Employability: Is it Myth or Rhetoric?

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Abstract

There are suggestions that employers are dissatisfied with the levels of skills graduates have prior to entering employment. There also appears to be some conflict between what various stakeholders require of the Higher Education curriculum and how teaching and learning institutions prepare graduates for 'employment'. The aim of this paper is to identify what employers, students and academic staff perceives employability to mean and the appropriate workplace skills commensurate with it. An empirical analysis was carried out with Business Management graduates, University tutors and local employers to determine which employability skills they believe were important. The results indicate that while employability skills might be identifiable, there was not complete reconciliation between what employers, graduates, and university academics believe they need to provide in order for graduates to gain meaningful employment. The findings suggest that while the stakeholders are concerned that graduates entering employment lack certain employment skills, they still base their decisions to take on graduates upon an historical perspectives of employment skills developed overtime, without perhaps taking into account the future requirements of 'employment', the possible challenges of an increasingly globalised economy and other possible societal changes which could be considerable and as yet, very much unknown. This study attempts to make a contribution to research on employability by identifying the gaps that may exist between employers, graduates and universities and any disparity in understanding of what 'employability' means and which employability skills might take priority.

Keywords: Employability; work; selection criteria; critical theory; higher education; future requirements

Introduction

The concept of employability has gained credit over the years as an important aspect in work practices (Knight & Yorke, 2001; Haug & Tauch, 2001; Cranmer, 2006) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have a vital role to play in terms of employability skills (Fallow & Steven, 2000). Much of the research and stakeholders on employability have supported the view that graduates lack generic workplace skills (Green, 1990; Nabi & Bagley, 1999; Yorke, 2004; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005; Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; BBC News, 8th December 2011), "soft skills", not enough stock of graduates with adequate capability (BBC News, Tuesday, 30 January 2007) and supported that Higher Education Institutions are not doing enough to prepare these

students for future career (Brown, 1989, Clarke, 2008), and to the economy (Mullan, 2004), a consistent theme over decades. This does not mean that, nothing has been done or cannot be done to ensure that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) aid graduates. Browne (2010) asserts that it is now the responsibility of all staff in HEIs to take into account the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of employer organisations with a view to improving graduates' chances of gaining employment. Other studies have revealed some good practices in the development of employment skills and attributes (Dearing Report, 1997; Knight & Yorke, 2001; Yorke, 2001; Harvey et al., 2002).

This article provides an empirical research into what stakeholders understand as employability and the concerns they have about graduates entering the labour market. In particular the article points out the conflict and the reconciliation between what is perceived as employability and the key skills required by employers. It concludes by making recommendations of what HEIs should and should not do.

Theoretical background

While greater emphasis is placed on what graduates have and do not have in the terms of gaining employment, employability needs definition and some explanation. Before we delve into the notion of employability, an understanding of the term 'work', 'no work' and' 'pre work' as noted by Grint (2005) and Watson (2012) is perhaps required. What is perceived as work may be reliant upon a number of incomparable social circumstances under which specific activities are undertaken, construed broadly by those involved. Grint (2005) notes that whether a given activity is experienced as work or leisure or both is neither related to the temporal, spatial and/or cultural condition of existence. In this regard, Grint (2005, p.7) describes work as 'an activity undertaken with our hands which gives objectivity of the world' whilst Watson (2012, p.344) defines work as "the carrying out of tasks which enable people to make a living with the social and economic context in which they are located". Subsequently work can be presented on a continuum, 'work on one side, not paid in the middle and employment on the other side - the not paid leading to 'Black economy'. The whole question of what is work, what is needed for that work, why work and boundaries of work remain central to individual's social and economic settings. Watson (2003, p.41) concludes that "the meaning attached by individuals to their work predisposes them to think and act in particular ways with regard to that work". Therefore by inference, 'employability' is to be questioned and can be seen from many perspectives. Harvey & Knight (2005) view employability as acquiring a job and as developing characteristics of graduates in employment. The increased competition for jobs (CIPD, 2011) has seen a change in emphasis, involving both 'push' and 'pull' factors both from employers and career advisors e.g. in encouraging the young potential job seeker to get involved in voluntary work to 'boost' their CV's. Securing a job is often the crude test of employability, but that can be arbitrary; questions such as; how useful is that work to society, how long will the employment last, how appropriate is the candidate ultimately for that work etc are not always put into the equation in calculating employment, unemployment and/or employability levels.

Traditionally, employment has been associated with payment for services rendered by a contracted worker for designated work they are to do. The term "employment" is used interchangeably with "job" or "getting a job" and this can be problematic to stakeholders. (However, such terms are not robust for every situation where it is commonly used. Individuals

hold different views regarding employment. For example there are people working but not receiving payments (charity workers, mothers, housewives etc) and people being paid for doing nothing or very little (the registered unemployed, shareholders etc). Some international comparisons on unemployment as with most statistics requires careful analysis e.g. in the UK those who are not in paid employment and registered as unemployed account for 21% of 16 to 24 year olds (NEETS, 2009), in Germany 9%, but the measurements are different and include groups in one country but not in another and the same is true of other countries (CBI, 2011).

