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| Vodcast Transcript 02/04/14 |
| Keynote address 2: Graduate Employability, Measuring SuccessDr Lorraine Dacre-Pool, University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)Senior Lecturer in Employability |
| Slide 1: Graduate Employability, Measuring SuccessI have been asked to come along today to talk to you a little bit about graduate employability and in particular measuring success. My name is Lorraine Dacre Pool. I actually work at the University of Central Lancashire. I am a senior lecturer in employability there. I am also a chartered psychologist. As I have put there (on the slide) views are my own. Slide 2: In this sessionIn this session I am going to talk a little about this whole idea of graduate employability. I know we have touched on this in a number of the sessions that I have been in today and the fact that it is such a slippery concept. I am going to introduce one definition; actually I am not going to introduce it as Ruth has already given you it earlier on. And talk about one particular model. I am going to give you some examples of measurement tools. Talk a little bit about some of the success that we’ve had with measuring. And I am actually going to share with you one of the tools that we use as well. And hopefully come to some conclusions at the end too. I will try my very best to keep you awake.Slide 3: So what exactly is graduate employability?OK so and I think this is one of the questions that we have just been looking at; what exactly is this thing called graduate employability? There is a reason as to why it is called a slippery concept. Because it is very slippery. So the questions we sort of need to ask ourselves are is it just about being able to gain a ‘graduate’ job? Now we have all been in the workshops today so you should all be able to answer that one now, is it just about being able to gain a ‘graduate’ job? The audience reply NO! Hooray! What is a ‘graduate’ job? And again that is in inverted commas because there isn’t even complete agreement on that. If a graduate is unable to secure a ‘graduate’ job on completion of their studies then have we as employability developers failed? Another one to put out there for you…Slide 4: the Big Issue!OK so this is the big issue. Certainly for me and for a number of other people. Employment and employability – they are not the same. But the two concepts are frequently conflated. I think this is where a lot of the confusion lies. I think it is because they both begin with ‘employ’! That certainly doesn’t help. So the questions…If a graduate gains a ‘graduate’ position do they have employability? Well possibly but not necessarily. I think one of the things I mentioned in the last session was that you could have a graduate who gains a fantastic graduate position because their best friend’s dad works for a particular investment bank. Can we say that that graduate has got employability – well they might have but not necessarily? Also if a graduate does not gain a ‘graduate’ position does that mean that they don’t have employability? – Again possibly but not necessarily. This issue really comes to the fore when we get to this whole idea of using destinations data as a way of measuring employability. It’s just fraught with all sorts of problems and I really, really wish people would just stop doing it. I mean basically all that tells us is a simple measure that tells us what graduates are doing six months after they graduate. And that’s all it tells us really, and not much more. I think it is probably quite a useful thing to do because I do think we do need to know what our graduates are doing. And it is helpful to know what our graduates are doing in six months’ time. Definitely so that those who haven’t gained the sorts of positions that they want can actually be offered some help and be given some advice and some guidance. But I think in the way that it is being used as the moment there are real issues with it. Slide 5: Some thoughts on this issue…I don’t know how well you can read that at the back. Is that OK? Do you need me to read those out for you? So just some thoughts on this issue about employment and employability. Can you see them at the back or do you want me to read them out? You can see them – OK I will let you read them for yourselves then. OK so this isn’t a brand new issue. People were saying things like that in 2002, 2005 and 2007. Slide 6: It is employers who convert graduate employability into employment. Possibly a little bit of a controversial one here but it needs saying. At the end of the day it is employers who convert graduate employability into employment. This exert is from an article by Lee Harvey whose work I strongly recommend you read if you are interested in this subject.As he said, as employability developers we have absolutely no influence over so many other variables that can affect whether or not a graduate gets a graduate job. These include things like the type of Higher Education Institution (HEI) that they attend. Yes it will make a difference if you have been to Oxbridge, or if you have been to University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) or Birmingham City University (BCU). Student location and mobility. Again we have got no control over that. The subject of study. So for some, particularly some vocational courses, you might have 98% of graduates in jobs in six months. For others it is going to be much more difficult. Previous work experience. Again we can’t control what experiences graduates have had before they have even arrived at our institution. And that is going to have an impact on what they end up doing when they leave our