

Chapter 1 **What is employability and what does it mean for you?**

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Introduction

Employability may be something that you have never really considered in detail before. Perhaps you have been focusing on completing your studies without really thinking about what will happen when you have finished? Will you continue studying as a postgraduate, go travelling or try to find a job in your chosen profession? Your consideration of your own employability should start as soon as possible and is a lifelong journey of learning and reflection about yourself and what you can offer the world of work. What can the world of work offer you? In a changing health and social care environment the opportunities within your profession are changing too – What do you need to do to respond to that in a proactive manner?

This chapter provides you with some of the history and theory behind employability and encourages you to consider where you are in your employability journey. There are suggestions on what you can do to help develop your own employability. The remainder of the book builds upon the concept of employability presented in this chapter, focusing on key areas of personal and professional development that are particularly relevant for healthcare employability. Throughout this chapter you are encouraged to reflect and consider how the information presented affects your own perceptions of employability and your own employability journey.

Time for reflection

What do you think employability is? How have you considered employability so far in your life? How do you think employability is different to employment?

What does the literature say on employability and how it has evolved?

Employability is complex and it is clear from the available literature that being able to develop a precise and clear focus on it as a concept is difficult (Harvey, 2001; Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Employability and career development are very often conflated as concepts but are addressed individually in this book. The debate on employability has been longstanding, reaching far beyond the United Kingdom (Harvey and Knight, 2003). Although the meaning of employability has changed over time (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), the importance of employability within the strategic direction of the Department of Education has been highlighted (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Some authors state that employability has historically been viewed from a number of perspectives – economic social, organisational and individual – with the individual perspective emerging more in the 1990s (Nauta *et al.*, 2009).

Rosenburg, Heimler and Morote (2012) discuss employability as the basic skills needed for job performance and once an individual is in employment, employability develops into transferable core proficiencies. They are, therefore, suggesting that employability is a continuing process of personal and professional development. Yorke (2006) states that employability as a concept was developed within education and focuses on the possession of relevant achievements and the ability to function in a job, not actually the process of acquiring a job. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) support this assertion, suggesting that employability is more than just getting a job. Employability is rarely defined as an individual being equipped to do a job (Harvey, 2001). Some approaches appear to confuse employability and employment (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Harvey and Knight (2003) present different perspectives on employability – from developing attributes for graduate employment to the ability of a graduate to get a job and to succeed in a job. Therefore, there are a wide range of perspectives on employability, most of which reinforce the notion that employability is more than just a set of skills and is a continuing process.

Time for reflection

How does the literature above inform your understanding of employability as a concept? What and who do you think influences your own employability?

Towards a common language of employability

Despite the arguments presented that propose that employability is wider than just a group of skills that individuals develop, skill acquisition still appears to be the basis used for policy formation (Holmes, 2001). There appears to be an

assumption that skills are synonymous with employability (Holmes, 2006). It is critical that education establishments and employers have the same understanding of employability (Holmes, 2001). This shared understanding is essential to ensure consistency in expectations and to assist the transitions individuals make, firstly from studies to employment and then within their careers. It is unfortunate that little research exists to underpin the alternative approaches to the skills approach to employability (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). With employability being high on some governments' agenda (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), it is crucial that this concept is adequately defined and researched to enable individuals to understand and enhance their employability through a common language.

It is the employers that convert the employability of graduates into employment (Harvey, 2001) – so, as previously suggested, employability is the process of equipping yourself for a job with employment being the outcome when you are actually in a job. You need an awareness of what employers are looking for; this may change in response to policy changes and economic changes, which are critical to keep abreast of. Professional bodies keep abreast and inform members of changes that impact on their profession. However, on a local level the individual needs to understand the impact of changes on the work context. For example, a speech and language service going through the tendering and contracting process requires flexibility and proactiveness of its employees. The journey of employability continues for an individual as he/she continues to develop personally and professionally in their job/s as they develop their careers (Figure 1.1).

Time for reflection

If you could design a model of employability – what would it look like?

