



Country Context: UK

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European Policy on employability and non-traditional students in HE

Expansion of European higher education has enabled a higher percentage of people to enter and participate at degree level (OECD, 2001). For Redmond (2006) expansion is associated with the need for a more highly educated workforce to enable Europe to compete in the global and knowledge-based economy. Between 1998–2006 the average participation rate in HE increased by 25% while in some countries, such as Poland, it increased by 90% indicating a move towards more knowledge-based societies. The range of programmes offered has also expanded so that adults can participate on full or part-time degree programmes. At postgraduate level there has been a growth in short Continual Professional Development courses as well as courses focusing specifically on issues of employability, particularly at undergraduate level. The labour market is also changing. Between 2010 and 2020 the proportion of jobs requiring academic skills will rise from 20% to 34%, while low skilled jobs will decrease from 23% to 18% during the same period (EC Rethinking Education, 2010).

The issue of employability is a central policy concern of the EU, national governments, and higher education institutions and is also a key goal of the Bologna process (The European Higher Education, 2012: Bologna Implementation Report). The Bologna Declaration, established in 1999 has led to the creation of a European Higher Education Area with the aim of creating a more common system of higher education across Europe while still respecting national and cultural diversity. According to the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities:

The process originated from the recognition that in spite of their valuable differences, European higher education systems are facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and transnational education etc. (p3).

The determination to change the nature of universities within the European Union was further enhanced at the Leuven and Louvain la Neuve Communiqué in 2009. It stressed the need for universities to 'equip students with the advanced knowledge, skills, competences they need throughout their professional lives' (2009: 2). To achieve this a closer partnership is advocated between universities, employers and governments. Economic changes at national, European and global levels, as well as increased economic competitiveness and the move towards knowledge-based societies (Castells, 2001) has thus created a closer relationship between higher education and the labour market (Morley, 2001).

There is also emerging evidence to indicate that there is a growing north-south divide in Europe in relation to this issue due to the economic crisis. Consequently the pattern of employability is different across countries (EC Employment and Social Developments 2012). For example, in Germany the employment rate of graduates is high while in Portugal there is hardly any difference in the unemployment rates between those with a degree and those with low level skills. Here in Spain it is also difficult for graduates to gain employment. In many countries there is a lack of opportunities and pathways from vocational training into higher education to increase their employability and job mobility. This situation again affects largely non-traditional students by limiting their study choices (OECD, 2012).

Country Contexts

Policy concerning employability, non-traditional students in HE and the relation between them

The concern with employability has led to a closer relationship between industry and Universities at both a policy and practice level within the UK. Yet despite this according to Little (2003) conceptual and contextual differences exist between universities and industry which makes it difficult to assess whether graduates are meeting the needs of employers. This has changed the fundamental nature and purpose of the university and critics point out that this situation entails a shift away from the social purpose of a university to what Gumpert (2000) calls an industry.

The external economic and social forces which have led to transforming the purpose and nature of the university have in turn impacted upon the perspectives and expectations which students bring with them to their undergraduate studies. For many undergraduate students studying for a degree is not just about learning for learning sake's and following a particular discipline in depth but rather as Tomlinson points out: 'It now appears no longer enough just to be a graduate, but instead an *employable* graduate'(2012: 25). Higher education is now viewed by students, as Tomlinson (2012) asserts as being an investment in their future lives in the labour market. They realise that it is a competitive world out there and that to get the best graduate jobs they need to offer more to employers than just their degree qualification. This process also puts increasing pressure on students to engage in

activities other than their degree work in order to gain extra credentials to help them in the graduate labour market.

National Statistics

National statistics on employability and the employment of graduates are available from a range of sources in the UK notably the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Office for National Statistics, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. The statistics collected includes data on following:

- the destinations of undergraduates into both the labour market (by type of job/industry) or postgraduate study
- by domicile, gender and age
- by class of first degree
- by qualifications obtained and subject areas
- by full-time and part-time study
- by geographical area
- by HE institution
- unemployment rates of graduates
- employed graduates in non-graduate roles
- by earnings

The following statistics from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on England draws on data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for January – March 2015. Overall the figures show that employment prospects for graduates are good and that graduates continue to earn more than non-graduates and are also more likely to be in high skill jobs. The employment rate for working-age population graduates is currently (2015) 87.5%. This is the highest it has been since 2007. The unemployment rate of young graduates is also at its lowest since 2007 at a rate of 3.9%. Non-graduates aged 21 – 30 have higher unemployment rates.

