UK Commission for Employment and Skills -
Employability Skills Project

Review of Evidence on Best Practice in
Teaching and Assessing Employability Skills

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SUMMARY

Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use

The term ‘employability skills’ is best understood and most widely used in the employment programme setting where ‘employability’ has been a key theme in supply-side Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) over recent years. However, in this context the term is most often associated with ‘job readiness’ through demonstration of some elements of the personal characteristics inherent in the draft UKCES definition (time keeping, responsibility, basic social interaction etc) but less associated with creative thinking and problem solving skills. The term ‘employability skills’ is also in circulation in other settings, notably Higher Education. In this setting the definitions in use are highly consistent with the UKCES draft definition with the emphasis being explicitly on functioning while in employment rather than merely the ability to credibly search for work.

In several of the other settings the term is not generally used in relation to a specific set of skills but the draft definition overlaps considerably with embedded and formalised elements of the curriculum and associated skills/competency frameworks. In early years settings for instance, there is a significant overlap between the draft definition and the curriculum framework emphasis on personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world; and creative development. In the secondary school curriculum there are synergies between several areas of the curriculum, notably Work Related Learning (WRL) (including enterprise education), key skills and the new vocational pathways. Throughout both primary and secondary school settings the relatively new but widely adopted Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) framework also provides some linkages to the draft UKCES definition.

In FE, aspects of the UKCES employability skills definition are found in mainstream provision, for instance in the Apprenticeships, Advanced Diploma and GNVQ qualifications and curriculum frameworks. In adult education, linkages are, reflecting many elements of the sector, often more diffuse and less formal. However, in the most significant funding and delivery programmes such as Skills for Life and Work Based Learning, there are substantial areas of cross over with the types of skills, behaviours and competencies required.

Evidence of the value of experiential learning

Experiential learning, alongside action learning and other terms for practical hands-on learning styles is widely reported to be beneficial in the literature, especially in relation to aspects of the employability skills definition such as social and teamwork skills, problem solving and creative thinking. There is evidence used to support these assertions in relation to each of the settings covered in the review. However, this evidence is frequently drawn from data collection methods which are imperfect. Nevertheless, without evidence to the contrary, experiential, action learning approaches to employability skills, particularly direct work experience, appear to be valuable in relation to promoting employability skills. In an early years setting these revolve around learning through play.
In a schools setting these approaches revolve around project work (including in simulated environments and micro-enterprise projects), work experience and role-play. In some FE settings, there is an emphasis on making a break with traditional class room learning that might have been experienced at school and using experiential approaches to demonstrate skills deficits as a means of demonstrating their relevance, thereby motivating learners. In HE settings these revolve around role play, games and real world projects and work placements. In employability programmes, simulated interviews and other role play scenarios are frequently used alongside work trials to build a portfolio of relevant experience and knowledge.

**Extent of employability skills in the curriculum**

As discussed above the actual term ‘employability skills’ is used variably in the different settings. However, similar or related skills, behaviours and competencies are promoted through a wide range of curriculum initiatives and components in each of the settings considered. However, in each of the settings there are problematic issues related to the embedding of these skills within established curricula, especially formally integrating these with subject or technical knowledge and skills. So in schools, OFSTED has noted that it is taking time to fully integrate WRL in learning objectives. In Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), transferable and generic employability skills are often seen as secondary to subject specific knowledge, though there are moves toward increasing standardisation of this as opposed to individual academics and departments developing their own approaches based on interest or other individual motivations. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are not present in ALT practices. For instance, in secondary school GCSE classes, learners are frequently asked to contribute their thoughts, to engage in class discussions, to solve problems and to analyse data. In FE colleges work placements have long been a key feature of vocational provision, though they may have in the past not incorporated reflection and an explicit emphasis on some non-technical skills such as teamwork and communication. In Universities, students are often required to take part in debates to give presentations and to challenge theories, using empirical material, developing a capacity for individual thinking. Nevertheless, these skills are often not in and of themselves recognised, taught or assessed outside of the subject related nature of the material covered.

As a result of the emphasis on job search and job entries in UK ALMPs there is often a reticence to consider skills, capabilities and behaviours which might help job seekers and the longer-term unemployed stay and progress in work. Rather the focus is on activation and job search behaviour and ALT practice is often skewed towards job search activities, CV preparation, the completion of application forms and interview presentation and performance rather than longer-term behaviours.

**Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills**

The major pedagogical approaches used in relation to employability-relevant skills do tend toward experiential and action learning methods in all the settings. However, the emphasis on this is often made precisely because it is a departure from more traditional teaching didactic/instructional practices.
In practice, experiential and action learning approaches are mainly used in combination with a range of more traditional styles, where lectures and teacher led elements are focused on covering a set body of knowledge or material and action learning approaches are used to follow this, demonstrating or engaging with theory through actual practice in role-plays, games and even direct work experience. In early years settings this is often hinged around play, in schools it is based on projects and work experience, in FE it is predominantly focused on longer work placements and classroom-based practice. In HE, games and again work placements or group projects might be used to support more traditional practices. However, these pedagogical approaches are often new and not embedded especially in early years, schools and universities, though they are understandably more embedded in vocational FE and adult education. As the employability chapter makes clear, evidence of what strategies are used is often lacking from research on these programmes, but where it is available suggests that role-play and simulations are frequently used in relation to the job application process and there are limited examples of job-specific training programmes, for instance as part of the fair cities pilot programme.

**Evidence of pedagogical success**

The vast majority of sources that report on the subject of successful or desirable pedagogical strategies in relation to employability-relevant skills suggest that **experiential action learning methods** combined with direct work experience are the most effective. However, the evidence that underpins this is often less convincing. That said, there is no indication or evidence to suggest that these conclusions are not correct. Indeed, there is a remarkable consistency across learner groups and settings in recommending experiential and action learning strategies.

The evidence, such that it is, also suggests that action learning approaches are strengthened by an **emphasis on reflection and evaluation** on the part of both learners and teachers. For instance, studies of the introduction of Records of Achievement in secondary schools suggest that this encouraged learners to reflect on their own development and to some extent take responsibility for it. In early years settings there is a robust and increasing body of evidence that effective pedagogy links experiential learning to reflection, with adults encouraging children to extend their thinking through, for example, open questioning techniques. Reflection is also promoted in HE in some examples as a means of integrating action learning with more traditional didactic approaches, with learners encouraged to reflect on the implications of their action learning for their understanding of theoretical knowledge and understanding. In employability programmes, beneficiaries are often encouraged to review their own interview practice, with the help of feedback from employers as a means of targeting ongoing development activity.

There is also an increasing body of literature which focuses on the importance of **context**. In its stronger forms this suggests that employability skills are so driven by physical/social environment that they can only really be understood in the context of individual workplaces and that relevant work experience is the only way to adapt them. Weaker forms of this argument suggest that workplace context is important but that the key features of this can be replicated in classroom settings. Nevertheless, the key finding is that the context in which particular skills are demonstrated is essential to learning and embedding them.
As such, at the minimum teachers and educational organisations need to think about the context-related implications of the skills that they aim to promote.

**Work experience** is obviously promoted as one very important means of direct action learning in an appropriate context.

However, echoing the findings in relation to reflection, several studies suggest that the most effective means of using work experience is to ensure that there are explicit links with the rest of the curriculum and that participants are encouraged to actively use the experience as part of their wider learning.

A range of other factors are also highlighted in the literature as key success factors:

- **Senior level commitment** – to overcome institutional barriers to the adoption of new methods and to harness organisational commitment and resources in support of them.
- **Planning and learning objectives** – the inclusion of employability-relevant skills and behaviours in learning objectives.
- **Universal but differentiated provision** (inc by group and individual) – Several sources confirm the importance of universal exposure to ALT in relation to employability and also that such curriculum content is not seen as being suitable only for low attainers. Nevertheless there is also a need to maintain differentiated provision to cater for the needs of different learners on the one hand and different employment occupations and sectors on the other.
- **High expectations** – Continuing the theme above, several studies suggest that high expectations need to be attached to vocational and employability-relevant learning.
- **Teacher autonomy** – embedding employability skills often necessitates innovation and flexibility to create contexts in which learners can practice team work or problem solving, which in turn requires that teachers and practitioners have a degree of autonomy in their pedagogy.

**Approaches to assessment of employability skills**

The adoption of assessment practices especially tailored to address employability concerns is a key indicator of how embedded these skills are in the curriculum in each setting. An absence or large degrees of variation in the adoption of such practices is an indicator that employability skills are only shallowly embedded or are in the process of becoming embedded but that this process is far from complete. Each setting varies to the extent that assessment practices have been adopted. In the early years, it is now compulsory to undertake assessment, using teacher observation and evidence from nursery schools and parents, against the curriculum framework at the end of the Foundation Stage. In schools, assessment practices for the more informal aspects of WRL vary widely, and OFSTED studies note that this is tied to the extent to which relevant skills are included in learning objectives. In relation to the new vocational pathways, and where informal WRL assessment practices are being adopted, there is an emphasis on new assessment approaches linked to the adoption of new pedagogical strategies.
So where an action learning approach orientation is in place, there tends to be a greater emphasis (as in the vocational GCSEs and Diplomas) on blending assessment techniques to include coursework and evidence portfolios to document the learners’ abilities and skills which might have been demonstrated in a work or project-based environment.

These practices are also embedded in the FE sector, where NVQ assessment might be based on an assessment of skills demonstrated in the workplace. In HE these practices are less widely adopted, as the fragmented practice in relation to employability skills and relevant pedagogical strategies would suggest.

**Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery**

Degrees of employer involvement and engagement in the design and delivery of ALT practice in relation to employability skills varies hugely in relation to different settings and aspects of the curriculum in each. Understandably, employers are not generally involved in curriculum design at early years stage but become progressively more involved throughout the secondary and FE stage. Over the last decade this has increased substantially as several reform initiatives, culminating in the introduction of the new Diplomas have sought to prioritise employer needs, especially as communicated through the Sector Skills Councils. Employer involvement in Adult education varies according to the type of provision but is more central to the Skills for Life and Train to Gain programmes.

**Barriers to promoting employability skills**

In the pre-16 education system common barriers to promoting employability skills revolve around teacher skills, knowledge and confidence and competition from other initiatives and aspects of the curriculum. Though not focused on employability skills per se, research has suggested that strategies to encourage cognitive development in the early years may have been hampered by other pressures to broaden the scope of learning. Equally in secondary schools the number and range of initiatives and programmes is bewildering, especially when issues not covered here such as building and capital modernisation are included, alongside frequent changes in qualifications structures, staffing structures, behaviour and attendance management programmes, and new curricula – e.g. SEAL, citizenship, enterprise and pressure to progressively and continually raise standards across other subjects. In school settings the traditional divide between academic and vocational subjects may have led to employability skills being seen as a concern only for low attainers, leading to them missing from some classes and devalued in others.

In FE institutional rigidities may be barrier to meeting employer demands alongside leaner motivation, for instance in relation to Key Skills, and again the skills and confidence of staff, especially where they have not had experience of working outside of the sector. In HE a major barrier to focusing on pedagogy at all and employability skills in particular is the culture and funding regimes which promote research as the most credit-worthy activity and stress the importance of theoretical work above applied learning. This is particularly the case in ‘old’ research intensive universities. In employment programmes key barriers again revolve around inflexibility, this time often of a regulatory nature. For example the 18 months qualifying period (6 months for some groups) for New Deal support means that motivation, confidence and behaviour all have to be tackled in addition to skills problems.
The mandatory nature of some provision also means that learner motivation can be a challenge. While its effectiveness has been demonstrated, the work first emphasis in welfare to work policy might also mitigate against promoting longer-term skill development.

Summary of ‘Best Practice’ Principles

Although covering a range of countries and sectors, it is possible to identify themes for best practice, even if hard measures of their success are not available. These include:

- **Work-based learning** and **work-related learning** which *both* make an important contribution to the development of employability skills.

- **Experiential / action learning**, with their more informal, flexible, student-centred approaches.

- ‘**Student autonomy**’ and self-directed learning through individualised pathways and activities where students exercise choice and take decisions for themselves, allowing for learning to be tailored/customised to individual context taking account of learning preferences, personal motivations for learning, self-esteem, aspirations, class and gender.

- Promoting reflection on experience and practice – **reflexive learning** – is critical to ensuring integration of knowledge and understanding. A process for demonstrating this, whether through presentations, e-portfolios, or personal development plans, may be related to an overall mapping of employability skills.

- **Multi-interventions** at each stage of engagement, use of multiple models of learning, ‘system’ of measures, taking a holistic approach.

- **Employer engagement and involvement** in design and delivery, including assessment, design, expert panel.

Considerations

- **Plethora of initiatives** to develop skills in this area, whether at national, regional, institutional, department or individual level. These need encouraging, sharing and embedding through a process which engages key stakeholders and elicits their support. This may require clear messages tailored to different groups as to *why* this is important to them and *what* needs to be done, with *how* they can implement and embed in their sector / area being left to them.

- **Research** across sectors using consistent measures to provide a more complete evidence base to measure impact, which will help in changing attitudes and identify more clearly effective approaches.

- Developing **partnership** and **collaboration skills**, to build and sustain closer relationships with stakeholders especially employers, recognizing that there may transferable effective engagement practices from employers.

- **Resources** are needed to embed employability. Without sufficient support goodwill will not be enough. How the funding is given, the degree of flexibility allowed will impact the possibility of flexible provision. Funding institutions may need to understand this.
• **Specific barriers** need to be understood at different levels for different sectors (as well as how they have been overcome where there is best practice) in order to tailor interventions to address these.

• **Development needs** of organisations, their leaders and staff to meet these considerations should be addressed.

Although the sectors in this research are very different as well as their target groups, we identified generic themes which may then need to be translated back into different contexts to engage with different audiences.
1. **Early Years**

**Summary**

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<th>Definitions of employability skills in use</th>
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<td>‘Employability skills’ are not generally referred to in the early years context. However, the UKCES draft definition overlaps with several areas in the six areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum (see section 1.1, p10).</td>
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<th>The value of experiential learning</th>
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<td>Several longitudinal studies emphasise the importance of children learning through exploration and play, with adult support (see Section 1.2, p10). The evidence base in support of the value of experiential learning is more robust for this setting than several of the others covered in this review.</td>
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<th>Employability skills in the curriculum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Understandably, employability skills do not feature in the curriculum <em>per se</em> but the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage curriculum are highly relevant to the draft employability skills definition (see Section 1.3, p11).</td>
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<th>Major pedagogical approaches</th>
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<td><em>Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage</em> establishes what is to be taught during the Early Years and how it is to be taught. This guidance places a strong emphasis on learning by doing, exploration and play (see Section 1.4, p11). However, several studies question the extent to which this is embedded in actual practice.</td>
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<th>Successful practices</th>
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<td>Development in the early years is crucial for later educational attainment and progress (see Section 1.5, p12). This depends on dynamics both within and outside of formal educational provision, which are centred on social inequalities (see p12). However, research on early years interventions to support child development and parenting practices (such as Head Start in the US and childcare/Sure Start in the UK) suggest that this can be effective in reducing inequalities. There are several large-scale and methodologically robust studies which highlight particular pedagogical practices as effective in promoting development in young children. These include play, child exploration and adult encouragement reflection on this, especially through open questioning and engaging in ‘sustained shared thinking’ (see p13).</td>
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<td>Assessment of progress in the six areas of learning are a statutory requirement and are conducted by teachers at the end of Foundation Stage during the reception year. These are informed by ongoing teacher assessment, observations and evidence drawn from parents and pre-school staff (see Section 1.6, p15).</td>
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<th>Employer involvement</th>
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<td>Evidence of employer involvement in provision was not sought.</td>
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<th>Barriers</th>
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<td>The main barriers (see Section 1.8, p15) to the adoption of evidence-based successful teaching practice revolve around practitioner skills and experience as well as curriculum competition. However, the barriers to the success of these practices, even where they are adopted, largely lay outside of formal educational provision in wider social inequalities.</td>
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1.1. Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use

The term ‘employability skills’ is understandably not often used in a pre-school and early years context. However, as in other settings, aspects of the statutory curriculum echo aspects of the UKCES draft definition of employability skills. For instance, since 2002, the National Curriculum has extended to the Foundation Stage (age 3-5 years). The statutory guidance sets out six areas of learning, each of which is in some way relevant to the employability skills definition. It covers not just curriculum content but also teaching practices.

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<th>Box 1: The Six Areas of Learning in the Foundation Stage Curriculum</th>
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<td>• Personal, social and emotional development</td>
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QCA and DfEE (2000), *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*, London: QCA.

1.2. Evidence of the value of experiential learning

Studies which identify successful teaching practices (see below Section 1.5) suggest that the most important means of learning in young children are through play and exploration. Indeed, Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002), review several comparative longitudinal studies which suggest early adoption of more instructional techniques can harm long-term development and lead to serious negative social and behavioural consequences. The routes of some theories of learning in small children are in very early development and the role of exploration and copy-cat behaviour in babies for instance. There is also a strong emphasis in this literature on the importance of experiential learning within interactive relationships between adults and children, where learning is focused on an activity but encouraged by adult support (Pascal and Bartram, 1997).
Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002:28-28) draw attention to Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’ and the importance of extending the learner’s limits of success in any particular task by matching experiential learning with instruction. Here the emphasis is on children learning by doing, but with the limits of what they can do being gradually extended through encouraging the child themselves to reflect on successes and failures and also through adult-provided instruction, feedback and demonstration.

Many of the studies drawn on here are evidence based and some include long-term longitudinal and experimental components. Generally, the evidence base revealed (by Moyles et al. 2002; Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002; McQuail et al, 2003) is of a more robust type than that in the other settings. However, this may be because the requirement to match pedagogical technique to employability relevant skills was relaxed for the early years setting in favour of a more general survey of work on pedagogy.

1.3. **Extent of employability skills in the curriculum**

The whole curriculum at Foundation stage is shaped around the six areas of learning, each of which is relevant to the draft employability skills definition. Active play-based learning is also a central element of the emerging curriculum in Scotland, with the emphasis being on encouraging freedom for children to make choices about the sorts of resources needed to undertake tasks and solve problems. Increasingly this is feeding through to thinking about learning environments and classroom design with an increased emphasis on open spaces, outdoor classrooms and the availability of resources in open displays and cupboards (Bancroft, 2008).

1.4. **Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills**

The benefits of particular teaching approaches and strategies in terms of employability are difficult to demonstrate in relation to the early years because of the large time gap between their deployment and possibilities for economic activity. However, there is a wide-ranging literature on the impacts of pre-school/early years factors and later educational attainment and cognitive development which is discussed very briefly below (Section 1.5).

Throughout the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* (QCA and DfEE, 2000) there is a strong emphasis on learning by doing, exploration and play. Indeed the guidance suggests that play is engaged as the primary pedagogical strategy. However, several large-scale studies undertaken for the DfES on early years and pre-school pedagogy (see Section 1.5) question the extent to which any of this is universally applied. In particular they question whether practitioners are able, on a widespread basis, to reflect on some of their ‘beliefs’ about pedagogical practices and relate them to underpinning theories and evidence (Moyles, et al. 2002). None of these practices however are related to employability skills per se and therefore must be assumed to develop as a product of cognitive, personal, social and educational development as a whole.
1.5. Evidence of pedagogical success

Nunn et al (2007:36-9) review a range of studies that link dynamics in the early years to later prospects for social mobility. These factors fall into several categories: innate characteristics, family structure and home environment and experiences of pre-school care.

For instance, Leon Feinstein’s research (e.g. 2003) shows that by the time children have started school it may already be too late to reverse inequalities which arise from family background and which continue to shape individual development even after formal schooling begins. To demonstrate this latter point Feinstein famously compares test scores for children from high and low socio-economic groups. He finds that over time those from a high socio-economic background converge toward the top of the attainment spectrum by age 10, even where they begin toward the bottom at 22 months. Correspondingly, those from lower socio-economic groups converge toward the bottom of the attainment spectrum by age 10 even where they begin toward the top at 22 months. This evidence demonstrates that whatever happens in the education system, attainment and educational progress are in large part driven by factors in the family and home environment. Regardless of whether this is influenced by innate or environmental factors the weight of evidence suggests that persistent inequalities in development and progression are in place before schooling starts (e.g. Murphy, 2006; Savage and Egerton, 1997).

Authors such as Waldfogel (2004) and Esping-Andersen (2004) suggest that more equal pre-school experiences may help to combat the development of inequality in attainment in the early years. What the weight of this research suggests is that in highly unequal societies, like the UK, patterns of educational attainment are set by factors other than teaching strategies. Research on the Head Start programme in the US and which informed the Sure Start programme here suggests that targeted early intervention can contain the emergence of this inequality in attainment and development (Sylva et al., 2004:2-4).

Several studies appear to support the emphasis in the curriculum guidance on active learning through play and problem solving. For instance, a study undertaken by Walsh (2008) in Northern Ireland using multiple methods including a quasi-experimental element showed that play-based teaching practice enhanced physical social and emotional well-being in comparison with more traditional teaching methods. It also showed that children in a play-based setting were also more disposed to learning and had a better cognitive experience, with the author concluding that these findings suggested that play-based approaches provided a better basis for transition to more formal schooling.

Despite this a large scale study funded by the then DfES found that while subscribing to this belief in the efficacy of play, many practitioners could not cite the theoretical basis for their opinion and play did not constitute a major theme in their observations of early years practice (Moyles et al, 2002). This study is one of three large-scale and in some cases ongoing studies of pedagogy in pre-school and early years settings funded by the DfES which
summarise the state of international evidence and undertake substantial empirical research.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) (Syla et al. 2003) study was based on a longitudinal examination of the development of a national sample of children initially between the ages of 3 and 7 and continues to track the development now up to the age of 14 (Sammons et al., 2007).

The study has investigated the background of these children in terms of parents and home environment as well as the type and nature of their pre-school education setting and a group of children who were largely based at home during this time.

The study found that attending pre-school care enhanced children’s development, with an earlier start and full-time provision being associated with better outcomes. The study found that higher qualified staff, blended approaches to teaching which mixed traditional teaching with ‘sustained shared thinking’ between adults and children were effective. Sustained shared thinking refers to adults being engaged in instructional dialogue with children, taking advantage of child-initiated interaction to extend thinking and discussions often using explorative open questions to stimulate thinking and reflection on activity based learning. The study also found that integrating an explicit focus on social development with other forms of development was key to success.

The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL) study (Moyles et al. 2002) included a substantial literature review on effective pedagogical strategies. Drawing on a wide range of studies and research projects, this review identified the following common findings:

- Relationships between very young children and adults are crucial to their cognitive development. This means that the quality of interaction between teachers and children is of crucial importance and needs to encourage children to feel valued and safe.

- Teacher-child interaction needs to be based on questioning and feedback, with children asked and encouraged to explore questions and feedback given to help them to develop these skills.

- A balance is needed between child and teacher-led activities, with children encouraged to take on incrementally more challenging developmental tasks.

- Where children are being encouraged to develop thinking skills as opposed to having their knowledge tested, they should be asked open rather than closed questions, stimulating their ability to hypothesise and reason.

- Different authors suggest different approaches with some emphasising directing children to undertake group discussions, exploring findings and ideas within structured activities while others emphasise children’s choice over activities.
This large-scale study on teacher practices was focused not on demonstrating effectiveness through measuring the impact on children’s development but on drawing on the collective expertise of professional practitioners, classroom observations and relating these to pedagogical theory in order to develop a series of widely supported statements relating to principles, practices and professional dimensions. The former approach was not just avoided but explicitly rejected as inappropriate as the result of an evidenced-based judgement of the difficulties associated with measuring children’s development and the impact of interactions with adults. As such, the basis of judgements on effectiveness was expert opinion and observation.

This resulted in the production of 129 Key Statements which set out what the study concluded were effective principles, practices and professional dimensions. While these are too numerous to replicate here the emphasis is clearly on nurturing individual development, recognising individual learning styles, engaging and motivating learning, allowing and encouraging autonomy, choice and independent reasoning, encouraging a respectful and orderly environment and engaging in reflection on teaching practice, using evidence and observation as well as child-feedback.

The third study focused on child development rather than teacher practice (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002). This identified four aspects of effective practice:

- **Adult-child verbal interactions** – here the study found that effective practice was based on ‘sustained shared thinking’ and extending child-initiated interaction. The use of open ended questions to explore ideas and curriculum content were found to be effective but this required a strong grasp of the curriculum material by teachers. Where children engaged in higher level cognitive tasks and were able to sustain such shared thinking this was as much the product of the child’s home environment as it was that in the educational setting;

- **Differentiation and formative assessment** – here formative feedback to children while engaged in activities was found to be effective as was the engagement of parents in designing individualised learning plans;

- **Parental partnership and the home education environment** – effective practices embedded in the home environment were able to lead to child development even in the absence of effective pedagogy in the formal learning environment. This was highly socially dependent and largely present in middle-class households. While it could be reproduced in less affluent areas, this required a more directive and proactive approach on the part of teaching staff.

- **Discipline and adult support in talking through conflicts** – the research found that effective learning environments were underpinned by an ethos of discipline where children are encouraged to be assertive but that they also discuss and rationalise conflict situations, supported by adults. Instructions simply to ‘stop’ or distraction strategies were found to be generally less effective than follow-up of episodes of bad behaviour with discussion and rationalisation.
This study recommended that traditional instructional ‘teaching’ should be blended with more open ended activities within learning environments.

Several of these studies draw on the major international approaches to pedagogical practice in the early years. These include the US High/Scope approach, the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches all of which have slightly different emphases for instance in relation to the role of play and adult-imposed structure.

Bennett (2000) reviews these and suggests that they all share some core aspects such as a broad approach to social and personal development as opposed to educational progression/attainment, a rejection of pure didactic instructional approaches, respect for individual identity and development and the importance of a positive and engaging relationship between teacher and child. Another review of successful pedagogical practices throughout Europe, North America and Australasia confirmed a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of play and first-hand exploratory approaches to learning (McQuail et al, 2003).

1.6. Approaches to assessment of employability skills

At the end of the Foundation Stage all children are assessed against the six areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. This is undertaken via a Foundation Profile Assessment which replaced the Foundation Baseline Assessment in 2002. The profile is derived from ongoing teacher assessment and observation throughout the final year of the Foundation stage, which is most usually undertaken in the Reception year of Primary School. Contributions also come from parents and teacher/professionals in pre-school settings that the child attended prior to Reception (e.g. pre-school nursery) (for more detail see the QCA website\(^1\)). Attainment and development are assessed against a series of scales for each sub-section of the six learning areas (QCA and DfES, 2003: Ch2).

1.7. Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery

No evidence was sought or collected of employer involvement in this stage of education.

1.8. Barriers to promoting employability skills

The major studies of early years pedagogy identify several barriers to the adoption of successful ALT practices, though, as above, these are not directly linked to employability skills. These barriers cover several of those that frequently emerge in other settings and can be summarised as teacher confidence and skills and ability in particular to reflect and theorise what they perceive to be effective teaching practice. The role of play was thought to be poorly understood.

These studies also suggest that there are important institutional/systemic barriers. For instance Moyles et al. (2002) suggest that pressure to cover a

\(^1\) [http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/5828_handbook_web_2.pdf](http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/5828_handbook_web_2.pdf) accessed 15/06/08.
certain amount of curriculum material, as introduced by the national literacy strategy, may have distracted teachers’ attention from encouraging the more time consuming approaches to teaching practice – such as encouraging exploration, questioning and open dialogue – that are thought to be effective. As such the breadth of learning was impinging on the depth of cognitive development possible.

In addition, a wide array of institutional and social factors are clearly important in shaping the potential to adopt successful practices. For instance, some of those countries that have what are widely thought to be the most successful in terms of their early years provision, have much more equal societies, earlier and more equal access to childcare and longer-term and more stable policy emphasis on government support for early years settings (McQual et al., 2003).

1.9. **Resources available to promote employability skills**

SureStart publishes a range of research, toolkits and guidance to support pre-school and early years services such as Children Centres: [http://www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/).


Foundation stage resources on Teachernet are at: [http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/foundation/fsresources/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/foundation/fsresources/).

Resources and guidance on the DCSF Standards site is available at: [http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/foundation_stage_practitioners/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/foundation_stage_practitioners/).

Learning and Teaching Scotland Early Years page: [http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears).

1.10. **Case studies of good practice**

1.10.1. **Case Studies from the SPEEL Project**

Two examples of activities are provided. The first described a group of reception class children from a maintained infant school washing and pegging out clothes in the playground. This was part of a daily, free choice, ‘workshop’ session within which children are free to move between the classrooms and the playground. There was a wide range of easily accessible resources organised within ‘workshop’ areas indoors for children to choose to work with and take outdoors if they wish. The practitioner had set out soapy water, rinsing water, pegs, clothes and a washing line. Other activities, such as painting and water play, had also been set up in the playground.

The practitioner was an experienced, qualified teacher who worked outside during the morning free choice workshop sessions on alternate weeks. She moved between groups of children involved in a variety of activities.

A second example is provided in a pre-school playgroup where children were encouraged to visit the ‘Milk Bar’, a table set up and ‘open’ for one and a half
hours once during the session activities period. The number of chairs around the table was restricted to three plus one for the adult, so that a high adult to child ratio could be maintained. One practitioner sat at the Milk Bar table for the whole time, interacting solely, with each child at the table. The set up of the Milk Bar was changed periodically according to the theme or topic and to reinforce learning through other activities, but the routine remains the same.

The children were encouraged to keep a look out for a free space at the Milk Bar and sometimes there were called when there was a space free. Each child had a card with her/his full name written in large letters for him/her to identify – the name of the child’s key worker, dietary needs, special needs and key words were also written on the back of the card. The practitioner decided how much support was needed for each child to be able to identify his/her own name card, for example by offering a small selection to the child or by discussing the sounds of the letters in the names. The children kept their name card in front of them while they were at the Milk Bar. The children were asked what they would like to eat and drink and which colour cup they would like to use; the practitioner encouraged the children to say rather than point to their choices. The practitioner’s aim was to encourage and seek ‘natural’ conversation whilst the children were at the Milk Bar. The practitioner was also the playgroup manager, a post which she had held for 12 years. She has a Pre-school Practice Diploma.

This Case Study is adapted from

A wide range of additional case studies are available at:
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/casestudies/
http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/Curriculum_guidance_for_the_found
ation_stage_COMPLETE.pdf
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/casestudies/
http://www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/
http://www.ioe.ac.uk/cdl/eppe/pdfs/eppe_brief2503.pdf
http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_6035.aspx
2. Schools

Summary

Definitions of employability skills in use
The term ‘employability skills’ is not used in a way that links to a specific set of skills and competencies in the schools system. However, a wide range of curriculum components and material are strongly linked to the draft UKCES definition. These include Work Related Learning (see Box, p21), enterprise education (Box 3, p 20) Key Skills (Box, p20), Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (Box, p21) and the new Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (Box, p22).

The value of experiential learning
The value of experiential learning is frequently asserted in advice and guidance offered to teachers and other practitioners, though the evidence base that these assertions are underpinned by is often unclear (see Section 1.2, p23).

Employability skills in the curriculum
Employability skills have been promoted through several waves of curriculum reform (see Section 2.3, p233), especially in the secondary school context and are central to the current reform process (see p23) which has introduced a much stronger vocational element, both through infusing mainstream teaching with work related content and through the introduction and strengthening of discrete vocational pathways in the form of applied GCSEs (p25) and the new Diplomas (p25).

Major pedagogical approaches
The major pedagogical approaches associated with employability-relevant (see Section 1.4, p26) skills are hinged around learning by doing and learner reflection and some of the new vocational curriculum components have much more extensive and structured work experience elements (see below – successful practices). However, the adoption of these practices is currently variable (see below – barriers).

Successful practices
Several practices are suggested in the literature to be successful in relation to relevant skills promotion. These include:

- ensuring that these skills have sufficient status in the curriculum and are included in learning objectives and lesson planning (see Section 2.5.1, p27);
- encouraging learner reflection on progress, development and experience (see Section 2.5.2, p28);
- using careers guidance and advice to build awareness of vocational options and the skills/qualifications required for these (see Section 2.5.4, p29);
- the replication of some of the key contextual features of workplace settings and the use of direct work experience (see Section 2.5.5, p29);
- action learning methods based on practical experience, problem solving and reflection (see Section 2.5.6, p31);
- there is some debate over the extent to which employability skills require educational approaches dedicated to adaption to existing social structures and power relations or the adoption of skills and competencies which might challenge these (see Section 2.5.9, p33);
- teaching linked to employability skills should be based on high standards and expectations and should not be seen as only relevant to low attainers (see Section 2.5.10, p34);
- teaching practice should acknowledge the importance of individual learning styles (see Section 2.5.11, p34);
some degree of teacher autonomy is required to develop new and innovative methods which are engaging and motivate learners (see Section 2.5.12, p34).

**Assessment practices**
Approaches to assessment (see Section 2.6, p36) vary between the different programmes but there is a common emphasis on mixed approaches and a transition to less test-based and more coursework, experiential methods (such as portfolios). Where these are a formal aspect of the relevant qualification they are undertaken but there are concerns that where they are more informal and mainstreamed through other subject areas, there are weaknesses in relevant assessment practice.

**Employer involvement**
There are a wide range of institutional mechanisms for employer involvement (see Section 2.7 p37), ranging from employer interest group lobbying through organisations like the CBI to the role of the Sector Skills Councils in designing the new vocational pathways and involvement in individual schools.

**Barriers**
The major barriers (see Section 2.8, p38) associated with the promotion of employability skills and adoption of relevant pedagogical techniques relate to staff skills, confidence and knowledge of the world of work, institutional support and competition in the curriculum.

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### 2.1. Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use

In the schools sector, the term employability skills has not in the past been widely used in anything other than a general term; that is, it has not been used to refer to a codified or specific set of skills, competencies and attributes. However, those skills, competencies and attributes that commonly appear in definitions of employability skills, including the UKCES one (HEDRA, 2008), do appear as components of ‘life skills’, ‘core skills’, ‘key skills’, ‘enterprise skills’ (Turner, 2002; Powney et al, 2000:5-7; Brockington, 2002) and ‘work related learning’.