Definitions of unemployment (ILO, 2007) have evolved to meet political pressures and the changing jobs market over time, but there is always a time lag between what is happening in the 'work' market and agencies such as educational establishments and employers responses to it, perhaps never more so than today? …… *The current job climate in (area) is challenging….few immediate vacancies…….several nearby education institution offer employers a choice of hundreds of graduates…. Even the voluntary sector is getting choosy these days* (extract from an Interview with a local employer).

Employment has always existed but its nature has changed over time. Traditionally survival forced most people to work and/or search for a form of employment. An historical perspective (Dupre & Gaigner, 1996) suggest that during mediaeval times and before including early hunter gatherers segregated 'work' by gender. Generally, men went hunting and women did the childrearing practices and cooking. This maybe simplistic and stereotypical in terms of the division of labour, but it is still the norm in some societies. In more recent times such phenomenon is replaced by more enlightened notions such as the "glass ceiling". With the inventions of machines during and after the Industrial Revolution and a growth in what Marxists would label Capitalism, the nature, expectations, demands and values placed on employment have changed significantly including ever more growing specialist employment. Historical perspectives on what is work and perhaps by inference 'employability' continue. The feudal lord/ serf relationship of the Middle Ages would recognise work to mean self preservation and survival. Employability to F.W. Taylor generations tended (and in many industries and parts of the world) still means hard, physical, mostly repetitive work calling for acceptance of "your lot, and to do as you are told", mostly without question; the usual values associated with the servant master relationship and repetitive Scientific Management Principles (Spender & Kijne, 1996). Employability, in more liberal times has come to encompass more Transformational concepts (Burns, 1978) such as 'team-player', 'Intelligent', 'self-motivated', 'problem solver' etc. What 'employability' will come to emphasise in twenty, thirty years' time who knows?; perhaps more creative thinking, intuition, ability to speak Mandarin, willing to accept robotic 'leadership', and get to 'grips' with almost non- stop change etc, almost certainly transferable skills that are probably not being emphasised at the moment!

The term Employability has to be adaptable enough to encompass those who work for payment (skilled and semi-skilled) and those who work for no payment (volunteers) and/or those pre-prepared to work either financially or voluntary based work placement (Students) and who work across cultures, countries and organisations formally and informally. Employability criteria encompasses knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, skills (Hillage & Pollard, 1998) and psychology that come from a wider meaning of the word "education" and qualification with its connotations of synthesis, evaluation and using the understandings of one scenario to be able to apply it to another, *which might be completely different in the future.* For most people "education" is

equated with academic education and qualifications and tends to be viewed in terms of certificates, diplomas, degrees etc obtained from a learning institution hopefully leading to a career. Asking a number of people what they understand by the term employability, tends to get various answers and emphasis e.g. soft skills, hard economic issues, attitude, abilities and the rest (BBC News, 2007) whilst Yorke & Knight (2004) concur that employability consists of four inter-related components that is understanding, skills, efficacy belief and metacognition (USEM). We argue that the nature of work is changing, the reality of much employment too and thereby what is meant by 'employability' is changing alongside it, often in line with macroeconomic and societal factors and the changing nature of work and employment e.g. temporary contracts, periods of self employment, cooperative associations, volunteer work and many hybrids of the above and others.

Definitions of work/employment and employability (Ball, 2009) and cultural attitudes (Watson, 2012) are followed by regimes of subsequent education and training priorities (Rae, 2007) but they have not always changed in harmony with those speedier alterations in society. For example a current emphasis is on S.T.E.M. Subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) may be a limited vision of possible future requirements and it may lack the broader perspective for the longer run.

Much has been written on employability skills and approaches from an instrumental view; pragmatic and economic; caricatured as "UK Ltd"; examples see (The UK Commission for Employment and Skills, employers survey (UKCES, 2009; CBI, 2011). We argue that the term 'employability' is a social construct which, given time and the speed of change is in danger of becoming relatively meaningless as it is currently understood and any concentration on it for today's purposes in higher education institutions may be simplistic, pragmatic, reductive, quickly out of date and perhaps counterproductive for tomorrow's employment and non employment world. Today's 'employability skills' may be tomorrow's irrelevancies, indeed in a way they may be counter to 'employability ' and even employment requirements.