institution. Age, ethnicity, gender, social class. We all know that employers should not take any of those things into account when they are employing people. How many of us can honestly say that that never happens? All of these factors could directly influence whether or not a graduate is able to secure a graduate position.Slide 7: A quote from 2001 – have we moved on since then?Got another one there just for you to read as well. This is a quote form 2001. I wonder if we have moved on since then.So have we moved on? Not really. Again 2001 we are still talking about DLHE stats and employability in the same sentence. There are probably going to be connections between the two. And a lot of the things that we do with our students should help them to gain employment. But can we actually say that employability development activities equals graduate employment always. The answer to that is No – we can’t. However does that mean there is no value to what we do? I would say no, no it doesn’t.Slide 8: Some further thoughts…Some further thoughts. Obviously this one from Yorke and Knight, 2006 where they say ‘*It may tentatively be concluded as with many of the achievements valued by society, graduate employability is something that resists reliable and valid measurement in this value added way and that attempting to measure it in this fashion is a somewhat pointless exercise’.* Like other things, for example being a good citizen. I think that we would all agree that this is something that we would all want our students to do. But what exactly does that mean and how would you go about measuring it. Are we saying then because we can’t define it exactly and because we can’t measure it then it’s not something we should be encouraging students to do? But I would say that developing models and tools that enable students and graduates to actually engage with this whole idea of employability. Actually reflect on their strengths, their areas for improvement then that is a worthwhile endeavour. I think self-evaluation is most likely to be the most useful way of approaching this task. Slide 9: There are some published measures of self-perceived employability out there. In terms of self-perceived employability measures, there are some out there. So there are three here that I have given you, well one item from each of them. All published around 2007/08. I think that you would agree that they are probably only going to be that useful to graduates who are already in the workplace. You would have had to have been out there and working for a little while in order for these measures to make much sense to you. Then the question is could we use these to measure impact about what we do? I would say well possibly – but there is a great big but.To have a really robust research methodology what you would probably need to do is recruit two large cohorts of students that you are going to look at. You would have one who would take part in the employability activities. You would have one who wouldn’t take part in the employability activities. OK so I can see quite a few of you nodding. You know instantly you have an issue. You have a huge ethical issue apart from anything else. How are you going to say you are going to come to our institution but we are not going to give you any employability stuff? So that’s to start with.That’s the first issue. The other issue would be, even with the group that you said you weren’t going to give any employability too. Because so much is now embedded into so many programmes. Sometimes without students even recognizing it, sometimes without some staff recognizing it. Again it is going to be very difficult to actually keep a group that are completely untouched by employability in any way – even if you wanted to.Then you would need to follow those two groups through and into the workplace. And you would have to have them there for probably a year or two. Then you would need to follow them up and give them these measures and compare them. I would say it’s possible. But you’ve still got an issue that some people will bring up. In that they will say ah but even after doing all of that it’s still only self-perception. So I think this is a really, really tricky one. And I think it would also be very challenging to get those students to complete these measures. Having done research using questionnaires, to get them to do that once they have been out in the workplace for a couple of years. You would need a massive sample size to start with in order to have a reasonable number at the end of the day. Slide 10: FuturetrackI don’t know if any of you are aware of this particular study. This is, I think, a very important research study that has been going on for the past few years. They have actually tried to do something with a very large cohort. It’s a longitudinal study following all students who applied in 2005/06 for a full time place in Higher Education (HE). They have got a massive amount of data and they are releasing things in different stages. The latest figures were released November 2012. That was stage four. Some of the statistics that they came up with from that was that this group of students were graduating in one of the worst recessions in history. But from that group:* 75% thought that they had learnt skills that employers seek
* 78% thought that there skills would help them to get work
* 70% were happy with their future career options
* 96% would do it all again

