



HE Employability Strategy

2021 - 2025

The importance of graduate employability

What the research shows

A review of the published research and literature during 2012 to 2016 conducted by the *Higher Education Academy* (now known as AdvanceHE)¹ outlined four prevailing themes associated with employability:

- 1) employability will not necessarily lead to enhanced employment opportunities, since the number of graduates is not closely aligned to the number of graduate jobs;
- 2) employability is a critical part of the public policy rationale for Higher Education (HE);
- 3) in a marketised HE system, employability is likely to be a key motivator during the student decision-making process as to which institutions and which programmes to apply to;
- 4) employability can be considered through a range of stakeholder standpoints (e.g. government, employers, students, universities, etc.).

This Employability Strategy ("the Strategy") recognises the limitations of employability in the context of point 1 above, while recognising the growing importance of employability and associated destinations data that are affecting HE regulation, metrics and funding (including but not limited to higher tuition fee income) (as per points 2 and 4 above). It also recognises the possible influence of a HE provider's track record and/or infrastructure and associated resources on a potential student's application and decision-making process (as per point 3 above).

According to the literature review, many HE providers have been actively creating strategies, frameworks and institutional narratives that outline how they plan to address employability, including but not limited to:

- *changing structures*: this seeks to establish or reorganise the infrastructure at institutional level to make the institution more effective in delivering employability (e.g. changes to staffing, resourcing, curriculum and institutional mission);
- *changing the programme mix*: this focuses on developing HE programmes that have a strong vocational aspect, work-related learning and increase employer involvement;
- *curriculum development*: this considers how changes to the current curriculum, such as employability modules, workshops or other employability elements can support graduate employability;
- *extra-curricular provision*: this examines what institutions can do outside the core curriculum, through supply of career and employability services and other provision designed to enhance the student experience;
- *co-curricular provision*: this emphasises provision which complements or enhances the curriculum;
- *networking*: this considers ways in which institutions can involve external stakeholders, such as employers, in the development of student employability.

This Strategy takes account of the above elements and has selectively scanned the HE sector² to identify published current practice relating to employability strategies and initiatives, adapting and contextualising good practice to aspects of this Strategy as appropriate. The *Graduate Capital Model* is a case in point (see *Our approach* section below).

¹ *Employability: A review of the literature 2012 to 2016: A report for the Higher Education Academy* (02/2017), J Artess, T Hooley, R Mellors-Bourne

² The criteria for this 'scanning' was based on a HE provider having already achieved high quality metrics for progression (such as a TEF Gold or Silver Award acknowledging effective approaches to employability), published strategies (in particular employability strategies) and Access and Participation Plans that linked/aligned employability strategies and initiatives to such plans.

Defining employability

There are various definitions of employability, but the one which this Strategy adopts is the one noted below by Yorke and Knight³, viewing employability as a personal state that individuals occupy, a lifelong journey rather than exclusively developed by HE, with employment not being the sole indicator of a successful employability strategy:

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

The *Higher Education Academy*⁴ provided the following composite list of graduate attributes following examination of published literature on graduate attributes and frameworks:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| • Aspiration | • Language skills (particularly second language skills) |
| • Autonomy | • Multi-tasking |
| • Career management | • Numeracy |
| • Communication skills | • Opportunity awareness |
| • Creativity | • Positive attitude |
| • Critical thinking skills | • Presentation skills |
| • Customer awareness | • Problem-solving |
| • Digital literacy | • Professional knowledge |
| • Efficiency | • Research skills |
| • Emotional intelligence | • Resilience |
| • Enterprise and entrepreneurship | • Self-management |
| • Ethics | • Social intelligence |
| • Flexibility and adaptability | • Team-working |
| • Giving and receiving feedback | • Time management |
| • Independent thinking | • Willingness (and capability) to learn |
| • Initiative and self-direction | • Work ethic |
| • Inter-personal skills | • Writing skills |