A brief synopsis of employment history might be as follows; hunter gatherer to farming, to heavy industry, moving more onto services with industries currently moving towards hi- tech, digital, photonics, robotics, nano-technology, genetic engineering and then on to; who knows where? We are already seeing dramatic changes in shorter time periods; mass industrialisation by developing economies such as the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and wholesale changes of the services to 'virtual' trading. The ongoing traditional curriculum is perhaps not fit for purpose with its emphasis on subjects, didacticism and the current so called employability factors. We may need more emphasis on a wider approach which comes from a non employment stance as we see it today. Perhaps one that second guesses tomorrow's skills but broad enough to build on to the current useful practices? Nor are these writers making a plea for the traditional pedagogy of classical languages and aesthete content in the preparation of people for the future but towards some greater balance, which is away from the hard employment skills end of a continuum. This emphasis on work and by association the current "employability" is to be found in most of today's education, socialisation processes and even endemic culture (e.g. a great deal of TV programmes and popular culture is set around employment and its associated topics. The curricula of much of university and further education and school pedagogy are about the current world of work in general. Is this emphasis the best way forward for the longer term?

There are internal and external factors related to employability (Hillage & Pollard, 1998) that is to suggest the skills, competences and psychological states of job applicants being the 'Internal' and the demand in an economy which determine levels of employment at any one time being the 'External'. These are, for the main, out of the hands of any educational establishment no matter what they put into their curriculum and what has been defined as 'the skills employers need' (Mason et al., 2003).

Institutional changes

There has been a series of 'good practice in employability skills development (Dearing Report, 1997; ILO, 2007; HEFCE, 2010) and initiatives to improve employment opportunities for graduates. Government policies over years have been partly adhered to in response to the levels of "dissatisfaction" by employers with whether students leaving full time education are with or without employment skills or adequate qualifications. These most notably around the area of 'soft' social (customer care) and practical employment skills but also everyday basics such as the 3R's (Reading, writing, and arithmetic) - but should these skills take such a high profile in higher education or in HEIs curriculum?

Universities are now conscious of a growing competitiveness agenda partly manifested by tuition fee hikes, National Student Survey (NSS) statistics, current Government policy perhaps towards 'free markets in education' and economic recession with many more applicants "chasing too few jobs". The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD, 2011) is anticipating employers to be shedding workers and not taking new ones on for quite a while. It is not surprising that an emphasis on the ability for students, especially about to leave university, having the 'requisite' skills, attitudes and psychology, (Gedye et al., 2004) and attributes that will enable them to gain employment is rising to the top of university agendas but it remains mainly instrumental in nature. Witness an increasing desire on the part of universities, professional bodies and some students to include within the curriculum, "bolted on" subjects for the purpose of gaining accreditation to bodies such as CIPD, Chartered Management Institution (CMI) and Institute of Marketing, these are increasingly being added to the general core of topics taught. Schools are adding more to their timetables with subjects related to current "employability skills" and similar activities such as entrepreneurial/ business clubs. These writers argue that teaching and learning is being altered and as a result is not necessarily advantageous to the long term needs of UK or even "UK Ltd" or the individual students coming from higher education or to society in general especially in the longer term.

We are not going to compete with the fast developing Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRIC) and the next wave being Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa (CIVETS) nations on price as they are quickly going to catch up on the more value end niche markets which the "expensive" developed world is trying to secure. Our competitive advantage is going to have to come from somewhere new and different, which we do not yet probably know, if it is to come at all. Educators and employers need to take the longer view and one that is not so much about the employment requirements of industry and commerce and its associated psyche of short term-ism (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008) that seems to predominate. Employment skills most cited by organisations are about *their* requirements such as having a "work ethos" and "problem solving abilities", "can work in a team", "understand the business and self manage effectively" etc; much of these, is what society and the individual needs to address in the rest of their lives, not just in

the work place, but it's also a question of emphasis and 'political' priorities (Dearing Report, 1997; Cox & King, 2006).

Accelerating technological advances are altering the emphasis gradually, for example as robotics and automation advance the need for 'team work' and 'decision making' areas often to be seen in job selection criteria, may at the very least change if not totally disappear in some areas. 'Problem solving', another selection criteria is a relative term, as technology advances and is able to solve its own problems and those of decision makers, what should be taught in that area becomes more difficult to decide. To take a basic example; is it necessary for students to be able to solve complicated formulas for investment decisions or inventory control when there is plenty of software that can do it better, as Einstein said" I don't know my telephone number, if I need it I can look it up in the directory"? Just how important is it for us to have the basic concepts and understanding when relatively soon robots with voice recognition etc can answer most things after working them out in a mille second? We are already getting some insights into this with the growth of search engines, data drilling, advanced computer technology (which are at a relatively early stage yet) and artificial intelligence (AI) devices. Will the graduates of tomorrow need to know how to "use numbers effectively", "use language effectively" or even be able to "use I.T. effectively" areas typical in today's selection criteria used with job applicants. These functions might be done better by advanced AI technology robotics some of which might be implanted into humans and/or through the manipulations of our DNA when the human genome has been fully explored and exploited, as it most probably will? The point being, these stated requirements of employers are likely to move on and we could be teaching the 'Sabre Tooth Curriculum' (Abner-Peddiwell, 1939) i.e. out of date and irrelevant content, faster and more pointlessly than ever; do we need to know how a calculator works or to dismantle the TV in order to understand the plot of our favourite soap/programme?