That’s the one that we should be really trumpeting. So these are students that are out there and 96% are really pleased that they have come to Higher Education (HE) and that given the chance they would do it again. I think this certainly provides evidence of the value of studying for a degree. But it also gives us an idea about some more of the employability related themes as well. So if you are interested in a big study with some really good robust data then that’s one for you to have a look at. There is lots of stuff online. It’s done by Kate Purcell and Peter Elias *et al* from Warwick.Slide 11: One definition of graduate employability Ok I think Ruth mentioned this definition earlier so just to share with you again. Certainly for me and for my colleague Peter Sewell this was our definition of employability. This comes from something that really evolved from a definition that Peter had back in 2001. *‘Employability is about having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose, secure and retain occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful’.* Dacre-pool and Sewell, 2007; 2012. I think that fits quite well with what you were saying earlier. I think some of the important things here are ‘more likely to choose’. So again they have been given the help in terms of thinking about what it is that they want to do. Secure, so we have got some of the job getting bits in there as well. And retain – again we are now recognizing that this is a really important part of it too. And the satisfied and successful elements. Slide 12: The CareerEDGE model of employabilityI don’t know how many of you have seen this before? Have you all seen it before? No, OK so it’s probably worth me just talking about it a little bit. From that definition we wanted to come up with a practical model of graduate employability. So that when people said that’s all very well, you’re saying that’s what you mean by it, how do we go about developing that within Higher Education? So we came up with this and we call it the CareerEDGE model. CareerEDGE is just a way to remember the five bits along the bottom.We think that while students are within Higher Education (HE) they should be given an opportunity to develop their career development learning. This is where all of these things like knowing yourself more, thinking about what sort of person you are, what motivates you, what your values are. Finding out about the opportunities that are there for you and the job getting bits as well. So being given help with your CV. How to complete an application form, mock interviews, and assessment centres. All that sort of stuff are all part of your career development learning. We also think it’s really important that students gain experience. And I know I am amongst a group where there is bags and bags of that but it’s not the same for all Higher Education (HE) courses. We have put there (on the slide) work and life. Because we also wanted to recognize that for some students, particularly mature students, they might be coming with a whole wealth of life experiences that would be of real interest to some employers. And they might just need a little bit of help to start to recognize what some of those things might be and how they would articulate them. Right at the very centre of the model is the degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding and that’s where it needs to be to be perfectly honest. I think this is another reason when generally when we share this with other academic staff that they are a bit more accepting of this maybe than they are other types of model. Because we say your degree subject is right at the very centre we appreciate that’s very important.We have talked quite a bit today about employability skills; that is what we call the generic skills. So these are the transferable skills. Again I don’t think that you will ever get everyone to agree on exactly what these are but after probably about twenty-five or thirty years of speaking to different employers we have some good ideas of what sorts of skills they are looking for. The same things tend to come up time and time again. So they are looking for graduates with things like good communication skills, the ability to work well as part of a team, possibly have the potential for leadership. Reasonable level of numeracy. IT literate, usual sorts of things that come up time and time again. And this thing here called emotional intelligence which is a subject very close to my heart. I was actually here talking about this in February to some of your newly qualified, sorry nearly qualified nurses. And some of the staff as well. I don’t know if any of the staff here were at the session that I did. Which I think is one of the fundamental things that really underpins most of our social and human communication and interaction. Certainly I have heard it come up quite a few times today in different guises. We were talking about empathy at the last session we had. Empathy is obviously a very important part of emotional intelligence. Then once we have helped our students with all of that we should also be helping them to reflect and evaluate on those experiences. Again we have talked quite a lot today about this whole issue of reflection. Then we should see that they have increased levels of self-efficacy, so the feelings that they can achieve what they want to achieve. Self-confidence. Which can sometimes be seen as the way that’s projected to the outside world. And self-esteem. This feeling of general self-worth. They know that they are worthy of going for whatever it is that they desire and what they want to do with their lives. Slide 13: The Employability Development Profile (EDP)From the CareerEDGE model we also wanted to create some sort of practical tool that would go alongside it. So we developed something called the Employability Development Profile (EDP) which I am going to share with you in just a second. It uses CareerEDGE as a practical framework to structure discussions around