The 'wicked' problem of employability development in HE degree programmes: experiences, understandings and perceptions of lecturers and students

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ABSTRACT

For more than a decade, universities around the world have been placed with great responsibility to develop their students' employability for political, economic and social reasons. Though many policies, research and practices have tried to address the issues and challenges employability development in HE faces, to date it remains a 'wicked' problem for higher education.

Through a close up research framework, this study explored and examined the experiences, understandings and perceptions of lecturers, and students from two English Post 92 degree programmes, in an educational discipline, regarding employability and employability development. In order to illuminate some of the critical issues, in an attempt to understand 'why employability development is so problematic to higher education', this study took a reflexive phenomenological approach to look at how lecturers and students make sense of employability and employability development, through their own experiences. As well as looking at the two groups separately, it also compared their perceptions and understandings to highlight any dissonances they have, which are crucial to the complex and 'wicked' problem of employability development in their programmes.

As lecturers and students hold diverse perspectives on employability in HE that is often in conflict, it was expected that there would be no "one size fits all" solution. In addition, this study found that employability has certainly added complexities to higher education. Certainly, it has led the students and lecturers to have complex issues within their roles and identities, in relation to employability development in their programmes and in HE in general. As such, this study reflexively examined those issues, and concludes that although employability development in HE will remain complex and 'wicked', through reflexive research and practices, vital issues relating to lecturers' and students' roles and responsibilities can be illuminated and solved.

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PREFACE

Before I 'officially' start to tell you about this study, I would like to share some thoughts here. Undertaking a PhD has always been my intention, although the institution I studied in and the subject I did were 'accidental'. As a result, I have placed much of my focus on 'doing a PhD' as well as 'conducting research myself'. Some might argue this 'accidental' research project is not the 'right way' to go about it, as my passion and understanding of the subject I am studying might not be strong enough to carry me through. Indeed, there were a lot of times I wished I had much greater knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to sociological theories (and more time). However, throughout the whole journey I never had any doubt about doing a PhD and developing my research skills. For me, the 'journey' I went through in searching for the knowledge and understanding, is as important and exciting as writing up this thesis as the 'end result' of the whole process. Therefore, I have made some decisions in regard to my thesis which I wish you to keep in mind when you are reading it.

Decision one: This thesis is written in first person. Although in my previous academic studies I was told to avoid first person in writing research work as it is not objective. I feel I must do it for this piece of work as I have been 'in' my study since day one, and I found it extremely difficult taking myself out of it. Particularly taking up a Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology, where the first-person experience is the key to the research, making connections between my experiences (as a student, an academic staff member and a researcher) and participants' experiences is a vital part of this study. From my point of view, this is where my original authentic contribution lies, because no one can see what I have seen.

Decision two: Although I have had an official writing up phase for my study, I wrote this thesis with the intention to document the journey I went through to get here. As a result, it is a little different from some of the conventional PhD theses I have come across, particularly in relation to the methodology. So far, at this point, I believe that methodology is the bone structure, where all the literature and data can hang on to as the flesh in order to create a lively creature. With this belief, I strongly feel that I could not just include a section after literature review, and then forget about it. To me, methodological consideration has been constant throughout (from project design to finishing writing up), and I feel I must share this process of thinking throughout this thesis, as it is a vital part of how I came about doing and writing this research. Of course I also want to demonstrate how I have grown as a researcher, and how much this work has developed since December 2008. As a result, there

are two methodology chapters: rationales and design, and reflection. Indeed, overall, this thesis is written chronologically as to how this research was carried out.

Finally, I just want to say that it took me a half year longer than planned to finish writing this because ever since I finished collecting my data, I have been running around in circles for a very long time drafting this work. But a thesis has to be completed, and that's not to say I have finished my PhD…

Where did it all begin…

The initial interest for this study originated from my personal concerns regarding students' employability development, and this later has developed into my professional interest. Employability development was one of the key reasons for me to come here in 2004 as an International student to study my degree, and ever since I was little, improving and enhancing my own employability has always been a key drive for my educational journey. My parents always said to me the reason for me to go to an excellent school and doing well is so that I can have a good job when I graduate. Coming from an inner city area in China, the level of competitiveness and pressure for employment meant most of my school friends had the same educational philosophy as my family: good school grade → good university → good job → good life. As far as I understood, the ultimate goal of HE for Chinese people is about getting a well-paid and high powered job once you have got that piece of paper.

However, this belief of mine about HE was challenged when I came to the UK. I soon found a lot of my friends and peers in my BA (Hons) Sport Development with Physical Education programme have a variety of different reasons and motivations for coming to the university, and how they went about experiencing HE was very different to my previous experiences – and this really intrigued me! A key question struck me: Do we go to schools and universities only because we need to get jobs or are we trying to get something else (education perhaps)? Of course, most of them were concerned about their employability, but there were so many different types of attitudes toward it, and so many different ways to develop and enhance their employability. This experience has left me with some questions about employability: Does employability mean different things to different people here? If so, what does it mean to different people? How do students know what they need to develop and enhance in relation to their employability? What do they expect from a university experience in relation to their employability development? How do they value their university learning experience in relation to their own employability development? Why did they engage with the experiences which they feel were valuable to them? And so on...

As I am a student in education, I also started to pick up the roles which lecturers play in developing students' employability in educational settings. Through my personal experiences with different lecturers on my degree and masters courses, I felt that each individual lecturer has offered something unique to their students' learning experiences in the university, but why they chose to offer those unique experiences, how they went about deciding what to offer, and most importantly what the students feel about those experiences offered by different lecturers, and how their interaction with their lecturers (formally and informally) have shaped their learning experiences in university regarding developing their employability.

With those personal questions in mind, I was in the process of developing my own employability to be an educator. As I always intended to undertake a doctoral study, I came across the Liverpool John Moores University's (LJMU's) National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) funded project on Developing Learning and Assessment Opportunities for a Complex World[1] (Cable, Thompson and Vickerman, 2008) which I felt could help me answer some of those questions I had regarding students' employability development. In addition, because this NTF project (see Appendix 1 for NTF project bid) was informed and developed by the works and research from the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in LJMU where I studied my degree and Masters, I felt this PhD studentship opportunity could really help me to develop a good understanding of graduate employability development in the area of education. This research could potentially be very useful to me personally, professionally and academically.

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[1] The NTF project seeks to 'identify aspects of dissonance and congruence in perceptions, understandings and expectations of staff, students and employers in relation to preparing students for employability in the 21st Century' (ibid, online http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ntf/index.htm) in order to 'establish how gaps can be narrowed to produce authentic assessment strategies, new learning opportunities and more closely aligned learning and assessment models' (ibid), with my own experiences and questions in mind I have decided to look at the experiences and understandings of STUDENTS and LECTURERS in the area of sport related education (e.g. PE, coaching, outdoor education, etc).

Highlights of the chapters and sections

Part I Introduction, context and literature: With my early thoughts and ideas in mind, I started to engage with the context and literature in and around the topic area, to develop a much more in-depth and holistic understanding from multiple perspectives and conceptions about employability and employability development in HE, in order to inform my research design.

Chapter 1 – Context and rationales: This chapter establishes the background and context in which this study was undertaken. It also includes a brief review of the literature in which the essential key themes, issues and literatures are presented and discussed. The research questions, aims and purposes for this study are presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 2 – Literature review: this chapter includes three sections which addresses three crucial areas accordingly: first, it examines some general theoretical aspects that underpin employability policies and practices from historical and current perspectives; secondly, it looks at employability and HE, specifically through examining the current strategic and practical reactions to the employability agenda, and highlighting the complex 'wicked' problem of employability development in higher education; thirdly, it focuses on justifying the importance of students' and lecturers' understandings and perceptions regarding employability development in HE, through looking at theoretical underpinnings and current research studies on students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions. Through this literature review, key publications are referenced and examined in order to inform my research designs and discussions, also, it has provided me with essential background knowledge regarding employability, employability development in HE and HE insiders' experiences and perspectives.

Part II Methodological rationales, designs and processes: this is the second stage of this research, where findings from literature review were taken into consideration critically to design and conduct the data collection and data analysis part of this research.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and method: this chapter is the first of the two methodology chapters which addresses the initial methodological designs and implementations prior to the analysis of empirical data. The two sections in this chapter include: first, a critical

justification on the methodological underpinnings of this research regarding the close-up research approach, phenomenology essences and semi-structured interviews; second, a critical description and examination on some of the issues I experienced during the data collection and analysis process.

Part III Findings and discussions: this is the third stage of this research where the 'actual' doing doctoral research part happened through a long critical process of making sense of the empirical data, constructing themes and logical arguments and reflecting on the theoretical, methodological and philosophical underpinnings of this study.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 – these two chapters present and discuss findings from lecturers' and students' interviews separately to explore and examine their understandings, perceptions and experiences accordingly. Through the spiral data analysis framework, each chapter consists of three sections to look at the initial findings, emerging themes and close-up narratives. Starting from surface level definitions on employability and employability development, the spiral analysis gradually illuminates deeper issues that connect with the complexity of employability and employability development in higher education. As well, through the spiral examination of lecturers' and students' experiences, the discussion shines light on the issues regarding the ontological and epistemological underpinnings each group holds in relation to their personal experience, subject traits, professional values and HE ideology and realities.

Chapter 6 – dissonances and congruence between students and lecturers: putting together findings from Chapter 4 and 5, this chapter examines some of similarities and differences between lecturers' and students' understandings and perceptions to further understand 'why employability development in HE is a complex and 'wicked' problem?' Though lecturers and students have shared understandings on a number of issues, due to their similar perspectives on the nature and value of their subject, their profession and higher education, as expected their different experiences lead them to have different perspectives regarding some of the key characteristics of employability development in higher education. The complexity of employability also means that lecturers and students interpret their roles and identities through a multiple conceptualised perspective, in which the mismatch of roles and identities leads to some of the dissonances between the two groups.

Chapter 7 – A reflexive research study: in the second methodology chapter of this thesis, reflects on the 'real' ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study that I adopted during my data analysis and writing up of Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This chapter displays the reflexive ways of thinking I developed parallel to my data analysis, and examines how reflexivity impacts on this research, not only in relation to how I view my participants, but also regarding how I interpreted my data, and how I conclude the solutions to some of the issues and challenges to employability development in HE and research on employability development in higher education.

Part IV Concluding thoughts – The ending of this thesis, although, it is not the end of my research on this topic. In this part, I look back on some of the key findings and reflections in order to plan the next steps…

Chapter 8 – Conclusion: This chapter draws together the conclusions which are made throughout the discussion chapters' summaries to provide some final thoughts in general and in relation to lecturers' experiences and thoughts, students' experiences and thoughts', the dissonances and congruence between the two groups and research methodology (i.e. close-up research, phenomenology and reflexivity) in order to address the research aims that were set up at the beginning of the study and highlight some key issues for future research and practice.

Chapter 9 – Recommendations: three key recommendation themes are highlighted here regarding HE insiders' voice, reflexivity and research informed practices – methodologically, theoretically and practically for me to undertake as my next professional step, and for others in HE to consider in their research and practices.

Part I: Introduction, context and literature

This section provides two key purposes. First, I want to highlight the context in which this study is placed, that is the UK Higher Education [HE] (particularly in England) and to some extent HE internationally. It is particularly important to set the theme and to provide the overall background information about today's HE and its relation with employability. Secondly, I will review some key literature areas regarding employability and employability development in HE (particularly in the UK and in England). For me, the key point for this literature review is to inform the key understandings and practices regarding employability development in the UK HE at present. It also helps to identify the research gaps in this topic area, empirically and methodologically to inform the design of my research as well as shaping my interpretation of the data and my discussion.

With these purposes in mind, this section includes:

1. Context - an overall look at UK (particularly English) and global HE today, contextualising the employability issue via key literatures, developing research questions and aims.
2. Literature review - a multi-dimensional critical examination of current literatures on the following aspects:
    - What is employability?
    - How does HE relate to employability?
    - How do universities develop students' employability?
    - And what do students and lecturers think about employability?

Finally, since employability is one of those complex concepts which relate to a number of subject areas (e.g. economics, politics, business studies, sociology, etc.), I want to make it clear that, this study is mainly focusing on social and educational aspects of employability, with some reference to politics and economics.

As this study mainly concerns employability in English HE, the key focus of this section and the whole thesis will be English and UK HE's connection with employability development, but some international perspectives and research will be included to provide a wider global view. Given that the key focus of this study is about students' and lecturers' experiences and thoughts on employability in HE at the moment, primarily it will focus on policies and practices since the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into HE[NCIHE], 1997) with some references to key issues prior to 1997 (e.g. Robbins Report, Committee on Higher Education, 1963).

Chapter 1 – Context and rationales

1.1 The great expectation! And the disappointing reality?

The culture and ideology of HE is changing. This evolving process is a dynamic interaction between individual students, academics, HE institutions, the government and its general public. One of the key concepts at the centre of this change at this point in time, it is the notion of graduate employability.

Universities are at the heart of this development and sustainment of every country, economically and socially. Not only do they provide the modern world with research findings for innovations and social advancements; nowadays, universities also educate a large proportion of a country's population at degree level. This, from the government's point of view, serves the social and economic needs of a country (NCIHE, 1997). With this belief, in many countries (developed and developing), people (particularly young people) are encouraged to participate in HE because university education can

> *"inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest*
> *potential level throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well-*
> *equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve*
> *personal fulfilment" (ibid, p.7).*

At the centre of this, employability has become an increasingly significant issue for 21st century HE around the world (Yorke and Knight 2006). In the move towards a more knowledge-driven economy, governments around the world look to HE for ways to build a highly skilled and knowledgeable human resource capacity to compete in the 21st century globalised market (Tomlinson, 2008).

Since the mid-1990s, UK HE institutions (HEIs) have been encouraged by government policies (e.g. NCIHE, 1997) and labour market demands, to promote employability throughout curricula and pedagogies. From the government point of view (e.g. Department for Business Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2009; NCIHE, 1997), HE plays a fundamental role in making the country more competitive to fulfil the 'broad' requirements from the market by providing graduates with the types of knowledge, skills and qualities to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy (Tomlinson, 2007). Accordingly,

> *"(HE) learning should be increasingly responsive to employment needs*
> *and include the development of skills widely valued in employment"*
> *(NCIHE, 1997, p.3)*

> *"Britain's HE is a major contributor to the economic success and social*
> *wellbeing of the country. HE is a national asset, whose excellence in*

teaching and research is world recognised" (Department for Business Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2013, online).

To achieve and thus ensure HEIs are fulfilling this purpose, the government suggests *"universities need to produce a statement on how they promote student employability, setting out what they are doing to prepare their students for the labour market, and how they plan to make information about their employment outcomes of their provision available to prospective students', in order to address the 'top concern' of business in which 'students should leave university better equipped with a wider range of employability skills" (BIS, 2009, p61).*

Globally, the HE sector has been placed in a similar position by governments to develop their students' employability for social and economic benefits (e.g. Bai, 2006; Barrie, 2004; Reichert and Tauch, 2003; Griesel, 2003). As in the UK, governments around the world look at developing graduates employability to solve the dilemmas between employment and widening participation in HE (e.g. Bai, 2006), to up skill HE graduates for global economic competition (e.g. Griesel, 2003), and to improve social mobility and social capital (e.g. Reichert and Tauch, 2003). It is clear the UK government is not alone on putting employability at the heart of 21st Century HE.

To individual students and their parents, the expectation of being a highly employable graduate also seems high. Ever since the Robbins Report in 1963 (Committee on Higher Education), UK HE has been progressively engaged with 'widening participation' in its policies and practices. Particularly, from the 1990s when new universities were formed, based on former Polytechnics (i.e. post-92 universities), the publication of Dearing Report[2] (NCIHE, 1997) and the New Labour Government commitment to 'Education, Education, Education'. With the aim to break down social class barriers in HE, and increasing 'non-traditional HE students' (i.e. 18 year old white middle class young people) through a democratic educational ideology (Bowers-Brown, 2004), it was expected the diversity of the student cohort will be changing. Especially, the number of 'first generation' HE students from working class background and ethnic minority background was expected to increase, as well as mature students. With this changing diversity, students' expectations about their university experience and post-university employment are expected to also change.

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[2] The Dearing Report is a series of reports on the future of UK HE published in 1997. The Report was commissioned by the UK government and led by its principal author Sir Ronald Dearing. The key focuses of the report are on HE funding (e.g. introducing tuition fees), the expansion of degree courses and the employability agenda for economic growth in the 21st Century globalised knowledge economy. As the first nationwide comprehensive review on HE since 1960s, Dearing Report holds significant place in today's UK HE and has made great impact on the employability agenda.

Funding issue came to the centre of HE widening participation, which was highlighted by Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997). The report pointed out that, due to rising student numbers, in 20 years' time additional funding of almost two billion pound is required to ensure the quality of HE. Though the report recommended the government to increase public spending on HE, it favoured the idea that students should contribute to their study by taking out student loans to pay for tuition fees. Since then, home and EU students' tuition fees for UK universities (particularly in England) rose up from £1710 in 1998 to £3000 in 2005 to £9000 in 2012.

The introduction and increase of tuition fees seems to be one of the major aspects that shifted the culture and ideology of HE in the UK. As one of the original arguments strongly supporting tuition fees was the fact that graduates tend to earn more than those with no degrees, the government has promoted to prospective students and their parents, the idea that tuition fees will be a worthy investment for their future. Consequently, students and their parents have developed high expectations on their employment prospect after their graduation.

However, the situation at the moment seems far from ideal to the government, the graduates and the HEIs. This is reflected by constant headlines in the mainstream media regarding low graduate employment rate (Burns, 2012, a), graduates working in low skilled jobs (Burns, 2012, b), business being unsatisfied with graduates' employability and graduates being unhappy about their employability development at university (Tickle, 2012). Clearly, the great expectations from the key stakeholders to HE on developing students' employability are not met.

So what went wrong?

One of the major factors for the current bleak graduate employment situation is the global recession which started from late 2000. As a result, there has been a sharp decrease in employment market. Consequently, many graduates in recent years found their employment expectations were not met. In the highly competitive job market, recent graduates found themselves unemployable compared to other more experienced job seekers. As portrayed by the mainstream media, businesses blame the universities for not appropriately equipping students with employability skills (e.g. The Telegraph online, 2012).

Under the high expectations and pressure from all its key stakeholders to delivery greater employability, HEIs have placed great attention and resources on developing and enhancing their policies, practices and research on employability development. Employability has

become one of the key strands for the HE Academy (HEA), and subsequently a key focus for each of its subject centres. To date, almost every UK University has its own employability-related initiatives and projects. It is in this context, this study is taking place where HE has been given great responsibility and a major role in developing students' employability for Britain to compete globally in the 21st Century knowledge economy, and for individual students to realise great career and financial gain particularly for those who come from first generation HE families.

1.2 The changing landscape of UK higher education

The employability agenda does not stand on its own. It is tangled with issues like widening participation of HE, and the changing of funding structures which come with it. Those movements all started at the end of the 20th Century, when the overall landscape of HE in the UK changed mainly due to the changes in the global economies and social structures.

Although widening participation for HE has been in the UK government's policy since the Education Act in 1944 mainly for social inclusion and mobility reasons, the big wave really started in the 1990s. In 1992, under the Further and HE Act, the former polytechnics were abolished, and a new group of post-92 universities (more than 30 of them in England alone) were formed. This not only increased the number of universities hence the number of HE students in the UK, it also had a significant impact on the nature of HEIs as post-92 universities were developed largely based on vocational and professional training programmes. The vocational nature of most post 92 universities means they have a strong foundation for applied and professional degrees. Those universities work closely with industries and professionals through collaboration works, employing experienced practitioners to be academics, and providing students with professional work experiences and trainings. With their focus rooted in applied education for the world of work, it could be argued the post-92 universities have always had students' employability development in their mind.

The second big wave on HE mass participation, and the employability agenda for HE came when the New Labour government took the recommendations made by Dearing (NCIHE, 1997). In 1999, the government set out a 50% participation target to achieve for the next 10 years by 2010. This movement was largely concerned with social inclusion and indeed competition in knowledge economy on a global scale (ibid). With the government's strong belief in widening participation, a number of policies and practices were put into place to encourage people, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds to go to university. Since widening participation, the student population has been growing year on year from

about 1.1 million in 1991 to 1,845,757 total HE enrolment in 98/99 academic to 2,493,415 in 09/2010 (HESA, 2011).

With the increasing student numbers came a number of changes that reshaped the landscape of UK HE. One of the most significant adjustments was the changing structure of funding. Traditionally, student tuition fees were paid by local education authorities, and non-mature students also had a maintenance grant between the 1960s and 1980s. However, as students' number rose since widening participation, the government and the local authorities could not afford to pay for all students' HE, and thus tuition fees were introduced in 1998 under the recommendation of Dearing (NCIHE, 1997). Since then, English university tuition fees for UK and EU students have increased from £1000 per academic year in 1998 to £3290 in 2006, and from 2012 students will be charged up to £9000 per academic year to study in English universities under the recommendation of Browne (2010).

The introduction and increase in tuition fees have changed the dynamics between the government, HEIs, students and the general public. Since the introduction of tuition fees, students have taken up a role as 'consumers' of HE, who shop for the most suitable HEI with the concern of their future employment and career in mind (McNair, 2003). HEIs have developed customer-focused and customer-led policy and practices to ensure their own success for attracting new students in a competitive market (Maher and Graves, 2008). Indeed, students' experiences and their graduate employment have become major indicators for the quality of a HEI's teaching and learning (ibid). For instance, the Guardian University league table has taken into considerations factors like 'students' satisfaction with teaching', 'student: staff ration', and 'job after six months' to rank the quality of HEIs.

As mentioned before, the government has high expectations for universities to enhance its competitiveness in the global economy, and producing highly skilled and employable graduates is one of the means to achieve this. With students also expecting good employment prospects after graduation, universities now must work closely with employers to assess and address their needs. Additionally, with the Coalition Government placing strong emphasis on employer engagement in HE and a demand-focused approach to address employability, it is clear that one of key focuses of HE is that they must work with their key stakeholders (e.g. students, graduates and employers) to develop their students' employability. It is in this context, this study takes place when the roles, powers and ideologies of HE are changing. Universities have become the great interests of the society with several key stakeholders looking to universities to serve their interests in graduates' employability.

1.3 Amongst many stakeholders, whom to listen?

While it seems there is some consensus among the key stakeholders regarding the universities' role and responsibility on employability development, in practice, the employability agenda remains problematic (Maher and Graves, 2008). Students, parents, academics, businesses and the government are the key stakeholders of HE on this matter. However, which group or groups take the primary role when considering the purposes of HE is still unclear. As a result, there remains a debate on how to deliver and achieve employability development.

For some, the purpose of HE is for students to gain higher and further education which is much wider than just learning and developing employability skills (Barnett, 2008; Fearn, 2008). As there has been an increasing engagement of businesses within HE, academics are concerned about the development of HE for the future. This conflict among the 'outsiders', academics and students has left many to question, wonder and search for the 'real' purpose of HE (e.g. Barnett, 2008; Love, 2008; Schwartz, 2008). As stated by Cleveland,

> *"the outsiders want the students trained for their first job out of university, and the academics inside the system want the student educated for 50 years of self-fulfilment. The trouble is that the students want both. The ancient collision between each student's short-term and long-term goals, between 'training' and 'education', between 'vocational' and 'general', between honing the mind and nourishing the soul, divides the professional educators, divides the outside critics and supporters, and divides the students, too." (1974, p. 4).*

With regards to Barnett (2008), he argues that it is inappropriate to discuss HE without knowing what the students really think HE is about. In recent years, the importance of 'student voice' in HE has been increasingly stressed. However, according to Seale (2009), there are still only a handful of studies that have been done to address this issue. Nevertheless, these works tend to be conference papers and institutional or project reports in which most are descriptive and have a lack of in-depth knowledge on students' perspectives (ibid). After viewing recent literatures, Seale (2009) argued that, those works tend to serve the purposes of quality assurance and staff development. As there is generally a lack of research studies with the aims of empowering students and exploring their perceptions and attitudes regarding employability development within their degree programmes, it is important, therefore, for this research study to address this issue. This suggestion is supported by Knight and Page (2007) and Barrie (2006) who argued the case for carrying out qualitative research on students' understandings, perceptions, attitudes and experience regarding learning and developing employability within HE curriculum. Indeed, the fact that nearly 50

years on from the Robbins Report (1963) we still find employability development problematic and suggest new research approaches need to be considered and different questions should be asked to illuminate the key issues regarding students' employability development in HE.

As in the wider HE environment, the concepts and definitions of employability still appear to be unclear and confusing (see Lees, 2002) and academics' views on this issue are still vague. Although studies have been conducted by researchers like Knight and Page (2007) and Barrie (2007, 2006); academics' understandings, perceptions and attitudes toward developing students' employability in HE are still in an under researched area. So far, it appears academics' views on employability in HE are neither entirely the same, nor as simple as the political employability agenda would suggest. Moreover, HEIs are social institutions for not only developing employability, but promoting learning and research to advance knowledge and practices (e.g. Barnett, 2008). Results from Barrie's (2007, 2006) phenomenographic study of academics' understandings and perceptions on graduate attributes development suggest that 'the academic community does not share a common understanding of graduate attributes as the core outcomes of university education' (2006, p. 238). As a result, Barrie (2006) concluded that this lack of clarity and confusion regarding HE academics' understandings toward employability is one of the key reasons for inconsistent design and implementation of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) of employability in the curriculum. Regarding TLA of employability in the HE curriculum, results from Knight and Page's research study (2007) highlighted the 'wicked' problems of assessing employability in curriculum, in which they suggested further 'close-up' research to investigate lecturers' understandings, perceptions and attitudes in relations to TLA of employability in HE.

This lack of knowledge on lecturers' views and feelings not only restrain the empowerment of academic teaching staff in every environment in which they work, it also limits people's understanding of lecturer's personal experience, philosophy and attitude in relation to TLA regarding employability development. Studies relating to teachers' perceptions on TLA in schools have demonstrated the importance of this understanding. For instance, Rich's (2004) study on female PE teachers' perceptions revealed how teachers' personal experience, understandings and perceptions affect their pedagogical believes, thus their everyday acts in TLA. As a result, there is a need to explore lecturers' understandings, perceptions, attitudes and experiences in relation to employability development in HE via TLA. This will not only provide an insight of their views and feelings, it also will present the relationship between their experiences, perceptions, decisions and every act in TLA.

It is in this context, this study is going to offer a close up (Prichard and Trowler, 2003) examination on students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions

regarding students' employability development in their degree programmes in order to illuminate the complexity and 'wicked' problem of employability development.