Anecdotal analysis suggests that students often have a short term, view about employability and its associated skills, in many areas not too dissimilar from those of employers and university tutors with the emphasis on job skills and getting started and promotion from formal qualifications. These constructs can become self fulfilling and self perpetuating philosophies along the lines of the paper' The Sabre Tooth Curriculum" Abner-Peddiwell, (1939). They may be falling into the trap of short term employability attraction at the expense of longer term needs and for other world views, such as critical evaluation, the need to question the 'givens', creative thinking and continuous lifelong learning; especially with what might be an increasing rate and scale of change.

Some selection criteria (employability) for traditional graduates' first jobs contained/s reference to leadership skills (Boyatzis, 2007). This might be a useful one to scrutinise in order to demonstrate how emphasis changes (Payne, 1999). Leadership theory has changed fashions over the years (Stogdill, 1974); 1) looking at leaders being made and not born (Hoff, 1999) rather than nurtured e.g. trait theory; 2) to leadership being "taught", to leadership which has to take more account of the situation (Contingency Theory); 3) to Transformational and Transactional Leadership (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Northouse, 2012). There has been, up until recently relatively, little emphasis on leadership as being the opposite side of the coin with 'followership'. 'Leadership' in the future and increasingly in more creative industries may blur the lines between leadership and followership and as time progresses today's construct of 'leadership' is likely to

change again. It may come to be associated with a different emphasis, in Marxist's terms perhaps, one of more equal partnership one that emphasises empathy and listening.

Much is made of the employers' requirements of its future employees but what about the different and in most cases more up to date skills that the young graduate/ leavers bring with them, which is often ignored or not recognised or esteemed. The young have different views which are not necessarily less valuable than those of their elders and employers, indeed it is they who are to grow to be the predominant influencers of their future, employers might benefit by learning to listen to them now.

A Critical Theory perspective on employability emphasises the exploitative nature of the whole notion of 'employability' (Rae, 2007; Ball, 2009). The very term could be said to echo a, servant/ master relationships, one group controlling others/another. Marxist theory on Alienation, False Consciousness and the exploitative aspects of capitalism could be seen as being tied up with the word employability. Our very sense of self identity is challenged and made to conform, for a society biased towards consumerism and materialism, often perhaps, beyond what is sustainable, ethical or wise (Nordhaus & Tobin, 1972). Critical theorists would argue that so many of the questions used to "interrogate" job seekers are to do with establishing that they, (applicants) can be, or are, good producers (and consumers). It can be argued that that there are and should be other priorities; societies should not be prioritising, growth, consumption and profitability at the expense of greater well being for the majority and "saving the planet"; mirroring notions of Bentham's Utilitarianism and spiritual philosophy etc.

At the heart of the term 'employability' is the notion of students being part of a nations' future capital (in the same light as money is used as capital for investment/s). The Dearing Report (1997) emphasised the 'vital role that HEIs play in a modern economy' but there are plenty of other examples. Conversation by economists as well as employers often converge around 'economic growth', any two quarters of no growth becomes a "recession" or worse "depression", almost to the state of seeming like a mindset, a factor not to be questioned. Most popular commentators would have us believe that an absence of economic growth is to be absolutely avoided or discussions about a current economic crises ensues such as the Euro, the banking sector of 2008 and ongoing, after the collapse of Lehman Bros, etc. These seem to have lead to the partial end of what was continuous growth. Marx would explain these aspects as being endemic to capitalism and it repeats cyclically against a background of, oligarchy, then monopoly, exploitation of under classes and leading ultimately to war/s and famine as a consequence of the conflict it helps to perpetuate, this in the midst of a few gripping tightly to their "spoils and vast wealth". The usual counter argument is that free market capitalism leads to most people being able to have goods and services that they wouldn't otherwise be able to afford, as was/is/the case in more artisan economies; besides competition leads to a more efficient use and allocation of resources (Hayek, 1944). Both philosophies have truths and simplifications. It is hard to completely dispute that our priorities of consumption and growth and competitiveness with the consequent reliance on employees to produce and use those consumables and have competitive and productive 'skills', comes at a high price to our individualism, perhaps our planet, world stability and much else (Nordaus & Tobin, 1972). Future criteria around employability may change to reflect societies' changes in priorities, perhaps away from consuming so much and having unsustainable continuous growth and conflict. Yorke (2004, p.422) states that "employability is a complex construct, under which

many aspects are subsumed". We argue that constructs can have the habit of turning to the opposite of their current meaning which are based on the requirements of the time, going on to one that has limited use, eventually to having little or no meaning at all. Today's' definitions of employability will shift. They may move from ones about skills and aptitudes which embrace employers' needs to ones more about of self development and then to unknown territory, such as intuition, and perhaps about non- employment (which is not the same as unemployment). We suspect that questions asked of job applicants today will not be the same as in ten years time or even over a shorter period and as yet we do not know what they will be. In the meantime that leaves us with the unsolved problem of how and what to educate the workforce of the future, not least at under graduate level.

