges. It was originally proposed that one survey would be carried out with colleges. However, when the range of issues to be investigated was clarified it became apparent that it was unlikely that one person could provide all the data without a great deal of additional work. It was therefore decided to carry out 2 surveys. The first was aimed at a senior manager within each college to collect data at the whole-college level about strategy and procedures. A second survey was aimed at heads of faculty, school or department to identify operational aspects of employability activities.
15. Twenty-seven out of 43 responses (63%) were received from the senior manager survey. The colleges represented all geographical areas of Scotland and were representative of the different sizes of college found in Scotland.
16. Colleges nominated contacts for the head of department or faculty survey. A total of 225 contacts were invited to complete the survey. Sixty-seven responses (30%) were received in time to be included in the analysis. These represented a wide range of disciplines in 30 colleges. The respondents had a variety of responsibilities and titles including head of department, curriculum leader, director of centre, etc. For the purpose of this report we refer to them as heads of departments or course providers.
17. Eight case studies, selected from examples of good practice nominated by respondents, were investigated. Each case study was rich with examples of practice covering multiple aspects of employability development. Short extracts only have been used in this report to provide illustration.
18. The draft findings of the study were presented to stakeholders to obtain feedback on the findings and to discuss priorities for developing the employability agenda in colleges. Principals received copies of the report through the Association of Scotland's Colleges Principals' Forum, with a request for feedback to the researchers. Presentations and workshops were held for the SFEU Guidance Community of Practice. All colleges were invited to send representatives to one of two workshops for dissemination of the findings, including presentation of the case studies by college lecturers: 31 people from 21 colleges attended.

## The outcomes of the study

19. The final report of the study presents detailed findings according to the main strands of the research, namely: the desk research, the survey of senior managers, the survey of heads of department, the case studies and the feedback from the workshops. This summary presents the findings according to the themes noted in paragraphs 8 to 11 above, drawing from the various strands of the research as appropriate.

## Defining employability

20. As noted above in paragraph 5, definitions of employability can vary according to who is defining it. In the early stages of developing the questionnaire this was highlighted as a problem for the sector – that there was a lack of agreed understanding of the terms employability and enterprise. The research team, therefore, prefaced the surveys with the following definitions:

*“The SFC Learning to Work document defines employability as: ‘a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations’. (SFC 2004, p9)*

This definition is taken to include:

- occupational/technical skills and knowledge
- basic skills such as literacy and numeracy
- practical skills such as using information technology
- a range of soft or personal skills including planning and organising, communicating, problem-solving, working with others, critical and creative thinking, and the ability to manage self and others
- personal attributes (attitudes and values) such as confidence, reliability, integrity, adaptability and ‘good work habits’ such as honesty, punctuality and regular attendance
- career planning and employment-seeking skills, i.e. the recognition of personal capabilities, how they match employment opportunities and the ability to present oneself to employers.

Enterprising attitudes, skills and values are seen to be important in relation to employment as well as for future entrepreneurs and those wishing to be self-employed. Enterprise capability is defined as:

*‘the ability to apply enterprising skills, attitudes and values such as self-awareness, self-confidence, creativity, initiative, risk-taking, communication, decision making, problem solving and teamwork in a range of social and economic contexts’. (SFC 2004, p10)*

21. During the workshops, practitioners expressed the view that it was important to have a broad view of employability, which can be defined on a continuum from very specific job-related training to developing a breadth of skills and knowledge. The link between employability and personal effectiveness was also highlighted. College education was not only about getting a job – it was also about helping students recognise their potential and discover what they wanted to do.

### *Case Study: Cardonald College*

#### *Working with emotional intelligence*

*Cardonald College has been involved in Focus on Learning 1 and 2 initiatives and has taken forward development in a range of areas aiming to improve student attainment and retention. One focus has been emotional intelligence. Selected staff and students have taken part in training and workshops.*

*Four aspects of emotional intelligence were selected and targets were set for students in relation to these, with associated person-centred planning and review: self-regulation, empathy, motivation and self-awareness. These were supported through drama, art and communications workshops.*

*The aim is to help students develop as individuals and to equip them with soft skills necessary for employability as identified in 'Learning to work': effective time management, planning and organising, effective written and oral communication skills, problem solving, working with others to achieve a common goal, the ability to learn and to continue learning and the ability to handle interpersonal situations.*

