

# ***Employability Guide***

- ***Tips and hints on future employment***

- ***Ways to communicate your attributes***

- ***How to network effectively***



# Employability - What's All the Fuss About?

The Skills Development Service wishes to acknowledge Cardiff University Careers Service for help with providing the text on pages 2-4

## Why is employability a word that just won't go away?

The answer is obvious - at some point, university and the lifestyle that goes with it is going to end. You're going to enter the big, wide world of work and when that happens, you want to be prepared, ready for action and able to get the best job that you can.

There are some interesting claims made by graduate employers:

- One in three top companies can't fill graduate vacancies
- Too many students leave university without the right skills

More than one in three recent graduates are employed in a lower skilled job compared to one in four in 2001.

## So what is employability?

There are lots of definitions, but the most simple is:

*"Having the right skills and experience to get the job you want".*

Or you could put it into an equation:

$$E = s + x + r\sqrt{ul}8$$

**Employability = skills + experience + the ability to articulate it.**

The bottom line is that by the end of your degree you will both need and want to move onto something else. Your degree will have taught you so much and given you confidence in your abilities - transferring this into the workplace is what makes it all worthwhile.



## GET INVOLVED LOVE CARDIFF

As a student at Cardiff University you will have the chance to get involved in a wide range of activities such as paid and voluntary work, involvement with societies, attending extra curricula courses, indeed almost anything. The opportunities to shape yourself towards becoming the ideal graduate employer are in fact around you but not always clear to see. However, many miss the boat as they don't necessarily see the appeal or come up with the "that's not for me" thinking.

**So get involved, love Cardiff.**

### **How to articulate your skills, knowledge and experiences**

It is important to reflect on the differences any employability experiences including extra-curricular learning have made on you personally and to log them. Two examples are reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

**In reflection-on-action, you debrief your experiences after the fact in order to more fully understand and learn from them. Some typical considerations are:**

- What did I set out to do?
- What happened?
- What did I do well?
- How could I improve for next time?
- What did I learn from this experience?

For example, if you've been working in a front-line role, you might have had to deal with a customer complaint; in a volunteering capacity you might have solved a problem for a client; in representing you might have reassured a peer; in running a society you might have organised an event; working in a bar you might have trained a colleague, in an office you might have covered for someone etc.

- After attending a workshop or course pay particular attention to what you've learnt, outlining specific concepts and theories.
- A comprehensive reflection on action should help you scrutinise the experiences and enable you to competently describe them to an employer.

*I have become a much more confident presenter and my ability to think on my feet and respond to situations on the spot has improved.*

*By going round all the university halls I informed students how to approach the private housing stage in their life.*

*Working in the front line as a sales assistant has taught me punctuality, enabled me to interact with customers and to relate with employers in a business ethical way.*

*The role has allowed me to gain an understanding into the administrative side of how an academic school is run, as well as playing an active role in the organisation of events.*

*The role has brought out key leadership and management skills in me as I have to manage both my studies and student affairs.*

*I attended a Welsh education conference and shared practical experience of partnerships and established plans to build relationships.*

## GET INVOLVED LOVE CARDIFF

In *reflection-in-action*, you evaluate your performance in the moment in order to make corrections, for example, in the course of work as a student, middle of a course, etc. Of the moment reflection helps you adjust your performance or style to better suit the situation. Some typical considerations are:

- What am I doing well?
- How can I improve?
- What difference do I notice in myself?

It's one thing being able to relate what you've been getting up to but how do you go about making this attractive in the eyes of the graduate employer? Often the temptation is to rattle off what you have actually been doing without paying much attention to what it is you're actually saying. While this not incorrect as such, it is much more effective to be able to explain the advantages that you have to offer should that employer take you on. In this respect you need to see yourself as an item which you hope will be bought and the best way to sell yourself is by means of **“features”** and **“benefits.”**

Imagine if you were interested in buying a car and when you call at the showroom the salesperson says “This one has an automatic gearbox” and they follow it with “It's got a 2 litre engine.” You're starting to get bombarded with features and slowly lose concentration and interest. The problem with features is they only tell. Unless the salesperson is able to explain what that feature will actually do for you, you are not convinced and can pose the question “so what?”