Models of employability

The main models of employability reported in the literature are presented here. This provides an opportunity for you to consider how these reflect your understanding of employability and whether they are models that you would find helpful to apply to your own personal construct of employability.

Bennett *et al.* model on course provision

Bennett, Dunne and Carré (1999) proposed a model focusing on course provision within education – with five main areas of focus for education establishments to adequately prepare students for the world of work:

1. Disciplinary content knowledge, for example anatomy and physiology.
2. Disciplinary skills, for example taking someone's blood pressure.
3. Workplace awareness, for example knowledge of what is offered and what is required of you within the hospital workplace or area that you are working.

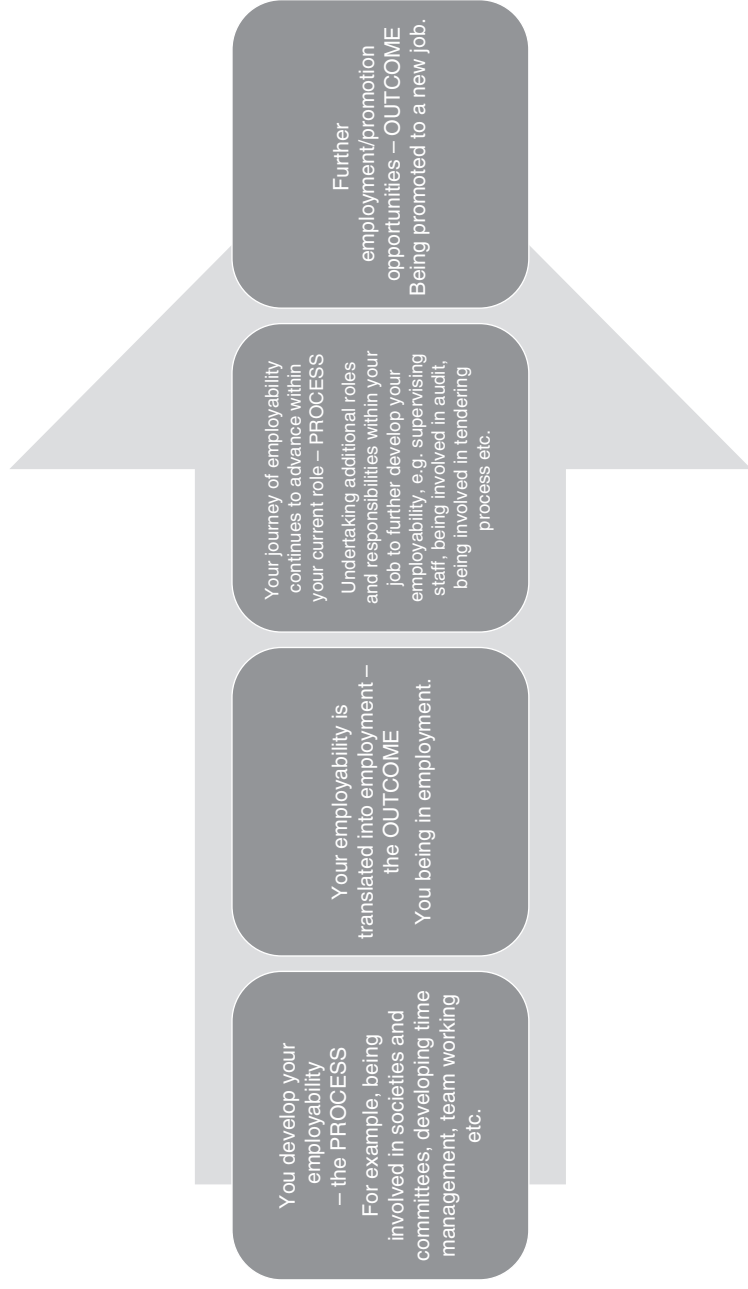


Figure 1.1 The journey of employability

4. Workplace experience, for example placement experiences.
5. Generic skill, for example team working, time management, communication.