## **Opportunities to develop employability, enterprise and career-related knowledge and skills**

22. It is recognised that much of the core work of colleges is in helping learners develop occupationally specific knowledge and skills; it seemed unrealistic to ask colleges how much of their core work they did! Therefore, in the survey of heads of department, in relation to 'employability', our questions focused on opportunities for developing basic, core or 'soft' skills and attributes and the opportunity to reflect on and record achievement. In relation to career awareness, questions related to finding out about careers and the job market and the opportunity to develop employment-seeking and interview skills. With regard to enterprise, the questions related to opportunities to learn about enterprise, complete enterprise projects and develop 'enterprising skills' such as risk-taking and creative thinking.
23. The questions focused both on discrete units and 'embedding' employability and enterprise skills into teaching and learning alongside other learning goals. It was considered important to ask about the opportunities provided through discrete units, as such units exist within the SQA catalogue and course providers use them. These represent an important opportunity for learners to develop knowledge and skills.
24. Course providers were more likely to include discrete or special units about employability and reflecting on the development of employability skills in their full-time courses than units which focus on career and employment seeking skills. Only a few included enterprise and enterprise projects. Discrete units were less likely to be part of part-time courses than full-time courses but, as with full-time courses, reflecting on employability-related development and employability issues were more likely to be included than career-related and enterprise units.
25. During the workshops it was emphasised that part-time students are often employed and therefore working when not in college and so develop employability skills in their employment. However, the majority of full-time students also work and so are exposed to the demands of employment. Thus many students, both



full- and part-time, develop employability skills outside of college. The importance of helping students to identify the specific and general skills gained in employment, even though not specifically related to the college course, was identified as a priority for college staff.

26. From the survey data, while discrete units addressing employability were reported in all types of courses, including Higher National and degree level work, they were more likely to be found in lower level SVQs (ie levels 1, 2 and 3) and in courses for jobseekers, with over 60% of providers indicating that more than half of their students completed such units. Units which addressed career and employment seeking issues were most likely to be found in courses for jobseekers, but provision appeared at a similar level across a range of courses (SVQ levels 1, 2 and 3, Intermediate level National Qualifications, European Social Funded courses, courses for people with additional support needs and Higher National), with around 40% of course providers indicating that half or more of their students completed such units.
27. This accorded with feedback from the workshops. The view was expressed that 'employability' was likely to be strongest, that is employability skills and attributes were most likely to be addressed, in courses where students were closest to the point of entry to work; for example in construction, hairdressing, care, sports studies, catering and hospitality. Where the focus is on progression to higher education, employability is less prominent but still requires to be addressed, in particular in relation to personal effectiveness.

*Aberdeen College, Care and Care Service Industries*

*Embedding core skills and employability skills and attitudes  
Care and Care Service Industries as a department is very focused on employability within all its programmes and communicates this to learners when they start their studies.*

- *Learners are treated as 'employees' as part of their programme.*
- *The student Code of Conduct reiterates sector principles for attitudes and behaviours linked to employability*
- *Lesson plans all include clear references to core skills*
- *Individual learning plans include core skills and employability attitudes and skills such as punctuality and participation*
- *The college has 'core skills experts' who support lecturers to integrate core skills by developing core skills solutions to challenges within a class*
- *Students keep learning diaries on placement and many of these have revealed extraordinary personal development, improvement in self-esteem, behaviour and attitudes.*

28. The skills most likely to be addressed through discrete units were core skills, followed by personal development for work, then career and progression planning and finally enterprise-related skills. (See figure 1, p8.)
29. It was, however, also reported in one of the workshops that some students do not value or see the relevance of being asked to focus on core or soft employability skills as they are attending college to learn job specific knowledge and skills. This is a challenge when discrete units are delivered by core skills specialists who may find it more difficult to contextualise the skills. However, subject specialists may not be confident teaching core skills. One of the case studies presented at a workshop had addressed this by introducing team teaching, where the subject specialist and core skills specialist worked together with a class.