These attributes are more than just ‘employability skills’; they “describe a range of skills, attributes, attitudes and behaviours that have a relevance to the workplace, but also [frequent] relevance to other contexts such as higher education, family life or citizenship.”⁵ It could be submitted that employability is a synthesis of attributes that will only be demonstrated if the student is aware of the attributes they possess and how they work together, and can articulate them, thereby making personal literacy (the ability to read oneself) necessary to transform attributes into valuable personal capital.⁶

Therefore, a holistic approach should be adopted in order to ensure and assure that employability initiatives and activities have a positive impact on the employability of students graduating from the College. One approach, which has been used by some HE providers in the context of their employability strategies, is to apply a *Graduate Capital Model*⁷, which is considered in the section below entitled *Our Approach*.

³ At page 8 in Yorke, M. and Knight, P. (2006) *Embedding employability into the curriculum* (Learning and employability series 1). York: Higher Education Academy

⁴ *Employability: A review of the literature 2012 to 2016: A report for the Higher Education Academy* (02/2017), J Artess, T Hooley, R Mellors-Bourne, at p17

⁵ *Ibid.* p17

⁶ *Ibid.* p17

⁷ This Model has been adopted by [University of Southampton](#) and [Anglia Ruskin University](#).

Aims of our Employability Strategy

This Strategy aims to develop and significantly enhance the employability skills and graduate attributes of all our full-time undergraduate degree students within the Faculty of HE, adopting a *Graduate Capital Model* and employability framework, and contributing to the improvement of student progression rates to a level exceeding the minimum numerical baseline expected by the Office for Students (OfS). This Strategy and its implementation will be informed by and/or will complement other HE related strategies, including but not limited to *Access and Participation Plans*, the *HE Strategy* and the *HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy*. It will further align and embed the College Strategic Plan 2020-2023 to ensure that the College achieves its strategic aims and objectives, with particular emphasis on Strategic aim 2 and 4.

- Design and deliver high quality progression pathways to support student progression and regional skills needs
- Extend and develop our partnerships to embed our reputation and improve the economic prosperity of the South East and Essex Region

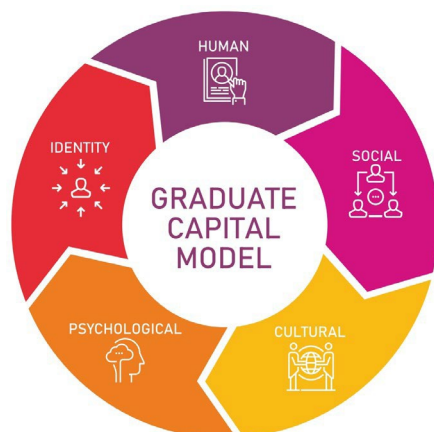
To achieve this aim, we will:

- Identify good and best practice for employability in the HE sector and internally (at programme or portfolio level), including use of software solutions to facilitate aspects of employability (such as [Abintegro](#) and [Gradintelligence](#)), adapting and embedding employability across relevant parts of the student-life-cycle where it is likely to have the greatest student engagement and impact.
- Work with and respond to the needs of local stakeholders including South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Opportunity South Essex (OSE), schools, businesses and industry, unitary authorities and county council.
- Develop sustainable partnerships with employers to inform support and develop our curriculum delivery alongside meeting their needs
- Provide opportunities for all students to develop the employability and enterprise skills they need to achieve their career potential
- All curriculum development to be informed by labour market intelligence to increase the employability opportunities. In particular the college will concentrate development of HE courses to the seven priority sectors identified in Essex with strong potential for growth, where a range of openings exist. These include construction, logistics, engineering, IT, digital and creative and finance and insurance.
- Design and deliver curricular and co-curricular activities which underpin these aims holistically.
- Introduce or further develop the infrastructure needed to implement, oversee and evaluate employability projects and activities.
- Encourage all HE Students to engage in extracurricular opportunities leading to the completion of the bronze, silver and gold awards in employability.
- Actively identify and where possible source a variety of work placement opportunities across the student-life-cycle.
- Buy-in expert consultancy and research activity contextualised to the needs of our full-time undergraduate degree students in order to contribute to improving their progression rates, in line with regulatory expectations, and closing any gaps highlighted in the *Access and Participation Plan*.
- Work in partnership with key stakeholders to ensure our students develop various forms of graduate capital and skills to meet the existing and future demands of employers or prospective clients or customers (in the case of freelance, contract and self-employment activity) within the region and beyond.
- Provide a flexible employability offering that is responsive to the challenges of a changing environment.
- Ensure that staff designing and delivering employability projects and activities have access to associated external staff development from sector experts (such as [Advance HE](#)), as needed.