Watts DOTS model

Further suggested models include the DOTS model, which is discussed by Watts (2006). It is made up of four main components that break down employability into manageable areas to focus on – **D**ecision learning, **O**pportunity awareness, **T**ransition learning and **S**elf-awareness. The interesting aspect of the DOTS model is a self-awareness of your skills interests and values. For example – if you are a physiotherapist – does women's health interest you or does musculoskeletal physiotherapy interest you? If you are considering working within a social enterprise, do their care values match your values and if they do not match up then how comfortable are you working within such an environment?

Dacre Pool and Sewell Career EDGE model

Career EGDE was presented in a paper by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007). It is a three-tiered system. In the first tier, the following employability components are included: career development, experience in life and work, degree (knowledge and understanding), generic transferable skills and emotional intelligence to motivate yourself and others. The second tier of the model is a reflection and evaluation tier – reinforcing the importance for you to reflect upon your experiences. The reflection and evaluation feeds into the third tier, which includes self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. Reflection upon your experiences is something that as healthcare students/practitioners you are used to undertaking regularly.

The unique value of the Career EDGE model lies in its transferability to any stage in a career. It is not exclusive to students, which reinforces the message that employability is a life-long journey and does not end when employment has been secured.

Yorke and Knight USEM model

The USEM (understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs and metacognition) model presented by Yorke and Knight (2006) is reported to be one of the most used and respected models of employability and offers another model that looks beyond the skill development aspect of employability (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011; Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). The USEM model contributes to a large body of academic work on employability which can make it inaccessible for individuals to use, resulting in it becoming more of a guide for curriculum development rather than a clear guide for personal employability development.

Personal responsibility for employability

What is interesting to note about the models presented is that they reflect that employability is more than just skill development and begin to articulate the importance of self-reflection and awareness. Employability is not something that is undertaken by others for you, it is something that you need to consider and undertake for yourself. If you do not take ownership you risk restricting your personal and professional development, thereby potentially adversely influencing your long-term potential within the world of work. This suggestion of ownership and individual employability identity is supported by evidence reported in the literature. Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) undertook research to provide some evidence about employer expectations of graduates. A questionnaire was distributed to employers to judge graduate performance and four strands of themes were identified from the research; these are summarised here:

1. *Values* – personal ethics, social and organisation values, including the value associated with entrepreneurship.
2. *Intellect* – how a graduate is able to think critically, to analyse information and to bring about change within organisations.
3. *Performance* – the transfer of skills and ability to learn new skills relevant to the workplace.
4. *Engagement with others* – the ability for graduates to engage with a wide range of challenges and individuals/organisations.

These four strands emphasise the importance of you taking ownership and influencing your own employability, whether it be in response to your own personal values or your motivation to think critically and influence, which could have a positive impact within the working environment. Some of the changes that are happening within health and social care may be difficult to deal with, but employers need individuals who can continue to develop personally and professionally within the working environment despite difficult demands.

Time for reflection

How do your personal values and beliefs influence your focus on employability?

External influences on employability

The limitations of the models presented thus far is that they do not explicitly consider external influences, such as economic, environmental, social or political contexts, that may influence your employability. This is a very real issue within the health and social care sector and something that impacts on career development and planning, as discussed in Chapter 2.

It needs to be acknowledged that external influences, such as economic social and health priorities and policies, will have an influence on your employment options. You need to respond to this to maximise your employability. This is the drawback on focusing purely on skill development rather than taking a holistic approach to employability. You could spend your time developing a specific skill but if, in the meantime, the political landscape has changed there may be different priorities that render your skill worthless. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) presented seven operational versions of the concept of employability: dichotomic employability; sociomedical employability; manpower policy employability; flow employability; labour market performance and employability; initiative employability; interactive employability. These seven versions of the concept of employability support the suggestion that is not just the individual who influences their own employability – there are external contributory factors that will have an influence on the employability of individuals. There is a concern that there is a perceived narrow concept of employability adopted by policymakers and researchers that does not take into account the personal circumstances and external factors that may influence an individual's employability (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Further literature (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) supports the assertion by McQuaid and Lindsay and presents four components to employability, which include assets, deployment, presentation and also take into account the external influences. External influences could be, for example, government policy changes that result in a change in clinical priorities or changes in family circumstances that restrict an individual's ability to commit to a leadership course that would be useful for employability development.

