

# The Ten Step Framework to Enhancing Student Employability

Introduction

Student employability is a key academic and practice concern; to ensure that our health and social care students not only attain jobs but that they also have the right skills, the right attitude, the right behaviours and the mindset to be successful and satisfied throughout their career journeys (Pegg *et al.* 2012, Health Education England, HEE, 2013).

Employability is an approach to curriculum design that supports students in their personal development and career progression and is much more than just about getting a job and achieving lists of categories and skills (Pegg *et al.* 2012).

Instead the learner, who should be at the very heart of everything we do, ought to be enabled and empowered to enhance a wide ranging repertoire of skills, attributes, abilities and knowledge through curriculum and extracurricular activity, personal development and career planning so that their mindset is engaged for a successful and satisfied career (*ibid*).

In addition those students whose employability has been developed throughout their undergraduate programme are more likely to inhabit their first and future roles more efficiently (Yorke, 2006).

Furthermore academic staff are being positively challenged to go beyond facilitating learning and teaching activities that focus on subject knowledge and vocations skills alone and instead consider how employability, becomes a natural part of our ‘teaching’ and students’ ‘learning’ as a core activity (United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills, 2009, 2011, HEE, 2013).

Background

This ten step framework is the result of a collaborative partnership between academic and career staff; and a proactive response to current evidence reflecting our view of holistic employability. The framework has been informed by our work with students, alumni, our colleagues in academia, clinical practice and careers guidance, and draws on established good practice.

In this context student learning is more about the journey rather than the destination. To assist student’s preparation in this crucial career stage we walk students through a process to enhance their employability via a ten step framework.

The framework is shared with students via an electronic learning resource pack (eLRP). The eLRP is further supported and aligned to on-line learning resources, via a Careers and Job Prospects Service page (iCity) which is follows the ten step outline. The Icity page houses a range of bite-size vodcasts as open education resources (OER’s) and additional resources as activities for students to engage in as part of their framework for learning. The ten steps can be seen in diagram 1 below.

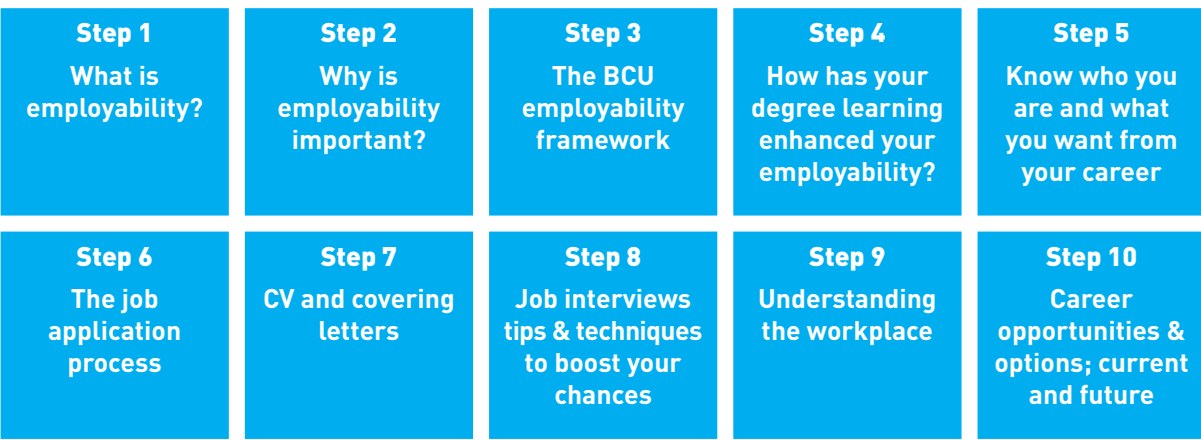


Diagram 1. The Ten Step Framework to Enhancing Student Employability (Yardley, Abbott and Whitehouse, 2014)



From left: Lisa Abbott, Senior Lecturer; Lindsay Yardley, Senior Academic and Katie Whitehouse, Careers Consultant, Birmingham City University

Step 1. What is employability?

This first step encourages students to reflect on their understanding of employability, through consideration of some popular definitions and their own experiences.

**‘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’ (Knight and Yorke, 2003)**

We want student learning to absolutely enhance their employability. Positively influence the way in which they care for patients and shape their successful and satisfied contribution to health and social care professions, their life and our society. To do this it is important that students know what employability is and why it is important.

Step 2. Why is employability important?

Students graduating in 2014 are likely to be working in the healthcare field in 2054! This step positively challenges students to consider the changing labour market, and how enhancing their employability will place them in a stronger position to be satisfied and successful in their future careers.

Ultimately we want to empower students to develop their strengths, skills, knowledge and resilience so that they can face whatever challenges lie ahead.

Step 3. The BCU Employability Profile

The BCU Employability Profile provides a space for students to reflect on and evidence their employability skills and attributes, and to develop an action plan for building on and improving their generic skills alongside degree subject knowledge. Transferable skills are considered as crucial features of a well-rounded graduate.

