



Influencers of Student Self-Perception of Employability Skills

A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

o851916 Julie Hayward | Applied Quantitative Business Research | 18th January 2018

“Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Abstract

Studies examining student self-perceptions of employability skills within UK business schools are limited, with very little being done to evaluate the impact of employability practices utilised to improve student employment prospects. With increasing focus being placed on HEI's to improve the prospects of their graduates, assessing the impact of these practices becomes critical. The author surveyed 35 students' self-perceptions of their employability skills to ascertain the most significant influencers from a number of variables previously identified in the literature. Findings indicate undergraduates whose programme content is focused on employability and where links are made between content and skills development, are more positive about the skills they have. Further, an association exists between feelings of conscientiousness and level of skill attainment. Recommendations are made to extend the practices identified as having a positive impact across The Faculty of Business and Management and for further research to be conducted across post 92 universities that run business programmes.

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1. Introduction and Rationale

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Growing skills gaps, global uncertainty and issues of productivity in the face of rapid technological advancement are challenging the human advantage in today's labour market (Allen, 2016) (CIPD, 2017) (ONS, 2018) (Griffiths, et al., 2018). With almost 2.5 million students registered in the UK, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) have a key role to play in closing these skills gaps and in improving the productivity of the UK workforce (Minocha, Hristov & Reynolds, 2017), by producing work-ready graduates (Brown, 2014) (Artess, et al., 2017) (Holmes, 2013) (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010).

A university degree is no longer enough to make one employable (Brown, et al., 2004), arguably, it is employability skills that are valued more by employers today than the certification of knowledge offered by traditional degree programmes (Artess, Mellors-Bourne and Hooley, 2017; Saunders & Zuzel, 2010; Helyer, 2011). As such, HEIs are becoming progressively more competitive on graduate employability, implementing strategies to increase their share of the graduate employment market (Minocha, et al., 2017). Despite this, increasing gaps are being reported between graduate skills and employer needs. 54% of UK employers found graduates to be highly qualified but lacking soft skills, resulting in many positions being unfilled (Llewellyn-Smith, 2015) and around 1 in 4 graduates reporting feeling underemployed (Firth, 2017) (Weale, 2018).

There is extensive literature looking at the meaning of employability, the skills that constitute employability and the range of approaches adopted by HEIs to deliver

employability (see Artess, Mellors-Bourne and Hooley (2017) and Minocha, Hristov & Reynolds (2017) for a synthesis of recent literature). A full discussion of these themes is not within the limits of this study; however, the selected operational definitions are outlined below.

1.2 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1.2.1. Definition of Employability

There are various definitions of what constitutes employability and whether it is simply about obtaining employment (Brown, et al., 2004). The following definition by Yorke (2006, p. 8), has been adopted by the Higher Education Academy (HEA):

“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.”

This definition is cited extensively in research in this area and is selected as a good fit for this study.

1.2.2. Employability Skills

It is widely acknowledged that, in addition to the requirement for a workforce with well-developed technical skills, advanced generic skills are also needed in response to the turbulent and rapidly changing management environment graduates are likely to encounter (Anderson, et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2012). However, there is a lack of consensus as to what these generic skills might be (Holmes, 2013). World Economic Forum (WEF) list 35 skills (WEF, 2016) and HEA list 35 (Artess, Mellors-Bourne and Hooley, 2017) but only 11 are aligned (Griffiths, et al., 2018). Due to their future-focused

nature, the 10 skills needed to thrive in the fourth industrial revolution (listed in Table 1) according to WEF (2016) are selected for this study.

Table 1: The 10 Skills you need to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

1.	Complex Problem Solving
2.	Critical Thinking
3.	Creativity
4.	People Management
5.	Coordinating with Others
6.	Emotional Intelligence
7.	Judgment and Decision Making
8.	Service Orientation
9.	Negotiation
10.	Cognitive Flexibility

(Source: WEF, 2016)

1.2.3. Approaches to Delivery Practice in HEIs

For the past two decades, there has been an on-going commitment for HEIs to integrate themes relating to employability into degree programmes (Currey, et al., 2018). Some of the most popular strategies identified in the literature (Minocha, Hristov & Reynolds, 2017; Brown, 2014; Jones & Warnock, 2014; Artess, Mellors-Bourne and Hooley, 2017) include:

- ❖ Embedding employability into the curriculum
- ❖ Using work-based components within programmes
- ❖ Adopting employability based modules
- ❖ Using work/project-based learning in parallel with curriculum

Some research suggests managers are judging students from project-based and work-related courses more positively a few months after starting work (Jollands, Jolly,

Molyneaux, 2012; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). However, Tibby (2012) questions whether enough is being done to evaluate the effectiveness of these employability practices, hence the need for the current study into project-based learning (PBL).

PBL is defined as the application of knowledge to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter (de los Rios, et al., 2010) (Markham, 2011). According to Thomas (2000, p. 1) these projects should consist of *“complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations.”*

1.3. RATIONALE

The question of whether the existing approaches of HEIs to developing graduate employability are having any impact is a complex one (Cranmer, 2006) as there are a great number of variables at play that are impossible to isolate. Research suggests a variety of individual and external factors play a part in shaping employability self-perceptions. Individual factors include demographics (De Vos, et al., 2011), knowledge and skills gained via education and work experience (Yorke & Knight, 2006; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), and individual attitudes and personality (Pool & Qualter, 2013, Qenani, et al., 2014). External factors might include the state of the labour market (Berntson, et al., 2006) and opportunities for the deployment of skills in real-world conditions, such as PBL (Hanneman & Gardner, 2010). The current study seeks to examine a number of these identified variables and their effect on student self-perception of their employability skills. It is worth noting, unlike many other studies completed in this area, which seek to determine student self-perception of employability (whether they will

