

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA15221

STSM title: Research stay in relation to career learning and development

STSM start and end date: 01/03/2019 to 15/03/2019

Grantee name: Laura Cordes Felby

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

One of the initial findings in the We ReLaTe Action was that teachers should be supported in helping students in acquiring and refining core skills common to academic work. (CA15221, 2018, s. 14) Rethinking how students' academic future can be implemented in their academic present seems even more urgent today, due to massive changes in universities internal structure and external demands.

By extension, the STSM's contribution to the scientific objectives of the Action was to investigate how a continuous and general focus on teaching and learning in relation to Career Centers and employability-theory¹ can give the students and teachers "(...) *the means to succeed and improve according to their specific needs, possibilities and objectives (...)*" (CA15221, 2018, s. 12).

This STSM structures an initial conversation between theory on employability in higher education and two European Universities (Aarhus University, DK and University of Derby,

¹ In the initial application for the STSM "career theory" was used instead of "employability-theory". However 'employability' has been used in the literature review and in the final report, since "*Employability is broadly the predominant driver of careers and employability policy and practice in universities*" (Burke & Christie, 2019, s. 3)

GB) work with supporting university staff with an integration of the employability-perspective in the curriculum. In this context, employability is defined holistically as “(...) an implied commitment to autonomy and self-reliance: of acquiring the skills and know-how to manage and pilot one’s own career.” (Burke & Christie, 2019, s. XI)

The STSM took place at International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

The following research methods was used by the grantee;

1) A small-scale literature review about employability and higher education. The purpose of the literature review was two-fold; on one hand, the purpose was to identify which core academic skills that were articulated as valuable in an employability-framework. On the other hand, the purpose was to map out how employability could be embedded in the curriculum, without losing contact with the subject at hand. In addition, the literature review was used to inform the interview questions.

- The literature review was conducted in the educational database ERIC. The search string was “employability AND higher education AND curriculum”. Only peer-reviewed journal articles after 2010 was included in the research. The title and abstracts was read, and out of the 87 results, nine articles was valued relevant for the STSM and read thoroughly. The nine articles represent a wide range of research of employability in higher education, from different countries, subject disciplinary areas and methodologies.²
- In addition the 2017 report “*Employability – a review of the literature 2012-2016*” (Artes, Hooley, & Mellors-Bourne, 2017) was included, as well as the 2017 book “*Graduate Careers in Context – research, policy and practice*” (Burke & Christie, 2019)

2) Conducting an interview with Tom Staunton, PhD-candidate at iCeGS and career professional employed at University of Derby Career Development Center from 2012-2017, as well as ongoing conversations with Dr. Ciaran Burke, who was the main contact person for the grantee during the STSM at International Center for Guidance Studies.

The objectives of the interview and literature review was as follows:

² See appendix A

- *Objective 1: Discuss whether employability should be a curricular activity or an extra-curricular activity. E.g. embedded or not embedded in the subject matter.*
- *Objective 2: Discuss how Career Centers can act as academic support centers and work with academic staff to integrate employability “techniques” in different organizational and institutional contexts.*
- *Objective 3: Discuss how employability can be integrated in the curriculum.*

Why is this STSM relevant?

According to Burke & Christie (2019) modern higher education “(...) is charged with the responsibility to meet the demands of the knowledge economy and to provide value for money for students. (...)” (s. 1) A consequence of this is that “(...) professional university staff have been increasingly tasked with providing careers and employability services to individual students and graduates, providing practical expertise about graduate careers and the labor market.” (Burke & Christie, 2019, s. 1)

One service who carries this out, is the Career Centers, which in relation to this STSM is considered an academic support center, whose work draws threads across teaching, learning and researching. However, as stated in the “Exploration of desirable centralized models of support”-report from the Action, centralized support is only considered valuable if it is “(...) proactive, evidence-based and proficient, while being conducted in a synergetic and context sensitive manner that provides a collaborative and communicative setting.” (CA15221, 2018, s. 4) How this can be sought out is discussed in the main results.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

Objective 1: Discuss whether employability should be a curricular activity or an extra-curricular³ activity. E.g. embedded or not embedded in the subject matter.