1.4 Research questions and aims

After reviewing the current employability development context and issues in UK HE (especially English universities), it is clear, employability development in HEIs is complex and problematic. There seem to be many different perspectives and approaches to it, as suggested by Yorke and Knight that "one size fits all does not work" (2003, p.2) for employability development in HEIs. This means what seems to be effective in theory might not be applicable in practice because of the number of different key stakeholders involved. As a result, it could be argued, employability development overall (not only its assessment as suggested by Knight and Page, 2007) can be seen as a 'wicked' problem (Horn, 2007) in that:

- It has no one 'correct' view of employability due to its variety of stakeholders;
- There is no definitive formulation and definition of employability; it can be explained and understood in many ways depending on the viewpoint and how the issues are framed;
- It can never be fully understood by its all stakeholders, and it can never be solved completely.

After this initial review of the context in which this study is situated in, it is evident that there is a need to examine students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings, perceptions and acts regarding employability development in their respective degree programmes to better the understandings of such 'wicked' problem. As suggested by Barnett (2008), Knight and Page (2007), and Barrie (2006), this examination must consider HE 'insiders' (i.e. students and academics) as current trends on studies related to learning in HE are moving away from students and academics. To date, according to Tomlinson (2007), the majority of the research around the graduate labour market and employability development in HE has been conducted to a large-scale quantitative manner, focusing mainly on the labour market outcomes of graduates and inferring from ideas about the employability. In addition, studies on employability skills and competences development often focus on identifying the skills and competences, thus incorporating appropriate activities and models into HE curriculum (Knight and Yorke, 2003). This kind of study is often conducted with employers, policy makers and decision makers in universities (e.g. Vice Chancellors' report) (ibid). Although there have been some studies on students' and lecturers' perceptions and experiences in relation to TLA of employability skills and competences in degree programmes, this kind of

study often approaches the topic quantitatively (e.g. evaluating students' skills development via an instrument or a list of skills) (e.g. Burke, Jones and Doherty, 2005).

From my point of view, there is still a lack of clarity about lecturers' perspective on the employability development agenda, though they are the ones experiencing the agenda via their TLA daily. In addition, the current understanding and evidence of how students experience and interpret their university learning in relation to their employability development is still limited.   It almost seems ironic that research on HE is so limited, considering one of the key purposes of universities is about conducting and implementing research. As stated by Rothblatt (1996, online),

"inundated with information about nearly every aspect of higher education, we lack sustained discussion of the changing inner culture of universities".

Certainly, this is one of the reasons that despite more than a decade of researching and changing policies and practices on employability, the issue still remains.

With this context in mind and in an attempt to improve our understanding regarding the 'wicked' problem of employability development in HEIs, this research is going to explore:

"What are the understandings, perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students regarding students' employability development in undergraduate degree programmes?"

To achieve this, I am going to use what Prichard and Trowler call 'close up research in higher education' to focus on the 'fine-grained' (ibid, p. xv) details of the thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding students' employability development that lecturers and students encounter in their degree programmes.

This research aims to:

1. empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment,
2. identify dissonances and congruence in perceptions by comparing and contrasting the experiences and thoughts from the two groups in order to illuminate some of the vital problems in this issue;
3. sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE;
4. develop methodological understandings regarding conducting research on and about higher education, particularly those focusing on the culture and everyday life of HE insiders.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 What is employability?

In this part of the literature review, I am going to look at the concept of employability through some theoretical perspectives. I will include an overview on the development of employability as a concept, current understandings about employability in a broad social context, some key characteristics of employability, and the section will finish with discussions of employability in the context of HE. The overall purpose of this section is to grasp some of the key theoretical understandings on the concept of employability before we move on to employability development in UK HE. Certainly for me, during the process of reading and writing this section, I found this 'wider' understanding about employability (not just focusing on HE) very useful. Particularly, I have gained an understanding of why developing students' employability is problematic and complex. As the HE sector is part of society in which employability is situated in, it could be argued that the general theoretical aspects of employability also apply to HE.

Generally employability is a 'contentious concept' (Harvey, 2003) which has over time produced a complex picture involving several definitions and theories from multiple disciplines (e.g. sociology, politics, economics) from various perspectives (e.g. government, employers, individuals, institutions). Accordingly (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005),

> *"the concept of employability continues to be applied within a range of different contexts and to both those in work and those seeking work, while it is simple enough to assign 'employability' a straightforward dictionary definition, such as 'the character or quality of being employable', arriving at a working definition is far more complex process" (p.199).*

This view on the problematic and complex nature of employability is also acknowledged by many other authors (e.g. Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Harvey, 2003); Knight and Yorke, 2003; Hillage and Pollard, 1998). As such, it is important to identify and examine current understandings of employability from different angles in order to be clear on what employability is about.

2.1.1 Theoretical development of employability

The recent focus on employability for HEIs is undoubtedly coming from government policies concerning the economic and social needs of the country. Whilst the current focus on employability is very much on graduates and young people, as a concept, "employability

always plays a crucial role in informing labour market policy in the UK, the EU and beyond" (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005, p. 197).

Despite the rapid increase of the interest in employability in recent years, historically, employability, as a concept, can be dated back to 1909 (Gazier, 1998) in western society. It was a phenomenon that emerged within contexts related to industrial development, labour markets and requirements on employment-related issues within the society (ibid). Since Beveridge's (1909 cited in Gazier, 2001) first mention of employability in 1909, it has become a political and social concept which reflects the status and requirements on employment related issues within the society. This is apparent throughout Gazier's (one of the leading employability theorists in today's western society) review on the development of employability in 20th century in which seven successive versions of this concept were highlighted as summarised in table 1.

According to Gazier's work (2001 and 1998), employability is a complex and problematic concept which evolves and changes as society develops. Indeed, it is clear employability as a concept has developed from a single dimension to multi dimensions, requiring from individual's physical availability to one's physical and social ability to personal quality. This kind of evolution is largely due to the development of social and economic requirements on the labour market.

Clearly, as a concept, employability will carry on changing and evolving based on the broad social and economic requirements of the labour market (Gazier, 2001). Though, at the moment, it seems problematic even to define it, since as a concept its development does follow a successive motion pattern. This means that the advanced concept has always included the previous versions as well as adding new elements based on the trend of industrial employment status. As a result of this evolution, the concept of employability has become richer and more complex through an increasing amount of interactions between individuals and the labour market.

Clearly, according to Gazier's works (2001, 1998), employability is a complex and problematic concept which evolves with society. As its complexity develops over time, it becomes increasingly problematic to define, conceptualise, understand and apply (Maher and Graves, 2008).

Table 1 Gazier's seven successive version of employability in 20th century

Version	Period	Meaning
1. Simple dichotomy	early 1900s to early 1950s	A person either was or was not employable (i.e. valid and immediately available on the labour market)
2. Socio-medical employability	1950s and 1960s	A quantitative measurement of a series of items that make up a test of individual employability: physical and mental abilities to undertake employment
3. Adapted Socio-medical employability	1960s	Manpower policy employability focuses more on the social factors as well as physical disabilities. Mobility and presentation were taking into account as well as professional qualifications. It measures the distance between one's characteristics and the production and acceptability requirements on the labour market.
4. Flow employability	1960s	The speed at which a certain group of the unemployed finds work. This concept focused on un-employability rather than employability had the advantage of directly relating the situation of employment with labour market requirement.
5. Labour market performance employability	1970s and 1980s	Focus on the quality of a job rather than the probability of finding work. It did not propose any link between individual situations, economic actions or social policies and the result in the labour market.
6. Initiative employability (individualistic model)	Early 1990s	Individual responsibility and a person's capacity to trigger a process of accumulation of human and social capital around his/her projects. It can be seem as the marketability of cumulative individual skills and can be measured by the breath of potential or already acquired human capital (e.g. knowledge, skills and learning abilities) and by the level of individual's social capital (e.g. size and quality of networks).
7. Interactive employability	Since 1994	It defines employability as the relative capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment given the interaction between personal characteristics and the labour market. It connects the individual traits and paths to the circumstances and trends of the labour market.

(Summarised from Gazier, 2001, 1998)

2.1.2 Employability at the moment

Theoretically, as suggested by Gazier (2001), we are currently in the sixth and seventh wave of employability, which originated in the 1980s and developed since the 1990s. This mainly concerns individual's responsibilities in a labour market which focuses on performance and outcomes (Initiative Employability) (Gazier, 2001), but the interaction between individuals and the market is also considered (Interactive Employability) (ibid). Thus 'being employable' has been broadened from one's physical and mental abilities, to how well an individual fits into the labour market, based on their human capitals and social skills (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Taking interaction with the labour market into consideration, 'being employable' also concerns the structural constraints and opportunities of the economy (ibid). As a result, in the current labour market, the availabilities of vacancies are as important as the individual's qualities, if this person wants to be considered as 'employable'.

Although theoretically employability is moving towards a more interactive model concerning both the individuals and the market, employment policies still seem to place most of employability responsibilities into individuals' hands (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). As highlighted in table 2, most of the definitions (which are widely cited by the government and HEIs) have made individuals responsible for their own employability. To some, those definitions are too absolute and too ideal (Brown et al, 2003) as they fail to acknowledge the complexity and the ever changing nature of labour markets (which are the important characteristics of employability as highlighted by Gazier). As suggested by Brown et al (2003), those definitions present a classic example of blaming the victim from the policy makers' and the employers' point of view.

Surrounding this debate on employability responsibilities, is the issue about whether employability is an objective and absolute concept, or a subject and relative concept. Clearly, according to Hillage and Pollard (1998), employability is this 'absolute' and 'objective' concept where an individual's ability to be employed can be defined and measured based on the level of skills, knowledge and other qualities this person has against a set criteria (e.g. job description); but, to others (e.g. Brown et al, 2003), employability is about relativity. For example, if ten suitably educated and trained teachers applied for two vacancies it is inevitable that eight of them would not get the jobs. Under this circumstance, the absolute measurement of those teachers' skills, knowledge and personal qualities becomes the relative contest between them in order to select the most suitable two out of ten to do the job from the employer's point of view. As suggested by Brown et al (2003), this is what most definitions of employability failed to consider, because if employability were absolute, the eight teachers would be not employable as teachers; but accordingly to Brown et al's

argument (2003), those teachers are not employable in these jobs only because the other two teachers (who have got the jobs) seem to be more employable for the two jobs also applied the positions. In other words, they could be employable if those two teachers did not apply. Nevertheless, this does not mean they are not employable as teachers in general.

Table 2 Popular Employability Definitions

Reference	Definition
Hillage and Pollard (1998, p.2)	Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment.
Harvey (2001, p.100)	Employability is the ability of the graduates to get a satisfying job.
Forrier and Sels (2003, p. 106)	An individual's chance of a job in the internal and/or external labour market.
Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2005, p143)	The continuously fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies.
Yorke and Knight (2006, p.3)	A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and he economy.

Indeed, the concept of employability should take both absolute and relative ways as Gazier (2001) suggested. As Brown et al (2003) point out employability depends on the laws of supply and demand within the market for jobs which are relative to a number of job market conditions. Accordingly (ibid), if 'being employable' is judged by successfully attaining and maintaining an employment, surely creating more vacancies can make more people 'employable'. As a result, employability would not be a problem in the labour market as there would be a small amount of unemployable people. Of course, in reality, employability is much more complex than this 'simple' equation on more jobs = less unemployment.

Nevertheless, this type of labour market supply-demand employability relativity has some critical characteristics. It relates to a number of factors, such as the geographic locations of the applicants, the time period when they apply for jobs, the professions they are in and so on. For example, it is stated in the report 'Employability and skills in the UK: redefining the debate' (Wright, Brinkley and Clayton, 2010), that in the UK there are clear uneven

geographical distributions of the demand and supply of employability skills. Accordingly (ibid), in the central and inner London area (measured in the first quarter of 2010), over a third of London's working age population is qualified to degree level and above, whilst only 24% of the same population group achieves this level in North East. This means there is a higher saturation of degree qualifications in London than in the North East of England. So it could be argued that in theory, with the same degree, a graduate from certain professions has the possibility to be more employable in the North East of England than the London area, as there is less competition. On the other hand, this data could also mean that there is far less graduate-level vacancies in the North East thus much less demands for potentially highly employable graduates compared to London. Through these two possible justifications to this data by Wright et al (2010), as discussed before, employability is a complex issue which consists of 'absolute' qualities (e.g. skills, qualifications) and relative considerations (e.g. local supply and demand).

An individual's relative employability can also be understood by considering how this person perceives his/her employability. Perceived employability is about an individual's believed level of their own employability, in which people with high levels of perceived employability believe their chances of getting employment are good, and vice versa (Berntson, 2008). Though having objective employability skills and qualities (i.e. hard employability evidence) is certainly important (as argued by Hillage and Pollard, 1998), the perception of being employable is also critical and potentially even more important as suggested by Berntson (2008). This is because according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), a person's perceptions have an impact on her/his behaviours, feelings, thoughts and physical conditions. As a result, in terms of employability, people's perceptions on issues like how employable they are and what employability is required may have an impact on the situation. As suggested by Berntson (2008), when an individual feels employable, potentially this person has a sense of security and independence towards his/her own employability circumstances, in this case, this person is more likely to be optimistic and active in the job seeking process.

Those employability relativity theories certainly have provided strong arguments on why employability is not an absolute concept. Indeed, even though such theories often focus on a small issue within the concept of employability, they have illustrated how its concept is a relative term depending on factors such as macro labour conditions and individual's perceptions of their own employability. Clearly, any theories, policies or practices that focus solely on improving the abilities of the work force, without acknowledging and considering those relativity issues, will not and cannot appropriately address the challenges and problems employability development faces.

2.1.3 Employability and skills

As highlighted above, current understanding, particularly politically, has placed a lot of attention on the supply side of employability. Within the political employability agenda, one of the key discourses regarding employability at the moment is the focus on skills. According to the Leitch Review[3] (2006),

> *"in the 21st Century, our natural resource is our people – and their*
> *potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential.*
> *The prize for our country will be enormous – higher productivity, the*
> *creation of wealth and social justice. "(Leitch, 2006, p1)*

It was clearly argued in the Leitch Review (ibid) that skill-levels affect productivity thus the UK's economic competitiveness in the global market. Accordingly (ibid), the average German, French and US workers can all produce at least 13 per cent more than the average UK worker, and this is largely because the average skill level of workers in the UK is lower than those three countries. Based on this analysis, the Review (ibid) has concluded the key reason for the UK's low economic competitiveness in today's knowledge economy, is due to the lack of high-skilled workers. As a result, the report has called for government to focus on economically valuable skills which are being led by the demands of employers. For the UK government, up skilling the population becomes the key to its economic success.

HE has been given the key responsibility to develop a highly skilled work force, i.e. the employability agenda for HE (as discussed in the previous chapter). However, this political employability agenda, with a particular focus on skills' development for economic and political gain, has received strong criticism, especially from the academic community. First, a large number of authors from different disciplines (e.g. education, economics) have questioned whether the government's belief in the power of skills and employability is even correct (e.g. Wolf, 2002). As queried by Brown et al (2003), this whole employability agenda for knowledge economy has had little conceptual examination, because the government's assumptions of what knowledge economy is about and what skills are needed has very little evidence to support it. Indeed, for many, this whole employability agenda is largely driven by political imperatives, rather than concerns about employment, social and educational equality. As suggested earlier, even though the Leitch report (2006) has pointed out the UK's skill shortfall compared to some of the other developing countries, there is no evidence to suggest this is the absolute sole reason for the UK falling behind in today's global economic

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[3] The ***Leitch Review*** was an independent review commissioned by the UK Government and led by Lord Sandy Leitch to investigate the UK's long term skills needs. The Review published its interim report "Skills in the UK: the long term challenge" in 2005. In it, it shows that the UK must urgently raise its achievements at all levels (including Higher Education) to be competitive and becoming a world leader in skills by 2020.

competition. As a result, the validity and reliability of the employability skills agenda is still under question.

Secondly, some argue there is too much focus on developing the supply side of skills, whereas the demand for employment opportunities is largely ignored by the current employability agenda (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). This actually leads to the danger of creating potentially mismatched skills and employment, which as a result could lead to high levels of skill wastage and devaluing of skills (ibid). This is because even though according to the skills agenda, the country would be much more competitive if the population were more highly skilled, ultimately the number of people employed is only going to be the number of jobs on offer in the labour market. It could be argued that this employability skills agenda will see the government and employers taking economical advantage of a highly skilled work force, whereas individuals may not enjoy much economical and/or social gain from their own skill development. Indeed, taking graduate labour market conditions as an example, it is reported there is an increasing number of UK graduates working in low skilled jobs (Burns, 2012, a), and one of the key reasons is that in today's economic downturn, there are not enough high skill level jobs for our graduates.

Thirdly, in terms of the skills themselves, there are a number of issues which seem problematic. Like the concept of employability, skills are also subjective, complex and constantly changing. Currently, there are so many different terminologies for skills, like generic skills, soft skills, and transferable skills. In addition, different skill lists contains different types of skills, which as a result makes the whole issue about what skills should be developed seem confusing.

Fourthly, the debate about employability is dominated by employers, particularly large corporations (Hesketch, 2000). This has raised an issue of who decides what skills the work force should develop. As Barnett (1994) pointed out, often those skills are related to business and/or science requirements, whereas values and qualities in relation to ethics, kindness and so on are hardly ever mentioned. It is questionable, particularly for certain professions in the areas of medical care, teaching and so on, if having the 'right' skills is enough (ibid). There is a worry that the domination of the skills agenda by large corporations, can lead to a diminishment of some of the good human qualities and experiences which are not included in the 'skill list'. As such, employability development works in a supply-demand model, this runs the danger of individuals who are preparing themselves for employment failing to recognise the importance of developing such qualities and experiences.

Finally, the measurement and assessment of an individual's skills also seems problematic. Skills, like employability, are complex to define and to assess, but it seems the government

is using qualifications as a common means for skill measurement (see Leitch, 2006), which make it easier for government and employers to make judgements. However, the validity and reliability of such measurement is questionable, particularly when this measurement is tied to education credentials, it raises a number of issues. By using this measurement, government and employers assume that with certain qualifications come certain skills and a certain level of those skills. However, what does it mean if a person has a Level 3 qualification? What kind of skills and what level of skills does this person have? This remains vague. Also, this tacit understanding about skills and qualifications shared between employers has left potential employees and educational institutions feeling puzzled. For instance, the notion of 'graduate level employment' still seems problematic to define (Maher and Graves, 2008).

This establishment between skills and education credentials also places the pressure and responsibility in educational institutions' hands, as certain levels of educational qualifications are expanded to provide learners with particular styles and levels of employability skills. This is particularly problematic at a HE level, because in many ways it challenges not only the practices of TLA, but also the philosophy and ideologies of HE (Barnett, 1994). I will focus on this point in the next part of the literature review, taking a close look at why employability development, especially skills development, seems problematic to HE; what challenges this brings to HE; how universities respond to this; and how the students and academics understand and perceive employability development in higher education.

2.1.4 Summary

In this part of the literature review, I looked at general concepts of employability to gain an overall view of some of the key issues relating to employability. It seems this century-old concept (first appeared in Beveridge 1909) is problematic, complex and evolving. Through its development, employability has become a concept which relates to a number of key political, economic, social and educational areas.

In its current theoretical state (i.e. transitioning between initiative employability and interactive employability, Gazier, 2001), the concept consists of both absolute and relative elements. While absolute employability is about an individual's quality and abilities to perform the 'essential' criteria of a job, relative employability deals with factors related to the supply-demand law of job markets. This includes factors like numbers of vacancies, geographic locations and competitiveness of candidates for a vacancy and the job market. An individual's perception on his/her relative employability is also an important factor that impact on any individual's chances of gaining and attaining employment.

However, current policies and practices are largely focusing on the supply side of employability, which as a result means employability is about developing individuals who are fit for employment purposes. With the belief that high levels of employability skills can help the UK gain economic benefit in today's knowledge economy, the UK government has placed the employability skills agenda at the heart of its education system. As Britain currently is only average in high level skills compared to other developed countries, up skilling the population to HE level had become the UK government's priority. However, this political employability skills agenda has been heavily criticised for making assumptions about the 'power of skills'. Additionally, this skills agenda is largely focused on employers' requirements about what the labour market should supply to their businesses, without taking consideration of employability relativity. Finally, skills are hard to define, develop and measure, which has led to confusion and constant changes in policies and practices. With this literature about employability in mind, in the next chapter, I am going focus on development for HE students, specifically looking at their development during recent years in terms of policies and practices, and identifying the various issues and challenges it poses.

2.2 Employability and Higher Education

After gaining a broad view and understanding of the notion of employability (its definition, theory, characteristics and some key issues), I am going to place my focus on the issue of students' employability development in HE. So far, we have established that the UK government has turned to its HEIs to develop a highly skilled and employable work force to compete in the 21st Century knowledge economy. In this part of the literature review, I am going to further explore and examine

- why employability development, especially skills development, seems problematic and what challenges this brings to HE;
- how universities respond to this through its policies, initiatives and practices,
- and how the students and academics understand and perceive employability development in HE.

2.2.1   Strategic and pedagogical reactions

Although vocationalism and professional learning such as teacher training have been long associated with universities, this current employability agenda for HEIs really took off ever since the New Labour Government took advice from the Dearing Report, promoting employability development for knowledge economy through vast expansion of participation (Mason et al, 2002). So what has happened since then in relation to employability policies and practices in HE?

Noticeably, there has been a considerable scale of changes in terms of HE employability related policies from the governments (both New Labour and the Coalition Government) which triggered policy changes in the sector. Moving on from the Robbins' reports (1963) and the Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997), the current Coalition Government's policies start to suggest businesses should be involved in programme design, delivery and sponsorship for employability purposes (BIS, 2012).

"We begin with instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour."

Robbins (1963, para 25)

"Education and training [should] enable people in an advanced society to compete with

the best in the world" (NCIHE, 1997, para 1.11).

"ensure graduate skills and employability met the needs of business" (BIS, 2012, a, p. 5).

Individual universities have reacted to this with changes in their own institutional policies and practice on employability. Currently, most HE institutions (regardless of their characteristics)

in the UK have put employability into their core policies and strategies in various guises (see table 3 for examples).

Table 3 Examples of UK HEIs' strategic reactions to employability agenda[4]

University of Cambridge Learning and Teaching Strategy (2009-2012) Strategic aims: 4. Develop knowledge and skills which are relevant at all stages of each student's career and which equip students to continue to learn throughout life. Skills and personal development Skills training will focus on areas of demonstrable student need and demand. (University of Cambridge, 2009, p.4)
University of Manchester Strategic Plan 2011/2012 Edition Goal 2: Higher Learning: to provide superb HE to outstanding students from all backgrounds and to produce graduates distinguished around the world for their professional employability, leadership qualities and broad liberal education. Strategies for higher learning 1. To embed the "Purposes of a Manchester Education" in all programmes and to introduce a broad-based curriculum which allows all undergraduate students to develop non-discipline specific skills. The University is also committed to providing its students with the opportunity to develop key employability skills central to their future success. This includes increasing student access to the educational experience currently provided by its Manchester Leadership Programme, which provides opportunities for students to combine formal leadership and enterprise skills training with community work. (University of Manchester, 2011, p.10)
Liverpool John Moores University Strategic Plan 2007-2012 The curriculum should continue to develop to match the needs of a wide range of employers and prepare students for the possibility of self-employment as student entrepreneurs. "World of Work" skills, that are built into the curriculum, supported by work-related learning opportunities for all students, are fundamental to the concept of WoW (World of Work), as is the ability to assess and certify these skills for all students. (LJMU, 2007, p.18).

Though it seems many universities took a strategic approach to employability development in their programmes, the very diverse and dynamic nature of their different provisions mean that such an approach is not operated in the same way at each HEI (Yorke and Knight, 2003)

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[4] Here I chose those three universities to present the three types HEIs in the UK-elite, red-brick and post-92.

due to different institutional cultural backgrounds, rationales and even funding and management structures (Lowden et al, 2011). Some institutions are better at embedding employability in the curriculum than others, some prioritise the role of central services through a university-wide employability project/award, some have excellent relations with employers and have made enormous progress in developing and acknowledging work experience opportunities.

It is apparent that those who have very strong vocational and professional learning traditions (e.g. post-92 universities) tend to take up such approaches through working with industries and employers; some of the traditional universities (e.g. Red Bricks) tend to adopt an applied research approach – focusing on developing students' employability and academic qualities holistically (Lowden et al, 2011). Nevertheless, employability is one of the essential elements of today's HEIs, regardless of how individual institutions approach it.

While there are strategic reactions to the employability agenda, pedagogical understandings and TLA practices have also gone through significant changes during this period of time. As universities recognise the diversity of students' backgrounds and needs which comes with the widening participation agenda and the ever changing landscape and needs of graduate labour market (e.g. various work settings in large and small, private and public, employment and self-employment), employability development has moved on from simple skills development workshops like CV writing and interviewing techniques in the early 1990s, to much more sophisticated and diverse range of employability development approaches in recent years (Harvey, 2004). Here, I am going to focus on some of the most significant methods, strategies and theoretical developments through the past decade to see how HEIs are responding to governments' call on employability development.

With the realisation of the complexity of employability for university graduates in the current labour market, universities nowadays have developed a range of activities and methods to develop and enhance students' employability development, targeting different needs from students and potential employers. As summarised by Harvey (2004), those activities and methods can be broadly categorised into four areas:

- enhanced or revised *central support* (usually via the agency of careers services) for undergraduates and graduates in their search for work;

- *embedded attribute development* in the programme of study often as the result of modifications to curricula to make attribute development explicit or to accommodate employer inputs;

- innovative provision of *work experience* opportunities within, or external to, programmes of study;

- enabled reflection on and *recording of experience*, attribute development and achievement alongside academic abilities, not least through the use of progress files.

For the scope of this literature review, here is a summary of some key points for the four areas.

- University-wide employability initiatives (often as employability awards), with the aid of a central support are very popular at the moment for many HEIs to have consistent impact on employability development across all programmes in the institution. Those projects are often extra-curricular and voluntary in nature for students to gain value-added employability. From the institutions' point of view, university-wide project provides excellent opportunities to work with employers (government agenda's requirement), and has crucial marketing value to perspective students (Harvey, 2004). Though in theory, they are sustainable and effective due to their institution wide impact and clear directions for degree programmes (Tomlinson, 2008); in practice, the levels of engagements and the numbers of key stakeholders make their implementation problematic (Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003), particularly considering the 'right' message is not easy to send to all its many insiders (academics and students) to ensure buy-in to this top-down approach to employability development, because often top-down initiatives are not taken seriously to fully utilise their potentials (ibid).