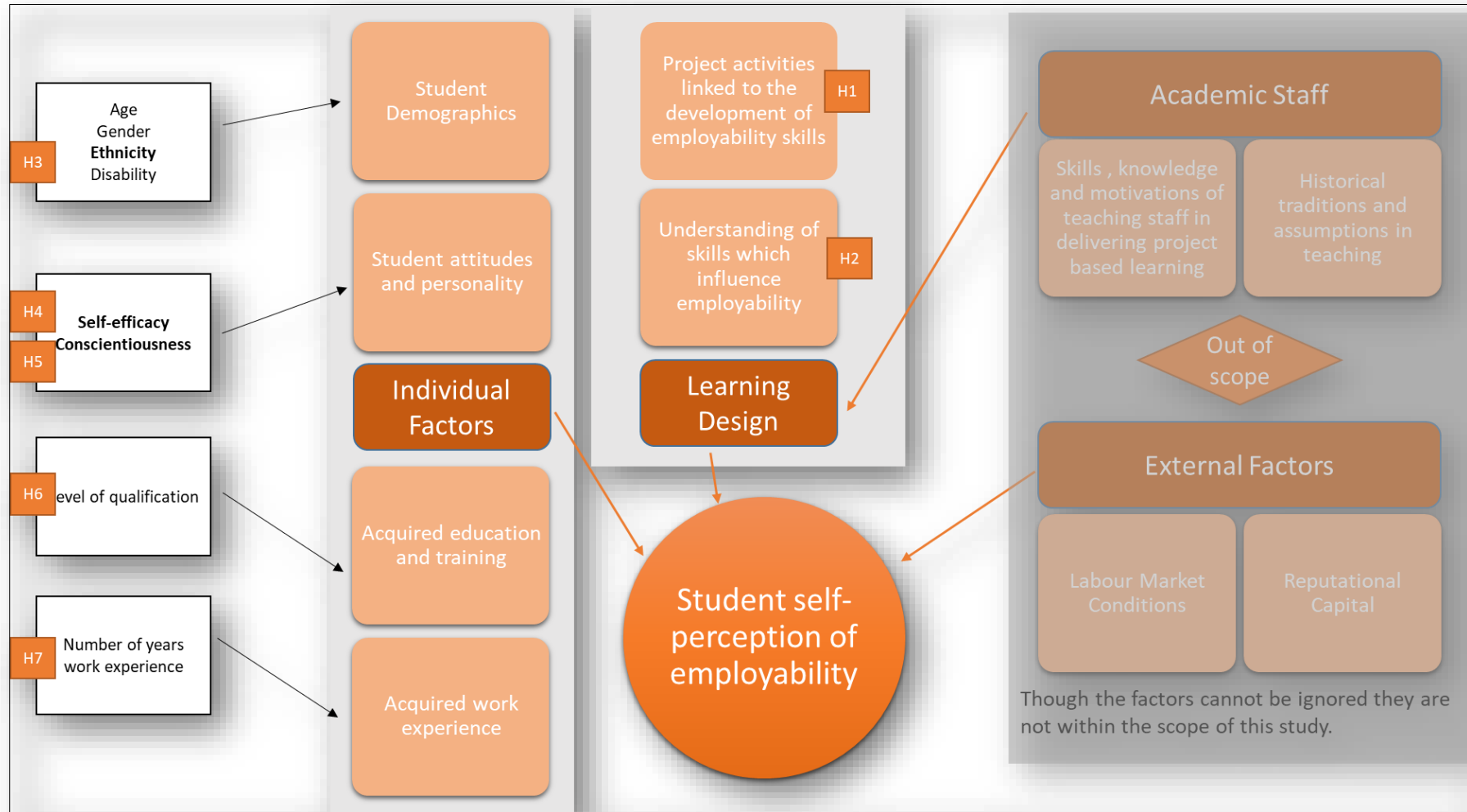
secure a job after graduation), the current study is focused on student self-evaluation of employability *skills*. Hence, the reason external labour market factors and reputational capital (associated with the perceptions of the quality of graduates from certain institutions) (Qenani, et al., 2014) are not considered significant.

Variables thought to be significant are summarised in Figure 1 below, a conceptual framework informed by a rapid literature review (RPR) (see appendix 1 for PRISMA). The RLR is a streamlined version of a systematic review, allowing evidence to be synthesised in a much shorter timeframe (Tricco, et al., 2015). The use of an RLR has implication in terms of rigour, bias and results (Ganann, et al., 2010) but was thought most appropriate for this study due to time constraints; it typically takes twelve months to undertake a full systematic review (ibid). Though a full review may have led to the production of a more detailed map, Maxwell (2013) argues no map can capture everything about the phenomena of the study; it is only a simplified version of a more complex reality. Becker (2007) also warns that existing literature can sometimes distort the way you frame your research due to “ideological hegemony” (Cited in Maxwell, 2013).

As a response to the context discussed above, The University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD) has recently included a project-based element into its Undergraduate Business and Management programmes.

The goal of this study is to determine whether the PBL element of the curriculum has any impact on student self-evaluation of their employability skills when compared to other variables. There is a lack of empirical research in this specific area and as such,

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the variables that may influence student self-perception of employability



the study aims to contribute to the literature by providing evidence of the impact of a widely adopted employability practice, in boosting self-perception of employability.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this research is to explore the influencers on student self-perception of employability skills via a self-evaluation survey. Due to the scope of this study, it is not possible to analyse all variables, therefore, conclusions will be drawn based on the following hypotheses.

