



Framework for embedding employability in higher education



Introducing the framework

This framework offers a structure and process for embedding employability within policy and practice in higher education (HE). Enhancing students' employability requires a systematic, cohesive and comprehensive approach, which is supported by this framework.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) believes that employability needs to be embedded in the culture of learning and teaching in HE. The framework will have the most impact if embedded across an institution and applied with all programmes. The framework builds on *Defining and Developing your Approach to Employability* (HEA 2013) that detailed a rationale and approach for embedding employability.



What is embedding employability?

The HEA views embedding employability as providing the opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, experiences, behaviours, attributes, achievements and attitudes to enable graduates to make successful transitions and contributions, benefitting them, the economy and their communities. Employability is relevant to all students, and at all levels of study so includes both undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

Employability is complex, therefore, no single area of focus is the solution, for example addressing the provision of placements alone. It is the combination of a number of areas of focus and the processes used to embed them that will strengthen your approach. To be addressed effectively, employability should be embedded into all learning and teaching policies, processes and practices – particularly in the curriculum – and considered throughout the student lifecycle, from the very start of a student programme through to the completion of their studies. All stakeholders, including academic and support staff, students, careers services, students' unions, and employers, have a role to play in embedding employability and should be involved in doing so. The framework thus promotes the principles of inclusion and collaboration as key to achieving a joined up approach.



Who is this framework for?

This framework has been designed to engage and support a diverse range of audiences including those involved in developing and implementing employability policy and practice, curriculum design, student support and learning and teaching. It is most effective if adopted at an institutional level and then applied across all programmes.



Why is embedding employability important?

Increasing pressure to meet the expectations of stakeholders has driven the employability agenda and made it a priority in the 21st century for all higher education providers. Embedding employability is important to:

Students: with the rise in tuition fees, students are investing in their future careers and are more focussed on how the institution can support them to enhance their immediate employment prospects and longer term employability.

Supportive others: those investing and supporting students in HE, including families, communities and industry, have a vested interest in employability as an outcome.

Employers: employers have specific needs in terms of graduate knowledge, skills and attributes which should inform the curriculum, HE business engagement and employability support in HE.

Institutions: excellence in graduate employment and employability enhances an institution's reputation and global standing, influencing student recruitment and engagement with employers.

UK economy: graduate employability is a government priority as it is vital to the UK's economic growth (regionally, nationally and internationally) and supports both social and cultural development.

The HEA believes that graduate employability can be significantly enhanced by embedding employability into the culture of the institution and specifically the curriculum. This framework and associated toolkit is designed to support this process.



Want to find out more?

The HEA can help you or your institution to use and apply this framework to enhance policy and/or practice.



consultancy@heacademy.ac.uk

The HEA has a toolkit containing complementary tools and resources to help you apply this framework.



www.heacademy.ac.uk/frameworks-toolkits/toolkits

Be kept informed through:



employability@heacademy.ac.uk



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How is the framework structured?

The framework is structured as follows:

- the inner circle of the framework illustrates the broad areas of focus that are integral to graduate employability;
- these areas are encircled by a cyclical process that is key to embedding employability across the institution and at a programme level.
- the outer circle contains the underpinning principles for how these areas are put into practice.

It is the combination of the areas of focus, underpinning principles, and the cyclical process that enables employability to be embedded comprehensively and consistently. Taking time to define and identify the employability priorities of your particular institution, department or programme is significant at the start of this process. Involving students and other stakeholders will enable you to develop a clearer view of the combination of areas of focus that are right for your particular context. Embedding this process into your existing institutional policies, processes and practices so that it is integral and not bolt on, will have the greatest impact.

Principles underpinning employability

Inclusivity: all students, regardless of location, situation, programme or mode of study, should have equitable access to opportunities to enhance their employability, make successful transitions and manage their careers.

Collaboration: collaborative approaches to learning and teaching can enrich and inform the curriculum and support graduate employability. Collaboration between HE and business provides opportunities, informs the curriculum, and should be a key feature of your approach to employability. Employability is a process of engagement and continual enhancement and is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders.

Engagement: The language used around employability is critical in terms of its potential impact on engagement, with all stakeholders. Developing a shared understanding and view of employability in any given context will facilitate staff, employer and student engagement. Students can subsequently engage proactively in seeking to develop as individuals in the areas of focus being highlighted.



How can this framework be used?

The framework outlines a cyclical process to help you reflect on and address current employability policy and practice in your institution, faculty, department and programme(s). It is helpful to work through stages one to four as introduced here, when designing and planning curriculum, as part of curriculum validation/revalidation, or within staff development opportunities.

The process encompasses the four stages involved in developing a defined and cohesive approach to employability. This provides an institutional approach that also enables local ownership and development at a programme or subject level. In the HEA's employability toolkit, the process is explained in more detail and provides a range of questions at each stage to facilitate and support discussion and reflection between staff, students and key stakeholders.

The process

STAGE 1
Defining employability including all key stakeholders and making this explicit at an institutional and at a programme level and with all your students.

STAGE 2
Auditing and mapping provision and support, considering all policies, practices and processes, against the definition agreed at Stage 1.

STAGE 3
Prioritising actions to address gaps, sharing best practice and agreeing measurable outcomes/outputs within policy, practice and processes.

STAGE 4
Measuring impact, identifying measures of success and using feedback and evidence to inform future priorities, resourcing and areas of focus.

HEA frameworks series

This is one of a series of strategic frameworks on core sector priorities, developed by the HEA, the national body for learning and teaching in the United Kingdom (UK). They have been created in response to, and in collaboration with, the HE sector and draw on extensive evidence, expertise and experience.

The frameworks can be adapted by a wide range of HE stakeholders, individuals and groups, and applied to different disciplines, modes of study and institutional contexts. They may have more impact if adopted at an institutional level and embedded across all provision, with all staff. HEA toolkits can support you in this process. Frameworks are designed to enhance individual sector priorities or be interconnected to enrich policy and practice. They aim to improve learning outcomes by raising the quality and status of teaching in HE, across the UK and internationally.

Frameworks in the series include:

Embedding employability in higher education

Internationalising higher education

Transforming assessment in higher education

Student access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education

Flexible learning in higher education

Student engagement through partnership



How does this framework align with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)?

Staff may want to consider how their engagement with embedding employability in higher education can offer an effective approach to areas of activity, enable deeper understanding of core knowledge, and demonstrate alignment with professional values. It is particularly relevant to the following dimensions:

Activity: A2 and A4 **Knowledge:** K1, K2, and K5 **Values:** V2, V3, and V4

The HEA invites lecturers, teachers and learning support staff to evidence their use of this or other HEA frameworks in applying for HEA Fellowship in recognition of their commitment to professional practice.



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Acknowledgements

This framework is based on the HEA publication, *Defining and Developing your Approach to Employability: A framework for Higher Education Institutions* (2013) and was originally developed with sector expertise as part of a learning and teaching summit. Since its launch, it has also been informed by feedback from representatives of the 37 higher education institutions who participated in the HEA's Embedding Employability Strategic Enhancement Programme (2014-15). Thanks are due to them and the authors of HEA publications whose work informed this framework.

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