Our Approach

This Strategy is informed by a holistic student development approach based on the *Graduate Capital Model* introduced by University of Southampton and adopted by Anglia Ruskin University (see below) and influenced by existing good practice in the HE sector and the College's OfS metrics, including the Condition B3 numerical baseline (relating to progression) and aspects of the *Access and Participation Plan* (in particular focused on progression).

Graduate Capital Model



The *Graduate Capital Model* identifies a range of personal capitals, which are broader in nature than the approaches associated with graduate attributes and employability skills. These capitals are defined as:

Human Capital: Developing graduate level knowledge, incorporating technical knowledge, subject specific and career building skills during an undergraduate degree programme, which signal to prospective employers that individuals with a degree are operating at a higher technical and cognitive level than non-graduates. However, on its own this type of capital is not sufficient to secure graduate level employment, since it is foundational in nature.

Success indicators:

Graduates with well-developed Human Capital will be able to:

- Apply subject discipline knowledge and concepts
- Demonstrate transferable skills relevant to the graduate job market
- Interpret the labour market and search for opportunities
- Identify appropriate ways to apply for opportunities
- Write high quality job applications and perform well in the recruitment process

Social Capital: Developing networks and social relations (through for example work-related learning and associated interaction with the relevant sector and prospective employers) in order to enhance knowledge and be able to access target employment.

Success indicators:

Graduates with well-developed Social Capital will be able to:

- Identify a range of graduate-level roles
- Examine what is new or changing in the graduate job market
- Describe the key influencers in their field
- Recognise and capitalise on opportunities that arise
- Build a network of career contacts
- Create an effective online presence
- Demonstrate the confidence to talk to people they do not know

Cultural Capital: Appreciating the culture of sectors and organisations and responding accordingly by being able to present oneself and one's profile, whether it is through a C.V., Higher Education Achievement Report, LinkedIn profile, etc. or in a way that demonstrates a connection between the graduate and the prospective employer or client (this may include tailoring one's profile around the cultural values or working culture of an organisation).

Success indicators:

Graduates with well-developed Cultural Capital will be able to:

- Demonstrate that they have added value through extra-curricular activities
- Select and apply methods to present themselves in a professional and targeted manner (on paper, on-line and in person)
- Assess the culture of key organisations in their chosen sector
- Demonstrate an awareness and sensitivity to different cultural contexts and an increasingly internationalised labour market

Psychological Capital: Having the capacity to move into and adapt to a fluid job market and to have the resilience and ability to manage adversity, thereby preparing oneself to withstand challenges and pressures of the labour market and marketplace and be able to undertake scenario planning and contingency planning in terms of one's long-term career goals.

Success indicators:

Graduates with well-developed Psychological Capital will be able to:

- Manage workplace uncertainty and when necessary generate plans to take measured risks
- Demonstrate the capacity to be adaptable, able to manage setbacks, changes and transitions
- Establish personal strategies to manage workplace stresses effectively
- Construct career contingency plan(s)

Identity Capital: Reflecting on and understanding experiences, values and achievements to support development of one's professional profile (an ongoing identity that a graduate presents to the labour market or market place, thereby signalling their suitability for employment or engagement); the development of strategies to accomplish career goals.