Table 2: Research Hypotheses

	Null Hypothesis	Alternative Hypothesis
Hypothesis 1 (H1)	Student participation in project-based learning will have no effect on self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Student participation in project-based learning will improve self-evaluation of their employability skills.
Hypothesis 2 (H2)	Programme content focused on employability skills will have no effect on self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Programme content focused on employability skills will improve self-evaluation of their employability skills.
Hypothesis 3 (H3)	Student ethnicity is not related to self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Student ethnicity is related to self-evaluation of their employability skills.
Hypothesis 4 (H4)	Number of years work experience will have no effect on student self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Number of years work experience will improve student self-evaluation of their employability skills.
Hypothesis 5 (H5)	Higher levels of educational qualification will have no effect on student self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Higher levels of educational qualification will improve student self-evaluation of their employability skills.
Hypothesis 6 (H6)	Higher scores on self-perception of efficacy will have no effect on evaluation of employability skills.	Higher scores on self-perception of efficacy will result in improved evaluation of employability skills.

Hypothesis 7 (H7)	Higher scores on self-perception of conscientiousness will have no effect on evaluation of employability skills.	Higher scores on self-perception of conscientiousness will result in improved evaluation of employability skills.
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The methodological approach and research design adopted to test these hypotheses are outlined in the following chapter.

2. Methodology & Research Design

The research project took place at University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD), a higher education institution in the UK, specifically within Swansea Business School (SBS). Data was collected during the autumn of 2018. Students from the BA Business and Management (BABM) programme, were selected to participate in the study, some of whom had participated in PBL and some not, for the purpose of comparison.

2.1. Philosophical Underpinning

Quantitative research is historically associated with a positivist philosophy and the natural sciences (Dawson, 2017). It emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data and is most suited to a deductive approach (Bryman, 2016).

A quantitative research approach is adopted in the current study, namely, a self-completion questionnaire (see appendix 2): the reason for this being two-fold. Firstly, to fulfil the expected learning outcomes and timeframe for this assignment. Secondly, it is the most suitable to deliver the study aims, from a pragmatic perspective. Had these not been the primary considerations, a mixed method approach would have been applied, including semi-structured interviews. The complex social world can rarely be represented through simple, linear mathematical description alone (Byrne, 2002) therefore, using mixed methods adds depth and meaning to numeric data, whilst numeric data can add precision (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Questionnaires are the most appropriate method for explanatory research, such as this (Saunders, et al., 2016). A self-completion questionnaire (SCQ) has a number of benefits: they are both quick and cheap to administer (Bryman, 2016); they allow for

elimination of interviewer variability (Cameron & Price, 2009) and will normally require less skill and sensitivity to administer than semi-structured interviews (Saunders, et al., 2016). Whilst the limitations of this method are recognised (including, lower response rates, lack of control over who responds, greater risk of missing data (Bryman, 2016), inability to ask additional questions or probe respondents to elaborate on their answers (Anderson, 2009)), where possible, every effort was made to reduce their effect in the presentation of the questionnaire and wording of the questions.

2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study seeks to identify a correlation; correlational research design observes naturally, what goes on in the world without directly interfering with it (Field, 2018). ‘Non-experimental hypothesis-testing’ is used to measure the association of a predictor variable (e.g. PBL participation) and the outcome variable (self-evaluation of employability skills).

Having determined the methodology and research design strategy, there are a number of other elements of design to be addressed, such as the method of selecting a sample, questionnaire design and, issues of reliability and validity.

2.3. SAMPLING

Due to time constraints and the small size of this study a non-probability, convenience-sampling strategy is adopted (Greener, 2008). Convenience sampling is often used under these circumstances, however, it does mean the results cannot be generalised (Saunders, et al., 2016). Total sample size is 135, representing all students currently enrolled on BABM at SBS. This poses an issue for generalisability to the wider

population, as the sample size is small and selected from a specific discipline area. Therefore, the results will be used only *‘as the basis for developing theoretical explanations or accounts which could be applied to that wider population’* (Lynch, n.d., p. 2).

2.4. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

“Given the underappreciated complexity of asking and answering questions, careful and intentional design of survey questions is of paramount importance to minimizing the opportunity for error” (Vanette, n.d.), especially when using a sample selected from a student population as they are one of the most surveyed (Klemenčič, et al., 2015) and apt to suffer from survey fatigue (NRC, 2016). This increases the likelihood of ‘satisficing.’¹ Careful consideration was given to the presentation of the questionnaire and the wording of the questions in order to limit this effect (Tourangeau, et al., 2000; Vanette, n.d.).

Questions were designed to collect nominal data (e.g. age, ethnicity and employment status) and ordinal data (e.g. feelings about efficacy and conscientiousness). Statement style questions often referred to as Likert scale (Johns, 2010), enabled scaled responses, indicating the level of agreement with a particular statement. This type of questioning is popular in surveys, having the ability to capture the intensity of the answer, whilst providing uniform data that is easier to analyse (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A mixture of response options were used to limit satisficing (Johns, 2010).

¹ A tendency to minimize the amount of effort expended to arrive at an answer, rather than optimise responses (Bryman, 2016).

With only one opportunity to collect the data, it is impossible to return and collect additional information (Saunders, et al., 2016), hence the importance of conducting a pilot study (Vaus, 1996). Feedback gathered from the pilot led to the inclusion of two additional categorical questions; ethnicity and learning impairments were highlighted as possible contributors to self-perception of employability.

Qualtrics Survey software was used to deliver the questionnaire as it allowed for effective completion on mobile devices, which is thought to aid completion rates (Wells, 2014). A link to the survey was delivered via e-mail to student accounts, with assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. The Qualtrics tool also allowed for ease of analysis as data could be exported directly to SPSS.