Key skills have been a formal part of the secondary curriculum since the mid 1990s but were revised in the form of the new Key Skills Qualification, introduced in 2000 and revised in 2004/5. The description of skills, attributes and behaviours included in the two-part definition (see Box ) is closely related to the draft employability skills definition and the government and related skills bodies described them as “a range of essential generic skills that underpin success in education, employment, lifelong learning and personal development” (DfES, QCA and LSC, 2005:6). This list of key skills was incorporated into the Key Stage 4 (age 14-16) curriculum from 2000/01 onwards and is also available to adult learners.
Box 2: Key Skills Definition

Main Key Skills
- Communication
- Application of number
- Information technology

Wider Key Skills
- Working with others
- Improving own learning and performance
- Problem solving


In 2002 the high profile Davies Review of enterprise education in schools reported that while there was not necessarily any hostility to enterprise education in the school system, it was not well embedded in schools and relatively few pupils experienced it. Davies therefore recommended a step change in the mainstreaming of enterprise education and set out a definition of enterprise capability (see Error! Reference source not found.). This definition now underpins mandatory enterprise education in schools and is used by OFSTED in assessing the extent and quality of this education. The definition shares many common features and is consistent with the draft employability skills definition such as the emphasis on flexibility and adaptability, personal responsibility, organisational ability and management of information. The emphasis in the Davies Enterprise definition (Davies, 2002:17) on understanding and evaluating risk also tallies closely with the emphasis in the draft employability definition on critical and analytical thinking, problem solving and decision making. The Davies definition also embraced two further categories of financial literacy and economic and business understanding, which again, while not fully aligned, are entirely consistent with the draft employability skills definition.

Box 3: Howard Davies’ Definition of Enterprise Capability

“The capability to handle uncertainty and respond positively to change, to create and implement new ideas and ways of doing things, to make reasonable risk/reward assessments and act upon them in one’s personal and working life. This depends on the development of the following:
- Knowledge and understanding of concepts - organisation, innovation, risk, change;
- Skills - decision-making (particularly under conditions of uncertainty), personal and social, leadership, risk management, presentational;
- Attitudes - self-reliance, open-mindedness, respect for evidence, pragmatism, commitment to making a difference.

(Davies, 2002:17).
The Davies review also recommended that existing Work Related Learning (WRL) provision should have a sharper focus on employment, business and the economy.
The revised WRL curriculum, which is a statutory obligation in Key Stage 4 and assessed by OFSTED again promotes a range of experiences which are supportive of the draft employability skills definition, though it is not hinged around specific skills or competencies. Rather it is structured according to a variety of development experiences and activities that pupils are expected to undertake (see Box ).

**Box 4: Work related learning framework**

1. Recognise, develop and apply their skills for enterprise and employability.
2. Use their experience of work, including work experience and part time jobs to extend their understanding of work.
3. Learn about the way business operates, working roles and conditions, and rights and responsibilities in the work place.
4. Develop awareness of the extent and diversity of local and national employment opportunities.
5. Relate their own abilities, attributes and achievements to career intentions and make informed choices based on an understanding of the alternatives.
6. Undertake tasks and activities set in work contexts.
7. Learn from contact with personnel from different employment sectors.
8. Learn from experience (direct or indirect) of working practices and environments.
9. Engage with ideas, challenges and applications from the business world.

QCA (2003), *Work Related Learning for all at Key Stage 4*, London: QCA.

Additionally, the Secondary National Strategy promoted the adoption of teaching approaches which recognise the emotional and social aspects of learning. It put forward a series of Pilots in 54 schools which aimed to implement such approaches. These were intended to promote a range of skills which are consistent with the draft employability skills definition (see Box ).

**Box 5: Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning**

- Self-awareness – including knowing and valuing oneself, and understanding feelings.
- Management of feelings – focusing on improving the management and expression of emotions.
- Motivation – including developing persistence, resilience and optimism and developing strategies to reach goals.
- Empathy – to promote understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others and valuing and supporting others.
- Forming positive relationships – building, maintaining and improving relationships with others.

Reform of the 11-19 phase of the National Curriculum has included the development of a new framework of personal, learning and thinking skills.

These skills are expanded under a six part framework (see Box 6) which is also consistent with the employability skills framework and which will form part of the new 14-16 Diplomas.

**Box 6: QCA Framework for Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills**

- Independent enquirers
- Creative thinkers
- Reflective learners
- Team workers
- Self Managers
- Effective participators


### 2.2. Evidence of the value of experiential learning

Experiential learning is less relevant to the schools than other settings in the sense of recognising the benefits of prior unaccredited learning because of continuous progression and assessment throughout the primary and secondary system. However, there are aspects of promoting and accrediting relevant experiential learning within the secondary school system. For instance, as part of the Key Skills Qualification, the assessment framework involves the collection of a portfolio of evidence that aspects of assessment criteria have been met, with this coming from “any area of their life be it study, employment or leisure activities” (QCA Website guidance[^2]). Likewise, the guidance on teaching enterprise skills suggests that action learning and learning by doing are the most appropriate way of teaching these skills (Teachernet website on enterprise learning and teaching[^3]). In its evaluation of enterprise learning at Key Stage 4, OFSTED was clear that the best enterprise learning and teaching allowed pupils to explore their own ideas in action oriented projects:

> “Enterprise learning requires pupils to have opportunities to interact with each other, make decisions, take risks, realise that there is not one right answer to a problem and evaluate outcomes”. (OFSTED, 2004:12).

A common failing highlighted by OFSTED was an ‘over-directed’ approach, failing to allow this degree of learner autonomy and self-management.


However, at the same time the report also makes clear that action learning needs to take place in a clear and well understood (by learner and teacher) framework of learning needs (2004:14). Similarly, the National Evaluation of Enterprise Pathfinders notes that experiential learning and teaching styles tend to be favoured over more traditional didactic methods in promoting enterprise skills, with a portfolio of evidence approach to recognising progress and assessment often being adopted (CEI, 2006:23-5). However, the OFSTED report does not actually reveal the evidence that underpins the judgements made in this regard and it is unclear exactly what type of evidence (either qualitative data drawn from respondent interviews or analysis of progress records) underpins the judgements made in the CEI report.

WRL also involves significant experiential components. The guidance for schools on implementing WRL is categorical that:

“direct experience of the world of work is an essential part of learning through work...work experience provides an opportunity for students to practise their skills in a new setting and recognise the use of skills in that setting. Work-related activities significantly enhance the capability of the curriculum to develop transferable skills.” (QCA, 2003:8-9).

The 2020 Review Group recommended that experiential learning become a core part of the primary curriculum. This was set within the context of individualising learning and was intended first to allow an individual focus by recognising the state of knowledge of individuals, including from out of school experiences, and second to facilitate more active learning styles, based on experimentation and reflection (2020 Review Group). This approach is certainly valued and recognised in the design of the new Diploma qualifications suggesting that employers value the emphasis on learning by doing.

2.3. Extent of employability skills in the curriculum

In the past, aspects of Life and Core skills such as decision making, personal responsibility and career planning were confined to the relatively narrow slot in the school curriculum occupied by Personal and Social Development or Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) (Powney et al., 2000:16). However, in successive waves of reform WRL has been introduced and then augmented to have a larger role within the formal curriculum leading to the introduction of significant new vocational pathways, particularly at the secondary – 11 to 16 – stage of schooling.

WRL was introduced into the secondary school curriculum as a product of the Education Act 1996. The Act enabled schools to deselect two National Curriculum subjects in order to promote work related learning programmes (see for instance, QCA, 1999; OFSTED, 2001). In order to do this, schools needed to notify the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and ensure that all students undertook a careers education interview prior to joining the work related learning programme to ensure their suitability.
WRL programmes were to provide participating pupils with a first hand experience of work in preparation for leaving school, though the nature of this requirement changed in 2003 when a statutory obligation meant that it was compulsory for all pupils. The new duty varied the types of provision with the intention being that WRL was integrated throughout the curriculum. The wider engagement with WRL is made up of three elements; learning through work, learning about work and learning for work alongside some teaching of basic economic understanding (previously Economic Awareness and Understanding) (QCA, 2003). WRL has been further strengthened with the introduction of the new Diplomas and with the publication of several new reports and guidance documents (e.g. DCSF, 2008).

Enterprise education was introduced into the curriculum following the 2002 Davies Review. Enterprise education fits within the WRL component of the National Curriculum and is therefore a statutory obligation and assessed as part of OFSTED inspections. Personal, Social and Health Education is a core part of the National Curriculum and is supported by the Healthy Schools Programme. PHSE is taught throughout both primary and secondary schools and includes some aspects of careers guidance and awareness.

The introduction of the Citizenship curriculum (see Teachernet\(^4\)) has both strengthened and conflicted with these other initiatives, with implications for employability skills. On the one hand, there are strong links between the citizenship curriculum and aspects of WRL, PSHE and enterprise education. On the other, citizenship has often competed for the same ground in the curriculum/timetable. There are also frequent misunderstandings about the nature of citizenship, with OFSTED making clear that citizenship takes a societal level perspective on issues such as bullying, fair treatment and how the economy works whereas enterprise education, work related learning and PHSE would seek to explore these issues at the individual level, such as conflict resolution, how to relate to other people from different backgrounds or what the implications of economic change are for skills needs or business opportunities (OFSTED, 2005b).

Research and inspection evidence gathered by OFSTED tends to suggest that the approach, extent and quality of provision in relation to enterprise, PHSE and Citizenship are all highly variable.

Employability skills are also a core part of the current programme of reform of the 11-19 phase of the curriculum. They are embedded for instance in the introduction of new vocational qualifications such as Young Apprenticeships (YA), the new vocational GCSEs and the Diploma system as well as new approaches to learning which cut across other subject areas such as the Social, Emotional and Behavioural skills programmes which operate at both primary and secondary level.

The Young Apprenticeship scheme was introduced in 2004 to provide a new vocational route at Key Stage 4. Where pupils choose this option YA takes up 2 days a week of their curriculum time and involves time in school, FE colleges, training providers and in work experience. The programme is targeted in the main at well motivated students of average or above average ability (OFSTED, 2006a).

As part of the process of expanding the vocational element of the curriculum, eight new vocational GCSEs were launched in 2002, covering art and design, business, engineering, health and social care, information and communications technology, manufacturing, applied science and leisure and tourism. With the exception of applied science these subjects mirror the seven former GNVQ areas, though the aim was to increase the quality of the qualifications, making them commensurate with that of academic qualifications. These qualifications are called ‘double awards’ and have the same weight as two GCSEs in terms of curriculum time and assessment weighting DfES, 2003; OFSTED, 2003).

The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme began with pilots in 500 primary schools and then 54 secondary schools. Over the piloting period the programme was renamed and expanded and is now beginning to be used widely in both primary and secondary schools. There is considerable variation in approach, but the programme is intended to promote the integration of these skills in the mainstream curriculum (Hallam et al, 2006; Smith et al., 2007; OFSTED, 2007a).

The new Diploma qualifications will expand on the work undertaken in the Young Apprentices programme. Like Young Apprenticeships, Diplomas are delivered by a combination of schools, local colleges, training partners and universities. Diplomas are being phased in from 2008 (in creative media, construction and the built environment, engineering, information technology, society, health and development) through to 2013 when all young people will have the right to learn through a Diploma in a much wider range of subject areas. The idea behind diplomas is that employers in particular industrial sectors help to design the curriculum and teaching approach to meet their needs. The Diploma route is also intended to be flexible, potentially leading to further vocational training in an Apprenticeship or Advanced Diploma in Year 12 or to more traditional FE and then HE (DCSF, 2007). There are two types of diploma at KS4 – the Foundation and Higher Diploma, with the latter being GCSE A-C grade equivalent. Personal, Learning and Thinking skills are part of the skill set that Diplomas aim to embed alongside applied or traditional maths, English and ICT.

Employability skills are also recognised as important internationally and several countries have fashioned significant policy responses (Commission on the Skills of the American Population, 1990; Mcglaughlin, 1992; Conference Board of Canada, 2000). For instance, in both Canada and the United States significant ‘School to Work’ programmes have been introduced (and subsequently curtailed) to promote work readiness and acquisition of work related skills among young people in secondary education (see Thiessen and Looker, 1999; Neumark, 2004; 2006; Krumbotz and Worthington, 1999).
Though detailed evidence of micro-level teaching strategies was hard to uncover from these programmes they tended to replicate the mix of activities in UK schools which exist under the banners of work experience, WRL and key skills and enterprise skills. The emphasis was very much on infusing the entire curriculum with this approach rather than isolating work related teaching and learning in separate vocational classes, though there is some evidence to suggest that this was only imperfectly applied due to a combination of factors including time, resources and teacher confidence (Yan, Goubeaud and Fry, 1994:10-11). However, some of these US programmes had a more formal streaming element which matches more technical job or industry specific training (‘Tech-prep’) to individual students (Krumbotz and Worthington, 1999:317).

2.4. **Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills**

In each of the new qualifications, curriculum elements and teaching approaches discussed above (WRL, enterprise education, PSHE, Citizenship education, vocational GCSEs, Young Apprenticeships and the new Diplomas) there is a general emphasis on moving away from traditional teaching approaches to more action learning and experiential methods. For instance, the Young Apprenticeship programme relies on a combination of study based with an employer, college or training provider, 50 days of work experience and traditional mainstream teaching in the core areas of the National Curriculum (Teachernet). Some of the new Diplomas have the option of an extended project. An example drawn from QCA research with the Diploma pathfinders includes students working with a nearby University to undertake a water sampling project using the University’s laboratory and IT facilities and taking ‘masterclasses’ to enable them to do this (QCA, 2007a:92).

There is also an additional emphasis on both social and interpersonal skills, team working and finally on reflective practice to support learners benefiting from experience and particularly problem solving exercises. Work experience is embedded in several programmes, whether as part of enterprise education within the school (e.g. setting up a small business or ‘dummy’ small business) or in external work experience of varying extent (e.g. from an expectation of a short 1 week placement to the more substantial placements which form part of the Young Apprenticeship scheme and new vocational GCSEs). However, in most cases this does not mean an end to more traditional methods and mixed teaching practices appear to be the norm. Moreover, generally, OFSTED research and inspections have tended to show that the take up of new teaching methods is slowed as a result of teacher resistance or a lack of confidence and relevant skills. Where OFSTED have been critical of the implementation of these initiatives these criticisms have tended to hinge around a failure to or unevenness in the application of the key success factors highlighted in the Section 2.5.

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[www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/vocationaloffer/Apprenticeships/youngapprenticeships/](www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/vocationaloffer/Apprenticeships/youngapprenticeships/)
2.5. **Evidence of pedagogical success**

The discussion below synthesises the findings of the studies included in the review, identifying what appear to be the most successful aspects of the pedagogical approach to teaching employability skills.

2.5.1. **Curriculum status and lesson planning**

Cotton draws on the 42 studies she reviews to suggest that “employability skills are best learned when they are included among instructional goals and explicitly taught” (2001:7) – that is they are a formal and clear aspect of the curriculum and subject to formal teaching. Cotton draws the contrast with alternative perceptions that such skills will (a) simply be acquired as part of the process of other learning or (b) are inherent and therefore individuals either have them or do not. She suggests that teaching practice needs to explicitly recognise that these skills are being promoted and learners need to understand what skills they are trying to develop and why.

OFTSED also report on successful teaching practices in a range of related subjects and consistently report that this begins with well planned and structured lessons aligned to clear learning aims and outcomes (e.g. OFSTED, 2005:7). In their first report on the impact of the introduction of WRL, OFSTED found:

“The most effective programmes had a clear rationale, well defined criteria for admission, and were seen as an integral part of the school’s curriculum. They were astutely planned and thoroughly monitored…” (OFSTED, 2001:3).

Reports on enterprise education suggest that this works best where it is mainstreamed throughout other subject areas rather than being seen as discrete activity. They also report that significant organisational commitment needs to be given to this curriculum area, including by senior managers who promote a coherent and common understanding of what is to be learned. They also suggest that organisational resources, for instance to broker external expertise and to facilitate relevant continuing professional development among teaching staff must be marshalled in support of enterprise education (OFSTED, 2004; 2005a).

OFTSED’s evaluation of pilot schemes to promote social, emotional and behavioural skills in around 50 secondary schools again found that this approach needed to be mainstreamed throughout the curriculum and led by a senior manager at the school rather than being seen as a ‘bolt-on’ to PSHE lessons in the judgement of inspectors informed by multiple visits incorporating pupil observation and supported by survey evidence of pupil’s perceptions (OFSTED, 2007). The evaluations of SEAL in both primary and secondary schools also suggested that senior level commitment and a ‘whole school’ approach were key success factors, alongside school culture change (Hallam et al., 2006; Smith et al. 2007) and used large-scale mixed methods to unearth these results.
2.5.2. Learner reflection

Guile and Griffiths (2001) consider the use of work experience as a learning process either in the form of a component of general education as in the UK or in the more formalised vocational education streams in (for instance) Germany. They argue that traditionally it is simply hoped that learners will benefit developmentally from work experience, most often simply by communicating with and copying more experienced others.

However, they argue that increasingly a new approach will be needed which stresses the reflexive capacity of individuals undertaking work experience to be able to understand, question and resituate knowledge and experience collected through work experience. The nub of this approach is that work experience is structured and integrated into the mainstream curriculum, for instance by encouraging participants to reflect on what they learn, its significance and how it might (and might not) be applied to new situations – thereby moving toward the type of independent boundary crossing skills that they perceive to be demanded by the modern flexible and complex work environment. In their review of the UK work-related curriculum Saunders et al. (1997:155) also find that the benefits of work experience are “too often lost” because this sort of structure and integration is not in place. They suggest that “using this experience to ‘research’ some question about how the business operates could add a powerful educational dimension”. This kind of reflective integration of work experience activities and school-based learning has been identified as a key successful feature of the Young Apprenticeships scheme (OFSTED, 2006a:7). The CBI also endorses this approach and suggests some practical approaches to encouraging reflection on work experience (CBI, 2007).

Saunders et al. (1997:157) also considered the impact of initiatives such as Compact and National Records of Achievement were successful in encouraging a greater commitment to learning and generating increased interest in continuing education, including resolving earlier problems of poor commitment and truanting. This appeared to result from their emphasis on individualised goal setting and making learning more relevant to longer-term aspirations. One-to-one contact to establish such goal setting and planning appeared to be particularly effective in Years 9 and 10.

Reflection is also a central element in metacognition approaches to learning and teaching. These stress that reflection and theorising causality are essential components of problem-solving. These approaches stress the importance of selection of problem-solving strategies and reflection on the success of these in order to inform decisions about whether to continue or to try a different approach and have apparently (DfES, 2004a) been shown to be among the more successful pedagogical practices.

2.5.3. Motivation

Research reviewed by the then DfES (2004a:21) suggests that motivation is an important determinant of learning and is linked to ‘self theories’ about the nature of intelligence and learning.
They draw attention to the work of Dweck which suggests that learners may either have a view of intelligence as a fixed capacity or as an incremental, variable and malleable capacity. Whereas the former group may lack motivation because they see intelligence as fixed and constrained, the latter may commit to learning and development because they readily see the benefits that can accrue from it. DFES comment:

“In order for pupils to be effective learners they need to have a belief that they can become better learners. To encourage this, teachers need to reinforce effort and risk-taking in learning rather than neatness. The ‘self system’ is fundamental because it underpins motivation”.

The report goes on to suggest that crucial to motivation and retention is explaining the relevance of learning. It then cites research comparing the activities of children at different schools where one group was able to retain their knowledge and apply it outside of the classroom because theories and models were developed through problem-solving approaches. Rodd (2001) also supports this notion arguing that establishing relevance and motivation are crucial to the process of ‘learning to learn’

2.5.4. Careers guidance and awareness

Saunders et al. (1997:159) also looked at the impact of careers guidance and planning and suggested that this is associated with enhanced personal planning and decision making skills as well as longer-term outcomes such as continuing in education beyond age 16 and satisfaction with career decisions. OFSTED echo these findings, suggesting that the introduction of work related learning often resulted in improved careers guidance and the structuring of work-experience opportunities (OFSTED, 2001:6). They suggest that key features of successful careers education and guidance are a mixture of in-school and out of school activities, professional delivery and an individualised focus.

In a study on the factors which impact on individual capacity for social mobility, Nunn et al. (2008) are clear that a lack of first knowledge and awareness of occupational structures and qualification/skill requirements and second knowledge of how to develop effective strategies to work towards these act as key barriers to achieving aspirations.

2.5.5. Context matters

Cotton (2000:9) summarises the findings of several studies that suggest that the context of learning matters:

“In school settings, employability skills are best learned when classrooms replicate key features of real work settings and student tasks approximate those performed by workers in those settings”

Here the emphasis is on contextualised learning rather than abstracted learning in artificial or unrealistic classroom settings. This reflects the increasingly widely held acknowledgement that the context for learning is crucial to its success (Guile and Griffiths, 2001:117; Giddens and Stazs, 1999; Stazs, 2001).
One important implication of this is that direct work experience is a highly successful approach to teaching employability skills. Some studies distinguish between different types of employability skill, with the research evidence suggesting that some are learned better in one setting than another. For instance, Krahn et al. (2002:283-5) undertook a survey with high school students in Alberta, Canada\(^6\) which suggested that they thought that school was the most likely site for learning analytical and basic academic skills while direct work experience was a better setting for learning people and social skills. Work related attitudes such as discipline and time management were thought to be acquired in both settings.

However, what Krahn et al. also note is that there is variation in these results for different respondent groups such as between males and females (286). Thiessen and Looker’s study also distinguished between different types of transferable or employability skill and suggested that traditional school settings may not be as effective at encouraging people and social skills, team work and problem solving as well as practical applications of numeracy skills (1999:235).

Stazs et al. (1993) offer something of a corrective to the emphasis on direct work experience as being the only way to teach employability skills while maintaining the focus that context is very important in defining the precise mix of skills required for a task. They undertook extensive ethnographic research inside US high school classrooms and suggested that so long as classroom conditions replicate the key features of workplaces where specific skills will be used, they can be equally well learned in school settings.

Examples here might include developing practice tasks that develop mathematical skills and techniques in the context of real world workplace problems (DfES, 2004b:20).

However, Stazs' later socio-cultural work (e.g.2001) suggests that the identification of skills needs in the first place is such a context driven activity that the usual survey approach to defining employer need is inappropriate; leading to an emphasis on selection of broad lists of skills, aspects of knowledge and behaviour which are difficult to translate into teaching and learning practice. Without more detailed information about how tasks are performed, about the nature of the workers involved and how they relate to the business process and each other, she argues it is difficult to identify precisely what skills are needed. Indeed she also suggests that employers may not be well placed to provide such information because of demonstrable biases acting on their responses, such as tendencies to report normatively what skills mixes should be necessary in order to perform a particular task, or they contextualise their responses in relation to what they aspire their workplace to be rather than purely what is needed currently (Stasz, 1997).

\(^6\) It is worth noting that the majority of the sample population were planning to undertake further learning and approximately a third were planning to progress to university.
In the UK context Saunders and colleagues (1997:157) distance themselves from the pure socio-cultural perspective, suggesting that while direct work experience is important, what is most important is that experiential learning from this is linked to reflexive subject-based and other in-school learning.

2.5.6. Learning by doing

Studies, toolkits, and guidance on teaching employability skills frequently emphasise the importance of experiential, action learning approaches. However, the concrete identification of research evidence to underpin these assertions is less easy to find. In many cases such evidence that is reported is heavily reliant on qualitative pupil or teacher feedback but is not necessarily corroborated by any other form of measurable evidence (e.g. Powney et al. 2000; Krahn et al., 2002; Jones and Iredale, 2006).

Other studies, especially in the context of American School to Work programmes highlight potential differences in the assessment of skill acquisition between employers on the one hand and students themselves on the other (Thiessen and Looker, 1999). A review of the evidence on the impact of the work-related curriculum for the then Department for Employment and Education was critical of both the general lack of evidence and the quality of studies that did attempt to address this issue (Saunders et al., 1997:152-3). Their findings suggested that multi-method approaches to evaluating the impact of employment-related skills were necessary.

Saunders et al. also concluded that the evidence suggested that while experiential learning was an effective method of developing employability skills this needed to be contextualised by prior conceptual development, particularly around a basic understanding of the nature of the world of work (155). They also found that students enjoy experiential and action learning, though they are cautious over whether this should be seen as more effective in increasing motivation than other teaching methods. Indeed they argue that “good teaching involves a judicious use of a range of teaching and learning strategies, with fitness for purpose being a prime consideration” (157).

Another study that did employ large scale mixed-methods (including quantitative survey, qualitative focus groups with multiple groups of respondents, skill tests, tracked monitoring of assessment data and a comparative quasi-experimental component) was Thiessen and Looker’s substantial (1999) study of the Nova Scotia pilot School to Work Programme. This programme was delivered to students in year 11 and 12 (what would be currently considered FE in the UK) and included both a smaller in-school component and a more substantial work experience component with assessment being undertaken for both and employers involved in the assessment for the work experience component (1999:29-34). Several general summary conclusions were drawn from this study, including that the relevance of material, especially the in-school components had to be clearly and fully explained to gain student ‘buy in’ and encouraging learning by doing. Reflection appeared to be associated with stronger outcomes especially in relation to the in-school component where workshop style teaching was regarded as more successful than lecture style teaching (239).
However, this evaluation found relatively little evidence that the programme had substantial positive effects on participants’ ‘transferable skills’, though one possible reason for this is that the vast majority of the participants in the programme and comparator respondent groups had undertaken work experience of one form or another outside the programme. Evidence from the US School to Work programme was also disappointing (Neumark, 2004; Neumark and Rothstein, 2006), though some commentators suggest that this was due to a lack of time for the programme to become embedded and design issues (Yan et al. 2004; Bailey et al. 2000).

In the UK, OFSTED have produced several reports looking at the success of teaching strategies in relation to PSHE, Enterprise education and WRL. In PSHE, which covers many highly relevant topics, they suggest that provision is best where it allows group work, role play and class discussion to facilitate exploration of ideas and deeper understanding (OFTSED, 2005; 2007). Successive reports on enterprise education have emphasised the importance of pupils being given the freedom and autonomy to explore their own solutions to problems and promoting reflection on learning, including decision making (OFSTED, 2004). They also stress the importance of matching in-school activities to extra-curricular activities and access to external expertise, including undertaking actual enterprise tasks through setting up and running micro-businesses (OFSTED, 2005a).

The evaluation of Enterprise Pathfinders (CEI, 2006:33-4) reports generally positive results from the introduction or strengthening of enterprise education particularly through the use of experiential learning. Cited benefits included improved attendance, attitudes toward learning and behaviour as well as confidence and improved academic work and attainment. The types of skill acquired through this learning were project management, team working and communication as well as more purely enterprise related skills such as business management, costing and marketing. These findings appear to be drawn in the main part from qualitative interviews with both students and teachers with these sources offering some degree of triangulation.

2.5.7. Scaffolding

The practice of scaffolding is widely reported to be an effective pedagogical strategy relevant to employability-type skills (e.g. Cotton, 2000). This is taken from the work of Vyotsky who identified a ‘zone of proximal’ development which is the learning which is just beyond the reach of the existing capacity of the learner. Here teachers and practitioners can encourage development by supporting thinking to a slightly higher level (DfES, 2004c:21). The idea is that learners learn by doing with some additional support in getting beyond their existing capacity until such point that the support can be withdrawn. Though this technique is widely referred to and promoted evidence of its success was not present in any of the studies reviewed.

2.5.8. Group Work

In a resource aimed to assist teaching in secondary schools the then DfES (2004) reviewed a range of evidence which suggested that group work is an important pedagogical approach in and of its own right.
The document cites a wide range of research evidence that suggests that small group working is beneficial because it generates independence, promotes social and empathetic skills and strengthens group working dynamics (leadership, collective responsibility, mutual support). However, it is also suggested that such methods can be counterproductive unless appropriate pre-conditions are in place such as mutual respect and inclusivity or if free-rider problems are not checked.

2.5.9. Democratic versus indoctrinational approaches

Cotton suggests that the finding from her review indicates that “democratic instructional approaches are superior to indoctrinational approaches for imparting employability skills to students and workers” (Cotton, 2001:8). Here the emphasis is on open, experiential and reflexive learning styles with individuals and groups encouraged to explore and challenge ideas themselves, arriving at decisions and perspectives through debate and questioning rather than receiving knowledge or ‘facts’ passively. This has implications for teachers who should be regarded as ‘facilitators and coaches…[and] expert practioners’ rather than didactic lecturers or “order givers” (Cotton, 2001:10).

Gregson and Betis (1991) explore the debate between ‘democratic’ and ‘indoctrinational’ teaching approaches further. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Dewey on the one hand and Prosser and Sneddon on the other, they posit a debate between the political and social purpose which underpins assessment, learning and teaching as historically and socially situated processes. Here democratic education takes on Dewey’s focus not just on learning by doing but on challenging the prevailing order, subjecting it to critique and potentially adapting skills to change or mediate it. Here, the purpose of education or training is transformative and enabling, seeking to imbue participants with not just adaptability to external contexts and pressures but the capacity to change these, becoming the agent of transformation and change. By contrast, they critique indoctrinational approaches as being concerned to instruct students in the values and attitudes which promote the existing order, leaving power relations largely unchanged. This purpose is defined largely in relation to “transmitting work values and attitudes necessary for a compliant workforce” (Gregson and Bettis, 1991:3). They thus suggest that there is a tension between teaching different aspects of employability skills with values, attitudes and behaviours which support the existing order (time management, responsibility etc) potentially contrasting with those that are transformative such as problem solving, critical thinking and innovation. While they argue strongly in favour of democratic methods and suggest that this is in the interests of transforming workplaces and organisational structures with pay-offs in relation to productivity, they do not actually cite any empirical evidence to support these claims. Neither do they prove that the tension between the two types of skill that they mention cannot be resolved.

Facer et al. (2001) examine the logic and discourse around the promotion of ICT skills and are critical of the treatment of these skills in the UK school curriculum as one more area of study where students must engage with a predetermined definition of ‘key skills’. 
Rather, they argue in favour of a more democratic approach, recognising and encouraging engagement with ‘youth culture’ in which technology plays a major part, with young people acting as producers and active consumers. Writing in 2001 they emphasise the role of computer games or the production of web content but their central arguments would apply equally well to more contemporary phenomena such as technology enhanced social networking (e.g. Bebo, Facebook, Myspace) and user-created media dissemination (e.g. YouTube).

In essence they argue in favour of an open approach to learning and assessment, encouraging creativity rather than being solely concerned to map achievements against pre-determined and closed lists of skills and assessment criteria.

2.5.10. Standards and streaming

“A key feature of classes that successfully teach employability skills is that instructors hold and communicate high expectations for the learning and behaviour of their students whether or not the overall culture of the school holds high expectations for them” (Cotton, 2001:9) – this is an exhortation not to regard employability skills as lower-order alternatives to academic learning.

The message conveyed by the author is not to reinforce the messages that might be conveyed by ability-based streaming in other subjects that expectations are lower for some students than others. Others have also emphasised that these skills and behaviours need to be developed throughout the ability range rather than just the preserve of low-attainment students or contributing to gender-stereotyping (Overtoom, 2000; 2020 Review Group, 2006). Saunders et al. (1997) go further than this arguing that:

“the case for the work related curriculum as a particularly suitable kind or mode of provision for lower-attainers and disaffected young people – potential or actual drop-outs from ‘lifelong-learning’ – has not yet been proven”.

2.5.11. Individualised learning

“In classes whose participants acquire a high level of employability skills, learning is individualised – determined by students’ learning needs and styles rather than being regulated by textbooks or rigid lesson plans” (Cotton, 1999:10). This is a continuation of the argument in favour of experiential and contextualised learning, noting that learning is most successful when conducted on an ‘as needed’ basis when relevant challenges and problems are faced. The implications of different learning styles are that mixed methods need to be used to ensure that there are opportunities for all to progress (DfES, 2004b:19).

2.5.12. Teacher autonomy

Cotton reports that “teachers are most successful when they have considerable autonomy in establishing curriculum, classroom design and instructional approach” (2000:11). She notes that such freedom has often resulted from the lack of management attention given to vocational education in US schools, enabling teachers to be more innovative and experimental.
Stasz et al (1993) also report that teacher autonomy is important to enable them to bring to bear personal experience, real life examples and innovative teaching methods that allow the curriculum content to be matched to the motivational triggers and contextual experiences of individual students and groups. On the other hand, as Stasz et al. also note and OFSTED’s research on PSHE (2005; 2007), Enterprise (OFSTED, 2005b; 2004) and Citizenship (2005b; 2006) education confirm that autonomy can be counter-productive if school context does not facilitate a serious approach to the subject matter, sufficient curriculum time or where teachers themselves lack the skills, experience or confidence to teach to a high level.

2.5.13. Classrooms that work

Stasz and colleagues distil many (though not all) of these features into a model of school ‘classrooms that work’. They argue that many of the factors identified above should not be seen as a check list of separate factors which can be applied independently. Rather, their comparison of classroom activities that did and those that did not appear to be successful in imparting employability skills suggested that a four part framework was necessary for understanding and articulating successful practices (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Stasz’s Instructional Model for Generic Skills

Adapted from Stazs, C. et al. (1993), Classrooms that work: teaching generic skills in academic and vocational settings, Berkley, California: Rand and National Centres for Research in Vocational Education, p56.
2.6. Approaches to assessment of employability skills

In their review of the impact of the work related curriculum Saunders et al. (1997:156) suggest that assessment of key employability skills is challenging because of a lack of available measurement frameworks:

“One of the difficulties in assessing the impact of work related provision on the development of key skills lies in the paucity of instruments for measuring skills competence, outside the more familiar areas of literacy and numeracy. Even here, the means for assessing the application of numeracy and practical communication appropriate to workplace contexts (e.g. use of the telephone or giving and receiving messages) have not been developed or adapted for this age group to any great extent”. (Saunders et al. 1997:156).

While progress may have been made since Saunders’ review, adapting new assessment techniques to relevant skills, behaviours and attitudes remains a challenge, often being highlighted by OFSTED as a difficulty in implementing and embedding the new vocational curriculum elements. There are differences here between formal summative and informal formative assessments. Where new initiatives are linked to a qualification and come with a formal examination style assessment (such as new vocational GCSEs or Diplomas), the difficulties in implementation are in relation to understanding and preparing students for this by setting out expectations and aligning formative and course work assessments with the formal assessment criteria. In addition, many of these new qualifications, such as Key Skills qualifications or the vocational GCSEs include at least part of their assessment on a portfolio basis where learners collect and present evidence of meeting assessment criteria in circumstances outside of formal coursework assignments or examinations, where many of the skills and behaviours are difficult to assess (e.g. DfES, 2003). In the new Diploma programme, precise assessment details vary by award and awarding body but include a variety of methods ranging from formal written examinations to the collection and presentation of portfolio evidence (National Database of Accredited Awards7).

