

Welcome to Issue 8.2 of *Higher Education Skills and Work-based Learning (HESWBL)*, the official journal of UVAC, the University Vocational Awards Council. I am very happy to welcome Mandy Crawford-Lee of UVAC to the journal's Editorial Board and look forward to working with her in her new role of Associate Editor. I am also delighted to announce that Professor Tony Wall is now the Deputy Editor of *HESWBL* and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tony for all his hard work and inspirational input on the journal over the last four years.

There are seven thought-provoking papers in this issue all with a keen focus on employability, skills and issues impacting upon the real workplace. The first paper, James and Yun's "Exploring student satisfaction and future employment intentions" presents a fascinating case study centred on students' perceptions and expectations of graduate employment in conjunction with their academic experience of higher education.

The students are from a small higher education institution (HEI) in Canada, primarily providing undergraduate level study; the research they take part in focuses on their ideas about future employment expectations together with their rating of their academic experience. The study aims to assist other HEIs to develop policies related to student retention and to embed success around students transitioning from undergraduate studies to the workplace.

The results shared in the case study suggest that while student satisfaction may be relatively similar for all of the academic programmes in question, perceptions of career expectations – based on academic programme – do differ. Furthermore, the results also indicate students' expectations for employment did not have a negative effect on their satisfaction with the HEI. On the contrary, most respondents were satisfied with their academic and personal development; feeling prepared for the workplace and satisfied with the skills and knowledge developed at university, regardless of job expectations.

The issue's second paper, Smith's "Integrated work-based placements – shifting the paradigm" continues the theme of professional employment with a study offering a novel insight into the role of HEIs in enhancing capability development of the healthcare professionals' workforce. A result of this is that work-based learning is now viewed as an essential component of awards which are linked to professional registration. This paper investigates how academics, workplace tutors, and students, on a Biomedical Scientist programme, position themselves in their roles, together with the subsequent impact this has upon the delivery of pre-registration training together with the development of professional capability.

The author draws upon constructivist grounded theory methodology and a mixed-methods approach in this study and shares findings which expose the challenges of a positivist focus and assumptions around workplace learning and professional development presenting a barrier to developing professional capability. Suggestions are offered as to how students might be supported to develop not only technical skills but also professional capability.

Next, Forder and Fowlie offer us "Employability, work placements, and outward mobility: views from England and Germany", a small scale study which again focuses on the employability of graduates, an area of crucial importance to all HEIs. The authors state that, preparing graduates for the global economy is one of HE's most vital roles. However, UK outward mobility targets for students set in 2017 remain lower than the original set by the Bologna Process in 1999; with other European countries achieving substantially higher outward mobility. Existing research in this area concentrates on study abroad, and exploration of the work placement context. This paper instead examines employability and



outward mobility in the context of the perceived reluctance of UK students to undertake work placements abroad.

The research is based upon responses from undergraduate business management students at Brighton Business School and these responses are then compared to those of German students studying at Goethe University in Frankfurt. Further responses are included from staff from Brighton Business School, and some other UK universities. Both sets of students displayed similar barriers to going abroad, whilst being motivated by different drivers. These drivers are examined within the context of “employability”. The research finds that lack of staff awareness, or interest, can also negatively affect students’ decisions about undertaking a placement abroad.

Our fourth paper, “From skills to practices, from tool-kits to ethnography: re-thinking employability with a literacies lens” by Kendall and French draws upon the outcomes of a Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded project, Literacies for Employability (L4E) and offers a contribution to the discussion of the interface between university learning and workplace settings. The paper includes information about employability which crosses disciplines and subject areas, together with practical ways of engaging students in ethnographic approaches to understanding workplace practices and professional, work-based, or placement learning.

The project L4E is grounded in social theories of communication from sociology and education; understanding literacy as a complex social activity embedded in domains of practice. These ideas recognise workplaces as highly distinctive and diverse contexts for literacy and that to be successful in particular workplace settings students must be attuned to the nuanced literacy practices of that workplace. As little exists to foreground this the project has developed a framework to scaffold and support this process across the disciplines so that students can develop the attitudes and behaviours they will need to be successful in the workplace.

Pennbrant and Svensson continue the discussion of success in the workplace in our fifth paper, “Nursing and learning – healthcare pedagogics and work-integrated learning”. The paper suggests that the increased pace of social change in Sweden means that HE needs to prepare students to manage change and drive change processes within their job roles. The example focused on in this study is HE’s obligation to meet the social and political demands for well-trained health professionals. The paper defines and formulates a research agenda for this area using work-integrated learning, with a specialisation in healthcare pedagogics.

Returning to the employability of HE graduates in the UK, Pigden, Garford and Moore offer us their paper, “Employability outcomes for university joint honours graduates” which again re-iterates the way in which, across the world, the intrinsic value of HE is increasingly linked with the ability of the graduate to secure highly skilled graduate employment post-graduation. After summarising the various tools used to record statistics on this globally, the paper focuses on the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education in the UK, a survey organised by the Higher Education Statistics Agency to collect student-related data and summarise what graduates are doing six months after finishing their degrees.

The paper examines how the vast majority of UK students specialise throughout their degree and study just one academic subject at bachelor degree level, commonly known as a single honours degree, in contrast to other systems globally. However, most British universities do permit students to study two or even three subjects in parallel in joint or combined honours degrees (double majors internationally). The study investigates how HE students choose to obtain their degrees in other countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa. A mixed picture is reported across Europe, with students studying a variety of vocational and academic disciplines as single or joint honours. So whilst the study predominantly reports on an analysis of UK graduate employment data,

its conclusions are relatable to any university education system where there is a mix of study options open to the students.

In our final paper of Issue 8.2 we are offered an insight into “Doctorateness and the DBA: what next?” Poole uses this paper to examine the extent to which the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programmes, currently offered by UK universities, are appropriate to the needs of all their stakeholders, including the experienced business and management professionals who enrol on them. In order to do this the study examines DBA programme descriptors on UK university websites, and by critically reviewing recent academic papers on doctorates in the fields of business and management, as well as considering available provision within the context of current debates about the nature of “doctorateness” which are taking place in the field of doctoral education as a whole. The paper has several conclusions, which include three possible futures for the DBA.

Thank you to all of the reviewers who made the publication of these great papers possible by giving so freely of their time and invaluable expertise. I hope you enjoy the papers in 8.2 and agree that they are incredibly useful in sharing information, experience and knowledge to facilitate innovation within the sector.

Ruth Helyer