2.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The validity of the research (the extent to which the findings are about what they profess to be about) and the reliability of the research (the extent to which the data will yield consistent findings) depend largely on the design of the questionnaire. Foddy (1993, p. 17), emphasises that to achieve reliability and validity, *'the question must be understood by the respondent in the way it was intended by the researcher and the answer given by the respondent must be understood by the researcher in the way intended by the respondent.'*

According to Vanette (n.d.), best practice is to use validated survey questions with known measurement properties in order to improve reliability and validity. In the current study, questions were adapted from existing scales used to measure efficacy and conscientiousness. Efficacy items were adapted from the Self-efficacy Formative

Questionnaire (Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, 2018) and conscientiousness items from the Big 5 Inventory (BFI) (John & Srivastava, 1999).

2.5 Bias and Ethical Considerations

No matter how fervently the goal of objectivity is pursued, no researcher can approach a subject entirely without bias (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). As the study is designed to test a particular point of view, it is likely the investigator's bias may influence the outcome (Durbin, 2004). Recognising and dealing with bias is an important part of the research process. Having identified potential biases, every effort is made to ensure the current research questions and design do not predetermine an outcome, nor exclude unwanted findings (Institute of Employment Studies, 2004), and can be replicated (Durbin, 2004).

Though there is little direct interaction between respondent and researcher in the administration of SCQ, there are still potential ethical implications relating to anonymity and confidentiality (Oliver, 2003). The effects of this were limited, as all data collected was anonymous and stored on password-protected devices.

3. Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyse the data. Figure 3 describes the profile of respondents (also Appendix 3). Of 135 students sent the questionnaire, 53 responded but only 35 completed all questions. The incomplete data was excluded from the analysis, as it was so partial as to not be of any use.

Cronbach alpha values for each scaled item (efficacy, conscientiousness, programme content and employability skills) ranged between 0.888 and 0.901 (see table x), ensuring internal consistency. One item was omitted from each scale to help improve reliability (Dawson, 2017) (See appendix 4).

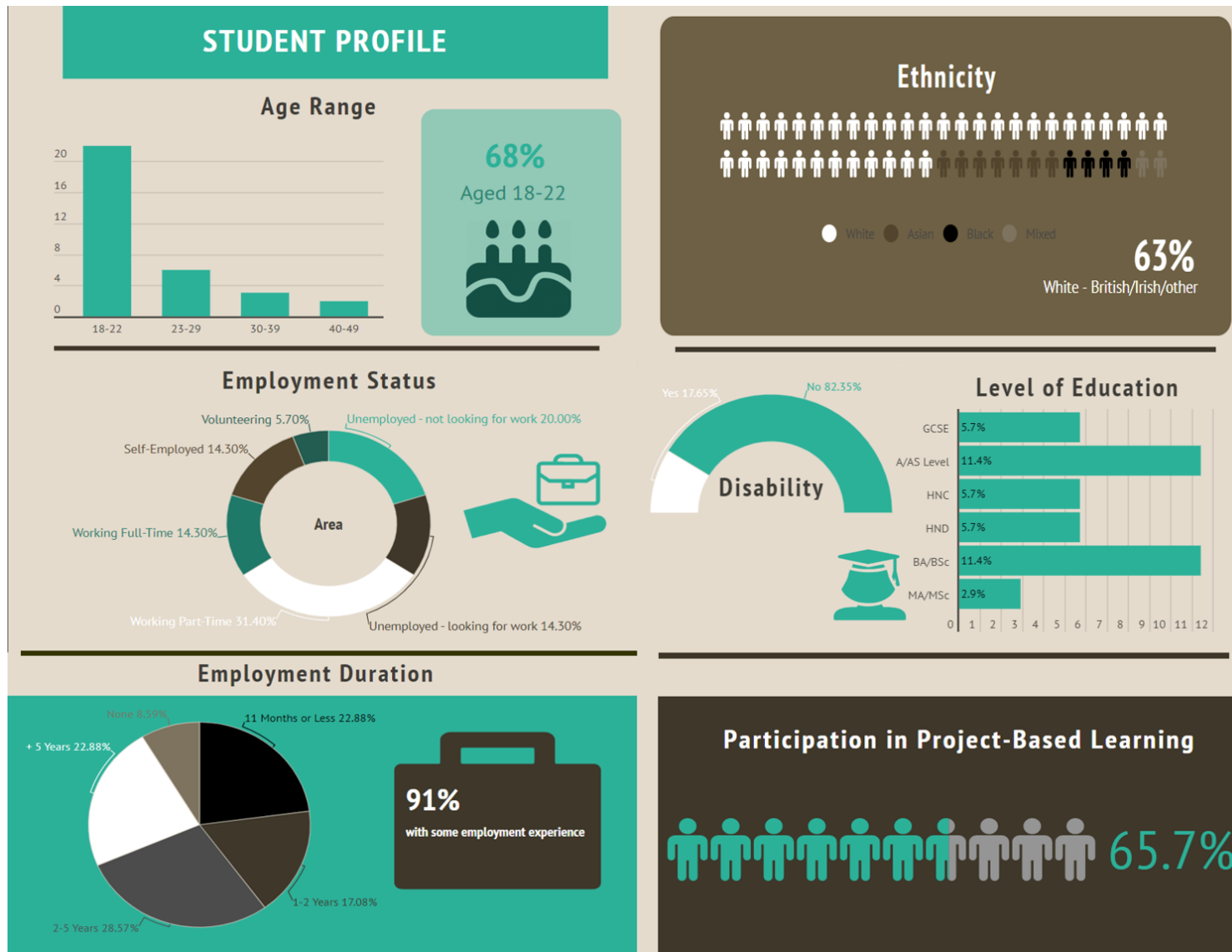
Factor analysis was conducted on 24 remaining items and 4 categories created based on the communalities score. Whilst this is useful for ease of analysis, had the scope of the study allowed for it, some of the individual items would have been explored in more detail (Miller, et al., 2002)