Time for reflection

What market conditions do you need to be aware of within current health and social care that may influence your employability?

Response to changing expectations within the workplace and personal circumstances

To fully embrace the concept of employability you need to have an awareness of the world of work into which you are entering. Workplace environments are changing and this is no less evident than in the area of health and social care. A psychosocial construct of employability has been presented by Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004). It identifies that a number of person-centred constructs are required in order to maximise employability and respond to the changing workplace. Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) argue that

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there are three main elements to employability that all have a mutual influence on each other:

1. Career identity.
2. Personal adaptability.
3. Social (networks) and human capital (education and experience).

You need to be increasingly flexible within the modern workplace to adapt to what the job requires you to do. The roles and responsibilities of health professionals are shifting; for example, the introduction of prescribing of medication and injection therapies for nurses and physiotherapists or the setting up of social enterprises to provide health and social care. This means that you may have to change your identity at work multiple times over a period of employment, depending on the demands within your job. The ability for you to adapt to change will be key to your success. This means that past learning needs to be adaptable to new working situations – and this needs to be evidenced to demonstrate this to future employers. For example, if you have been involved in an activity at university that has demonstrated your ability to be flexible and proactive, then use that as an example which is transferable to the work situation. The concept of an internal locus of control is an interesting concept relevant to this situation, whereby your response to external influences will have an impact on the outcome of the situation (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004). There may be external influences on job prospects and changing roles but your individual response to the situation – being optimistic and opportunistic about situations – will maximise your development and opportunities as an individual. Personal circumstances that may have an impact on your employability and response to work situations can also change, such a buying a house in a specific location. In order to maximise your employability potential, an appreciation and awareness of external and personal factors that impact on employability is essential if you are to establish and evidence where you are and how you are able to adapt and respond to the changes.

Time for reflection

How can you ensure that you respond in a proactive manner to change to maximise your opportunities?

A number of models have been presented that have attempted to incorporate the different definitions of employability within a workable model to try to increase the clarity of employability in practice. However, it has been argued that the models presented have been either too complex or too simple (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). The literature does present a wide range of considerations for employability which can inform the development of a personal construct of employability relevant to you.

Time for reflection

Having read the models presented above, does this influence your own personal construct of employability? What model is best applied to your own circumstances?

How is employability approached within education?

Time for reflection

How has employability been addressed within your education?

It is important to consider how employability is approached within education in order to understand the dynamics between education and employability and the potential impact on students. An example of this is presented in Chapter 3 relating to the University of East Anglia (UEA) professionalism charter. Enhancing graduate employability has been part of a wider UK government policy strategy (Harvey, 2000) and does assume a priority within education (Yorke, 2006). It is recognised that subject discipline achievements, such as core clinical skills, are important but it is equally as important to demonstrate achievements outside of a student's subject discipline (Yorke, 2006), such as extracurricular clubs, volunteering and committees and so on. Higher education institutions need to contribute to student employability in a comprehensive manner and not be limited to focusing on specific skills or work experience (Atkins, 1999). However, the focus of employability still remains with skills and attributes (Holmes, 2006) rather than using a holistic approach. Despite attempts to recognise the importance of experiences outside of the degree programme with the introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report (Pegg *et al.*, 2012), employability does not appear to be fully embraced by staff or students. You need to engage with the concept of employability very early on in your education careers in order to maximise your employability potential. Academics need to be made aware of the importance of employability and the relationship that it has with the curriculum and potential employment.