Where new initiatives are less discrete and defined and require mainstreaming throughout other curriculum subjects (such as Enterprise Education, WRL and SEAL) assessment is often much more difficult still as institutional pressures continue to focus teachers’ and learners’ minds on maintaining their existing focus on the standard assessments. For instance, OFSTED has been critical of the extent to which assessment is undertaken at all in relation to PSHE, with best current practice identified as simple assessment frameworks with evidence drawn from a range of sources including students’ own evaluative comments, classroom observation, talking to pupils and reflection on the quality of completed work (OFSTED, 2005:11). As a result of these weaknesses the QCA has introduced assessment guidance on PSHE (OFSTED, 2007:18).

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7 Details of the assessment methods for each individual Diploma award offered by each Diploma partnership are available in the Diploma Catalogues in the National Database of Accredited Qualifications www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/qualification/50040200.seo.aspx.
Assessment practices on work related learning where part of the new qualifications is clear, but in relation to the work related content of wider mainstream curriculum this is less clear and has been the subject of criticism in the past (OFSTED, 2005a).

2.7. Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery

Employer engagement and involvement in the design and delivery of education has moved on rapidly over recent years from very little direct involvement to being a core part of the 14-19 reforms, especially the introduction of the new vocational GCSEs, the Diplomas and the expansion of work related and enterprise education. This engagement comes in several forms and at several levels.

At the national level employers have as an interest group (e.g. CBI, 2007) clearly had a substantial impact on the overall design and purpose of education and training policy, having a major influence for instance on the development of the policy agenda through various reviews such as the Tomlinson Review, the Davies Review of enterprise education and the Leitch Review of skills (Leitch, 2006) – all of which mean that the current reform agenda substantially reflects employer concerns especially in relation to employability skills. This extends to employers having an integral role in the design of the new Diplomas via the Diploma Development Partnerships and the Sector Skills Councils. Sir Alan Jones (Chairman of Toyota Manufacturing UK) has been appointed as a champion for these new awards. Employers are also engaged at a regional and local level through Sector Skills Councils, regional and local Learning and Skills Councils, Regional Development Agencies and Local Authorities (DCSF, 2007a:16) – many of which are crucial to the reform of funding and strategic direction in 14-19 education currently underway.

Employers also have a more direct role being partners in the delivery and design of ‘on the ground delivery’ of new vocational learning in the applied GCSEs and the Diplomas, through both the applied learning components and the work experience elements. Employers are also involved in the wider WRL and enterprise education agendas through more general work experience. Some of this engagement is structured through Education Business Partnership Organisations, coordinated nationally by the Education Business Link Organisation Consortium which accounts for roughly 80% of work experience placements with around 200,000 employers. EBPs also support schools in developing their general WRL content (DCSF, 2007a:12).

Finally, employers are a central component in the Academy programme whereby often private sector partners sponsor the development of a new or replacement secondary school. There have been frequent promises from government that the Academy programme will be substantially expanded. Despite this the number of Academies has not grown at the projected rate but recent policy announcements (DCSF, 2008a) suggest that they will provide a further opportunity for employer engagement in the future.
2.8. Barriers to promoting employability skills

Since there has been a frequently recurring push to promote employability skills, both in the UK and internationally, each time prefaced by an analysis that not enough is currently being done, the question arises as to what are the barriers to the promotion of employability skills?

In the US, 1990/1 marked something of a watershed year for employability skills with several national commissions held first to identify the challenges and options facing the US economy and second to map out the skills needs of the economy against an analysis of present supply.

Despite putting forward a programme of action and the establishment of the School-to-work programme, by late 1998 the former executive director of the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills suggested that progress on mainstreaming a concern with employability skills was being held back by a series of widely held misconceptions: (1) that they should relate primarily to entry level employment; (2) that employability skills are only about soft skills such as communication and teamwork; (3) employability skills are in some tension in the curriculum with higher level rigorous academic work; and (4) some of these problems may have been caused by the very term ‘employability skills’ (Overtoom, 2000:3).

In the UK the teaching of personal skills has often been criticised for being marginalised by more mainstream traditional academic subjects. For instance, work-related learning, careers guidance and financial education have often been provided in PSHE lessons where OFSTED has been critical that provision is marginalised and often delivered by non-specialist subject teachers who have too few resources to update their skills and subject knowledge. OFSTED also found that the introduction of the Citizenship curriculum had further constrained the scope for PSHE in the curriculum (OFSTED, 2005; 2007). Indeed, insights from the new Diploma Pathfinders suggest that teaching the PLTS and Functional Skills elements of the Diploma in pre-16 contexts is more challenging than the post-16 context because English and Maths are retained as statutory components of the National Curriculum and there is potential conflict and repetition (QCA, 2007:89).

Another common barrier to the successful implementation of the new vocationally focused qualifications and curriculum elements is a weakness in assessment. For instance, this was criticised as weak in the OFSTED research on Citizenship (OFSTED, 2005; 2007). Similarly, OFSTED’s reviews of enterprise education found that while progress was being made, some schools struggled to set clear learning objectives in relation to relevant skills, knowledge and attribute development and to evaluate and assess progress, despite (OFSTED, 2004; 2005a). Evaluations of Citizenship education also found that setting goals and monitoring progress took longer to develop than other aspects (2005b). The introduction of WRL was also beset by problems of timetabling and failures to link learning to accredited assessment (OFSTED, 2001). There is also a danger reported in some of the literature that selection of pupils for a vocational emphasis may constrain their options at a later date.
For instance, OFSTED’s review of WRL found that job finding was emphasised in careers guidance as opposed to looking at further education and training opportunities (OFSTED, 2001:8).

The research evidence suggests that some barriers to promoting employability skills exist at a lower more micro – classroom – level. These include factors such as teacher confidence, training and skills, available resources and pressures. For instance Yan, Goubeaud and Fry (1994:10-110) suggest that a lack of time, confidence and resources were all contributory factors to the lack of measurable success achieved through the School-to-Work programme in the US.

Giddens and Stazs (2001:15) echo the emphasis on teacher confidence and capacity, citing one teacher who had adopted a facilitative rather than instructional approach to teaching work related skills:

“Old habits are hard to break and its very hard for me to turn over the control of the class to the class. But I also understand that if I want them to be responsible for their own learning I have to turn over that responsibility”.

These findings have relevance to the UK context. Evaluations of several relevant educational initiatives, such as SEAL (e.g. Hallam et al, 2006; Smith et al, 2007; OFSTED, 2001; 2005b; 2005a; 2006a) identify staff resistance, largely borne out of a lack of awareness, confidence or skills as the major barrier to implementing new non-traditional learning and teaching approaches at school/classroom level.

2.9. **Resources available to promote employability skills**

In general WRL received the following funding allocation in 2007-8 (DCSF, 2007a:18):

- £25m to local Education Business Link Organisation Consortia, via the LSC.
- £110m through Direct Schools grant for practical learning leading to qualifications.
- £36.4m through the Increased Flexibility Programme.
- £60m Enterprise funding.
- £33.9m for relevant local priorities.

This is in addition to:

- £33.9m for the Young Apprenticeship Scheme.
- £20m for engagement activities in KS4.

In addition, there is an astounding variety of resources available to schools to promote the initiatives described above which relate to employability skills:

**Teachernet:**
Enterprise Education:
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/ks4/enterpriseeduca tion/
Work Related Learning:
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/ks4/workrelatedlearning/
Diplomas: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/dg/
Work Experience:
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/w/workexperience/

Department for Schools Children and Families:
Enterprise:
http://www.enterpriseinschools.org.uk/enterpriseinschools/index.php
http://yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas/

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority:
Enterprise education:
Work Related Learning:
http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_14921.aspx
http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/110_136.htm
Diplomas: http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_13470.aspx

There are also a host of other resources available through:
OFSTED: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/.
Young Enterprise: http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/pub/
The Key Skills Support Programme: http://www.keyskillssupport.net/
The Functional Skills Support Programme:
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage4/iss/ks4_fssp/

2.10. Case studies

All the above resources and links provide detailed case studies of work related/enterprise education in action. For final draft a selection of these will be included alongside links to a wide range of others.

2.10.1. Case study example 1: Enterprise Education

In an East Midlands comprehensive school, Year 11 leisure and tourism students frequently organize the year-group leaving party at a local leisure centre. In a case study on Teachernet, the pupils focused on two key issues in organising this party: originality and cost. The pupils developed a project plan (including targets, a planning flow chart, resources, risk and contingency plans, project team allocations and evaluation procedures). The project team also undertook market research with the rest of the year group.
The project team visited the leisure centre, discussed options and costings for the party. The party had a ‘pop idol’ theme with prizes for the best fancy dress outfits and a security firm was employed to help with organisation on the night. The party raised £450 in revenue and students enjoyed the experience and had learned key skills in organization, planning and team work. Adapted from Teachernet®.

2.10.2. Case study example 2: Working with Employers on Applied Science in Secondary Schools

A secondary school is developing its applied science programme with help from employers, in the process delivering its WRL obligations. The school uses a variety of vocational activities in lessons such as the GlaxoSmithKline resource (www.atworkwithscience.com), which includes case studies of getting a job, detailed information on job roles and virtual tours of laboratory facilities. Students are also encouraged to undertake web searches; gathering, and disseminating information and using role-plays and presentations. Web-based activities are structure with specific criteria and outcomes to avoid distractions.

Students have to complete a portfolio of tasks with each one set to encourage the development of problem solving skills based around real life scenarios. For example one chemistry assessment was based on forensic science skills where students had to research the role of a forensic scientist, apply some key skills, following evidence to catch a killer. Subsequently they had to complete an exercise to apply for a job as forensic scientist, using their experience to complete the application form and demonstrate the skills they had developed.

This case study is adapted from:
http://www.schoolorsnetwork.org.uk/Article.aspa?NodeId=0&PageId=236392&

Other sources of case studies:
http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/110_2036.htm

Young Enterprise – learning by doing.
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/ks4/enterpriseeduca
tion/casestudies/

2.11. Key ‘Best Practice’ Principles - Schools

Principles

1. Clear structured programme with relevant objectives.

2. Work-based learning (out-of-school) and work-related learning (in-school) both make an important contribution to the development of employability skills.

3. Linked to this, it is important to note that the concept of ‘experiential learning’ has two different but complementary interpretations – 1) learning from the experience of the world of work (e.g. placements) and 2) learning from structured experiences (group and individual) in the classroom – both are important. It was also important that experiential learning was properly contextualised.

4. Exploiting ways to replicate the world of work in the classroom – simulations, running micro-businesses, work-based projects – is also important.

5. Given the age and stage of school students, learning methods that foster ‘student autonomy’ and ‘taking responsibility’ are relevant to building employability skills. It is both important and seen to be of real value to provide opportunities for taking responsibility – through self-directed learning, through individualised pathways, through activities where students exercise choice and take decisions for themselves.

6. Promoting reflection on experience and practice – reflexive learning – is critical to ensuring integration of knowledge and understanding. This enhances the value of work-based and work-related learning.

7. Effective teaching in this area draws on facilitation and coaching skills alongside any more traditional / didactic teaching skills. While there is more emphasis on student-centred, less didactic methods, when it comes to choosing the right methods, a wide range is appropriate – and ‘fitness for purpose’ is key.

8. Employer engagement and involvement in the design and delivery of the Employability Skills Development activities.
### Key Principles and their Impact and Importance to each Initiative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>PSHE</th>
<th>Enterprise Education</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Careers Education</th>
<th>Vocational GCSEs</th>
<th>Young Apprenticeships</th>
<th>Diplomas</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>WRL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting clear Emp Skills Relevant Objectives</td>
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<td>Learning from Real work</td>
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<td>Action Learning / Experiential learning</td>
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<td>Replicating ‘work’ in the classroom setting</td>
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<td>Reflexive learning</td>
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<td>Student self-direction / exercising choice</td>
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<td>Individualised pathways and choices</td>
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<td>Mainstream: not separate or in addition to separate focus</td>
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<td>Harness external expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer engagement and involvement</td>
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### Considerations

There have been a plethora of initiatives over nearly thirty years designed to develop at least some of the skills now bracketed under ‘Employability Skills’. Some emphasise the personal and social learning designed for personal effectiveness, others for being a good member of society, others more directly linked to the world of work. We can however identify to some Key contributors to success:

- Dynamic school leadership on this issue – commitment to and support for this agenda.
- Resources.
- Teacher confidence and skill.
3. **Further Education Colleges**

**Definitions of employability skills in use**
Employability is not surprisingly a key concern in the FE sector given its focus on vocational qualifications (see Section 3.1, p45). Relevant skills and competencies are thus infused within the NVQ and Diploma systems. These qualifications are also linked to the Key Skills (see Box , p20) and Functional Skills definitions (Box , p46).

**The value of experiential learning**
The vocational qualifications system – NVQs, Modern Apprenticeships and the new Diplomas – all implicitly acknowledge the value of experiential learning: each of which has work place learning and demonstration of skills as at least part of the assessment and qualifications procedure. There is also some evidence from employers that they see this as useful (see Section 3.2, p47).

**Employability skills in the curriculum**
Employability skills are a central part of the curriculum in vocational qualifications offered through FE colleges. Some of these are intended to be learned in a work environment, either on a work placement or in actual employment. They are assessed as part of the Key/Functional Skills components (see Section 3.3, p48).

**Major pedagogical approaches**
A mix of pedagogical approaches are used to teach relevant skills, including traditional classroom techniques and more activity based tasks. Key skills are often taught in a classroom context but in some colleges an action-oriented approach has been used in relation to these also – such as through outward-bound based courses.

**Successful practices**
Central to promoting skills development among FE students is motivation, especially where the skills are not obviously and directly job-relevant. As such, innovative approaches – such as outward bound activities – have been shown to be successful in demonstrating skills needs and the relevance of basic numeracy and literacy or teamwork (see Section 3.5, p51). While direct evidence of the benefits of ‘learning by doing’ is often difficult to find there is evidence from employers that they find recruits through the Modern Apprenticeship to be satisfactory against many of the aspects of the draft UKCES employability skills definition. Since the majority of the MA approach is action-learning oriented then this provides some evidence of success (see p53).

**Assessment practices**
A mix of assessment practices are in place ranging from formal examinations to workplace assessment and the collection of portfolio evidence. The assessment component of the new Diplomas is likely to have significant task-based elements.

**Employer involvement**
Employers and their representatives (e.g. Sector Skills Councils) are central to the vocational qualification system, setting the criteria by which skills and competencies are measured (see Section 3.7, p54).

**Barriers**
The main barriers to a greater focus on employability skills and engagement with employers revolve around institutional rigidities – such as in relation to funding, timetabling or staffing. Staff awareness and skills also present something of a barrier to the promotion of employability skills (see Section 3.8, p56).
3.1. Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use

Findings from research carried out by the Learning and Skills Network (2008) exploring the issue of employability skills, suggest that there are a range of factors that can influence the definition of employability skills. The research involved an expert seminar to investigate the views of the post-16 sector on the skills people need to be employable, current policy that is driving the focus on the acquisition of skills, and a shared definition of employability of skills. Working with YouGov, the Learning and Skills Network also surveyed 1137 employers to get their views on what they consider necessary for employment. When employers were asked what they expected of a job candidate that had just left school, college or a training scheme. They indicated that there are four skills they expect in this sort of candidate:

- 80% of employers said young people must be good at timekeeping
- 79% said they must have fully developed literacy skills
- 77% said numeracy skills were the priority for them
- 75% said enthusiasm and commitment

A SFEFC/SHEFC discussion paper (2006) ‘Learning to Work’ defines employability as “…an individual’s chances of progressing into and through the labour market successfully, according to what they choose to do. A person’s employability at any one time depends on a combination of their own skills, understanding and attributes and external factors and circumstances” (Focus on Learning, Learning Together, p7).

Yorke (2006) comments on the complexity of employability as a concept which seeks to explore and capture ‘personal qualities, beliefs, understanding, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience’. He puts forward two suggested models that have pedagogical relevance; Bennett et al (2000) and their differentiation of skills applicable to different domains and the specificity of skills to either discipline or cross discipline ‘generic’ as such they identify five categories for curriculum design consideration. These are:

- Disciplinary content
- Disciplinary skill
- Workplace experience
- Workplace awareness
- Generic skills

In the ‘Skills plus project’, Yorke and Knight (2004) suggest an interrelated model called USEM; Understanding, Skills, Efficacy, and Metacognition. They argue that the self efficacy of the learner is crucial in the dynamic interaction of ‘skilful practice’ and ‘subject understanding’ and metacognition, the process of reflecting ‘on, in and for action’. This type of pedagogical approach to employability brings the needs of the student (worker) to the centre stage and relegates the economic imperative as such to the backstage (Kenny, English, Kilmartin, 2007, p5-6).
The NVQ system of qualifications has expanded massively since its introduction in 1986 to address the perceived weaknesses in vocational education. The NVQ framework covers 11 occupational ‘areas’ and within each there are five levels of competence, related to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF Levels provide some generic details of competences which are linked to the draft employability skills definition. For instance, Level 2 requires some elements of team work, Level 3 refers to the performance of work tasks in variety of contexts and where autonomy within an established structure is required. Level 4 suggests a higher degree of personal responsibility and responsibility for others. Within this framework however, the Sector Skills Councils set National Occupational Standards which set what criteria NVQs must address (see the National Occupational Standards Directory). These are often broken down into detailed work related tasks such as customer care and communicating with colleagues. NVQ units often make explicit links to the QCA’s Key Skills (a variant are ‘core skills’ in Scotland) (see Box ). As such while the language is slightly different there are clearly strong links between the definitions of expected skills, competencies and behaviours and the UKCES draft definition.

NVQs also provide the basis for some aspects of Entry2Employment (E2E) and the Modern Apprenticeship Programmes (MA). E2E programmes focus on Basic Skills while the MA scheme, as well as consisting of NVQ units also utilises the key skills definition. In all cases there are links to the draft UKCES employability skills definition (DfES and LSC, 2005). The new Diploma qualifications are largely underpinned by vocational learning and job-specific technical skills but also include a generic skills component which is structured around the Functional Skills definition (see Box ). The intention is that Functional Skills will replace the narrower Key Skills definition by 2010, though it is expected that the wider key skills will continue to operate. Functional skills focus on applied English, Maths and ICT skills. Each of these is available for assessment from Entry level through Level 2 on the NQF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 7: Functional Skills Definitions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Speaking and listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reading</td>
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<td>• Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Maths</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Representing</td>
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<td>• Analysing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interpreting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ICT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use ICT</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Find and select information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop, present and communicate information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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9 All National Occupational Standards are available from [www.ukstandards.org](http://www.ukstandards.org).
Personal, Learning and Thinking skills (see Box ) are also part of all initiatives introduced as part of the reform of the 14-19 phase. This means that MAs and the Diplomas should include these within the skills that they teach and assess.

3.2. Evidence of the value of experiential learning

The NVQ framework assumes that there is significant merit in experiential learning and a large part of the assessment process hinges on accrediting skills and competencies that are demonstrated in the workplace as well as those gained through learning in a more formal setting (see QCA NVQ website). Similarly, the MA scheme is also based on this assumption, with a significant reliance on NVQs in the Competence and Knowledge based components and reliance on the portfolio demonstration of key skills for the transferable skills component (DfES and LSC, 2005). While research evidence of the value of this is difficult to identify, there is evidence from employers about the key skills and work-based assessment which is also part of the MA approach. For instance, a survey of employers suggests that employers were happy with the degree of administration that they had to undertake in support of work based assessment but were not asked about their satisfaction with the value of this. Employers were satisfied with the MA programme overall but had varying degrees of satisfaction with the Key Skills element. However, while a large part of these comments are related to the quality of experiential learning because of the nature of the provision in all components, the questions asked of employers did not differentiate between the effects of different pedagogical strategies (Andersen and Metcalf, 2003).

Dissatisfaction with the Key Skills component of MAs led to a greater emphasis on Key Skills in the MA programme. An evaluation of these efforts, drawing on data gathered from qualitative interviews with learners and teachers, classroom observation and analysis of assessment data (though not employer-sourced data), suggests that this has been partially successful and did address pedagogical strategies. This research found that linking Key Skills training to vocational relevance is central to improving learner motivation which appeared to be the most important driver of success. For instance, teachers noted the importance of avoiding replicating classroom environments that are reminiscent of schools and cited the benefits of learners being ‘out of their seat’. However, evidence was largely at the level of teacher and learner responses rather than other assessments of attainment (Cranmer et al., 2004).

The new Advanced Diploma award also centralises experiential learning in the form of the demonstration of applied Functional Skills as well as the more job-specific technical skills components and the use of extended projects resulting in dissertation submissions. However, evidence of the value of this in terms of student progress is as yet more assumed than demonstrated (e.g. QCA, 2007a; Higham and Yeomans, 2006).
Whilst some would argue ‘embedding’ employability in the curriculum or delivering stand alone programmes are crucial ways of delivering employability (see for example Fertig, 2003), others would argue that the only way for people to develop employability skills is through having direct experience of the workplace through work placements, apprenticeships and other related programmes. Work-related learning, through games and mock interviews are arguably beneficial but they are not substitutes for real experience of the workplace. Steedman et al (1997) point to the typical apprenticeship experience in Germany, where German apprentices spend two days in vocational college (Berufsschule), where their time is split equally between vocational theory and general education. Paris (1987) has indicated that students in Japan, who are studying at level 3 (NVQ 3), spend three years studying both vocational and general education, with both areas receiving about 50% of the available time. In Japan, student’s vocational subjects are taught in a largely theoretical way, and the rest of the time is then spent studying general education, in the form of Japanese, Mathematics, Social Science and Natural Science. It is suggested that the ‘foreign’ system of vocational education integrates general education, and makes it an integral part of the course (Hammond, 2001, p12).

3.3. **Extent of employability skills in the curriculum**

Learners in the FE sector are a diverse group, comprising a wide cross-section of society, with a particular concentration of young people between the ages of 16 and 24. Arguably, ‘employability’ indicators for FE learners are likely to fall somewhere in between those that relate to entry-level jobs requiring no qualifications and those that employers tend to look for in graduates.

Employability skills are often referred to as ‘functional skills’, ‘key skills’ and ‘core skills’ and feature as part of NVQ, MA and the new advanced diploma programmes in FE colleges. NVQs are structured around skills relevant to the workplace, including more generic or transferable (as opposed to just technical job specific) skills. MAs consist of four components two of which (the Competence and Knowledge-based components) are based around NVQs and one further component which is centred around the achievement of Key Skills.

At the heart of the new diploma system is what is referred to as ‘principal’ learning which is the main compulsory course in the diploma. This will cover the main things about the relevant employment sector, the key skills, and how it works. Diplomas will also offer the opportunity to apply what is learnt in ‘work scenarios’ due to the fact that some of the learning will take place in an environment that is more like a workplace than a classroom, giving learners the opportunity to try to solve the kind of problems they will be required to tackle in the workplace. These are referred to as ‘core skills’. Literacy, numeracy, and other key skills are delivered as a core part of an apprenticeship programme. Indeed, as well as training to NVQ levels 2 and 3, the modern apprenticeship programme itself was designed to include key skills. Employability skills are thus an increasingly important part of the curriculum in FE colleges.

The fact that employability skills or key skills were previously viewed as ‘separate’ to the core curriculum is an issue.
In the past it has been suggested that many of the problems around the development of employability skills is that Key Skills have been marketed as an additional ‘bolt-on’ qualification, and therefore not as an integral part, no matter the importance that is stressed of them, to the vocational qualification of the learner (see for example Hammond, 2001). Green (1998) does concede that within Germany, the apprentices complain that they do too much general education, as part of their vocational courses, however he concludes that the evidence suggests that later in their careers when the apprentices have been promoted, they discover the benefit of having more advanced key skills, which better equip them to move to supervisory and management positions (Hammond, 2001:12-13).

There are examples of work being carried out to develop employability skills within the curriculum in FE. For example, one of the ‘Skills Research Initiative’ (see http://www.ic.gc.ca/epic/site/eas-aes.nsf/en/h_ra01877e.html) portfolio of research projects entitled ‘Key Skills Framework: Enhancing Employability within a Lifelong Learning Paradigm’ focused on employability skills. The aim of this research project was to develop, pilot, evaluate and then mainstream a key skills learning model for upskilling the emergent labour force in terms of generic transferable skills. The intention was to critically review and identify the key generic skills that students, workers, employers and experts consider necessary in this new global employment environment and produce, pilot and mainstream a high value quality assured Key Skills Learning Module which fulfils the criteria of a Special Purpose Award Type at Level 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications as detailed in the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland policy documents. The intention is to use a blended learning methodology to deliver a flexible user friendly education and training package which covers the identified key skills (Kenny, English and Kilmartin, 2007:2).

In a study of the career paths of former apprentices, Perez-del-Aguila (2006) reported that one learning provider strongly believed in enhancing the employability of apprentices from day one of their training. In discussing the findings related to ‘rules for work’, they report how this was often done in very simple ways, for example, setting clear expectations and rules of behaviour to which apprentices must adhere to i.e. standards of discipline, language and dress code.

3.4. Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills

The 14-19 Pathfinders which preceded the introduction of the new Diplomas engaged in a process of broadening not just the curriculum but also the pedagogical approaches used to teach, especially vocationally oriented skills. Most commonly, this included an increased emphasis on practical hands on learning, including within the classroom setting and in workplaces. Examples included the learning of job-specific skills such as hairdressing as well as mixing this with more generic employability skills, often learned in more classroom based contexts. For instance, the report notes the “the Skills4Retail course developed by the Tower Hamlets Pathfinder which combined extended work experience with college-based work focused upon employability skills” (22).
The evaluation also noted take-up of extended tasks and projects, often tackled in the context of a partnership with employers with an example cited of students asked to provide information and advice on the design of an AimHigher website (23). The pathfinders also used e-learning such as:

“the use of a Virtual Learning Environment to increase access to vocational options in Lewisham; the provision of on-line revision materials in Cumbria; the use of PDAs and video-conferencing in Shropshire; the development of e-mentoring in Norfolk; the use of Extranet to support personalised learning in South Gloucestershire.” (Higham and Yeomans, 2006:22-23).

While research has been undertaken in the Diploma Pathfinders the focus is largely on the practical arrangements of facilitating effective collaboration between partners and on the pre-16 context rather than pedagogical strategies used in the post-16 context, though the general emphasis on blended learning approaches, the use of work-related and work-based contexts, applied skills and action learning are all apparent (QCA, 2007a).

There are a number of examples of ‘good practice’ of how employability skills feature in the curriculum and much discussion on how these skills should be taught in FE colleges (see for example http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/colleges/index_s4-0-work-related.htm).

Whilst some would argue ‘embedding’ employability in the curriculum or delivering stand alone programmes are crucial ways of delivering employability (see for example Fertig, 2003), others would argue that the only way for people to develop employability skills is through having direct experience of the workplace through work placements, apprenticeships and other related programmes.

The ‘Skills for Life’ strategy recognises that many people with literacy, language and numeracy needs do not want to attend LLN classes. It is also widely accepted that their willingness to work on their LLN skills is enhanced when they can improve them as part of a vocational or leisure programme (Roberts et al., 2005).

A recent approach to improving performance in literacy, numeracy and other key skills within apprenticeships has been to focus this support intensively at the beginning of programmes, or on a pre-entry programme – such approaches have been termed ‘front-end’ delivery models in contrast to programmes where key skills are introduced later on in programmes. An evaluation of a Learning and Skills Development Agency development project (Cranmer et al., 2004) which explored different models of delivering literacy, numeracy and other key skills within apprenticeships, suggested that many learning providers have regarded key skills as a ‘chore’ and have been leaving formal attention to key skills until very late in the programme. The consequences of a ‘back-end’ delivery model can mean that learners have no opportunity to develop such skills.
The key findings of the evaluation were:

- The ‘front-end’ delivery model is an effective way of delivering literacy, numeracy and other key skills as it prepares learners for their apprenticeship programme.
- Learners improve their literacy, numeracy and other key skills when the whole organisation believes key skills are an important underpinning for learning vocational skills.
- Vocational teachers and assessors, basic and key skills staff need to work together on delivering literacy and numeracy to learners.
- The way in which teachers introduced literacy, numeracy and other key skills was important.

The research also suggested that it is particularly important to promote literacy and numeracy skills to learners as relevant to the workplace and as essential to their vocational training and future employment.

A follow-up to this evaluation was carried out in 2005. The evaluation aimed to examine the longer-term impact of front-loaded delivery, with a focus on both hard and soft outcomes and an exploration of the ‘embedding’ of key skills in vocational courses and qualifications. The researchers revisited the six sites they visited in 2004. The findings highlighted a number of advantages of front-loaded models of delivering literacy, numeracy and key skills within apprenticeships, as well as a number of benefits of combining front-loaded and embedded models. Mainly, they found:

- Front-loaded delivery models can be effective in offering extra contextualised support to learners with key skill needs early in their vocational course.
- The use of front-loaded models led to patterns of increased achievement over shorter timescales.
- Early completion of key skills enabled newer trainees to jump ahead of their more established peers in the workplace and on site.
- Integrating or embedding skills into multi-faceted activities gives trainees the opportunity to use the skills in naturally-arising situations and thus enhancing the application of such skills in ‘real work’ situations (Sagan et al., 2005).

3.5. Evidence of pedagogical success

The SfLSU defines ‘embedded’ teaching and learning as that which ‘combines the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to succeed in qualifications, in life, and at work’.

‘Embedded’ has become a widely used term in relation to LLN but there are often different interpretations of what this means in practice. The various uses of the term always share the concept of bringing together the vocational teaching with LLN teaching. The practice of integrating or embedding LLN into vocational study is not new, but has recently been given a focus as part of the ‘Skills for Life’ strategy.
A research project carried out by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2005) explored the impact of embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The research explored the impact of ‘embedded’ approaches to literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) on 79 vocational programmes. The courses were based in 15 further education colleges and one large training provider located in five regions of England. The 1,916 learners who took part were preparing for national vocational qualifications at Levels 1 or 2 in one of five areas of learning: Health and Social Care; Hair and Beauty Therapy; Construction; and Business and Engineering.

The findings of the study provided a clear and consistent message: vocational courses at Levels 1 and 2 in which LLN is embedded are linked to more positive outcomes than courses for which the LLN provision is separate. The research presented an analysis of the key features of embedding LLN in vocational programmes, which were:

- Teamwork between LLN and vocational teachers
- Staff understandings, values and beliefs
- Aspects of teaching and learning that connect LLN to vocational content
- Policies and organisational features at institutional level

‘Raising Expectations’ (DfES, 2007c) proposes that from 2015, all young people should be required to participate in some form of education or training until they reach the age of 18. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an external review of national and international research evidence to explore the likely impact, benefits and challenges associated with the proposed change.

The evidence suggests that vocational qualifications do not yield the same economic benefits as academic qualifications (Dearden et al., 2002; Dickerson, 2006), and that the benefits of some vocational Qualifications at Level 2 or below are negligible (Dearden at al., 2004; Dickerson, 2006; McIntosh, 2002). McIntosh (2004) found that they do have a significant impact on young people who left school with no previous qualifications. This is particularly important given the fact that many of those currently NEET or in JWT have no or very few qualifications, furthermore, the wage and employment returns of the new Diplomas (DfES, 2005) are not yet known; given their blend of theoretical and applied learning, it is possible that they may be valued more highly than existing vocational qualifications (Spielhofer et al., 2007). Evaluations and research on Diploma pilot schemes do not provide any meaningful evidence of the success of particular pedagogical strategies (Highams and Yeomans, 2006; QCA, 2007a).

An evaluation of modern apprenticeships carried out by Anderson and Metcalf (2003) reported high satisfaction with apprenticeships (90%), with 37% of employers being very satisfied. In terms of additionality, employers reported that apprenticeship training led to them introducing new training, with quality improvements in broader or higher level training (27%) and increased flexibility, effectiveness and motivation (30%).
The study also found that many employers participating in modern apprenticeships said they would continue to do so in the future. However the research was less clear in determining precisely which pedagogical strategies were successful in employers’ eyes.

The evaluation of MAs in Wales reports that learners appreciated experiential learning, especially in the workplace and that they identified an increase in confidence as a result of participation. Evidence collected from employers suggests that they are broadly satisfied with the level of skills and competencies of trainees they recruit through the scheme in relation to overall ability to the job, interest, written and verbal communication skills, motivation, time keeping, attendance and ability to work with others. Satisfaction was lower however with numeracy skills (Wiseman et al. 2003). While this evaluation offers positive triangulation of employer and learner responses it does not explicitly link these findings to specific pedagogical interventions. Neither does it account for counterfactual issues – such as would these recruits have had the same skills with or without the MA intervention?

Cranmer et al. (2004) address specific approaches to teaching Key Skills. Again the methodology employed prevents firm conclusions or identification of which pedagogical approaches work beyond the relatively plausible finding that the introduction of key skills needs to be done in such a way as it overcomes learner apathy or resistance. Strategies identified as successful are the use of tests at the outset to identify and demonstrate need, linking teaching to vocational tasks which demonstrate their relevance and approaches which enhance the enjoyment of learners. For instance they highlight a four day intensive ‘Skills for Fun’ programme which involves outward bound activities where key skills are introduced in the context of these activities.

Despite the general lack of available evaluation evidence addressing the success of particular pedagogical approaches, the Quality Improvement Agency publishes a wide range of good practice examples and case studies which apply to FE colleges which are drawn from OFSTED inspections. They include preparation for work among a range of other topics. While these may well be good practice no evidence of underpinning research and evaluation is presented alongside them (OFSTED Good Practice Database11).

3.6. Approaches to assessment of employability skills

There is little evidence on the ‘assessment’ of employability skills per se outside of the assessment of Key/Core/Functional Skills. Key skills can be assessed in a variety of ways including traditional tests, electronic tests or portfolio assessments. Functional skills qualifications will be available as standalone tests or as a component of GCSE and Diploma qualifications. Assessment practices will vary but are likely to include an emphasis on task-based assignments, portfolios and electronic means (QCA, 2007b).