Table 3: Cronbach Alpha results before and after extraction

Scale Description	No of items in scale	Cronbach Alpha value before extraction	No of items extracted	Item extracted	Cronbach Alpha value after extraction	Mean	Standard deviation
Efficacy (Q 9)	7	0.885	1	9.1	0.888	39.9429	11.78968
Conscientiousness (Q 10)	5	0.888	1	10.5	0.923	27.9143	7.87166
Programme Content (Q 12)	6	0.872	1	12.5	0.919	18.46	5.305
Employability Skills (Q 13)	10	0.898	1	13.4	0.901	57.8857	14.10417

Regression analysis was performed on the scaled item predictor variables of efficacy, conscientiousness and programme content, to test for a relationship with the outcome

Figure 2: Student Profile (N=35)



variable, employability skills. An adjusted R square of 0.613 indicates the model explains more than 60% of the variability of the response data around its mean (Frost, 2018).

Table 4: Regression analysis of scaled items

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Efficacy	.170	.153	.170	1.112	.275
Conscientiousness	.465	.153	.465	3.049	.005
Programme Content	.384	.113	.384	3.412	.002

Outcome Variable: Employability Skills

Table 4 shows a statistically significant relationship between both conscientiousness (0.005) and programme content (0.002), and employability skills, but not with efficacy (0.275).

Relationships between categorical data variables (ethnicity, length of employment, level of qualification, participation in PBL and awareness of employability skills) and the outcome variable were tested using Kruskal-Wallis H test as this was indicted to be the best test for looking for association between nominal and ordinal datasets (Laerd Statistics, n.d.b). First, a test for normality was necessary (see Table 5).

Table 5: Example of Test For normality

Tests of Normality – Age and Employability Skills							
	What is your age?	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Employability Skills	18-22	.135	24	.200*	.953	24	.318
	23-29	.324	6	.048	.816	6	.082

	30-39	.176	3	.	1.000	3	.975
	40-49	.260	2	.			

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The data was found to be normally distributed and as such, the mean scores were compared to test for significance (Laerd Statistics, n.d.b)

Table 6: Outputs of Analysis of categorical items using Kruskal-Wallis h test (n=35)

Question Number	Variable Label	Chi-Square	D	Asymp. Sig.
Q3	Employment Duration	6.174	4	.187
Q5	Level of Qualification	2.734	6	.841
Q6	Ethnicity	8.145	6	.228
Q8	Participation in PBL	.246	2	.884

The results shown in Table 6 indicate there is no significant (< 0.005) association between the predictor variables tested and the outcome variable. However, it is likely the very small sample size has had an effect (Bryman, 2016).

4. Discussion

Organisations are increasingly operating in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments (Farnham, 2015) and as such graduates entering the labour market are expected to be creative, dynamic problem-solvers (Helyer, 2011) capable of meeting the demands of an increasingly flexible labour market (Tomlinson, 2012). Given this context, HEI's are developing innovative practices to address the need for transferable employability skills within their degree programmes (Little, 2011). The results of the current study demonstrate how a focus on employability within the curriculum has a more significant impact on self-perception of employability, amongst the sample tested, than a number of other variables. The study tested seven hypotheses and the significance ($P = < 0.005$) of the association between each of the predictor variables and the outcome variable is outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: p-Value for each tested hypothesis

	Null Hypothesis	Alternative Hypothesis	Significance
Hypothesis 1(H1)	Student participation in project-based learning will have no effect on self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Student participation in project-based learning will improve self-evaluation of their employability skills.	.884
Hypothesis 2 (H2)	Programme content focused on employability skills will have no effect on self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Programme content focused on employability skills will improve self-evaluation of their employability skills.	.002

Hypothesis 3 (H3)	Student ethnicity is not related to self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Student ethnicity is related to self-evaluation of their employability skills.	.228
Hypothesis 4 (H4)	Number of years work experience will have no effect on student self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Number of years work experience will improve student self-evaluation of their employability skills.	.187
Hypothesis 5 (H5)	Higher levels of educational qualification will have no effect on student self-evaluation of their employability skills.	Higher levels of educational qualification will improve student self-evaluation of their employability skills.	.841
Hypothesis 6 (H6)	Higher scores on self-perception of efficacy will have no effect on evaluation of employability skills.	Higher scores on self-perception of efficacy will result in improved evaluation of employability skills.	.275
Hypothesis 7 (H7)	Higher scores on self-perception of conscientiousness will have no effect on evaluation of employability skills.	Higher scores on self-perception of conscientiousness will result in improved evaluation of employability skills.	.005

Within various studies, all of the above variables have been shown to have some impact on student perception of employability (Jackson, 2013; De Vos, et al., 2011). There are a number of reasons why this may not have been the case here, such as the small sample size and the focus on perception of employability skills rather than on employment outcomes.

The size of the sample affected the amount of diversity present in terms of age and ethnicity, and the age profile meant there was a similar range of employment

duration. Most of the students had also attained the same level of academic qualification. It is possible that a larger sample size would produce significant results for these variables, as it would likely be more diverse. The focus on employability skills rather than employment outcomes may also have affected the results as external factors such as the labour market and employer attitudes towards some of these characteristics would not have an influence on how students rated themselves against each of the skills.