## ‘Embedding’

30. It is considered that employability, enterprise and career planning skills are learned effectively when they are included along with other learning goals. They should be made explicit but taught and applied in the context of other learning. This requires approaches to teaching and learning which allow students to be active, participative learners. Knowledge should be acquired and applied in relation to real-life problems and issues. The college setting should replicate key features of real work settings. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which approaches which embedded such aspects featured in their courses. (See figure 1.)

**Figure 1: Skills developed through discrete units and through embedded approaches**

Skills developed in discrete units – rank ordered by those most likely to occur	Embedded approaches used in teaching and learning to develop employability alongside other learning goals – rank ordered by those most likely to occur
<p><b>Core skills:</b>            Communication Skills            Information Technology Skills            Working with others            Problem solving            Basic skills (literacy and numeracy)            Presentation skills</p> <p><b>Personal development for work:</b>            Work discipline            Managing own work            Confidence and self-esteem            Reflection and self-review</p> <p>Career and progression planning:            Career Planning Skills            Search and application skills for jobs            Search and application skills for courses</p> <p><b>Enterprise-related aspects:</b>            Customer skills            Creative thinking            Informed risk-taking            Business start-up</p>	<p>The use of IT is expected across courses            Students work on collaborative tasks            Information is accessed by electronic means            Core skills outcomes are made explicit</p> <p>Values relevant to the workplace are modelled and expected of students            Students learn using real-life problems and issues            Students are encouraged to value and learn from mistakes            Employability outcomes are made explicit            Students take responsibility for their own learning and work            Learning is supported through structured self-review            Classrooms simulate the work environment            Learning is supported through reflective self review            Students take part in structured debriefings</p> <p>Students are encouraged to take informed risks            Enterprise outcomes are made explicit            Learning is supported through peer review</p>

31. Respondents reported extensive use of IT, collaboration, development of core skills, modelling and expecting workplace values, learning from real life problems and issues and learning from mistakes as ‘embedded’ activities.
32. It is interesting to note, from figure 1, that a similar ‘hierarchy’ occurs in the frequency of sets of skills for both discrete and embedded approaches to skill and attribute development, namely, core skills including IT, workplace skills and attitudes, reflection and review and finally enterprise-related aspects.
33. The concept of ‘embedding’ was discussed at the workshops. It was suggested that the term ‘embedding’ may not be the best word to describe what is to be achieved. Reference was made to the embedding of core skills in national qualifications, where it was assumed that if a unit had been successfully completed, certain core skills were also successfully achieved. The emphasis should be on ‘making visible’; an analogy was drawn with ‘weaving’ – different strands are woven together to make a whole picture, but the strands are visible.

This has implications for curriculum managers: the task is not so much to introduce employability issues, but given that employability development already exists as 'core activity', the task is to map it in practice, recognise where it is being done and enhance areas of identified weakness.

*Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, Curriculum Audit of Employability and Citizenship Themes*

*The Senior Management Team set up a short-life working group to investigate how the themes of employability and citizenship could be embedded within course delivery. The group developed an audit tool based on the HMLe Quality Framework Guidelines. Staff were asked to complete the audit with a view to highlighting gaps in provision and enabling cross-college planning of initiatives in employability and citizenship.*

*Findings from this audit were shared with all heads of departments so that each course team could see what other departments had done in relation to 'embedding'.*

*This activity was key in identifying how much good practice already occurs within courses and has initiated a process of reflection on areas for further development; for example, for students, how to measure 'distances travelled', how to improve guidance at the mid-course stage, and the nomination of staff to discuss progress with each student.*

## **Work experience**

34. Half of the respondents to the head of departments/faculty survey indicated that half or more of students in their areas participated in work experience or placement "in the real world", while just over half reported that students participated in some kind of work simulation.
35. It was in relation to the provision of work experience that collaboration with employers was most frequently mentioned by both senior managers and heads of department.
36. In the workshops, it was pointed out that work experience for full-time students also provided the opportunity to 'contextualise' guidance provision. For example, in some programmes students had to apply for work placements, completing CVs and application forms and going for interviews.
37. It was noted above (para 25) that many further education students are in employment and the challenge is to engage students in reflection of their work experiences in order to make them aware of the skills they already have and to identify areas for further development.