Within a competitive work market place, employment is not guaranteed (Holmes, 2006) and you need to focus on producing evidence to demonstrate your employability. The focus on education establishments for employability tends to be on the performance league tables, which measure the first destination of graduate employment at six months post-graduation (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000). The focus on employment post-graduation when referring

to employability reinforces the confusion between the concepts of employability and employment. The performance league tables are actually measuring employment rather than employability – as we have already ascertained, there is a difference between the two concepts. The performance league tables are important in influencing whether a student will decide to apply to study at a particular university. However, employability is about more than determining consumer choice, despite this being of increasing interest to students and their parents (Maher, 2011). There is a concern that this focus on performance league tables distracts academics from the importance of employability throughout your studies – as purely an outcome rather than a process concept. The role of academics in the development of employability within the curriculum is essential for it to be truly embedded within the university experience, rather than being tagged onto the end of your university experience, when employment becomes the focus for students. Therefore, although you need to take ownership of your own employability, it is essential that there is an understanding and support from academic staff as to the importance and application of employability in your student experience from day one.

Some institutions have attempted to assist academics in the translation of employability within the curriculum. The UCLan employability framework (Day, 2009) provides a tool for all of those involved in student education, breaking down employability into 14 areas. These areas have all been allocated a code and are used to badge material presented to students. This system of badging the material that students are exposed to reinforces and highlights employability within the curriculum for students and academics. Employability should be part of the language of students and academics, and the use of employability frameworks is useful in focusing attention and provides a common language for students and academics to use, thereby making employability an explicit part of the student experience. The implementation of employability frameworks within the curriculum does not need to impact on the subject-specific learning but provides some indication on how that learning can evidence a student's employability and translate into the world of work.

It does need to be recognised that a single model of employability, such as the UCLan framework, may not be relevant for all universities, and that there are a number of variables that influence embedding employability within the curriculum (Yorke and Knight, 2006). What universities can do, though, is to take the principles of employability models to apply within their own situations. Engagement of students and academics is key in the process, which has been shown to be problematic in the past (Higher Education Academy, 2012). Clarity in the importance and concepts of employability is key in there being buy-in from already busy academics and students who may not see employability as a priority, to increase engagement and ownership, which is critical for true embedding of employability (Graves, 2011). Realistically, though, the acceptance and application of the concept of employability into

everyday life and language is likely to take time for academics and students to adopt (Harvey and Knight, 2003).

Time for reflection

What can you do to make sure that you engage fully with the concept of employability during your studies? What feedback can you provide to your education institution for it to adopt an employability focused ethos to its curriculum development and delivery?

Maximising your own employability potential

As a result of the discussion over employability within higher education, a concept of a graduate identity approach has arisen (Holmes, 2001) that is owned by the graduate (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). It is suggested that it is made up of the four strands of development previously discussed: values, intellect, performance and engagement. Graduate identity and potential are maximised by graduates providing evidence of engagement in a wide range of activities, experiences and organisations. The generation of evidence to maximise graduate identity will enable employers to judge the ability for a particular graduate to fulfil and develop within the requirements of the work situation with greater confidence. This concept is encouraging individuals to demonstrate what they can offer based on evidence to date. The importance of evidencing employability is critical in order to be able to demonstrate to employers not what you have done in the past but what your future potential may be (Holmes, 2001; Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). The process of gaining employment involves a process of judgement on the behalf of the employer – it is not purely a process of measuring a person and matching them to a job (Holmes, 2006). On occasions it may be possible that employers lack clarity about exactly who or what they want and are also making a judgement of the future potential of individuals too. Being able to evidence who you are and what you can bring to a job situation with confidence and enthusiasm is critical for your success.

There should be a partnership between the skills and attributes approach to employability and a graduate identity approach, and should consider at the time of graduation how a graduate will articulate their employability and potential in order to gain employment as a graduate (Holmes, 2001, 2006). This reinforces the argument presented in this chapter that consideration of employability needs to start at the beginning of your student experience to provide a focus on employability throughout your studies. Embedding employability will enable you to genuinely evidence and confidently articulate your employability at the point of graduation and beyond. This argument relates to individuals at any point of their employability journey – not just at the point of graduation.

Time for reflection

How can you best demonstrate the potential that you have got to employers?
What have you got to bring to that job situation?

The key message from both the graduate identity approach and the psychosocial construct of employability is an awareness of the world of work and employer expectations, as explored further in Chapter 2. Without an understanding of what is required, there may be a resulting disconnect between your employability and the employability required by the employing organisation.