Step 4. How has your degree learning enhanced your employability?

Students have so much to offer yet are not always fully aware of exactly what that is and/or how their degree learning has helped them to build a repertoire of employability facets.

We were keen to ensure that academic learning featured centrally in the framework, to reflect the central importance of subject specialist knowledge and skills particularly for healthcare professions. This step encourages students to recognize how their degree learning has enhanced their future prospects.

So that students can start to consider how they will articulate what it is they have learnt in their role as new graduates and health and social care registrants.

Step 5. Know who you are and what you want from your career.

If we are going to enable students to find a job that they really want, they first have to know what they want. This all starts with knowing who they are and what they want from their career.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) (sometimes known as EQ = Emotional Quotient) is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental part of nursing/health and social care (Dacre-Pool and Qualter, 2012, Dacre-Pool and Qualter, 2013, Freshwater and Stickley, 2006, Kerr *et al.* 2006, Lyon *et al.* 2013, Nelis *et al.* 2011).

Furthermore employers are progressively placing significant emphasis on the importance of EI when recruiting and employing staff within their organisations (Mortiboys, 2013).

Empowering students to develop their EI abilities is crucial in the aim of achieving career satisfaction. This step allows students to consider their values, motivators, interests and strengths within an EI structure. Arguably vital self-knowledge not only when applying for jobs but also when working with patients, careers, families, the public, colleagues, inter-disciplinary and multi-professional teams.

Step 6. The job application process

Step 6 focuses on the practicalities of the job application process, from sourcing job vacancies through to understanding job adverts and on to writing effective applications.

We encourage students to try and think from the employer’s perspective – what are they looking for in applications, what will help to avoid them being rejected and how can they stand out.

Considerable focus is on writing personal or supporting statements, to try and ensure students have mastered this skill; which they will need to take with them into their future careers as they progress and move forward (INMC, 2010, NMC, 2011). Students are afforded written and verbal feedback on their mock job application forms; see Step 8.

One of the recommendations of the Francis Inquiry (2013) was that registered nurses should, as part of their annual appraisal, be able to clearly articulate their learning and provide evidence of up-to-date knowledge and practice and the ability to critique their performance. This step intends to help students prepare for this aspect of their career progression.

Step 7. CV and Covering Letters

A CV is a students’ personal marketing tool, to be used to apply for jobs, prepare for interviews, make speculative approaches and record personal achievements along their career journey.

We encourage students to find their own style when producing their CV, whilst advising them on established effective practice, and providing samples styles for them to consider.

We enabled nursing students to record their resume within an ePortfolio; with the 10 steps framework being intrinsically aligned to students Mahara pages.

Step 8. Job interviews – tips and techniques to boost your chances

This step focuses student’s attention on the job interview process – how to prepare effectively, what they might expect to be asked and how to answer interview questions well. Reinforcing the value they have to offer as well ideas as to how they can make themselves stand out from the crowd.

We incorporate recognised techniques such as STAR (Situation, Task, Actions and Result) for answering competency-based questions.

Students are proactively encouraged to practice before attending for a real job interview, through the mock interview process which provides a valuable learning opportunity (which includes written and verbal feedback from a mock interview panel made up of academic, careers and practice staff, alumni and in some instances, service users – it is here where students additionally receive feedback on their mock job application submissions).

Step 9. Understanding the Workplace

This step emphasizes the importance of students understanding the workplace – that of the profession they are entering and also more specifically of the particular organization they wish to work for.

We discuss how students can keep up-to-date with developments in their profession, and how they can use this information when applying for jobs or seeking opportunities for progression.

How to research employers is also considered, both for identifying potential organizations that may offer career opportunities and for when completing applications and attending for interview.

Understanding the workplace is also crucial for making a strong first impression when commencing work, and being prepared for the reality of life as a professional.

Step 10. Career Opportunities & Options: Current and Future

We encourage students to consider their long-term career plans, by sharing the journeys of alumni and staff, and providing information about a wide range of potential options. It is here where we will host the OER’s our transitional bloggers and media-student partners are creating (see poster submission on aiming for a seamless transition) once finalized in January 2015.

This Step intends to really encourage students to think about their career pathway and progression; as Willis 2012 highlights this is more likely to be one where registrants amalgamate opportunities for clinical, managerial, research and educational and pathways throughout their career journey.

Our aim is for our graduates to be satisfied and successful not only in their first job, but as they move onwards and upwards in their careers.

Summary

The ten Step Framework has been launched to two cohorts of nursing students and across all nursing fields in March 2014; therefore the ability to share evaluative data is limited.

Additionally the faculty is being asked to consider the mechanisms for implementing the framework for all health and social care professions; likely to be led by an Employability and Careers group Faculty Committee.

While there is always room for improvement we are optimistic that the framework will encourage students to think and learn more deeply with regards to their holistic employability facets.

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