### *Angus College, pre-apprenticeship placements in construction*

#### *Learner swap programme*

*The Construction department has developed a programme involving a mix of pre-vocational learners (15 and 16 year olds) and second year apprenticeship students. This enables learners in both groups to access a balance of college-based and work-based elements.*

- The second year students are employer-based and many of them are integral to the companies. Consequently, at busy times companies find it difficult to release students to attend college to complete their course.*
- To support both companies and learners the college has developed a learner swap programme, where pre-apprentice learners are placed with the company for one or two weeks to enable the second year learners to return to college to complete their course units.*
- Pre-apprentices are carefully selected by focusing on attitudinal and behavioural competence as well as technical and vocational competence.*
- This has resulted in pre-apprentices being offered employment with the companies, with many returning later to the first year of the apprenticeship course.*

## **Enterprise**

38. It has been noted that enterprise was less likely to be addressed in courses, either as a special unit or through developing 'enterprising approaches'. The courses where the use of enterprise units was most likely were SVQ level 3 courses and courses for students with additional support needs. Five respondents indicated that more than half of their students undertook business-start up units.
39. During the workshops enterprise was discussed less than employability and participants agreed that enterprise was less likely to be addressed in college provision than employability and career education. It was suggested that it might be appropriate to include an enterprise unit in some courses but that this was not possible on all courses. The view was expressed that there was a need for clarification of what was meant by enterprise and how enterprising approaches could be incorporated into other units.
40. An example was given of a college with an enterprise advisor and an 'incubator unit' to encourage and support those who aspired to starting up a business. Some colleges reported that enterprise was identified as part of learners' aspirations while on course, but that this was not reflected in the numbers of learners progressing into self-employment or starting their own businesses after leaving college.

## **Reflection on and recording of achievement**

41. Structured self-review, using checklists and grids, and reflective self-review, using reflective logs, were an important feature of discrete units, with around 70% of respondents indicating that half or more of their students were engaged in such review.
42. Around 40% of course providers indicated extensive use of structured and reflective review processes 'embedded' within the curriculum.

43. As reported below (para 56), senior managers reported high levels of support at institutional level to enable students to reflect on issues related to employability.

## Career Planning Skills and Guidance

44. As noted above (para 26), discrete units addressing career opportunities and employment seeking skills were less likely to occur than those addressing employability skills and attributes, but they were present across a range of courses. Where courses do not include specific units, students have access to college student services. College guidance services are discussed in the sections below on underpinning issues (paras 53 and 54).
45. Advice and guidance are most likely to be provided at the pre-exit stage of students' programmes, with 88% of respondents in the heads of department study indicating that such support was provided extensively at this stage. It is also important while students are on their courses (78% reporting extensive support); two-thirds of respondents reported strong support at recruitment and induction stages, while 28% reported strong post-exit support.
46. Participants in the workshops raised the following up of progression to employment as a significant issue. Some colleges had good relations with local employers and were able to identify where learners had gone into employment; others found obtaining progression information very difficult.

### *Stow College – Creative industries*

#### *Embedding enterprise and employability at all stages of the 'student journey'*

*Students on non-advanced and HNC/D level courses engage in enterprise and employability development through the medium of music production.*

#### *Employability and guidance is supported at all stages of the 'student journey'.*

- Prior to entry to the college there is a pre-entry assessment and diagnosis of core skills which allows some assessment of and focus on employability skills.*
- The induction week has both college and departmental elements. Induction emphasises that the values required for learning are similar to those required for working; the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to be successful learners are built on in the learning experience and through work experience and enterprise.*
- Course participants manage College-owned record labels as a key component of active learning. The running of these companies is the main vehicle for teaching and learning.*
- Students working in these companies take part in the normal 'review and reflection' activities of the college which include progress reviews that focus on self evaluation and may address employability aspects such as work discipline and attitudes to colleagues and staff. Personal learning planning has been introduced on non-advanced courses.*
- At pre-exit stage, the reflection on skills development is done with the class tutor. As staff have strong links with the industry, students on these courses are less likely to seek help from Careers Scotland advisers.*
- There is informal post-exit guidance, with Careers Scotland support available to individual students. A new directorate for learner support, guidance and inclusion has been created and one of the priorities is to introduce a strategy to provide continuing post-exit support and guidance for as long as ex-students feel they require it.*