- Degree programmes are where employability development really happens to students (Knight and Trowler, 2001), and there are many different approaches to it. Theoretically, a holistic approach where the programme has clear focus and embedded employability in its curriculum is the most effective way to develop and enhance students' employability (Knight and York, 2003). In practice, a balanced approach, where employability development is delivered maximally without too much pressure on staff and resources, seems to be most appropriate. This can be an embedded model with aid from bolt-on activities which take into account the subject's nature and culture, as well as its staff expertise, traditions, institution-level initiatives and sector-wide policies. Evidently, different kind of programmes (professional, applied or theoretical) have their subject specific approaches to employability development, and there are clear differences amongst them (Lowden et al, 2011). Programmes like Medicine and Teacher Training have much more particular professional frameworks to follow than programmes like Business studies and Computer Science, where individual programme works with the

industry independently. This is why Yorke and Knight (2003) argue that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for employability development, thus making the institutional-wide approach difficult to implement.

- Work-based learning (WBL) or work-related learning (WRL) has been an essential part of employability development for degree programmes as it is widely believed by politicians and academics (Harvey et al, 2002) that WBL/WRL provides students with opportunities to make connections between their academic study and the world of work. Traditionally used by vocational and professional degrees through placements, WBL/WRL nowadays takes many forms which can help students gain a range of experiences and employability qualities. Many research studies (e.g. Hall et al, 2009; Purcell et al, 1999) suggest it is the most popular employability development method amongst many key stakeholders, as it has the potential to provide a number of employability related benefits, including developing professional and generic skills, developing networks with employers, familiarising students with the working culture, and applying academic knowledge and skills in practice (Harvey et al, 2003; Little et al, 2001). But to achieve its full potential, such experience must be carried out meaningfully (Blackwell et al, 2001) which involves a high level of engagement of academics, students and employers. In reality, such level of engagement can be difficult to ensure when there are a large number of students requiring good quality WBL/WRL with excellent support from their lecturers, when resources and staff numbers are limited. As a result, often, programmes focus on getting the placements rather than on the learning process and reflection on it (Little, 2000).

- Reflection is essential to employability development (Harvey et al, 1998), because it helps students to make sense of certain learning experiences and encourages students to question assumptions which lead to new learning and understanding (Mezirow, 1990). It is key to transformative learning (ibid), where we reflect to learn, and then learn as a result of reflecting (Moon, 2004). As a result, individuals who can reflect on their practices effectively, can critically and meaningfully evaluate and understand their own strengths and limitations, setting themselves realistic goals, developing their personal effectiveness, and dealing with praise and criticisms constructively. Reflection can be evident in different forms at different levels (e.g. personal, professional, academic, etc.). This is the key reason that businesses and employers value reflection as a crucial employability competence.

Like WBL/WRL, reflection has been used within vocational degrees and professional degrees for years to develop students' professional learning in dealing with interpersonal and personal relationships. Working in a dynamic environment it is vital for such professionals to be able to make critical decisions effectively and efficiently and learning from their experiences quickly (Knowles, 2008). In recent years, an increasing number of degrees have started to recognise the value of reflection, particularly, when considering transformative learning, which can certainly improve and enhance students' academic understanding of academic knowledge like research methodology and applying academic learning to real world situations effectively (Lucas and Tan, 2007).

The value of reflection is apparent. In fact, the NTF project around which this PhD is based was triggered by a piece of reflective practice assessment from a Sport Science student's reflection on his WBL experience in a football club (Appendix 1). However, in practice, it can be problematic for lecturers and students. Due to its complexity and dynamic process, it is difficult to teach, learn and assess, because understanding the theories of reflection does not mean an individual can in practice apply reflection successfully (Tomkins, 2009). To date, many academics are still trying to address questions such as 'what makes a good reflection?' and 'How to develop teaching and assessment criteria for reflection?' (Knowles, 2008; Moon, 2004).

2.2.2   The 'wicked' problem of employability development in HEIs

Just as a theoretical understanding of employability (Gazier, 2001) develops over time into a more sophisticated and complex concept, the understanding of employability development in HE sectors also seems to have developed and evolved over the years. Through examining strategic and practical reactions from the HE sector, it is clear that employability development is viewed as one of the key purposes of HE despite, in a number of areas, universities and academics appearing to disagree with the government's employability agenda for HEIs. For instance, there has been a general belief amongst a large number of academics that the HE employability agenda should and, indeed, already has moved beyond the skills agenda (e.g. Knight and Yorke, 2004; Harvey, 2004). As Harvey (2003, p.39) stated:

"The last five years have witnessed an accelerating pace of engagement with employability within the academy. Initial, piecemeal accommodation of employability through skills modules has developed into a more diverse array of opportunities. In some institutions, they have been developed into an integrated, holistic strategy, most recently linked to learning and teaching policy".

After looking at how HE deals with employability at sector-level, institutional-level and programme-level, it is clear that nowadays skills development is only a part of the current employability agenda for universities, and the HE sector perceives employability as graduates' potential to be employed (the subjective and relative concept of employability), rather than their employment rates (the objective and absolute concept of employability). A current dominant approach provided by the UK HEA's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team views employability as "*a set of characteristics-skills, understandings and personal attributes that individual graduates need for employment purposes which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy*" (Yorke, 2004, p. 8). A number of studies have started to examine and identify what graduate employability is really about from the HEI's point of view (e.g.: Yorke and Knight, 2004; Fugate et al, 2004; Bennett, Dunne and Carre, 1999) (table 4).

It is clearly demonstrated through those models (see Table 4), that experiences and the ability to evaluate and analyse those experiences (as well as skills) are vital for graduates' employability. For those scholars, graduate employability is not just about gearing students up with skills and abilities to get and retain a job after their degree (though this is an important element), it is about

"enhancing the students' attributes (skills, knowledge, attitudes and abilities) and ultimately with empowering the student as a critical life-long learner" (Harvey, 2004, p.3).

In addition, studies (e.g. Tomlinson, 2007; Fugate et al, 2004) have also started to look at the interactions between individual students' identities (e.g. age, gender, social and human capital) and the external social and economic environment, given a contextualised and dynamic picture of graduate employability. It provides a distinction between graduates' employability potential and the actual employment status. Certainly, it connects to the theoretical stage of Interactive employability (Gazier, 2001) and the notion of employability relativity.

Table 4 Some examples of graduate employability models

Bennett et al (1999) proposed a model of course provision in higher education. • Disciplinary content knowledge • Disciplinary skills • Workplace awareness • Workplace experience • Generic skills

> Yorke and Knight's (2004) USEM model
> - **U**nderstanding
> - **S**kills (or Skilful practices)
> - **E**fficacy beliefs
> - **M**etacognition

> Fugate et al's psycho-social model of employability (2004 cited in Pool and Sewell, 2007)**:**
>
> - **Career identity** —this includes the components of self-awareness and career decision making. It relates to an individual's ability to reflect on their past experiences in order to determine who they are and who they want to be. This inclusion of past, present and future identity formation.
>
> - **Personal adaptability**—to stay employable an individual must be willing and able to transform themselves in response to changes in their environment. This could include the willingness to learn new skills, to adapt one's job hunting strategy to prevailing job market conditions, or even to reconsider one's goals in the face of barriers.
>
> - **Social and human capital** —this element incorporates the impact of an individual's social background and access to supportive networks. It also encompasses one's ability to successfully develop and utilise working relationships through factors such as emotional intelligence. In addition, the human capital element covers the various useful skills and knowledge that an individual has obtained from their experience and education.

It seems that the understanding and practices of graduate employability have moved towards a comprehensive level in HEIs to deal with the complexity or even super complexity (Barnett, 2000) of today's world. However, it is this complex or even super complex world we live in that has made the practical implementation of such employability development models challenging and problematic (a key characteristics of 'wicked' problems). Theoretically, those skills, qualities and competences span across many complex disciplines like psychology, sociology, etc., which are challenging for academics to understand in order to develop appropriate and effective strategic frameworks and everyday teaching learning and assessment practices.

Even with a comprehensive level of understanding, the application of such understanding is challenging. Indeed, looking at such implementation frameworks, it is clear that, such a complex process involves so many stakeholders, levels, factors and resources, that the outcome is unpredictable. For instance, as demonstrated in following model by Harvey (2006), it takes HEIs, students, employers, market and the academics to share understandings of all those key concepts, providing and engaging with the appropriate learning and development opportunities at the 'right' time and 'right' place for it to work. In

reality, to achieve this kind of shared understanding is too complex and too time and resource consuming for many, which seems almost impossible to achieve.
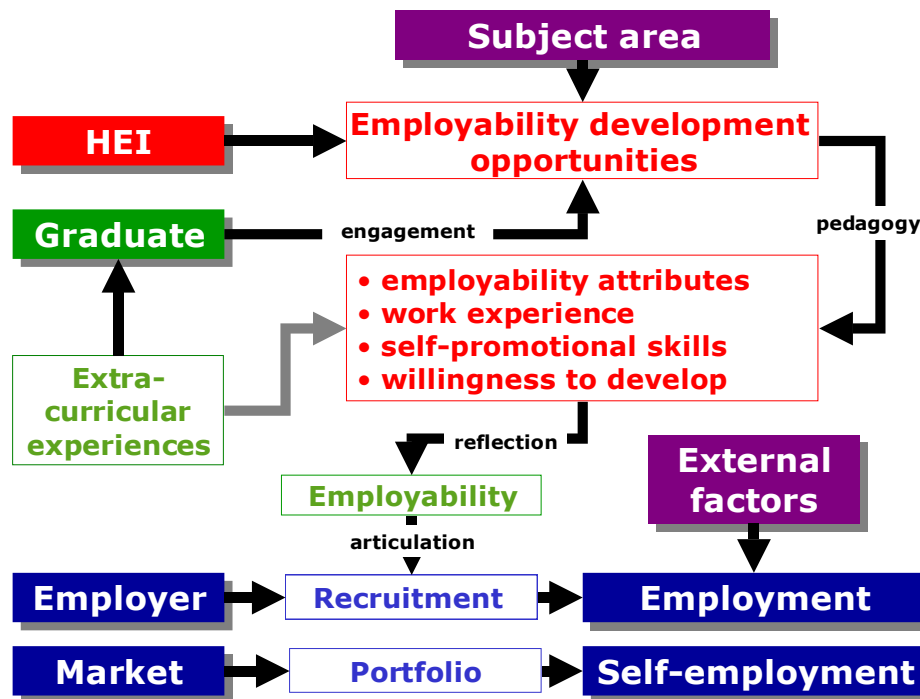
Figure 1 A model of graduate employability development (Harvey, 2006)

Clearly, at the moment, understandings and practices regarding developing students' employability have moved beyond skills development into more much broad and sophisticated competences, skills and attributes. However, due to its complexity in theoretical understanding and practical implementation employability development in HE is still largely problematic and challenging. One of the issues is the diversity of understandings and perceptions different groups of stakeholders have. As pointed out previously, within current limited research studies on this issue, it seems the dissonances amongst those stakeholders on issues such as 'what employability is about', 'why university has a role in developing students' employability', and 'how to develop employability', are making its implementation challenging. As this is the key point of this research study, I will further investigate this issue in the next section of literature review with a particular focus on students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions.

2.2.3 Summary

Here, I have examined some broad issues in relation to how HEIs in the UK (particularly in England) has responded to employability agenda in their policies and practices. Currently, it

appears, most universities have their own institution-level policies and initiatives for employability, which set out to provide individual institutions with their unique employability characteristics, giving the institution and its degree programmes a clear direction which aims to help their graduates to gain competitiveness, in terms of how to attract potential students. However, in practice, such a grand initiative is often complicated and messy. At degree programme level, where employability development really happens, various models and methods have been developed and implemented based on the culture and nature of the degree, its staff expertise and their institutional employability initiatives. In terms of methods in teaching learning and assessment, WBL/WRL and reflection are the most popular for employability development purposes, as their authentic and powerful learning outcomes serve the needs of employability development well. However, in practice, there are still a number of challenges for those methods as they are complex, highly individualised and, time and resource consuming.

Through reviewing the literature regarding those factors, further issues have emerged in relation to how much employability policies and practices have gone beyond simple skills development into diverse and sophisticated models and approaches. Clearly, the UK HE sector nowadays is equipped with much more comprehensive understandings on what employability is about for university degrees. At the same time, as employability, development policies and practices have become more and more complex, there are more and more challenges and questions. Many issues regarding the implementation of employability development into curriculum design and TLA activities are related to the perceptions and understandings of its key stakeholders – the students, the academics, the universities and the employers, who after all are the people dealing with it on a daily basis. Arguably, employability development in HEIs can be seen as a 'wicked' problem which has no 'correct' view, no definitive definition and formulation, and cannot be fully solved due to its complexity and variety of stakeholders' views and interests.

With this in mind, in the next section, I am going to focus on the issues regarding the students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions on employability and employability development in HE. The keys to this are to explore and examine current understandings on what the students and lecturers think HE employability is about, to identity the impact their perceptions have on policies and practices, and to recognise what dissonances and congruence they have in their experiences, understandings and perceptions, since these are the questions this study sets out to answer.

2.3 Insiders' experiences, understandings and perceptions

In the previous literature review sections, I have established that employability is a problematic, complex, evolving/flexible and individualised concept, and that employability development in HEIs can be seen as a 'wicked' problem. Despite all the effort spent during the past decades (discussed in the previous section), developing students' employability still remains as one of the greatest challenges and issues for HE institutions. In recent years, many reports from popular media have focused on the number of students failing to gain meaningful employments after their graduation (e.g. BBC report on low graduate employment rate, Burns, 2012, a) graduates working in low skilled jobs, Burns, 2012, b).

One of the main reasons for this complex 'wicked' problem is the fact that nowadays there are so many different stakeholders concerned with the issue of employability development in HEIs. Their various interests, understandings and perceptions about employability development in HE create a complicated picture. Moreover, within each stakeholder group, there are also diverse and complicated interests, understandings and perceptions. Ever since the employability agenda has been placed onto HE by the government, the interests, understandings and perceptions of those various stakeholder groups have been changing and evolving over time. As a result, we have a concept (employability) which is complex, problematic and evolving, with multiple theories and practices to come to terms with it. Coupled with this are the many stakeholders' interests, understandings and perceptions which are also complex, problematic and evolving all the time.

In the final part of the literature review, I am going to make a close examination of students' and lecturers' (the insiders of HEIs) experiences, understandings and perceptions regarding employability development in UK universities (particularly in England), in comparison with some international research studies. This is to identify what the current understanding is regarding students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions about employability and employability development in higher education. As this is the key question of this research, this part of the literature review aims to set the theme, identify research gaps and inform the rest of the research.

2.3.1 Why are students' and lecturers' understandings and perceptions important?

Previously I have discussed the lack of qualitative research on insiders' voices (e.g. Barnett, 2008) and the lack of employability related research focusing on experiences, understandings and perception (e.g. Tomlinson, 2007). Clearly, after many years of researching on employability development in HEIs via predominantly quantitative methods on skills identification and the TLA of those skills, research on employability development in

HEIs needs to take new and different directions (Tomlinson, 2007). Considering universities are social institutions where TLA are carried out as social practices, and employability can be viewed as a socially constructed concept in which employability development is carried out via social interactions (ibid), examining students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions in relation to employability and employability development through a social prospective, seems to be appropriate and necessary.

Perception, for instance, is important to both education and employability. It has been recognised by many scholars in the areas of psychology, sociology and philosophy that there is a difference between what actually happens and what people perceive to be happened (e.g. Magnusson, 1981). Different people perceive things differently. This is largely down to various *individual factors* associated with each individual person (e.g. age, gender, prior experiences, expectations, etc.). Even the same person could perceive the same event/object differently as they age and the situation they are in changes. When an individual is with different sets of other people, his/her perceptions change accordingly sometimes as a reaction of how they are perceived by those others. Importantly, there is no entirely unbiased perception (Clark, 1997). Perception then is closely associated with experiences and understandings – when prior experiences created based on prior understandings and perceptions each form new perceptions and understandings for new experiences, there is always a pre-determined expectation towards it – this process goes on like a complex spiral (ibid).

Clearly, to be able to know and understand those perceptions is important in educational settings. As people believe their perceptions of an event/object are the actual event/object, and different people form perceptions differently (Magnusson, 1981). For example, the same task/assessment can be understood and perceived differently by different students, or even their lecturers. What the lecturer sets out to be the intended learning outcomes of a task are likely to be perceived differently from individual students (Race, 2009) – through complex spiral process, students will form different attitudes toward the task, different ways to approach the task, and will have different end results of the task. Thus the learning experiences throughout can be diverse.

For employability, perception is also important, as it is a subjectively constructed concept. Indeed, *perceived employability,* how much an individual *believes* themselves to be employable, is an important part of employability (Berntson, 2008). It is associated with an individual's efficacy beliefs – reflects an individual views about themselves and their assessment of the labour market (often based on how they understand those issues and how they experienced them previously). As a result, an individual's perceived employability

affects how he/she approaches an employment opportunity. For graduates going into the labour market, perceived employability can also mean how prepared they *feel about* their own employability. Given the importance of such belief, many employability development models (e.g. USEM model, Yorke and Knight, 2004) have included 'Efficacy Belief' as a key employability aspect for HE students to develop and enhance.

The issue regarding experiences, perceptions and understandings of employability and employability development in HE is complex and problematic. As well as internal factors such as previous experiences, understandings and efficacy beliefs, external factors such as changes of government, changes of policies on employment and higher education, economic and social changes of graduate labour market, changes of student identities have all impacted on creating this problematic, complex and evolving concept of HE graduate employability.

Despite the good intentions and improvements made in recent years in LTA of employability, it could be argued that several perception related issues are making employability development in degree programmes still problematic. Students and lecturers might understand and perceive employability and employability development differently, due to their diverse past experiences and understandings on two kinds of issues: education and employability. Those factors will impact on their perceptions of employability and its development directly and indirectly (e.g. approaches to develop leadership). Considering the nature of mass participation HE, where lecturers and students are no longer coming from certain similar social and educational background, it is vital to explore what those prior knowledge and experiences comprise, in order to understand how they impact on students' learning and development of their employability. For example, in terms of employability development, considering the individualised and flexible nature of employability, the skills and competencies that seem to be important for certain students to develop, might already have been developed by others. In terms of education, due to those individual differences, students and lecturers might perceive the *same* TLA activity differently. As a result, what a lecturer intends students to learn might not be perceived by the students as what they think their lecturer wants them to learn.

Previously, I have established that for undergraduate students, employability development is a process of learning and developing various skills, knowledge and competencies (Yorke and Knight, 2004; Fugate et al, 2004; Bennett et al, 1999). In this highly individualised and interactive process of learning, students and lecturers construct their own understandings of employability through experiencing it and reflecting on those experiences (Struyven, Dochy and Janssens, 2002). As students and lecturers engage in the LTA of employability, their

understandings and perceptions of LTA are also vital to the issue. So within the subject of students' and lecturers' perceptions and understandings of employability development in higher education, there are three key issues:

- Understandings and perceptions of employability;
- Understandings and perceptions of higher education;
- Understandings and perceptions of TLA of employability in HE degrees.

As discussed previously, to date, only a handful of research studies have looked at those issues, which suggests that more research in this area is needed. Nevertheless, those few studies have informed my understandings on those issues, thus influencing the designing and conducting of this study.

2.3.2 Students' experiences, understandings and perceptions

As stated before, qualitative research studies on students' understandings and perceptions are limited (Seale, 2009) despite its vital importance to inform us what students think about their HE experiences pedagogically and socially. Current knowledge on students' perceptions and understandings tend to come from popular media reports, government reports and conference papers which contain a lot of assumptions about what students think about their HE experiences in relation to their employability and employability development (Barnett, 2008).

Though there are many studies looked at some very specific issues on employability development (e.g. WBL/WRL experience, reflective practices, etc.) through examining students' understandings and perceptions, very few have looked at the issue holistically. Amongst those few, Tomlinson's PhD research on pre-92 university undergraduate students', perceptions and understandings on employability and employability development shares some similarities with the aims and questions of this study (2008, 2007), and has thus informed some of the design of my interviews and discussion of my data.

Tomlinson's works clearly illustrated a more complex side of students' perceptions and attitudes towards employability compared to earlier quantitative studies on students' perceptions (e.g. Glover et al, 2002). They also show that students' perceptions and attitudes have been changing and evolving over time, just like the concept of employability itself. The following key pointed summarised from Tomlinson's papers (2008, 2007) provide much insightful and deep understandings on how students interpret employability, and how they value their HE learning, experiences and credential.

- Students are developing sophisticated understandings on employability: students interpreted the labour market as being increasingly flexible and higher risk. They appeared to be concerned with the need to adopt a more flexible approach to their careers.

- Students saw the problem of employability as being a problem for individuals. The task of managing a career was seen as being 'up to them'. Thus students looked at factors relating to *the individual* when they interpret employability and the labour market. There is a strong sense of overlooking structural factors like class, gender and ethnicity in relation to employability and employment.

- There is a sense of relative employability as students viewed themselves as competing against other graduates with similar credential and educational backgrounds. Interestingly, many students thought that the supply of graduates is much greater than the demand from the labour market, leaving them to believe their educational credentials are inflated, and as a result some students have lowered their expectations for their employment, others felt their need to gain extra employability qualities to fulfil their career aspirations.

- Students started to take individual approaches, e.g. achieving higher grades, exploiting the institutional profile of their university, re-investing in further study and so on, to add value or distinction to their credentials in order to compete with other graduates with similar credentials. Clearly, students believe that not all graduates are equals, and some have greater advantages by going to 'better' universities. In addition, students were taking a much instrumental view on their credentials, seeing the end outcome as a way of measuring the value of their credentials. Through this, it appears that students feel the academic content they gained within their degrees have very little or no value to their employability. Rather than learning as much as they can, students tend to work to achieve as good a grade as they can.

- The discourse of '*experience*' has emerged from this study, as students no longer feel their graduateness can be just represented through their formal academic achievement. For those students, finding, utilising, and being able to demonstrate the valuable 'economy of experiences' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004 cited in Tomlinson, 2007) is vital to their employability. This is their way to further distinguish themselves in the labour market, creating a unique individualised employability narrative which can reflect their own attributes and achievements. Students believe that employers tend to value what they have done outside their degree as well as their personal and behavioural attributes.

- Students value their HE credentials as vital human capital assets for their employability. They clearly believe they have access to a wider range of economic, occupational and

social opportunities compared to non-graduates, and without their HE credentials they have very little chance to pursuit well-paid, high-status employment. But only some students seemed to have clear understanding of where exactly their degrees can lead them.

- Because we are still in a relatively early stage of mass participation of HE, a lot of students seemed to be confused by different messages from their families, friends and popular media. Some held high expectations as they believed their degree can set them up for life; others were more sceptical about the value of their degree in an inflated credential market.

Compared to the political and theoretical perspectives of graduate employability which deal with the issue objectively on a mass level, Tomlinson's works showed the individual and subjective side of employability from individual students' point of view. To them, employability is about their own credentials, experiences and positioning in the labour market. Although they acknowledge the bigger picture, it feels like they have no impact on it proactively. Accordingly to Tomlinson's findings (2008, 2007), to students, employability is not about job market policies; rather it is about how to achieve their career aspirations effectively, and certainly their participation in HE plays a vital part in it. Although in those two papers Tomlinson did not directly investigate students' attitude and expectations toward their university learning experiences, some valuable points came out of his study which must be acknowledged and considered.

In his papers, Tomlinson (2008, 2007) has illuminated some deeper issues regarding gender, social class and political perspectives which most previous research studies in this area failed to address. Tomlinson identified some female students as careerists who have high expectations and aspirations themselves. They have the ambition to break into job markets which traditionally are male dominated. As they tend to play down the potential institutional and structural barriers, on one hand this shows encouraging signs of students' attitudes toward gender equality in relation to their employability; on the other hand, maybe some of those students lack real world experiences of such challenges. As mentioned before, because students in this study tend to have an individual point of view on employability, in most cases, the bigger picture of the labour market and indeed social structures is often ignored.

Tomlinson identified some social-class related issues, particularly when he compared different attitudes and offered justifications on why they occurred. Accordingly, some students' (i.e. retreatists) scepticism comes from negative experiences either first-hand or

through their peers. Those negative experiences were more apparent with first generation HE students from lower-middle class backgrounds.

"It would appear that these wider class-cultural dispositions feed into students' sense of what are available and realistic options in the labour market, and which they use to negotiate their position in the labour market field. (Tomlinson, 2007, p.298)"

As a result of this perception, those students tend to play down their potential and aspirations because they devalue their culture and social capital. Again, gender differences were shown as female 'retreatists' tend to shy away from male-dominated jobs.

Finally, political perspectives appeared to have effects on students' attitude as one of the retreatists expressed her political concerns toward corrupted and greedy corporations. However, Tomlinson did not identify her as a rebel, as her attitude was passive in which she chose to turn away rather than fight against the machine.

Through Tomlinson's work, it is clear that employability and employability development in HE is highly subjective and individualised. It relates not only the students' academic study and educational credentials, but also their wider experiences and social cultural capital. Although students' attitudes and perceptions do not affect the objective theoretical concept of employability, it is about their understandings of themselves and the labour market thus their positioning themselves in the future job market. To higher education, this is the challenge, as the problems illuminated in this study are wider policy and social issues (e.g. gender and social class inequality). Nevertheless, students have high hopes of their HE experiences in relation to their employability development. In his conclusion, Tomlinson (2007) stated:

"universities may in fact be limited in their capacity to enhance the employability of their students, even though policy-makers consistently argue that they have a pivotal role. Teaching and learning policies around graduate employability may only have a minimal impact in aiding the labour market trajectories of graduates. At best, they may merely be a compensation for effective and equitable employer strategies for organising graduate talent. However, the way students, graduates and employers make sense of an attempt to manage the problem of graduate employability, as well as their aspirations and expectations, presents some serious challenges for HE in the new economy." (p.303)

Taking findings and recommendations from Tomlinson's papers (2008, 2007), I feel my study must investigate 'how do students understand and value their learning experiences in higher education, particularly their degree programmes, in relation to employability and their employability development?' to further extend on the points Tomlinson made regarding their understand of their HE credentials and economy experiences. Although Tomlinson pointed out that students seem to have an indifferent attitude towards their academic learning experiences (just as findings from Glover et al 2002), I wonder WHY do they have that

attitude? And how does it effect on their academic learning and their employability development?