At the University of Derby employability perspective can be embedded as a curricular activity and as an extra-curricular activity. When it is an extra-curricular activity the students have to seek out the activities provided by the Career Center (however they are accessible through the university) – which can range from Careers fairs, individual guidance or CV building. With

³ In this STSM “extra-curricular activities” refers to activities held by Career Centers or stakeholders, that support the students employability

the extra-curricular activities, it is hard to reach all of the students at Derby, as supported by Jameson et. al (2012) and Farenga & Quinland (2015), who states that students only attends activities that are specifically related to their own career plans, which is a “*clearly missed ‘employability’ opportunity*” (Jameson, Strudwick, Bond-Taylor, & Jones, 2012, s. 32). This was also a theme in the interview with Tom Staunton, who said that:

“The classically, I think, for the UK, is [that the students are] doing stuff extra curricular, engaged students, who wants to turn up. However, you are not going to reach all students like that. And (...) sometimes the students will come with a low baseline of what they are expecting. So your students tend to think, that what they need is to understand their options better, to write a better CV (...). They tend not to think, that they need to develop confidence, need to develop self-awareness, develop decision-making ability. So the advantage of establishing it in curriculum is that it can engage people with those sorts of concept, so they become more aware about what their actual needs are. (...) You could say that it could increase somebody’s career literacy.” (from the interview with Tom Staunton)

The latter is a more holistic approach to employability, which is embedding career as part of the academic subject-specific learning (Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker, 2013). Both interviews and literature review shows, that the career- and employability perspective can be integrated in the curriculum in various ways. It can be through a career professional joining the class for 10 minutes to talk about a “career theme” (i.e. CV building, pitching) that isn’t linked to the academic area. Or at other times, the theme is embedded into the academic area. The theme will be developed through a consultancy relationship, between the career professional and the academic (i.e. university professor), and through that work, the theme will contextualized within the academic framework and subject. The literature review highlights that embedding employability into the curriculum has to be done in close relation to the subject at hand and “(...) need to address disciplinary variations” (O’Leary, 2017, s. 99). This was also supported in the interview, where Tom Staunton said that;

“It is really important to think about what the link is between a curriculum area and career learning. If you think about history, you could say that the link between history and career is that studying at a university gives you skills you can use in a

future career. So history allows you to think critically and to be analytical, and write well [...] You could also say, that the subject matter of studying history is a place where people can start thinking about what career actually is. [...] Actually studying history gives you all sorts of material about how the world of work actually is like. [...] It's a very different career learning, than what skills you got in your history class."

However, how university staff addresses and values employability varies across scientific disciplines and stakeholders (Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker, 2013). Speight et al. (2013) finds that, "(...) while theories of life-long or life-wide learning position employability as an outcome of a holistic curriculum embracing both discipline and employability, stakeholders perceive learning for employability as a threat to disciplinary learning." (s. 112) Yet Barrow et al. argues that rather than being a threat to disciplinary and academic values and the acquisition of academic soft skills, an embedment of employability-enhancing practices can increase the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. (Barrow, Behr, Deacy, Mchardy, & Tempest, 2010)

Objective 2: Discuss how Career Centers can act as academic support centers and work with academic staff to integrate employability "techniques" in different organizational and institutional contexts.

There is little mention in the research on how Career Centers can scaffold academic staffs' teaching and help with the integration of employability into the curriculum (Farenga & Quinlan, 2015). O'Leary (2017) highlights, that though the Career Centers seems to be taking a more active role, "*The right balance needs to be struck between the provision of employability-related support and integrating that support into the academic aims and curriculum*" (s. 97). If this balance is not met, academics tend to be reluctant towards an integration of learning for employability, which could be a result e.g. currency of knowledge (Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker, 2013, s. 119).

Speight et al. suggests that there needs to be an open debate between stakeholders on the meaning of employability – i.e. policy, employers, academics, students and Career Centers – before it can be engaged in the curriculum – and in addition, "*There needs to be a reconceptualization of employability and its relationship to the higher education curriculum (...). Employability reconceptualized is preparation for life rather than a specific job, it is about capabilities rather than specific skills, and about being rather than having.*" (Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker,

2013, s. 123) In the interview it was emphasized that there had to be established a consultancy-relationship between career professionals and academics, where the career professionals has an “*understanding of career development and the academic subject*”, and that the employability perspective should be incorporated in close relation to the subject or linked to generic skills.