Definitions used in the survey:

‘Young graduates’: Individuals with a first degree, aged 18-30

‘Working-age graduates’: Individuals with a first degree, aged 16-64

Further data from the Office for National Statistics (*Full Report – Graduates in the UK Labour Market, 2013*) indicates that there were 12 million graduates in 2013 in the UK. According to this survey over 40% of graduates worked in the public administration, education and health industry. Graduates with a degree in medicine or dentistry are the most likely to find employment and also earn the highest salaries.

Employment rates for graduates with undergraduate degrees by subject of degree April – June 2013 (Labour Market Survey for Office for National Statistics)

GRADUATES WITH AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE

We define graduates as all people who have left education with a qualification above A level standard, this means that not all graduates in this report have an undergraduate degree.

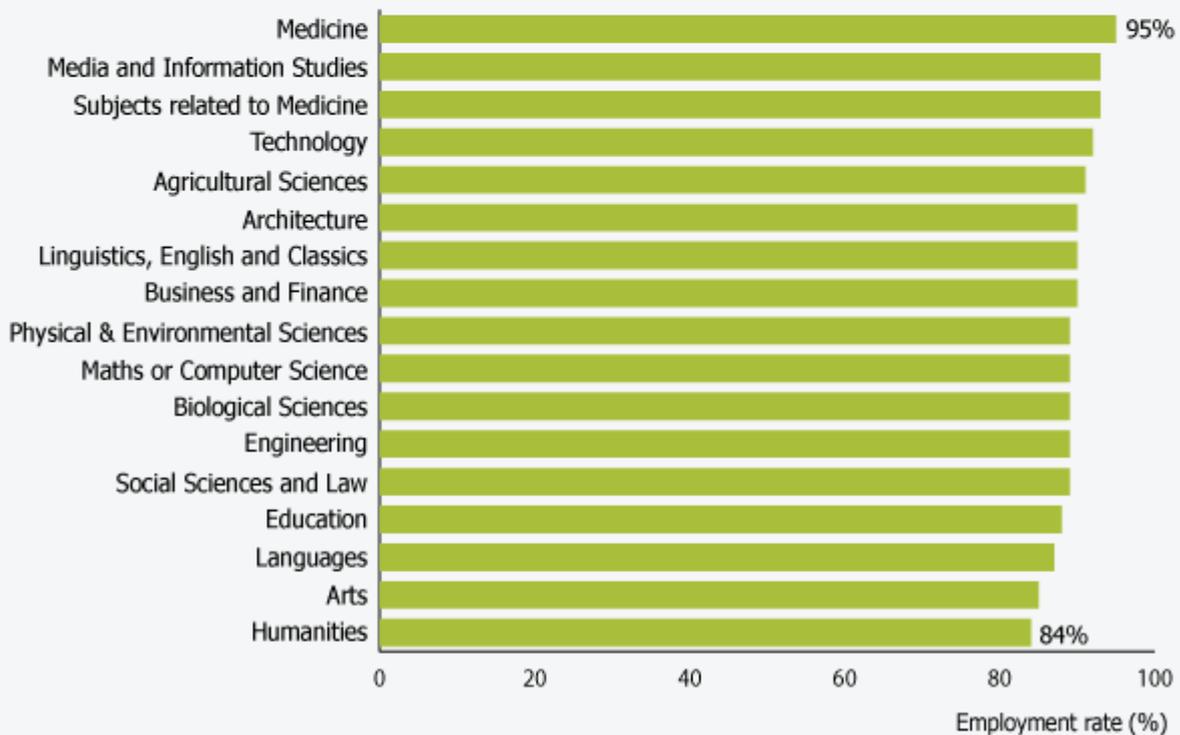


53%

of **graduates** in the UK in 2013 held an **undergraduate degree**

EMPLOYMENT RATE BY MAIN SUBJECT OF UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE

April to June 2013

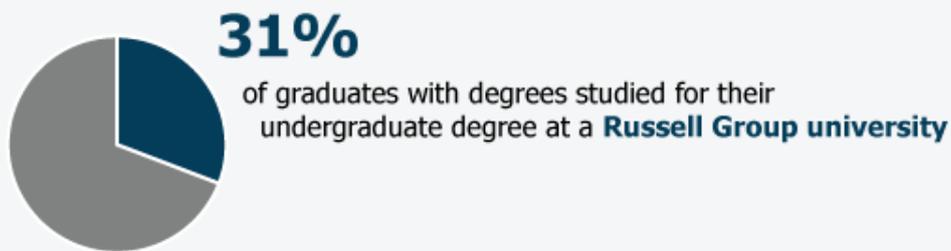


Those with a degree in **medicine** have the **highest employment rate**

Those graduating from the top universities earn more than those graduating from other UK universities.

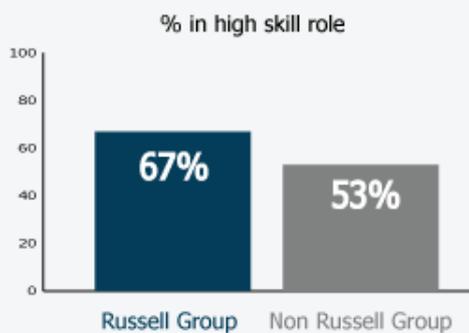
RUSSELL GROUP UNIVERSITIES

The Russell Group defines themselves as a group that represents 24 leading UK universities



Employed **Russell Group** graduates were more likely to work in a high skilled role . . .

. . . and therefore earned a higher average hourly wage



This may be related to the percentage of graduates that studied:

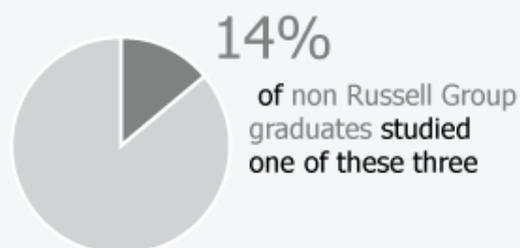
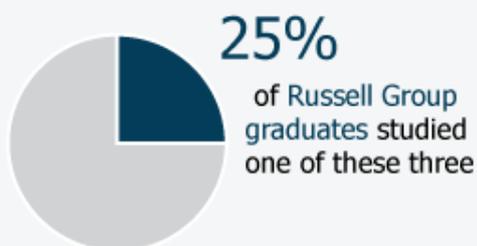


medicine



engineering

physical or environmental sciences



These three subject areas are associated with **high skill roles** and **high wages**

The above table is from the April – June 2013 (Labour Market Survey for Office for National Statistics).

In relation to gender men obtain a high or upper middle skill job than women.

Employment rates by level of qualification, mode of qualification and age on entry to higher education 2012/2013:

Table SE3 - Employment rates by level of qualification, mode of qualification and age on entry to higher education 2012/13

Subject	Full-time first degree		Part-time first degree		Full-time other undergraduate		Part-time other undergraduate	
	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator
Young	182275	92.4%	3766	90.5%	15370	94.8%	2730	94.7%
Mature	39890	90.5%	17595	95.7%	14730	96.2%	22075	97.5%
Unknown	0	..	0	..	0	..	5	..
All ages	222165	92.1%	21360	94.8%	30105	95.5%	24810	97.2%

In this table 0, 1, 2 are rounded to 0. All other numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest 5.

Percentages are not subject to rounding, but those calculated on populations which contain fewer than 22.5 individuals are suppressed and represented as '..'

Due to changes on the DLHE questionnaire in 2011/12 and hence changes to the derivation of the activity categories, the employment indicator for 2011/12 onwards is not strictly comparable with the indicator prior to 2011/12.

Where the response rate for an institution is less than 85% of the target response rate (68.0% for full-time first degree; 59.5% for all part-time undergraduates and full-time first degree), data for these institutions have been excluded from the calculations, see note #11.