Secondly, as the participants from Tomlinson's study (pre-92 university students from a variety of social sciences, humanities, physical sciences and vocational degree programmes like engineering, lay and media studies) are different from my potential participants (post-92 university students from sport, dance and physical education degree programmes), I wonder if I can find anything different regarding students' perceptions and attitudes toward issues like the value of their academic credential in relation to employability, their attitude towards graduate labour market, and so on. Taking into considerations findings from another paper, Ruthwell et al (2008) investigated aspirations and self-perception through a questionnaire with 2nd year business students from 3 universities (a pre-92, a post-92 and a former HE college). University 'A' students might well aspire to the traditional, elitist, notion of the fast-track 'graduate management traineeship', while for students at universities B and C, a job, any job, might well be sufficient. Considering the deeper issues like gender and social class representations and equality, certainly, it is worthwhile to examine any differences that come out from my studies.

As one of the key stakeholder groups, arguably students' views and thoughts on employability and their employability development have been largely overlooked in recent research on employability development in HEIs. Through examining those few studies on students' understandings and perceptions (Ruthwell et al, 2008; Tomlinson, 2008, 2007; Glover et al 2002), it is clear though students have a much more sophisticated view on employability and their employability development compared to how the popular media tends to portray them (e.g. consumers buying degrees for a better career prospective). Those studies also have shown diversities in students' understandings and perceptions, displaying differences between different types of institutions, genders and social class backgrounds, though generally speaking students value their HE participation positively in relation to their employability. Finally, comparing to the scientific, objective and top-down perspectives often used to examine employability issues, students' understandings and perceptions clearly suggest it is a personal and subjective matter. With those understandings in mind, this study aims to illuminate issues regarding students' experiences, understandings and perceptions further, in order to identify ways which we can improve current theories, policies and practices on employability development in HEIs.

2.3.3 Lecturers' understandings and perceptions

Research studies on lecturers' experiences, perceptions and understandings are limited. It could be argued that it is academics who are writing papers and making comments on the

issues regarding employability therefore their understandings and perceptions are expressed through those papers and comments, but just as the popular media reports on students' understandings and perceptions, the validity and reliability on such approaches to identifying academics' thoughts are questionable. Nevertheless, those publications are still valuable to current understandings of what lecturers really think about employability and employability development in HE programmes. For instance, through reading Barnett's book on The Limitations of Competences (1994), it is clear that he holds strong opposing views on the government's employability agenda. Certainly, those kinds of publications have informed my thinking on the issue, as demonstrated throughout the context and literature review.

Regarding research studies, three particular papers have been identified (Knight and Page, 2007; Barrie, 2007, 2006) which specifically looked at lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions on employability and employability development in their programmes using purely qualitative or mixed methods approach. Barrie's studies (2007, 2006) have been influential to my knowledge on lecturers' understandings on this issue (just like Tomlinson's papers). Although his papers were based on the Australian HE context and their lecturers' understandings and perceptions on the issue of graduates' generic attributes[5] development, the findings are applicable to the UK HE context as the nature of two contexts and issues regarding employability and skills development are very similar. Accordingly (Barrie, 2006, p.217-218)

> *In Australia the lists of graduate attributes developed by the different universities vary, not only in terms of which attributes are included, but also with respect to the nature and level of the attributes described. The lists of attributes typically include outcomes that range from simple technical skills to complex intellectual abilities and ethical values. Often these lists of graduate attributes are not well defined…While there appears to be an assumption of a shared understanding of the terms used, and the place of such 'generic' outcomes amongst the more familiar outcomes of university curricula, the lack of specification often leaves the stated outcomes open to interpretation…. The variation seen in the lists is multiplied by the various interpretations of these attributes presented in academics' reports of curriculum initiatives. Many publications describe a wide variety of very different initiatives targeting the same attribute (see for example Fallows and Steven 2000). The variety of pedagogical approaches (Bennett et al. 1999) might further suggest a similar variety of understandings of the intended outcome.*

Barrie's papers (2007, 2006) mainly focused on identifying and examining 15 academics' (from different disciplinary backgrounds) understandings and perception of generic graduate attributes (GGAs) and how such understandings and perceptions impact on their TLA practices in order to challenge the 'assumption of a shared understanding'. Accordingly,

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[5] the skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable in a range of contexts and are acquired as a result of completing any undergraduate degree, similarly to many lists of soft skills, key skills and graduate skills in the UK.

1. There are clear differences amongst those academics' understandings and perceptions on what are and what their programme's roles are in developing them; and the academics perceives how they approach the TLA of GGAs are also different. It is apparent, in this study, how the academics understand GGAs and how they perceive the teaching and learning of GGAs are related, though it is not clear how exactly their understandings affect their teaching and learning approaches. Those different levels of understandings, perceptions and approach can be developed into a hierarchy of conceptions. (See Table 5 for definitions and examples).

2. Overall, academics' understandings of GGAs and approaches to the teaching and learning of GGAs seem inconsistent. While it seems that "for some academics, generic attributes might have no place in their classrooms, for others they are central" (Barrie, 2007, p. 454). Although Barrie pointed out this small handpicked sample is not completely representative and it is not in this study's aim to report the frequency of these variations, this finding still raised the issue on the variations of academics' understandings, perceptions and approach to GGAs.

Table 5 Barrie's hierarchical conceptions of generic graduate attributes

Level of understanding	Definition	Approach	Example
Precursory	GGAs are necessary precursor skills and abilities that graduates should possess, but they should possess these on entry higher education. GGAs are irrelevant to HE level teaching and learning, thus no GGAs should be part of a formal academic curriculum.	Remedial: not usually part of university teaching	*"I don't see how I can be expected to be a remedial English teacher when my job is to teach science"*
Complement	GGAs are useful additional skills to have because they complement students' discipline knowledge. They are acquired as the result of higher education, and are therefore should be part of the university syllabus. But they are secondary to the learning of disciplinary knowledge. The key feature of this 'additive referential aspect' is that GGAs do not interact with disciplinary knowledge, in other words, they are bolted on to academic curriculum which have their own right as a part of university learning outcomes.	Associated: generic attributes are taught as discrete subset of the teaching in university courses	*"I think it is important that students graduating from university can write well. I offer an extra seminar session on basic academic writing, you know essay structure and things like that … I run the session at lunchtime because the tutorial sessions are all allocated to the lecture topics."*
Translation	GGAs are important because they let graduate make use of their disciplinary knowledge. GGAs are learning outcomes that students possess in with discipline knowledge because they are closely connected. Although GGAs are separated from disciplinary learning outcomes, they form part of the formal curriculum.	Teaching content: generic attributes are taught in the context of teaching the disciplinary knowledge Teaching process: generic attributes are taught through the way the course disciplinary knowledge is taught	*"Well they are the sorts of skills that change abstract knowledge into a form that is useful in the world of work or inquiry. If a student can't exercise abilities like ethical judgement and creativity, and balance these against scientific method in their research then they aren't a professional scientist."*
Enabling	GGAs are not separate or parallel learning outcomes, but important abilities that enable all academic learning. In other words, they are integral to disciplinary knowledge-they form the embedded core or 'skeleton' that provides 'both form and function' to disciplinary learning. To some extent, they are more important than the discipline knowledge because they form the framework for the development and transferring of knowledge.	Engagement: generic attributes are learnt through the way student engage with the course's learning experiences. Participatory: Generic attributes are learnt by the way students participate and engage with all the experiences of university life.	*"They are the sorts of abilities that are about intellectual and personal development. Which means they are more than just the tools of knowledge-like communication and literacy- they are part of knowledge – the way we interact and communicate about texts is part of what we know about texts."*

(Adapted and summarised from Barrie, 2007, 2006)

3. It appears that discipline-related variables did not have effect on those academics' conceptions. Academics from the same discipline did not share the same understanding, whereas academics from different disciplines had expressed same level of conception. While Barrie pointed out the small sample might have effects on this finding, he also suggested that

"Our understandings of phenomena are based in our prior experience of the phenomena and other relevant experiences. Understandings of graduate attributes are not unrelated to other understandings of university education and it seems likely that disciplinary differences in understandings of, for example, the nature of knowledge is likely to be relevant, as are broader understandings about the nature of learning, to our conceptions of graduate attributes." (p.234)

Clearly, Barrie feels the issue regarding academics' understandings and perceptions of GGAs are related to their understandings and perceptions of what constitutes as knowledge, what HE is about and what graduate attributes are about. Though they are relevant to disciplinary knowledge, for academics the issue regarding developing students' GGA relate to much wider and broader ontological and epistemological conceptions on higher education, disciplinary knowledge and graduate attributes.

Those key findings from Barries' papers (2007, 2006) clearly illuminated a number of issues regarding employability development in HEIs. First, when people mention employability, they are not talking about the same thing. Even among the academics, the definitions spread across a very wide spectrum of different conceptions. However, in employability policies, there is an assumption that everyone is talking about the 'same thing', thus this difference amongst academics' understandings and perceptions is ignored. Secondly, due to this difference in understandings and perceptions, curriculum design and TLA practices vary in the same institution or even the same programme. This inconsistency potentially can cause confusion amongst students as well as academics themselves. Thirdly, regarding universities' institutional wide employability development initiatives, Barrie argued that those curriculum reforms are not likely to be successful unless those policy makers start to acknowledge and address the variations in academics' understandings. He suggests that before identifying employability attributes, all the key stakeholders (e.g. academics, students, HE institutions, government, employers, etc.) must have an honest dialogue to have a clear understanding on some of the key issues like what employability is, what higher education's role is in employability development, how employability should be development, and so on.

Another significant research on the issue of academics' understandings and experiences with employability and employability development in UK HE is Knight and Page's report (2007) on

academics' understandings and experiences of assessing 'wicked' competences[6]. In their study, they used mixed methods (online-survey 83 responses and phone interviews 14 responses) to examine and explore the experiences and understandings of academics from six subject areas in a number of English universities on the issues of assessing 'wicked' competences. In this study, Knight and Page (2007) asked their participants from each subject area to identify two crucial 'wicked' competences they believe are 'wicked' problems for them and their students in relation to assessment-vital for the profession, and difficult to define, teach, learn and assess. Interestingly, some of those competences (oral communication, emotional intelligence, relating to clients and taking it onwards) are not their assessment priorities, and emotional intelligence is believed to be not valued by employers. The survey results certainly reveal some very interesting issues:

- There is inconsistency in the assessment of employability related skills and competences – sometimes the methods are inappropriate, sometimes they are not assessed at all.
- There is not one definite method – workplace performance, simulations, portfolios, tests and coursework are all used for the assessments of those 'wicked' competences with some are more preferable than the others.
- Through the survey results, it seems that academics in this study felt assessing 'wicked' competences is not as difficult as the Knight and Page (2007) presumed. To this *unexpected* finding, the authors proposed three explanations: there is no problem; questionnaire is not appropriate to investigate such complex issue; false consciousness of participants as they did not fully understand the issues. Further examination via interviews suggests there are definitely problems with how academics understand those 'wicked' competences and the assessment of them, and they cannot be fully exposed through quantitative research measures. Although the interviews were carried with a small number, and could be argued it is sufficient enough to reject the findings from the questionnaire, it certainly revealed much more depth of the problems.

Through Knight and Page's study (2007), it seems, again, there are dissonances amongst academics on how they understand and perceive employability and employability development; moreover there are also issues regarding how they approach employability and employability development in their assessment. Methodologically, the two different methods (questionnaires and interviews) have focused on different aspects of academics' experiences and understandings. While the questionnaire results revealed some issues statistically (particularly in relation to inconsistency); the interviews dug deeper into those issues. As the

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[6] 'Wicked' competences are ones that are hard to define and that cause assessors lots of problems. Yet these competences are often soft skills and other complex achievements that graduate employers say they value. The term 'wicked' competences is inspired by the idea that there are 'wicked' problems.

interview findings illuminated more issues and problems compare to survey results, the authors called for further 'close up' research to investigate lecturers' understandings, perceptions and attitudes regarding the learning, teaching and assessment of employability development in order to understand those TLA practices and associated logic-in-use.

As one of the key stakeholder groups, academics play a vital role in the very forefront of employability development in HE- they are directly involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum, and their practices effect on how students engage with the learning and the development of employability. As those research studies illustrated, their understandings and perceptions have impacts on their practices in TLA. Unarguably, teachers' attitudes and actions have profound impact on how students perceive and experience employability and their own employability development during their time in the university.

Like studies on students' perceptions and experiences, there is a very limited amount of research on lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions despite how important they are to the teaching learning and assessment of employability development. Nevertheless, with current research findings, it is no longer appropriate to just assume lecturers simply have an attitude of either for or against employability development in their programmes and institutions. And just like students' perceptions and understandings, those research revealed diversity and inconsistency in lecturers' understandings and practices. With Barrie's recommendation in mind, universities and policy makers must consult academics' understandings and perceptions on the employability issue and taking considerations of their views primarily with students' views if any meaningful improvements and reforms of HE strategies and practices wish to be carried out.

2.3.4   Summary and some issues

Through reviewing the literatures on students' and lecturers' perceptions, understandings and experiences on employability and employability development in higher education, it is clear that despite their roles within this issue, those two groups' experiences and thoughts are largely overlooked. One of the key reasons for this is perhaps the methodological complications of researching students' and academics' thoughts and experiences qualitatively, as Knight and Page (2007) pointed out that such research can be time and resource consuming (I will address this challenge in the two methodology chapters). In addition, there are some other issues I feel it is worthwhile for me to take a further examination to inform this research.

- The belief that government employability agenda is harmful

Although research studies on academics' understandings and perceptions are limited, there has never been lack of publications by academics on the issue of employability. It appears that a large number of academics have doubts about employability agenda, with some are even resisting it. This is largely due to that those academics believe that the political employability agenda is a simplistic view on a complex issue which primarily focuses on employment outcomes.
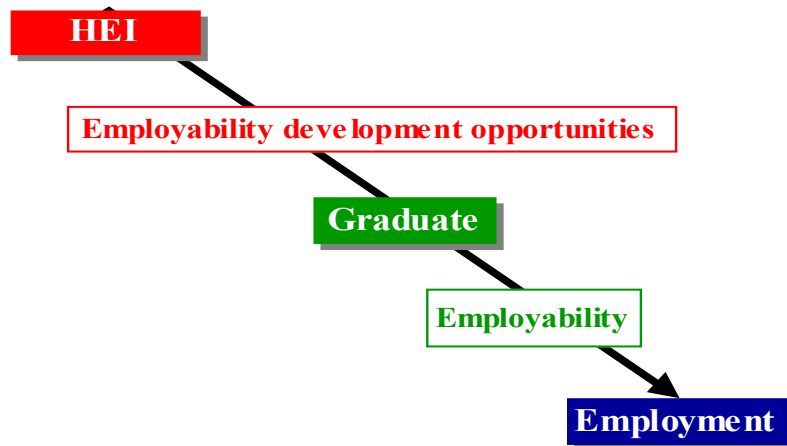
Figure 2 Government's "Magic bullet" model of employability (Harvey 2006)

It seems those political and economical expectations on HE have made many academics feel their HE and academia ideologies and values are challenged by this political agenda (see Figure 2). Publications were made to demonstrate how the government's simple believe on graduates employment and income relate to overall improvement of the country's economy is flawed (e.g. Wolf, 2002; Harvey, 2000). Indeed, looking at definitions of graduate employability from authors like Yorke, Knight and Harvey, it is clear for academics employability is NOT just about employment outcomes (e.g. first destination result), it is about what skills and attributes students have developed and how they can demonstrate it in a working environment. Furthermore, the likes of Barnett (1994) also challenged the value of graduate competences:

"We are seeing the displacement of one limited version of competence by another even more limited interpretation…in the new version, competence is given an operational twist and is marked out by know-how, competence and skills. In this operationalism, the key question is not 'What do students understand?' but 'What can students do?'"

In a deeper level, there is a strong sense that the very foundation of HE and academic value has been shaken as many academics feel the political employability agenda (i.e. graduates' employment rates and income) is taking over the primary purpose of HE(that is promoting learning and research to advance knowledge and practices, Barnett, 2008). With a

combination of complex issue like increasing tuition fees and marketisation of higher education, academics fear that universities are seen as service businesses where students pay for their employability – only here employability means employment. The increasing interference from the government and businesses on the issue of employability has also led to academics' concerns about their academic value and freedom. Nevertheless, many academics have pointed out that those employability attributes employers look for in graduates are complex attributes which are also vital for academic learning. This has questioned whether the employers themselves understand what university learning is about.

"Employability derives from complex learning, and is a concept of wider range than those of 'core' and 'key' skills" and states that employability is as a collection of capacities or achievements which constitute a necessary but not sufficient condition for the gaining of employment (which is dependent, inter alia, on the contemporary state of the economy) and considerably more complex than some proponents of 'core', and 'key' skills have suggested, and is strongly aligned with the academic valuing of good learning." (York, 2006, p.3)

- Mixed messages, understanding gaps – the focus of this study:

Through reviewing the literature, it is apparent that the messages from the students and academics are limited, but also mixed. As discussed above, the lack of consideration of the academics' and students' voices in employability agenda seem to make many academics resist it because they feel it is a top-down approach that government and businesses are forcing down on higher education. Even within the limited research that looked into academics' and students' understanding and experiences, the diversity of them seems to be problematic. Firstly, as pointed out by Barrie's papers (2007, 2006), the same language does not necessarily mean the same thing. When people talk about employability, skills and so on, it is likely that their definitions and conceptions are different. However, often, this difference in understanding is ignored, instead, there is an assumption that everyone is talking about the 'same thing'. This assumption sets further problems to employability development because people think they are talking about the same thing, but in fact they mean different things. For instance, lecturers could be talking about how students' employability can be developed through certain modules (e.g. work based learning) in which they mean students' employability skills, attributes and experiences can be developed through doing such module; but the student might understand it as after doing such module, they have better chance to be employed. Nevertheless, this assumption of shared understanding can also cause problems to research on employability, as often the terminologies (e.g. employability, skills, etc.) used in research studies are not clearly defined because the researcher and the researched assume they are talking about the same thing, but in fact the meanings are 'lost in translation' in the process (Cable et al, 2008).

Secondly, it seems that there are generally some dissonances amongst students and lecturers on what employability is about and how it should be developed and enhanced. Although findings from my above discussed are from different studies in different countries (Tomlinson, 2008, 2007; Knight and Page, 2007; Barries, 2007, 2006), clearly within the students group and the academics group, they experience and perceive the issues differently; moreover, there is a gap between the two groups. For example, though academics feel discipline knowledge is key, and can help students with their employability development (Barrie, 2007), students seem to feel discipline contents have very little relevance to their employability (Tomlinson, 2008). Through Tomlinson's findings, clearly many students are unclear about what employability is and how their HE learning relates to it; and Barrie's papers demonstrated the diverse and somewhat confused messages from the academics.

Although in today's mass participation higher education, diversity of thoughts is inevitable, lack of understandings and communications amongst the groups about their own perceptions and experiences seems to be one of the key reasons that employability development is a troublesome matter for HE teaching, learning and assessment. As pointed out by Archer and Davison (2008) and Mason et al (2006), even though many universities now are committed to develop and enhance students' employability, at the practical level, there is a mismatch of what is developed (i.e. what the universities are working on as their understanding of employability) and what needs to be developed (i.e. what the students really need to develop and what the employers are looking for). As a result of this, we often see those headlines in popular media stating graduates do not feel their HE improved their employability, and employers do not feel graduates are employable. But should universities take the sole blame on the problem when the insiders' voice are not heard?

Through my whole literature review, it is apparent to me that we are still far from fully understanding this complex 'wicked' problem of developing employability in HEIs, like Cranmer (2006) pointed out that despite the best intentions, and outcomes are very mixed on employability development. Indeed, as there are three layers of complexity within this issue: the concept of employability itself, the policies and TLA practices for employability development, and the experiences and understandings of policies and practices; we are still unclear on a lot of the issues and problems within those three layers of complexity. In the past, different studies have used different approaches to examine such issues, but because of its complexity, there are still many problems need to be illuminated and examined via different approaches and perspectives. Currently, the differences between the government, the employers and the HEIs still remain the issue even though it has been raised more than

a decade ago (e.g. Harvey, 2000). As pointed out by Cranmer (2006), '*employability issue are at the very core of contemporary HE in the UK*', as

> *"there are difficulties inherent within the employability in the HE agenda at every turn: from defining, to measuring, to developing, to transferring. The elusive quality of employability makes it a woolly concept to pin down…despite the best intentions of academics to enhance graduates' employability, the limitations inherent with the agenda will consistently produce mixed outcomes" (p. 172)*

With all those findings from context and literature in mind, this research is going to use 'close up' research approach to explore:

> *"What are the understandings, perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students regarding students' employability development in undergraduate degree programmes?"*

With focuses on illuminating the 'fine-grained' (ibid, p. xv) details of the thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding students' employability development that lecturers and students encounter in their degree programmes, this research aims to:

1. empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment;
2. identify dissonances and congruence in perceptions by comparing and contrasting the experiences and thoughts from the two groups in order to illuminate some of the vital problems in this issue;
3. sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE;
4. **develop methodological understandings regarding conducting research on and about higher education, particularly those focusing on the culture and everyday life of HE insiders.**

Part II: Methodological rationales, designs and processes

In this first part of my methodology chapters, I want to mainly describe and discuss the rationales for my methodological underpin and the process in which this research was planned and carried out. However, this section is NOT a step by step guide of what I did from day one to now (more detail on some of key stages of this study can be found in Appendix 2 my MPhil to PhD transfer report); rather this chapter highlights some of those key methodological issues and stages.

I want to point out that the use of methodology in this thesis means both the techniques of doing research as well as a way of coming to understand more about the reality I am studying (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). As I explained in the introduction of this thesis, this chapter will be the first of my two methodology chapters. As I intended to present this thesis as a chronological development of my doctoral research, this part of the work mainly concerns about my early stage of methodological understandings and applications. This includes what methodological underpins and method I chose to carry out my data collection and analysis, and why I chose them. To put a time onto this phase, it was between my initial research proposal (early 2009) till I finished my data collection (early 2011).

Although I feel this chapter does address most of those crucial methodological issues critically, all the *deep* reflective and reflexive part of my methodological understandings did not happen at this stage. As such realisation and understanding happens gradually through the process of 'doing' the research, I feel I must address them later on in my writing because I do feel some of the challenges I experienced during my research are largely due to lack of 'real' understandings and experiences on conducting this level of research at the early stage. But how could I know when I did not do it before? So I hope this two-parter methodology can help you seeing the development of a doctoral research student's learning journey, as well as some methodological and theoretical development concerning research on and about higher education. After all, it is one of the aims of this research to *'develop methodological understandings regarding conducting research on and about higher education, particularly those focusing on the culture and everyday life of HE insiders'.*

Chapter 3 – Methodology and method

3.1 Methodological rationales

3.1.1 A qualitative close-up research

As this research set out to explore students' and lecturers' experiences, perceptions and understandings in relation to employability development in higher education, it has adopted what Prichard and Trowler (2003) have described as 'close up' research in HE approach in order to provide 'fine-grained' (*ibid*, p.xv) details of the thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding students' employability development that lecturers and students encounter in current degree programmes. As a research approach, close up research in HE is still an unfamiliar notion to a lot of people (even a lot of academics). Indeed, one of the feedbacks I received about my initial research proposal was 'what this close up research is about?'

Close-up research, as an approach to study HE related issues, is developed as more and more academics recognise that a lot of the HE policies and practices have been carried out as unexamined and unopposed assumptions (ibid). The HE Close Up Conference started from 1998 aims to promote fine-grained research which concerns HE everyday practices and issues. As stated by Prichard and Trowler (2003), close up research is not about a particular method or even methodological framework, but it does take up the qualitative paradigm for its two senses of close up-ness[7].

Methodologically, the name 'close up' research is pretty self-explained - a study taking up appropriate approaches (mainly qualitative) to look at an issue or a number of issues closely in order to *illuminate* the details with a particularly interest in everyday human practices in a complex setting (ibid). The key here is illuminating as the purpose of such research approach is NOT to solve any complex problem, but to explore and shine lights on some major issues which will then be put into further investigation. This is particularly useful and appropriate for my kind of studies. First, this study aims to explore lecturers' and students' experiences, understandings and perceptions toward students' employability development in their degree programmes which is about illuminating fine-grained details of students and lecturers everyday practices and their thoughts. Secondly, as discussed in literature review, the issue regarding students' employability development in HE is complex and problematic in which our understanding of the concept is still very limited, particularly in relation to the "insiders' voice". Taking up with qualitative illuminative approach can certainly identify some 'fine-grained' date (as suggested by Knight and Page, 2007) which will be able to progress our

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[7] Close up research and other forms of HE research are not in opposition to each other, they complement each other for better understanding of the respective issues.

understanding on what students and lecturers experience and think about employability development in university. Of course, as this study forms part of the NTF project, taking such approach is also required by the project.

Traditionally, the selection for methodological framework tends to boil down to the debate regarding qualitative and quantitative paradigms. However, often, qualitative approaches were chosen because quantitative approaches had been rejected. Rather than looking at them as two alternative epistemological perspectives, a lot of people tend to compare their differences in a negative fashion in which Oakley (2000) describes as paradigm wars. However, I hold the view that both paradigms are equally valid (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Indeed, as suggested by Silverman (2005), rather than viewing them as being oppositions, qualitative and quantitative approaches lie along a continuum, and the critical decision lines with the researcher to locate the most appropriate approach(es) to investigate the issue(s). And my decision on using qualitative approach to study the issue regarding students' and lecturers' understandings, experiences and perceptions has certainly been taken based on a number of underlying rationales.

First, as I explained above, this study is about exploring and illuminating some issues that were not looked at before. For me, this is the first stage of Silverman's continuum (2005), before putting any claim into test for generalisation. So it is about inductive reasoning and exploration, thus a qualitative approach is most suited. Secondly, it was clear to me that the current 'objective' 'quantitative' approach to employability research does not appropriately and holistically present the concept of students' employability development in HE regarding students' and lecturers' experiences and thoughts. As I stated in the literature review, current studies focusing on economic and political aspects of employability, in most cases employment patterns, clearly lack in educational and social consideration of the employability development experiences. A fresh and different approach to this issue needs to be considered, particularly when the issue is so complex and dynamic. Thirdly, and I feel most importantly, this research is set out to empower the voice of the insiders, and this can only be achieved through qualitative approach which can help to gather and interpret (delicately) the experiences and meanings of students' and lecturers' daily lives. As Prichard and Trowler (2003) have pointed out, this kind of study sometimes looks into what some people may consider as private and sensitive issues. Such sensitive data cannot be achieved through the use of quantitative surveys and instruments. This is particularly my interest, because in an ironic way, HE seems almost reluctant to research their insiders' experiences and thoughts (Barnett, 2007; Prichard and Trowler, 2003) despite they take great research interests in every other sectors of our society.