In discussing the employability of young people, Worth (2003) argues it is important to understand young people’s attitudes and behaviour relating to a notion of employability that apparently assists their transition into work, but investigating the labour market value of these factors is problematic. The problem with there being little research on this issue is that it tends to be attached to work on ‘soft skills’, a subject that often relates to items that are arguably not skills at all. A number of large studies have attempted to assess the value of soft skills, including such factors as work motivations, levels of commitment to employment or perceptions of social status, for example, alongside in-work practices like teamworking or communication (see for example Dewson et al., 2000; Machin et al., 2001). Individuals’ motivations within work or the labour market, however, often represent values that are expressed through attitudes and it is difficult to accept that such factors could actually be learned as skills (p609). Worth’s (2003) study set out to explore whether employment-related attitudes, values and job search behaviour of a sample of unemployed young people supported the notion of employability espoused in current policy at that time (p210).

In terms of the approaches to the assessment of employability skills within FE, research carried out by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2005) highlighted a number of impacts of language, literacy and numeracy skills, including:

- Learners on the embedded courses had better staying-on rates than those on non-embedded courses
- The embedded courses also had higher success rates than the non-embedded courses
- For learners on fully embedded courses, 93 per cent of those with an identified literacy need achieved a literacy/ESOL qualification, compared to only 50 per cent for those on non-embedded courses.
- For learners with an identified numeracy need on fully embedded courses, 93 per cent achieved a numeracy/maths qualification, compared to 70 per cent for those on non-embedded courses
- One negative note amongst these findings was that, where a single teacher was asked to take dual responsibility for teaching vocational skills and LLN, the probability of learners succeeding with literacy and numeracy qualifications was lower. Learners were twice as likely to fail in these circumstances (Roberts et al., 2005)

### 3.7. Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery

There are in theory strong institutional linkages between FE colleges and providers and employers. For instance, the Sector Skills Councils are responsible for generating the NOSs which determine the detailed content of NVQs. However, these linkages have in the past been criticised as not being fully effective (e.g. QCA, undated). Employers are also significantly involved in the design and development of the new Diploma qualifications.

Increasingly FE providers are working with employers to address their specific skill needs, particularly through the ‘Train to Gain’ programme.
However, Leitch’s vision of a ‘demand-led’ system has yet to be realised. In early 2008, the Government released ‘Ready to Work, Skilled for Work: Unlocking Britain’s Talent’. This document describes the partnership Government wants to build with employers to meet the skills challenges detailed by Leitch. The Government expects employers to increase their investment in the skills of their employees, and in return can expect a central role in driving the changes they need.

Many FE colleges have a Business Development Unit. These units have a range of titles, e.g. external liaison etc. but usually their core business is to provide bespoke courses for local companies at full cost (Hughes, 2003, Learning and Skills Development Agency, p9).

Two thirds of the colleges interviewed (88) in a survey by McCoshan et al in 2003 had business units and some colleges were in the process of setting them up (McCoshan et al, 2003, p26). Forty-five colleges (34%) did not have a business unit. Principals at these institutions often argued that this enabled them to have a more ‘integrated’ approach to employer units (p27). The second most important barrier to linking with employers is the lack of human resources in the college to link with employers further (p30).

Research carried out by the Learning and Skills Network (2008) explored the issue of employability skills. When employers were asked whether they were working with FE colleges, the majority of employers who took part on the survey (76%) said that they did not work with their local college. The survey also asked employers whether they had worked with a government-funded Skills Broker. The LSC has developed a network of ‘Skills Brokers’ as a part of the ‘Train to Gain’ initiative. Skills Brokers are specialist advisers who aim to help employers diagnose skills needs and broker skills provision from local providers, providing access to government funding if available. This is supported by a high-profile campaign encouraging employers to sign the Skills Pledge – a voluntary, public commitment by the leadership of a company or organisation to support all its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2 (p41). That less than 6% employers said yes – arguably reinforces the view that employers are failing to engage with the FE system in the way government policy intends (p3).

The issue of employer engagement in 14-19 education and training is also discussed by Miller (2007) who addresses how employers are currently involved; the barriers that exist to engagement; and why more employers should be engaged. Involvement can include: offering work placements; speaking about their organisation, sector or experience; mentoring; specific schemes (e.g. Community Engineers, Young Enterprise); and apprenticeships. Barriers to engagement include, firstly, perceptions of a lack of value, interest or knowledge, in essence that such activities are peripheral to business.
3.8. Barriers to promoting employability skills

Employers need flexible provision that enables employees to take up training. There has been a long debate in the UK between employers and FE colleges about the ‘inflexibility’ of colleges. This inflexibility refers to several aspects of FE provision, a crucial one being the delivery of methods for FE training (McCoshan et al., 2003, p19). This includes training outside normal college hours, training outside the normal academic term and bespoke training.

However, tailoring provision to employer needs places greater pressure on core staff within college departments. Employer engagement is seen as an additional task and its nature often requires the delivery of provision outside ‘normal’ hours.

The widely reported key barriers to employer responsiveness of FE colleges are funding and qualifications systems. The Policy Research Institute’s (2008) recent work in developing the QIA’s strategic response to delivering employability within the FE system, found that respondents from the FE sector were almost unanimous in their view that the mainstream funding regime, with the focus being on full, formal qualifications is a fundamental barrier to encouraging and facilitating providers to deliver employability programmes and/or embed them into the existing curriculum. This is partly because employability qualifications are relatively rare and in most cases from a small component of a larger qualification for which funding exists. Furthermore, ‘embedding’ employability learning can be complex and relatively expensive (e.g. work placements, outward bound, artistic activities), so there is an incentive for providers to cut back rather than expand such activities.

Literature points to a range of operational barriers at the level of the individual college that affect the propensity of institutions to achieve greater employer responsiveness. These include both organisational issues such as rigidities in the timetable, as well as cultural issues related to staff perceptions of the role of employer responsiveness and the skills of college staff. A number of studies point towards the need for colleges to address human resource issues to ensure that they have the skills to work effectively with employers and undergo the cultural changes required within institutions (McCoshan et al., 2003).

It is increasingly argued that the focus on employer engagement should permeate the mainstream activities of the college or provider (see for example, Hughes, 2003) Learning and Skills Development Agency, p9). It is important, therefore that effective employer engagement in post-16 learning needs to be seen as a central part of the FE sector’s mission, rather than a marginal and optional activity.

One key issue in developing employability within the sector is to ensure that the staff working in FE are equipped to deliver employability skills.

A number of studies have highlighted skills gaps in the sector.
For example, the “Skills Foresight for FE” by the Further Education National Training Organisation identified problems in specific skills areas for college staff, particularly in relation to IT, but also business development skills and commercial awareness, areas which affect the relation of college staff with prospective clients and employers (for further details see http://www.fento.org/res_and_dev/reports/skills-foresight-fe-phase1/fe-sector.htm).

The capacity of the sector to deliver such skills is of particular relevance considering the components of the Commission’s definition of ‘employability’. However, more importantly perhaps in the current climate, is the need for FE staff to maintain up-to-date knowledge of their industry. Studies have found that one of the best ways of FE staff keeping up to date with their specialist area is to have placements or secondments to industry. A study by the Learning and Skills Development Agency back in 2001 reported this as being the best enabling factor for keeping knowledge up-to-date – this said, this was the option least used in continuing professional development by respondents with staff seeing the value of it but having little opportunity to experience it. The study also point to the finding (reported elsewhere, see for example..) that placements and secondments in industry can not only improve the quality of FE but can also be an independent mechanism for linking with employers (McCoshan et al, 2003, p8).

Capacity and skills of FE colleges to deliver is an issue. The Policy Research Institute’s (2008) work for the QIA on their strategic response to delivering employability within the FE system found that many FE providers were concerned about their organisational capacity to deliver the demand-led learning agenda - with it’s implication of increased employer engagement, flexibility, responsiveness etc – and at the same time an acknowledgement that many members of staff need considerable updating, for example in their knowledge and understanding of the modern workplace and its demands on employees. Furthermore the ‘teaching’ of employability is not seen generally as a high-status activity within the system, with the result that relatively small numbers of motivated individuals take forward the employer engagement, enterprise, employability and related agendas.

This issue was recognised by the Deloitte Foundation, which has been running an accredited employability programme for a number of years. They have now introduced a formal programme for FE teachers, with rigorous selection criteria, involving an intensive four-day programme. This is an attempt to introduce an element of professionalism and accreditation into an area that appears to be relatively informal in terms of recognising teachers’ skills.

The skills and attitudes of staff working in FE is important in addressing employability skills gaps within FE. However, the behaviour and attitude of students is also important. Hammond (2001) in work carried out for an LSDA West Midlands Research Network explored the delivery of key skills in colleges in the West Midlands.
Interestingly, when considering barriers in mode of delivery at the micro level, data generated from the focus group (the majority of participants were white females) suggested that students saw key skills as ‘boring and pointless’, ‘a waste of time’ and ‘a lot of extra work’. In addition, 60% of students who responded to the questionnaire as part of this research felt that key skills didn’t help them with their programmes of study, but just created a lot of extra work for them (Hammond, 2001:2-3).

3.9. Resources available to promote employability skills

There is some debate about the ‘formalisation’ of the teaching of employability skills. Given that ‘funding’ is cited as a barrier – the resources and capacity of FE colleges is crucial in addressing employability skills gaps.

In January 2007, the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) launched the first national Improvement Strategy for quality improvement. QIA has established the ‘Excellence Gateway’ (see http://excellence.qia.org.uk/) to help practitioners and providers make use of good practice that exists, bringing together a comprehensive range of online information, materials, effective practice, discussion forums and communities of practices.


3.10. Case studies of good practice

Brief Section – identifying two or three examples (2 paras each max) which demonstrate good practice of teaching employability skills – where there is evidence of success and where the causal factors are clear. Include a link or reference or contact point for further information.

3.10.1. Case study example 1: Deloitte Employability Skills Programme

This programme has been in operation since 2001 and employs ‘personal development’-type approaches to the delivery of employability for young people. Over 100 courses are being delivered at 34 colleges across England, covering a range of vocational areas. Over 800 young people have completed the course and funding has been made available to support 800 further places up to 2011. The course has been designed on the basis of extensive consultation and joint work with employers and ‘focuses on not just the practical skills of CV writing and interview skills but on the much more challenging aspects of personal and social skills development’.
The course is taught alongside existing vocational programmes and is supported by national qualifications.

The Deloitte Foundation identified the need for the training of college staff to deliver this programme and has established a ‘train the trainers’ course that is being delivered in nine centres across England. This is an intensive programme and selection of participants is rigorous in order to identify those tutors who have the necessary aptitude.

This is a relatively high-profile programme that has won several awards. However, it trains a relatively small proportion of learners and staff members and there appears to be considerable scope for the wider expansion and application of the model. While it is ostensibly ‘stand-alone’ and accredited in nature, the link with vocational programmes and the range of subject areas of participants on the ‘train the trainer’ programme mean that there is in fact a high degree of ‘embedding’.

Further details can be found from http://www.deloitte.co.uk/employability

3.10.2. Case study example 2: The Young Foundation

The Young Foundation focuses primarily on school-level education; they are also active in the FE sector and the nature of some of their work may have relevant lessons for those operating in the FE sector. Their approach is based on the SEED model (social intelligence, emotional resilience, enterprise behaviour and discipline) and emphasises the value of experiential learning and extra-curricular activities as key means through which desirable skills and attributes may be developed in young people.

The Foundation – among others – emphasises the key importance of early years in forming the types of ‘soft’ or ‘non-cognitive’ skills that are central to employability. Having said this, much of their activity focuses on secondary school level. This includes ‘Studio Schools’, a key feature of which is the incorporation of business or social enterprise activities in the school. Personal coaches help learners to develop and apply the necessary skills and attributes. Another interesting initiative is the ‘Teach Next’ programme to encourage successful career professionals to enter teaching.

It appears that these models – and others pioneered by the Young Foundation – might be applied to or adapted for the FE sector. Further information about the Young Foundation can be found at http://www.youngfoundation.org.uk

3.10.3. Case study example 3: York Pilot Diploma Example

The following is an excerpt from (QCA, 2007a:10).

“In York, schools, colleges, training providers and businesses recognise the need to develop the skills of our young people to enable them to make their way successfully in the modern world and our fast-changing economy.
The future development of our city and region depends on the growth of a highly skilled and flexible workforce. We see the development of the new 14–19 Diploma qualifications over the next five to ten years as central to improving our ability to meet the needs of both learners and businesses. Working as a collaborative partnership, York is at the forefront of Diploma development in our region. Our national pilot status for the society, health and development Diploma has helped to kick-start collaborative working across other Lines of Learning.

Many of the Diploma Lines of Learning are aligned with important sectors of our local economy. It is particularly important to York that they address the skills needs of the top three employment sectors in the future. These are:

- health
- business services/finance and retail
- bioscience (including bioengineering), creative and digital industries, and environmental and healthcare technologies.

Not only is the Diploma relevant to the learner, but it is also proving critical in persuading employers to work with educators to develop courses for key stage 4 students that:

- provide more work-related experiences
- raise the profile of the generic employability skills that employers seek from young people entering employment for the first time.

To this end, York’s Business Forum has developed a matrix of the six key employability skills that are being embedded into the delivery of the new Diploma from September 2008, and that are already being piloted with younger learners.

York’s schools and colleges are high-attaining and determined to safeguard quality as we develop breadth and access to a city-wide entitlement for 14- to 19-year-olds that includes the Diploma. We are committed to providing high-quality applied learning opportunities that are attractive to all young people and their parents/carers.

Lines of Learning in York will allow both specialist stretch and new career-focused learning that appeals to those not engaged with, or appropriately challenged by, the existing curriculum.

3.11. **Key ‘Best Practice’ Principles – Further Education**

From the review of evidence in Further Education it is difficult at this stage to identify ‘best practice’ principles for employability skills identify this sector.
4. Higher Education Institutions

Summary

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<th>Definitions of employability skills in use</th>
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<td>In the HE sector work on employability has frequently been fragmented, based on the efforts of individuals or single departments. However, there is increasingly a sector-wide approach to the issue, which has resulted in the major national funding councils producing a definition which is focused on increasing the capacity of graduates to find employment but doesn’t specify individual skills, behaviours and competencies (see Section 4.1 p62).</td>
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<th>The value of experiential learning</th>
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<td>There are many individual examples of interesting and innovative approaches to introducing experiential learning in the HE context (see Section 4.2, p62). However, actual and persuasive evidence of the beneficial effects of this is less widespread and the value of experiential methods are largely (probably correctly) assumed to be present.</td>
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<th>Employability skills in the curriculum</th>
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<td>Again there are many individual and noteworthy examples of the introduction of employability-related aspects to teaching practice. However, these remain fragmented and these concerns have not yet been embedded into the mainstream curriculum across the sector. Nevertheless there is increasing evidence of Universities taking an institution-wide approach to the issue (see Section 4.3, p65).</td>
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<th>Major pedagogical approaches</th>
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<td>Guidance from the English funding council suggests that employability skills should be promoted through teaching subject-related material (see Section 4.4, p67). The guidance also promotes the use of authentic contexts, collaborative project work, ‘scaffolding’ to encourage learning beyond current capacity and reflection (see p67).</td>
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<th>Successful practices</th>
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<td>Definitive evidence of the success of particular pedagogical approaches is to a large extent lacking. However, to the extent that research evidence is available this highlights the importance of context and encouraging learner reflection on their own development, for instance through the use of Personal Development Planning and modules (see Section 4.5, p69).</td>
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<th>Assessment practices</th>
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<td>A variety of assessment practices are in place in relation to employability skills, including the use of formative feedback on presentations and course work, the use of peer-feedback in collaborative projects and collecting of portfolio evidence (see Section 4.6, p70).</td>
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<th>Employer involvement</th>
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<td>Employer involvement and engagement is largely based on partnerships between individual HEIs and employers or through particular programmes which gain sector-wide prominence (see Section 4.7, p72). This is in contrast to some of the other settings investigated in this review where employer engagement is on more of a national basis, handled through intermediary organisations.</td>
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<th>Barriers</th>
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<td>At a sector wide level, a major barrier to pedagogical innovation is the way that both teaching and research funding operate. Because research funding is performance related, heavily competitive and the major means of ranking the status of individuals, departments and Universities, this is often the focus of attention. This means that it is often difficult to focus resources on innovations in teaching (see Section 5.8, p73).</td>
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4.1. Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) between 2002 and 2005 to help the sector engage with the issue of the employability of graduates. This initiative built on the recommendations of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, or Dearing Report (1997), and was handed on to the Higher Education Academy upon completion. The ESECT, comprising key researchers and practitioners in the field, as well as representatives of stakeholder organisations, offered a ‘working definition’ of employability that informed the series of guides they produced for the sector. To this end, employability is taken as:

a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2006).

In seeking to ‘unpack’ the many interpretations of ‘employability’ found within the Higher Education sector (HE), the ESECT considered that employability implies something about the capacity of an undergraduate to function in a job, and should not be confused with the acquisition of a job. Further, to consider employability as a curricular process, ESECT stressed that while the curricular process may facilitate the development of prerequisites appropriate to employment, it does not guarantee it. Rather, employability derives from the ways in which the student learns from their experiences. Thus, employability should be viewed as a multi-faceted characteristic of the individual student, considering that it is the individual job applicant whose suitability for a post is appraised.

In Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has taken a broadly similar line, building on its Work Experience and Employability Plans initiative and the evaluation of same (HEFCW, 2000; Harvey, 2002).

In Scotland, the Scottish Higher Education Employability Network (SHEEN) is a joint initiative of the Higher Education Academy, QAA Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Universities Scotland. Part of SHEEN’s remit is to assist the SFC in its implementation plan for Learning to Work (2007). This document’s definition of employability is taken from the work of the ESECT (Yorke & Knight, 2006).

4.2. Evidence of the value of experiential learning

Much of literature concerning experiential learning makes explicit or implicit reference to Kolb’s definition of it as being the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984; Kolb et al, 2002). The ESCET have broadened the definition to some extent in their research into planned learning activities and experiences related to, and drawing upon, understandings about work through, for example, work placements and work-related projects. Indeed, they term these activities as ‘work-related learning’ (Moreland, 2005).
Research into, and case studies of, experiential learning reveal a diversity of approaches (cf. Evans, 2000) and objectives in relation to curricula development and perceived future needs of different occupational sectors. For example, in an experiential learning project involving undergraduate nursing students at the University of Ulster, students undertook a placement with ambulance personnel to experience pre-hospital emergency care (Melby, 2000). Confronted with situations they had not faced in their clinical learning, students kept placement diaries and various entries demonstrated their potential to assimilate the characteristics of reflective action. The success of the placement convinced the BSc Honours Nursing course team that collaboration between paramedics and nursing teams can better prepare nursing students for the skills needed in holistic care.

In a review of the Urban and Regional Planning programme at Michigan State University, Kotval (2003) describes the final ‘capstone’ course, the Planning Practicum. The practicum provides a vehicle for substantive learning and the integration of techniques with theory, intended to teach graduates to become reflective planners through experiential learning that enables them to gain perspective from the views and experiences of various direct, active stakeholders in urban and regional development.

Students are placed with a ‘community client’ – such as a development organization, local planning department or community-based non-profit organization – who plays an integral role in the development of the practicum work, provides summative feedback and attends the student’s final presentation. The students also work with peers placed at the same community client to develop their skills in teamwork, communication, self-management, self-motivation, leadership, social interaction and personal development.

While the practicum has faced the challenge of a diversity of student skills and knowledge base (students enrolled on the programme come from a wide variety of disciplines such as geography, economics, architecture, civil engineering and sociology) it saw a steady increase in student achievement since its inception in 1997 to the publication of the review in 2003, and has been able to develop an established and reflexive experiential learning course which exposes students to the complexities and uncertainties in practice situations that cannot be duplicated in traditional lecture course.

Building upon the successful use of simulations/role-playing exercises in the teaching of international relations, the College of Wooster, Ohio has developed the Global Problems Summit – intended as a structured simulation providing an opportunity for experiential learning about international diplomacy and the complexity of global problems, an understanding of different national perspectives, and the development of negotiation and communication skills to promote international co-operation (Lantis, 1998). Students work with other peer summit ‘delegates’ to reach a preferred outcome in the form of a conference resolution, gaining insights about the complexities of international politics and experiencing the process of problem-solving, coalition building and bargaining.
In an article examining student reflections on a new venture planning course (NVP), Pittaway & Cope (2007) show how NVP seeks to simulate learning in entrepreneurship by engaging in experiential learning and reflective practice. The course incorporates experiential learning processes of conceptualization, experimentation, experience, and reflection alongside collective reflection on ‘action-learning’ and experiences of ‘communities of practice’ in work-based learning.

The NVP exercise is structured to provide problem-based tasks (such as market research or financial forecasting) for student teams to carry out, which are presented weekly to a ‘learning coach’ – a local business person. At the conclusion of the course, students undertake a ‘venture panel’ interview where they present their business idea to practising investors. The NVP exercise intentionally simulates uncertainty and ambiguity (which is felt by the authors to be a key success factor) within its structure in order for the students to better appreciate the dynamism and unpredictability of the entrepreneurial process.

Part of the Business Conditions and Economic Analysis (BCEA) programme at the University of Richmond, Virginia, includes an advisory board of 10 practitioners and professionals and selected university officials, which provides periodic guidance and reaction to student reports and presentations. These presentations refer to student-managed investment funds in finance (SMIFs). The BCEA group conducts domestic and global macroeconomic analysis and industry studies to support the portfolio decisions of student fund managers. The programme also includes a web-based publication for disseminating macroeconomic forecasts and special topic articles written by students. Course leaders present the BCEA programme as a ‘stand alone’ course or one with potential to be integrated with other experiential learning courses within the field. Formative assessment is achieved through written and oral presentations of economic forecasts to the advisory board.

At the University of Missouri-Columbia a model of experiential learning has been created that seeks to explicitly teach collaborative skills and habits for students who will become the future professionals providing human services to communities (Gronski & Pigg, 2000). An increasingly important skill for the contemporary ‘human service provider’ is the ability to collaborate with other professionals and stakeholders within a local community. Moreover, professionals and service programmes cannot address these complexities without the involvement of community residents. The university’s response was to develop a series of community/agency placements for students to enhance their collaborative work experiences through ‘service learning’.

Service learning is a credited educational experience through which students learn academic concepts in an organized community service activity, shaped by course learning objectives. Service learning connects students to existing community organizations, and promotes a partnership between HE institutions and the surrounding community (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Godfrey et al, 2005).
Staff involved in the Missouri University Interprofessional Initiative concluded that the collaborative skills offered by the service learning placements are needed to develop better interactions among diverse human service professionals as well as between professionals and community residents. Such types of collaboration are considered necessary for the development of solutions to complex problems, the creation of innovative approaches to enhance civil society, and the potential reduction of conflict in civil society: all highly prized skills among civil society organisations.

At Bucknall University, Pennsylvania, a collaboration between staff from the economics and geography departments has led to attempts to integrate service learning into the teaching of political economy with the aim of linking theoretical teaching with real world situations (Banks et al., 2005). This is considered to be particularly relevant when considering the employability of those studying mainstream economics, which often draws on fixed a priori categories and assumptions that may not correspond with empirical observation, or real world situations. For political economists, the authors consider that service learning provides an opportunity to engage students in the learning process by problematizing mainstream economics such as neo-classical assumptions about the operation of labour markets through participation in ‘living wage’ projects.

4.3. Extent of employability skills in the curriculum

In reviewing the extent of employability skills in their curriculum, many academics researching and writing on the issue acknowledge that embedding generic skills in the curriculum alongside discipline-specific knowledge is a challenge, but one that has the potential to considerably improve the employability of graduates.

As preparation for the professions has become increasingly university based over the last decades, many professions (e.g. education, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and social work) have integrated into their undergraduate programmes both periods of practice and subjects aimed specifically at preparing undergraduate students for the practice of their profession, attempting simultaneously to develop students’ knowledge and its professional applicability. Other disciplines, however, have sought to address the issues of embedding employability skills in the curriculum over the last decade or so.

For example, the 1990s saw numerous surveys and reports carried out into the language needs of business (cf. Metcalf, 1991; Hagan, 1993). Seeking to address the often repeated findings that better foreign language skills would very likely contribute to a better trade balance for the UK, the Department of Languages at Edinburgh Napier University introduced the Diploma in Languages and European Marketing (Visser & Wight, 1997). European Marketing was chosen as the core subject as it involves an area of communication in which foreign language proficiency is of particular importance. This core subject was closely integrated with the language component of the course reinforcing various points made in the export marketing sessions, and a real world consultancy project for a British exporter.
In this way, students could not only gain a new skill but also strengthen their language skills through extensive use in a practical context. The course was officially commended by the then Department of Trade and Industry in 1994.

More recently, a case study from the University of Wolverhampton has examined the School of Legal Studies’ development of a number of work-based learning modules in its undergraduate programme (Nicholls & Walsh, 2007). Utilising European Social Fund support, the School has developed close links with local Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) and through this can now offer around 40 level one students training to become a CAB adviser as part of their degree. Indeed, the School is reported as being in the final stages of validating a LLB (Advice Work) specialist degree. This will allow students to undertake significant periods of experiential learning within the sector and to take related modules throughout their degree. Encouraged by the success of the pilot, further employability-related modules have been embedded within the curriculum. Notably, a bespoke Diploma in Housing, in collaboration with a local housing association.

Of particular concern to the MBA in International Management at Northern Territory University in Australia has been the challenge to prepare undergraduates intending to follow careers in international companies for the ‘new’ values and skills required for the international manager (Richards, 1997). Underlying the university’s restructuring of the MBA programme has been the recognition that senior managers of the future will continue to require a broad education in a range of relevant management disciplines; a knowledge of international markets and different cultures; people management skills; and an awareness and understanding of issues that affect organizational effectiveness and quality of life in different parts of the world. Thus the MBA curriculum was altered focus on syndicate group-based self-directed learning, and intensive experiential learning.

Elsewhere, the University of Queensland, Australia, has mandated the process of integrating the prescribed generic skills for graduates into all courses and programmes and documenting this in course and programme descriptions. This process has involved mapping the extent of generic skills held by students, so-called ‘graduate attributes’, by tracing where support for graduate attribute development occurs within a course or programme, and embedding graduate attributes into the curriculum (Bath et al, 2004).

At Nottingham Business School in the late 1990s the growing significance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as potential and actual employers of graduate students at some point in their careers, led them to focus research on the value placed on transferable skills and qualities by SMEs within the context of graduate recruitment and selection processes (Stewart & Knowles, 2001). The result of this process was the creation of conceptual models intended to assist HEIs in planning and designing their curriculum responses to the changing graduate labour market.
At the Department of Computing and Information at the University of Central England in Birmingham, a new method of course development has been adopted whereby subject-specific, domain-specific and transferable skills are included. This ‘skill set’ model seeks to address the issues of ensuring that students possess a coherent skill set, a breadth of understanding of computing and information systems, and for them to develop professional non-subject specific work skills (Cox & King, 2006).

The Department considers that skill sets can develop flexible, adaptable workers if the emphasis remains on education, not simply job training. The course is designed to facilitate students to develop keys skills and knowledge in line with the skill set model: common core competencies with specialist pathway knowledge. The intention is to give students a clear focus in what they are to do, and how this will relate to their careers after university - thus leading to the ultimate goal of achieving qualifications aligned with roles in industry.

At the University of Luton, a university-wide debate led to the development of a detailed tabulation of the skills expectations for each level of undergraduate provision (Fallows & Steven, 2000). This exercise defined the desired learning outcomes for each skill area (information retrieval and handling, communication and presentation, planning and problem-solving, social development and interaction). Steps were then taken to embed these employability skills within the academic curriculum for all disciplines. Central to the initiative was the creation of detailed templates that describe the university’s approach? for each undergraduate level.

4.4. Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills

In the ESECT resource, Pedagogy for Employability (2006), a link is made between examination of how a curriculum is taught and the need to consider whether it requires adjustment to optimize the chances of helping students to develop their employability.

“Many teaching activities that promote good learning in the particular subject also promote employability in general. Employability and subject-specific learning are complementary, not oppositional. What the ‘employability agenda’ does is to encourage teachers to use pedagogic approaches that are likely to enhance general employability whilst dealing with the specifics of the subject. These approaches tend to fall within the scope of the phrase ‘active learning’. Some may cover an extended time-span and relate to the programme as a whole (for example, work-based learning, years abroad, and perhaps problem-based learning); others may be activities within study units (for example, inquiry-based activities, projects and dissertations), and yet others may be used within single teaching sessions (such as case studies of various kinds, solving small-scale problems, and peer assessment) (6).”

The resource goes on to state that, ideally, a pedagogy for employability suffuses a whole curriculum, with the component parts (e.g. individual modules) contributing to the overall employability aim.
Such a pedagogy will encourage student engagement, it is argued, by:

- Requiring students to work on learning tasks, where possible, in authentic and/or well-resourced contexts;
- Involving collaborative work where appropriate;
- Providing cognitive ‘scaffolding’ to help students towards achievements current beyond their capability and progressively removing it as that capability develops; and
- Encouraging the development of metacognition (e.g. reflection and self-regulation)

The development of students reflection and self-regulation has formed part of the rationale for the introduction of personal development planning (PDP) from 2005. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) have stated that HE representative bodies and national guidance should encourage HEIs to incorporate PDP into their strategic planning for the development and improvement of teaching and learning (QAA, 2008).

A further development in attempts to provide students with employability skills has been the enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives that, over the past decade or so, have encouraged students to develop skills that will enable them to start their own companies (cf. Scottish Institute for Enterprise, 2007; Leeds Metropolitan University, 2008). In addition to those skills and attributes related to enterprise, a more recent development has been concerning the ability for graduates to work within an organization to effect change.

This ability, termed ‘intrapreneurship’, includes innovating practice by developing new ideas, procedures or products, thereby enhancing the organization (Kneale, 2002). A series of case studies on aspects and innovations in intrapreneurship have been made available through the School of Geography at the University of Leeds, which are intended to help students understand the roles they can play in the workplace and make transferable skills from degrees explicit (cf. http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/courses/other/casestudies).

Two further developments in employability-related curricular components refer to foundation degrees and employability-oriented modules. Foundation degrees have a specific remit in respect of employability that is captured in the need for them to have been developed in conjunction with employers, and in the expectation that they will incorporate a substantial proportion of work-based learning (ESECT, op cit; Foundation Degrees Forward, 2008).

Similar in approach but tending to have a modular focus are examples of employability-oriented courses, which can include work placements, simulations, and guest lectures, among other things. Many of these initiatives rest upon now quite considerable evidence that shows graduates with work experience are more likely to get jobs on graduation than those without.
Indeed, the Dearing Report (*op cit*) recommended that work experience should be a student entitlement.

4.5. **Evidence of pedagogical success**

The ESECT pedagogy for employability resources for HEIs makes explicit reference to the fact that what works in relation to using pedagogy to generate employability outcomes is highly context dependent. Moreover, calls for ‘more research’ in order to swell the existing evidence base are unlikely to untangle this dependency to any extent (*op cit*, 11). In this way, a realistic position can be discerned whereby evaluation of pedagogic success is encouraged to determine what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why.

There are a growing number of published case studies, conference papers, and pedagogic resources relating to how different pedagogic approaches and initiatives have been piloted or implemented in different learning contexts. For example, and with respect to PDPs, there is case study evidence of attempts to embed their use within the Centre for Education in the Built Environment at Cardiff University (Higgins, 2002). Here they were considered excellent examples of relationships being formed between educational and professional requirements. Of particular benefit in this case was that in the keeping of their PDPs, the students were given practical experience in reflecting, articulating and recording their achievements and plans.

Elsewhere, the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network, in collaboration with the Open University, Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of the West of England, is developing an employability guide for psychology students. The guide is intended to offer a psychology-specific overview on topics such as employer expectations, as well as tips and examples to help students prepare for the job market – including developing a PDP (Psychology Network, 2008).

Viewing the development of PDPs in the Scottish Higher Education context and from the perspective of social sciences, Moir *et al* (2006) consider that a successful PDP model should encapsulate an effective and easily grasped method of recording for evaluation purposes. Further, it should involve a progressive process of collation through a portfolio of evidence such as a IT-based e—portfolio approach. Moreover, the process should be further supported by academic staff able to provide supervision and advice.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) recently reported that HEIs (and Further Education Colleges) had nearly 72,000 students registered, or expected to register, on foundation degree programmes in 2007-08. Over 40,000 entrants were reported for 2007-08 compared to 34,000 in 2006-07 and HEFCE project that, even with no further growth in entrants, total student numbers on foundation degrees will rise to about 97,000 before 2010 as current cohorts move through their programmes (HEFCE, 2008).
In their Strategic Plan 2006-2008, Foundation Degree Forward (*op cit*) build on the guidance and recommendations of a HEFCE evaluation of the organization in 2005 to state that the future success of Foundation Degrees rests largely on the ability of universities, faculties and individual departments to engage with more employers.

4.6. Approaches to assessment of employability skills

The literature reveals a broad range of approaches to assessing employability skills (cf. Knight & Yorke, 2006; 2007), ranging from the use of e-portfolios and generic skills ‘toolkits’, to skills ‘microtraining’ and peer assessment in the classroom.

At Monash University in Australia, the Multi-Disciplinary Industry Project involves engineering, marketing, accounting and industrial design students working in multi-disciplinary product development teams. The teams work on real world problems provided by participating industry partners. The formative assessment strategy, designed to evaluate individual student performance, is based partly on group performance on both written and oral presentations of project reports assessed by both industry partners and academic supervisors; and partly on academic skills assessed by the supervisors (Wellington *et al*, 2002).

The Working for Skills project run by Leeds Metropolitan University sought to harness the experiences which students encounter when engaged in paid work before graduation (Davies, 2000). Accepting that the development of employability skills is best served through formal, structured work placements, the project’s focus was those many students not taking degrees involving placements but for whom the taking of part-time work during their studies is a financial necessity.

The project sought to develop a transferable model of work experience using paid part-time and vacation employment to develop student skills and employability. A ‘workfile’, consisting of employability skills-related materials and a record of attributes experienced and gained by the student formed the main assessed aspect of the project. Academic course tutors provided summative assessment of the student workfiles, as well as supporting the student to reflect and self-assess their own performance. Participating students were also offered a Certificate of Completion upon completion of workfile activities.