- To get around the “so what”
- principle the salesperson needs to
- tell you thus
- 
- **“It has an automatic gearbox”**
- **which means that**
- **“you’ ll have stress free driving**
- **in traffic.”**
- It's the last part of this statement
- where it's expressed as a benefit
- that retains your interest.
- 
- 
- 
- 

Employers think similarly. They need you to explain how your knowledge, skills and experiences - your “attributes” - will work for them. Ask yourselves the question **“as a result of xx activity what difference has it made to me?”** and then record it with the line **“I am now able to...”**

So when you explain this to the employer you'll be doing so in a way in which they can see you're thinking about the differences you could make to them.

# Communicating Your Attributes

## GET INVOLVED LOVE CARDIFF

Through my role in running a society I've gained leadership, negotiation, communication, organisation, time management and budget management.

**which means that**

I am now more able to effectively organise events and I am more able to manage different kinds of projects and achieve the desired outcomes.

As a member of Welcome Crew I worked in Freshers' week helping the flow of people through the university, giving directions to a host of new students and answering questions on university life.

**which means that**

I am now able to communicate with a wide range of people and bring out confidence in others.

As a supervisor in a retail environment I have responsibility for cashing up and banking the takings and have become a link between management and staff.

**which means that**

I am able to be trusted with important responsibilities and am able to take initiative when dealing with the concerns of colleagues.

Through my role as a student representative I have addressed a student cohort of 410 and chaired a meeting of students and lecturers.

**which means that**

I am able to command the attention of different groups of people.

As a student representative I have gained considerable experience in co-ordinating students' activities and reaching out to them to get their ideas.

**which means that**

I am able to synthesise what people want into tangible outcomes.

# GET INVOLVED LOVE CARDIFF

*As a student-peer trainer I have more knowledge about soft skills outside of my academic work through delivering sessions. It's good to get an insight into both the trainers' as well as the students' perspectives.*

**which means that**

*I am able to apply what I teach into my own personal strengths and better appreciate the other person's point of view.*

*In my first year I volunteered on the Weekender project which takes young carers and their siblings out on day trips and went on to co-ordinate the project in my second year.*

**which means that**

*I am able to apply what I've experienced into the management of the project.*

Use the template below to help you build up your features and benefits. Under "attribute" identify what you have or have experienced or achieved. Using the link words "which means that" explain the advantage this would give to the person listening to you.

<b>Attribute (feature)</b>	<b>Link words</b>	<b>Benefit</b>
	<b>which means that</b>	
	<b>which means that</b>	
	<b>which means that</b>	

## **How experiences have counted through the eyes of students:**

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### **Experiential Learning:**

*Having been a president of a society is one of the major reasons I got a job only 10 days after graduation.*

*There's a clear difference between students who've worked and those who haven't. Work is involving, mentally and physically, but is a transition into the real world.*

*There are so many job opportunities to students, do something, be confident in selling yourself.*

*I shall definitely be putting my roles - Education Executive and Student Representative - on my application. I feel much more confident that I am able to tick the boxes when it comes to oncampus leadership and will be able to draw on my experiences in any supporting statements or interviews.*

*The role has brought out key leadership and management skills in me as I have to manage both my studies and student affairs.*

**Attending courses/  
workshops**

*I was asked about the sessions in almost all the interviews/assessments I went to.*

*The courses really do give a confidence boost and ideas of what to do when in difficult situations.*

*The workshops were very informative and I have enhanced my commercial awareness immensely.*

*The skills gained from the course are transferable and will help me to differentiate and stand out from other candidates both in the employability sector and in the university especially with the presentation skills. Understanding the basis behind each skill will help to communicate, negotiate, listen and present better and more efficiently.*

*In a job situation I will be able to get my point across in a good manner and will be able to take the lead on projects, making sure everyone knows what they are doing and how they are performing.*

So as you can see, the chances are you've been through similar experiences and these are valuable areas of concentration which can help provide a foundation for future employment. Don't dismiss what you've experienced as trivial or non significant. Too many students are known to bypass their experiences as if they didn't matter. Everything is valuable so get used to recalling and articulating. Indeed, in the world of mountaineering, mountaineers are taught to reflect and celebrate their achievements in getting to that landing stage before moving onto the next one.