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Employment rates by level of qualification, mode of qualification and ethnic group 2012/2013

Table SE5 - Employment rates by level of qualification, mode of qualification and ethnic group 2012/13

Subject	Full-time first degree		Part-time first degree		Full-time other undergraduate		Part-time other undergraduate	
	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator
White	179296	93.2%	17515	96.2%	24050	96.1%	21575	97.6%
Black	10535	86.0%	1485	87.0%	2455	91.2%	1025	93.6%
Asian	21810	87.2%	1380	88.3%	2205	93.2%	1140	93.7%
Other	8805	90.0%	625	89.3%	1070	95.0%	580	95.0%
Unknown	1920	90.0%	350	89.2%	320	95.6%	490	96.9%
All ethnic groups	222165	92.1%	21360	94.8%	30105	95.5%	24810	97.2%

In this table 0, 1, 2 are rounded to 0. All other numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest 5.

Percentages are not subject to rounding, but those calculated on populations which contain fewer than 22.5 individuals are suppressed and represented as '..'

Due to changes on the DLHE questionnaire in 2011/12 and hence changes to the derivation of the activity categories, the employment indicator for 2011/12 onwards is not strictly comparable with the indicator prior to 2011/12.

Where the response rate for an institution is less than 85% of the target response rate (68.0% for full-time first degree; 59.5% for all part-time undergraduates and full-time first degree), data for these institutions have been excluded from the calculations, see note #11.

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Employment rates by level of qualification and sex 2012/2013

Table SE4 - Employment rates by level of qualification, mode of qualification and sex 2012/13

Subject	Full-time first degree		Part-time first degree		Full-time other undergraduate		Part-time other undergraduate	
	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator	Base population	Indicator
Female	125685	93.6%	13160	95.4%	18225	96.5%	15425	97.5%
Male	96465	90.1%	8190	93.8%	11875	93.8%	9380	96.6%
Other	15	..	5	..	0	..	0	..
All sexes	222165	92.1%	21360	94.8%	30105	95.5%	24810	97.2%

In this table 0, 1, 2 are rounded to 0. All other numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest 5.
Percentages are not subject to rounding, but those calculated on populations which contain fewer than 22.5 individuals are suppressed and represented as '..'
Due to changes on the DLHE questionnaire in 2011/12 and hence changes to the derivation of the activity categories, the employment indicator for 2011/12 onwards is not strictly comparable with the indicator prior to 2011/12.
Where the response rate for an institution is less than 85% of the target response rate (66.0% for full-time first degree; 59.5% for all part-time undergraduates and full-time first degree), data for these institutions have been excluded from the calculations, see note #11.

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National research on employability and non-traditional students in HE

In recent years there has been an increasing focus and concern on the issue of employability and undergraduate students and the role of universities in this. This process has generated research in this field in the UK which has largely focused on areas such as defining employability, conceptual and theoretical approaches, issues of inequalities and policies, strategies and practice. Research on inequalities and employability focuses particularly on non-traditional students and the disadvantages they experience compared to middle students in relation to engaging in employability activities.

Defining Employability

Higher education is now deemed to be critical in developing a nation's and Europe's economic development. It is argued that a degree provides graduates with credentials which are essential for developing a knowledge-based society. Traditionally just having a degree – whether it was in the humanities or sciences - was seen as good enough for obtaining a good job but this is no longer necessarily the case. However, there does not appear to be a consensus as to the meaning of the term employability. At a conceptual level there are also differences in approaches. As Tymon asserts: 'employability is complex and multidimensional' (2013: 842). This is partly because the meaning of employability is perceived differently by the different actors involved: students, higher education institutions and employers (Hugh-Jones et al., 2006) and even differently within those groups. Employability can be seen as preparing graduates for employment in the labour market at a level which reflects their qualifications and intellect. Some authors view

employability as simply equipping students with the appropriate skills but there is a need to go beyond just a skills definition. Yorke's definition has a more holistic understanding as he defines employability as:

a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (2004: 210).

However, Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2002) are critical of defining employability from an individualistic perspective as they stress that 'employability is primarily determined by the labour market rather than the capabilities of individuals' (2002: 9). Instead they argue for a definition which takes into account the 'duality of employability'. This encompasses an 'absolute' dimension and refers to graduates having the appropriate skills, knowledge and commitment. The second dimension they describe as being 'relative' and relates to what is happening in the labour market in terms of supply and demand as a graduate may have the appropriate skills and competences but there may not be graduate level jobs available. In such a situation graduates may be employable but not have a job. For them employability is defined 'as the relative chances of finding and maintaining different kinds of employment' (Brown et. al, 2002: 11). Their dual definition is important as it recognises that the individual should not always be blamed for not finding a job or a job at an appropriate level as structural factors also have an impact on the graduate labour market.