In a study of a distance learning course run by the Open University for women returners to science, engineering and technology, e-Portfolios were trialled as a useful potential tool to assist career advancement (Herman & Kirkup, 2008). The formatively assessed e-Portfolio was designed to help the women develop a CV based on an organized collection of evidence of skills and qualifications.
The course’s internal evaluation indicated that integrating the creation by a student of their own individual e-Portfolio through the curriculum and assessment activities of a short online course proved very successful and led the course designers to recommend their use in other learning contexts – particularly so in the case of mature students who have experience a break in their jobs or careers.

In 2001, the School of Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Ulster introduced a new level two 10-credit module in ‘Enterprise and Employability’ for both geography and environmental science degree programmes (Maguire & Guyer, 2004). The employability aspect of the module revolved around course-specific materials, e.g. analysis of career destination data from previous cohorts, discussion of graduate career pathways and a careers convention featuring a range of the school’s graduates. The formative assessment tasks were selected to allow students to demonstrate their ability to apply theoretical understanding of the concepts covered to ‘real-world’ situations. Namely, through preparing and presenting a feasibility study for a subject specific business idea and in applying and being interviewed for an appropriate job.

In a study of level 2 undergraduate students taking applied social psychology or health psychology modules, student experiences and perceptions of a structured peer assessment exercise were examined (Cassidy, 2006). The study concluded that both summative and formative peer assessment in undergraduate degree programmes can contribute to the development of employability skills in the areas of student self-responsibility and autonomy. The exercise also brought into relief the importance of responsibility for a team, interpersonal skills, self-discipline and self-management.

At Napier University, concerns over widespread local concern at the perceived inadequacy of generic and transferable skills across the university led to the development a university-wide ‘ToolKit’ policy (Tait & Godfrey, 1999). This policy stated that all level one students should be given compulsory and explicit help in generic skills. Responsibility for delivering the ToolKit rested with individual departments, which could deliver a stand-alone module or, alternatively, embed the skills training within existing subject-based modules. The ToolKit policy required that learning outcomes be assessed on a pass/fail basis, where ‘pass’ reflects the minimum level of competency to permit effective independent study in HE. Students were also given opportunities to resubmit work until this minimum level of competence was demonstrated.

For the Centre for Human Communication at Manchester Metropolitan University, as most students (and higher-skilled employees) are now increasingly expected to work in groups or teams, several programmes of study have been developed to promote student’s ability to successfully manage personal relationships (Martin & Campbell, 1999). The Centre drew upon evidence that microtraining can be useful in improving presentation and communication skills generally.
The microtraining approach involves breaking down the ability to carry out guided group discussion into smaller segments, with students having the opportunity to build up their repertoire of skills over a series of microtraining sessions with student peer groups. As part of these sessions students receive immediate feedback through self, peer and tutor evaluation of the skills they use.

4.7. Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery

In the vast majority of cases reviewed here, including those which entailed work placements or other direct involvement with industry, companies or individual professionals in the previous section on Experiential Learning, academics, departments, faculties and universities have developed on-going relationships with local, regional or national employers.

These employers herald from the private, public and third sectors and approaches to engagement and employer involvement in the teaching and assessment of employability skills tends to be context dependent.

In a report examining the employer engagement policy of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (Wedgwood, 2004), the practice of universities to engage employers is seen as growing, with some significant innovations (often in partnership) in a number of institutions changing the way that course are conceptualized, designed and delivered to address the employability agenda.

The report goes on to state that a ‘new tradition’ of higher education is emerging of accessibility, flexibility, adaptability, integration and responsiveness to address the various service needs of employers and employees, relevant to the context of professional practice in the workplace across all employment sectors.

Case study evidence from a range of disciplines and initiatives reveals a spectrum of employer engagement ranging from guest lectures by noted professionals to employer involvement in formative assessment.

In the Working for Skills Project at Leeds Metropolitan University (Bibby et al, 2000), employers were involved in the outlining of the project bid to the then Department for Education and Employment and partnerships were established with six large national recruiters of graduates active in the Yorkshire and Humber region. The project provided a quality job matching service by working with the Leeds Metropolitan University ‘Job Shop’ to identify students who most closely matched the needs of the employing organization. Suitable students were then assisted in making their applications and were offered learning resources to develop employability skills in the workplace.

In a project based at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, an international course was introduced that would help students become competent members of virtual product development teams.
Integrated product development is seen to be directly affected by globalization processes of functional merging of geographically, organizationally and culturally dispersed employees – including product developers. Companies from the Netherlands, Switzerland and Slovenia contributed to the European Global Product Realization (E-GPR) course programme, which constitute a series of lectures and virtual project team work supported by the participating companies. The main objective of the course was to enable the participating students of nine different nationalities to become competent members of virtual product development teams, and thus better prepared to face the challenges of their future careers (Zavbi & Tavcar, 2005).

The University of Exeter is currently running a project-based placement that places graduates with local organizations on projects focused on marketing, IT, business planning, accounts and so on – depending on the need of the placement company. Final year students or recent graduates can apply for a placement with the Graduate Business Partnerships initiative, where they will be based with a company for 20 weeks, with pay of a minimum of £300 per week, and fortnightly attendance at a Business Training Course at the university. The initiative has placed students with over 300 companies to date (University of Exeter, 2008).

At London Metropolitan University, the Law Graduates Employability Network sought to enhance the employability of law undergraduates from disadvantaged groups both in and outside the mainstream legal professions (Nicolas, 2008).

The Network offers students careers guidance, work experience and customized training. From the success of its employer engagement, in 2001 the Network generated over 200 work experience opportunities for undergraduates, from solicitors, NGOs and charities, courts and local authorities, and law centres. The initiative has now evolved into the Law Employability Network.

In a paper that draws upon detailed information gathered at university department level, combined with graduate survey data, Mason et al (2006) assess the impact of different kinds of employability skills initiatives on graduate labour market performance. Among their conclusions is the finding that structured work experience has clear positive effects on the ability of graduates, firstly, to find employment within six months of graduation and, secondly, to secure employment in graduate-level jobs. The job quality measure the authors use is also positively and significantly associated with employer involvement in degree course design and design.

4.8. Barriers to promoting employability skills

Recent comment and reporting on the final Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in Britain’s universities have criticized the RAE process for its administrative burdens and the tendency for it to draw academics away from focus on student development and employability concerns (cf. Spencer, 2007).
Criticizing other hitherto ‘traditional’ notions and assumptions about HE and in particular the view that graduates form an elite social and occupational group, Tomlinson (2007) points out that there remain positional differences and on occasion observable inequalities between graduates on the basis of social class, gender and ethnicity. In this sense, employability may be seen to be value and identity-driven, relating to students’ own dispositions and biographies.

From his qualitative research with students Tomlinson concludes that many of them no longer anticipate clear link between their merit in education and its reward in the labour market. Many students, particularly those whose future aspirations are strongly geared around their future employment, now perceive the need to develop more proactive and aggressive labour market strategies.

Hendry (2006) considers that many current master of business education (MBA) courses, undergraduate and executive, the curriculum is dominated by the rationalizing techniques associated with the principle business functions of finance, accounting, marketing, operations and so on. Whilst there can be little argument that graduate management students have to be enterprising as well as technically competent, the essence of management in the knowledge economy lies in the governance of enterprise, not in its pursuit. Business schools, he argues, should pay equal attention to this fact in their experiential learning and other work-based employability initiatives.

4.9. Resources available to promote employability skills

The Higher Education Academy has developed a range of resources designed to assist HE departments and faculties in their teaching and learning in relation to employability skills. The HEA website also includes sub-sites dedicated to each individual areas that make up the network of 24 ‘Subject Centres’, including Art, Design and Media; Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences; Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism; and Sociology, Anthropology and Politics. These sub-sites include employability-related case studies, information, and links to the two series of Learning and Employability guides that the ESECT produced (HEA, 2008).

The HEA also includes information and links to employability-related organizations (such as the Association of Graduate Recruiters and the Centre for Recording Achievement), reports and articles examining different aspects of the employability agenda (including from DfES, HEFCE, and the Economic and Social Research Council), and case studies of good practice from a number of HEIs (see Section 5.10 below).

The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), whose members include the University of Liverpool, the London School of Economics and the Open University, as well as companies such as Legal & General, Rio Tinto, and Scottish Power, also offer a range of employability resources.
These include published summaries of the employability capabilities that students develop through studying different higher education subjects, and have plans to publish (in collaboration with the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts and the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship) a proposed curriculum framework and student learning experience guide on how universities might develop more entrepreneurial graduates (CIHE, 2008).

Intended as a high-level partnership between business, universities and colleges, the CIHE employability resources include information on Student Employability Profiles (CIHE, 2008). These are subject-specific summaries of the work-related skills that should be developed from studying a particular subject. Each profile gives a description of the subject as an academic discipline and includes commentary on the value of the skills in employment. These profiles have the support of the HEA Subject Centres network and the QAA.

The QAA has also recently published findings from an employability-focused audit of 59 HEIs in England and Northern Ireland (QAA, 2008). As well as revealing the efforts of HEIs to embed employability skills into the curriculum, the report also details examples of approaches to formative assessment of work-based learning, including the need to facilitate external examiners’ access to participating workplaces.

In Wales, HEFCW’s resources relating to employability include information and links to the Graduate Opportunities Wales project, GO Wales (GO Wales, 2008). The project is delivered by the HEIs in Wales in order to help businesses – particularly SMEs – access higher-level skills and to help students and graduates in their preparation for their careers. GO Wales services include work placements, a free recruitment site for graduates and employers, and continuing professional development.

In Scotland, a recent initiative involving Academy Scotland, the Centre for Recording Achievement and QAA Scotland has included the development of a new set of guidelines for HEIs to support PDP implementation (www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/) and access to a range of PDP/e-portfolio practice (www.recordingachievement.org/practitioners/default.asp).

4.10. Case studies of good practice

The Impact Project

The Impact Project is a collaborative project between the Universities in Yorkshire and operates at the University of Bradford, the University of Huddersfield, the University of Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield. Impact is an enhanced programme designed to boost employment skills and increase employment opportunities. Impact is also now part of the Aim Higher initiative and, in addition to working with UK Black and Minority Ethnic Students, also works with young people with no previous experience of higher education or of accessing the graduate job market.
Impact participants can choose from a range of activities, many of which are employer led. These activities include: specialist advice on job-search activities; workshops on job hunting, including interview techniques and CV-writing; a mentoring scheme where students are matched to an appropriate employer; access to and assistance with obtaining work experience and work shadowing; competency-based workshops on skills such as team-building, networking and negotiating; and student support groups.

For further details: [http://www.careers.brad.ac.uk/impact](http://www.careers.brad.ac.uk/impact)

Centre for Excellence in Professional Placement Learning (CEPPL)

The CEPPL, based at the University of Plymouth, was set up to develop best practice in various key aspects of placement learning provision, and the development of new, innovative placement opportunities for students. Whilst being located within the field of Health and Social Care, the CEPPL’s activities carry the related aim to inform and engage all academics, students, service users and employers with an interest in placement or experiential learning. CEPPL activities include assessment in practice, evaluating inter-professional learning, and auditing and enhancing the placement learning context. At present, the CEPPL’s placements are designed to enable students develop the relevant skills in the provision of health and social care to historically marginalized groups – such as refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless, and carers of chronically ill people.

See [http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/cetl/placement](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/cetl/placement) [http://www.placementlearning.org/](http://www.placementlearning.org/)

4.11. Key ‘Best Practice’ Principles – Higher Education

Principles

1. Work based or ‘real world’ active learning is at the heart of most initiatives, enabling students to integrate techniques with theory; connect abstract ideas with real world solutions; experience the authentic context with its complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability. This is often through a problem solving task or project.

2. Students are encouraged to be reflective practitioners and there is often a process for them to demonstrate this – whether through presentations, e-portfolios, or personal development plans, which may be related to an overall mapping of graduate skills.

3. The process is often collaborative, generally working with peers but sometimes with other stakeholders, enabling the development of team working and other interpersonal skills.

4. Engagement with stakeholders, who offer different perspectives, particularly employers who may be involved in assessment, design, expert panel.
Key Principles and their application in differing HE areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Undergraduate: subject</th>
<th>Undergraduate: professional</th>
<th>Masters MBA</th>
<th>Dept or Institution</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>PDP’s and e-portfolios</td>
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<td>Skill mapping</td>
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<td>Collaborative</td>
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<td>Employer engagement</td>
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<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
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(Professional related degrees included nursing, urban and regional planning, law, housing)

Considerations

- The majority of examples of best practices come from vocational/professional degrees, foundation degrees or MBAs. It may be more of a challenge to transfer the approach to more academic subjects where the link is less obvious. The impact of the RAE process may mitigate employability efforts. Arguably the principles are consistent with good teaching, but if research is valued more than teaching it will reduce energy into this area. Consider working on attitude change of funders and deliverers which may be critical.

- There are already a large number of initiatives in this area, many are departmental rather than institution wide, which need encouraging and propagating. Consider engaging key stakeholders to agree on transferable best practice, an overarching framework, as well as consideration of barriers at institution, department, lecturer, student level. They could also be the sponsors for research into consistent measures, across institutions to measure impact.

- This is an investment, likely to have a significant return, but will have costs in terms of time and energy for institutions, departments and lecturers. Ignoring this is likely to undermine effectiveness.

- Many of these approaches are common practice in the workplace. Engaging with employers, allowing the synthesis of academic and work reality, has benefits for both sides as well as students. Consider the development of partnership skills among the leadership of institutions involved, which could be strategic as well as soft skills and if delivered to a cross section of stakeholder leadership would enable the building of closer links and different perspectives.
5. **Adult Education**

**Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions of employability skills in use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adult education is an exceptionally heterodox sector. In some parts of the sector, employability skills are a major concern, whereas in others – such as community based learning – they may occasionally be seen as less of a priority. However, there is increasing interest in the development of key set of competencies and to distil specific employability-related skills (see Section 5.1, p79). As yet there is no sector-wide shared definition of employability skills.</td>
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<tr>
<th>The value of experiential learning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Experiential learning is widely promoted and acknowledged as important in the sector but, as elsewhere there is little direct evidence to categorically prove these assertions (see Section 5.2, p79).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Employability skills in the curriculum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Employability skills in the Adult Education sector are mainly promoted through the Skills for Life which has ‘Preparation for Work and Life’ as a central objective. Other provision such as ESOL courses are also central to employability (see Section 5.3, p81).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Major pedagogical approaches</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogical approaches to promoting employability skills vary widely across the sector but include a focus on learning by doing, traditional instructional teaching and work-based learning and reflection (see Section 5.4, p83).</td>
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<th>Successful practices</th>
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<td>Research and evidence on the success of particular methodologies is weak, beyond simple conclusions that entire programmes, such as Skills for Life do enhance employability, though not necessarily employment. Several studies have identified poor approaches to teaching, especially a failure to acknowledge individual learning styles and needs (see Section 5.5, p88).</td>
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<th>Assessment practices</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like teaching practices, assessment also differs across the sector but portfolios, work-based assessment and competence based models are widely used (see Section 5.6, p91).</td>
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<th>Employer involvement</th>
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<td>Approaches to employer engagement appear to be fragmented across the sector and relate to where is overlaps with Welfare to Work provision, such as in the Train to Gain initiative or Work-Based Learning (see Section 5.7, p94).</td>
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<th>Barriers</th>
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<td>The main challenges in employability provision apparent in the literature are the confidence and skills of learners themselves, who are often reticent or lack the basic language skills to engage in other provision (see Section 5.8, p95).</td>
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</table>
5.1. Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use

Adult education is delivered to an enormously heterodox set of learners, ranging from community classes in yoga, to basic skills classes to offenders and ex-offenders to more mainstream employability provision. While adult education may often be delivered by, through or within other settings considered in this review (i.e. schools, FE colleges and Universities) it is usually in provision which is seen as outside of their mainstream offer.

Danson (2005) notes that employability skills – however defined – are significant only in relation to how these skills or assets are presented to prospective employers; the deployment of those assets in terms of identifying and pursuing appropriate opportunities; and a number of wider contextual factors such as family, local labour market, and the attitudes and recruitment practices of employers. Failure to attend to these factors as well as the employability skills has resulted in the reproduction of non-employment along traditional unemployment patterns in the UK.

Over the last few years there has been increasing interest in the development of a set of defined key competencies for Skills for Life provision and to include within these concerns with employability skills. For instance, several conferences have been organised on this theme.

5.2. Evidence of the value of experiential learning

The literature contains a large number of materials concerning experiential learning, although most of this reflects perceptions rather than a clear evidence base. The perception of experiential learning is that it provides the basis for enhancing the curriculum rather than as a discrete activity unrelated to personal, institutional or sectoral learning objectives. There are a number of approaches and materials captured by the literature search which can be read in conjunction with other findings about the importance and benefit of a curriculum enriched by learning which is embedded in everyday experiences or those specifically relevant to employment. Many of these approaches and materials are underpinned by Kolb’s 1975 model of experiential learning which developed the idea of learning preferences but which nonetheless fall into four fairly stable types (diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating). Coffield et al state (2004) state that this model, along with Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory test, has been widely influential in generating many different practice-based approaches using experiential learning: e.g. Honey and Mumford’s (2000) use of the learning cycle to devise learning assessment, learning plans.

The value of the experiential approach is that it appears to contribute to the idea of an ‘enriched curriculum’, using approaches such as cooperative or self-directed learning, and through which issues from social, community and work life are used as the basis to develop basic skills, and progressing towards learning about family life, community life, work life and national life (Kissam 1993).
From its research in the UK into learner motivations the NRDC states that adults ‘fit learning into their own purposes ... related to their real lives and practices and role they engage in outside the classroom’ (2005: 4). As a result, their motivation enables teachers of adult learners to ‘scaffold’ various activities as learning opportunities, using idiosyncratic and incidental opportunities for learning which are potentially ‘socially and personally transformative’ (ibid: 5). The Northern Learning Trust (2006) reports on its holistic Skills for Work programme and the need for the delivery of vocational and academic skills to be delivered with support on issues such as self-esteem and motivation. The Trust reports that by tailoring the taught curriculum to individual’s own aims, needs and aspirations is more effective in engaging hard to reach groups. In Northern Ireland, in the review of the Essential Skills Strategy (for enhancing adult employability) it is noted that tutors ‘welcome a range of customisable materials to be used with their classes ... which reflect local people and issues’ (Frontline Consultants 2006: 46). However, the review also highlighted the inaccessibility of information about or examples of good practice in delivery of employability skills.

There are numerous resource materials which are based upon the perceived value of this approach. In the US Shaw and Roark (1977) provide one example of early context-oriented resources generated from the experiential learning model which promotes and structures experiential learning. In 1977 Nickse developed an ‘Adult Competency Education Kit’ which uses ‘real life materials’. Marlow et al (1991) reported on an adult basic skills instructor training programme through experiential learning using topics such as interpersonal communication, reading, language and arts. In the Swedish context, Delander et al (2005) investigated the value for new immigrants of combining learning in the classroom with learning language in the workplace. The research findings claimed that the sandwiching of formal teaching with informal experiential learning resulted in significantly more rapid absorption into the general workforce.

However, there little evidence overall of the direct value of this approach to developing employability skills, either by assessing how experiential learning helps to develop employability skills, or by demonstrating benefit through engagement in employment or career progression. The benefits of such programmes either have to be assumed, as there is little evaluation of direct impact, or inferred by reference to other research and evaluations reported throughout this chapter.

The literature search identified some texts which could not be sourced in time for this review: In discussing the Australian context in ‘The Adult Learner at Work’ Burns (2002) argues that provision needs to be more diverse through formal and informal delivery in order to be responsive to global and national contexts. Expectations about adult education have shifted towards education for employability, personal development and social equity which has driven developments in the value of experiential learning and andragogy (‘the process of engaging adult learners in the structure of the learning experience’), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and new thinking about intellectual abilities and ways of learning.

5.3. Extent of employability skills in the curriculum

The adult education curriculum is predominated by basic skills and skills for life provision geared towards economic and social integration through ‘Preparation for Work and Life’, in line with LSC targets (Davey 2006). Other popular subject areas include arts, crafts, fashion, music and drama, languages including ESOL, healthcare, etc. In some areas, such as ESOL, supply does not meet demand (ibid: 3). LSC funding streams include what is called Adult Community Learning (ACL) which includes ‘first steps provision’ setting out progression routes through the adult curriculum also in line with LSC targets. This and other funding channels largely influence the extent of employment-oriented training for adults through vocational training for young adults, basic skills targeting the long-term unemployed, the disabled, lone parents, etc. New deal for the Long-term unemployed, for example, targets the over 25s with the opportunity to access a number of employment support activities, including accredited full-time education and training available to those who continue to be ‘actively seeking work’ (2000: 43). There is no stipulation in the jobseekers contract which states what curriculum the jobseeker should pursue, only that it is agreed with the local jobcentre.

Despite these extensive funding streams for adult employability the delivery of most adult education provision is through free standing services which seek to remain responsive to local demand and patterns of delivery (Davey 2006). Jarvis and Campion (2000) also note that one of the effects of devolution has been increased flexibility in the delivery arrangements of employment service programmes, enabling the development of employability training through collaborative arrangements between local training providers, colleges, employers, etc. However, many providers aspire to ‘maintain the breadth of the adult education curriculum … ensuring excellent choice of subjects on offer’ (KAES 2007). The largest number of enrolments by subject sector in adult education is in curriculum areas such as ‘Preparation for Work and Life’ and ‘Skills for Life’, (Davy 2006, KAES 2007).

Following the report of Sir Claus Moser’s Working Group, A Fresh Start – Improving Literacy and Numeracy (Department for Education and Employment), ‘Skills for Life’, the national adult basic skills strategy promoting literacy and numeracy was launched in 2001. The strategy has included curriculum documents for literacy, numeracy and ESOL as well as a pre-entry curriculum framework with staff development programmes and qualifications frameworks aligned to these. The Core Curriculum is based on the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 2000. The standards devised by the QCA provide a map of skills and capabilities that adults are expected to need to in order to be able to function and make progress at in society and work.
The Core Curriculum is delivered through a number of levels, for example the ESOL curriculum is geared towards enabling basic communication and discussion, as well as building other competences, while at Level 2 Writing the curriculum aims to achieve the exchange of ideas and opinions ‘appropriate to purpose’ (DIUS 2008).

The curriculum document for adult numeracy broadly covers the ability to:

- understand and use mathematical information;
- calculate and manipulate mathematical information; and
- interpret results and communicate mathematical information.

The Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum (ANCC) was introduced in 2001 alongside the Skills for Life strategy and remains the central element to the numeracy element (BSA, 2001). Jassi and Mitchell describe the ANCC as essentially a map of numeracy skills which adults need and the curriculum elements are presented as being context free and although it is not statutory it is normalised through funding mechanisms geared to accreditation (2008). The existing ANCC fails to include issues relating to employability, Newmarch (2005) states that it is up to the tutor and learner to provide the context within which the learning takes place. The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (BSA, 2001a) broadly covers the ability to:

- speak, listen and respond;
- read and comprehend; and
- write to communicate.

Similarly, the core curriculum for adult literacy does not specifically address employability skills and remains context free.

Provision within the formal curriculum for work related skills emanates from numerous sources, including central government’s own national skills strategy encompassing basic and core skills through pre-entry to level 2 provision. Other providers include agencies such as City and Guilds, a vocational course and accreditation agency which produces extensive course materials aimed at preparing adult and other learners for work in particular employment, such as the Care Sector. Apart from emphasis on the nature of particular employment sectors, City and Guilds claim its courses also seek to develop generic work-related skills communication skills, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, workplace health and safety, and developing own learning in preparation for work (City and Guilds 2004). In Scotland City and Guilds produces a Workplace Core Skills programme which extends and relates the basic skills curriculum to work settings, from Access (i.e. those who have little or no skill and experience of using Core Skills in the workplace and need help to do so and where the work scenario is at a basic or trainee level) to Higher levels of achievement (i.e. aimed at those with significant skills, such as managers, and experience in the workplace) (City and Guilds 2001 – this curriculum is delivered in Scotland only).
An interesting report which argues that a certain group of employability skills which is lacking in employability provision is ‘skills for enterprise’, which refers to entrepreneurship and ‘the relevance of enterprise to transferable skills, social enterprise, community regeneration and enterprise learning’ necessary for the demands of 21st century knowledge-based economy (NCVER 2002: 7). The report sets out the attributes, skills and behaviours required of an entrepreneurial workforce not commonly found in other definitions of employability (with reference to the UKCES skills definition), such as ‘taking risky actions in uncertain environments’, coping with and enjoying uncertainty’, and ‘commitment to making things happen’. Such skills underpin wider skill needs beyond the six key skills set out by government such as project management, independent action, and self-management but which are not developed in a culture of over-testing and assessment.

Work Based Learning (WBL) has also played an important role in adult learning over previous years by combining university level learning within the workplace, it typically involves a three-way relationship between the student, employer and higher education institution where a set of learning outcomes are agreed in a contract. Therefore the curriculum is student centred and less likely to be derived from pre-existing curricula. The curriculum design is formulated by individual higher education establishments; therefore the incorporation of employability skills is at their discretion. For example, the WBL Working Group at the University of the West of Scotland state:

“In taking account of employability, curriculum design teams need to recognise that for many, if not the majority of learners, the motivation to learn a given discipline is not chiefly intrinsic, but is for a purpose – that is to enhance their opportunities to gain employment and/or improve their quality of life.”

The Workers Education Association (WEA) is the largest voluntary sector provider of adult education and has students introduced through their place of work and through partnerships with trade unions and employers. The organisation offers a wide range of learning opportunities including Skills for Life and higher education Access courses. One of the key characteristics of the organisation is the development of educational processes that build democratic relationships between tutors and students and building the curriculum together. However, there is no evidence available about how employability skills are integrated into the curriculum.

5.4. Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills

The literature search captured numerous examples of materials for use in classroom along with guidance for their use. The US is particularly prolific in developing teaching materials for classroom usage with young adults towards developing basic competences linked to employability skills. One example (Krombout et al 1979) uses wages and wage-slips, including understanding taxation and using banks, the intention of which is to relate to experiential learning for job-seekers or seeking to progress in employment.

http://www.paisley.ac.uk/schoolsdepts/capd/signposts/curriculum-section5.asp
There are many examples of different manuals which use adult learner’s previous experience as the basis for instruction in the classroom. One example, the ‘Learning for Earning: A Basic Skills and Employability Training Manual for Adult Students’ is structured through chapters which present different issues about employment, commencing with the condition of women in the workplace in the early 20th century, and then considers employment paths and the wider job market, as well as practical guidance on how to get a job. Each chapter of the manual commences with a problem-solving exercise as a framework to understand the chapters that follow but the manual is intended for use in small groups to encourage communication and role playing in order to promote insight into an employer’s perspective. Staszewski (1997) reports on a study into ‘job readiness’ in community colleges, concluding that certain elements are necessary for effective job training programmes, such as inclusion of academic instruction, skills training integrated with academic (or remedial) instruction, and work-based education coordinated with instruction through ‘connecting activities’; connection of all programmes in a hierarchy of education and training opportunities; and use of applied teaching methods and team teaching strategies’ (1997: 122). He describes the job readiness programme as delivering training in 7 sets of workplace skills (reading, writing and computation; listening and speaking; learning how to learn skills; personal management; teamwork; leadership and organisational effectiveness. These formed a core set of outcomes which framed the job readiness training in a community college targeting low-income and other disadvantaged groups. In addition to the core curriculum, participants could access further support in terms of career education and exploration, pre-employment / work maturity competencies (not explained); coordination of work experience and internships; case management and counselling services; and orientation to the world of work.

An interesting classroom technique assessed by Cairns (1996) is the ‘work skills simulation’ project based upon the idea that ‘a shift to experiential learning focus in career education could help students make the transition from fact-based learning about employment to skilled job performance’ leading to ‘an increase in experiential career education’. The project concerned creating ‘an accurate underlying model of the workplace’ in terms of reproducing decision-making scenarios; activity which displays knowledge, skills and attitudes; as well as a way for learners to assess their behaviours and skills on entry to the simulation. The simulation emphasises 5 skills sets (basic academic, self-management, problem-solving, co-operative, and leadership) and learners were hired into various positions within four departments of a simulated manufacturing company. Participants’ job responsibilities are outlined and successful demonstration of the skills sets by the learners in each job was assessed with reference to the company’s overall profitability, completion of departmental tasks, and individual performance appraisals. The simulation can be run on computer or on paper.

The author concluded that the simulation provided learners with a comprehensive approach ‘to combine discrete skills into a smooth, personal work performance’.
One training programme which comprised of six student booklets, each one focusing on a competency associated with employability, for use with students and adults in learning environments, was evaluated across a number of states in North America for its flexibility to student needs. Kromhout et al (1978) reported that the programme was successful because it allowed trainers and teachers to adapt the material format to different contexts and student groups, depending upon a key criterion of the programme which was ensuring that students set their own objectives for employability competences rather than these being pre-set. Other research projects in the United States have looked at combining academic and employability skills learning in the classroom (e.g. Bowers 1983). In these projects the employability skills interventions have been couched within a wide package or ‘system’ of measures which include job seeking skills, vocational training and job club activities as well as job placement activities. This multiple-intervention approach was deemed to be effective based on the numbers of participants who subsequently found employment, went into further training, and got job interviews.

There are several examples of approaches which have targeted offenders, such as the Canadian ‘National Employability Skills Program for Offenders: A Preliminary Investigation’ (2005). The programme sought to help offenders acquire a number of basic employability skills, including communication, problem solving, managing information, using numbers, working with others, leadership abilities, adaptability, demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviours, being responsible, participating in projects and tasks, and working safely. Programme evaluators claim that the programme was successful in helping participants to improve these employability skills, evidenced through ‘increases in post-release employment planning, resolving problems with employers and colleagues, and understanding the skills they needed to keep or advance in their current employment’. Mulgrew (1996) reported on further Canadian research based upon a shift in emphasis away from job-specific skills toward generic employability skills, attitudes, and knowledge. The Correctional Service of Canada developed an employability skills project involving another state agency (the Centre for Career Development Innovation) to develop ‘on-the-job’ training guides for one correctional facility, including an employment skills and career planning workbook for classroom use.

Although there are many different approaches which appear to advocate emphasis on core academic skills or job-specific skills, the most critical skill identified in the literature is reading. There are therefore a significant proportion of adult education resources placed in or organised around adult literacy schemes (e.g. Darling et al 1983). In many cases literacy acquisition is organised around job finding and retention skills such as the Foundation Skills Framework Wheel devised by the Institute for Adult Literacy (2000). Carman et al (2002) use this framework to develop a learning resource for adult learners which encompasses basic employability skills, basic workplace knowledge (including health and safety, and quality), basic workplace skills, and lifelong learning skills. Although many such resources target non-achievers, many also target immigrant communities and those with learning difficulties.
However, the success of literacy programmes and manuals linked to employability skills appears to indicate that there is a minimum literacy level which is required for adult learners to engage with adult learning materials, equivalent in the US to 5th grade (Eyster et al. 1979). Farrow et al. (1979) used this minimum level of reading skill as the basis of class-based instruction on skills related to job retention and career progression.

Research in the UK suggests that such materials can only play one part in a much wider and flexible approach to adult education. Kenwright et al. (2007) state that the use of materials such as manuals or other resources must be used to fit learner styles and learner motivations. The research found that satisfaction with course structure and content was higher where resources and activities preferences were used by practitioners to develop individual and group learning strategies, promoting the development of an active learning approach and challenging the perception held by participants of being passive recipients.

Moreover, resources made available to practitioners to generate materials relevant to adult learners was also helpful in retaining adult learners’ interest. This need not be expensive, as in one case a tutor used clothes pegs in order to join words and letters on flash cards to demonstrate the use of apostrophes. Hill (1995) sought to investigate key themes underpinning the notion of ‘work ethic’ as a frame for assessing particular employability skills. He describes work ethic as no longer being linked to any religious ideology and developed an ‘occupational work ethic inventory’ (OWEI) made up of 50 desirable traits in any work circumstance, then condensed into a manageable list of themes. Hill suggested the traits could be made an explicit aspect of any training programme but added: Lecturing about the merits of interpersonal skills, initiative, and being dependable will likely have little lasting impact. Facilitating a situation where students must mentally grapple with choices about these issues for themselves, with others, and thereby weigh the merits of these issues within a social context is likely to have the greatest benefit.

One of the key influences of adult employability skills delivery is the link between reading and writing skill acquisition as the basis to social and economic integration. Research based on data from the British Birth Cohort Studies asserts the critical importance of basic skills of literacy and numeracy as the key to employability. Brynner (2002, 2004) states that ‘reading’ is the key skill which is the basis of economic integration – thus need to look at settings. However, these issues are critically linked in the literature to the barriers which prevent adults not just from participating in skills training but from retaining them in such training. Kirstein (2000) looked at the relationship between self-esteem and participation in terms of developing sensitive approaches in new adult tutors to this issue. The approach which he recommended included establishing a positive classroom environment, encouraging and knowing learners, encouraging interaction among students, being flexible in the learning approach itself in terms of materials and pace, and acknowledging progress.
An identified problem in the research is the association of failure or exclusion with formalised approaches to learning, such as classroom settings and materials that are usually covered in childhood. However, the relationship between self-esteem and retention (or ‘attrition’) is vague and many findings are based upon estimation about linkage of these issues.

One approach to employability learning trialled a multi-media based curriculum using texts, videos, ICT and on-line resources (portfolios) to develop ‘workplace essential skills’ (Sabatini 2001). Although the research provided only ambivalent conclusions about the overall multimedia approach, there were more specific conclusions about the delivery of the adult employability skills curriculum. For example rather than emphasise formulaic writing skills, Sabatini cites a compelling argument for using writing for empowerment, namely in respect of establishing a voice which must be sensitive to audience. The writing process was delivered through a stepped process of (i) identifying purpose of writing; (ii) gathering facts and organising thoughts; (iii) selecting appropriate format; (iv) drafting; (v) reviewing; (vi) proofreading; and (vii) distribution to audience. There were less positive conclusions about the use and value of online resources which required more time in preparation than in delivery to learners.