What do employers want from graduates?

It is important for higher education institutions to be aware of what employers want from graduates in relation to employability (Wilson, 2012) to ensure a partnership between the two. Engagement between higher education institutions and employers has been well established in the past, with a suggestion that the gap between education and employers is widening over recent years (Rosenburg, Heimler and Morote, 2012).

It has been suggested that employers can have a narrow interest and understanding of employability (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). However, from previous discussions in this chapter, the same could be said about higher education institutions! There needs to be a common language of employability between academia and employers. This can be very difficult to achieve (Harvey, 2001). It is, therefore, difficult to answer the question of what employers want from graduates. Sometimes employers may not be entirely sure themselves, and may be under constant change resulting in limited evidence to provide direction to graduates. Despite this backdrop, it is still important to try to establish what is important in order to focus on key areas of development (Holmes, 2006), as employers are not just looking for a subject-specific achievement (Yorke, 2006). Also, with a changing health and social care work landscape, graduates may need to initially work in roles that are not considered to be graduate level (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) or relating to their degree subject, thereby increasing further the importance of an individual's wider employability, rather than just their degree. It is likely that some skills will be prioritised within certain areas of work (Wilson, 2012). To a certain extent the responsibility lies with you to establish which skills are prioritised within certain areas of work, by exploring the organisational culture and values and personal specifications of similar roles via relevant web sites. Students generally are not ignorant of employer's requirements but still give employability a low priority over other things in their lives (Atkins, 1999). It is difficult when you

have the demands of studying to think beyond just getting from one assignment to another as well as how you need to be developing your employability – but you should aim to do this when at all possible, as you will reap the benefits when it comes to applying for jobs at the end of your studies.

Time for reflection

What priority do you give employability within your everyday life? What aspects of your personality do you think would appeal to employers and why?

Rosenberg, Heimler and Morote (2012) undertook a research study to establish what were perceived as important employability skills that are required for employment. Three groups were studied: recent graduates, the faculty that taught them and human resources managers that recruited them. The three groups articulated differences in opinion in relation to required elements of employability. However, all three groups agreed that leadership was a critical skill. Numeracy and literacy were identified as skills that are a basic requirement. In another paper, personality has been identified as one of the most important criteria for employers (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Values and ethics, including work ethic, have also been highlighted as important aspects of employability (Rosenberg, Heimler and Morote, 2012; Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011); it is not just down to skill performance, it is about who you are and what you can contribute to an organisation. The requirement of common generic employability skills within jobs has little published evidence to inform individuals (Atkins, 1999). If you are thinking about areas such as values, engagement, intellect and performance, you will be ensuring that you are focusing on doing employability-related activities/experiences, which is key evidence for your employability and potential (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). Employability needs to be systematically approached to enable employers to see how your learning has been developed and built upon. There is an assumption that learning can be transferred from one situation to another, but you need to ensure that this is explicitly evidenced and confidently communicated to employers (Yorke, 2006, Holmes, 2011). Unprepared students are unlikely to be successful in getting jobs (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2012).

Time for reflection

What long term employability goals do you want to focus on and why? For example, do you want to develop yourself to be a team leader, do you want to have the ability to set up your own social enterprise?

You need to be able to hit the ground running (Harvey, 2000) within a changing work landscape. You need to have a range of strong core employability skills to be able to respond to the job-specific specialist skills, which may be changing (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2012). Flexibility and response to change are required from employers, and an ability for you to sometimes grow your own jobs within an organisation will be required from you, as you will be part of organisational change (Harvey, 2000). For example, a junior Occupational Therapist had a desire to work towards becoming a palliative care specialist. A palliative care specialist Occupational Therapy post did not currently exist within the hospital where she was working. However, when the opportunity arose to develop her knowledge and skills within the area of palliative care, she took them. Any relevant courses on palliative care – she attended. Any networks related to palliative care – she joined and built up contacts. Any research related to palliative care – she participated in. She undertook audits to demonstrate the need for a specialist Occupational Therapist in palliative care. Within two years she had secured funding for a senior position as an Occupational Therapist working within palliative care, and within five years was a specialist palliative care Occupational Therapist. Her passion, drive and proactiveness were what led to her success. Within the changing world of work, resilience is an essential trait for individuals to demonstrate (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007) – employers want to have confidence that you will survive in the world of work. Health and social care professions are tough – there are constant changes and pressures, and resilience to manage and respond positively to the changes and pressures are key for your well-being and progression through your career.