## Underpinning issues: extent of employer engagement

47. In the senior management survey, 25 out of the 27 respondents indicated that employers were engaged in activities at a college-wide level in relation to employability, enterprise and career issues. Half reported that employers were engaged in course development through participation in liaison or advisory groups, course boards and programme review boards.
48. In the heads of department survey, employers were the most frequently reported partners for collaboration. In addition to providing work experience, employers were involved in advising on content and course development along with sector skills councils and training bodies.
49. In relation to student support, employers were most likely to contribute as guest speakers; a small number of respondents reported that employers were involved in coaching and mentoring of students and helping them with target-setting and review.
50. At one of the workshops, the requirement to consult with employers in the modernisation of higher national units was emphasised. This is to ensure that the course provision meets the needs of employers and that all units include technical knowledge, technical skills and soft skills. The process also requires collaboration between colleges in writing the units.
51. At the workshops, it was noted that some employers were more difficult to engage than others and that this varied between sectors and geographical locations. Some providers were exploring ways of involving employers more, for example, through working breakfasts. College representatives indicated that they would welcome improved opportunities to work with employers to review specific areas of their employability practice.

## Underpinning issues: institution-wide strategies

52. The SFC raises the issue of the extent to which colleges have in place institution-wide strategies to embed and evaluate employability-related practices. Senior managers were, therefore, asked to indicate if they had college-wide policies on employability, enterprise and career education and guidance and if these areas were included in quality assurance procedures. They were also asked if there were resources that are used on a college-wide basis to make explicit to students what is meant by employability skills, to assist them to reflect on their development and to record progress.
53. Twenty-two out of the 27 respondents (82%) indicated that there was a college-wide policy on **career education**, with 21 (78%) reporting that this service was included in quality assurance procedures. Those who said that there was no written policy all indicated that student services were provided. Twelve respondents emphasised the importance of student services offering central support, while 8 referred to the inclusion of guidance and career planning as required units within courses.
54. The majority of respondents indicated that they had service-level agreements with Careers Scotland to provide a certain number of days or weeks per year and that most of this time was spent working with individuals and groups to help with various aspects of career choice and job-seeking skills. Some reported close

working with Careers Scotland staff, with examples of Careers Scotland staff working full-time in the college. Other respondents were more negative about the role of Careers Scotland. Similar concerns were raised by participants in the workshops, highlighting the variation in partnership arrangements across the country, with the view that it was very effective where Careers Scotland staff did work full-time in a college.

*Edinburgh's Telford College – A student-focused employment service*

*Jobzone @ etc is a free student employment service (or Job Centre) which assists students in finding full-time or part-time employment opportunities, either casual or course-related. Working in partnership with local employers, Careers Scotland and the Benefits Agency, 'Jobzone' is part of Telford College's Student Services provision. It is an integral part of the ESF 'DELIVER' project: Development of Labour Markets: Innovation, Vocational Training, Employability and Renewal (see [www.deliver.se](http://www.deliver.se)).*

*A full-time member of staff, the Student Services Officer, is responsible for the day-to-day running of Jobzone @ etc. A full-time Careers Scotland Adviser is based in the college and offers support with applications, CV writing, interview techniques and career guidance. Over 21,000 students have registered with the service to date and over 500 employers are involved.*

55. Fourteen out of the 27 respondents (52%) indicated that they had in place a college-wide policy in relation to **employability and enterprise** developments, while 17 (63%) indicated that these were addressed in quality assurance procedures. Such policy was included in a variety of college plans and strategies, eg college strategic and operational plans, college learning and teaching strategies, quality enhancement strategy. Where there was no specific overall written policy, it was indicated that these would be reflected in curriculum development and student services. Four respondents indicated that they were currently working on such a policy. Four respondents mentioned using the SFC/HMIE quality frameworks, while the majority indicated that quality issues would be addressed within course and programme reviews.
56. Twenty-three (85%) indicated that there were college-wide resources available to help students develop and reflect on their employability skills. More than half referred to some form of **development planning process** (eg personal development plan, personal learning plan, individual learning plan, student learning plan, learning log, progress log). Some had toolkits and guidance to support staff in their use. Some were in the process of developing such resources; 3 indicated that curriculum areas developed their own materials and this was not necessarily uniform across the college.