In considering pedagogical approaches to ESOL, Barton and Pitt (2003) note how little research has been undertaken into adult learners and learning styles in relation to the learning of language, with most focusing on children learners. Instead they rely on importing research from other contexts in order to explore the relationship between classroom practices and individual learning. They note how research from other contexts have been imported to inform the structure and delivery of the adult learning curriculum even though the bases of such research is thin and the relevance cannot be assumed. As an example they report a study from an Algerian University (Slimani 2001) which looked at what students claimed to learn from classroom activity, noting that in fact few students could remember much of what went on in the classroom, and that most of what was remembered came from topics raised by other learners rather than the teacher.

Tusting and Barton (2003) explore pedagogical methods by summarising a wide range of literature on adult learning. They draw on the different models in use and their significance for the development of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL within the Skills for Life strategy. However, these methods were not examined specifically in relation to employability skills; instead the models identified are helpful to begin understanding the complexity of learning and are presented as providing potential use for the overall teaching of adult basic skills.

The Key Skills Support Programmes Guide to Good Practice (2006) identifies some of the broad approaches recognised for the delivery of basic skills within the framework of a vocational programme. Those methods identified include team teaching, team planning, front-end approach, discrete (non embedded) and embedded. As curriculum documents are context free, in practice the way in which employability skills are incorporated into Skills for Life varies widely across projects, training providers and initiatives.
5.5. **Evidence of pedagogical success**

Hasluck et al (2006) undertook a review of Skills Coaching provision as part of the New Deal for Skills strategy launched in 2004, the core objective of which was to add value to existing Jobcentre Plus support to help individuals find the most effective route to improved employability. The evaluation considered the efficacy of a brokerage model in order to direct young adults (Jobseekers Allowance claimants) to local learning providers as well as the value of Skills Diagnostics and Passports. They noted that the differences in outcomes of the programme may be attributable to the delivery and effectiveness of the coaching itself, but could not establish this as it didn’t form part of the review. However, the authors did note that less that 7% of participants in the programme achieved a qualification as a result of the referral to local learner providers and stated that brokers and claimants ‘complained of a lack of suitable local training provision or that training was available at times and in a manner that did not suit Skills Coaching customers. … also commented that sometimes customers wanted skills and training for which there was little demand in the local job market’ (2006: 6.3). Evaluations of the Skills for Life programme have shown that individual beneficiaries increase their capacity against relevant competencies (such as “employment commitment, greater self-esteem, improved literacy and numeracy” as well as commitment to employment and training) when compared with a control group, though this did not necessarily contribute to enhanced employment itself (Meadows and Metcalf, 2005).

Brooks et al note that there is a dearth of evidence on the impact and wider benefits of adult basic skills training and the limited evidence there was available showed that gains ‘were undramatic but worthwhile’ (2001: 3). In relation to numeracy, the evidence of benefit was ‘sparse and unreliable’ (ibid). Drawing on a body of evidence from Britain and the US, they noted that more worthwhile benefits were perceived from workplace provision. They add ‘the biggest single gap is the total absence of intervention studies exploring what factors in teaching basic skills cause progress in learning basic skills’ (ibid). They call for an immediate and systematic programme of research into the pedagogy of adult skills and its impact in terms of progression. The materials generated in this literature review supports this position: while there are many examples of materials, programmes, etc. there is little evidence of success either in terms of immediate impacts or longitudinally. In relation to vocational qualifications Unwin et al note that ‘the research literature on vocational qualifications is thin, reflecting the invisibility of vocational education and work-based pathways more generally. Where they do exist, studies of vocational education and vocational learning often do not include any focus on [the delivery of] vocational qualifications and, hence the UK lacks a substantive evidence base on vocational qualifications’ (2004). Although they looked mainly at NVQ provision, their finding that research on retention and achievement is often not published or exists ‘in the “grey” literature of unpublished research dissertations and presentations and papers at conferences’ (ibid: 7.1) is also the case with adult education.
They refer to other commentary on the limited research base that is available (e.g. Martinez 2001) which is usually small scale, with unclear methodology, demonstrates particular bias, is usually inaccessible and lacks a theoretical framework for comparative analysis.

Despite the lack of a broad or rigorous evidence base Unwin et al (2004) bring these findings together and state that dissatisfaction with vocational courses is usually due to poor course design and boring teaching methods; poor group dynamics; mismatches of learning styles to taught methods; poor assessment, and scheduling of work or timetabling unsuitable to learners. However there is no effort to link these findings to a large learner population with diverse needs, pre-existing experience of education, existing basic skills competency, etc. and the way in which vocational or employability skills are taught.

Coffield et al (2004) undertook a systematic review into the literature on learning styles, looking at the perceived advantages and disadvantages of 13 different pedagogical models in use in the post-compulsory education sector, ranging from learning approaches modelled on mind, learning, study or cognitive styles; personality types; theories of thinking; motivation and others. They commented that although these different models could be sited on a continuum which ranges from models based on narrow definitions of teaching techniques to those which focus on contextual issues such as culture, power and identity, most could be seen as leaning towards psychological rather than sociological approaches to learning. The different leanings can be seen in practices which emphasise the principles of teaching to those with the practices of learning communities. Despite the volume of literature on the different pedagogical approaches they state in the UK ‘there is still no reputable and honoured tradition of pedagogical research and thinking’ (2004: 132). However, they conclude that there is a need to educate learners how to enhance their learning by reference to multiple models of learning rather than the adoption of a single learning approach which disregards learner motivation, awareness, context, and so on. They add that strategies which enable learners to set their own goals and choose their own strategies ‘are more effective in improving learning outcomes those which simply aim to engage learners at the level of presenting information for understanding and use’ (ibid: 134). They also warn of approaches based on vested (e.g. market) interests which can ‘label’ learners as certain types, e.g. treating them as ‘non-reflective activists’, and which are based on tenuous datasets.

The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Skills (NRDC) (2005) has undertaken research best practice about how the delivery of training in these skills can enhance economic development and social inclusion. The delivery sites range from ESOL in further education colleges through to informal learning either peripheral to adult education in the classroom, or in ‘embedded learning environments’ which offer opportunities for experiential learning, such as job searching.
The NRDC describes ‘community focused provision’ as one context which is largely under-conceptualised and under researched but which roots learning in the lives and interest of learners; takes a more holistic approach to learning which may ultimately lead to certification but where the route to that is ‘unorthodox’; where basic skills can be woven into the learning curriculum, set at the learner’s pace, but without being made explicit; and also linked to the rhythms of people’s lives as opposed to term or modular based. However, NRDC (2005) reports there is no one effective way of organising embedded learning and that embedding learning is ‘not just about interlinking different curricula; mapping of the Skills for Life curricula is only a starting point’ and tutors must seek to situate learning in relation to particular jobs with emphasis on developing transferable skills. The case study research into embedded adult education for employment also revealed how vocational teachers had much greater flexibility in responding and adapting to adult learners’ needs than those trained to deliver purely literacy and numeracy competence. Furthermore, this is reinforced by Tusting and Barton (2003)

“learning for adults is always related to their real lives, their real problems and their real issues, and that we therefore need to try and understand and make links with these, in order for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision to be meaningful, relevant and effective” (p.53).

The NRDC has undertaken a range of research about embedded learning. The evidence to date suggests that embedding Skills for Life into vocational programmes and into workplace learning promotes learners progress and achievements (Casey et al 2006). The Leitch Implementation Plan (DIUS 2007) has acknowledged the embedded approach as being the best way to move forward with the delivery of Skills for Life.

Kenright et al (2007) report on a research project in York College into engaging new learners, based upon findings from the literature which show that adults are most likely to benefit from learning when motivated by their own goals, whether they be personal, social or employment related. They stated that the motivations for adult learners were often blended around the goal of getting a qualification, getting access to and learning about computers, and for some it was about getting time off work to attend courses. However, many had personal motivations for retraining or improving skills, such as the arrival of grandchildren, redundancy, but the research claimed that practitioners’ understanding of individual motivations to learn was often the key to the delivery of appropriate learning, by matching techniques to needs and interests. What was appropriate was not necessarily fixed, and ranged from the use of specific learning materials through to a range of different activities and ways of delivering them. The point was that there was no universal technique which will work for all learners, or even for one learner over a period of time. The researchers also noted the motivating value of computers for adult learners either as a general way of getting to grips with the technology or because of a specific job-related skill.
They also helped to overcome the fear barrier as the use of spell-check and delete options ‘were reassuring “safety nets” that protected them [adult learners] from feeling embarrassed by their mistakes, especially in the early stages’ (2007: 13).

Rosseler and Bolton (1984) highlighted the need for ongoing support following adult education for basic and vocational skills despite what appeared to be some success in participants gaining employment following training. Many of those not employed cited inadequate vocational training as a cause of unsettled work patterns; the authors conclude that even where there is some evidence of success in the classroom, this needs to be supplemented by placement and job-seeking support, post-employment counselling and direct interventions with employers. Further studies have considered how the delivery of job training serves as an incentive to employment, addressing the delivery mechanism in terms of curriculum components and training duration.

Whilst there have been successes within individual higher education institutions in relation to WBL, Nixon et al (2006) discusses ‘encouraging good pedagogic practice’. It is argued that whilst higher education institutions have developed numerous pedagogic approaches that work, there appears to be a lack of understanding about what works well overall. There is also little known about how additional factors may impact the programme of learning e.g. students background, current role, size of employer etc.

5.6. Approaches to assessment of employability skills

5.6.1. Summative

Saterfield et al (1995) describes the reluctance of employers in the US to assess foundational skills compared to educators because of fears of adverse impact on hiring rates and even legal implications due to ethnicity,. However the authors challenge the generic nature of employability skills stating; ‘When selecting an approach for assessing employability skills, several criteria must be kept in mind. First, the validity of an employability skills assessment rests on job analysis: a clear and validated relationship should exist between the assessment and the skills required for one or more jobs. This relationship should be based on a systematic analysis of the skills and skill levels required for the job(s) in question. It is not sufficient to observe, for example, that "reading" is required for the job; one must know which tasks require reading and the type and level of reading skill needed. The assessment must clearly mirror the nature of the skill required, and the score attained on it must accurately reflect the examinee’s level of that skill’. In addition, the skills identified must be something that can actually be taught, as opposed to some ‘intrinsic ability’; and lastly whatever assessment is used must be rigorous enough to be open to external scrutiny. In considering the employability issues faced by Mexican immigrants in the US, Kissam (1993) expressed concern that assessments of adult basic skills programmes do not fully test the full range of skills necessary for work and home life or social interactions leaving claims about their effectiveness open to question.
Assessments are often directed at programme completers who may not represent the wider challenges of developing employability skills, but nonetheless highlight the need for workplace competencies to be geared towards the ICT needs of employers. He added that ‘the task of identifying a nominal set of “basic skills” within the full behavioural repertoire required to function successfully in everyday social and work life is difficult’ (1993: 25). The result is usually an arbitrary division between basic and advanced competencies and concludes that those identified as basic skills are ‘grossly inadequate’ as a basis for assessing successful functioning (ibid).

5.6.2. Formative

Torrence and Coultas note the lack of evidence about assessment in post-compulsory education in the UK and, as with the literature assessment for this review that most of the materials on assessment tend to relate to policy and programmatic development rather than evidence of effective practice. They state ‘we know very little about how assessment procedures and processes are operationalised and experienced by learners (and indeed tutors) in action in the learning and skills sector’ (2004). They do try to draw some conclusions from the limited evidence available claiming that ‘learners across all sectors prefer coursework assessment and practical competence-oriented assessment over end-of-course tests’ and suggesting that much more needs to be done to realise the potential of formative assessment on potential learning benefits. Green and Howard (2007) report on research in a homelessness scheme and state that summative assessment cannot fully reflect the range of a learner’s capabilities and can actually be demotivating or even intimidating. In comparison, formative assessment can have a positive effect on low achieving and vulnerable learners, and on disaffected young adults and offenders. Kenwright et al (2007) argue that formative assessment is an important way to use and enhance learners’ motivations. Forms of formative assessment which were shown to be effective included clear acknowledgements of progress made, and identifying manageable areas for improvement with clear guidelines on how to improve.

An approach to assessment which is reported to different effects for both summative and formative assessment is the use of portfolios. Fingernet states that portfolios redefine ‘the scope of assessment and provides a way to look at personal development as well as academic skill growth as reflected in new literacy practices’ (1993:40). She claims that students using portfolios can gain new insights into their learning new skills and new attitudes about learning, as well as promoting professional development and practitioner enquiry by encouraging reflexivity. Romaniuk (2000) notes how portfolios can help to both concretise and enable the assessment of prior learning, however acquired, through systematic reflection. ‘Both the process of developing a portfolio and use of a completed portfolio are associated with benefits which appear to meet the needs of the contemporary workforce’ (p. 31).

Examples include how reflection can help build an ‘integrated identity’ and boost confidence, but also as a reference that can be used as an ‘employability tool’, such as accuracy and consistency in job searching.

Other research into problems with assessing adult employability skills, mainly related to consistency and variability of assessment procedures, includes a lack of any programme of formal assessment, to the complexity and relevance of assessment procedures. Torrence et al (2005) consider the impact of assessment methods in the learning and skills sector (LSS) to determine which approach might have the best effects in of progression and in which contexts. They found that although there were many anomalies of assessment structure and practice across post-16 skills provision, the assessment methods themselves per se ‘do not directly affect learner’s choice of award or likely success, but the association of certain awards with methods which employ extensive writing does’ (2005: 1). They conclude that recent shifts towards ‘criterion-referenced’ and ‘competence-based’ assessment has demonstrable benefits in terms of retention and awards, referring to clarity and the use of formative feedback as particular beneficial. ‘Detailed tutor and assessor support, in the form of exam coaching and practice, drafting and redrafting of assignments, asking ‘leading questions’ during workplace observations, and identifying appropriate evidence to record in portfolios, is widespread throughout the sector and is effective in facilitating learner achievement and progression’ (ibid). However they add that the transparency of learning objectives, assessment criteria and coaching support promotes a culture of assessment as learning in which the purpose of engagement is driven by assessment rather than by learning.

Torrence and Coultas (2004) say that there is wide agreement on ‘the importance of monitoring, support and feedback on progress in improving retention and achievement but that little is actually known about ‘what sorts of support make a positive difference in what circumstances’ and the need for much more rigorous research into assessment of skills training.

The Skills for Life initial diagnostic assessment tools (formerly known as screening) have been designed with different audiences in mind:

**Standard** for general purpose use in a range of contexts

**Workplace** for standard workplace usage (i.e. non sector-specific workplace)

**Contextualised** for specific workplace usage (i.e. sector-specific workplace)

The diagnostic assessment toolkit is designed to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of learners and to help identify their entry level. Following the diagnostic assessment, an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) should be completed with the learner about goals and targets.

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14 ‘Adult Student Assessment Resource Guide. Adult Competency Based Diploma Project’ ERIC ED179582
The plan is to include results of assessments, the learner’s long-term goals, the goals of the program to be followed cross-referenced to the national standards or core curriculum, other goals that the learner wishes to achieve both social and personal, targets and dates for meeting goals, a programme of dated progress reviews, space to record achievement of targets and any developments in the ILP and signatures of learner and teacher.\textsuperscript{15} A range of paper based tests exist for literacy, numeracy and ESOL. In addition portfolios are required for elements of the Skills of Life programme, however some learners may be exempt from this based on their previous education.

The assessment methods involved for WBL vary according to the higher education institution which the programme of learning is being undertaken at. For example the University of Birmingham has a Quality Code for WBL which means that the WBL programmes and modules are set within the standard quality assurance process of the wider university. However, the policy does also take into account the special needs of WBL. For example this has an impact on the choice of external examiners. The policy also suggests that clarity and understanding of the assessment process is even more important than with standard programmes because of the demands it brings. It also takes into consideration the needs of employers and the provision of student support.\textsuperscript{16}

5.7. Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) – which exists to encourage adults to engage in different types of learning, and others all cite examples of good practice of employer involvement in adult education, but this is often related to the provision of work-based learning in the employment setting. However, there are examples where FE colleges are seeking to develop employer focused learning strategies in line with spatial development plans. One example is Central Sussex College which seeks to engage local stakeholders (i.e. Local Community Boards, Local Learning Partnerships, Voluntary and Community Groups, and Sector Skills Councils to determine the key priorities for employers needs as well as increase employer engagement targets. The College has sought to develop an organisational approach which is more outward facing and engaging with the business community to develop better understanding of sector skill needs ‘to provide a seamless integration of employer related training activities within the college’. An example of this activity is Central Sussex College’s lead of a consortium of 22 training providers giving employers across the whole of Sussex access to Train to Gain funding. The College extended the provision to higher level skills, and since January 2008 has been leading a pilot for the provision of level 3/4 funding. The provision includes the opportunity to undertake an organisational needs analysis for the employer to identify any skills gaps in the business, and then develop and deliver a comprehensive training plan through Train to Gain.

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.niace.org.uk/projects/learningfromexperience/EBS/Good-Practice/ILP.htm
\textsuperscript{16} http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/policy/cop/wbl.htm#6
This can include specifically tailored provision, work-based learning qualifications (such as NVQs), and courses which teach employability skills. Employees are supported with any Skills for Life training required, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The Somerset Market Towns Employment Project was formed through European Social Fund (ESF) Article 6 programme. Six market towns in the area came together to develop strategies for diversifying and developing the local labour market. The project aimed to develop market town labour market strategies, designed to improve skill levels and employment opportunities, managed by a Market Towns Strategic Partnership (MTSP) in each of the six towns and was steered by a county-wide partnership. The project evaluation revealed numerous positive benefits of the collaborative approach but was particularly successful in getting employers involved as partners, or as consultees to the project.17

In commenting upon lack of economic development within the Spanish economy, and particular lack of technical innovation in the Spanish business sector, Perez-Diaz calls for employer commitment to employability, even where this means an employee moves employment as becoming more employable, which ‘involves seeing the workplace as a place for continuous learning and, ultimately, a redefinition of the company as a moral community’ (1998: 219). In 1994 the California Business Roundtable pursued a programmatic alignment of education to business using lifelong learning as a framework to promote employability skills in the adult population as well as job preparation in colleges, etc. Although the report was prepared in response to economic recession and seeking to reverse sector specific fortunes, it points to ‘a lack of a coordinated education and training system, the failure of reform to keep pace with the need for change, and the insufficient involvement of education in economic restructuring’ as a basis for economic downturns. It recommended that an education and economic development council be established at state level which coordinates policy, certification linked to business needs, adult education deployed around these needs, and a single point of access and information for learners / students.

Several examples of employer engagement in curriculum design, but most do not relate to adult education. Some (e.g. MacAllum and Charner 2000) do make generalisations about the importance of partnership arrangements in aligning formal learning to employability skills and improved morale and productivity of industry but there is rarely any detailed evidence about the benefit of this.

5.8. Barriers to promoting employability skills

Soden and Maclellan undertook research into the deployment of thinking skills by tutors of adult education, based on previous work (Kuhn 1991) stating that ‘the case has been well made that learning to think critically about whatever is being studied is an important but not well realised purpose of post-school education’ (2004: 335).

17 http://www.markettownsemployment.org.uk/
These (critical) thinking skills include identifying claims, questioning assumptions, querying conceptualisations of phenomena, considering the reliability, validity and generalisability of evidence, considering different interpretations of evidence, and looking for bias and agendas that might be served. The authors argue that the relevance of these thinking skills to modern citizenship and employability is evident in abilities such as working with multiple criteria that may be in conflict, dealing with uncertainty and meta-cognitive competence. A significant barrier to learning these skills arises where the tutors engaged in lifelong learning initiatives do not themselves think critically, and this is partly because the materials they use may not promote this thinking. They highlight a distinction between the use of ‘makes sense epistemology’, in which people tend to base judgements on whether something seems right) as opposed to a ‘critical epistemology’ which is about testing one’s argument or practice against challenge and modifying them accordingly. ‘Unless educators reconstruct their knowledge in this rigorous way, their views and proposals for change may not stand up to scrutiny by colleagues and learners’ (ibid: 345).

Breitkreuz (2005) discusses the Canadian situation in relation to complex policy implications of employability-oriented training for lone mothers. She argues that while employability competence training is underpinned by notions of citizenship and self-sufficiency, there is a failure to fully consider the class and gender related issues which lone mothers must deal with in the workplace (e.g. low pay) and in order to be in the workplace (childcare). Rogers and Hansman describe this as a lack of consideration for adult learners – i.e. perceiving them as objects rather than subjects – with the effect that their experience of the world can be ‘rendered invisible’ (2004: 18), and thus undermine the concept of experiential learning. Based on a study into employability training based in Leeds, Willott and Stevenson concluded that the issue of gender needs to be considered critically when thinking about employability skills training. They report that women in the study ‘were more likely to explain their unemployment in terms of ‘self’ or intrinsic failures: inadequacy, weakness or lack of requisite skills. For men, unemployment was seen as a consequence of extrinsic circumstances: bad luck, the failure of others or lack of support’ (2006: 441). Also noted was that women perceived barriers to training as social or personal, while men saw them as structural; and that women valued soft skills such as confidence and team-working, whereas men valued job-specific hard skills.

The NRDC (2005) says that the biggest barrier to adult education and training is fear, not just of ‘the unknown’ but specifically because of exposing one’s lack of basic skills to others, uncertainty of being able to cope with learning – either through negative experiences of school or simply a long break from education and learning, and perhaps because of costs such as travel and childcare, or a home environment conducive to learning.

A recurring theme in the literature about adult engagement in classroom activity and learning is language barriers associated with immigrant and refugee populations, noting in many situations that the level of education attainment alone is not a clear determinant of employability.
In relation to language barriers for new populations, especially women, more information is required to assist in the transition into the workplace by way of information about welfare support mechanisms.

In discussing the impact of adult basic skills education in rural areas Atkin and Merchant (2004) claim that their research in Lincolnshire and Rutland revealed very little concern among senior personnel in small businesses, reporting that 56-57% of the senior personnel were aware of any initiatives to support adult literacy and numeracy. They link this to a perception that much rural employment remains seasonal, low paid and manual work. They also noted a culture of ‘coping’ whereby older people in rural areas reproduce low expectations of the need for literacy among younger people which employers say creates a barrier to engagement in adult basic skills acquisition.

5.9. Resources available to promote employability skills

There are many opportunities for attaining employability skills and an issue may not be the availability of such support, but rather being able to access it through the complex and overlapping delivery mechanisms. For example, the Scottish Assembly prepared an assessment of funding available for enhancing employability (Workforce Plus 2006), placing an estimated figure of £515 million on total financial investment in the UK. It summarised this funding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Agency</th>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>Funding per Annum (£ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DWP/Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Funding</td>
<td>The New Deal programmes and Pathways to Work are just some of the programmes available</td>
<td>£70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>This is mainly staff through their Jobcentre Network and includes jobsearch, personal advisors and employer engagement</td>
<td>£169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>Significant contribution to a variety of programmes - via ESF</td>
<td>£94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Executive</td>
<td>Significant contribution to a variety of programmes, such as Cities Growth Fund, Homelessness, Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Working for Families, Individual Learning Account Scotland, Healthy Working Lives, Lone Parent Mentoring, Full Employment Areas Initiative, Criminal Justice Social Work Services, LEAD Scotland, Beattie Funding and Scottish Skills Fund</td>
<td>£83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Enterprise Networks</td>
<td>Substantial contribution to employment focused mainstream interventions - including Get Ready for Work and Training for Work (inclusive of training allowances)</td>
<td>£41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authorities</td>
<td>An understated amount - a response was received from 24 out of 32 LAs only. A significant provider of employability services both using their own funds and drawing down other funding streams</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities Scotland</td>
<td>This is based on 15% from the Communities Regeneration Fund - and is likely to rise</td>
<td>£16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers Scotland</td>
<td>A significant contribution through their inclusiveness projects and all-age guidance</td>
<td>£10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lottery</td>
<td>This is an increasingly important funder of employment related projects for more disadvantaged groups</td>
<td>£5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Prison Service</td>
<td>This is for enhancing employability of ex-offenders (includes staff costs)</td>
<td>£4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHSS</td>
<td>This figure is based on funding for the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives, the employability programme of Scotland Against Drugs and 4 responses from 15 NHS Boards. This figure will almost certainly rise over the next few years, both in funding and manpower terms as the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives improves the co-ordination of NHS services in this area</td>
<td>£3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further and Higher Education</td>
<td>Colleges play a key role in developing skills, knowledge and attributes and draws funding from Europe and various national employment programmes. No figure for this activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are numerous funding streams available for employability skills through FE. ‘Train for Gain’ is aimed primarily at supporting employees who do not hold a qualification at Level 2 or above. It is part of the government’s wider skills agenda to enable employers and their businesses to remain competitive in the wider global market. The LSC’s Learner Support Programme is made up of a number of strands (Education Maintenance Allowance, Adult Learning Grant, Career Development Loans, Dance and Drama Awards, Care to Learn, Discretionary Learner Support Funds (hardship, transport, 20+ Childcare, residential support) which help to support learners who would otherwise not be able to participate in learning for financial reasons. The Learner Support Directorate within the LSC manages other schemes which may also support adult learners return to learning. These include Residential Support Scheme, Residential Bursaries, Adult Education Bursaries, Discretionary Learner Support Fund, Sixth Form College Childcare Scheme and Career Development Loans.
There is little shortage of guidance and training materials on adult skills for employability as this is embedded into the Skills for Life and Key Skills curricula. In fact, as the literature highlights the need for resources and delivery materials to be adaptive and responsive to context, such training materials can be found from one educational or training establishment to another. Examples can be found through the following websites:

NIACE (http://www.niace.org.uk/)

Basic Skills Agency (http://archive.basic-skills.co.uk/)

The Embedded Learning Portal (http://rwp.qia.oxi.net/embeddedlearning/) which has resources linked to the Skills for Life strategy. It describes embedded learning thus: ‘Embedded teaching and learning combines the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to progress, gain qualifications and to succeed in life and at work’. The materials it lists have been produced for use by teachers coming from vocational, professional and community education backgrounds and also for teachers from specialist literacy, language and numeracy backgrounds.

National Literacy Trust (http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/About/index.html) – an independent charity promoting employability through literacy.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) produces numerous guides and technical documents on the Skills for Life curriculum (adult literacy and innumeracy) as well as the teaching and learning materials - arranged by units - for all entry levels to Skills for Life. This includes a number of key policy documents including The Leitch Review (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Publications). The Train to Gain website also contains links to many resources, including many examples of ‘success stories’ related to skills sectors (http://www.traintogain.gov.uk/).

The Leitch Implementation Plan (2007) contains a list of actions, one of which is that DIUS working collaboratively with the LSC, QIA, QCA and the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching of Maths are due to publish the adult numeracy and employability strategy in 2008.

5.10. Case studies of good practice

There are very few materials available which give examples of good (or any) practice specifically in adult education outside of work-based learning approaches. It was not possible to find any studies in the time available that systematically evaluated the teaching of employability skills against outcomes. Most evaluations that were considered looked at delivery strategies, learning partnerships and brokerage of adult education rather than what was being taught.
Given the link between employability and reading as the skill identified as critical for teaching employability skills, one interesting project which falls into the wider remit of adult education worth reporting is the ‘Vital Link Reading and Libraries Campaign’, delivered by the National Literacy Trust, which seeks to ‘encourage and enable adult literacy practitioners to integrate reading for pleasure and links with libraries into their practice with adults who are improving their literacy skills’ (Spare 2008: 2). Its funding comes from DfES / DIUS in order to assess the impact of promoting reading for pleasure on learners and practitioners and identifying any barriers to implementation; make strategic links between policy and practice at national level; create support materials for reading for pleasure in order to increase good practice; ensure a continuing supply of appealing reading materials at the right level for learners and create replicable partnership models for audience engagement through reading. The report states that the most important benefits of reading for pleasure include language development, self-esteem, wider reading experience, integrating literacy and communication skills, and motivation. Spare concludes ‘reading for pleasure is seen as a valuable part of literacy teaching, with 94% of online respondents and over two-thirds of interviewees currently including it to some extent in their classes. Activities include individual and group reading, focussed reading for discussion, creative writing based on reading, comprehension, book reviews and parents reading with children. Tutors believe that reading for pleasure increases confidence, broadens knowledge and develops personal skills, taking learners out of the category of “non-readers” in which they often view themselves’ (ibid: 6).

(See [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/readingforpleasure.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/readingforpleasure.html) for further detail).

5.11. Key ‘Best Practice’ Principles

Principles

1. Some evidence that multi-interventions at each stage of engagement, use of multiple models of learning, ‘system’ of measures, taking a holistic approach are effective.

2. Perceptions, rather than strong evidence, that formal classroom ‘teaching’ and use of ‘materials’ are not enough on their own (toolkits, manuals, competency booklets, scenarios, simulations etc) and work better if supplemented by informal, flexible experiential approaches that are tailored/customised to individual context taking account of learning preferences, personal motivations for learning, self-esteem, aspirations, class and gender.

3. Some evidence that active learning and empowering learners are effective approaches.

4. Consistent evidence that a minimum level of literacy (reading) is the most critical foundation for employability (with links to writing and numeracy skills, and settings).
5. Some limited evidence that formative assessment practices enhance learners’ motivations more than summative. Portfolios and competency-based assessment cited as beneficial in terms of retention and awards.

6. Some evidence that partnerships and collaborative approaches with employers have positive benefits.

**Key Principles and their application to differing target audiences**

While the research suggests a number of best practice principles it is difficult to identify, with confidence, the impact, transferability or application of these principles to the target audience (new immigrants, young adults, etc.)

**Considerations**

- Consider looking at what is transferable from effective engagement practices from those already in work.
- Consider greater exploration of appreciative inquiry, coaching and mentoring approaches.
- Consider taking a systems/process thinking approach – access to learning, input/stimulus (quality of teaching/experiential), action (active learning/empowerment), retention of learning (assessment), embedding learning (post-employment support)
- Consider developing partnership and collaborative soft skills capabilities for both supply and demand sides.
- Stimulate targeted research to generate a more complete evidence base.
## 6. Welfare to Work Employment Programmes

### Summary

**Definitions of employability skills in use**
Employability as a concept is perhaps most used and debated in the context of Welfare to Work provision. However, perhaps because of this there is a great deal of debate about what the term means and there is little consensus on a particular definition of the skills and competencies that make up the concept of employability. Indeed several noted commentators suggest that the way that the term is promoted in policy rhetoric is excessively focused on individual factors and needs to be broadened to focus on labour market demand issue also.

**The value of experiential learning**
Evaluation evidence related to Welfare to Work programmes suggests that individuals do benefit from experiential learning in terms that enhance their employability in relation to the draft definition (see Section 6.2, p103).

**Employability skills in the curriculum**
While there is an obvious focus on employability in Welfare to Work provision the basis of UK Active Labour Market Policies has been to promote job search and acquisition rather than performance in the workplace. The latest round of reform, related to the Leitch agenda, however suggests that there may be an emerging move away from this ‘work-first’ approach toward an increasing focus on the skills needed to stay and progress in the labour market. Examples include an increased focus on skills assessment and individualised training and development to plug identified skills deficits (see Section 6.3, p104).

**Major pedagogical approaches**
The types of provision that are common across Welfare to Work programmes are job clubs, job search coaching, interview preparation, advice and support on CV writing, confidence building activities, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Work Trials (see Section 6.4, p105).

**Successful practices**
While there are multiple research and evaluation studies which consider the success and impacts of Welfare to Work programmes in terms of both employment and employability there is little evidence about precisely what pedagogical strategies are effective (see Section 6.5, p109). To the extent that it is available, interview coaching, feedback from employers, CV writing are all widely thought to be successful in strengthening job search and acquisition capacity. Other important techniques often include confidence building, the development of peer-group support to build motivation and other means – such as sports activities to build self-esteem. Work trials are also widely regarded as effective means of changing people’s mindsets. Finally, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is thought to be effective in overcoming confidence and apathy problems.

**Assessment practices**
Assessment practices vary widely and there a plethora of screening and employability assessment tools in operation nationally and internationally. The current Welfare reform process should lead to the establishment of more robust basic skills assessments to identify the skills needs of jobseekers. These are likely to be heavily determined by employability concerns.
**Employer involvement**
Employers often engage Jobcentre Plus to help with recruitment practices and where this is the case there are often attempts to broker job entries for benefit claimants. Employers have also been involved in programmes like the Fair Cities pilots where employers designed training and support measures for the long-term unemployed. However, the evaluation of these pilots suggested that individual beneficiaries still lacked the types of skills that employers said that they needed at the end of the resulting interventions (see Section 6.7, p113).

**Barriers**
The key barriers identified in the literature revolve around the inflexibility of the benefits system and especially the long qualifying period – 18 months in some cases – before individual Jobseekers can access substantive support to address skills gaps. Though people with basic skills needs should qualify for early entry to New Deal, these are often not identified.

6.1. **Definitions of ‘employability skills’ in use**
In the context of welfare to work programmes, there was little explicit reference to how ‘employability’ was being defined in the literature. Evaluations of programmes would simply refer to increasing participants’ employability skills. The most commonly cited definition in the welfare literature comes from Hillage & Pollard (1998), who define employability as having four concepts:
- **Assets** - an individual’s knowledge, skills and attitudes
- **Deployment** - career management and job search skills, strategic approach
- **Presentation** - demonstrating employability in an accessible way, e.g. CV, interview
- **Personal and labour market context** - external circumstances that affect reaching full employability potential, e.g. caring responsibilities.

6.2. **Evidence of the value of experiential learning**
The perception of the value of experiential learning can be seen in the UK government’s investment in work-based learning programmes, and the employment option element of the New Deal programmes. In the UK and abroad, experiential learning has been included in welfare to work programmes as a means of improving the ‘employability’ of unemployed individuals.

This is demonstrated in a survey of participants on the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) programme (Ritchie, 2000). Perceived benefits of the programme included gaining work experiences and references, acquiring occupational or basic skills, undergoing work-related training and vocational qualifications. Participants also reported increased motivation, confidence and self-assurance, changed career interests and development of in-work routines. Similarly in the NDYP in Scotland, participants who undertook the employment option (subsidised work placement) were more likely to report increased confidence than those who had not (Bonjour et al. 2002).
The value of work experience/trials was also expressed by participants of Working Neighbourhoods pilots, as a means of finding a job (Dewson et al., 2007).