Employability is a life-long issue (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007) and does not finish when you have been successful in gaining employment. Employability needs to continue throughout your career – those individuals with high employability are influential within organisations (Nauta *et al.*, 2009) and can, therefore, maximise their career potential. For you to continue to maximise your career potential, a continuing drive to develop yourself and take opportunities within your new work situation is crucial.

Healthcare employability

In this chapter, the focus to date has been more on generic employability issues. Within health care, the situation in relation to employability is not dissimilar to non-health related employability. Within the United Kingdom, there are system changes to health and social care that are having an influence on employability requirements of healthcare students, with changes to the employment options that are available for graduates. Regardless of where

individuals work within health care in the world, there are changes to adapt to, with a resulting change in the employability requirements to prepare yourself for the future landscape of work.

Within each of the healthcare professions, the relevant professional and governing bodies publish basic minimum levels of professional and clinical competence. All students on a pre-registration healthcare course need to fulfil these criteria in order to graduate. From an employability point of view, this means that there are a large number of students who will be graduating with a similar professional and clinical competence profile. It is, therefore, crucial for healthcare students to focus on acquiring additional elements of employability during their studies, in order to strengthen their position within a competitive job market.

Papers within the United Kingdom – but which are equally relevant worldwide – have been written to provide an employability profile for health-care students to refer to (Kubler and Forbes, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). The main generic competencies identified by employers were outlined as:

- Cognitive skills
- Generic competencies
- Personal capabilities
- Technical ability
- Business and/or organisational awareness
- Practical and professional elements.

Within each of the generic competencies are listed numerous benchmarks and there are suggestions as to how these could be achieved. The documents are very long and predominantly focused on clinical and professional issues, but they are useful as documents to refer to when looking at employability within health care. Research undertaken by Taylor (2014) aimed to provide information on healthcare employability by undertaking focus group discussions and using a questionnaire survey with students, educators and employers as participants. There were common themes between the groups as to what was meant by employability and what is expected of healthcare graduates, over and above the requirements for professional registration. The participants were asked to rate the themes in order of importance. The three themes that were rated highest were: making a good impression, enthusiasm for the job and passion for the profession. The least important rated theme was academic grades. This does not mean that academic grades are not important, but in relation to the other employability themes it was rated as less important than all of the other themes.

The themes generated by the research by Taylor (2014) support the considerations of employability that have been presented in previous literature and provide employability considerations not just focusing on skills or attributes but on a holistic approach to employability. The degree

and associated clinical competence and skills that come with it are important but what are rated as equally important are interpersonal elements. It is easy to demonstrate the achievement of your degree, as you will receive a certificate, but it is important to consider how you are going to demonstrate fulfilment of all of the other aspects of employability that have been highlighted as important.

Time for reflection

How do you currently rate yourself on the employability themes outlined? Could you provide evidence to demonstrate your employability within each of the themes presented?

Evidencing your employability

This chapter has outlined the concept of employability and described a number of models of employability. The underlying message throughout has been the ability of individuals to evidence their employability. Professional development portfolios enable individuals to report the employability journey that they have had (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). There is a strong link between employability and professional development portfolios (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). The process of producing a professional development portfolio will provide an individual with opportunities to reflect – which is an expectation in graduates (Atkins, 1999) – and then to generate an action plan to evidence a response to learning which is necessary (Yorke, 2006). Continuing professional development portfolios are good to demonstrate how individuals make sense of their experiences rather than just a list of the experiences (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004). Listing experiences does not demonstrate how the individual has learned and moved on from the experience – employers need to have confidence that individuals are able to do. Within healthcare education, reflection and continuing professional development are encouraged and supported from day one and you should then continue this throughout your working life. Being in the habit of reflecting and generating evidence of your continuing development is not only good for evidencing your employability but is also an essential requirement for most healthcare professional registration bodies.