Success indicators:

Graduates with well-developed Identity Capital will be able to:

- Identify their skills, attributes and experiences and evaluate gaps to be addressed
- Evaluate their self-concept, including their values and motivations
- Appraise their strengths and areas for development
- Test their ideas through work experience and insights
- Judge their fit for roles and opportunities
- Select an emerging or clear career path(s)
- Assess their progress, identifying and recording their learning

OfS metrics and associated commitments

Our HE related strategies are data-informed and their implementation is data-driven. Consequently, this Strategy takes account of the annual Condition B3 numerical baseline metric and the associated College indicator for progression, in particular the baseline for *professional employment or postgraduate study*, as well as the differential progression outcomes and associated targets in the *Access and Participation Plan*.

Our Key Priorities

Our Employability Strategy aims to address four major strands:

1. Systematic general and subject specific embedding of employability at programme, portfolio and institutional level, where possible linked to assessments or delivered as co-curricular or extra-curricular activities/provision.
2. Significantly increase flexible, current and relevant work-related learning opportunities for students at appropriate points in their student journey with us.
3. Systematic and effective promotion of employability and careers related development opportunities for students at particular points during their time with us.
4. Faculty and institutional level commitment to employability at a strategic and operational level, adopting a holistic approach wherever possible, with proportionate and timely allocation of resources where they can have the greatest impact.

- 1. Systematic general and subject specific embedding of employability at programme, portfolio and institutional level, where possible linked to assessments or delivered as co-curricular or extra-curricular activities/provision.**

This should result in the following outcomes:

- Students will be able to directly link aspects of their programme to employability through active reflection.
- Aspects of programme content remain current and relevant to practice in an associated sector or sectors.
- Improved academic connections with the sector, including but not limited to employers.
- Increased academic staff confidence with developing or facilitating the embedding of employability and monitoring and evaluating its impact.

To achieve these outcomes, we will:

- Ensure students undertake active reflection in relation to employability, with tutors facilitating accordingly, and engage with [Career Edge+](#) and, optionally, an Employability Award developed by the College's careers service.
- Align certain assessments or elements of assessments to current sector practice for the subject area or ensure co-curricular or extra-curricular activities/provision develop direct or transferrable skills that are desired by the sector and employers in the sector, taking account of and promoting development of relevant graduate attributes accordingly.
- Ensure all programme development is based upon the latest Labour market intelligence Surveys and is employer informed.
- Recognise and value the Lecturer-Practitioner approach, where lecturers are current or recent practitioners in the discipline they deliver and/or are maintaining sector links and/or are updating their knowledge through relevant higher level studies (such as a Master's Degree).
- Staff development activities (both internally and externally sourced) equip programme teams to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate embedding of employability.

2. Significantly increase flexible, current and relevant work-related learning opportunities for students at appropriate points in their student journey with us.

This should result in:

- Students being better prepared and confident in applying for and accepting work-related opportunities (including in a post-COVID-19 environment).
- Continue to improve the connection between the Faculty of HE, its programmes and the associated sector(s) and employers.
- Increase the proportion of students undertaking work-related activities (including but not limited to live briefs, work placements, projects, volunteering, virtual work-related activities).
- The University Centre South Essex should, over time, become recognised for facilitating work-related learning and improving progression opportunities for its full-time undergraduate students.

To achieve these results, we will:

- Ensure programme teams prepare and support students in applying for work-related opportunities. Programme teams, in turn, will be supported by staff engaged in employability related activity within the Faculty of HE.
- Enable Programme Leaders and staff engaged in employability to cultivate and maintain connections with sectors related to their programme through sufficient time and resources to do so.
- Increase work-related learning opportunities and activities in the curriculum through programme modifications and/or during programme (re-)validations, with associated resources through earmarked funding (including from the prevailing *Access and Participation Plan*) and projects to ensure the increases are sustainable.
- Increase the profile and promotion of work-related learning opportunities, careers support (facilitated through customised [Abintegro](#) and [GradIntelligence](#) software), together with success stories regarding progression to prospective applicants. This will, for example, be through our marketing materials and the HE micro-website.