There is still concern amongst employers that graduates lack the appropriate skills on entry into graduate employment (Cumming, 2010). Archer and Davison's (2008) looking at employers' perspectives illuminated that they increasingly valued key soft skills such as communication, team working and integrity as much as knowledge/subject skills as a result of work becoming more customer focused.

Most of the definitions focus on the individual student but as Brown et al (2002) assert a student does not exist in a vacuum but interacts with others and also institutions in particular contexts. Any definition of employability needs to take into account the micro, meso and macro levels. Employability and securing a job in the graduate labour market has also to do, and drawing on Bourdieu's work, with the levels of cultural, social and economic capitals a student brings with them to the university and develops while they are there.

Employability is also about managing the transition from learning to earning, from education to the world of work, although for adult students this may not be the first transition into work. Students feel increasingly the need to be 'employable' and to prepare themselves for firstly finding a suitable job and ensuring that they are capable of doing that job (Clarke, 2008) by assembling a portfolio of skills, knowledge and experiences. It's stressed that in post-industrial societies a job is no longer for life and research by and Leathwood (2006) indicates that graduates are expecting the labour market to be uncertain and unpredictable. Learning to be employable and flexible in the labour market will, for many, not be confined to something you prepare for in universities but will continue throughout working lives to enable them to prepare for future career transitions. Graduates need to be lifelong

learners and engage in professional development throughout their lives if they are going to survive and thrive in the labour market at a particular level.

Conceptual and Theoretical Approaches

As Tomlinson (2012, 2010) critically asserts higher education policy has largely been dominated by human capital theory. Human capital theory views a university education as being an investment for the individual, the university, and society's economy. In this framework universities provide and match students with the skills and credentials they need to engage with the labour market to fill the jobs which only those with the highest qualifications and skills can take. For individual students it is also an investment as the 'promise' is that in return they will receive employment in the highest paid jobs. At societal level their human capital is contributing to a nation's knowledge economy in times of a competitive global market. In the UK students have to now make a financial investment in their studies as they have to pay fees - £9000 (11, 300 euros) a year and there are signs that this may rise so being employable becomes all the more imperative if they are to avoid future debt. Tomlinson is critical of human capital theory as it promotes an individualistic competitive approach with an emphasis on skills acquisition. Skills are discussed in quantifiable terms using a rational, instrumental, technical and utilitarian approach. Leonard refers to this as the 'project of masculinity' (200: 181) as the human, social side is absent. In terms of teaching it produces 'narrow and instrumental teaching practices' (2006: 14) according to Hyslop-Marginson and Sears. They go on to argue that such 'a neoliberal education policy reduces learning to a discursive ideological apparatus that encourages student conformity to the market economy (2006: 14).

Importantly it also ignores issues of inequality such as class, gender and race which increasingly characterise the student population in a mass based system which results in less opportunities in the job market for some students. On a different level it obscures, as Blackmore and Sachs point out, the academic, social and educational benefits which studying in university can bring as the focus is on employability and market needs (Blackmore & Sachs, 2003). For Lave and Wenger (1991) the emphasis on skills and the transferability of skills omits to take into account the social context of learning.

Critics of human capital theory and skills approaches to graduate employability and higher education have turned to a more social constructive approach or as Holmes (2013) calls it a 'social positioning' perspective. This draws heavily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concepts of capitals, habitus and field and has been used in relation to employability by, for example, Brown and Scase (1994), Kalfa and Taksa (2013) and Tomlinson (2008). Bourdieu (2005) stresses the need to look at social behaviour within a particular context. His work on education with Passeron (1977) in general and higher education in his study *Homo Academicus* (1990) looks at how the education system is a form of cultural reproduction.

Bourdieu's work on social class is useful in looking at the experiences of working-class and non-traditional students in higher education and how their habitus affects their chances of employability in the labour market. Bourdieu draws on Marx in his analysis of class in seeing class in relation to the means of production and in looking at how dominant classes maintain their power and the reproduction of class. However, he differs from Marx as he also draws on Weber in looking at notions of

lifestyle. Class, for Bourdieu, is based on four different forms of capital (cultural, economic, social and symbolic) which people inherit through socialisation in social spaces such as the family. Different classes, therefore, have different levels of capital. For example, working-class adult students arrive at university with a different cultural capital to that of the younger middle class students as a result of their family background and initial educational experiences. Students, therefore, because of class inequality and also inequalities of gender, age and race, do not start the 'employability pathway' on a level playing field.