### **Underpinning issues: collaboration on a disciplinary, geographical or other basis**

57. Thirteen of the senior managers (48%) reported that their colleges had formal collaborative arrangements with other colleges. Seven specific examples, which either targeted specific student groups (eg NEET), or were part of funded initiatives (eg Focus on Learning 2) were highlighted. Four represented



geographical groupings; of the others that were on a wider, national basis, one was discipline-based and the others had an initiative focus.

58. At a departmental or faculty level, collaboration was more likely to happen with employers than with other colleges. No examples were given in the survey of colleges collaborating on developing curriculum or resources, though an inter-college sports event for special needs students was highlighted as being particularly beneficial for the students.
59. As mentioned above (para 50), during the workshops, the collaborative nature of the modernisation of higher national units was seen as an important way of colleges working together.

### **Underpinning issues: staff development**

60. In the senior management study, 22 (82%) of respondents indicated that aspects of employability, enterprise and career issues had been included in programmes of staff development, although numbers varied widely from all staff to two. Around one-third had undertaken development that had targeted the majority of staff, addressing specific issues such as introducing personal development planning and taking account of employability and citizenship with reference to the HMIe Quality Framework. Other forms of staff development had included sessions with Careers Scotland staff, SFEU seminars and in-service days and workshops.
61. Both senior managers and heads of department were asked about the greatest perceived needs for staff development. From the senior management perspective, the most frequent response related to the need to increase awareness of what is meant by employability skills, where and how they are already incorporated in teaching and learning approaches and what needs to be done to make further progress. Examples of good practice and the sharing of learning materials were perceived to be helpful. Two senior managers mentioned the importance of lecturers being able to return to industry. One respondent suggested that having a strategic approach would be helpful, instead of everyone having their own version of employability and enterprise.
62. From the heads of department perspective, staff development fell equally into two categories:
  - updating staff with relevant workplace knowledge and skills and awareness of the present day job market
  - understanding of employability and enterprise issues and how to embed them in courses.
63. The senior managers and heads of department both identified greater understanding of the employability and enterprise agenda, but the heads of department put far greater emphasis on the need to maintain and update lecturers' technical knowledge and expertise,
64. The views expressed by the heads of department were echoed by the participants in the workshops, who emphasised that 'embedding' was a demanding process and required time and resources. Additionally, college staff were being asked to focus more on employability and enterprise in the context of rapid curriculum and assessment change; development needed to occur at a pace which did not produce initiative overload.



## Other issues

65. Heads of department were asked to reflect on the priority they thought was given to employability issues in the overall aims and objectives of their colleges. The responses were:
- very high 17 (25%)
  - high 28 (42%)
  - medium 10 (15%)
  - low 1 (2%)
  - very low 0
66. The majority see employability as being high on their college's agenda. Most refer to strategic, operational or other plans as evidence of this. Two comments, however, are revealing. One respondent stated, *'we still have much to do, but it is very high on our agenda'*; on the other hand, the respondent who indicated that the priority was low stated, *'while it is accorded higher priority in terms of strategic and operational planning documents', there is a 'lack of course content and a lack of appropriate staff'*. Some reported the appointment of additional staff with a remit to take forward developments and others that there was strong central support with a commitment to purchasing and developing resources. Strong commitment in some centres was reported, whilst other areas of the college had not yet taken forward any developments. One respondent summarised the state of affairs as being that these issues are in the operational plan and *'employment skills are well covered, careers to a slightly lesser extent. However, enterprise requires more development work'*.
67. One respondent indicated that the lack of clear performance indicators relating to progression was a reason for less priority being given to these developments. The view was expressed in the workshops that appropriate performance indicators are required, particularly in relation to progression to employment or higher education.
68. Some providers indicated that further developments included 'rolling-out' activities which had been piloted in some departments. Activities being developed included the integration of employability into awards and courses; the introduction of 'stand-alone' units; introducing or extending learning logs/PDPs and improving the use of 'guidance slots'.
69. In the workshops, there was some discussion around the extension of good practice developed in one area to other areas within a college. As cases in point, the case studies presented by college staff were well received by participants. It was noticeable that they fell into two categories – those that were resourced from core funding and those that received special funding from external sources. There was no obvious difference in the impact or significance of the initiatives that resulted from their source of funding, although there may have been differences in scale. However, it remained a challenge to take forward developments led by enthusiasts, whether funded or not, into other areas of the curriculum.
70. In general, college representatives felt that employability activity required additional support, as it involved substantial investment of staff time. It was suggested that there could be more progress made towards correlating SFC employability priorities with the HMle framework, to further enable colleges to

take a single strategic approach to developing and delivering employability activities.