3. Systematic and effective promotion of employability and careers related development opportunities for students at particular points during their time with us.

This should result in:

- Students engaging in an expedient manner, based on their individual needs and aspirations, with HE employability related platforms and services offered by the College's careers service, including but not limited to those adapted from [Abintegro](#) and [GradIntelligence](#).
- Prospective students being made aware of the employability and careers related support they can expect once enrolling at the College, which could inform their decision whether or not to apply to the College for a full-time undergraduate degree programme.
- Students actively engaging with internal and external resources and platforms that promote them to potential employers or clients.

To achieve these results, we will:

- Ensure that Programme Leaders work collaboratively with the College's careers service to develop or update HE specific careers information, resources and platforms (such as those provided through [Abintegro](#) and [Gradintelligence](#)) so that they are aligned to their students' needs, requirements and career aspirations (including self-employment and business start-up).
- Update the information and signposting available to students regarding employability and careers during the research and application stage so that they can make an informed decision.

- Students are provided with internally and externally sourced training on a variety of relevant social media and professional platforms and use of careers related HE platforms in order to present and promote themselves in line with sector expectations for particular job roles and services. The training sourced also results in promotion of or contribution to development of some of the graduate attributes needed for entry to a particular sector.

4. Faculty and institutional level commitment to employability at a strategic and operational level, adopting a holistic approach wherever possible, with proportionate and timely allocation of resources where they can have the greatest impact.

This should result in:

- Students being provided with the resources, support and guidance they need to reflect on and respond to their own career aspirations (whether as a graduate employee or through self-employment, freelancing and business start-up) and engage with development of certain graduate attributes desired by the sector.
- A holistic approach to employability that connects a range of HE related strategies across the student-life-cycle and leads to strategic and operational synergy (i.e. a result that is greater or more beneficial than HE related strategies working independently of each other).
- Development of good practice, actively engaging with or being informed by best practice in the HE sector.

To achieve these results, we will:

- Use a course viability model and Access and Participation Plan to earmark and ringfence higher tuition fee income in a proportionate manner to resource progression related strategies, projects and activities, including various aspects of employability.
- Ensure that relevant strategies, such as the *HE Strategy*, aspects of the *Access and Participation Plan*, where relevant, and the *HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy* are inter-related in terms of employability and promotion of progression for our students. This includes but is not limited to the targeted development of graduate attributes within and around the curriculum, the adaption of the *Graduate Capital Model* and any other directly relevant or complementary sector specific models or frameworks, such as the [UAL Creative Attributes Framework](#) for UAL validated provision, the [AdvanceHE framework for embedding employability](#) (including updates) and the *NERUPI Evaluation Framework* for Levels 3 to 6.
- Externally source expert input in the form of consultancy, research and staff development from recognised HE sector sources, such as [Advance HE](#), validating partners, other institutions leading on employability (financed through earmarked and/or ring-fenced higher tuition fee income). This is in addition to sharing good practice internally.

Higher Education Strategies: Glossary of terms

Active learning	A term for learning and teaching methods which put the student in charge of their own learning through meaningful activities. Students think about and apply what they are learning, in a deliberate contrast to passive learning where attention in lectures begins to wane every 10-20 minutes. Active learning promotes recall and deeper understanding of material as students are engaging with the content, rather than simply listening to it. Active learning can be a good way of preparing students for future employment. By integrating activities such as case studies and problem based learning scenarios into the teaching, students are able to practice skills which are essential for the workplace.
Active reflection	Looking back on an experience and considering what could have been done differently or what has been learned from it. When a student reflects on their accomplishments and the opportunities for improvement, they are better able to take on future challenges. Each learning experience becomes more meaningful and more productive.
AdvanceHE	A member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education bodies across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. Support is delivered through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys, and includes accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, research, and the sharing of knowledge and resources.
Cultural capital	'The essential knowledge that students need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.' (Ofsted 2019)
Curriculum	In higher education, this refers to the process of connecting and integrating university learning and teaching into coherent and meaningful educational experiences for students, not just simply the programme of study.
Formative assessment	Activities used in a lesson in order to discover what students know while they're still in the process of learning it. This enables adaption to the teaching to ensure student's knowledge and understanding is reinforced.
HEA	The Higher Education Academy (HEA) was a British professional membership scheme promoting excellence in higher education. The HEA advocated for evidence-based teaching methods and awards fellowships as a method of professional recognition for university teachers. The HEA was responsible for the UK Professional Standards Framework for higher
	education practitioners. In 2018, the HEA merged with the Leadership Foundation and the Equality Challenge Unit to form Advance HE
HESA	The Higher Education Statistics Agency - the experts in UK higher education data, and the designated data body for England.
Human capital	An individual's capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience as well as the capacity to add to this reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experience through individual learning. Usually used to refer to the value of an employee to an organisation