Hypothesis

Traditional categories of skills determining employability (mirrored by this paper's questionnaires) as examples, emphasise the practicalities and didactic nature of who should get a chance of employment, typically; Qualifications, Experience, I.Q, References, Motivation, Personal Circumstances (Rodgers, 1952; Munro-Fraser, 1954). The writers believe that increasingly the nature of employment and thereby employability will reflect growing complexity, ambiguity, conflict handling, and an increasingly paradoxical state of affairs within life and commerce. By way of example we have already seen a growth in using team approaches by firms with employees who also need to possess an ability to handle change and cope often without having a total picture of why. They are likely to be asked to be able to read situations quickly and stay focussed in the midst of even more growing uncertainty this trend may well accelerate.

Much of the current selection process is reactive and rather like reading the road ahead from the car's mirror rather than taking a zero based approach, where we have to argue our case for the direction or argue what is really important for a potential job and how it can best be filled and with what kinds of attributes/people. The employer finds themselves selecting on criteria which is often didactic (Cox & King, 2006) historicist and full of a need for conformity. Even if job interviewers are not necessarily very conformist there's always the concern for what others might think; customers, co workers even employers about who is to be employed. Most employers like conformers, but that's not where creativity and the future lie, most probably. When it comes to setting someone on for employment in the future in whatever form that may turn out to be, today the robust methods for selecting candidates on employability and the selection criteria currently used may not be fit for purpose in the future.

A seasoned job searcher from one of our focus groups said; "I found it important to gain a rapport with interviewers………. providing answers that are original and not rehearsed"….. "to varying degree interviewers have to stray from the, mechanical job selection process in choosing who they think is going to be most suitable: it's not an exact science".

There are over powering psychological factors in 'employability', not least related to an applicants' self esteem; candidates with low self esteem do not fare well in the current employment stakes, (McArdle et al., 2007) nor do those who come from, what is often referred to as a dependency culture. Intrinsic motivation but also extrinsic i.e. what is the "pay off" to employment and is it enough and how much is enough? This has been a factor in youth

unemployment for years, as up until now the need to have employment has not been as pressing as some would maintain especially of those within countries with adequate to generous social support systems. There are and have been disincentives to take employment, especially in cases of poorer pay than that which their State will provide for the unemployed. Some suitable (job wise) young unemployed, many would argue, have had an incentive to appear less than ideal for employment especially in cases where they come from 'dependency' backgrounds and with weak extrinsic motivators such as pay rates that are less than those social security payments provided by their state (Aaron, 2011).

We argue that employability is not one sided and graduates are looking for a package that best suits them which is not always consistent with an employers' brief or work, as we have come to accept it. Candidates' self-perception and commitments (Rothwell et al., 2009), and expectations (Gedye et al., 2004) are but two of the many things to be considered alongside the approaches to employability today.

Methodology

A paradigm of positivism is applied, in as much as it can be seen possible to improve selection processes and inform students of requirements of future employers. The following processes and research uses qualitative surveys. A phenomenological perspective used to ascertain subjective ontology about selection criteria and processes is also being attempted. There is a degree of triangulation using semi structured interviews with local employing organisations and graduates with some aspects of an auto ethnographic approach using the personal diary of a long term job hunter who was fresh from university some months before.

In conjunction with Young (1986) aspects of gap analysis are used to determine what employers think they need by way of employment skills from university leavers. What students perceive employers do need and what university tutors believe employers do need by way of employment skills/attitudes, competencies etc. Two separate questionnaires given to students about to leave university and looking for employment, and to University academic staff and one to employer's organisations and representatives. Some questions set were not the same for employers as graduates and academics on the premise that it would have been rather like asking if they were in "favour of apple pie" and some were perhaps inappropriate or contentious e.g. "be able to write reports", "communicate effectively". Questions set were mainly of a deductive and semi qualitative nature. Answers to the questionnaires were themed to fit categories; 'Academic ability', 'Applicant's circumstances', 'Qualifications' 'Social background', 'Work experience' and 'Attitudes' (Munro-Fraser, 1954).