Indeed, the '*real*' life experiences and thoughts of our students and lecturers are what I am interested in. And this is where the second notion of close-up-ness from such an approach comes in. If just looking at the methodological notion of close up research, it could be argued that it is just another name for in depth qualitative studies. Indeed, the methodological characteristics do suggest that a close up research is a 'fine-grained' qualitative study approach. However, the uniqueness of this type of research lies with its second notion of close-up-ness - the theoretical one. As suggested by Prichard and Trowler (2003), close-up research in HE is particularly focused on the everyday professional practices and issues in the HE setting. The underpin philosophy for close-up research is that "*the best research comes from people who are close to the action*" (ibid, p. xv). The key is to ask 'real questions' (ibid, p. xiv) which is generated through the reflection of everyday professional practice in HE as oppose to research agendas generated by the government and politicians.

'Real questions generated by insiders', again connects to the notion of empowering the students and lecturers through a bottom up approach. And reflect back to my original personal inspirations (see Preface) for this study at the first place, this has always been my motivation. Through examining literature, it has been clear to me that students and lecturers (especially) somehow are the 'marginalised' groups out of all those key stakeholders of HE regarding employability related issues.

One key issue must be pointed out here is the subjectivity in such research, here also connects with the question that 'What are those *real questions,* and where they come from'. As I discussed in the literature review, employability, with its multiple complex connections to a number of areas and layers, certainly has a large part of socially constructed meanings by those key stakeholders. In this socially constructed notion of employability, lies the multiple perspectives of its 'reality'. For Prichard and Trowler (2003), the real questions in close up research are really about issues those within HE face in their everyday lives. In other words, they are NOT questions generated by 'authorities'. Although, this study is funded by a HEA NTF project, the 'freedom' to ask my research questions was always placed in my own hands (within the research aims of NTF of course). It is in my interest to describe and interpret these multiple perspectives of meanings and experiences. This is particularly valuable to understand 'how social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) by my participants. For me, students' and lecturers' understandings, experiences and attitudes toward employability related issues are certainly constructed by their individual perspectives.

But 'where those *real questions* come from'? Certainly, as the investigator of this research, I am the one who ask those questions. But from which perspective? And how it will affect my participants' interpretation of my research and those questions I ask? As I stated in the

Preface section, initially my perspective was from the students' point of view (and this is what I was employed by the NTF project to do). However, through the process of developing research questions and aims, I have also adopted a researcher's perspective to look at this issue. For me, those two perspectives have not contradicted each other yet. Till now, my original motivation and questions about the issue remain the same, only the researcher's perspective has compensated my students' perspective with theoretical and methodological underpins. In this sense, subjectivity always remains in any kind of human actions (even with those quantitative approaches), but it is the methodological and theoretical underpin of such subjectivity gives meaningful sense and interpretation of the data. The goal here is "*to learn 'what is going on here?', and to investigate social phenomena without explicit expectations*" (Schutt, 2008, p.14). However, this issue regarding research perspectives later becomes complicated when I start to also adopt academics' perspective with my teaching and research duties in the university. In the second Methodology chapter, I will examine and reflect on this issue in details.

On the matter of subjectivity, comes to the interpretive philosophical framework this study has adopted. As I mentioned in literature review, the notion of employability and employability development in HE is highly socially and politically constructed. Particularly for individual students, employability development in HE is a socially constructed process of making sense their HE learning and experiences (Tomlinson, 2007). Like I stated above, my interest in this research is to identify and understand how students and lecturers experience employability development and make sense of those experiences. Certainly, an interpretive framework is the key here to see ways for me to understand how my participants come to understand, define and interpret the meanings (Schwandt, 1994) of their HE experiences. This production of knowledge is generated through my interaction with participants in the environment where we all live our daily HE experiences (Ball, 1997). Underneath this layer of interpretation, lies their own interpretation of their HE experiences-constructed by themselves as well as the authorities (e.g. government, employers, and HE policy makers). In short, it is my interpretation, using my theoretical and methodological knowledge as well as my understandings of students and lecturers perspectives through my own experiences in higher education, of their interpretations of employability development in higher education. This realisation about the interpretive analytical framework this study has adopted is crucial as the key of Interpretivism is the *relationship* between the 'knower' and the 'known' (Trexler, 2001) which goes back to the key question I asked before about 'real questions'. To ensure my interpretation of their interpretations is scientifically valid, two key methodological approaches are used: a phenomenological framework and reflexivity (the latter is in the second methodology chapter).

3.1.2   Taking the essence of phenomenology

As this study sets out to explore and understand students' and lecturers' experiences and thoughts of their 'shared' employability development experiences in higher education. I have identified phenomenology as the most suited ontological and epistemological paradigm to offer this study a methodological framework.

But why phenomenology?

This is because phenomenology is best suited when the research is about

"understanding several individual's common experiences of a phenomenon, and it would be important to understand those common experiences in order to develop practices, policies, and to develop a deeper understanding about the features of this phenomenon". (Creswell, 2007, p.57)

Certainly, for this study, it is about trying to understand "*a social problem [or issue] based on building a complex picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting*" (Creswell, 2007,p.1).

As previously stated, to deal with the subjectivity of the data and indeed my own assumptions, a sound methodological and theoretical framework must be put into place to ensure its credibility. In terms of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings, what does phenomenology offer which is different from other qualitative paradigms, such as grounded theory, (which seems popular with other qualitative doctoral studies)? This process of coming to phenomenology, for me, was somewhat accidental. After deciding on using the qualitative close up research approach, I immersed myself in methodology books, trying to find that *perfect* paradigm as my methodological answer to my research framework.

It was not easy! How could it be easy since I had not actually done the research? In my mind, there was this strange tangle between the methodological design and the actual doing of research: on one hand, I thought I must get the methodological design right from the very beginning to ensure there is NO flaw in my whole research process, but on the other hand, I thought "how could I make sure this when this study takes up such long time and large amount of data?" Throughout this process, I came to the realisation that the selection of methodological paradigm is like a two-way street: as I was picking my methodology, the methodology also found me because how I see the world and what I regard as knowledge (back to ontology and epistemology). For me, I always knew how I want to carry out this study. So as soon as I read about phenomenology, I quickly identified it as my research framework. This process has been precisely described by Creswell (2007)

"An educator, van Manen, has written an instructive book on hermeneutical phenomenology in which he describes research as oriented toward lived experiences (phenomenology) and

interpreting the 'text' of life (hermeneutics). Although van Manen does not approach phenomenology with a set of rules or methods, he discusses phenomenology research as a dynamic interplay among six research activities. Researchers first run to a phenomenon, an 'abiding concern' (p. 31), which seriously interests them (e.g. reading, running, driving, mothering). In the process, they reflect on essential themes, what constitutes the nature of this lived experience. They write a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relation to the topic of inquiry and balancing the parts of the writing to the whole. Phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences." (p.58)

You might have noticed that rather than call it 'a phenomenological study', I used the term 'taking the essence of phenomenology'. This is because, although I have taken up phenomenology as the core methodological framework, I feel this study is not solely a development and application of phenomenology into employability research, rather it is using phenomenology to study our students' and lecturers experiences and thoughts. As Creswell pointed out (ibid), I took the approach van Manen did – that is rather than following the strict set of rules and methods, I have followed the spirit of Phenomenology through those six research activities referred to by Creswell in the above quote. As a result, under the phenomenological framework, there are also other approaches like case study, grounded theory, and so on.

A crucial point must be discussed here regarding the spirit of phenomenology that I have followed is the difference between Empirical Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). Often, those two approaches have been set out opposing each other as alternatives to interpret and construct the 'same' phenomenon – while the Empirical approach attempts to be objective, and the Hermeneutic approach aims to be holistic, I feel in this study, I should use and have been using both approaches when it is required. Certainly, as the inspiration and the initial questions of this study came from my students' experiences in the UK HEI, my identity as a student in this context and my interpretation of my **own** experiences have played an essential part in this research. Taking Heidegger's Hermeneutic Phenomenology essence, my 'being' in this context, my reflective understanding of the issue, asking 'real questions', and my shared background with some of my participants have helped me in developing a holistic view of the issue from a students' perspective, as an insider. As this research set out to investigate HE insiders' experiences and thoughts, I am certainly one of those insiders, which is what close up research is about. In addition, it has been my intention to look at the issue regarding employability development holistically, through illuminating and interpreting the meaning of 'being a student' and 'being a lecturer' in this employability driven HE context. It is through accessing 'lived' experiences of those students and lecturers, that I can gain an understanding of the meanings and perceptions of their realities. This sense of being has been presented to me by Barnett's book (2007) on 'A Will To Learn-Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty'. In it, Barnett has

demonstrated how the rich descriptions of students' experiences form the identity of what a student in today's HE world is like, at the same time giving new meaning to HE through those students' experiences.

However, although at times, my involvement with this study is as an insider of higher education, I also feel that I am an outsider to my participants in that I am not completely immersed in my their life world. Certainly, taking Heidegger's approach (Creswell, 2007) to employability can offer a holistic understanding of the phenomenon through looking at the meaning of being students and lecturers living with this issue; but, at the same time, there are also elements of this study where I act as a researcher with a critical eye looking at the issue from outside my participants' world. This is where I feel another approach to phenomenology (what Creswell calls Empirical Phenomenology) should also play its part in this research. Developed by Heidegger's teacher Husserl as the early development of phenomenology, this approach takes a more 'objective' perspective to investigate the chosen phenomenon. Although it still focuses on the real life experiences shared by my participants, my perspective as the researcher of this study to some issues remains natural and neutral (e.g. I have attempted to 'bracket' (ibid) my insider identity out to offer a 'third' person observation and interpretation of the issue – for details on issues regarding my 'natural' and 'neutral' perspective throughout the research, see section *3.2.1.1. Staff Interviews, 3.2.1.2. Student interviews and my reflexive reflection in section 7.2. Being and 7.3 The Challenges of Close Up Research in Higher Education*). However, I am very aware that a complete state of 'objectivity' is not achievable, as Heidegger pointed out to Husserl, it is not possible to approach everything freshly as if for the first time (ibid).

Certainly, as I pointed out before, though it seems straightforward to write about the rationale behind taking the essence of phenomenology, taking quotes and ideas from text books; during actually doing the research, the triangulations amongst theories, methodologies and philosophical paradigms were complex and messy. It is during 'doing' the research, I have come to somewhat real understandings to meanings regarding 'hermeneutic phenomenology', 'lived experience', 'authentic settings', 'objective perspective', 'being' and so on, which I will address in the second methodology chapter. Nevertheless, with such understanding, I certainly feel I can only claim this study has taken the *essence* of phenomenology.

3.1.3 Semi-structured individual interviews

My decision to use individual semi-structured interviews, out of all the qualitative data collection methods (e.g. focus groups, observations, reflective dairies etc.), was largely due to two principal reasons. First, I believe it suits the aims of this study, and can provide

answers to the research questions under my methodological framework, particularly taking into consideration the timing restriction this project has had. As this research seeks to explore students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions regarding students' employability development during their degree programmes, it is important that those thoughts, feelings and experiences were expressed by the participants through their own words. Although as I mentioned before, I have taken the essence of hermeneutical phenomenology in which my own involvement and reflections are crucial to the development of research questions and discussions, equally important is that one-to-one individual interview allows me to access my participants' consciousness - using their own words to describe and reflect their own experiences and thoughts. The shared understanding between me and my individual participants in those interviews could not be created and developed through other methods (e.g. if it was in an observation situation where I collect data through the perspective of a researcher).

Certainly, interview is a powerful method, particularly for unpacking the experiences and thoughts of individuals (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Through the richness of participants describing their feelings and experiences using their own words, the researcher and the researched can make the connection between their *conscious* thoughts, feelings and interpretations and the social context within which they are located (ibid). In my case, the ways students and lecturers perceive and describe that perception of employability development in their programmes provides me with an understanding of how they frame their experiences in the current context. This is certainly what this close up phenomenological study sets out to achieve. While the 'structured' interview questions allow me to carry out triangulations and examination between students' and lecturers' interviews, and between my study and other research studies' findings (e.g. Barrie, Tomlinson); the flexibility of such an approach also means I have room to explore and expand those students' and lecturers' narratives for a close-up illumination on their experiences and thoughts regarding employability development.

Secondly, I chose one-to-one semi-structured interview because I have previously had experience with such method. So I feel confident and comfortable using such approach to collect data. Going back to Heideggerian phenomenological perspective on undertaking research, I feel my experiences and preconceptions about semi-structured interview should be acknowledged and utilised rather than dismissed. Like my methodological framework, I believe with regard to research method, it should be more about how the method is used meaningfully. Although there are other options in terms of interviewing methods (e.g. unstructured, storytelling, etc.), I feel semi-structured interview can let me ask my

participants questions that I identified through literature review and reflection, at the same time there is the room for expansion and explanation into more details about their answers.

In addition to interviews, I also decided to use some documents (e.g. programme handbooks, students' CVs) collected by myself or given to me by my participants as supporting data.

3.2   Process

Doing a PhD is an on-going process, but as I said before, I do not want to make this part into a step by step guide of the process. So I am going to focus on what I feel is important, providing some snapshots of the process on my data collection here. In Appendix 2, you will find my MPhil to PhD transfer report which has a lot of the details about my data collection process (e.g. Research stages flowchart, the original plan and pilot study, philosophy table, etc.), and the research settings (local context) are in Appendix 3 (the institution i.e. LJMU, the faculty i.e. IM Marsh, and the two programmes i.e. PE and OE), Here, I am going to discuss the crucial part in this process - data collection (participants, interviews and ethical issues),data analysis and writing up.

3.2.1   Data collection

After pilot study, the 'official' data collection took place between September 2009 and January 2011 from recruiting participants to my final interview, during which I also have done my transcriptions and started my data analysis. I have split this section into two to talk about the staff interviews and the students' interviews separately; though the data collection for both groups was carried out at the same period of time, there are specific issues with each individual group I would like to address (interview procedure details in Appendix 4).

3.2.1.1   Staff interview

Getting lecturers to talk about employability is easy nowadays, but getting lecturers to talk about what they *really* think about employability was not so easy. From participant recruitment to interviews, a number of issues had occurred which made me reflect on the ethical issues. As Prichard and Trowler (2003) pointed out, close up research for some people deals with some very private and sensitive issues. Of course, getting people to talk about their personal experiences and perceptions of employability and employability development in their programmes is a sensitive issue at a sensitive time.

At the participant recruitment stage, I did not manage to recruit all the full time lecturers from the two programmes as I had planned to. After emailing and meeting staff members from OE and PE for several times (collectively and individually), explaining the research and trying to gain their consent to be interviewed, majority of lecturers agreed to take part in the interviews

(eleven in total, six from OE, five from PE). Though I understood there may be a number of reasons for lecturers not being able to take part in this study – maybe because they were busy teaching and doing their own research; but also I felt maybe they did not want to be *interviewed by me* because they did not want to *talk about employability*.

As this research set out to empower the insiders, I was very concerned about letting their voice be heard. However, I came to realise, maybe their absence in the research can also demonstrate how they feel about employability and employability development in their programmes, thus their 'silent voice' should not be seen as simply they do not want to talk because sometimes silence speaks louder than words (Jaworski, 1993). Silence in such context can be a subtle way of those lecturers telling me 'I don't know much about employability' or 'I don't want to be associated with employability' or 'I don't care about employability agenda'. Though I do not really know why they did not want to take part in this research, certainly I cannot and should not ignore the absent of their voice. Particularly when taking into consideration of some of the ethical issues surrounding this study, arguably some lecturers felt the authenticity and the purposes of this research were questionable.

As explained before, this research was funded as part of the NTF project in LJMU. Though personally I felt I had autonomy in terms of how I designed and conducted my research, the power dynamic in the NTF project team and my supervisor team[8] meant sometimes my participants might perceive there were other agendas attached to this study, as well they had concerns about the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews. As far as some of them were concerned, their participation was not anonymous due to the close-up research nature and the supervisor team structure. As a result, the confidentiality of what they said in those interviews was crucial – for me, I had to ensure such confidentiality was always protected in order to ensure what the lecturers told me was what they *really* thought. Such issues certainly echo Prichard and Trowler (2003), who are concerned about the ethical problems which come with the close-up nature of such research. Indeed, through this process, though the aim was to ask 'real' questions to gain 'real' answers, I was constantly questioning the meaning of 'being real' in this setting.

There were long pauses and silence, and queries like 'I am not sure if I should tell you about this'. Some lecturers even joked about me being a spy. After a while, it was clear to me, some lecturers were giving me 'correct' answers (i.e. answers they believe I wanted to hear or answers they wanted me to hear). Although those answers might not be the lecturers' 'real'

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[8] The project was led by directors of the faculty and the then Learning Development Unit who directly and indirectly manage the academic delivery of the faculty; my supervisor team was consists of those directors and a senior academic management member who directly manage most of the lecturers I interviewed.

thoughts or experiences regarding employability development, in the context of my interview, those were the answers they wished me to hear and to report. Even if I overheard them in the staff room expressing their thoughts differently on the 'same' issue covered in my interviews, those 'staff room talks' were in a different context, with different people. Those lecturers were talking to their colleagues as opposed to talking to a research student from a NTF project.

Another methodological issue relating to lecturers' interviews was about the immersive nature of the employability agenda and higher education. Between September 2009 and January 2011 (when the field study was carried out), a number of new government policies and university strategies were implemented within the department. The biggest impact was that the undergraduate PE course was terminated due to the government's new teacher training strategy. As a result, some of the findings from PE lecturers and students now seem irrelevant. In addition to this, there have been a lot of new policies and schemes specifically in relation to students' employability development, such as the introduction of the World of Work (WOW) project and the implementation of the Graduate Skills (LJMU, 2013) into all LJMU programmes (see Appendix 3 for details).

The immersive nature of this study has had a significant impact on my interviews, particularly in relation to lecturers' interviews. Compared to students' interviews which had a particular focus on those individual students' own personal experiences and thoughts, lecturers' interviews were much more holistic. They focused on their programmes, the university, the HE sector, their own professional sector and beyond.

Throughout the interviews, particularly with those staff members who are new to higher education, there were many moments when they felt they could not give me an answer as they believed they did not have sufficient amount of knowledge on specific issues. There were also occasions when some lecturers altered their answers from our previous interviews because they had gained new knowledge about some particular issues. To me, those were precious moments as they exactly captured the essences of Close Up research in higher education. Here, as well as their answers, how their answers had changed is part of the data in this study. After all, it is about HE insiders' daily experiences and thoughts, and those experiences and thoughts are not lived in isolation. During the past few years while the government has changed, a lot has changed in higher education, and this must be reflected within this kind of research – even though the data only captured small snapshots of local practices on Campus. (See Appendix 3 for details on LJMU and IM Marsh), it does illuminate some key issues. Certainly, the immersive nature of HE policies and practices is one of those issues.

In a sense, I am released from the 'validity issue' in that I did not need to go to check whether the participants told me untruthful fact. Even if they made up stories, it is the act that constructed another reality in the research which they wish to present to me. Rather than going through the transcript sentence by sentence to check 'truth', I treated each person's account as a whole. This was what they wanted me to know at that point of time, in that context. I am fully aware that their opinion probably has changed by now, and what they told me on that day was a combination of their thoughts on the past, the present and the future at that specific time, but giving that we are human beings investigating human beings, those kind of issues will always exist. The key is to deal with it through a meaningful methodological framework and a deep reflexive process throughout the research (Chapter 7).

After gaining the consent from those lecturers, I started interviewing them according to my interview plan. For each individual, we had our semi-structured interview first. Those interviews lasted between 51 minutes to 1 hour and 33 minutes, during which we covered all my scheduled questions (see Appendix 4) and expanded on some answered accordingly. Within those 11 lecturers, I managed to have a second interview with eight of them (five from OE and three from PE) to further explore some of the issues regarding employability development. Again, those interviews were long and in-depth (between 43 minutes and 1 hour 23 minutes), during which the participants provided a lot of narratives about their experiences and reflections. To a lot of them, those interviews gave them opportunities to reflect on their own practices as a lecturer. By talking to me about their thoughts and practices, some of them even came up with new plans and ideas for their teaching, assessment and pedagogic practices. For example, a female lecturer told me that sometimes she felt 'lonely' as there are very few females in this 'traditionally masculine subject area'. By talking to me, particularly as our interviews took more than an hour, she felt she had opportunities to reflect and it was important that as her interviewer I listened and prompted questions. As a result, she had new ideas for her module revalidation, and now there are new modules within the programme to address issues we talked about during the interview. Some lecturers admitted to me that those talks were therapeutic to their mind and constructive to their practices This is exactly what I wanted to achieve - if Close Up research is about HE insider's everyday life and 'real' issues relate to them, certainly providing a platform for our academics to engage with deep personally reflection on their practices is a valuable achievement.

3.2.1.2   Student interview

Students' interviews started later than lecturers' ones. The whole recruitment process took from October 2009 to February 2010. This was largely caused by final year students' research project submission deadline was around February and PE students were in their

final placement until 2009 Christmas break. This unexpected delay meant the whole data collection process was shorted by three month (interviews carried out between January and July 2010). As a result, out of all 11 students (six from OE and five from PE), two of them (one from OE and one from PE) I only managed to interview them once. One of the OE students withdrew his consent midway through the research. In the end, I had five OE students (four of them I interviewed twice) and five PE students (four of them I interviewed twice). Similarly to lecturers' interviews, while the first time, we covered those semi-structured interviews (Appendix 4), the second time, the students had carried out narratives and reflections.

Initially, recruiting students was not easy. With permission from programme leaders, I gave presentations to the students, but in the end only a few showed an interest. Attempts were then made to 'snowball' the sample (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As a result, the students from each programme were all housemates and/or good friends with each other. Certainly I understood the bias this could potentially add to the data, but just like the subjectivity issue with the lectures' interviews, I feel the impact this had can be addressed with the right data analysis process carefully. Indeed, first, interviews were carried out individuals, so the 'friend' affect was minimum during the interviews, because they did not need to worry about certain characteristics they show in front of their friends. Occasionally, some students said similar things (even the same quotes) as their friends did during the interviews, but as generalisation is not the aim of this study, I feel with similar point of view, the students' interviews still provided enough insight of their experiences and thoughts to illuminate key issues about their employability development. Nevertheless, even sometimes some of those students share similar views on certain issues; none of them had exactly the same experiences and thoughts about all those issues we talked about during our interviews. With those interviews, rich data was generated (even the shortest interview lasted 45 minutes)!

It was clear to me, my identity as an ex-undergraduate student from this campus had appeal to those students. Unlike the lecturers' interviews, once I had my student participants sat down in front of me, they told me a lot of things. If anything, sometimes I felt some interviews were too close. There were tears, dark personal secrets, very uncomfortable and sensitive experiences…A lot of time, they got carried away, and ended their long talks with a question 'I am sorry, what was your question?' But I got to let them talk, to make them feel comfortable and giving authentic insights about their experiences and thoughts.

There was a fine line for me to judge as the researcher, between carrying out an insightful interview and running counselling sessions. If the lecturers' interviews sometimes were therapeutic, it was clear that almost every student volunteered themselves for this study because they had something they want to say about their university experiences, most of

those experiences were extremely good or bad. This is understandable, after all, those students gave hours of their spare time talking to me, and sometimes they even needed to do a little preparation. For example, I asked the students to prepare some modules which they really liked and disliked, regarding their employability development, and talk through them. For this, those students had to prepare their modules handbooks, revise those handbooks to formularise themselves again about those modules, and do a reflection on why they liked and disliked those modules.

It was important for me to understand their motivations to take part of this study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). This helped me to understand and interpret their answers. Some students got involved because they really enjoyed the course, and they wanted to promote their delight and their achievement; some students had particularly bad experiences, which they had no one to talk to about, and they felt it was safe to share them with me. Of course, because the snowball sampling method, few of them were doing their friends a favour. Nevertheless, it was also important for the students to understand their own motivations in order to see how they understood the purpose of the research and my interview questions (ibid). During early stages of students' interviews, one student even said to me "Vanessa, what do you want me to say, and I will say it." Clearly, some of them felt I had specific things in mind I want to hear from them. Of course, this is not avoidable in any kind of research involving interactions with people. Just like the lecturers' interviews, they were immersive, but in a different way. To ensure the data has been interpreted and written up meaningfully, it has been crucial to establish a valid data analysis framework.

3.2.2   Data analysis

A particular challenge for this research is the rich and complex data from those lengthy interviews. As I mentioned before, in order to gain insightful information from my participants, sometimes I just left them to talk. With this amount of information, the data analysis framework must keep a focus on the research question and aims to ensure I don't get side tracked. This process was not easy, particularly during the first stage of data transcription and analysis, I was very caught up by each individual's experiences, wanting to tell all those stories my participants told me. Eventually, I realised this was not possible, as it detracted from the actual purposes of this research.

Reading through each person's interviews to develop a general idea of what thi person said-immerse my self into the details, trying to get a sense of each interview.

Systematically higherlights key statements, horizonalisation of the data-developing a lost of non-overlapping statements, formulating meanings

Mapping key statements to develop key themes
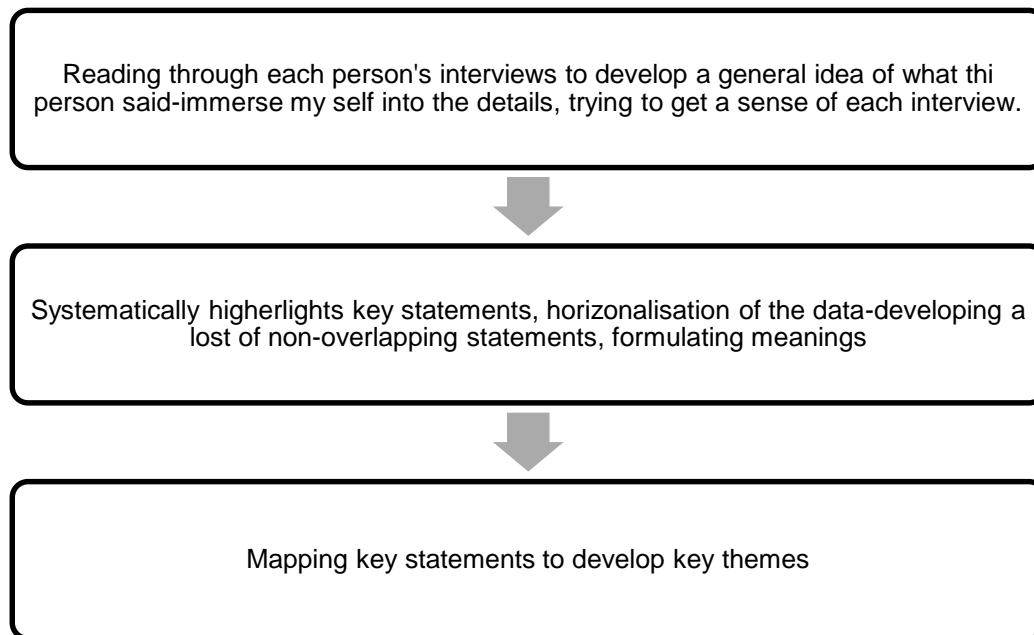
Figure 3 Initial data sorting out process

After almost going around in circles, I came to realise how a methodological framework works. Eventually I arrived at the 'right' way of doing data analysis, because my attempt to do it differently (e.g. case studies) did not work. Indeed, just like my participants' experiences and thoughts are immersive, my learning journey through this research has also evolved and developed like a flow of work (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As a result, I went through the following process to sort out the data from lecturers' and students' interviews accordingly to Titchen and Hobson's suggested analytical framework for phenomenological studies (2005).