# How to “Network” effectively

*Networking has been referred to as the “new way of working” and is thus a critical skill that everyone should master. Remember you all have the same mission to network and that is why networking groups have been set up. Their main purpose is to help you meet new contacts to determine if there is a connection or link and to start building relationships*

- 1.** Set yourself clear objectives for what you want to achieve at the end of the event, e.g. how many new contacts you want to meet, how many new opportunities you want to get, etc.
- 2.** Work on your introductions in advance focus on the benefits you or your company can deliver to the other company or person
- 3.** Research the companies and industries of those attending if you know who will be at the event
- 4.** Arrive at the event early so you are not faced with that sea of people when you first walk in
- 5.** Go up to someone on their own and ask if you may join them - they will probably give a sigh of relief and think. “Yes! I am not Billy No Mates any more”! That’s how you’d probably feel, so have the confidence to make the first move and start to build a relationship. You will be surprised at the response you will get
- 6.** Carry a good supply of business cards with you at all times. Your card is your silent salesman, reminding people of you after you’ve left
- 7.** Your image and style is important and 55% of the message you give out is attributed to how you present yourself. Remember your posture and dress appropriately for the occasion
- 8.** Let the other person speak - people would rather talk than listen and it’s amazing what free information they give out

- 9.** Ask questions to learn as much as you can about the other person, and listen to the answers. People love a good listener who is interested in what they do
- 10.** When someone approaches you, give him or her your full attention immediately. Pay particular attention to the person’s name and repeat it several times as soon as they’ve said it
- 11.** It is better to be interested rather than interesting
- 12.** Be active and visible - volunteer your expertise to the group
- 13.** Be memorable;- say something funny, witty or different that helps people remember you
- 14.** Watch people and echo their words. If they hear their words come from you, it indicates you are on the same wavelength and builds rapport.
- 15.** When approaching a group of people already engaged in conversation, use plenty of eye contact, nodding and smiling to send the signal to the speaker that you want to hear more.
- 16.** Don’t waste time if you meet someone who’s not of interest – don’t be afraid to move on.
- 17.** Be true to your word and if you are going to follow up the contact at a certain time in a certain way, then do it.
- 18.** Follow up should be done within 7-10 days of the event.
- 19.** Remember Networking, if done well, can change your life-why would you leave this important skill to chance?
- 20.** Get yourself registered with LinkedIn. It’s amazing how many people will have access to your details this way.

## **Further Advice**

### **Cardiff University Careers Service**

Email: [careers@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:careers@cardiff.ac.uk)

Phone: (029) 20874828

### **Cardiff University Enterprise (Support on entrepreneurship and creativity)**

Email: [enterprise@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:enterprise@cardiff.ac.uk)

Phone: (029) 20871442

### **Skills Development Service (Courses and workshops)**

Email: [sds@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:sds@cardiff.ac.uk)

Phone: (029) 20874828

### **Student Volunteering Cardiff**

Email: [svc@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:svc@cardiff.ac.uk)

Phone: (029) 20881494

### **Students' Union Jobshop**

Email: [jobshop@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:jobshop@cardiff.ac.uk)

Phone: (029) 207815358

**Get Involved Love Cardiff**

**Take The Employability Test**

**<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/skillstest.html>**

The Skills Development Service wishes to thank those students who kindly gave of their time to share their experiences and advice in the production of this booklet.