Limitations

The limitations of sample size, choice and representation (respondents from a limited area in the North West of England) apply. The subjective nature of the questions and how they might be interpreted was partially negated by the one to one surveys with the researchers' presence who were able to clarify statements to try to ensure as much uniformity of interpretation of the questions as possible. A potential flaw in the questionnaire's design was that they did not stipulate which type of employment/job was to be considered .These writers argue that by adding further job categories to the research would have taken away the general nature and its meaning

of 'employability' which was the major constructionist point of interest. The feeling was that it would have led to a refining of a job selection criteria rather than a more qualitative study about the nature of employability as a construct and suitability of graduates, as that much opinion on the topic is subjective, anecdotal, autobiographical and broad by nature the type and level/type of job was not the main consideration. Translating scores of 6 to 10 on Likert Scales as being the same as "important or very important" is arbitrary and by default simplistic. As representative a sample of employers across the macro economy was attempted (manufacturing and industry 22%, services 77% and Government/agencies proportions attempted as far and as near as possible (ONS, statistics BIS Analysis) but as ever there are overlaps between these categories and the people completing the questionnaires to achieve an exact replica would be very difficult given resource constraints' and sample of people available and the time to do it.

Analysis

Fig No1: **% who saw it as "important" or "very important" (6-10 on Likert Scales)**

Themes:Academic ability	Academics (21	Graduates (33	Employers (15
Q1.can write reports	100%	55%	Not asked
Q2.Good verbal com's	100%	79%	Not asked
Q3. Has I.T skills	100%	65%	Not asked
Q.20 Q16 (I.Q.)	57%	64%	60%
Q.21 Q17 (E.I.)	76%	81%	53%
Q.28 Can research	45%	56%	Not asked
Circumstances			
Q7.& Q2 is mobile	71%	48%	20%
Q11 ,3 criminal record	52%	48%	47%
Q.23 Social factors	52%	53%	0%
Q.15.10 Has good refs	95%	81%	87%
Qualifications			
Q6, 1, 12 ,21,22 Qualification grade	75%	48%	27%
Q13 degree type	24%	41%	13%
Q18,14 Prof qualif'n	61%	71%	7%
Q25 'elite' University	24%	19%	7%
Q26 &22 Russel Group	62%	25%	0%
Q27 Broad Education	31%	41%	Not asked
Social Background			
Q16 &11 Age, race etc	44%	42%	7%
Q12.&4.Work Experience	95%	69%	73%
Q19& 15 never worked	75%	61%	27%
Attitude	**Academics (21**	**Graduates (33**	**Employers (15**
Q4 custm care skilled	90%	73%	n/asked
Q5 team player	95%	84%	n/a
Q8 sociable	86%	75%	66%
Q9 &7ambitious	95%	75%	59%
Q10 group worker	33%	9%	7%
Q14 &9 "who you know"	47%	30%	7%
Q22 &18 sporting	29%	3%	0%
Q24&20 Intuitive	52%	81%	13%
Q17&13 Psychometrics	57%	39%	47%