After sorting out the initial layer of findings based on themes and issues highlighted in literature review, Creswell's Spiral (2007) data analysis frame was developed to further develop the data analysis and discussion. A key characteristic of this research's data is its immersive nature which calls for an analysis framework that deals with the multiple layers of information through its "several analytical circles, rather than a fixed linear approach" (Creswell, 2007, p.142). Certainly, for this research, the spiral framework has effectively dealt with the challenges I faced - matching up the descriptive players of the data with deeper analytical themes and issues which are embedded within the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As illustrated in the following figure, such an analytical framework allowed me to not only illuminate the deeper layers of the issues, but also capture the sense of the immersiveness of the research topics, the participants' interviews and my understanding and interpretations as the spiral *moves* down.
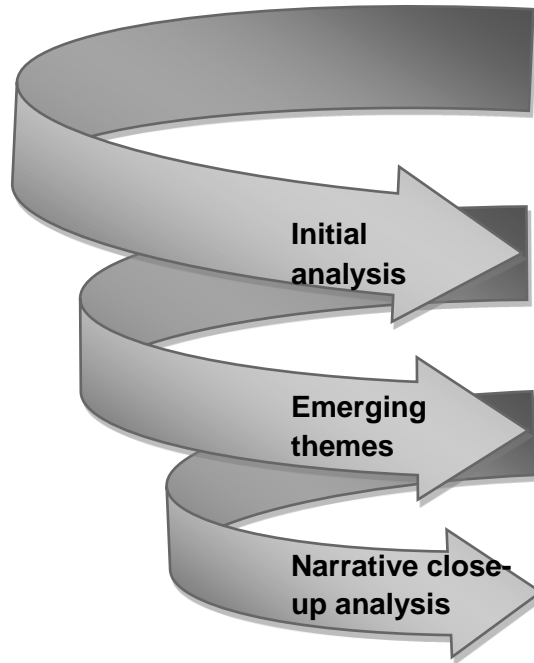
Figure 4 Spiral analysis framework (adapted from Creswell, 2007)

I must point out that, although the data collection of both lectures' and students' interviews took place during the same time period, the final analysis of the data was carried out separately, as I found it extremely difficult to analyse such large amounts of data at the same time. As a result, the analysis of lecturers' interviews was carried out before I analysed students' interviews. Consequently, the thought process and the development of themes followed the similar patterns. Though it could be argued that, if the order of the analysis was carried out differently, different themes and discussions might be constructed, this certainly reflects the subjective and immersive nature of phenomenological research as there are complex and multiple ways to interpret the 'same' reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). With such characteristics of interpretation in mind, it has to be said that the interpretation and discussions in this research was only one way of analysing the data, certainly it is not the only way and the data can be interpreted differently under different research questions and frameworks. This was demonstrated through the paper I wrote with Stott and Zaitseva (2012) to look at outdoor education students' fresher and graduate identities in relation to their employability.

3.2.3 Writing up

With such rich data, writing up the findings and discussion has been challenging. As I discussed before, this thesis has been intended to document the process of this research to demonstrate how the study has progressed and how I have progressed with it as a

researcher. As the research evolves, I have started to engage with different types of literature. As a result, my writing style has also evolved, and this is clearly illustrated by the different kind of writing styles in this thesis. Indeed, since the early stage of this study when I conducted my literature review before I started my field study, my writing was influenced by my previous research training in management degrees; as well, the types of journal articles I was reading and studying also influenced on how I wrote. However, ever since I started my field study, I have started to engage with different types of literature (e.g. Barnett, 2007, 2000, 1994; Foucault, 1970; Giddens, 1991, 1987; Goffman, 1959), and my writing style has changed significantly under the influence of those literatures. In addition, as discussed before, the close up interviews had generated very rich data which lead to the narrative analysis in the final circle of my spiral analysis. To write those narratives under this close up research framework means I need to present the data as authentic story telling so that my readers can engage with my participants' experiences and thoughts as vivid as they intended those to be! Finally, as I started to *really* understand qualitative social research (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and started to be reflexive about my research (see Chapter 7), my reflexivity has started to reflect in my interviews, my data analysis and my writing up style. As a result, I am no longer only reading and writing text literally (i.e. focusing on the literal content and form of the text), instead, I have started to read and write reflexively (i.e. focusing on my own orientations that shape my interpretations and focus) (Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

During my writing up, a particular challenge was to meaningfully present and discuss the findings from the spiral analysis, especially those rich narratives. Considering the close up research framework and the spirit of phenomenology this research has adopted, 'authentic' narratives are presented as those verbatim quotes from the interviews with my interpretations and analysis. Though amongst all 21 participants (11 lecturers and 10 students, see Appendix 5), there were many narratives, and I chose five (three from lecturers and two from students) in particular based on the aims of this study that are to:

- empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment,
- identify dissonances and congruence in perceptions by comparing and contrasting the experiences and thoughts from the two groups in order to illuminate some of the vital problems in this issue;
- sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE.

As the spiral analysis progresses from those 'structured' themes which I have identified through my literature review to those emerging themes, it was clear that those six narratives have the quality to:

- provide authentic and rich accounts on students' and lecturers' experiences and thoughts;
- represent other participants' experiences and thoughts;
- highlight some critical issues regarding employability development in HE.

Most importantly, I believe my examination, interpretation and discussion of those narratives can provide original contribution to this subject area.

Finally, a particular issue I must discuss here is the ethics of such narratives. As stated before, Prichard and Trowler (2003) have rightly shown their concern regarding those "private and sensitive issues" close up research is trying to investigate. Through my experience, those highly contextualised truths and realities can very easily be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Considering participants in this study were talking about their experiences with their peers, colleagues and this institution, protecting their anonymity and confidentiality has been a priority of this research. For me, this does not only provide my participants with confidence to tell me what they experienced and thought, but also give HE insiders the confidence to share with experiences and thoughts. However, through my reflection (Section 3.2.1 and Chapter 7), I feel both myself and my participants knew that because the overt description of the two programmes involved, complete anonymity is not possible even their names are pseudonyms and their identities are blurred in my participants' profiles (Appendix 5). Perhaps this 'overt' pseudonyms situation is one of the reasons for my participants to provide me with those contextualised truths. Nevertheless, to protect their anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in those narratives and participants profiles; in other discussions, I only labelled the quotes as 'OE lecturer', 'PE lecturer', 'OE student' and 'PE student'. I must also declare that all the final writing ups of those narratives have gained full consent from those participants involved[9].

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[9] Originally there were more narratives written. However, after checking with those participants, some of them did not want their narratives to be incorporated in the thesis. As a result, in this completed thesis, there are five narratives (three from lecturers and two from students) which still clearly illustrate the discussion points I make; at the same time, through this process of gaining participants' consent on using their interviews, I have experienced again those issues and challenges regarding the ethics of doing Close Up research in HE which I have discussed throughout my methodology chapters.

Part III: Findings and discussions

This part of the thesis is where I feel the process of '**doing the PhD**' took place after gaining initial understandings of the literature and methodology and designing the research. As I explained before, it has always be my intension to write this thesis as how this research developed chronologically and how I developed as a researcher with this study.

In this chapter, mainly through using the **empirical** data gathered in the interviews, I will display and examine the findings regarding students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions in relation to employability and employability development to achieve the aims of this research; at the same time, I will also discuss my reflexive interpretations of the data and the research to provide the 'real' [10] ontological and epistemological thought processes which took place during my data analysis.

As I explained in the data analysis section of the first methodology chapter, though the data collection process took place between September 2009 and January 2011 when I was interviewing students and lecturers almost at the same time, the lecturers' interviews did start earlier thus my analysis of their interviews happened before students' interview analysis. As a result, in here, I am presenting my findings of lecturers' interviews first, followed by students' interview findings, because chronologically this is the order of my analysis, and as discussed before, the lecturers' interview analysis did effect on how I later analysed students' interviews. In addition, though my reflexive analysis of the findings and the research as a whole happened while I was analysing the data, this section will be presented at this end of this part of the thesis. I believe although this process happened parallel to the analyses of lecturers' and students' interviews, my realisation of such a reflexive thought process has been as somewhat 'after thoughts' (i.e. when I reflect on 'why did I interpret the data like this'). As a result, I believe this structure best represent the process I went through when I was 'doing' the analysis.

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[10] As I explained before, the first methodology chapter deals with the 'theoretical' underpins of this study ontologically and epistemologically – through Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Close up Research; in this part of the thesis, I will discussed my ontological and epistemological understandings of such theoretical underpins and what they meant to this study in the second methodology chapter. From my experience, it is the 'doing' of this research made me understand the meaning of Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Close up Research in the context of my study.

Chapter 4 - Lectures' understandings, perceptions and experiences

As this study sets out to explore and examine

"What are the understandings, perceptions and experiences of academic teaching staff and students regarding students' employability development in undergraduate degree programmes?"

In this chapter, I will present findings (through the phenomenological spiral analysis, see Chapter 3 – 3.2.2), from lecturers' interviews which mainly focus on achieving the first, second and third aims of study to:

1. empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment,
2. identify perception 'gaps' by comparing and contrasting the opinions from lecturers in order to illuminate some of the vital problems in this issue;
3. sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE by exploring lecturers' views.

4.1   Initial findings from lecturers' interviews

As it is the initial analysis of the data, the themes in this chapter are mainly based on those issues that I identified and discussed in my literature review chapters. In other word, here I am going to focus on the findings from the 'structured' part of my interviews regarding the following issues:

- Definitions and conceptions of employability and employability development
- Approaches to employability development in degree programmes (designs and implementations in teaching, learning and assessment)
- The role and responsibilities of HE, their programmes and themselves in relation to employability development

4.1.1 Defining employability

4.1.1.1 What is employability? - Sophisticated understandings

Through reviewing the literature, it is clear that defining employability is not simple and straightforward (Maher and Graves, 2008). As demonstrated through my literature review, theoretically, employability as a concept consists of many dimensions (e.g. political, economic, social, educational, etc.) which further include multiple layers (e.g. Gazier's theoretical model, 1998). Within the context of UK HE, 'what is employability' is still a problematic question which has no apparent answer to. Indeed, at the macro, policy level, there is little agreement between government's objective, political, economic agenda of graduate employability (i.e. employment rates and quality) and academics' educational and social conception of graduate employability (i.e. students' achievements like skills, competences, understandings and attributes, and potential to obtain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations with benefits to themselves, the community and the economy) (e.g. Knight and Yorke, 2003). At the micro, personal level, as demonstrated through research studies by the like of Barrie and Tomlinson, individual students and academics hold different understandings and views on employability.

Unsurprisingly, lecturers in this study have provided various answers when asked 'how do you define employability?' For the lecturers, employability can be

> *"a skill of an individual that I would want to work with me."*

Or

> *"skills, qualities, attitudes, experiences, to enable them(students) to undertake a role which they would apply for. "*

Or

> *"in its widest sense, it (employability) is not just about having a job and making money. It's about doing something meaningful and productive. It's about being prepared to live life in its full."*

Generally speaking, on the surface, it seems there is a somewhat agreed definition that employability is something (e.g. skills, competences, etc.) that students need to develop in order to be successful in their future career (whatever that will be) to benefit themselves, their profession and the society. This is similar to what Yorke and Knight (2006) define employability as "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and he economy." (p. 3). Indeed, to the lecturers, employability is clearly a relative concept which includes a number of key components, and it consists of different stages.

Evidently, lecturers perceive employability as a **relative** term rather than an absolute concept. Although through the statements they provided to answer my question 'how do you define employability', their understanding seems single dimensional; through exploring the rest of their interviews, clearly they have much sophisticated understandings on the concept. Indeed, all the lecturers pointed out that as the external competitions and the requirements of the employers are flexible and dynamic, students cannot only 'fix' themselves onto a set of defined 'employability skills', though it is important to have them. Some lecturers even used the similar example that I used in the literature review about 10 teachers going to an interview in order to illustrate the idea that 'not employed for that teaching job does not mean not employable as a teacher'.

As some lecturers pointed out, because the diverse cohort of students they have now comparing to a decade ago, rather than trying to develop 'the same employability' for everybody, now their focus is to help students develop their self-awareness in order to 'get out the best of them, and get them to think about what they can do with their potentials'. This is because lecturers feel that what is essential to some students as employability (e.g. ability to lead mountain climbing) might be totally irrelative to others on the same course. Indeed, mass participation seems to have a great impact on how lecturers perceive employability. It was made clear to me that the number of students and the diversity of their individuality really make the difference to how employability means to the programmes and the lecturers.

As well as seeing employability as a relative concept to students due to job market competition, employers' requirements and individual students' different needs and potentials, lecturers also recognise that employability is process which consists of different stages. For the lecturers, it is not a static point that happens after graduation when graduates go to find a job; it is a constantly evolving process. As stated by Hillage and Pollard (1998), the initial gaining employment stage is only part of what employability is for, 'being able to stay in their jobs, and progress on their career' are also regarded as key outcomes of employability. Lecturers feel that the relativity of employability means individuals must constantly review and develop their employability to 'stay on top of it'. Employability is a key life-long learning and development concept that it is not something only the education institutions (schools, colleges and universities) have the responsibilities to help students to develop and enhance. Individuals should hold their own responsibilities as well as the wider society and the government.

One thing for certain is that our lecturers do not seem to share the objective and absolute conception of employability. To them, statistics are only an indication of how well their students have done to gain an initial employment, because as they pointed out there are so many other external factors that have impact upon the job market. In addition, employability

is definitely not something that can be defined and ticketed off as a list of skills – though skills are an essential part of employability. To individual students employability means differently; as well, to different professions, different employability is required.

4.1.1.2 What does employability consists of? – Several key components

As I pointed out in the literature review, often, the lists of employability skills, attributes and competences include different contents and different terminologies. The subjectivity, relativity and ever changing nature of employability makes it complex to determine what employability includes. Although a number of authors have suggested key graduate employability components (e.g. DOTS by Law and Watts, 2006; USEM by Yorke and Knight, 2004; Bennett et al's model of course provision for employability, 1999; and Hillage and Pollard's four employability elements, 1998), there is still no agreement on what employability precisely includes. However, collectively, there are some elements that have been highlighted by different authors as essential employability components, such as subject/disciplinary knowledge and skills, workplace experience and knowledge, self-awareness and efficacy beliefs, and generic/transferable skills.

Considering how lecturers see employability as this relative concept that evolves through different stages of one's career, it is not surprising that different lecturers suggested different key employability components in their interviews. Collectively, the lecturers from both programmes have suggested the following elements as the key components of employability:

- Professional and subject knowledge, skills and attributes
- Meaningful work experience and knowledge
- Personal competence and individual traits
- Insight knowledge about the industry/profession
- Industrial/professional recognition (e.g. extra qualifications)

In addition, OE lecturers also feel that networking and developing contacts in the industry is important for their students to be employable in today's outdoor industry. In particular, all lecturers consider professional and subject knowledge and skills and meaningful work experience and knowledge to be the most crucial employability components for their students – not only because they think those are the components employers value the most, but also they perceive those two components are the keys to link all the other components together. In Appendix 6 and 7, there are examples of employability development curriculum designs and practices provided by the lecturers from the two programmes.

- Professional and subject knowledge, skills and attributes

Every lecturer argued that professional and subject knowledge and skills are essential to their students' employability. Like generic (or transferable) skills, professional skills and competences form part of students' employability. For PE, they are simply requirements by the TDA (Training and Development Agency for schools) standards (see Appendix 6 for examples), which means in order to be a successful PE graduate with the QTS (Qualified Teacher Status)[11], students on the PE programme must have comprehensively subject and professional knowledge and skills. Those include a range of elements from pedagogical knowledge on teaching learning and assessment to practical abilities to teach and assess; from abilities and skills to perform physical activities and sports (e.g. being able to perform a dance routine) to knowledge and abilities to teach physical activities and sports (e.g. teaching pupils to perform a dance routine); from being aware of and understand policies, legislations and strategies (e.g. Every Child Matters) to being able to apply policies, legislations and strategies into their teaching learning and assessment. Indeed, as the lecturers pointed out, the QTS standard has provided a comprehensive list of professional knowledge, understanding and skills which are clear to all their students since they start their degree programme. Because they have this comprehensible guideline on the professional knowledge, understanding and skills, PE lecturers feel their students should be very clear with what they need to develop and enhance for their employability in relation to their professional knowledge and skills.

Comparing to PE's explicit list of professional knowledge and skills, OE lecturers seem to have a more diverse view of their professional and subject knowledge and skills, though overall they all agreed that it is vital for their students to have them at an accomplished level. In an attempt to narrow down such diverse range of professional knowledge and skills, the OE programme team has carried out a CETL funded research project which investigated OE employability requirements from the employers' point of view (via 18 online surveys and 4 semi-structured interviews) (Boorman et al, 2008). The results of this research indicated that as well as a good degree, OE employers value work experience, National Governing Body Awards (NGBAs) and a driving license as the most important areas of employability. In addition, verbal communication, team-working/interpersonal skills, personal planning and organising/initiative are ranked as the top employability skills and competences for OE. Finally, students need a passion for the outdoors and the ability to work under pressure.

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[11] Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is required in England and Wales to become and continue being a teacher in state schools. To gain a QTS, an individual needs to have an undergraduate degree and some form of teacher training.

Although Boorman et al's (2008) research has informed the outdoor programme team with some vital knowledge on what OE employers value as employability components, the ever growing outdoor industry means that there is an increasing diversity of professional knowledge and skills which the small sample in Boorman et al's (2008) research cannot fully represent. Indeed, during the time of this study, the OE degree has been divided into three sub-degree routes: OE with environmental studies, OE with adventure tourism, and OE with PE. This further suggests that their subject and professional knowledge and skills are much more comprehensive and complex. As OE originated from a teacher training degree, the programme kept a professional development framework which is similar to the PE programme, particularly for their practical skills (e.g. climbing, kayaking, etc.). Although all the three routes share some core modules which include many of those professional development elements, each route itself consists of some specific subject and professional knowledge and skills which seem to be problematic at times for the lecturers, because there is 'a lot of ground to cover'. For instance, the module leader for the adventure therapy module found it was challenging because the module requires a lot of specific knowledge and skills which are not covered in core modules, but difficult to develop in a short space of time (e.g. counselling skills like listening). In addition, even some of those professional skills that are covered in a variety of modules through the whole degree (e.g. climbing), the diversity of the student cohort means that it is challenging to develop a teaching learning and assessment practice which is suitable for students at all levels. Nevertheless, due to strict industry regulations (e.g. health and safety), OE professional knowledge and skills are perceived by their lecturers to be crucial for their students' employability.

Clearly, all our lecturers believe professional knowledge skills and competences form an essential part of students' employability as without them graduates will have very little chance to succeed in pursuing a career in PE/OE. However, there seems to be some different opinions amongst our lecturers on how professional knowledge, skills and competences relate to students' employability. For PE, it seems because the programme's core nature is professional training, professionalism is perceived as employability by some PE lecturers. As discussed before, within the QTS standards, there are explicit requirements for professional knowledge and skills (Appendix 6); however, it seems for some lecturers, every requirement listed by the QTS should be considered as employability. Accordingly, the QTS standards serve as the professional requirements for PE students when it comes to their employability - the more they exceed their professional standards, the more they are employable.

PE lecturer: "I think in anything professionalism is really important, it's about how you go about your work, but it is even more important when you are in a school, because you are there to educate the people for the future…in terms of employability, it's those professional

attributes which make a good teacher or a good worker in any respect, and therefore that part of it is really important, because you do have a professional responsibility in the society."

Researcher: "do you think being professional means that person has high employability?"

PE lecturer: "yes, I think so. And we do see that, because when the reports come in from our trainees, we do say once you set your foot through that door, you are not a trainee, you are a teacher, and you have professional responsibility. The reports we got back are about professional roles and professional role models, you can see that's happening, about how people behave in schools, and it is about making them employable as teachers, because that come across in their references about how professional they are, and about how they engage."

However, some lecturers are cautious and even slightly sceptical about professional knowledge and skills, particularly in terms of how they are defined and who defines them.

PE lecturer: "I think the professional standards demonstrate what we should be doing as a teacher on an everyday basis, what we should know, and how we should be doing it. I think it's restrictive, in terms of what we expect them to do, in terms of creativity. They need to be more innovative, risk taking. And it has come through Ofsted[12] characteristics of what a good teacher is. And they build it because it's very much driven about...in terms of pedagogical thinking, one thing gets me is this three-part lesson is the best lesson to have because some research said that. The way we deliver our assessment is very much driven by the policy which says this way is better. I think they try to standardise it, I suppose in a good sense to make sure we are all doing what's supposed to be doing to be a good teacher. There is a lot of accountability there, you can actually measure those teaching performance against those standards, and prove you can do it. But on the other side of things, we are very much driven by, I suppose, understanding of others think of what a good teacher is. And I think that leads to very much inflexibility to let a person become their own teacher. They have been moulded in what the school thinks what a good teacher is about or those teachers think it's a good teacher, so therefore it's a socialisation process, when you move into any kind of culture, you become the norm of the culture, what's good in there, I think that's very restrictive, they became those little clones of what a good teacher is, and therefore maybe teaching doesn't move on as quickly as it can because we tend to hold on what we think is the best teaching practice without challenging the practice itself. So I think that's important. So I think in one way it's good, and it gives you a structure, doesn't it, to hold on to and to be defined by; but on the other hand, I think it can be inhibiting, in terms of teaching development."

OE lecturer: "I think the whole discourse on things like emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing has become part of education in the past 10 years because political and social reasons. But on the other hand, skills is still the strong part of the (outdoor) industry, and for me there is a gender issue within that discourse. So reflective skills are often called soft skills and practical skills are hard skills, I think it creates a dichotomy and undermines reflective skills. For me, actually those soft skills are harder, it's harder to learn and to practice them well, it's hard to learn how to listen and to respond to people effectively. That's definitely harder than how to tie a knot, because it's cognitive, it's a different kind of learning and thinking. That's still around, and I think it's implicitly in people's values. It marginalises those skills with an underlining gender issue, people think its feminine, and the practical skills are the masculine skills. And how the practical skills are valued more than

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[12] The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is the non-ministerial government department of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England. Teacher training providers are in one of the key Ofsted inspection and regulation service areas to ensure teacher training courses and school placement providers perform at a high quality level.

those reflective skills in the industry because of this kind of belief is still inherent in the industry. I think it is a legacy of history and tradition, because it was a very male dominated industry, and what adventure and outdoor stands for, was very much about that."

In addition, as I pointed out in the literature review, though there are many lists of what employability includes (e.g. skills, competences, etc.); often people still feel there is something missing in those lists. For instance, a PE lecturer has pointed out the importance of having a work ethic, and questioned why it is missing from their professional standards.

PE lecturer: "One thing is work ethic, that's difficult, isn't it. I think work ethic is something perhaps missed out a bit as employability, because ethics is something which is very difficult to teach anyway, and very difficult to get from any...and being in university, being self-motivated and having a good work ethic, you have to look at where that comes from. And understanding working in the world is very different from being in university, particularly for the younger ones, I think work ethics and understanding work ethic is something missed out."

Researcher: "why do you think such an important thing has been missed out?"

PE lecturer: "I think it is such an important thing because I think it's about the value of work, and it's about self-esteem and it's about what you get from working, work to live or live to work, and I suppose a lot of people, in a good sense, work to live, but then they seem to lost that pride of what they are doing and wanting to work hard when they are there, they seem to develop this culture of getting something from nothing. You know, you don't have to work very hard, you become a little spoiled, you don't need to work hard to get much money, and, I don't know, that's my personal opinion on it, I don't have any reference, but I see our work ethic has changed. In comparison, I have been in the States, I worked in the States, and I have been to so many countries to see the work ethic of people is very different."

While it seems some essential employability attributes and skills are missing due to wider social and cultural impact, according to some lecturers, there is a certain degree of unbalanced professional knowledge and skills in their own profession/industry because of how their profession/industry has constructed their own professional knowledge and skills. For example, some OE lecturers feel there has been too much emphasis on developing their students' practical skills (e.g. climbing, canoeing, even mini bus driving) from the outdoor industry, whereas the essential transferable skills have been played down by their students' expectations as less important compared to practical skills. However, from the lecturers' point of view, those skills and competences are the ones that allow students to apply themselves, to reflect on their practices, and to be a successful outdoor professional.

Clearly, for lecturers in this study, there are three different kinds of perceptions regarding the relationship between professionalism and employability. For some lecturers, the concept of employability for students (particularly PE teacher training students) is very similar to their professionalism. Both concepts are flexible – they evolve and develop over time based on requirements from the wider education and political context. Like employability, professionalism for teachers has moved from a 'simple' technical competency to a much more complex or even super-complex concept (Barnett, 2008). As argued by Hargreaves

(2002), for today's teachers, professionalism is no longer fixed but is being and will be argued about, struggled over and pulled in different directions in different places at different times…accountable to multiple stakeholders. This is very similar to what employability is about as a concept.

For others, employability seems to be greater and much more flexible than professionalism. For them, professionalism is a set of competencies and qualities that can be defined and assessed. Though depending on different perspectives (e.g. school, pupils, parents, government, etc.), such a set of competencies and qualities varies, and it is not as complex as employability. Those lecturers take the view that employability is primarily based on the supply and demand of the labour market, which as a result means a professional graduate might not be employable for certain jobs because of market competition. Nevertheless, as professionalism is a fundamental requirement for OE and PE graduates, an employable graduate is certainly a professional. But what exactly are the characteristics of such a professionalism? A robust knowledge and skills base? A code of ethics? A capability for critical reflection? Autonomous decision making? Or is it simply about meeting a set of standards?

Finally, some lecturers hold the view that professionalism is greater than employability as it holds more ethical and moral values than just skills and knowledge. This perception, which takes the 'narrow' view on employability, considers it as a political agenda primarily driven by a government skills' agenda to compete in the global market. As a result, those lecturers feel those crucial ethical and moral values which professionalism in education holds dearly are not included in such an employability agenda.