Further support comes from a review of active labour market policies (ALMP) in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries; Martin & Grubb (2001) found that smaller scale tightly focused on-the-job training programmes aimed at women and other disadvantaged groups had the best outcomes.

Despite this, there are arguments that show little difference in employment outcomes between programmes that include an experiential learning element and those that rely solely on job-search assistance. For example, in a review of ALMP programmes across Europe, Martin (2000) recommended that support with job searches, counselling and incentives are prioritised.

6.3. Extent of employability skills in the curriculum

The extent to which employability skills are covered in the curriculum of welfare to work programmes varies on an international level, primarily as a result of the nation’s welfare reform agenda. For example, in Australia, the ‘Work for the Dole’ programme is mandatory for benefit claimants, requiring them to undergo approved work activities for up to 2.5 days per week for 6 months. This programme reinforces Australia’s Mutual Obligation reform, where beneficiaries of welfare are required to pay back their debt to society through placements. Although this can be considered to be a form of gaining employability skills through the exposure that welfare recipients receive to the labour market, the programme has been criticised for the types of experience individuals gain (ACOSS, 2000), e.g. unskilled manual labour.

This is in contrast to the focus that the UK’s New Deal initiatives have taken, where the first phase is used to assess an individual’s level of employability and skill development needs prior to being placed in subsidised employment or training. Short training courses in building motivation and confidence can be provided during this period. The New Deal for Long Term Unemployed Adults (NDLTU) provides individuals with the opportunity to equip themselves with the skills needed to compete for future jobs. Individuals can be offered basic employability training (literacy and numeracy), work placements, work-focused training, and support with increasing motivation and developing soft skills. McQuaid & Lindsay (2005) highlight the concerns around the efficacy of programmes that emphasise job search strategies, and less on the development of skills that help sustain employment. In contrast, Meager (2008) highlights the decline in training and skills development, and the rise in the number of programmes that emphasise job searches, which have had similar if not better employment outcomes.

Further evidence of variation was provided by Shepherd & Saxby-Smith (2001), who compared return to work programmes targeted at women in the UK, France, Ireland and Spain.
The programmes reviewed were supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) under New Opportunities for Women, and were either short-term (10-16 weeks) or long-term (6-12 months) in duration. Skills ranging from IT, communication, supervisory, presentation, business language, problem solving and job-seeking were featured in 3 out of the 4 countries. Teamworking was also featured, though not in France or Spain.

All countries except the UK featured a work placement at the end of the programme. It was also noted that the French programmes were delivered “in a school way” (p4). In addition to the formal development of skills, many interviewees reported an increase in confidence as a result of completing the course.

An example of an employment programme that did not provide formal development of employability skills is Canada’s Self-Sufficiency Project (Michalopoulos et al. 2002). This project explored the impact of providing financial incentives to single parents to return to full time employment and off welfare. The only support participants would receive was CV writing, a job coach and job leads, in addition to the financial supplement. As the lone parent’s earnings increased, the supplement would decrease. Program participant’s were twice as likely to be employed than non-participants during the follow-up period. A similar approach was used in Australia as part of the Youth Employment Training Programme (Richardson, 1998), where unemployed young people were given wage subsidies whilst in work placements. Richardson reports that participants were more likely to retain their jobs after the subsidy had ended and have improved employability, though it was highlighted that a longer-term evaluation of this improvement was required.

The focus on developing employability skills was apparent in Portland, USA. Gueron & Hamilton (2002) highlight the ‘hybrid’ nature of the programme, where individuals were encouraged to wait for a job that was above minimum wage with good prospects. The education and training provided were limited to a six month period, and participants were advised that progress had to be made. If participants lacked basic skills, 3-5 week life skills or occupational training was provided. For participants who with a high school diploma, vocational training or work experience was provided.

6.4. **Major pedagogical approaches to employability skills**

Most welfare to work programmes can be broadly categorised as ‘work first’ or ‘human capital development’ in their focus. The former approach deploys strategies aimed at getting unemployed individuals off welfare and back into paid work within as short a timeframe as possible. These strategies have been used extensively in the USA and Australia and can include activities such as job clubs, job search, esteem building, and counselling, to assist with the desired rapid transition back to work. Training tends to only be provided for the least ‘job-ready’/least employable (Theodore & Peck, 2000).
Critics of work-first approaches argue that there is little scope for increasing employability given the low skill-low pay opportunities that tend to be provided through such programmes, and the dependence on the state of the labour market for opportunities (Theodore & Peck, 2000; ACOS, 2000). Theodore & Peck (2000) recommend that stimulation of demand for skills should play a role in policy, especially if unemployment levels rise.

Human capital development approaches focus on raising educational and skills levels with the aim of achieving a sustainable transition to work.

This can include occupation specific training, basic skills training, job counselling, placement assistance, and subsidies for childcare, transportation and healthcare. This approach is more holistic in terms of reducing barriers to employment. Theodore & Peck (2000) argue that this option is less suitable for the more job-ready, given their higher level of employability.

A UK initiative targeted at achieving sustainable employment is Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) (Speckesser & Bewley, 2006). WBLA is a voluntary programme for long-term unemployed people, with four options: short job-focused training (SJFT), longer occupational training (LOT), self-employment provision (SEP) and basic employability training (BET). SJFT offers limited occupation specific training to increase an individual’s chances of being qualified for a job, as well as job search and interview advice. LOT aims to improve and update an individual’s formal qualifications, e.g. IT refresher. SEP is a programme designed to support individuals on their journey to self-employment. BET is targeted at those with a poor level of basic literacy, numeracy and working skills to improve up to the basic skills entry level. BET is provided for up to 26 weeks depending on need, though Personal Advisors have commented that this time period may be insufficient for those with severe needs (Hasluck & Green, 2007).

Pre-employment training has been used to increase individuals’ employability for certain roles. For example, Belt & Richardson (2005) presents a review of case studies of pre-employment training for call centre work in the North East of England, where this field was growing. These initiatives were demand-led, in that local employers had moved into the area to take advantage of the available workforce, but were disappointed with the number of individuals who lacked the appropriate level of skills for call centre roles. Belt & Richardson interviewed trainers and participants, observed classroom and practical training, e.g. selling, keyboard skills, customer service. Despite the attempts to develop skills, the success rate of the various programmes was lower than anticipated. Participants would rate the programmes as useful and enjoyable but few would go on to be successful at interview. Belt & Richardson (2005) identified several issues which prevented participants from being perceived as employable:

- Mismatch in the emphasis placed on technical and social skills- the content of the training programmes tended to focus on technical aspects of a call centre worker’s role, e.g. keyboard skills. Some trainers set target typing speeds for trainees to achieve, as this was ‘what employers expected’ (p 264). The mismatch became apparent in employer interviews where only basic IT skills were specified.
• Trainees' performance at interview further highlighted the need to focus more on social skills; several employers noted a lack of confidence, poor verbal expression and dress at interview.

• Employer prejudice against the unemployed—some employers perceived participants on pre-employment programmes as a 'risk' in terms of their reliability and ability to remain employed long-term.

• Employer prejudice against the inexperienced—some employers expressed that the skill level achieved by the end of the programme was not always high enough for the company’s own induction training. The rigidity of recruitment criteria was also noted, e.g. specifying that candidates needed 6 months experience to be considered for a job, which automatically excluded programme participants from applying. Finally, competency-based interviews which are geared towards presenting experience tended to be used by employers, further limiting the chances of participants’ success.

A similar but somewhat more successful pre-employment training approach is discussed by Boyd & Jackson (2002). They present the case study of the EnterTech project; a blended learning approach to improving the employability of individuals to fulfil roles in Texas’ high-tech industry. This programme combined simulated work environments, IT training, group and project work, mentoring and role play to develop individual’s employability in technological firms recruiting in the local area. The classroom was set up to represent the different departments that would exist in a technological organisation, and learners would role play as workers and be presented with problem-solving tasks and activities requiring them to interact with other ‘workers’ (For more detail on EnterTech, see good practice case studies).

In the US, the Minneapolis based Twin Cities Rise pre-employment initiative delivers a 6-18 month programme of soft and advanced skills training, career training and individual coaching (cited in Fair Cities, 2004). Training focuses on developing empowerment skills to help individuals achieve personal stability and career advancement. Participants undergo up to 15 hours of training per week with either a basic skills (numeracy, literacy, IT) or personal development or occupational focus. Simultaneously, participants work part-time.

Another example of pre-employment training can be taken from the Fair Cities pilots run in Bradford, Birmingham and the London Borough of Brent. This project was also demand-led, with local employers shaping the learning. ‘Pipelines’ were designed to develop people in line with specific job requirements. Development needs were met through the use of existing local training providers. The training content was developed with input from the training providers and employers to be geared towards meeting specific employer roles (Atkinson et al. 2008).

The New Deal programmes run across the UK combine support from personal advisers, work placements and training to increase employability (Hasluck & Green, 2007). How this support is given varies according to the recipient group. For example in the NDYP, participants enter a ‘gateway’ period, where their personal adviser identifies the skills that need to be developed to increase employability, and provides support for an intensive job search.
If the end of this period is reached and the individual still has not gained employment they enter the option phase, where the individual can gain choose between a work placement or training. Whilst on a placement, training is still required to further increase employability, and this tends to be on-the-job (Hales et al. 2000). Large employers tend to provide additional off-site training. If provided through a college or training centre, NVQ level 2 was the most common qualification sought.

For unemployed adults over 25 in the UK, there is New Deal 25 plus (ND25 plus). Similarly to NDYP there is an intensive gateway period, focusing on assessment of skills. Participants receive up to 13 weeks of support in the way of BET, work-focused training, and help with motivation and soft skills. Work placements are also available through ND25 plus and deemed to be helpful for gaining a clearer view of an occupation (Hasluck & Green, 2007). If unsuccessful in sustaining employment after completing ND25 plus, individuals would join the StepUP programme, where they would enter subsidised employment for 50 weeks.

Work trials are also available through Jobcentre Plus. These are short work placements lasting up to 15 days, and participants can be referred as part of being on a New Deal scheme to complement learning and skill development (Jarvis & Campion, 2000). Work trials have been found to be important for older people who may have been out of work for a significant time or experienced in a different sector. Moss & Arrowsmith (2003) found that shorter trials of 3-5 days were preferred amongst this group. This could reflect the employability level of this more experienced group. Classroom based training via programme centres was also deemed effective for those aged over 50 (QPID, 2001).

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) requires participants to attend mandatory work focused interviews to assist with job search and identifying skills needs. NVQ level 2 training is offered through NDLP, and referral to WBLA can be made depending on individual needs (Hasluck & Green, 2007). For lone parents in an Employment Zone (an area of high unemployment that has flexible funding arrangements to target such individuals), confidence building courses can be provided.

During a period of high unemployment in Sweden in the 1990s, the Swedish government implemented a large scale ALMP (Calmfors et al., 2002). Various programmes were implemented, with limited success:

- labour market training- mainly vocation training, but general education also
- computer activity centres- for IT training
- relief works- (subsidised employment) which later became work experience schemes,
- resource jobs- an employer receives subsidies for hiring an unemployed person for 6 months. The worker is also required to undergo training and look for jobs,
- work practice programmes- similar to job creation but with a training element
• trainee replacement (employer pays for training and hires a replacement),
• activity guarantee (for those at risk and are long-term unemployed) where individuals undertake job searches full time until they find a job or enter full-time education.

6.5. Evidence of pedagogical success

In their review of the New Deal programmes in the UK, Hasluck & Green (2007) report varying levels of success. For young people, higher success rates in terms of job outcomes were found in the Private Sector led units than in others, and seen as a responsive and effective in their work with learning providers (Rodgers et al., 2000). Furthermore, young men were more likely to find unsubsidised employment on leaving the programme than women, and ethnic minorities, suggesting that NDYP needs to address additional barriers faced by these groups to achieve greater successful employment outcomes. In studies of participant views, the general conclusion is that NDYP improves employability through developing new skills, obtaining qualifications, providing work experience and references, enhancing job search strategies, increasing motivation (Ritchie, 2000). However, these improvements do not always translate into employment for individuals with multiple barriers to employment (Bonjour et al. 2001), further highlighting the need for more holistic support.

Little success is reported for the ND25 plus and NDLTU programmes, in terms of meeting the needs of this group. Hasluck & Green (2007) report a positive employment outcome of 30% for ND25 plus participants, though this is marred by a third of participants re-entering the programme for a repeat spell. However, the employment rate of repeat participants is almost double than that of the first spell. The StepUP work placement was found to be most helpful for those with multiple disadvantages and assessed as having low employability (Bivand et al. 2006). In relation to long-term unemployment and inactivity exercise, sports and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) have all been shown to have some positive benefits in moving individuals toward work (Barnes and Hudson, 2006).

The outcomes for participants of BET do not appear to extend into employment. Dench et al. (2006) refer to the more positive employment outcomes for people who have undertaken SJFT and LOT (59% and 53%) than those who undertook BET (33%). This suggests that there may be other barriers faced by those with poor basic skills, and BET is only one part of their journey to employment, and is supported by Speckesser & Bewley’s (2006) evaluation. The greater distance that people with poor basic skills have to travel can be seen in the example of community Work Experience placements in the US. Similar to Australia’s Work for the Dole initiative, welfare recipients were required to work unpaid in governmental or not-for-profit organisations in exchange for their benefit. Participants tended to lack basic skills, and no clear or consistent effect on employment earnings of welfare was found (Brock et al. 1993).
Greater success has been found in the New Deal 50 plus (ND50), targeted at unemployed people over 50. Moss & Arrowsmith (2003) evaluated what works in the ND50 programme and highlighted the effectiveness of support from personal advisers and flexible training. A training first and job second approach appeared to be preferred by this group, with training at a more advanced level being required, reflective of their greater work experience.

However, it can be argued that the success of this group was to be expected, given that ND50 targets people on jobseekers allowance and is voluntary, and are therefore more motivated to obtain employment as an outcome.

For lone parents, the NDLP has doubled the probability of their entering employment. Hasluck & Green (2007) cite the flexibility of the programme as being an important factor in the successful outcome. In addition, education/training and providing the opportunity to meet people were participants’ top perceived benefits of the NDLP programme (DSD, 2002).

In a review of the longer-term outcomes of WBLA, Speckesser & Bewley (2006) reported that SJFT was the most successful form of work based learning in relation to achieving sustainable employment and reducing the benefit. This is perhaps due to the focus on increasing the match between job requirements and the jobseekers attributes.

In the US, where local implementation of welfare to work programmes is more common, initiatives that have combined training with work placements and development of personal skills have shown to be effective in producing successful outcomes. One such example comes from Gooden (1998), who reviewed the Washington Works programme for unemployed women, run by a not-for-profit organisation. Participants on this programme undergo training in the areas of basic skills (literacy and numeracy), office skills (customer service, administration, IT), job search skills and personal effectiveness (e.g. maturity, reliability, professionalism) over a 5 month period (further detail is provided in the case study section). Following this, participants enter the job search period, supported by volunteer advocates. Despite the majority of the women facing major barriers to employment, completion of the programme was 75%, with 56% gaining employment 90 days after completion and 74% within 6 months. A similar level of success resulted from the aforementioned EnterTech project (Boyd & Jackson, 2002), where 44% of participants found employment on completion of the programme, and a survey of employers expressed general satisfaction with participants’ performance.

The Lottery funded Survival of the Fittest programme provides an example of local success in developing the employability and motivation of young people in Brixham Devon. Stanistreet (2004) outlines how this project successfully engaged with unemployed young men through providing access to a local gym, and life skills sessions (e.g. cookery). When sessions on CV writing were arranged, attendance was very poor, and due to the already educated background of the participants, the project did not focus on the development of basic skills.
Instead the project focused on self-esteem and confidence building. Stanistreet reports positive outcomes in relation to participants finding employment and starting their own businesses, but specific figures are not provided.

Australia’s Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (2006) reviewed the net impact of welfare to work programmes and reported good employment outcomes. Job search training achieved the greatest net impact (the difference between programme participants and non-participants) at 11%, and 7.3% for Work for the Dole.

In a review of OECD countries’ Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP), Martin & Grubb (2001) recommended that employment programmes should use counselling, job-finding incentives and job-search assistance to be effective. Labour market training was noted to be effective for some groups. In a later review of ALMPs, Kluve (2006) concluded that employment programs should include training, job search assistance, counselling and monitoring, with sanctions for non-compliance. Kluve highlights the UK’s New Deal programmes as an example of such a programme, with the addition of training and employment subsidies.

6.6. Approaches to assessment of employability skills

Bimrose et al. (2007) highlight the lack of practice in assessing the employability of adults and the non-existence of a single tool. Tools have varied with the target group and purpose. Bimrose et al reviewed the available assessment and screening tools and highlight three types:

- **Attitudinal screening**- usually categorising an individual as having high, average or low employability as opposed to a score. This type of assessment is used in France, Portugal, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands.
- **Statistical modelling**- to create profiles that predict benefit spells for an individual. These are most highly developed in the US and Australia.
- **Tools for intensive support of individuals**

Assessment of employability by way of profiling an individual’s risk of unemployment has been the strategy for some countries. For example, in 2004, the Job Barometer was introduced in Denmark to standardise the way unemployed people were profile in employment offices (Rudolph & Konle-Seidl, 2005). The Job Barometer is administered along with an interview preparation questionnaire, record of benefits received, and a dialogue manual for the employment officer. The Job Barometer analyses the individual’s probability of finding employment within the next six months and uses a traffic light system of good, average and poor chances. The employment officer then uses this information to match the individual to labour market requirements.

In Australia, a similar ‘risk of unemployment’ approach to profiling is taken in the form of the Job Seeker Classification instrument (JSCI), which recommends which employment programme an individual will be suitable for though this has not always been accurate (Rudolph & Konle-Seidl, 2005).
Similarly in the Netherlands, a CWI undertakes categorises the employability of an individual as one of four categories, which informs future reintegration of work (Morrell & Branosky, 2005).

An example of basic skills assessment is provided by Brown (2001), who outlines some of the tools that have been used in the US to address employment barriers in employment and training programmes:

- Test of Basic English Work-Related Foundation Skills: reading, mathematics, language and problem-solving
- Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills: workplace and foundation skills, e.g. IT, interpersonal, basic skills
- Equipped for the Future: lifelong learning, interpersonal, communication and decision-making
- Job Literacy Skills: communication, decision-making, quantitative skills and following directions

However, Brown (2001) does note that these tests do not screen for learning disabilities, therefore further screening may be required.

In all of the tools reviewed by Bimrose et al, none were used to replace a personal adviser; therefore control over the outcomes was still maintained. This could also represent an acknowledgement that holistic case management of the most disadvantaged is likely to have the most benefit in assessing employability (Bimrose et al. 2007). This case management approach can be seen in France, where personalised action plans for job searches were used. An assessment of problems was carried out with the GAPP profiling tool after the participant had had structured interviews and built up their confidence. Following this priorities and actions were agreed. Early evaluations indicated that more stable employment resulted (Rudolph & Konle-Seidl, 2005).

The Gateway phase of New Deal programmes incorporates a form of assessment of employability skills through the role of the Personal Adviser. During this time, a New Deal participant will receive intensive advice and guidance, aimed at increasing motivation and job search activity and undergo basic skills training. Following a revision of the ND25 plus in April 2000, improved assessment and diagnosis of basic skills and barriers to employment are reported, however, the impacts were slight. (Hasluck & Green, 2007).

A more formal assessment of employability comes from the skills diagnostic and development plan, which is integral to the skills coaching programme, managed by Learning & Skills Councils (LSC). This involves vocational, IT and Basic skills assessments to identify skill deficits and select learning services from a menu. However, an LSC report (2007) states that only 70% of participants receive a skills diagnostic, despite being a mandatory part of the customer journey. Skills coaches are required to use a tool called ‘Skills check’ and have the option to use additional tools such as MAPS. The Skills Check tool was seen as beneficial as a starting point for discussion around basic skills, but coaches identified several issues with the tool:

- It is based on self-assessment therefore ratings were often over or under inflated.
• It does not draw upon interests or motivations, resulting in unappealing job options.
• Potentially undermining for individuals who had IT and higher level skills.
• The language is not tailored to those with poor literacy and numeracy skills.

6.7. **Employer involvement and engagement in design and delivery**

Despite the call for employer involvement and engagement in the design and delivery of welfare to work programmes, the evidence is mixed around effectiveness, e.g. Atkinson et al. (2008), Gooden, (1998). In demand-led programmes where individuals are developed in line with employer needs, strategies for engaging employers has varied. Belt & Richardson’s (2005) demonstrated how a mismatch between employer needs and training provision had a negative impact on employment outcomes. In contrast, a high level of employer involvement and success rate was reported by Boyd & Jackson’s (2002) Entertech example, which provided a curriculum that more closely matched the skills desired by employers.

Gooden’s (1998) case study of Washington Works outlined the significant engagement of employers, as it was integral to the design of the programme. Washington Works engaged with employers through a dedicated Employment Director, and set up an advisory council of 15-20 major employers whose role was to advise on job skills training and public relations. Members of the council were under no obligation to hire programme participants. Washington Works positioned itself as a job broker for employers, saving on recruitment costs by providing job-ready applicants for their vacancies.

The Twin Cities Rise training programme also places significant emphasis on engaging with and involving employers. Efforts are focused on following up leads from employers who have been intrigued by what the programme delivers, helping employers prepare for the arrival of a non-traditional worker, and careful screening and matching of applicants to placements to increase the chances of success (Atkinson et al., 2008).

In the recent UK Fair Cities evaluation, employer engagement was cited as an issue (Atkinson et al., 2008). Employers were involved in the design, delivery and recruitment of programme participants. Despite this setup, Fair Cities staff expressed that they had insufficient time for building relationship management. The Bradford pilot was more successful in engaging with new employers that were not part of the board and utilised existing forums such as the West Yorkshire Employer Coalition. An issue of time also emerged, where employer pledges to participate took a lengthy period to become concrete. Communication issues within employer organisations were highlighted as a causal factor. In the UK, Local Employment Partnerships have recently been established as a means of engaging with employers to meet recruitment and skills challenges.
According to the jobcentre plus website, over 1400 employers have signed up to ‘jobs pledges’, which demonstrate employers’ commitments to considering candidates referred by Jobcentre plus, encouraging the recruitment of local unemployed people.

A recent innovation in welfare to work policy originates in France, called intervention on Offer and Demand (IOD). The IOD approach has turned employability on its head by targeting employers and acting as an intermediary for the unemployed. Salognon (2007) outlines how mediation officers liaise with employers to uncover their unexpressed recruitment needs for unskilled labour. The officer tries to place individuals as close to full-time permanent employment as possible, and works with the employer to ‘downsize’ the qualifications required – “you don’t really need qualifications to be a cleaner do you?” (p721)- to increase the chances of creating a match between jobseeker and the job. This clearly work-first method has proven effective in improving employment outcomes- 67% back to work and 41% in permanent employment. Following successful placement, officers continue to meet with the worker and employer, and intervene if issues are arising to avoid termination of placements.

Employer involvement has been noted in Hasluck & Green’s (2007) review:

- NDYP: employers providing input to short CV writing sessions about what employers expect, the recruitment process and interviewing
- NDLTU/ND25 plus: an unwillingness amongst Personal Advisers to market the programme to employers and the need for better relationships with employers to create placement opportunities

Hirst et al (2005) also recommend developing good links with employers to find work placements and source vacancies. This is echoed by Taylor’s (2001), who goes further by recommending that trainers should also build relationships with employers. Taylor also recommends that employers are involved at a strategic level.

6.8. Barriers to promoting employability skills

The literature presents several examples from around the world of the systematic barriers to promoting employability. These include the political view around welfare reform and the emphasis on skill development, the timing of programme provision, and differences between groups.

Systematic barriers can arise in the emphasis that is placed on employability skills in welfare to work programmes. A prime example is that of Australia, where the Work for the Dole and Mutual Obligation programmes do not emphasise employment, but imparting the ‘right’ attitudes (Curtain, 2000). Despite positive reported employment outcomes, the low-skill placements undertaken as part of Work for the Dole have been reported to do little for the employability of participants (ACOSS, 2000). In the UK, political influence is seen in the mandatory nature of various New Deal programmes. Given that the importance of raising individual motivation is made explicit in the early stages of such programmes, the effectiveness of using mandatory measures is questionable.
In interviews with a sample of unemployed people with multiple problems, Dean et al. (2003) highlighted interviewees’ dissatisfaction about being required to participate in New Deal, and their finding that voluntary agencies, family and friends were deemed most helpful.

The point at which welfare to work provision commences can be seen as barrier to employability. For example, in their review of what works for whom, Hasluck & Green (2007) highlight how support with intensive job search on ND25plus is only given after 18 months of claiming Jobseekers Allowance. This time lag leaves Personal Advisers with the task of addressing lowered motivation and negative attitudes which have often already set in. This raises the question of whether more flexible take up of support should be provided through New Deal.

The aforementioned studies by Salognon (2007) and Belt & Richardson (2005) have demonstrated how employer bias against the unemployed can be a barrier to promoting employability. In the latter study, some employers expressed a reluctance to hire New Deal participants due to concerns about their skill level. In both studies, concerns about the reliability of unemployed people and their ability to sustain employment were raised by employers. This highlights a need for dedicated resources and strategic engagement with employer organisations to break down these barriers to increase the success rate of welfare to work programmes.

The ‘package’ of services provided in welfare to work policies have also been mentioned by several authors as important to the development of employability skills. A ‘holistic’ approach to increase individuals’ employability that considers not only skills, but how to address an individual’s barriers to employment:

“...without patronising them or compounding the stigma they so often experience- be cognisant of the personal and emotional wounds that may sometimes lie beneath the surface... as they attempt to access the labour market” (Dean et al., 2003, p24)

“For most customer groups the evidence points to a need for a holistic approach rather than a one dimensional approach to provision” (Hasluck & Green, 2007, p 143)

“Only when mandatory activities including work experience and training were introduced is there any evidence of a significant impact on job entry. This strongly implies that it is ‘bundles’ of provision that work for this customer group [ND25 plus] and that provision is complementary. Unfortunately there is little evidence of which bundles of provision work best together and for which individual customers” (Hasluck & Green, 2007, p52)

This is also highlighted by Breitkreuz (2005), who cites research that highlights the lack of flexibility and autonomy that jobs from welfare to work programmes offer, making the transition to work more difficult. This is often in stark contrast to the flexibility offered by some training programmes.

The design of ‘one size fits all’ provision has also demonstrated to be unhelpful in promoting employability skills.
Several reviews have indicated differential outcomes between men and women, younger and older people, and ethnic groups (Hasluck & Green, 2007, Calmfors et al. 2002, DEWR, 2006). Differential responses to employability training have been highlighted by Willmott & Stevenson (2006), who suggest that more consideration to gender differences is given when designing employability training.

They found that many initiatives focused on the development of practical skills (e.g. IT and job searching), and not enough on personal and social skills (e.g. assertiveness), the latter of which were more likely to be perceived as barriers by women participants. Indeed, Martin (2000) argues that until there is more evidence on why some programmes work for some groups and not for others, it will be difficult to design effective programmes.

The size of employment programmes has also been referred to by several authors, with the general conclusion that the scale should be kept small. For example, Calmfors et al. (2002) reports that if training programmes are expanded rapidly and become too large against a backdrop of long term unemployment, the impact of such programmes can become marginal, as was the case in Sweden.

The location of employment programmes can also have an impact on the teaching of employment skills. The regional variation in provision of employment programmes can lead to Personal Advisers not being able to refer customers to interventions. This may especially be the case in rural areas, which have been noted for their additional barriers to employment in relation to reduced social networks and transportation, e.g. Lindsay et al. (2003).

Whilst there is a body of research around the barriers individuals face that make them ‘unemployable’, there is little in the literature about ‘classroom’ barriers to the teaching of employability skills in employment programmes. What does exist tends to focus on the location and timing of delivery of such initiatives, gender and IT access. For example, in Scotland, resistance to travelling out of one’s area to attend training was identified (The Scottish Office, 1998). Also, NDYP, issues around co-ordinating the start of training courses with educational institutions and the NDYP programme have been raised, delaying or preventing provision (Ritchie, 2000).

Willmott & Stevenson (2006) highlighted the benefits of providing more single gender employability training. They reported gender differences in the barriers faced by unemployed people. For example, women were more likely than men to have caring responsibilities and financial constraints, and be lacking in confidence self–esteem and motivation. Women were also less likely to hear about potential training opportunities via word-of-mouth than men. Ethnic minority women faced the additional barrier of having their (often higher) foreign qualifications disregarded by UK employers. In addition, women may not be able to access employability training due to cultural reasons that forbid them to be working alongside men (Willmott & Stevenson, 2006). Given the differential employment outcomes that have been reported for women, e.g. Hasluck & Green (2007), Gooden (1998), it may be useful to consider the impact women-only programmes could have.
Lindsay (2005) also highlighted a need for community-based resources that provide unemployed jobseekers with ICT access, helping to raise their employability and job searching capabilities.

6.9. **Resources available to promote employability skills**

Several studies report the use of European Social Fund (ESF) funding, either wholly or partially to deliver welfare to work programmes. ESF supported programmes have been reported to achieve much better success rates than Training for Work (equivalent of WBLA). In a review of ESF supported training programmes designed to promote employability amongst the multiply disadvantaged, Hirst et al. (2005) found that this funding route enabled more individualised support, better quality provision, and an increased range of support compared to mainstream provision. Additional funding was also obtained from the Lottery fund, the Innovation fund and the local Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The recent Fair Cities pilots were also partly funded through the ESF, with the majority of funding coming from the Government’s Employment Development and modernisation fund (Atkinson et al. 2008).

In Germany, local employment offices have now been given more flexibility in how they allocate their budgets to different programmes, helping them to meet the needs of their local population (Hujer et al. 2002). Flexibility is also a feature of funding welfare to work programmes in the US, where states are given federal block grants from the Department of Labour, and can use the funding to invest in additional services (Brown, 2001). A similar devolved approach is taken in the Netherlands (Morrell & Bronsky, 2005). An example of local flexibility is that of Twin Cities Rise, who are under a pay-for-performance contract with the state of Minnesota, and are only paid in full after participants have been in their job for one year (Fair Cities, 2004). The Washington Works programme was originally supported through foundation funds and individual donations as a means of having the most flexibility in how the programme was designed and delivered. To maintain stability, the programme went on to secure funding from the Private industry Council on a cost-reimbursement basis with specific performance benchmarks. Theodore & Peck (2000) comment on whether control over the New Deal and funding systems have “sufficiently slackened” (p83) to meet the desire for local innovation in policy in the UK.

Perhaps Australia has undergone the most dramatic shift in how it funds welfare to work programmes. In 1998 formal labour market policies were abolished and placement and case management services to instead be provided through members of the Job Network (employment service providers who had undergone a competitive tendering process). A review of the contracting out of welfare to work programmes in the Netherlands and Australia is also expected later this year (Finn, in press).

Given the disparity in what works and for whom and the noted inability to replicate successes in different areas, there is no comprehensive guide to the ‘best’ employment programme.
However, there are recommendations and guidance offered by various authors on engaging with employers (Taylor, 2001), setting up an employment programme (Goode, 1998) and evaluations of what interventions have had more success with various groups (Hasluck & Green, 2007, Willmott & Stevenson, 2006).

### 6.10. Case studies of good practice

**Washington Works**

Washington Works provides a good example of a holistic approach to increasing employability which addressed personal barriers in a hard-to-help group. Washington Works is a not-for profit Seattle-based organisation founded in 1992. It’s founders were committed to a philosophy of personal transformation, helping low-income women to think differently about their lives and their families. This philosophy has underpinned the holistic design of the programme in the training subjects provided. The programme has had success in placing welfare recipients in above average placements and employment, many of whom were described as “lost causes” for social services. ‘work’ skills are not developed until personal development, focusing on individual effectiveness had been addressed. The training was also delivered to mirror a typical work environment: the programme ran from 8:00-15:00 and participants were required to wear professional attire.

The organisation invests heavily in how it engages with and provides a service to employers. Once placed, programme participants are given ongoing support to ensure a successful transition to work. Interestingly, the organisation achieved this success despite initially difficult relationships with public service agencies. Washington Works also demonstrates good practice in terms of how it evaluates it’s performance by using uniform data-reporting to aid comparison of outcomes, reviewing feedback from employers and using this to improve the programme. Finally, good links with the community were developed to assist with volunteer recruitment and increase awareness of the programme, which led to a rise in referrals.

**EnterTech project**

The EnterTech project provides a good example of how experiential and blended learning was deployed to increase the employability of individuals and meet employer demand. Learners included welfare recipients, at risk youth, dislocated workers, unemployed people and teen parents. A needs assessment revealed that the training would need to cover aspects not normally found in a classroom environment, to help tackle the barriers to employment that this group faced.

An integrated learning environment was used to create a ‘virtual workplace’ with simulations of typical workplace situations, from tedious repetitive tasks to busy periods of activity. Learners are presented with problems and have to decide on a course of action, and respond to the consequences. Training aimed to develop job, people, growth, organisational, communication, reading and writing, numeracy, and strategy skills. 70% of activities were It based and 30% group based. Learners would undertake group projects to enhance their knowledge and group work skills.
Learners were also given

- a learning resource- to emphasise to learners that they already possess a skill, demonstrate how it applies to work, and encourages them to try it, and
- a personal planner- to help them balance work and life outside of work, including handling stress and raising confidence. One learner even intended to continue using the planner in future.

6.11. Key ‘Best Practice’ Principles - Welfare to Work

Welfare to Work Principles

1. **Increasing motivation and confidence** of unemployed people has shown to be an important factor in several welfare-to-work programmes. Despite limited success in replicating programmes, increasing motivation and confidence of participants has shown to be successful in different initiatives.

2. **Development of personal skills/effectiveness** has shown to be effective when included in an employment programme, helping to address one of the barriers to employment that an unemployed person faces.

3. **Individualised support**, e.g. Personal Adviser has demonstrated to be useful in tailoring the package of development that a person receives, though depending on various factors, what is needed may not be available.

4. **Holistic support**, e.g. childcare, transportation, healthcare. This takes into consideration the often complex needs that face the unemployed, and reduces the barriers to employment by considering the context.

5. **Work experience/work trial element** has demonstrated to be effective in providing references and work history, which the unemployed often lack. Additional benefits in the way of increasing confidence have also been found.

6. **Small-scale and targeted provision** has shown to be effective in meeting the needs of the long term unemployed, who often faces multiple barriers to work.