The graphs are derived from the percentages in the tables which are the composite totals of those answering with 6 to 10 on Likert scales questionnaires – believing the statements to be 'important' to 'very important and then correcting a percentage to represent the different sample sizes of the three groups. The themes are slightly different from the Munro Fraser's 5 & IPM 7 Point Plan models. These are meant to reflect the different questions or those not asked of employers. The main theme is employers do not seem to bother that much about academic ability and/or qualifications.
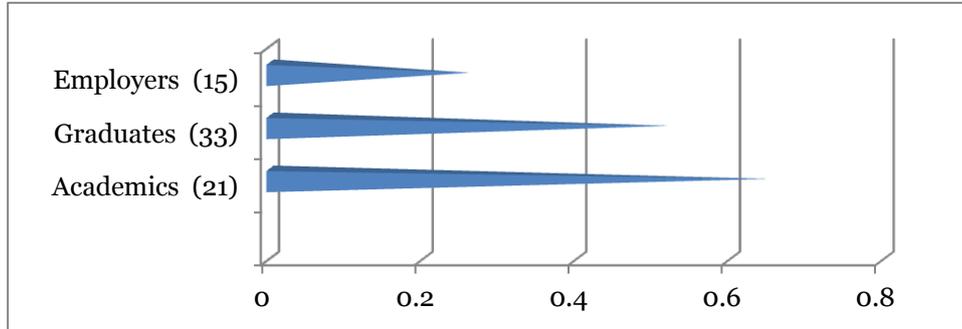
Importance of Academic Ability	
Academics (21)	80%
Graduates (33)	67%
Employers (15)	19%
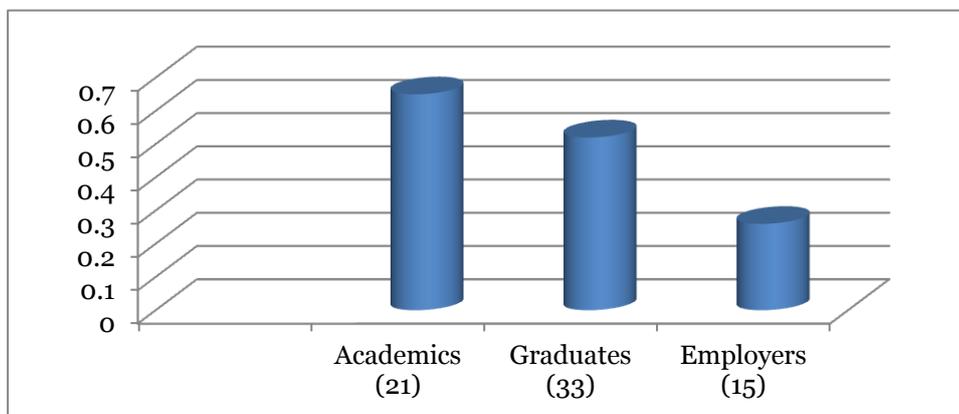
Importance of Circumstances	
Academics (21)	68%
Graduates (33)	58%
Employers (15)	39%
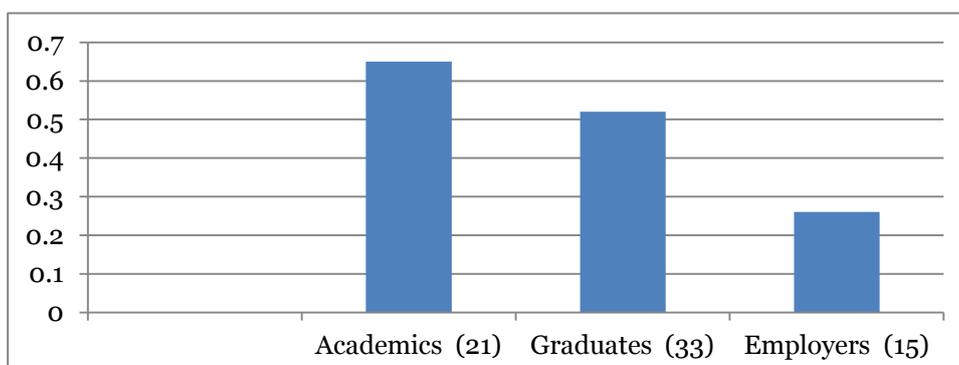
Importance of Qualifications	
Academics (21)	46%
Graduates (33)	41%
Employers (15)	14%

Importance of Social Background	
Academics (21)	71%
Graduates (33)	57%
Employers (15)	36%

Importance of Social Background
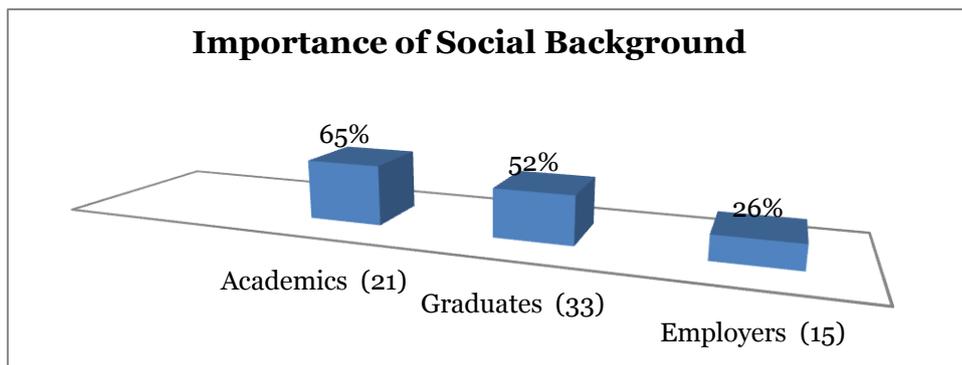
Importance of Attitude	
Academics (21)	65%
Graduates (33)	52%
Employers (15)	26%