In short, both programmes consist of comprehensive professional and subject knowledge and skills for employability; but PE lecturers believe theirs are structured and explicit due to QTS standards, OE lecturers feel theirs are complex and problematic as there are too many areas to cover. Just like the general concept of employability, professional and subject knowledge and skills seem to be complex and problematic from our lecturers' point of view in terms of how they are defined and what they include. Nevertheless, they are crucial to employability because our lecturers believe that in order for our students to be employable, they need to be at a comprehensive level of professionalism (Knight and Yorke, 2004).

- Meaningful work experience and knowledge:

As discussed in the literature review, work experience is widely believed to be essential to employability as it can help students to "make connections between their academic study

and the world of work and to familiarise themselves with the skills necessary to be effective in the work setting" (Harvey, 2004, p.9). Despite this there are a lot of disagreements amongst academics and scholars in relation to what the key components of employability are, almost everyone seems to agree that work experience is crucial for employability. Unsurprisingly, our lecturers from both programmes all expressed how important they think work experience and knowledge is the core for their students' employability. In addition, they have emphasised that those experiences must be meaningful and constructive for students to develop and enhance a range of employability skills and attributes which include professional practices, applying theories into work contexts, understanding working culture and so on. For the lecturers, those crucial employability attributes are almost impossible for students to understand what employability is and to develop and enhance their own employability if they only engage in classroom learning.

Certainly, from their point of view, work experience and acquisition of knowledge does not only prepare the students by providing them with the opportunities and the environment to apply themselves in a work context, sometimes it also helps the students to 'try out different things' in order to 'work out if this is really something they want to do when they finish university'. However, it seems that meaningful work experience and knowledge does not have to only come from structured work placements organised by the university; some lecturers feel any kind of working experience that helps students to develop those key employability components (e.g. professional knowledge, generic skills, understanding of the industry, etc.) should be promoted and encouraged.   .

Indeed, lecturers feel that as well as the WBL/placement opportunities which students undertake during their degrees, there are a range of other learning opportunities offered by the programmes which connect the students with the working world. As the OE lecturer pointed out, if the learning experience is valued by their respective profession/industry, it should be recognised as meaningful experience for employability development. In addition, extra curriculum activities and work experiences (e.g. part time jobs, voluntary works etc.) should also be acknowledge as meaningful employability experience if they develop and enhance students' employability knowledge, skills and competences. Though, to make such experience meaningful to employability, students must play the vital part to make the connection between their experience and their employability. According to the OE lecturer, without the reflection, many work experiences which could potentially be meaningful to employability tend to be wasted. From some lecturers' point of view, this is what separates students' employability level. In other words, though most students on the degree go through the 'same' work related learning opportunities, the more reflective the student is about such experience the more employable this student will be.

As discussed in the literature review, the importance of reflection on meaningful work related learning experiences is evident theoretically (e.g. Mezirow, 1990). At the same time, the difficulties and challenges of successfully grasping such competence are widely acknowledged (e.g. Tomkins, 2009). While almost every lecturer in this study agrees that reflection is one of the most important employability competences students need to develop and enhance in order to make sense of their experiences and transform such understanding effectively into their future experiences; like the scholars (e.g. Knowles, 2008; Moon, 2004) in reflective practices, many have expressed questions and concerns on how it should be taught and assessed in their programmes (e.g. 'how to teach and assess reflection?' 'What is a good reflection?' etc.). It seems many lecturers do not feel confident to teach and assess their students' reflection because there is a lack of professional development and support for them to learn and develop such teaching learning and assessment practices in the first place. In addition, the few lecturers who are experts in reflection through their own professional practices, have pointed out that this lack of consistency within the programme may send out confusing messages to students on the purposes and the practices of reflection (i.e. how to reflect, and why?). Indeed, some of them feel that because of the lack of expertise in the programme, reflection has become a paper exercise without apprehending its true potentials.

OE lecturer: "I was sitting there watching them chatting…I was very disappointed (sign)."

Researcher: "Why? What happened?"

OE lecturer: "they are third years, they supposed to be professional about it (development training practice). But they just…I don't think they understand…some of them even have their feet on the table…I just think if I was an employer, I wouldn't employ any of them. I know it sounds harsh, but I just don't think they get it. I think they are just doing things because they think they have to…For example, for this module, if they do it properly, there are a lot of things they need to learn beforehand, but I just don't think they have done it. I am not saying it wasn't in the programme, I think they just…like reflection, they probably did it in first year, and then just forgot about it, but that's not right. …for me, things like reflection, PDP need to be embedded throughout the programme so when they (students) get to third year, they will be able to do things like development training properly."

Researcher: "I thought they have PDP?"

OE lecturer: "yeah they do, but I think a lot of them saw it as an easy mark, do you know what I mean? I think a lot of them didn't really understand things like goal setting, reflection. That's what I mean by doing it properly. It shouldn't be a piece of 800 words what they did and what they thought they can do better. Properly reflective practice takes years to learn and develop."

Overall, for the lecturers, work experience and knowledge brings all the other key employability components together (e.g. insight knowledge about the industry/profession), at the same time, the lecturers feel employers value meaningful experiences as key evidences to prove their employability when students applying for jobs. As a result, work experience virtually plays the most important part of the PE programme as students must complete four comprehensive placements during four years in different schools where they carry out all their practical teaching training progressively failing to complete or performing poorly in any placement can literally jeopardise their employability particularly in today's competitive job market; for the OE students, their programme offers a range of opportunities for students to gain work experience and knowledge, as the outdoor industry is very different compared to the PE profession (particularly as Boorman et al's, 2008 research identified how much OE employers value work experience). Nevertheless, for both programmes' lecturers, meaningful work experience and knowledge is undoubtedly the key for employability; and our lecturers have a comprehensive understanding on its meaning to their students' employability.

Certainly, most of our lecturers acknowledged all those theoretical matters regarding meaningful work experience. However, the challenges remain as practically speaking, to provide students with meaningful work experiences that constitute the six essential WBL/WRL qualities from Blackwell et al (2001) seem almost impossible. Indeed, when it comes to the actual process of learning and assessing of WBL/WRL, it seems we still have a very long way to go. Even for the PE programme, whose work placement has a long tradition and seems to be regarded highly as a good example by lecturers from both programmes, there are a number of practical issues and challenges. For example, many lecturers have pointed out the challenges in relation to the quantity and quality of school placements; some have indicated concerns in relation to the quality of mentoring; and so on. Most important of all, just like Little (2000) pointed out, there is a sense that WBL/WRL sometimes runs the risk of becoming a box ticking exercise where the process of learning and reflection is neglected by the students.

- Other key components:

Apart from professional and subject knowledge and attributes and meaningful work experiences, lecturers also feel that personal competences, personalities, insightful knowledge of their respective industry/profession and industrial/professional recognitions are essential employability components for today's graduates. Few lecturers point out that particularly for OE and PE, personalities and personal competences are ever more important than a lot of the other professions, because not only working in OE and PE means dealing

with a diverse group of people every day, but also it involves teaching, coaching and leading those people to achieve complex learning outcomes – thus it is important that the students 'are good with kids', 'like working with people', 'have the qualities to inspire others' and so on. As a result, their personality seems to become part of their professional competences that employers value as part of their employability (e.g. accordingly OE employers really value students who have passion for outdoors, Boorman et al 2008), but often this judgement is made implicitly (e.g. rather than explicitly listing the personality traits and personal competences as part of the recruitment criteria, the lecturers believe that employers judge their interviewees implicitly during the application process while they are carrying out tasks and undertaking their interviews). This has made personality and personal competences to be one of the most difficult employability components from our lecturers' point of view. Indeed, lecturers feel that such judgement is also down to the interviewers' personality in which the interviewees cannot be prepared for. In addition, unlike other employability components which the university and the degree can prepare the students for, lecturers feel this essential component is all attributable to individual students' own development, particularly prior to higher education.

Insightful knowledge about the industry/profession goes hand in hand with professional knowledge and meaningful experience. This, from our lecturers' point of view, is all about knowing and understanding the working culture within OE and PE, such as organisational culture of schools or outdoor organisations. This kind of tacit knowledge is important throughout the whole working career – at the initial gaining employment stage, graduates need this kind of knowledge to be able to best match their employability with the most suited jobs and organisations; after gaining the initial employment, this kind of knowledge is crucial for attaining the employment and progressing on throughout one's career. For example, a PE lecturer pointed out that when their graduates go for a job, 'there are a lot of things to consider…is it a private school? Is it an all-girls or all-boys school? What their facilities like? etc.' It is important for those PE graduates to have this kind of knowledge and utilise it well during their initial gaining employment stage because at this point they are still at the beginning of their career, and they still 'need to do well during their NQT[13] (Newly Qualified Teacher) years'. For OE graduates, industry knowledge does not only help them to find a suitable position in the 'right' organisation, it also helps them to decide which sector of the outdoor industry they want to initially enter (e.g. environmental businesses, outdoor instructing, retail, etc.), how to enter it, and even the nature of their employment (e.g. self-employed etc.). In addition, due to the nature of the outdoor industry, some lecturers also

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[13] After gaining their QTS, teachers must go through an induction period which is normally their first year of teaching as NQTs. Those who fail the induction still retain their QTS, but cannot teach in state-run schools.

suggested that having strong network and contacts within the industry is a crucial part of insightful industrial knowledge.

Certainly, this kind of tacit professional knowledge is vital to today's graduates' employability. Indeed, as I pointed out before, the reflective piece from the science of football student's work based learning which triggered the NTF project that funded this PhD research was in fact based on the student's reflection on his learning of such tacit professional knowledge. Like this science of football student pointed out in his work, this kind of knowledge is different from the explicit professional and subject knowledge that students learn and develop through their academic and practical learning within the university. And our lecturers' views on this essential employability component further proved its importance, as well as the challenges students face to develop such knowledge. For both programmes, apart from WBL and placements, lecturers also provide other methods such as guest lecturing, external tutoring/instructing, field trips and so on to help students learn and develop their tacit knowledge about their industry/profession. Nevertheless, lecturers feel that, like personality and personal competences, insightful knowledge of their industry/profession primarily takes individual student's own effort to learn and develop through their experiences with the industry/profession and personal reflection, university and their degree programmes can only assist students by providing opportunities like WBL and reflective assessment.

Finally, in today's ever more competitive job market, lecturers feel value-added extra qualifications and experiences, which are recognised by the PE profession and OE industry, are essential for graduates to gain competitive edge, and they believe their students know that. Accordingly,

Researcher: "Do you think our students have responsibilities when it comes to their own employability development?"

PE lecturer: "Yeah, massive, and our trainees are really good…if you ask them I can guarantee you a lot of them will tell you 'I did a table-tennis course last summer', 'I did a hockey coaching this spring'…they know that there are a lot of competitions out there, almost everybody graduate will have their degrees, most them good 2.1 and 1st, they will have their QTS, again most of them very good, a range of school experiences, etc. those kind of things which everybody does when they are on a PE course…a lot of them know they need to do things like coaching qualifications, summer campus, etc. because that's going to improve their employability, but it is mixed. Some of them do very well, some of them don't, that's just human nature."

Researcher: "Why do you think they would do those extra things?"

PE lecturer: "I think it's to do with their believes that when they go for a job (they need to have those extra experiences and qualifications)…I mean when they come here, they have strength in specific activities…They will see the way they are going to get employment is by

having a number of coaching qualifications, different coaching qualifications in different areas. So it's very employability drive, because they might feel that is an area of weakness they might have. And even though, the course does do gymnastics, dance, swimming and the rest of them, the amount you can do is fairly limited. So they acknowledge that 'yes I have done that in university, but in addition, I have also done this course.' I think that's how they decide what to do."

OE lecturer: "What the employers want are two main things: NGBs [National Governing Body Awards] and those sophisticated skills and competences like communication skills, leadership. NBGs are not enough, because people can just get them without coming to the university. And you can have people with some NGBs but lack of those sophisticated skills which you can get from a degree programme."

Particularly for OE, as Boorman et al's research (2008) suggest that industry recognised experiences and qualifications such as NGBAs are essential employability that OE employers value, it seems though those experiences and qualifications are value-added to students' employability, they play an important part. Indeed, some OE lecturers suggest for particularly kind of employments in the outdoor industry, without any qualification, graduates even have a high degree classification will not be able to gain an employment. As a result, unlike PE which encourages students to gain extra qualifications through extra curriculum trainings that are delivered on campus in IM Marsh, OE offers practical learning and qualifications as part of their curriculum.

Having practical qualifications as part of the OE curriculum seems to be problematic for the programme team. While lecturers all acknowledge that practical qualifications are vital for outdoor education, there is a divide between whether such qualifications should be part of the curriculum. It is clear that all lecturers feel that students must take on their own responsibilities for employability development in extra curriculum times. Certainly, not only the programme has limited resources and time to deliver everything, but also it seems many lecturers feel that providing those extra qualifications as part of 'an academic degree' is unfair to many students, and sending out contradictory messages to the students on the value and the point of higher education. However, those lecturers who seem to support having extra qualifications within the curriculum have pointed out that: first, just like students came to the university with different academic achievements, students are also likely to have different practical achievements, this is natural. In fact, some of the practical modules which provide students with options of different activities, can compensate this problem to a certain degree. Second, because the marking method is progressive, students who take their extra curriculum time to practice and improve their practical skills should be rewarded with better marks, which again is like academic studying. Finally, when a student applied to come to university studying outdoor education, he or she should have considered what this

programme entails, and therefore be prepared to meet the expectations the programme has upon them as OE students from LJMU. Nevertheless, though the high employability value of extra qualifications that are recognised by the outdoor industry is well acknowledged by all OE lecturers, there remains a debate within the programme team regarding the issues and challenges regarding how they should be delivered and assessed.

Comparing to Barrie's findings (2006, 2004), all lecturers in this study showed transformative understandings on employability. Perhaps it is because the nature of the programmes, the lecturers seem to be very engaged with employability. Even some of them do not see themselves to have a 'direct role' in students' employability development, the level of understanding is much sophisticated. Rather than seeing employability as this one dimensional notion, as the political agenda of employability suggests, all the lecturers have demonstrated a much complex and holistic understanding on the concept. They have connected it to a number of areas like academic learning, professional development, personal development and so on, and suggested that employability can pull a lot of other key concepts in their programmes together. In addition, some lecturers also put employability into different wider contexts, arguing its implications on issues like social mobility, social inclusion and globalisation, etc. Clearly, the lecturers in this study perceive employability as this multi-dimensional and rich concept as suggested by Grazier (1998).

Individually, perhaps because they hold different positions within their programmes, teaching different topics and having different personal background, different lecturers have their own take on employability, which create a pool of diverse understandings (Yorke and Knight, 2006). I will come back to this point later, having an in-depth examination on lecturers' roles and experiences. Generally speaking, on the surface, it seems there is a somewhat agreed definition that employability is something (e.g. skills, competences, etc.) that students need to develop in order to be successful in their future career (whatever that will be) to benefit themselves, their profession and the society, this definition is similar to the one from Yorke and Knight (2006). However, underneath that, the details on issues like the ownership of employability seem to differ amongst some of the lecturers. Perhaps because of their individual differences in their positions and backgrounds, each lecturer has suggested different essential employability components-just like I pointed out in the literature review, there is a diverse list of employability skills, attributes and elements. Possibly because they cannot include everything in the interview, they have just pointed out the ones they feel are most important. But this kind of diversity in those fine-grained details has placed crucial impact on how the lecturers go about their practices in teaching, learning and assessment. I will come back to this point later when I examine their practices and its implications.

Overall, it seems unlikely on the issues regarding the professional knowledge and skills and meaningful work experiences in which lecturers have appeared to most agree with each other on their importance to students' employability, and how they should be delivered through the programmes, lecturers have shown rather varied understandings and attitudes toward the other key employability components. For elements like personality and extra qualifications, lecturers seem to feel that students should take the major responsibility to develop and enhance them, and the degree programmes should only play an assisting role. However, it appears that there are some disagreements on how the degrees should assist on such employability development. Nonetheless, the values of those employability components are acknowledged by all the lecturers as key to successfully attain, maintain and progress on graduates' desired employments in their respective professions.

4.1.2 Employability development

Through discussing what employability consists of, lecturers have already revealed how them and their colleagues design and deliver those essential components within their programmes. In addition, lecturers shared their opinions and experiences with me on some crucial principles of designing and delivering employability development, both within their programmes and within the institutional wide employability project.

4.1.2.1 <u>Employability development within their programmes</u>

While examining what employability includes, lecturers have expressed how they feel employability development is like and should be like within their programmes. Collectively, three crucial principles have emerged as how they feel employability development should be like within their programmes.

First of all, for the lecturers, employability should not be developed solely through add-on/bolt-on approaches. However, this is not to say bolt-on approach is completely inappropriate and ineffective, only it should not be the priority for employability development in their programmes. For example, an OE lecturer suggests that though workshops for students to learn how to write a job application before their WBL module, can be seen a bolt-on approach, it is appropriate for that purpose and a suitable component for the WBL module which on the whole is an embedded employability development approach to the OE programme. Like I mentioned before, some lecturers even think the bolt-on/add-on approach is better than the embedded employability for certain aspects (e.g. extra qualifications).

Nevertheless, the embedded approach is believed to be what the programmes must adapt for meaningful and effective employability development. This is largely because the lecturers feel that through an embedded employability curriculum, students can experience coherent and aligned learning and assessment which deliver the benefits of such transformative learning that employability development needs. It is important for the students to know what expectations the programmes have on them, what they need to develop for their employability and how to develop it progressively through their degree, and the add-on/bolt-on approach simply cannot achieve such learning experience. However, some lecturers also believe that students nowadays are learning within the assessment-driven culture (see Lees, 2002) in HE in which all their learning activities are directed by assessment. A PE lecturer stated that:

> *"At the end of the day, students turn up to things and engage to things more often if they are assessed in some shape or form. And they know what that assessment is and they work towards it. So if it is part of the degree programme,*

they are going to do it; if it is not mandatory, then that's when it's going to be
difficult to get the whole cohort to actually toe the line."

However, considering employability is a relative and highly personal matter, many lecturers questioned whether it is necessary to demand every student to achieve the 'same' employability development outcome through mandatory learning and assessment activities.

Providing add-on/bolt-on employability often involves formative learning and assessment which does not contribute to final degree classification, it seems some lecturers believe students do not engage with such learning experience as much as they should be. This further leads to dilemmas and complications regarding assessment which I will come back to them later.

As a result, the lecturers suggest that employability development should be embedded into the curriculum for appropriate and effective outcomes. Collectively, lecturers have suggested following five key qualities for embedded employability curriculum for their programmes:

- Holistic and aligned TLA
- Encouraging and motivating students for extra curriculum learning (sometimes involving bolt-on activities)
- Having direct application towards students learning
- Employability as one of the key themes going through the curriculum
- Mixing well with subject and professional knowledge and skills.

Clearly, those key qualities are related to key employability components suggested by the lecturers. For them, employability is definitely one of the essential elements of their programmes, considering how they regard their programmes as 'professional training', 'vocational' and 'applied'. It has this complex and dependent relation with various other essential elements of the programme such as professional development, research, and so on. Ideally, the lecturers feel that employability should be fully integrated within their curriculum, like how the PE programme delivers their professional standards. In reality, the lecturers are generally happy with how employability is embedded and delivered through their programmes, though they acknowledge that improvement is always needed.

One interesting point raised by an OE lecturer is that, in between bolt-on and embedded employability development (see Lees, 2002), there is a grey area in which he feels external qualifications are offered as part of the programme. Accordingly, some assessment criteria are solely based on professional qualification conditions rather than academic requirements, but others take into considerations of academic requirements. According to him, this can cause problems because they "intend to assess students on acquisition of the skills,

acquisition of bolt-on skills which seems contradict the academic and the holistic side of the programme". As discussed before, although lecturers view employability as a key element within the degree programme, many still hold the view that the nature of HE education is still academic development (like suggested by Barnett, 2008). As a result, it is suggested that for the OE programme, industry requirement need be mixed in TLA with academic knowledge and skills, in which professional qualifications should be offered as options for students to gain in extra curriculum activities.

Clearly, the relationship between employability development and academic learning is one of the critical topics amongst our lecturers' perceptions. Indeed, almost every lecturer believes that when designed and delivered properly, employability can and should aid to students' academic studying - which is the best outcome for students' learning in high education (like suggested by Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003). They particularly feel that for their programmes, which are applied and professional development in nature, employability development and academic learning should not and cannot be clearly separated. Taking the PE professional standards (Appendix 6) as an example, evidently, academic learning (e.g. pedagogical theories) and employability (e.g. the application of such theories) are intertwined together.

Importantly, lecturers have pointed out that HE degree programme mustn't be driven away with developing employability; academic learning and development is what HE education is primarily about (like suggested by Barnett, 2008), even in professional programmes like the teacher training programmes.

OE lecturer: "training a person to meet a particular outcome or aim is the purpose of training programmes; whereas a HE programme needs to have much more holistic sides to it. Otherwise what's the difference between a college apprenticeship and a HE degree?"

PE lecturer: "students aren't here just to train to be something; they are here to develop in a kind of holistic way. Their focus is about becoming a teacher, so in that sense they are trained in certain competences, but they are not just training to do that, they are also studying an academic degree".

However, in reality, lecturers feel that their students sometimes perceive those two separately – evidently, some of their students achieve high academic results do not necessarily have great employability, and vice versa. This could be because their students perceive one as more important than the other. For example, some PE lecturers suggested that their students might think because they are training to be PE teachers, how they perform during their school placements is more important to them than their academic assessment; some OE students focus on their practical achievements on qualifications rather than their academic study. To this, some lecturers commented "*they (students) should know that they can get those practical experiences and qualifications even without coming to university;*

what's made them different, it's the academic side they have done which underpin their practices." This kind of imbalance between academic learning and employability development, from the lecturers' point of view, reflects that though overall employability is embedded within their programmes, it is still not incorporated well with academic learning sometimes. Perhaps, in today's HE context, a degree does not necessarily mean academic achievement to students anymore. This regards the deeper issue as what HE is for in 21st century, which I will come back to it later in the section on HE's role and responsibilities.

Secondly, employability development should be delivered as a process rather than a product. Indeed, just as lecturers define employability as a process, rather than an isolated event; employability development should also be carried out progressively. Some lecturers feel that though giving the finally year cohort a 'big employability push' is essential and effective (particularly through bolt-on activities like CV writing and interview technique workshops); it take students more that the final year to develop those complex employability skills.

> *"…And then help them ready in terms of employability towards the end in terms of, I suppose, your bare bones of writing CV, interviewing, so they can better display those skills they developed over three, four years."*

Evidently, the lecturers feel that employability is one of the key lifelong learning and development traits which individuals start developing even before they enter higher education, and will definitely carry on developing it after they finish their degrees. Rather than portraying it as an isolated outcome of higher education, students should engage with this whole process constantly. Within this process, not only students engage with the learning and development of those essential employability components, but also they start to through an employability circle – from finding out what they want to do (realisation of their career aspirations), to start applying for jobs, then they can obtain their jobs and move on from there.

Again, the lecturers point out that the five key qualities for embedding employability development into their programmes are essential when it comes to ensure students developing their employability gradually throughout their degree programmes.

- Holistic and aligned TLA
- Encouraging and motivating students for extra curriculum learning (sometimes involving bolt-on activities)
- Having direct application towards students learning
- Employability as one of the key themes going through the curriculum
- Mixing well with subject and professional knowledge and skills.

Clearly, for the lecturers, when employability development is well embedded into their programmes, it also reflects its developmental process. This is demonstrated by the

programmes, particularly in relation to subject and professional knowledge and practical skills such as the outdoor practical modules and assessments which use developmental assessment criteria (Appendix 7).

However, in practice, some lecturers feel it is a great challenge to engage students with employability development, especially in terms of those 'soft skills and attributes' such as reflection, particularly during students' first year in the university.

"There is just too much going on…For a lot of them, this is their first time away from home, away from their parents. It is not easy…they are trying to figure out a lot of stuff…making friends, living by themselves…when something seems that far away, it slips down their priority list."

In addition, many lecturers pointed out that even though the university and the HE sector in general acknowledge that employability consists of complex achievements and attributes, in reality, it is still measured quantitatively based on surveys like the first destination. Here, employability is not the complex achievements and attributes, but employment outcomes (i.e. how long does it take a graduate to gain an employment, and what wage this job offers). Those lecturers feel that the measurements used for employability and the discourses used by politicians and popular medias promote a consumerism driven attitude amongst students. This portrays employability as a product to students, their parents and the wider public, and it creates a consumer attitude amongst students as employability is something they purchase with their tuition fees. They feel that their students tend to disengage when it comes to challenging and complex learning, instead they seem to expect their lecturers to 'spoon feed' them with the 'right answers and skills'.

Finally, it is crucial that whatever the programmes are delivering in terms of employability development, it should aim to fulfil each individual student's career aspirations. And this, to our lecturers, is the most difficult but most important principle when it comes to design and deliver employability development within their programmes. Indeed, in today's mass participation HE, not only the number of student is vase, but also their academic and social backgrounds are diverse. Clearly, though lecturers believe that students on their programmes have a general career aspiration in PE and OE, the details on what kind of employments in the OE and PE professions seem to vary. This is evident according to the LJMU CETL employability survey on the past few cohorts' graduate employments, particularly for OE, their students tend to go to a number of different jobs within and outside outdoors (Stott, Zaitseva and Cui 2012). According to their programme, this is one of the key reasons that in recent years, they have split their degree into three routes – environment studies, adventure tourism and PE to cope with the employability demands of their students and the outdoor industry.

Our lecturers are clear about the challenges they face in relation to this principle. In order to offer their students a wide range of employability development opportunities, lecturers have pointed out that their programmes have taken a number of approaches. Those include: a strong group of highly qualified academic staff who have a wide range of experiences and expertise in the field of OE and PE, continuously engaging with their own professional development and research to inform their practices, and ensure their students are offered with the most up-to-date knowledge and skills in their subject areas. Engaging with pedagogical research initiatives such as the CETL to ensure their information and understandings on their students and relevant issues are current. Regularly evaluating and updating their curriculum, assessment and material as much as they can to ensure their students' and profession's expectations of their programmes are met.

Of course, lecturers admit that it is impossible to meet every student's expectations. Here, for our lecturers, lays the challenges of identifying various expectations and needs, and addressing them accordingly. Indeed, students themselves must take their own responsibilities, particularly in relation to their own employability development. Many lecturers have used the expression that 'you can lead a horse to the water, you can't make it to drink' to illustrate how they feel about the issue.

PE lecturer: "we have personal tutoring system where students can come and ask questions about their academic works as well as their school based works. We have lots of documentation that will help the students to find their way through academic and professional work, as well as being at the other end of email and phone. So the quality of the support is there. But obviously, that depends on the individual student because not all of them choose to access the sort of support. We have got 600+ students, but the provision is there for them. They are very knowledgeable, but I am not saying they are more knowledgeable than other universities. Because students are students, and they are all different. And a lot of other universities might not provide a lot of support, but the students might be more proactive and doing them themselves. But we do give them an awful lot, and the course is very good here."