Identity capital	'Identity capital is an individual's collection of personal assets. It is the repertoire of individual resources assembled over time. Some identity capital goes on a résumé, such as degrees, jobs, test scores, and clubs. Other identity capital is more personal, such as how we speak, where we are from, how we solve problems, how we look. Identity capital is how we build ourselves—bit by bit, over time.'(Jay 2013)
Learner centred	This refers to moving the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. It aims to develop learner autonomy and independence. focuses on skills and practices that enable life-long learning and independent problem-solving
NERUPI	Network Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions. NERUPI is a community of practice for those seeking to reduce inequalities in higher education access, participation and progression - a partnership of over 70 higher education organisations working together to create a new approach to evaluation using the framework developed by Annette Hayton, University of Bath and Dr Andrew Bengry, Bath Spa University.
Neurodiversity	The concept that differences in brain functioning within the human population are normal and that brain functioning that is not neurotypical should not be stigmatized
OfS	Office for Students -the independent regulator of higher education in England. Helping students to get into and succeed in higher education by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helping students stay informed. 2. Making sure that students get a high-quality education that prepares them for the future. 3. Protecting students' interests. The OfS's other functions include the administration of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Register of higher education providers.
Pedagogy	The theory and practice of teaching and learning , and how this process influences, and is influenced by, the social, political and psychological development of learners. Pedagogy, taken as an academic discipline, is the study of how knowledge and skills are imparted in an educational context.
Peer review	The evaluation of work by one or more people with similar competencies as the producers of the work (peers). It functions as a form of self-regulation by qualified members of a profession within the relevant field

Polar quintiles	All universities are required by the Office for Students to increase the proportion of students they take from 'low participation' areas. One of the main ways they do this is to flag up on applications the ' Polar quintile ' the applicants live in. POLAR is an acronym which stands for Participation of Local Areas. POLAR classifies local areas into five quintiles based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter HE aged 18 or 19. Quintile 1 is the fifth of areas with the lowest proportion of progression to HE.
Psychological capital	The concept of Psychological Capital is strongly linked to increased mental wellbeing, and levels of satisfaction with life and work. The positive developmental state of an individual as characterized by high self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience.
Social capital	The links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together
Stakeholder	An individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization.
Summative assessment	Summative assessments are any method of evaluation performed at the end of a module, or period of study, allowing teachers to measure a students' understanding against standardised criteria. They usually result in the student receiving a determined grade
TEF	The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) is a national exercise, introduced by the government in England. It assesses excellence in teaching at universities and colleges, and how each higher education provider ensures excellent outcomes for their students in terms of graduate-level employment or further study. There are systems in place to help ensure that all UK colleges and universities meet national quality requirements. The TEF looks at what they are doing in addition to these requirements, and participating universities and colleges can achieve either gold, silver, bronze, or a provisional award (meaning that they do not yet have enough data for a full assessment).
Transition pedagogy	An approach to learning and teaching that aims to support students as they enter higher education, and as they progress through their programme of study and beyond. It recognises that students have diverse needs and experiences and that these are addressed in order to ensure successful completion of a students HE journey.
UAL	University of the Arts, London.
UEA	University of East Anglia

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