In two cases the null hypothesis were rejected as results were found to be significant within the sample, programme content focused on employability and conscientiousness. A surprising result was the lack of correlation between efficacy and self-perception of employability.

4.1. PROGRAMME CONTENT FOCUSED ON EMPLOYABILITY

The study supports a very significant positive relationship ($p=0.0002$) between a focus on employability within the programme content and students self-perception of employability. Whilst it is widely acknowledged in the literature, that work-related learning plays a part in improving graduate employability perceptions (Qenani, et al., 2014; De Vos, et al., 2011; Jones & Warnock, 2014; Helyer & Lee, 2014), there is little empirical research relating to how developing awareness of employability skills, through programme content, might have a similar effect.

The results demonstrate that in addition to the opportunity to practice skills, referring to them in lessons and making links to how the programme content will help develop them, improves self-perception in levels of attainment of these skills. Thus, the findings support previous studies, indicating the importance of embedding employability in the curriculum and making explicit links between the curriculum and employability (Artess, Mellors-Bourne and Hooley, 2017; Qenani, et al., 2014).

4.2 CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

Conscientiousness is just one element of the Five-Factor Model of personality; it includes dimensions such as dependability, goal-orientation and being highly organised. Research suggests conscientiousness has stronger links with employability than any other personality factor within the model (Qureshi, et al., 2016; Finch, et al., 2016). The results of the current study support these findings with a significant correlation ($p=0.005$) found between conscientiousness and self-perception of employability. The link is hardly surprising, given that conscientiousness indicates persistence and a propensity to work hard (Jackson, 2014). Conscientiousness was found by Finch et al. (2016), to be the most significant personality trait in graduate selection, and even more important than skills. The implications of this are how do HEI's work to develop conscientiousness if indeed it can be developed.

4.3 EFFICACY

Contrary to the findings of this study, Pool and Qualter (2013) found emotional self-efficacy to be an important predictor of graduate employability (Pool & Qualter, 2013) (Artess, et al., 2017). Self-efficacy is closely linked to self-perception (Turner, 2014) and as such, this was the most surprising of the results. Turner (2014) identified efficacy as a precursor to positive academic performance and resulting employability, advocating a more explicit approach to developing self-efficacy skills. As with conscientiousness, it remains to be identified in the literature how this can be achieved.

4.4. SELF-PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYABILITY

It could be argued, self-perception of skills will not necessarily lead to improved employment prospects; however, Pool and Qualter (2013) suggest individuals make decisions *“based on their level of self-perception as opposed to what is objectively true of their abilities.”* As such, feeling employable can produce motivation and behaviours conducive to successfully attaining employment and other life benefits (Berntson, et al., 2006; Pool & Qualter, 2013).

In conclusions, the results suggest making students aware of employability and the skills associated with it, helps improve their self-perception of the attainment of these skills, which in turn is likely to influence their confidence and motivation in

to achieve employment. In addition, improving the competencies associated with conscientiousness will have the same effect.

4.1. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The data used in the analysis came from a small student group from one degree discipline, studying at a Business School in one geographical location. Therefore, it would be very difficult to generalise the findings to the wider student population. The data used are also self-reporting and dependent on self-perceptions of respondents. The responses might as a result be subject to distortion, (Donovan, et al., 2014).

The study could serve as a pilot for future research across the whole of the Faculty of Business and Management at UWTSD and could be extended to include other post 92 universities in Wales that deliver business programmes.

5. Recommendations

The importance placed on the outcomes of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DHLE) survey means the way in which SBS prepares students for their transition to the workplace is of genuine concern to a variety of stakeholders within the School. Therefore, the results of this study will be of interest to these stakeholders and the following recommendations are made in light of the findings.

Though the study cannot be generalised beyond the BMBA programme, it appears to go some way to legitimising the recent changes made to the programme in making it more employability focused. Thus, it makes a case for similar practices to be adopted more widely across SBS programmes.

It is recommended that an agreed upon list of employability skills are developed and that reference to these skills is consistently applied across module learning outcomes. The result of this will be that students become familiar with the terminology and recognise them as employability skills. Further, links should then be made with taught elements and assessment, and the development of these skills. Marking criteria should be updated to incorporate demonstration of or evidence of the presence of employability skills within practical and written work.

In addition, efforts should be made to understand how to develop conscientiousness within students, if indeed this is possible. At the very least, teaching staff should

impress upon students the impact that dimensions of conscientiousness will have on their academic performance and likelihood of achieving employment success.