The different levels of capital produce a certain class habitus which structurally locates a person in society or identifies "a sense of one's place" but also a 'sense of the place of others" (Bourdieu, 1989: 19). Habitus also endows a person with dispositions (attitudes, thoughts feelings, practice) which shape the way a person acts in relation to others and society. Habitus is useful in looking at the biographies of non-traditional students as it links class and identity. Bourdieu's work on class and habitus has been criticised for being too deterministic as he outlines how classes are socially reproduced.

Inequalities and Employability

Tomlinson (2008) points out there is a lack of research in relation to non-traditional students in relation to employability. There is increasing evidence that graduate employability is a problem across Europe (Edvardsson Stiwne & Gaio Alves, 2010, Tomlinson, 2008). Research indicates that particular groups of students, such as non-traditional students, are more affected in terms of graduateness than other students (Brown & Hesketh, 2004, Reay et al 2006). Non-traditional students are taking a longer transition period than 'traditional' students to gain employment and when they do it is often at a lower and less meaningful level than graduate level. Such students, therefore, experience a mismatch between higher education qualifications and the demand of the labour market. By non-traditional we mean students who are under-represented in higher education and whose participation in higher education is constrained by structural factors. This includes, for example, students from particular minority ethnic groups, living in what are described as low participation areas, working class women and men, adult students, students with disabilities and increasingly EU migrants as well as asylum seekers/refugees.

Undertaking a degree as an adult or as a working class younger student in an elite university is a risky business (Barnett, 2007, Reay 2003) as there is no guarantee of obtaining a well-paid job or even a job at all after completing a degree. Age also comes into play here as employers are more reluctant to employ older graduates. Drawing on Bourdieu's work working class students (younger and older) have a different habitus and cultural capital to middle class students and to the habitus and culture of universities, particularly elite universities. As Brown and Scase (1994) point out those from privileged backgrounds have higher levels of cultural capital which puts them at an advantage in the labour market. They are also more likely to possess extensive social capital and networks which helps in terms of links and connections to employers. Brown et al assert:

The idea of cultural capital has been helpful in understanding how individuals and families from middle class backgrounds are able to 'capitalise' on their cultural assets in ways that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are

not...When employers reject candidates as unsuitable it could be argued that they are being rejected for lacking 'cultural' capital. There is absolutely no doubt that this happens when people are seen to have the wrong accent, dress inappropriately at interview, or do not know the rules of the game when candidates are invited to a formal dinner to meet company employees (2002: 28).

Recent research indicates that employers are increasingly looking for social/ soft skills just as much as hard skills when employing graduates. They explain that this situation happens because those who make the decision about who to appoint come from a similar cultural background. Brown et al (2002), therefore, emphasise that the strategy of how 'students, prepare, package and present 'themselves' in the recruitment process' (2002: 28) is critical. They argue that 'the management of employability is largely a question of how cultural capital is translated into personal capital' (2002: 28). Research indicates that working class students are aware and conscious of class differences at university (Reay, 2003, Merrill, 2012) so that some as in Bourdieu's term feel like 'fish out of water'. Tomlinson argues that:

In terms of social class influences on graduate labour market orientations, this is likely to work in both intuitive and reflexive ways. Studies of non-traditional students show that while they make 'natural, intuitive choices based on the logic of their class background, they are also highly conscious that the labour market entails sets of middle-class values and rules that potentially alienate them (2012: 423).

In the UK as the class system is deeply embedded within society and there is evidence that those from privileged backgrounds who have been to private (public) schools and then Oxbridge obtain the top jobs in UK society. This process is often seen as being part of 'the old boys network' and it is also a gendered and raced process so that if you are a female or black it is harder to get the top graduate jobs. A recent study by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, UK, indicates that those graduates who went to a private school earn at least £4,500 (5,660 euros) more than graduates who went to state schools. Clare Crawford stated in a press release that:

Our research shows that even amongst those who succeed in obtaining a degree, family background – and in particular the type of school they went to – continues to influence their success in the work place.