Time for reflection

How will you systematically address and record your employability development?

Taylor (2014) used the focus group research to develop an evidence based UEA Healthcare Employability Development Portfolio. This portfolio provides healthcare students and educators with a software framework of employability based on the themes generated from the research (known as employability domains). Each employability domain has three incremental phases of development, so that students can develop their employability over a period of time (for example phase 1 for year 1, phase 2 for year 2 and phase 3 for year 3 of a 3-year pre-registration healthcare course). Supportive resources are provided at each phase of development to encourage reflection and action planning from the individual. This ensures that employability development is focused on throughout studies and also provides a structured approach to employability. Individuals completing the employability development portfolio generate evidence to document and this facilitates their confidence to articulate their employability journey at the point of applying for a job.

As previously suggested, continuing professional development is required within the healthcare working environment (Moore *et al.*, 2011). Developing a positive and structured approach to professional development as a student will prepare you well for continuing this focus and discipline within the working environment. Employability is a life-long issue (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007) and there needs to be a continuing focus on personal development and employability, which can help you in your career pathway – as discussed in Chapter 2. In order to develop a career, it is essential for you to go through the process of personal development planning to identify your areas of strength and development (Watts, 2006) that can be worked upon in a structured way.

Time for reflection

What key areas of employability do you need to focus on?

Conclusions

Employability is difficult to define and has been the topic of debate over a number of years. There are a number of models of employability. Many focus purely on the skill acquisition side of employability. However, a holistic approach to employability is recommended. Personal values and ethics emerge as a priority area of employability. Employability assumes a high priority within higher education institutions, but the implementation of employability within the curriculum and development of student employability is not entirely clear from the literature available, with only a few

institutions fully embedding employability explicitly in the curriculum. Guidance for students and educators in the development of employability within education is limited. The understanding of employability for employers is not extensively documented but there has been a shift in recent years to the need for you to be flexible and resilient within changing working landscapes. The concept of an internal locus of control supports a proactive and opportunistic approach from you to the working environment to give yourself the best chance of maximising employability.

There needs to be more engagement between employers and higher education institutions to establish a common language of employability, which, in turn, will provide clarity for all of those involved in graduate employability. Healthcare students will all graduate with clinical and professional competence. Therefore, you need to focus on the other elements of employability to maximise your chances within a competitive work marketplace. Employers want to see evidence of employability to demonstrate the potential that you have and what you can bring to the workplace. Portfolios are encouraged as a way of organising a structured approach to employability development and encourage reflection and action planning as a result of learning. This provides you with evidence of your development and a continuing focus on personal development in relation to employability – employability is the journey, employment is the destination. In the ever changing world of work there will be multiple destinations with many employability journeys in between. Engagement in employability is essential from an early stage to maximise your own employability and career development opportunities.

Definitions

Employability Within this book the term employability is used in the context of healthcare students who have just graduated or are about to graduate. The term is used to mean the knowledge, skills, attributes, experiences that you have had to date within your curriculum and extracurricular activities that will maximise your development and culminate in the ability to articulate yourself as an employable individual with confidence when applying for jobs. Employability continues when you are in employment, to demonstrate your continuing personal and professional development to maximise your potential for career progression.

Employment This term is used in this book to describe when you have acquired a job and are in employment.

Employability is the process of working towards being at the stage to apply for a job and *employment* is the outcome.

Potential interview questions in this area

- How do your personal elements of employability relate to the personal specification for a specific job?
- Do you think that skills or attributes are more important for this role?
- How do you think that you should develop your employability whilst in employment?
- What do you think you could contribute to our organisation?
- Can you give me some examples of transferable skills that you can bring into the work environment?
- What are your opinions on reflection?

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