6 References

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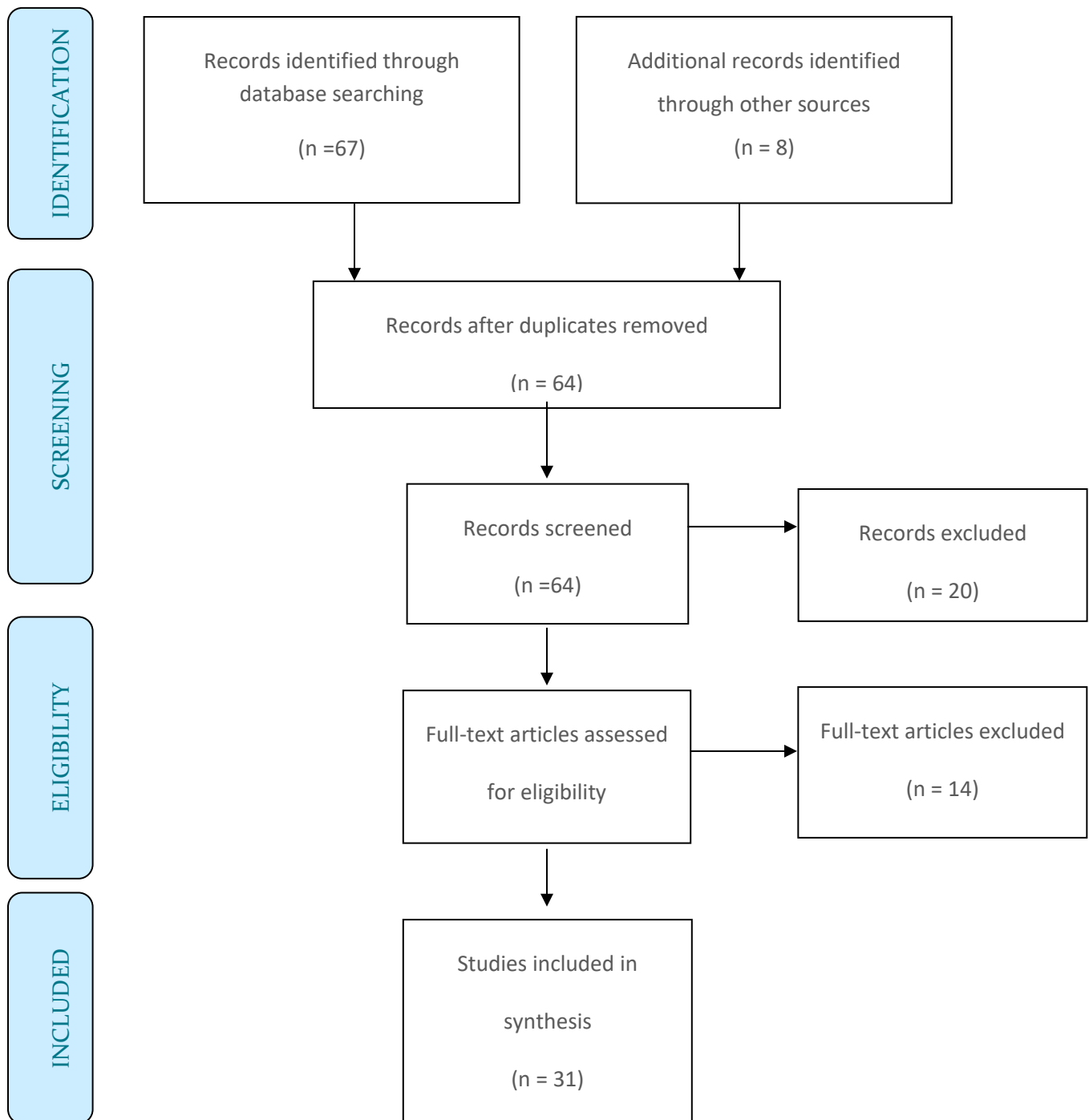
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7. Appendix

APPENDIX 1 – PRISMA FLOW DIAGRAM

Source: (PRISMA, 2009)



APPENDIX 2 – COPY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS

This online survey is being conducted as part of a DBA project. The data collected will be used to investigate student self-perception of employability. The time given to answering the questions is appreciated. Your responses will help support future work in this area of research.

The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Most of the questions require you to state the extent to which you agree/disagree with a statement. For example, 'I believe hard work pays off.'

All data collected will be held confidentially, anonymously and securely. No personal data is asked for or retained. Cookies and or personal data stored by your web browser are not used in this survey.

If you are aged over 18, and would like to take part in the survey, then please give your consent by clicking on the continue button below. If you do not wish to participate in this survey just close the window of your browser and no data will have been recorded.

The next pages contain questions regarding aspects that may affect student self-perception of employability. Please answer in a way that reflects your experiences/perceptions at the moment and answer as truthfully as possible. Please just select the answer that best describes you now.

About the student

Q2: What is your age?

- 18-22
- 23-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50+

Q3: Have you ever been employed earning wages or salary, either full-time or part-time, including self-employment?

- Yes, for 11 months or less
- Yes, for 1 - 2 years
- Yes, for 2-5 years
- Yes, for more than 5 years
- No

Q4: Which best describes your current employment situation?

Unemployed - Not looking for work
Unemployed - Looking for work
Working Part Time
Working Full Time
Self Employed
Volunteering for a charity

Q5: What is the highest level of qualification you hold?

GCSE/O-level (grades D-G)
GCSE/O-level (grades A* - C)
A-Level/AS Level
Higher National Certificate (HNC)
Higher National Diploma (HND)
Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree
No qualifications

Q6: With which ethnic group or groups do you most identify?
(Select up to two options)

White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
White - Irish
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
White - Other (please write in)
Asian - Indian
Asian - Pakistani
Asian - Bangladeshi
Asian - Chinese
Asian - Other (please write in)
Mixed ethnic group - White and Black Caribbean
Mixed ethnic group - White and Black African
Mixed ethnic group - White and Asian
Any other mixed ethnic background (please write in)
Black - African
Black - Caribbean
Black - other (please write in)
Arab
Any other ethnic group (please write in)

Q7. Do you consider yourself to have a disability or learning impairment?

Yes No

Student Characteristics

Q8: Are you currently participating in a project-based event as part of your degree programme?

Yes

No

Don't know

Q9: Please indicate the level to which you believe the statements below describe you.

9.1: I am confident I can learn what is being taught in class this year

9.2: I am confident if I practiced every day, I could develop just about any skill

9.3: Once I have decided to try to accomplish something that is important to me, I keep trying, even if it is harder than I thought

9.4: I am confident I will achieve the goals I set for myself

9.5: When I am struggling to achieve something, I focus on my progress instead of feeling discouraged

9.6: I believe hard work pays off

Q10: Please indicate the level to which you believe the statements below describe you.