71. It was noted in feedback on the report at the workshops that the study had not taken account of the views of learners, nor of the parents of younger students. Participants felt that this was important to focus on their understanding of employability, aspirations for employment and their expectations of providers.

### **Priorities for next stage of development**

72. The following priorities were identified by participants in the workshops as an outcome of reading the draft report and discussions which occurred during the workshops:
  - It is important to have a shared framework for development for the further education sector, with guidance and examples on how to incorporate employability, enterprise and careers issues into other units, and which makes employability skills and attitudes visible and explicit for staff and students.
  - Additional funding is required to support wide-reaching developments, including support to take forward practice developed by enthusiasts into other areas of the curriculum.
  - Appropriate performance indicators are required; for example, progressing to employment or higher education is not currently widely used as a performance indicator for colleges.
  - Labour market intelligence, consolidated and presented to colleges in a format which directly relates to further education provision and employability activity, would be welcomed.
  - Further research which directly involved learners (and parents), and which focused on the learners' understanding of employability, aspirations for employment and expectations from providers was recommended.

#### *Borders College, Land Based and Leisure Department*

##### *Innovative projects to enhance employability*

- *Work Placement and Residential Schemes in the UK and Other European Countries.* These activities include residential visits within the UK to sites relevant to the students' courses, such as the Eden Project, the Smithfield Show, the Horse of the Year Show, and the Cairngorms for snowboarding. The college also has one of the largest Leonardo Mobility Project involvements in Scotland which includes work placements for agriculture students in France, horse care students in Ireland, rural mechanics students in Norway, game-keeping students in Sweden and leisure students in Spain. These activities are seen to contribute to the students' learning by taking them out of their normal environment, increasing self reliance, raising self esteem, meeting people from other cultures, providing new technical skills and developing employability and citizenship skills.
- *Development of enterprise and citizenship skills through contributing to projects in the local community.* One example given was the planting of a hawthorn hedge which the community bought and the students set out and planted. This activity was seen to develop team working skills and also to provide a source of pride for the students, who had worked on it for many years. Advantages included having real as opposed to simulated work, the use of real materials, having to work to a realistic schedule, problem solving, experience of budgeting and time management, and liaising with members of the public.
- Students had also taken part in several enterprise projects that developed similar skills to those described above and also provided funds for some of the residential visits. For example one group of students produced garden obelisks that retailed at over £100 each. This funded a go-karting outing.

#### *Langside College – Pre-modern apprenticeship course in playwork*

##### *Partnership working and embedding employability skills and attitudes throughout the learner journey*

Langside College has developed a pre-modern apprenticeship course for young people in collaboration with SkillsActive, the National Training Organisation for sport, recreation and allied occupations and supported by Glasgow City Council and the Local Enterprise Company. Local Out of School Hours care providers offer placements for the students. The students work towards the Scottish Progression Award 'Accessing Playwork' and SVQ 'Playwork level' 2.

Employability skills and attributes are addressed in the core skills and knowledge-based units and in the workplace. They are an integral part of the programme. For example:

- Before joining the course, students complete Individual Learning Support Plans to assist in identifying individual learning needs; throughout the course progress is monitored and reflection encouraged through the use of Learner Action Plans.
- 'Basic' employability issues, such as time-keeping; dressing appropriately; informing employer of absences; how to communicate with different kinds of people (eg adults and children are addressed differently); and working with others are a focus of the pre-placement preparation.
- Team working, problem solving, decision making, taking responsibility and identifying hazards are all developed through the course units and on placement.
- Each student is mentored by college staff and their placement provider.
- Each student is prepared for and takes part in an interview for their placement to help them develop employment-seeking skills.
- They develop their CVs and as part of the mentoring process they reflect on their future career plans, considering if they wish to continue in playwork.

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