

Abstract for University of Warwick, Start-Up Event, 2 December

University of Warwick held a second start-up event on 2 December 2015 with employers, careers advisors, career development directors and alumni staff within the university.

After a short presentation providing a brief overview of the main objectives of the Erasmus+ EMPLOY project the session focused on facilitating discussion between university staff and employers on questions related to employability. Employers began by highlighting that at a number of institutions, including their own, innovations in recruiting had been recently introduced into the application process to promote wider opportunity. The aforementioned changes have been taken either in the form of blind screening or as a commitment to no longer using UCAS points as a selection tool. In the UK and the Republic of Ireland the UCAS Tariff system is a means of differentiating students based on grades as a means of giving them places at UK universities.

When turning to the issue of graduate skills that are considered by employers of particular value, the following were identified:

- 1) Social skills, particularly with respect to the confidence to approach and present themselves appropriately in different formats and situations;
- 2) Flexibility, the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, expectations and commitments;
- 3) Ability and endeavour to thoroughly research the employer, tailoring to fit the values and expectations gleaned from this analysis;
- 4) Presenting and contextualising life experiences and skills effectively within an interview context.

An interesting discussion that emerged from amongst employers observed that in the current environment the specific institution at which the student studies could be more significant than whether or not the student is traditional or non-traditional. In this regard there was an acknowledgement of the success of Warwick in having become a target for employers. To dignify this hierarchy within relationships to higher educational institutions, employers emphasised both the importance of relevant dedicated university societies and facilities as well as the commitment of the careers service. This led to a broader discussion of the significance of an existing hierarchy amongst universities in the UK visited by employers. It was noted in this context that a larger percentage of non-traditional students are at newer post-1992 institutions.

A final point in the meeting entailed considering the challenges for the future. Here there was a particular emphasis from both employers and careers advisors on the need to change perceptions amongst both non-traditional students as well as employers, in establishing greater links and understanding what employers are looking for, where they can find it, as well as amongst students what they need be equipped with in order to succeed in the job market.

The participants of the meeting expressed considerable interest in the project and in keeping in contact to find out about its development and the results of the research.