10.1: Does a thorough job

10.2: Is a reliable worker

10.3: Perseveres until the task is completed

10.4: Does things efficiently

10.5: Makes plans and follows them through

Employability

Q11: Have your programme team highlighted the importance of employability skills during this semesters teaching?

Yes/No

Q12: Please indicate your agreement with the following statements.

12.1: My current degree programme is very focused on developing employability skills

12.2: The lecturers on the programme make connections between the content and employability skills

12.3: I understand which skills will be valuable to me in the workplace

12.4 My current degree programme allows me to practice the skills which will be important for me in the workplace.

12.5: More focus should be placed on employability in my current degree programme

12.6: The project elements of the programme allow for the development of employability skills

Q13: Rate your confidence in the following skills, 1 being extremely lacking in confidence and 10 being Extremely Confident.

Complex Problem
Solving
Critical Thinking
Creativity
People Management
Coordination with
Others
Emotional
Intelligence
Judgment and
Decision Making
Service Orientation
Negotiation
Cognitive Flexibility

APPENDIX 3: FREQUENCY STATISTICS – STUDENT PROFILE

What is your age?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22	24	68.6	68.6	68.6
	23-29	6	17.1	17.1	85.7
	30-39	3	8.6	8.6	94.3
	40-49	2	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Employment Duration					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, for 11 months or less	8	22.9	22.9	22.9
	Yes, for 1 - 2 years	6	17.1	17.1	40.0
	Yes, for 2-5 years	10	28.6	28.6	68.6
	Yes, for more than 5 years	8	22.9	22.9	91.4
	No	3	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Current Employment Status					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unemployed - Not looking for work	7	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Unemployed - Looking for work	5	14.3	14.3	34.3
	Working Part Time	11	31.4	31.4	65.7
	Working Full Time	5	14.3	14.3	80.0
	Self Employed	5	14.3	14.3	94.3
	Volunteering for a charity	2	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

		Level of Qualification			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GCSE/O-level (grades D-G)	2	5.7	5.7	5.7
	GCSE/O-level (grades A* - C)	4	11.4	11.4	17.1
	A-Level/AS Level	20	57.1	57.1	74.3
	Higher National Certificate (HNC)	2	5.7	5.7	80.0
	Higher National Diploma (HND)	2	5.7	5.7	85.7
	Bachelor's Degree	4	11.4	11.4	97.1
	Master's Degree	1	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

		Ethnicity			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	22	62.9	62.9	62.9
	White - Irish	1	2.9	2.9	65.7
	White - Other	3	8.6	8.6	74.3
	Asian - Bangladeshi	2	5.7	5.7	80.0
	Asian - Chinese	3	8.6	8.6	88.6
	Any Other Mixed Ethnic Background	1	2.9	2.9	91.4
	Black - African	3	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

		Disability			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	6	17.1	17.6	17.6
	No	28	80.0	82.4	100.0
	Total	34	97.1	100.0	

Missing	System	1	2.9		
Total		35	100.0		

Confirm PBL					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	23	65.7	65.7	65.7
	No	9	25.7	25.7	91.4
	Don't know	3	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX 4 –OMISSION OF ITEMS FOR FACTOR ANALYSIS

Efficacy				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Eff - 9.1	39.9429	138.997	.496	.888
Eff - 9.2	39.9429	128.761	.669	.869
Eff - 9.3	40.3429	126.526	.700	.865
Eff - 9.4	40.0571	128.291	.629	.874
Eff - 9.5	40.3429	121.055	.775	.855
Eff - 9.6	41.5429	113.961	.825	.848
Eff - 9.7	38.8000	130.518	.628	.874

Item 9.1: 'I am confident I can learn what is being taught in class this year' was omitted. This variable was thought to have a different focus, i.e. on specifics around the course, rather than the general focus of the rest of the questions. This may account for the lack of correlation.

Conscientiousness				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Con - 10.1	28.2000	50.341	.873	.816
Con - 10.2	27.4000	50.012	.857	.819
Con - 10.3	28.1143	54.634	.735	.850
Con - 10.4	28.1429	52.538	.736	.849
Con - 10.5	27.9143	61.963	.410	.923

Item 10.5: 'Makes plans and follows them through' was omitted. It could not be immediately determined why this question had such a low correlation. Nevertheless, it was removed, as the score was significantly lower.

Programme Content				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Pro - 12.1	18.06	24.055	.676	.849
Pro - 12.2	18.09	22.492	.770	.832
Pro - 12.3	18.00	23.294	.747	.837
Pro - 12.4	18.29	22.387	.887	.815
Pro - 12.5	18.46	28.138	.257	.919
Pro - 12.6	18.40	21.953	.782	.830

Item 12.5: 'More focus should be placed on employability in my current degree programme' was omitted. This question was future focused, unlike the others, which may account for the difference.

Employability Skills				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Emp -13.1	57.9714	181.205	.653	.887
Emp - 13.2	58.1714	182.146	.607	.890
Emp 13.3	57.6571	183.114	.595	.891
Emp - 13.4	57.8857	198.928	.412	.901
Emp - 13.5	57.2571	183.020	.761	.881
Emp - 13.6	57.9143	179.434	.627	.889
Emp - 13.7	57.8571	179.773	.708	.883
Emp -13.8	58.2857	179.151	.670	.886
Emp - 13.9	58.2857	180.739	.719	.883
Emp - 13.10	58.0571	180.820	.721	.883

Item 13.4: 'People Management' was omitted. People management may be considered to be made up of a number of other skills often associated with experience.