employability with students. It’s a brief questionnaire. I think its twenty-eight items that encourages students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. It also encourages them to think of the evidence to support the things they feel they are very confident about. And also to think about action planning for where they need to make improvements. If we could just hand those around. Hopefully I have brought enough. I’ve brought fifty. There is some little guidance notes that go with them. Slide 14: The Employability Development Profile (EDP)On the front you can see that we just ask the usual sorts of questions. So name, date, student number, email address, academic-careers advisor and we’ve added now personal tutor. I will talk a little bit more about that in a second. We have got things like age, gender, course title, and year. Some of these things are quite useful for us for research purposes. Probably one of the most important things before you even get onto the questionnaire items is the bit that says ‘*My current career aim is*’. If that’s blank or it says something like astronaut that’s where your conversation needs to start. We also ask about whether they would consider or not starting their own business. Because again we offer quite a lot of help and support for students who want to start their own businesses. Again we try to identify those as early as possible so we can start to signpost those students to get the help that they need. Then in the middle we have got the twenty-eight items and as you can see they fit with the CareerEDGE model. We have items on career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills and emotional intelligence. You don’t need to worry too much about the number bit. Again that’s useful for some. Some students like to add it up and look at the range and see where they fit within the range. Again if you want to you can just completely ignore that bit. Then on the back like I say you have really two very important parts of it. The first bit is where you are asking students to look at the items where they feel very confident and saying how would you demonstrate that to an employer. So that’s a very useful exercise. Particularly for the students who sit there and go seven, seven, seven, seven, seven I am brilliant at all of this. And then you go that’s fantastic. OK pick one of them and show me how you would articulate that to an employer. That usually means you get a bit of back tracking and crossing out. And then the other bit – so you looked at the ones where you are maybe say not so confident. Well what action could you take to increase those scores to a six or a seven? Choose one of them and make a little action plan. That could be something quite straight forward like they don’t know where to find out more information about jobs that may interest them. So probably the first thing would be I think you need to be going to have a chat to one of the careers advisers. Or it might be if you are in a particular area. Somewhere you might want to sign post those students to where they could explore some possibilities, it could be something like that. Ok so that’s it. Quite a straight forward little questionnaire. Slide 15: Some of the ways we have used it.OK so I’ll tell you some of the ways that we have used it. We have used it in face-to-face meetings with students like I say so that they can be directed to different services, sometimes to modules, sometimes to workshops that we think will be useful to them. Some of our careers advisers use them themselves for those sorts of activities. We have also used them as part of career development learning taught modules where it can be quite a nice little introductory activity to get the students started. Same thing during little employability one off workshops.I’ve actually done it in lecture theaters with very large cohorts. Now this isn’t ideal I have to say but it’s better than nothing. What I have done then is provided individual feedback. I think that’s one of the key things with doing this. It’s no good just giving it then nothing happens. It’s really important that students are given some kind of feedback on it. If they are being signposted or whatever it is that you are doing. So I have done feedback by email with large cohorts. That still takes quite a lot of time I have to tell you. I think I got it down to about fifteen minutes each one. I have actually used it as quite a useful way of identifying employability related activities that can be embedded into the curriculum. So with a particular course where students would have completed this we can analyze the data. We might be able to see if there are certain skills maybe that the students are not very confident about. There was one where they or the lowest scores seem to be in terms of making presentations. So the tutor said that’s easy we’ll just incorporate and maybe change a couple of those assessments. And then it’s quite amusing because the students then said to this tutor ‘*oh god we hate presentations’!