Nixon & Williams argues, that curriculum change, in regards of embedding employability, is depending on support for staff, if the embedment should be successful (*Nixon & Williams, 2014*), which is supported by Roberts (2015). However, as one career professional argues, there tend to be an understanding among academics, that this support is not given by the Career Center, since they are seen as a “*placing service rather than an education service*” (Farenga & Quinlan, 2015, s. 774)

Nevertheless, there is a great potential for Career Centers to help academics scaffold their teaching to embed the employability-perspective. Stemming from their extensive literature review Artess et al. argues, that Career Centers can offer a wide range of support for academics in embedding employability in to the curriculum; i.e. through career support within the curriculum – with building it into the learning outcome of subject disciplines -, through personal development planning for students, and through “*professional development opportunities for academics to enhance their understanding of career management and employability.*” (*Artess, Hooley, & Mellors-Bourne, 2017, s. 35*)

Objective 3: Discuss how employability can be integrated in the curriculum.

In the Artess review from 2017, a broad list of 34 graduate attributes was presented, ranging from skills, attitudes and behaviors. Of the 34 attributes, eight reflect the skills highlighted in CA15221, as skills that are “central to the higher education activities even beyond the institutional boundaries of universities”, e.g. critical and creative thinking, problem solving, communication, creativity and (work) ethics. These skills are referred to in a wide range of the research studies in the literature review as ‘soft skills’ (Farenga & Quinlan, 2015; Rampersad & Patel, 2014; O’Leary, 2017) or generic (employability) skills (Roberts, 2015; Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker, 2013; Jameson, Strudwick, Bond-Taylor, & Jones, 2012). Studies shows that an inclusion of generic/soft skills in to the curriculum can lead students to broaden their learning outcome, as well as giving them a sense of purpose for what they are studying, and through that strengthen their motivation (Litchfield, Frawley, & Nettleton, 2010). In addition, Roberts (2015) argue, that an inclusion of “*generic skills in curricula has led many academics*

to broaden their learning outcomes and processes beyond content and knowledge transmission to consider the relevance for students and diverse future pathways.” (Roberts, 2015)

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

Due to the length of the report and the STSM, this report presents a limited scope on the literature and the knowledge obtained at the University of Derby.

However, this STSM has illuminated some of the tensions in the field of embedding an employability perspective in higher education. Based on the preliminary STSM application and the results from the stay at iCeGS, a similar interview is going to be conducted at the Career Center at Aarhus University. Comparing how Career Centers support the scaffolding of employability across the different universities will act as cases, which can enlighten advantages, possibilities and challenges in the field, and elaborate further on how the obtained knowledge can support the initial findings in the Action (CA15221, 2018, s. 14). These results could be presented in an international paper or at a conference.

Especially the work with objective 2 carries a great potential for further work, since the STSM showed that it is underexposed in the literature and, to a certain degree, in practice. With the grantees own knowledge from the Career Center at Aarhus University’s work with academics scaffolding an employability- and career learning perspective in their teaching, it could be very interesting to investigate the objective further.

How to balance internal and external demands of employability needs to be investigated further if a successful integration should be made possible. As Speight et al. writes:

“Employability as bolt-on serves those who need it least. Employability as “hidden” within the curriculum serves no one as it cannot be articulated. Employability as consciously integrated is indeed a threat to academic knowledge if construed as skills (as most stakeholders in this research currently understand it). However, employability as capability brings to the fore the interconnectedness of learning for employability and academic learning.” (Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker, 2013, s. 124)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Artess, J. H.-B. (2017). *Employability: A Review of the Literature 2012-2016*. York: Higher Education Academy.
- Barrow, R., Behr, C., Deacy, S., Mchardy, F., & Tempest, K. (2010). Embedding Employability into a Classics Curriculum - The Classical Civilisation Bachelor of Arts programme at Roehampton University. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*(3), s. 339–352.
doi:10.1177/1474022209350294
- Burke, C., & Christie, F. (2019). *Graduate Careers in Context - Research, Policy and Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- CA15221. (2018). *Exploration of desirable centralized models of support*. COST Action CA15221. Hentet fra https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UR6igm74CFA5Kym_Yy5E2avsMUYLLnT4/view
- Farenga, S. A., & Quinlan, K. M. (2015). Classifying university employability strategies: three case studies and implications for practice and research. *Journal of Education and Work*(7), s. 767-787. doi:10.1080/13639080.2015.1064517
- Jameson, J., Strudwick, K., Bond-Taylor, S., & Jones, M. (February 2012). Academic principles versus employability pressures: a modern power struggle or a creative opportunity? *Teaching in Higher Education*(1), s. 25-37.
- Litchfield, A., Frawley, J., & Nettleton, S. (2010). Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes. *Higher Education Research & Development*(5), s. 519-534. doi:10.1080/07294360.2010.502220
- Nixon, S., & Williams, L. (2014). Increasing student engagement through curriculum redesign: deconstructing the 'Apprentice' style of delivery. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*(1), s. 26-33. doi:10.1080/14703297.2013.845535
- O'Leary, S. (2017). Graduates' experiences of, and attitudes towards, the inclusion of employability-related support in undergraduate degree programmes; trends and variations by subject discipline and gender. *Journal of Education and Work*(1), s. 84-105.
doi:10.1080/13639080.2015.1122181
- Rampersad, G., & Patel, F. (2014). Creativity as a desirable graduate attribute: Implications for curriculum design and employability. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, s. 1-11.
- Roberts, P. (2015). Higher education curriculum orientations and the implications for institutional curriculum change. *Teaching in Higher Education*(5), s. 542–555.
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1036731
- Speight, S., Lackovic, N., & Cooker, L. (2013). The Contested Curriculum: Academic learning and employability in higher education. *Tertiary Education and Management*(2), s. 112-126.
doi:10.1080/13583883.2012.756058
- Yorke, M., & Knight, P. (2006). *Employability: Judging and Communicating Achievements. Learning and Employability*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Appendix A

The following articles was included in the literature review:

- Barrow, R., Behr, C., Deacy, S., Mchardy, F., & Tempest, K. (2010). Embedding Employability into a Classics Curriculum - The Classical Civilisation Bachelor of Arts programme at Roehampton University. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*(3), s. 339–352. doi:10.1177/1474022209350294
- Farenga, S. A., & Quinlan, K. M. (2015). Classifying university employability strategies: three case studies and implications for practice and research. *Journal of Education and Work*(7), s. 767-787. doi:10.1080/13639080.2015.1064517
- Jameson, J., Strudwick, K., Bond-Taylor, S., & Jones, M. (February 2012). Academic principles versus employability pressures: a modern power struggle or a creative opportunity? *Teaching in Higher Education*(1), s. 25-37.
- Litchfield, A., Frawley, J., & Nettleton, S. (2010). Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes. *Higher Education Research & Development*(5), s. 519-534. doi:10.1080/07294360.2010.502220
- Nixon, S., & Williams, L. (2014). Increasing student engagement through curriculum redesign: deconstructing the 'Apprentice' style of delivery. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*(1), s. 26-33. doi:10.1080/14703297.2013.845535
- O'Leary, S. (2017). Graduates' experiences of, and attitudes towards, the inclusion of employability-related support in undergraduate degree programmes; trends and variations by subject discipline and gender. *Journal of Education and Work*(1), s. 84-105. doi:10.1080/13639080.2015.1122181
- Rampersad, G., & Patel, F. (2014). Creativity as a desirable graduate attribute: Implications for curriculum design and employability. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, s. 1-11.
- Roberts, P. (2015). Higher education curriculum orientations and the implications for institutional curriculum change. *Teaching in Higher Education*(5), s. 542–555. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1036731
- Speight, S., Lackovic, N., & Cooker, L. (2013). The Contested Curriculum: Academic learning and employability in higher education. *Tertiary Education and Management*(2), s. 112-126. doi:10.1080/13583883.2012.756058