Importance of Attitude
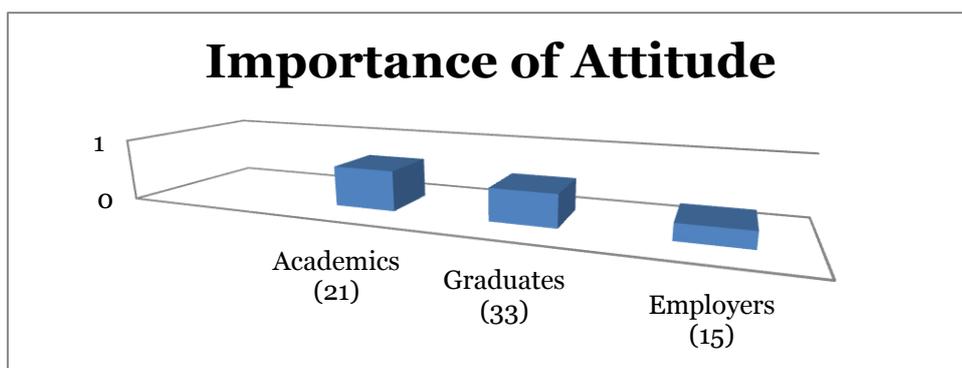
General Findings

From those interviewed and the questions partially or not answered it would appear that these graduates (and we suspect many others) are not generally well versed in psychometric testing or know how important it can be in selection, especially by larger organisations, albeit that our small number of S.M.E. interviewers (employers) of graduates were, at worst, sceptical of such tests and at best thought them to be a useful backup. The figure in the above fig 1 (47%) is not necessarily representative of the big picture, as the sample of employers in number was mainly from SME's within the area studied, these are the least likely to use psychometric testing. Both academic staff and students believed, to varying degrees that race, class, age and sexual orientation(Q16) had a bearing on being chosen, employers, for the main denied (perhaps not unexpectedly) that they were. Employers were less concerned of where a degree came from than what graduates or academic staff believed, from the sample asked, or that an elite university was necessarily advantageous especially for the kinds of jobs that new graduates fitted and that the sample employers had to offer. Graduates tended to rate 'being sociable 'as being more desirable than potential employers, who perhaps have a more hardnosed attitude to selection. As one seasoned graduate job seeker concluded; "Organisations are looking for people they can mould into their individual requirements"….. calling for personal qualities of listening, empathy, those that have a long view, such as recognising the importance of lifelong learning and such related themes, these were highlighted by several questioned. The arguments related to students working towards some kind of professional qualification is not born out here albeit the small sample of employers asked, most thought at this early stage of potential employment, graduates would be gaining those as they worked and gained working experience later. From the sample asked especially of SME employers, they were not too concerned about the level of degree obtained as academics and graduates foresee, or where, again, a degree came from. Employers 'denied' getting a job was much to do with "who you know" as the others, nor did the notion of "intuition" being "sporting" and "emotional intelligence" hold up as much emphasis as the academics and graduates thought. Undergraduate courses having a work related part, such as a job placement was agreed by those interviewed to be important or useful but perhaps surprisingly from the employers asked 'not ever having had a job of some sort' was not necessarily a barrier to first time job engagement for graduates but having had some form of work experience was seen as beneficial. Some graduates may have a disproportionate idea of the value of their specific subject degree, though generally students have a surprisingly modest expectation from graduating. On the whole employers are more concerned about what a degree says in general terms.

Conclusion

'Employability' is a complex and subjective matter and something of a slowly moving construct (Yorke, 2004). The short term instrumental view about interview/job skills is an ongoing debate and has to be balanced with the longer term broader needs of individuals and a quickly and potentially, dramatically changing society at large particularly technology wise. It would not be appropriate from this limited study to suggest wholesale changes to higher education, particularly one that necessarily recommends more emphasis on today's employment skills, thought it might highlight a need to introduce some work element to courses that do not contain one, especially in today's competitive job market. However there are other findings to suggest that work placement alone does not affect chances of gaining employment to such an extent and

in all circumstances; (Rothwell et al., 2009). There is an emphasis on what employers needs are e.g. questions asked in interviews were often around; "What do (graduate) bring that is useful?, "What are you best at?, "Why should we choose you?", "What can you do as an applicant that can help us?" type of selection as opposed to a longer term investment and three way (employers, employees, societal) benefit approach. This is perhaps not surprising given the social and economic conditions but somewhat short term, top down and 'exploitative' these writers believe!

Recommendations

Several interviewed/questioned expressed the usefulness and advantage of courses with a job placement element e.g. associated comments were; "I was in a Catch 22 situation with no experience and the qualifications or some experience and no qualification". Another wrote; "In practice I have always had some reservations about 18-21 years olds studying a 'management' degree." "Some significant work experience prior to or within a degree programme is in my view essential for undergraduates".

Universities may have to manage student expectations better, if a degree is worth anything it is now almost at the level of being a minimum expectation on the part of some employers…. And the concept of qualifications inflation (Barone & Ortiz, 2011) strikes us as valid, a graduate commented "At the start of my university course, the world was my oyster", as I got towards the end and started to hunt for jobs I realised it wasn't and I quickly had to rectify my expectations" this was a repeated theme.

Higher education institutes should not necessarily rush in to providing and or changing their curriculum for the short term advantages of giving students some so called employability skills in the interim. That may be at the expense of long term evaluative skills needed for an unknown future and it also may lead universities to the same charges as those cast at schools, i.e. their curriculums have changed too broadly in order to accommodate so many requirements, they have given a back seat to the fundamentals, such as the three R's? What might be seen as the universities equivalent of the three R's is not easy to say but possibly "analysis, synthesis and evaluation"(Bloom's Taxonomy, 1956) might be good contenders. In the meantime, undergraduates may be better getting to know more about psychometric tests especially if they hope to gain employment in larger organisations.

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