Research by Smith et al (2011) highlighted that the class of degree, subject studied, prior qualifications and social class background are key factors in determining whether a graduate is likely to be unemployed six months after leaving university.

Education is often viewed as a pathway to social mobility and universities as an institution which acts as a leveller. However, mass high education, while widening participation allowing more people to enter HE, it has also led to a tiered system. This has resulted in a contradictory situation whereby there is now an over-supply of graduates but not enough graduate level jobs. In the UK this has produced a big binary divide between the 'traditional' universities and the post 1992 universities. And within the traditional universities there is a hierarchy between the elite universities (Russell Group) and those not in this group. Employers favour graduates from the

traditional universities and the Russell Group in particular. The post 1992 universities have a higher percentage of students from more diverse backgrounds by class, ethnicity and age. These issues of inequality need to be taken into account and challenged when developing employability strategies. Adult students are also limited in their labour market choices as they are tied, because of families, to a specific geographical locality. Higher education institutions need to work collaboratively with local companies and organisations to encourage them to employ local adult graduates as they have a lot to offer to the local economy. The Confederation of British Industry stated in their report *Boosting Employability Skills* (2012) that 'businesses want graduates who not only add value but who have the skills to help transform their organisation in the face of continuous and rapid economic and technological change'.

A new study just published in June 2015 undertaken by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission - *Study into non-educational barriers to top jobs* – substantiates the findings of previous research. The study interviewed staff from thirteen law, accountancy and financial services firms who offer 45,000 of the best jobs in the country. It found that bright working class applicants were being excluded from their firms. Graduates from the 24 Russell Group universities (the top UK universities) are offered between 60 – 70 percent of the jobs available at the top accountancy firms. The study concluded that recruitment to top jobs is now favouring 'poshness'.

Strategies and Practice

Universities now employ a range of strategies in relation to employability. These include embedding employability skills within the curriculum and some subject areas lend themselves to this more than others; as extra-curricular activities and through work placements or internships either as part of the curriculum or as an activity undertaken during non-term time. Other approaches include entrepreneurship modules, careers advice and activities, portfolios, profiles and records of achievement. However, Little claims that 'while there is international concern that higher education should enhance graduate employability, there is little evidence of systematic thinking about how best to do it' (2003: 4).

Employers are increasingly looking for graduates who possess 'soft skills' such as 'high levels of communication, presentation, teamworking and written skills' (Andrews & Higson, 2014: 277). University teaching is now increasingly incorporating group work and student presentations in their sessions and sometimes as part of the assessment process. An EC study – *The Employability of Higher Education Graduates: the Employers' Perspective* – by Humburg et al (2013) showed that employers considered interpersonal skills to be just as important as professional knowledge:

In order to be employable, a graduate needs interpersonal skills and below average levels cannot be compensated for – even by the best grades or the most relevant study field. This is because employers fear that potential negative consequences of poor interpersonal skills on the team as a whole and thus the impact on organisational goals (Humburg et al, 2013: v).

Work experience and internships are now an important route into graduate employment. Helyer and Lee (2014) argue that work-based learning is beneficial to universities as well as it encourages students to develop experiential learning approaches. Birchall argues that students are narrow learners if they focus only on their academic learning:

Students who just focus on their degree studies without spending time in the workplace are unlikely to develop the skills and interests that graduate employers are looking for (2013).

There is evidence to suggest that work placements are advantageous to students because employers are using them as a recruitment strategy. This is increasingly the case for those who undertake internships. Internships according to Guile and Lahiff support graduates in:

Developing expertise (knowledge, skill and judgement) and identity, but also helping to develop a) entrepreneurial flair so they can assist a business to grow; and b) social capital, that is, the networks to help them to secure permanent/contract-based employment or self-employment (2013; 3).

Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth and Rose (2013), however, drawing on their qualitative study, are less positive as they argue that:

what makes a 'successful' and 'employable' student and 'ideal' creative worker are implicitly classed, raced and gendered. We argue that work placements operate as a key domain in which inequalities within both higher education and the graduate labour market are (re) produced and sustained (Allen et al., 2013: 431).