7. **Employer relationship management** has shown to be important in two ways: i) to involve employers at a strategic level in the design of programmes, ii) to reduce the prejudice that some employers have shown towards unemployed people.
Key Principles and their application to differing target audiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Young people</th>
<th>Lone parents</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Older people</th>
<th>Ethnic minorities</th>
<th>Long-term unemployed</th>
<th>Multiple disadvantage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing motivation and confidence</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td>New Deal programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of personal skills/effectiveness</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Washington Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualised support, e.g. Personal Adviser</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>New Deal</td>
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<td>Holistic support, e.g. childcare, transportation, healthcare</td>
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<td>Work experience/work trial element</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>ND50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer relationship management to increase matching requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Twin Cities Rise!</td>
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Considerations

- What is common to the target participants of employment programmes, despite their many differences, is their unemployment status. Given that most participants are not taken onto employment programmes after a certain period of unemployment, this demonstrates that there is an associated ‘unemployability’ of these individuals, and the research has shown that the complexity and number of barriers faced varies with the target group.

- The time delay in embarking upon government-led programmes, e.g. eligible after receiving benefits for x months, during which time motivation can slip. Voluntary participation earlier than the ‘mandatory’ period might be useful to consider.

- In addition, as smaller-scale/localised initiatives have tended to achieve more successful outcomes, due consideration should be given to how programmes are rolled out and to whom. This is akin to how a training professional would design learning programmes to meet the needs of the learners, considering their learning styles, needs and current skill level.
• By considering the different components of what makes an individual/group unemployable, providers can more effectively target programmes to address each specific area. This more holistic approach to developing the employability of the unemployed proactively helps to address the wider barriers to employment.

• Finally, the funding models used in different countries and regions have impacted upon the flexibility of what is provided. In the UK, government funding has tended to be accompanied by terms and conditions of how the funds are to be spent. This goes against the need for flexibility in provision that has been cited. Dedicated resources to strategically engage with employers has shown to be valuable, therefore funding for this activity should also be made in order for supply to more effectively meet demand.
7. Concluding Thoughts on Teaching and Assessing Employability Skills

7.1. Employability Skills: A perennial and international concern

There is nothing particularly new or indeed specific to the UK about policy concern with employability skills. There is widespread concern throughout advanced industrial economies about the employability of new entrants to the labour market whether this be from a position of unemployment or full-time education (Commission on the Skills of the American Population, 1990; McGlaughlin, 1992; Conference Board of Canada, 2000). For instance, at about the same time as the Leitch Review of skills was being published in the UK, in the US a broadly similar analysis of the challenges and opportunities open to the US economy and way of life was being published (New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 2006). This reflects partly a perennial concern among employers for more amenable, effective and productive workers and partly a concern that economic and industrial change is driving new demands for skills in the labour market that specific groups in society do not hold or that the education system is ill-equipped to bestow upon its subjects.

It is very much in the context of industrial change and the changing skill needs of business that the current political and policy concern with employability has arisen. It is most often associated with those that are seen as fundamentally lacking employability skills and therefore being effectively unemployable. This narrow focus on employability skills is very much the subject matter for this rapid review of the literature. However, it is important to heed McQuaid and Lindsay’s (2005) warning that the concept of employability should not be seen as solely defined by the skills and attributes of individuals. Rather, they argue that employability is a much broader concept encompassing individual skills and competencies as well as other factors such as personal circumstances labour market demand and institutional context which act on both the supply and demand side of the labour market. McQuaid and Lindsay also suggest that the concept is fluid, requiring flexibility to meet context specific characteristics in different places and different times. For instance, an individual may be eminently employable in one context or for a particular type of employment but unemployable in other circumstances. As such flexibility and reflexivity are needed alongside a broad definition of the concept to give it real explanatory and pragmatic power in shaping policy interventions.

Just as there is little new in concern over the level of ‘employability’ skills in the (active, latent or future) workforce, neither is there anything new in attempts to develop educational and training responses to this. In the past several waves of skill sets which are closely related to those set out in the draft employability skills definition have been promoted under various labels such as life skills, core skills, generic skills, work related skills and enterprise skills in the UK (Turner, 2001; Powney et al. 2000:1), ‘foundation skills’ and ‘work competencies’ in the US, ‘essential skills’ in New Zealand, and ‘key competencies’ in Australia (Stasz, 1997:207).
7.2. Quality uncertainty, labour market signalling and employability skills

Additionally, it is important to note some caveats on the debate around employability skills. For example, defining and measuring skills is very difficult for three main reasons: there is often insufficient distinction between those factors which are requirements of a job rather than individual attributes; skills are often very difficult to assess because of their complexity and finally skills are often socially constructed and reflect power relations in a particular society, industry or workplace rather than being solely the requirements of the job/task (Krahn et al., 2002:277).

Qualifications are often used as a proxy indicator for skills precisely because of some of these difficulties in pinning down exactly what skills are needed to function well in a particular work environment, including the ability to ‘fit in’ (Hogarth and Wilson, 2001). Indeed, there is a large literature on the role of quality uncertainty as it affects employers’ recruitment behaviour, building on the seminal work of Akerlof (1970). This suggests that because employers cannot know how productive a prospective employee might be they are forced to rely on a number of proxy indicators to influence such judgements. Such judgements are confirmed as correct or defective on the basis of experience through individual employer’s experience of recruitment of different types of people. This experience can lead, where experiences are negative – for instance in the case of recruiting an individual who subsequently turns out to have poor employability skills – to further uncertainty and can lead to a situation where employers do not recruit because they assume that all similar candidates have the same skills deficits (e.g. Izquierdo and Izquierdo, 2007). In the face of this sort of uncertainty, qualifications can offer one means of screening applicants for a job. Economic theory often makes a distinction between the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ ‘screening hypothesis’. In the strong version, education is not necessarily thought to confer productivity enhancing benefits but can act as a signal about the types of personal characteristics and aptitudes of an individual (Bosworth, et al. 1996). The assumption is that higher level qualifications require a more serious and longer-term commitment on the behalf of individuals, indicating an aptitude for hard work, an ability to commit to a project over the long-term and meet normal social expectations about working within authority structures, meeting deadlines and time keeping.

The weak screening hypothesis on the other hand suggests that, while the primary role of schooling is to signal future productivity potential, schooling also has some inherent productivity increasing effects (see, for example, Lambropoulos, 1992, Arabsheibani and Rees, 1998, Brown and Sessions, 1999 and Castagnetti, et al. 2005). Where employers lose confidence in the capacity of qualification screening to provide them with sufficient information on which to make a decision they may resort to other channels such as informal social networks (Rees, 1966; Hogarth and Hasluck, 2008), background internet searches (Swailes, 2007) or more expensive psychometric testing (Hogarth et al. 2007). In general, employers invest more in recruitment for high productivity jobs and positions that require considerable training than for other jobs (Pellizarri, 2004).
Quality uncertainty and labour market signalling are important because they have a strong bearing on how employers perceive the skills of recruits and the credibility of the qualifications that they hold. Uncertainty is a greater factor for recruits/applicants without a long or visible employment history, meaning that employers tend to be more suspicious of the employability skills possessed by young people leaving the education system and those that do not have a relevant work history, for instance as a result of being long-term unemployed (Newton et al. 2005:40-1; Gregg, 2001:F628; Arulampalam et al., 2000:34-38). Where employers use qualification screening methods to judge such applications but view this (rightly or wrongly) as a poor decision they may then quickly lose confidence in the capacity of particular qualifications, or the formal education system in general, to accurately signal the skills and characteristics of individuals bearing these qualifications. This may lead to general failing confidence and a reluctance to recruit, or in an international labour market a decision to recruit elsewhere. This obviously has potentially huge economic implications for labour market performance and the benefits accruing from public investment in education.

The implications of economic theories of quality uncertainty and adverse selection arising from imperfect and unequal information are multiple. They suggest that care needs to be taken in designing and implementing learning and teaching strategies intended to promote employability skills. Unless such strategies are highly consistent in their application and encourage employer confidence in them, economic theory suggests that they will be ineffective. One way of helping to build employer confidence is through sharing information on the quality and success of provision through for instance publishing and disseminating evaluation and research evidence, especially relying on employer-based evidence of utilising the skills of new recruits whose employability skills have been enhanced by experiencing good quality education and training provision.

7.3. **Is employer evidence on skills needs/deficits accurate?**

Moreover, because the debate on employability skills arises in part from employers’ suggestions that recruits and potential recruits are not skilled enough, it is necessary to focus attention on the validity of employers’ assessments. For example, quality uncertainty and adverse selection might result from inaccurate judgements. Without mechanisms to share information about the average quality of potential and actual recruits employers may form views on the quality of skills provision based more on individual negative experiences as opposed to more accurate judgements based on the aggregate quality of all prospective recruits. Moreover, research on workplace cultures suggests that at least part of what employers collectively refer to as employability skills is related to the processes by which individuals ‘fit into’ relatively inflexible organisational contexts which are often unwelcoming to ‘outsiders’ and which can lead to processes of either “assimilation or exit” (Sommerlad, 2007:194).
Work on the context-driven nature of skills demands in the workplace suggest that while it may be correct to suggest that employers both need and want ‘team work’ or ‘communication’ skills what is meant by these terms will vary in different employment contexts, making it difficult though not impossible for the education system – as opposed to (sectorally/occupationally) relevant work experience – to promote them (Stasz, 1997).

Finally, it is important to remember that employers are one of a range of special interests who, individually and through associations, will act to promote their own interests above those of others. Lobbying for increased public investment in particular skills may in part reflect a desire to reduce their own share of the responsibility for training employees.

7.4. **Multiple initiatives are underway in each setting**

The evidence collected for this review suggests that while the term ‘employability skills’ is only partially recognized in each of the settings investigated, the types of skills and attributes that form the draft UKCES definition are increasingly a part of the formal curriculum across the education and training sector. In each setting this is manifest in slightly different ways but it is difficult to conclude that the main components of the UKCES draft definition are missing from curricula or content in any of the settings.

In early years education, the six areas of the National Curriculum framework are clearly linked to aspects of the UKCES employability skills definition, particularly in relation to attitudes, social and communication skills, working collaboratively, contextual knowledge development, applied mathematics and creativity. Throughout compulsory education in schools multiple aspects of the curriculum, especially during the secondary phase, are highly relevant to the employability skills agenda. This applies to all pupils through the compulsory WRL element of the curriculum but particularly to the new vocational pathways such as applied GCSEs, the Young Apprenticeship scheme and the new Diplomas.

In the FE system, employability skills feature again as part of the new Advanced Diploma, the Apprenticeship scheme and the new Diplomas which are to be delivered jointly by schools, FE colleges, other providers and employers and which include the Advanced Diploma which is an FE level qualification.

At HE level employability skills are increasingly promoted as ALT practice is strengthened through the HE Academy and centrally designed initiatives such as Additional Student Numbers (ASN) bids. There is evidence that a concern with these skills is increasingly migrating from isolated individual academics to Institution- and sector-wide initiatives.

In employability programmes delivered in the main to those experiencing long-term unemployment or inactivity, employability skills have long been a key feature of the UK’s adoption of supply-side Active Labour Market Policies, though the emphasis in the UK is more on a ‘work first’ approach based on activation, job search, matching and work experience than training and human capital development (see Meagre, 2008) – i.e. strengthening the capacity of individuals to get a job rather than to perform well in it.
While the international evidence suggests that such ALMPs are more effective than training based interventions in terms of short-term indicators such as job entry (Meagre, 2008), there may be scope to argue that some of the experiences reported by employers as skills deficits in their recruits may be due to large numbers of people being referred by the Public Employment Service (Jobcentre Plus) and its contractors to job vacancies before they have overcome their (often significant) barriers to work and therefore not being truly ‘job ready’.

7.5. Implementation is difficult and takes time

While there is certainly cause to argue that skills and competencies relevant to the draft UKCES definition are part of the curriculum and content in each of the settings explored as a part of this review, the evidence also suggests that reforms intended to promote these skills are far from being fully embedded.

For example, in the secondary school context research and evaluation on the implementation of the wide range of programmes and interventions designed to promote relevant skills suggests that they have been accompanied by difficulties in implementation such as widespread issues related to teacher confidence and skills, competition for space in the curriculum and management capacity to cope with and successfully interpret the wide range of initiatives under development.

In FE, while colleges have moved some distance toward promoting generic vocational skills and developing links with employers, this is often limited by rigidities in the model of provision. In the HE sector, while there is increasing recognition of the importance of ALT issues in general and transferable ‘employability-type’ skills in particular, this is mitigated by the continuing status and performance-based resources which are attached to research income generation and outputs. While teaching funding outstrips that for research, research funding is highly competitive and disproportionately shapes individual academic motivations and behaviour. This is particularly important because success and reward in the academic labour market is heavily dependent on being able to attract research funding and produce research outputs. As such, attempts to lever up the quality of teaching provision and to re-focus some aspects of provision on employability skills and the innovative (and time consuming) teaching approaches that this implies, are often limited by the emphasis given to attracting research income.

In employability programmes, performance management systems tend to focus minds and behaviours on measureable outcomes. To some extent this mitigates against a focus on specific skills acquisition, particularly because this is hard to do (see below). Rather attention is often focused on more visible and measurable indicators such as throughput of ‘beneficiaries’ and, particularly in the public employment service, on job outcomes (see Nunn et al. 2007; Nunn and Kelsey, 2007; Nunn et al. 2007a).
This pressure for a ‘quick win’ may result in pushing people toward jobs who are not fully job ready, though changes to the nature of the predominant performance management systems were intended to offset these pressures (Nunn and Johnson, 2005).

Taken together, these findings suggest that while employability-relevant skills and competency frameworks are increasingly a part of the formal curriculum, such initiatives are not yet fully embedded in any of the settings included in the review. In some cases this embedding process will require significant culture change at a sectoral level, suggesting that the transition will be a long process. However, there may also be scope to argue that existing practices do promote many relevant skills and behaviours but that this is not always fully recognised and incorporated into formal and reflexive practice. For instance, many of OFSTED’s studies on the implementation of various aspects of WRL in secondary schools suggest that one of the basic steps that needs to be taken is the inclusion of employability relevant aims in the formal learning objectives set by teachers. Without doing this, it is difficult for employability concerns to be reflected in ongoing assessment and feedback to learners or the reflections of teachers on their own teaching practice.

7.6. ‘Providers’ need these skills too

One of the key barriers in relation to promoting employability-relevant skills, cited in the literature, especially in the formal education system, is related to teacher/practitioner skills, knowledge and confidence. This is unsurprising where practitioners have not worked outside of the educational sector and/or where their own professional training and development has not included employability skills and relevant pedagogical practice. It is also relevant where teacher/practitioners have relevant work experience but this is out of date. It is worth noting the evidence in the schools chapter that those teachers cited as most comfortable with the new vocational pathways as those with recent relevant professional experience outside of the education sector, and similar evidence cited in the FE chapter.

This can lead to teachers and practitioners lacking first hand knowledge and awareness of employer-needs and the teaching approaches which best suit the learning of these skills. Importantly, it is important not to discount the evidence of what works for learners in relation to teachers own training needs. If learners learn employability skills best through experiential learning and work experience it may be that teachers will only gain appropriate insight into employer needs through work experience in relevant occupations/sectors and may only fully adapt to the necessary teaching styles through practical experience of them. This may explain why evaluation and research findings (in this country and abroad) appear to suggest that teacher skills and importantly confidence in new teaching methods is lacking even where guidance and toolkits exist.

Finally, in thinking about teacher/practitioner training needs it is important to remember the vast range of initiatives underway in most of the settings included in the review.
Relevant employability initiatives are only one of many competing initiatives, especially with regard to pedagogic practice and which require professional development to support them. For example teachers in schools are expected to undertake more rigorous monitoring and assessment on an ongoing basis than in the past, to be more aware of child protection issues, to introduce new technology such as IT enabled approaches, to engage more with parents, to implement new behaviour management systems and to continually lever up standards in mainstream provision. While the ultimate intention and motivation of many of these reforms is supportive of the employability agenda, care needs to be taken over the crowding of the time available to teachers and practitioners for professional development and, importantly, for the implementation of the practices and skills learned in the classroom.

7.7. Problems in assessing impact and success

Undertaking this review was in many ways a frustrating process. While there are large numbers of studies and reports which suggest particular approaches to ALT practice in relation to employability-relevant skills, many of these come against very real methodological problems in assessing impact. To assess the impact of ALT practice on employability, which actually refers to employer views of productivity and effectiveness in the workplace, would require tracked longitudinal assessments of individuals starting with exposure to particular ALT practices and ending with staged assessment of workplace performance. It would also probably require the adoption of quasi-experimental approaches, with the use of large statistically robust sample and control groups, and some degree of control over the range of ALT methods used. In any context such methods would be extremely resource intensive and would require a long-term time horizon and these implications would increase incrementally with the distance between intervention and workplace assessment; in the case of pre-school initiatives for several decades, though it is notable that such methods are in place in these settings. Moreover, such approaches would come against the familiar issue of attribution and causality, in addition to controlling for the many influences on cognitive development and educational attainment which are outside of the education sector.

These methodological difficulties mean that many studies of pedagogical approaches to employability skills present evidence of the success or failure of particular methods but suffer from weaknesses related to how this evidence is collected and the status that it should therefore be given. A frequent and understandable approach is therefore to rely on learner and teacher feedback after experiencing one or other pedagogical approach. Such feedback is useful and should not be simply discounted but can tend toward relatively trivial findings (such as learners enjoyed the experience) or findings which fail to demonstrate whether or not learners have become more employable in the eyes of employers who are reporting that there is a problem in this regard in the first place.

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18 Though this in itself is not insignificant given the emphasis on engaging and motivating learners.
Nevertheless other studies do take a more robust and sophisticated approach relying on mixed methods and longitudinal assessment of learner competence in specific respects, though even these rely on the adoption of causal assumptions that their assessments will match employer perceptions. This kind of ‘logic model’ approach can also help to overcome gaps in time between intervention and workplace performance, especially when linked to assessments of capacity to learn and adapt. For instance, while it is difficult and expensive to track pre-school children in relation to their nursery education and future employability relying on employer evidence, it is possible to link pre-school experiences and later cognitive development, educational attainment and capacity to learn as proxies for future employability (e.g. see Figure 2) and this is the basis of most studies of the introduction of new pedagogical approaches to promoting employability.

Figure 2: Logic model approach to assessing impacts of pedagogy on development and then employability

Such assumptions could be used to utilise the existing results of large-scale studies on early years and primary pedagogy on child development that utilise longitudinal methods. For instance the Effective Pedagogy started tracking a cohort of children at age 3 and is now considering their learning in the development of these children up to age 14 in 2011 (see http://www.ioe.ac.uk/schools/ecpe/eppe/index.htm).

This latter issue is of central importance because the weight of evidence suggests that the most significant drivers of development and attainment act outside, and potentially against, developments in the education system. It is these social factors around inequality, class, race and gender which some authors suggest explain the failure of comprehensive education to lead to greater social equality and mobility (Lucas, 2004). The implications of this are that whatever is achieved through education and training, while large social inequalities persist some social groups will always be regarded by employers and others as less employable than others.
7.8. Reflection and ‘learning by doing’ works (probably) as part of mixed approaches

The vast majority of studies and guidance related to employability suggest that some degree of active learning by doing is what works in relation to many of the relevant skills. This is especially so in relation to communication, working with others, time and personal management and problem solving. The evidence also suggests that learners need to be encouraged to take responsibility and reflect on their own development and progress against agreed objectives and in relation to specific tasks. As such personal development plans and records of achievement are suggested as important mechanisms for encouraging individual responsibility and reflection. Group project and task-based learning, role plays and simulations are frequently promoted as central to developing appropriate team working and communication skills as well as allowing learners to develop their own approaches to solving problems, including through failure.

The theoretical roots of such approaches are in the pedagogical theory of authors such as Dewey and more recently Kolb, Argyris and Schön and Senge. The emphasis in these theories of learning is frequently on how learning takes place through a mixture of practical experience and reflection (e.g. Dewey, 1933). Kolb (1984) distils this into a four part model of learning where experience shapes reflections and internally held theories which are then tested through ongoing experience. Argyris and Schön elaborate a similar model which suggests that the way in which individuals operate in a given context is determined by internalised mental models and that these guides to action (‘theories in use’) are often different from the way in which they are consciously represented or explained to others (‘espoused theories’) (1974: 6-7). Because theories-in-use are implicit and internalised they are often not reflected on and become automatic behavioural determinants rather than the product of conscious reasoning and re-reasoning. The nature of learning, to Argyris and Schön, is through the detection and correction of error as theories-in-use are disproved (1978: 2). It is thus a process of action-learning (Caveleri, 2004: 169). Argyris and Schön developed a schema for understanding how this learning process happens.

‘Zero learning’, (Argyris, 1985), occurs when individuals are unable to take corrective action when confronted with fresh imperatives or problems. ‘Single loop learning’ refers to making simple adaptations and taking corrective actions. As such it involves error detection and correction which enable current behaviours or actions to largely continue. It focuses on the question: am I doing things right? ‘Double loop learning’ involves re-framing in terms of seeing and conceptualising things and situations in totally new ways. It promotes enhanced reflection, error detection and correction in ways that involve changing the underlying behavioural norms, objectives and practices.
Here the question that one is faced with is: am I doing the right things.

“When the error detected and corrected permits the organisation to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives, then that error and correction processes single-loop learning. Single loop learning is like a thermostat that learns when it is too hot or too cold and turns the heat on or off. The thermostat can perform this task because it can receive information [the temperature of the room] and take corrective action. Double loop learning occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organisation’s underlying norms, policies and objectives” (Argyris and Schön (1978: 2).

Figure 1: Argyris and Schön’s Single and Double Loop Learning

Senge (1990), adopts a similar model of learning behaviour based upon adaptive and generative learning, where the former is roughly analogous to single loop and the latter analogous to double-loop learning. Adaptive learning practices may sustain high performance in a static context but where individuals are faced with a dynamic environment they may not only act as barriers to change but also obscure the realisation of the need for change (McGill et al, 1992: 8), in a workplace context hindering productivity.

The focus of both Argyris and Schön and Senge is that agents operate in structures but can in turn actively reshape those structures. This is reflected in Senge’s identification of five dimensions of learning organisations all of which stress the need to inculcate individuals with the ability to reflect on their own behaviour and how this is first shaped by and then in turn shapes or reinforces contextual and structural parameters. The emphasis is on imbuing individuals with the ability to identify where systems and structures are no longer facilitating the desired objective and therefore need to be changed – essentially critical analytical and problem solving skills. Action learning approaches are frequently suggested in all of the settings covered. For instance, in the early years curriculum, play, exploration and creativity are promoted as effective pedagogical tools. In secondary schools, the emphasis in WRL and enterprise education is on projects and practical application of knowledge including through micro-business and entrepreneurship activities. In the new vocational pathways at secondary and FE level, there is a strong emphasis on applying the skills learned through more traditional approaches.
In HE games and practical exercises are promoted as a means of applying, testing and confirming/denying theoretical propositions.

However, there are significant caveats that need to be born in mind. While conclusions about the value of experiential and action learning are logical (and there is certainly no evidence to contradict them) equally the case for such methods was not conclusively and demonstrably proved in many of the studies included in this review. Moreover, while some of the skills that form part of the draft employability skills framework suit these methods, there is some evidence drawn from UK studies of WRL that more traditional – lecture – based teaching methods are important in developing theoretical and abstract contextual knowledge of the economy, labour market and nature and meaning of work. As such, ‘learning by doing’ is most likely to be successful as part of a mixed approach to ALT, though it may be true to suggest that the emphasis on active approaches is needed to correct the traditional institutionalised emphasis on lecture based didactic instructional approaches.

Examples of this might include more traditional methods of teaching about the working of the economy and key business tools such as project management accompanied by project based tasks to use these in practice. The key appears to be in connecting the two together, encouraging reflection on how practical experiences are shaped by and demonstrate theoretical and conceptual knowledge. Such approaches can also be used with more traditional academic material too, as the discussion in the HE chapter shows in relation to theories of International Relations and diplomacy and simulated games or in relation to economic theory and real world projects or ‘laboratory experiments’.

Action learning approaches necessitate very different styles of teaching. They require teachers and practitioners to move away from didactic instructional approaches to teaching methods based on facilitation and coaching. However, such approaches involve difficult transitions for both teachers and learners who are schooled in the more traditional methods. They involve teachers ‘letting go’ of control and learners changing their expectations of teachers from one of a source of unchallenged knowledge. This can prove challenging for all concerned and reinforces the importance of teacher/practitioner development.

7.9. Work experience is important

A key theoretical insight which appears to be born out by empirical evidence relates to the notion that ‘context matters’. In particular, the suggestion in the literature is that successful inculcation of the non-technical skills needed in the workplace requires a teaching environment that replicates the key contextual features of the workplace. There is some debate over the extent to which this requires direct work experience or whether the relevant features can be replicated in educational environments. Regardless of this though, the consensus does appear to be that work experience matters but that care needs to be taken to get the most out of this linking it with content delivered in school, in particular more theoretical and abstract material. The emphasis is on encouraging learners to reflect on the benefits of work experience, what they have learned and how this relates to contextual work on the nature of work, collaboration and work place behaviours.
This reflection should also extend to their own behaviour and interaction with others and how this demonstrates skills and personal development.

7.10. **Other common key success factors**

A range of other features of successful practices in relation to teaching employability skills emerge from the literature, though again, general weaknesses in the evidence collection processes undermine the extent to which it is possible to suggest that these are proven. These factors include:

- **Senior level commitment** – A common theme identified in research studies, especially where employability and vocational content is a relatively new (or is perceived to be relatively new) introduction to the curriculum, is the importance of senior managerial commitment. So in several studies OFSTED picks out the commitment of the Head or Deputy Head to the success of new teaching practices to support the adoption of vocational qualifications. The emphasis here is that institutional commitment is key to ensuring that a particular initiative is taken on by individual members of teaching staff rather than being crowded out by other initiatives. As such teachers/practitioners need to know that they will be asked to account for their actions in relation to teaching employability skills and be supported in changing their practices accordingly through for instance:
  - access to resources (e.g. time and finance),
  - associated development opportunities; and
  - flexibilities to vary existing routines and structures (e.g. timetables, room allocations, work experience arrangements, contractual requirements and working hours).

An example of this type of commitment in HE might include allowing lecturers to schedule part of a teaching module in traditional fashion with lecture and seminar/tutorial slots but then allowing other parts of the module to be booked out as block time to undertake structured games or even placement activities. This might include resolving timetabling conflicts with other modules, varying lecturer working hours, for instance where placements were evening or weekend based, use of different rooms and facilities and additional student/lecturer time to make links with employers. It might also incur additional development time from that which would normally be allocated. Similar implications can quite easily be envisaged in relation to schools or FE. All these needs require institutional support and senior manager commitment to make them happen. In sum, they require a strategic decision on the part of managers that the organisation will invest in the change process.

- **Planning and learning objectives** – It is a basic and simple insight but several studies make the point that the precursor of employability or vocational considerations shaping pedagogical practice is that these concerns are included within the learning objectives set for specific courses/subjects/modules. Unless this is the case, neither teaching nor assessment practice is likely to be significantly influenced.
Setting relevant learning objectives is central to linking planning, practice, learner assessment and teacher/practitioner evaluation.

- **Relevance matters** – several studies suggest that barriers to promoting employability skills are related to the motivation and engagement of learners. This can be increased where learners clearly see the relevance of the skills/behaviours that they are being taught and therefore actively want to learn and reflect on their experiences.

- **Universal but differentiated** (inc by group and individual) – There is consideration in several areas of the literature that employability considerations need to be seen as a mainstream and universal concern. For example, they should not be the preserve of the less able students who are streamed away from academic programmes. This is a central issue. Research by the project team (e.g. Nunn et al. 2008) has shown that while adult education and vocational FE can bestow very real and demonstrable benefits on participants, especially in relation to stable participation in the labour market, it may also act as a constraint on their social mobility and aspirations when compared against more academic streams. A key issue in the introduction of the new vocational pathways in the 14-19 phase was to counteract these historical (and socially and institutionally embedded) tendencies (that are notably not so apparent in countries such as Germany where vocational education is regarded as higher status) by providing vocational opportunities for high attaining students. Equally, the evidence from employers demonstrates that high attainers need employability skills. However, it is also the case that the types of communication skills needed, for example, differ between different types of occupation and sector. Differentiating the focus on employability skills without limiting learners’ horizons is thus a key challenge. Moreover, if learners are to respond to the signal that vocational pathways are of equal status to academic options and/or to take seriously the employability components of higher level qualifications they will need to be confident that employers also acknowledge this – which in turn emphasises the need to build employer confidence that qualifications are sufficiently robust and can ‘signal’ that the bearer has the types of work related skills that they require (see Section 7.2).

- **High expectations** – Continuing the theme of the need to counter the perception and implications of past perceptions that employability and vocational content is for low achievers, especially in the compulsory education system, relevant ALT practice needs to set high minimum expectations about the standards required.

- **Teacher autonomy** – Several studies highlight the need to ensure that teacher/practitioners have the autonomy that they require to innovate and vary existing practices in order to promote employability skills. While there may be some tension here in relation to the dynamics of senior level commitment and a strong curricular emphasis on employability skills it is the variance of actual classroom practice that will require this autonomy if change is to happen.
7.11. Partnerships and organisational change

The current programme of reform in skills delivery is highly connected to the employability agenda. In particular the introduction and planned expansion of the new Diploma system provides a major means of improving the employability of young people leaving full-time education. Diplomas are to be delivered through partnerships of schools, FE colleges, Universities and employers. In addition, Universities in making bids for Additional Student Numbers will increasingly need to forge relationships with employers and other education providers. In schools, secondary provision of the WRL curriculum as well as Diploma and Applied GCSE/MA implementation will require working with other organisations and employers. Research evidence (McMorris, 2005; European Institute for Urban Affairs et al., 2006) shows that partnership working is difficult and time consuming and therefore allowance will need to be made for this both in the support that UKCES delivers and its evaluative judgements on progress.

7.12. ‘Employability skills’ are about more than work

In reviewing the evidence on employability skills and associated pedagogical approaches, parallels were clearly apparent with skills needs outside of employment which were thrown up by research conducted by the project team with long-term unemployed and insecurely employed people (Nunn et al, 2008). The parallel is that many of the skills in the draft definition are not just relevant to effectiveness at work but are about personal effectiveness in a range of different contexts including employment but also making the most of public services, being an effective consumer, in civic engagement (political/social activism, campaigning, lobbying etc) and in personal relationships. Success and failure in these different contexts can be cumulative. For instance, in the research mentioned above, many respondents were unsuccessful in employment because they had not been able to make public services work for them or to sustain important personal relationships. In this research, one respondent had been unsuccessful in a range of these different contexts but became politically active and gained skills, motivation and confidence through this activism to develop personal relationships and a career also. This is potentially important in making the case for promoting employability skills through the use of different pedagogical strategies because it can help to overcome resistance which might emerge from the position that education is about preparation for the life rather than just work.

7.13. Issues to consider

On reflection, the UKCES may wish to consider the following issues when drafting its Employability Skills Toolkit document:

- There are a multitude of initiatives underway across the education and training sector, many of which address the skills/competencies/behaviours which are in the draft employability skills definition. While there is scope to reinforce the importance of the employability skills agenda there is a danger of institutional confusion and replication of initiatives already underway.
As such, rather than suggesting new approaches the document may be more effective acting as a signpost to resources/initiatives that are already in place. This is especially the case in the early years, schools, FE and HE settings.

- In the Welfare to Work system there is an ongoing debate about the merits of the work-first approach. Sensitivity to this debate will be needed to avoid policy contradiction.

- The role of imperfect information and employer recruitment decisions is important. If the public funding that goes into certifying employability skills is to be well spent then employers need to have confidence that it is a useful signalling/screening device; acting as an effective proxy-indicator of skills. This in turn means that the institutional and social pressures that exist in relation to certification and accreditation of skills need to be resisted as economic theory suggests that employer confidence in this regard is brittle.

- Publishing research evidence and on the rigour and quality of new vocational pathways and marketing them effectively will be important in building their credibility with employers.

- Teaching employability skills requires the adoption of new and innovative teaching skills. Practitioners need to be supported in developing these skills as well as confidence in them. Assessment practices as well as pedagogical practices also need supporting.

- The review suggests that these new pedagogical approaches include an emphasis on exploration, learning by doing and reflection in authentic contexts. However, these need to be mixed with rather than simply replace existing approaches.

- Work experience and simulations appear to be extremely important in allowing individuals to gain relevant experience and apply their learning in an appropriate environment. However, the toolkit will need to promote the idea of work experience being structured to fit with wider work related and academic learning.

- A tangential conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that the skills/competencies etc which form part of the draft definition are not purely about ‘employability’ and are also associated with broader issues of personal effectiveness for instance in relation to being an intelligent and effective user of public services or civic participation. Equally, the teaching methods associated with these employability skills appear to also promote this wider notion of personal effectiveness. There may therefore be some merit in reflecting this in the toolkit and even considering the name of the skill-set. This may help to overcome resistance which arises from the viewpoint that education is about more than preparation for work.

- Teaching employability skills may require that organisational practices and structures are amended to fit different pedagogical approaches (e.g. timetabling, resource allocation etc). This requires organisational commitment and flexibility. The toolkit should therefore address these issues alongside micro-level pedagogical approaches.
• In thinking about future measures and evaluations of success, it needs to be remembered that organisational and especially institutional change is difficult and time-consuming. This will be especially so in relation to some of the major implementation initiatives (e.g. the new Diplomas) which are delivered through partnerships of organisations that do not necessarily have a history and culture of working with one another. As such, the toolkit may need to include references to the literature (not considered here) on facilitating organisational partnerships.

• The toolkit will need to adopt a fine balance between ensuring that employability skills are promoted for all learners at the same time as acknowledging that these will be very different in relation to higher skill occupations than they are for ‘entry’ level employment.

• Focussing on employability skills is only one side of the equation, further toolkits may be necessary to support employer practices to adapt to new recruits and get the best out of them.

• The evidence base in support of some of the pedagogical approaches suggested as effective is not always as convincing as it might be. Targeted research looking at the benefits associated with these approaches may help to plug these gaps and build the credibility of relevant qualifications.
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