* He was able to say argh but you really need them! So that’s that – you can use them in that way. They can be used to evaluate employability interventions. Although I have put a little note there; care needed when interpreting the data. Say for example you give this before your intervention and then maybe you have some kind of intervention that involves lots of team-working activities and then you do it again. You may well find that your scores have gone down and some people might say oh that’s because that intervention didn’t work particularly well. Well that might not be the case at all. It might be that the intervention worked really, really well it’s just that what’s happened is that some of the students have had a reality check. And maybe they thought they were brilliant at team activities but that’s really important learning obviously for them to happen. What we have been doing more recently this year we have introduced it to one of our schools as part of their personal tutorial sessions. So academic staff, personal tutors are using this as a little framework for discussions with their tutees. The feedback that we’ve had so far has been very positive. Because there are items in there as well about the academic side of things the staff are saying it’s quite a nice little tool. It stops that thing that sometimes happens were students come in they will sit down. Staff will say how are you? They go fine then there’s silence. So you have got something there to at least start some conversation around.So what I would like you to do maybe for the next couple of minutes is have a little look at the questionnaire. And then maybe give some thought as to whether or not this is something you would possibly want to incorporate. Or if you have got any ideas as to how you might want to use it in your own practice. I am here to say if you do it’s free. I am not selling it or anything. We have given it away to lots people. So if it’s helpful to you I would be interested to know of any ideas that you have got. So we’ll just have five minutes.Slide 16: Measuring some aspects of employability development So we used the EDP pre and post module for one of our face-to-face modules this was – planning your career. We found significant increases for the career development learning items. Obviously what we were looking for. If we had have found that everything had increased we would have wondered about how useful the tool was. That was part of the studies that we did to actually look at the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. That one should be out in Education and Training any time soon. Slide 17: Emotional IntelligenceI also want to talk very briefly about emotional intelligence so I am going to have to race through this. Obviously as I firmly believe this is an important aspect of employability. So the questions are often asked A) can you teach it and B) can you measure it? I would say yes and yes.I actually did develop an intervention. It was designed to enable students to learn more about Emotional Intelligence (EI) as an area of academic research. But also to develop their own EI ability.It was done as a module, semester long. They could do it as part of an employability award if they wanted to do it as an extra. One class weekly. It was taught over twelve weeks with activities to complete outside of the classroom as well. Including a reflective EI journal.It was assessed like any other twenty credit module. They wrote an essay on EI where they would have to go away and read the research on things that I had recommended. Thinking about it in terms of employability. That was the question, was EI an important aspect of employability? And they took some emotional intelligence tests before and after and I gave them one-to-one feedback as well. Slide 18: Measures used in the evaluationSo these were the measures that I used. This first one we call the MSCEIT; Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. As it says there it is an ability measure. It is an online measure. It is a bit expensive I have to say. It’s not self-report. They attempt to measure it in the same way as you would measure other types of ability or even IQ (Intelligent Quotient). You are given pictures of faces and you have to judge what emotion there is on the face and various scenarios and you are expected to say which would be a better way of handling it. They were also given something called the Emotional Self-Efficacy Scale which is a self-report but again it is about self-efficacy which looks at how confident you are about those abilities. I also had a control group on an unrelated module and they took the tests at the same time. Slide 19: ResultsYes it worked. The EI students showed statistically significant increases particularly in their ability to understand and manage emotions. We had a very significantly statistical - oh I can never get that the right way around. A highly significant increase in their emotional self-efficacy. So their confidence in that ability. Like I say if you are interested in reading more about that then that was published in Learning and Individual Differences back in 2012.Slide 20: ConclusionsSo just to conclude as it says there I think measuring our success as employability developers it is tricky and it is complex. Not least because the concept itself is tricky and complex. It is possible to certainly measure some aspects of it which hopefully I have shown you. But although I think that it is difficult we do need to at least try to continue to provide evidence of the impact that we have on our students’ employability development. But as I have said their reliance on DHLE figures for this purpose is really unlikely to be a helpful way forward. Slide 21: Albert Einstein Quote I just want to leave you with those words. And just to say if you are interested in using either CareerEDGE or EDP you just need to contact me at that address. I’ll happily send you an electronic version of this. We basically say if you want to use it yourselves we don’t mind what you put on the front of it. If you want to ask some different questions on the front provided you still credit us. You need to keep the items the same obviously in the middle but the rest of it you can add whatever you want to the front of it. So as I say just drop me an email and I’ll gladly send you the word document. Oh - just about one minute over so thank you.  |