

Abstract: Strategies for Enhancing the Employability of Non-Traditional Students in HE

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This paper presents a review of practical strategies to enhance the employability of non-traditional students. To set the scene, we will present a critical review of employability including policy and the graduate labour market. We will then consider three strategies specifically aimed at supporting employability development for non-traditional students, two of which are based on first-hand experience; the third, a proposal currently being evaluated by the UK's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: namely, Earn to Learn.

Contemporary higher education systems carry a legacy of significant expansion, driven on one hand by government policies to widen participation and on the other by a lack of alternative options for young people. At the same time, structural economic changes, recession and the widespread offshoring of core employment resulted in a decline in the availability of good quality jobs. This has created pinch-points in the global labour market, particularly the employment of young people in disadvantaged regions, those from non-traditional backgrounds and those who may lack the employment connections possessed by their more privileged peers. Such concerns have now become global concerns.

Leaving aside policy and rhetoric, this paper focuses on practical strategies to enhance employability. The first is an evaluation of a two-year degree pilot project, delivered more than ten years ago in a 'widening participation' university and aimed at students who had been unable to take up higher education options on leaving school or college. As only two years' fee would be charged, and of course two years living costs, this was a highly cost-effective initiative from the student's point of view. Similar proposals were presented by the Conservative government in February 2017. The second strategy involves the provision of year-long placements for students for whom this had almost never been trialled: international students on a full-time MBA programme. Despite a complex and shifting web of regulations and a lack of prior employer engagement the programme has enjoyed modest success. The third strategy is a radical proposal to re-shore entry level professional work (for example finance or human resources) through the development of business shared service centres attached to universities which would employ students at the same time they are working towards their degrees. This 'training nursery' would enable employers to evaluate potential applicants, support less well off students in the provision of decent work related to their studies, and enhance employability through experiential development. The presentation will take the form of a workshop including facilitated participant activity through a short version of the 'World Café' format, and a written paper.

Biography

Dr. Andrew Rothwell is a member of the Centre for Professional Work and Society in the School of Business and Economics, Loughborough University, UK, and the author of several papers concerning both self-perceived employability (individual's perceptions of their own employability) and critical perspectives. The greater part of his teaching career has been spent working with non-traditional students. Andrew's work is widely cited and replicated in several languages and cultures. Current work includes collaborative research on student employability in other countries and theoretical development.

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