In their study students were left to find their own work placements which were unpaid. This advantaged middle class students because of their greater social and economic capital. To overcome issues of inequality Allen et al (2013) produced toolkits for both students and HE staff which offer guidance and recommendations for addressing inequalities. They also advocate financial support for working class students. A recent report by the Sutton Trust, UK indicates that unpaid internships favour the rich. The report goes on to say that 'because these areas are so competitive, employers are often able to offer internships as completely unpaid positions. These issues make unpaid internships a serious and pressing problem for social mobility'.ⁱ

Often students are expected to undertake work placements or internships during the holiday period. This penalises non-traditional students, particularly adult students with families as they cannot afford childcare or have to earn money. There are some exceptions to this. For example, Teeside University in the north east of England initiated in 2011-2012 the 'Graduate Internship Programme' which consists of a 12 week paid work-experience placement with a local employer. Importantly, besides being paid it is embedded within the students' development days at the university. Teeside is a post 1992 university with a commitment to widening participation and as a result has a diverse student population - 66% are adult students. One aim of the internship is also to boost the number of local graduate level jobs. The majority of the

students and employers were positive about the experience. In particular the students liked the fact that the work related to their degree studies. Heyler and Lee maintain that: 'Facilitating undergraduate internships can work as part of developing students into resourceful change agents, who work across the business university interface to genuinely transfer and create knowledge' (2014: 367). Students interviewed in a study by Andrews and Higson revealed that:

From the graduates' perspectives, experiential and work-based learning afforded multiple benefits allowing them to apply and hone theoretical skills learnt in education to 'real-life' ... work-based learning was that such experiences enhanced subsequent university-based learning (2014: 278-279).

Another study by Cranmer (2006) found that where universities combined work placement with employer involvement in the design of the curriculum positive outcomes were generated in relation to the capability of students to find graduate level jobs within six months after leaving university. The EC study by Humburg et al (2013) also indicates that when students engage in relevant work experience they are more likely to be offered a job interview and that work experience can compensate for having lower grades.

Geoff Layer in his report *Widening Participation and Employability* identified some examples of good practice such as the following:

The *Impact Project* in West Yorkshire was designed to enhance the employment skills of students from minority ethnic groups and to improve equality of access to graduate jobs. The project analysed local and national data and established a supporters' club of graduate employers. This supporters club designed and delivered a programme of learning, personal development and guidance to better prepare graduates for entry to the labour market. <<http://www.brad.ac.uk/admin/impact/>>

The *Law Graduates Employability Network* at London Metropolitan University <<http://www.lga.ac.uk/careers/lagren.html>> aimed to enhance the employability of law students from disadvantaged groups both inside and outside the mainstream legal professions. The key outcomes were:

- An increase in work experience and mentoring opportunities for law students
- Work shadowing opportunities
- Development of a skill-based customised training programme
- Increased level of careers advice
- Casebook published to guide career choice outside the legal profession

Being at an elite university enhances a graduates' chances of employment. Within six months of graduating 2010/2011 80% of Warwick's undergraduates were in graduate employment and further study while at postgraduate level it was 89%. Like most universities all departments including those which are not traditionally employment linked such as History, Politics, English have to address, in some way, issues relating to employability. There are also initiatives run centrally by the University such as the Warwick Advantage Award run jointly with the Students Union. This award helps students to identify their skills through a series of activities by asking:

Where do I start?
Where do I want to be?
What do I have to offer?

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/career/developingself/>

The Student Careers and Skills Services also have an activity to help students develop an Employability Development profile.

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/employability>

Conclusion

Employability is now firmly part of the agenda of European universities and a closer link and engagement between universities and the employment sector is a by-product of this, Universities, national governments and the EU all agree that it is a good thing to develop the employability skills and competencies of their students. While there is some evidence of good policy and practice there is still a long way to go in achieving this across the system as a whole. At present we have an unequal system whereby some graduates are at an advantage because of their class, gender and ethnic backgrounds and cultural and social capitals so that the white middle class male is more likely to end up the most prestigious and well paid graduate jobs. Surveys show, for example, that women earn less. The odds are also stacked in favour of those who go to a top or elite university and are younger rather than older and also white, male and middle class. Work placements and internships, for example, should be accessible in the UK to all those who want to participate so that those from low income backgrounds are not disadvantaged. It also raises some key questions. Who is benefitting from employability schemes – employers or students (and only certain students)?

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