Indeed, as discussed before, as employability is such a subjective and relative concept, though evidently many OE and PE students seem to know what their career aspirations are even before they entered HE (LJMU, 2011), they might not know how to engage with the 'right' learning opportunities to achieve such aspirations. In particular, considering students have varied social and academic backgrounds prior to HE means that some students require more and different support than the others, though many students on the course share similar aspirations.

For our lecturers, overall they are happy with what their programmes are offering in relation to employability development opportunities to their students; and the most important thing is that students themselves must engage with those opportunities. Some lecturers feel that it is nature some students are more active than the other when it comes to employability

development. As employability is a relative concept, in the job market competition, some graduates are better and more suited for certain employments than others. It is impossible and unnecessary to try to make every student 'the same'.

Generally speaking, our lecturers seem to have a sophisticated understanding on how employability development should be designed and delivered within their programmes. Certainly, their understandings and views echo some of the experts' theories on constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 1999) and transformative learning (Harvey and Knight, 1996) when it comes to those three employability development curriculum design and delivery principles (i.e. embedded, progressive and learner-focused). There is a shared understanding on what it should be like ideally; and there is also a shared concern on some of the practical issues. Clearly, the challenges remain in reality as how to go about delivering employability development in order to engage students as much as possible. The dilemma seems to be: when it is implicitly embedded into the TLA, students seem to unable to identify and articulate what they have learnt and developed; when it is explicitly presented to them through TLA, students seem to be indifferent (particularly during first and second year). One lecturer has summed up such dilemma

"The trouble is the good student gets most of the help because they are the one turn up to thing and fully prepared, and the poor students you never get to see them. And of course they are the ones need help".

4.1.2.2 <u>Institutional employability development</u>

Apart from employability development in their own programmes, lecturers also discussed their experiences and feelings toward the institutional wide employability development initiatives, namely LJMU Graduate Skills and World of Work (WOW) (LJMU, 2013). In particular, our lecturers have shared their experiences and thoughts on the Graduate Skills (ibid) initiative as it was what every academic staff has to engage with at the time of the interviews.

In reality, the introduction and implementation of Graduate Skills (ibid) have been far from being 'simple' and 'straightforward' to the lecturers in the OE and PE programmes. Throughout the interviews, it seems individual lecturers have had their own 'version' of Graduate Skills regarding their expectations, experiences and attitudes toward it. Evidently, the lecturers do recognise the value of those eight skills highlighted by Graduate Skills. For those lecturers, university learning should include gaining transferable skills which "can be applied into anything when students start to look for jobs". This is particularly important in current mass participation HE setting, where the diversity of the student cohort means that their career aspersions also are much more diverse than decades ago. For the PE programme, even though the lecturers believe almost every student come to the programme

with a career aspersion to be a PE teacher, the current labour market down term means some students might not be able to secure PE teaching positions when they finish their degree. Nevertheless, lecturers also believe that university education should prepare students not just for a short-term graduate employment, but for their long-term work life. As a result, students should have appropriate transferable skills to be able to gain employment in other areas after their graduation and also be able to change and adapt their employment when it is necessary. For the OE programme, those generic transferable skills seem to be more relevant as OE students tend to go for even more diverse employment types after their graduation comparing to the PE programme. Even with the traditional PE and OE careers, as PE teachers and outdoor educators, the lecturers all credited those eight skills as essential for their professions.

Unlike previous research, where identifying and defining skills seem problematic (references), OE and PE lecturers all seem to feel those eight Graduate Skills (LJMU, 2013) are essential to their students. No one questioned the appropriateness of those skills. This is mainly because the lecturers believe those Graduate Skills are essential 'professional skills' in the areas of PE and OE, as one of the OE lecturers pointed out the importance of verbal communication skills,

"in the outdoor world you have got to stand up and talk to people. So for example, I get people to provide feedbacks in group work, and by the time the module is finished, I made sure everyone has done that. Some people might be uncomfortable about that, but how can you run a climbing session if you don't want to talk to people."

Similarly, for PE students, they need to be able to work with children, which requires a number of different professional skills that highlighted by Graduate Skills (LJMU, 2013):

"They will also be able to look at how their professional skills will be developed on how to organise children, for example in large groups, how to manage their behaviour, how to assess their progress, how they are differentiating their learning, those are all our employability skills."

Although it seems the eight skills identified by the university Graduate Skills (ibid) project are essential professional skills for PE and OE students from their lecturers' perspective, the implementation of the Graduate Skills project seems to be problematic for the lecturers. One of the key issues is that those skills have been identified as key professional skills in PE and OE programmes long before the Graduate Skills project.

OE lecturer: "I think for the graduate skills, if you look at a degree like the outdoor education one, all those skills are covered in what we do already. For example, the report they got to

write is about reflect what they have done, so they might reflect on 'yeah, I got everyone to the top of the hill, but my leadership wasn't very good so I need to work on that'. I think the issue for the university is that a lot of the programmes don't have the opportunity to do those kinds of things like the OE programme does. Students on our course and the PE course, you know they have all kind of opportunities to develop those skills, and to work with the public."

Indeed, as discussed above, those eight Graduate Skills seem to be essential professional skills for PE and OE. For PE students, the key assessment criteria for their QTS-their Professional Standards contain a list of much more comprehensive professional skills which includes those eight LJMU Graduate Skills. Taking verbal communication skill as an example, the following tables state LJMU Graduate Skill project's Verbal Communication and the QTS Professional Standards' verbal communication related skills and attributes.

This repetitiveness of skills was identified by the PE and OE programmes when Graduate Skills project was introduced to all the programmes in the university. Accordingly, both programmes have raised their concerns regarding the lecturers' and students' perceptions about Graduate Skills, asking the university's Graduate Development Centre (GDC) to be flexible with the adaptation and implementation of the Graduate Skills into their respective programmes. However, it seemed that an agreement between the programmes and the GDC was not reached, which as a result meant the PE and OE programmes had to embed the Graduate Skills project into their curriculum and assessments.

On one hand, the lecturers did express that they understood the university's initiative needed to be implemented within certain framework so that all the programmes could follow the 'LJMU Graduate Skills' branding. In addition, some lecturers also felt that additional support from the GDC could always benefit students, particularly for those students who struggle with their employability development. But the question was: 'should it be part of the programme, especially when the curriculum already has those skills?'

Indeed, for OE and PE lecturers, the Graduate Skills initiative has been perceived to be problematic for a number of reasons. First, all lecturers questioned why repeating the same skills if they are already there. For lecturers from both OE and PE programmes, there was a strong sense that the university's skills project has been a waste time and resources for their respective programmes. This is particularly considering the point of Graduate Skills, from the lecturers' point of view, is to provide students with added employability value; whereas for their programmes, the project does not seem to have achieved it. From their point of view, this repetition can be dangerous-not only it might not help students to develop their employability (which is the purpose of the Graduate Skills project), excessively pushing students to demonstrate and achieve those skills via Graduate Skills' framework runs the risk of exasperating students to be completely put off developing their employability.

OE lecturer: "It seems like at the moment, students are not interested in university project. No point for the university to put out a project, if at the programme level nothing is happening. We have 5 students turning up today (to WOW). So how this project can be embedded within the programme? It's about how we really take the responsibility of those things. Like Graduate Skills are part of our modules, but really we just tick a box. How do we really assess that? There are a lot of assumptions about it. I just feel at the moment, it's not clear how the university initiative match is up with what we are doing in the programme. Particularly for our kind of course, a lot of things we do are about leadership, communication, group work, so I think there are risks of being repetitive."

Secondly, because it seems that the Graduate Skills project has little value to the programmes from the lecturers' point of view, but the university insisted the programmes must go ahead with its implementation, there is a sense of 'this is another political initiative to add onto other political initiatives'. All the lecturers in this study feel that the university's project has adopted a top down approach that they have very little saying in how it is best suited to their respective programmes. For them, this has become the institution's way for political and financial gain. From the lecturers' point of view, it does not seem to benefit the students' employability development, and it does not seem to improve their programmes either.

PE lecturer: "When a new initiative starts, it becomes a bolt-on. It is an add-on, and people think 'oh here we go, another thing we get to try and do now'. You know, like graduate skills, 'oh we have to try to demonstrate them now'. That's how people see it, because that's how it is introduced. You have to do this, you have to do that. And the students clearly are going to say 'well, we have done that already', and they are right, they have. It's crazy. It needs to be inter-linked more".

In addition, some lecturers have also pointed out that they do not feel the university management itself has taken this initiative seriously enough. Although the marketing of the project is persistent at the moment, the fact that GDC has less than 40 staff members to deal with the whole institution's students' employability development does not seem to be a fair investment. As a result, the lecturers have an impression that it is "only a paper exercise".

Thirdly, the lecturers have raised a concern about adding Graduate Skills into their curriculum and assessment instead of something more valuable to their students.

OE lecturer: "We have to balance it out, because for something to put in, you have to leave something out. We always have to debate on what we have to leave out. So to squeeze in these extra things, to some extend we think we probably can squeeze in some better things than that."

Taking consideration of the previous two points, this further determines the dilemmatic situation the PE and OE lecturers feel themselves are in regarding implementing the university skill's project. For them, if the university is really committed to developing students' employability, it must consult lecturers from different programme to look at how employability can be tailored for different courses.

PE lecturer: "I think what's going to make someone employ a student from this university than a student from another university, clearly that is very important, and we should be working on that as a university. But that's where I feel that there are certain programmes already doing that, they already have a huge amount going on concerning employability. That's what I am saying, that needs to be acknowledged. You can't treat each course in the same way, because they all have different aims and they all organised in different ways."

Finally, some lecturers' experiences regarding how they are supported by the university to implement Graduate Skills also seem to be problematic. This is particularly an issue with new academic staff members. For them, the only explanation of what the Graduate Skills is about, and how to implement was provided by their colleagues on the programme. Some of them did not even receive any explanation and support until they went to ask other colleagues what to do with Graduate Skills.

PE lecturer: "I know about Graduate Skills and things like that. but I still don't quite fully understand the university's perspective on employability development. I think probably I haven't been around for a very long time, so I still don't really know the message."

OE lecturer: "Nobody told me what to do with it, so I did it based on what I think is the right way to do it, with some help from (my colleague)…I was told we need to embed those graduate skills into this module, so I went to ask him 'what shall I do with it?' and he showed me how he did it with his module, but it is really up to me…yeah, pretty much just picking out relevant things based on my personal experience with them, but to be honest, I was under the impression I don't need to spend too much time on it, so I didn't really give much thought about it."

Even with staff members who have been in the programme before the introduction of Graduate Skills, lack of support and communication between the programmes and the GDC meant the programmes and individual lecturers have been implement it according to "what they feel is the right thing to do". For the lecturers, this further led them to treat the project as a paper exercise, because it is not perceived as a serious investment. In addition, it was clear that some modules and lecturers put more effort into implementing and delivering Graduate Skills than others, which as a result seemed to be lack in consistency across the whole programme.

Throughout the interviews, the purposes and the values of the LJMU Graduate Skills project was constantly questioned by the lecturers from both programmes. For the lecturers, the repetitiveness of Graduate Skills comparing to their own programmes' professional skills means that it is very difficult to have students from the PE and OE programmes to 'buy into it because they feel they have already done them', particularly if their professional skills' requirements (e.g. QTS Standards) seem to be more sophisticated and creditable to their potential employers. In addition, lack of support from the university and the increasing pressure to deliver quality employability with limited time and resources led the lecturers further doubting the real value of the Graduate Skills project.

PE lecturer: "This is the whole discussion we had about graduate skills. Do they need extra sessions? Do they need to document their graduate skills? Well, it's interesting, I don't think they do. I think what needs to happen is for the whole of our programme, I think they can demonstrate they have achieved the WOW criteria without having to go through the WOW programme. Purely by evidencing their work-based learning tasks or work-based learning reports. I think there is an overlap there to a lot of what they already do."

Under those surface dissonances appear to be between lecturers and the university's management lays some deeper issues which could indicate academics' resistance and frustration towards top-down initiatives. And some of those issues appear to be no longer just about the pedagogical problems regarding the TLA of employability.

PE lecturer: "I don't think its (Graduate Skills) best sense was sold to staff. It was a very big picture, came on broad quite quickly, and suddenly through a lot of management groups, but it really needs to be disseminated and sold to staff at lower level, really. I think it happened top down rather than bottom up. And therefore, those on the ground who are delivering it...cause it can change the focus of what you do in your lectures to make students be more aware of what they are doing in lectures, how they are working as groups, you know, this kind of things… people who are delivering it on the ground are the important ones to those kind of things rather than management groups. And it can get all filtered and watered down, then when it reaches to the bottom, perhaps it doesn't really happen. So I think the whole idea and concept of WOW and Graduate Skills could be devolved a lot better across programmes, I think it would get picked out a lot quicker if it was done from the bottom by academic staff. In my personal opinion, rather than being driven down from management groups, saying 'you have got to do that', who I really don't think understood it either. From the bottom up, we are the ones on the ground, the lecturers who are working with the students on the daily bases, they are still trying to get their heads around it and they know very little about it. And staff development is trying to roll forward the idea of WOW, and I think it happens too quickly. I keep on repeating myself, but like I said, there is not enough staff engagement in it, and that's one of the key issues with a lot of things if it comes top down. It doesn't get those people on the ground really engaged and wanting to work with it. They just think it's another idea it's being throwing at them on top of all the other ideas that they have to do, and it will go away…Some people have taken responsibility for it, others aren't as engaged, or haven't seen the importance because there are so many things we have to achieve as lecturers, in terms of research, delivering the subject, and so on. The employability side of the things, even though it's been embedded in the programme, and again, because we are constantly talking about those things anyway, but in terms of the university's initiative, it didn't really get into people's consciousness".

Clearly, like I discovered in my literature review, academics feel there are political and management issues regarding employability and employability development in HE. As I highlighted in my literature review, our lecturers seem also feel that top-down employability initiatives seem to be driven by a lot of political seasons. In relation to their designing and implementation, there seems to be a lack of communication and negotiation between the lecturers and the university leadership which makes our lecturers feel their voice is not heard, even though they are the ones dealing with it in their everyday work with their students. Clearly, like how many academics feel about the employability agenda (e.g. see Harvey, 2000; Barnett, 1994), our lecturers feel their academic autonomy and freedom is challenged by the university management group. Although it seems they understand within today's HE

context, certain 'game' must be played for funding and recruitment purposes; such top-down initiative seems to have challenged the core – who holds the right to define what programmes should deliver? The Government? Professional bodies? Employers? University? Students? Or academic staff? On the issue of employability in particularly, it seems there are too many different perspectives and expectations to fulfil which leave our lecturers feeling the purposes of their TLA activities are shifting. Perhaps this is the challenge that 21st Century academics are facing as described by Barnett and Hallam (1999):

"...that state of affairs where one is faced with alternative frameworks of interpretation through which to make sense of one's world and to act purposively in it... situations such as these present their subjects with alternative and possibly incommensurable frameworks to understanding not just those situations, but themselves. The dilemmas that super complexity presents us all with are dilemmas of understanding (the world), of action (in the world) and of identity and self-understanding (in the world)". (p. 138)

4.1.2.3 Overall discussion on employability development

The view expressed by lecturers in this study so far seems echo the transformative model Harvey and Knight (1996) suggested in which HE education is viewed as a fundamental change of students' form qualitatively. The key of transformative learning is about encouraging students to think about education as a process in which they are engaged, not some 'thing' they tentatively approach and selectively appropriate (Harvey, 2004) which is also recognised by the lecturers as they suggest that employability development in HE needs to focus on the process rather than the specific content so that when the students going to new environments, they will be able to transfer and adapt.

As well as expressing their beliefs on transformative model employability development, all the lecturers also state their concern on outcome-based model for HE education in general and employability in specific. As stated by the lecturers, they believe some of the current employability development initiatives in HE are 'making graduates fit for purposes' in which 'we are almost producing students off a production line'. As pointed out by Lees (2002), even though Knight and Yorke's concept of employability development in HE has been widely accepted and adopted by HE insiders, the government is using an outcome-based model (i.e. the Employability Performance Indicators [EPIs]) to judge HE employability development.

With this transformative model (Harvey and Knight, 1996) in mind, lecturers also point out reasons for being resistant to some of the current employability development initiatives. Lecturers perceive many of the top-down initiatives as an outcome-based model (see Lees, 2002) which is just another add-on for the students and the academic staff. They suggest any add-on initiatives are likely to be viewed as paper exercise in which lecturers and

students are just ticking boxes, filling paper works and receiving certificates. This approach is not perceived as the appropriate and effective way to develop students' employability, because lecturers suggest it is often repetitive, surface, and lack of professional and subject specific knowledge and skills. This is because lecturers believe that top-down initiatives are not merged from the core natures of the programme, even though these elements are directly or indirectly affected by some policies and initiatives. For example, some lecturers pointed out that because the nature of student cohort on the programmes has changed in recent years due to the increasing number of students on the programme, the curriculum has changed to offer greater professional and subject knowledge and skills.

This challenge regarding implementing top-down initiatives, further highlights that the current practice on TLA of employability development in programmes is a 'wicked' problem (Knight and Page, 2007), as it seems the designing, delivery and understanding of these initiatives are misunderstood, thus chaotic. Nevertheless, lack of considerations of academics' voices by such top-down initiatives seem to also challenges our lecturers sense of their own autonomy and freedom on what they should delivery in their own programmes. This leads to the issues regarding how our lecturers perceive the roles and responsibilities of the university, their programmes and themselves in relation to their students' employability development.

4.1.3   The role and responsibilities of university, programmes and lecturers

As pointed out in the literature review, nowadays employability development is an essential part of HE programmes due to the high demand from various key stakeholders of HE (e.g. government, students, etc.). Under current policies, employability is a key indicator when the government, employers and students assess the value of degree programmes. However, often employability means a much narrow and objective measurement on graduates' employment rate and quality (measured by income). Nevertheless, developing students' employability to help them achieve success in their future career is a common goal of our lecturers', because 'at the end of day, we all want our students to do well'. Indeed, lecturers have much sympathy on the financial and social pressures students are under as a result of their participation in HE. However, there is some disagreement on whether employability is the main purpose of the programme, or if is a good by-product of excellent HE teaching and learning. To some lecturers, employability is embedded right through the whole course in which every element of the programme plays its part in employability development (i.e. 'everything we do here is for employability'), to others, 'it just happens' as a valuable by-product of holistic learning which aims to develop students as people (i.e. 'sometimes we do things for employability, other times employability happens to also be developed as a result of what we do').

Evidently, this kind of dissonance is much more visible amongst PE lecturers.

PE Lecturer 1: "And in terms of that, I think for undergraduate programmes, employability is embedded right through the whole course because its training teachers, its teacher education, so in terms of employability, everything we do is geared towards developing their subject knowledge, their pedagogical knowledge, their teaching capacity, in order to create good teachers in the workforce. So the whole programme is designed initially in terms of what knowledge they need to know to be a good teacher, to be employable, and the skills they all need as well, in order to be able to work, to plan, to teach, to manage and lead in school situations and beyond."

PE Lecturer 2: "From where I sit, the students aren't here just to train to be something, they are here to develop in a kind of holistic way. Yes, their focus is about becoming a PE teacher, and so in that sense they are trained in certain competences; but they are not only training to do that, they are studying an academic degree. So I think they are not just training, it's broader than that."

Researcher: "from your personal viewpoint, what the differences are there between a training programme and a HE degree programme?"

PE Lecturer 2: "my best guess would be, a training programme trains a person to meet a particular outcome or aim, and that is it. Whereas a HE programme needs to have more holistic sides to it. It's about the development of a person. At the end of the day, our students come in usually at age 18, they have never been away from home, they don't know much about life to be honest, but when they leave, they have grown a lot."

PE Lecturer 3: "A normal degree programme, like sport science, for example what I did, you finish a degree and there are a number of avenues you can go down in terms of career, but you may not experience life in that career. But teaching, our course is very different. Trainees come to our course, on the first day, they know what they want to do after it, they know what they need to do to be a PE teacher, everything here is geared towards that."

Clearly, some PE lecturers perceive their programme to be different, compared to 'normal HEFCE' programmes, arguing a professional course like the PE programme has a specific purpose that is to provide an excellent workforce for their profession in which employability is the key. On the other hand, some lecturers feel that professional courses still come under the broader umbrella of HE in which the purpose of HE learning is greater than, but also inclusive to their professional learning. It seems that those lecturers feel because within such a diverse cohort, students come to HE for different reasons, it is not acceptable to make employability the sole purpose of a programme. As one lecturer pointed out

"What if they (students) one day decide they don't want to be teachers anymore? … I would like to think their university experience has prepared them for life, not just their first job."

Perhaps because the nature of their programme as a professional teacher training degree rather than a 'normal HEFCE' degree adds on extra dimensions to the programme as the

expectations and perceptions about the programme seem different. Lecturers' perceptions on the purposes of their programmes, the purposes of HE and the relationship between employability development and academic learning are key to how they perceive the position of employability is their programmes. It seems here lays great dissonances amongst our lecturers on those issues, due to their personal backgrounds and identities within their programmes (I will come back to this point later).

OE lecturers also seem to have some dissonances amongst them in relation to how they perceive the purposes of university and their programme, in relation to their students' employability development. Although, PE lecturers seem to feel their programme is different compared to a HEFCE funded programme, yet OE lecturers' dissonances share the similar arguments. Accordingly, our lecturers feel the pressure from the government, the institution and their students with regard to their graduates' employment rates and quality, particularly at the time when tuition fees seem to be increasing and the competition for graduate jobs seem to be growing. At the time, when funding and recruitment seem to be closely linked to those factors, lecturers feel they have to make employability as the primary purpose of their programmes to appeal to their potential students and the political employability agenda. It must be said that our lecturers have great concerns on how well their students do in relation to their graduate employments. However, just like the top-down institutional initiative on employability, lecturers feel rather than letting it happen naturally as part of a holistic learning experience, they believe their students should be engaging within HE degree programmes, employability seems to have been forced to become the outcome of today's HE through a solely political and economic constructed concept. Here, for our lecturers, the dilemma is: to what extent programmes have to give in to employability agenda to ensure the expectations of various stakeholders are met, and yet the purposes and academic integrity of their programmes are not lost?

Through talking to our lecturers, it is apparent that some lecturers seem to be more engaged with employability than the others. Like one of our PE lecturers pointed out, some lecturers seem to take on more responsibilities than others, most likely because they have different roles within the programme. In addition, depending on individual lecturer's understanding and definition on what employability and employability development is, they perceive their roles and responsibilities differently.

PE lecturer 1: "I suppose I have taken that on by myself, rather than being told that I have a role within it."

PE lecturer 2: "everybody is involved; some are more than the others."

OE lecturer 1: "Indirectly (I have a role within the employability development of the programme). And next year, becoming more so. At the moment, I am not allocated any hours

for CETL or employability. But that will change next year. My major role there is totally, virtually teaching outdoor activities, and with very minor classroom based teaching as well."

OE lecturer 2: "yes and no. no in the sense that I don't have a formal role in employability like WOW. Yes in the sense that everyone within the centre has some responsibilities to support students' employability, so facilitate things like graduate skills. So informally, I think everyone has a role in it. And I worked in the industry in a number of areas, so I have a good sense on what quality practices are."

Clearly, just like demonstrated by Barrie's study (2006, 2004), lecturers perceive their roles and responsibilities toward their students' employability development differently. It is apparent that there are somewhat degrees of confusions on what exactly everybody's roles are within the programme in relation to employability development. Linking with their varied perceptions on what their programme's purpose is, for instance, some PE lecturers clearly feel everybody within the programme has a major role in employability development through delivering the different aspects of those essential components (see previous sector on the five components), whereas others feel certain individuals have the responsibilities of delivering employability but others do not. This lack of clarification amongst our lecturers seems to have created problems and issues on how those essential components should be delivered and who should deliver them. In addition, there seems to be an assumption on individual's roles and responsibilities within the programme team. Without the communication and clarification on each other's perceptions on roles and responsibilities, it seems some lecturers feel their colleagues are not 'doing their job properly', whereas some other lecturers feel they have been 'given something which is not their responsibility to do'. It must be said, our lecturers did not blame their colleagues in relation to their roles and responsibilities on employability; but clearly there is a certain degree of conflict amongst the programme teams due to the lack of clarifications on their dissonances with regard to how they perceive employability development and the roles and responsibilities of the university, their programme and themselves.

4.1.4   Summary discussion on initial findings

Through this first, initial analytic layer, it is apparent our lecturers share much congruence in their understandings and perceptions about employability and employability development. Clearly, for our lecturers, employability is vital to their students, and supporting their students' employability development is one of their essential roles and responsibilities as lecturers in today's HE (Knight and Page, 2007), particularly considering the nature of their degrees as a professional programme and an applied programme.

Evidently, our lecturers in this study have sophisticated understandings on the key characteristics of employability, and perceive it as a process which is relative and subjective (ibid). With this understanding in mind, our lecturers believe employability is not just a list of

skills or objective measurements of graduates' employment rates and income, but a combination of complex attributes, skills, knowledge as well as meaningful experiences, self-awareness and understandings of their respective professions (as suggested by many academics and experts, e.g. Yorke and Knight; Harvey; Holmes).

Our lecturers also perceive employability as a long-life concept which should be about graduate employability (short-term) as well as students' career progression and development throughout their life time (long-term) (Knight and Yorke, 2003). As a result, our lecturers feel employability development should not be short-sighted (focusing on producing graduates fit for purpose) but to focus on developing students' competencies to carry on learning, developing and applying their learning into their work, nevertheless, graduate employability is still important because students need to gain an initial employment after their graduation to be able to carry on developing and applying their employability.

In terms of the teaching, learning and assessment of employability development in their degree programmes, our lecturers feel it should consist of five essential components: professional and subject knowledge, skills and attributes; meaningful work experience and knowledge; personal competence and individual traits; insight knowledge about the industry/profession; industry/professional recognitions (e.g. extra qualifications). These key components are very similar to those suggested by leading experts (e.g. Harvey; Knight and Yorke) on what employability development should consists of, which further suggests our lecturers in this study have sophisticated understandings on the issue. In order to meaningfully develop those components, our lecturers suggested that employability development in the HE programmes need to consider three key principles (which are a reflection on their beliefs that employability is a life-long process which is subjective and relative): embedding key components; valuing employability as a process rather than produce; and aiming to fulfil each individual student's career aspirations. With those three principles in mind, our lecturers feel their programmes are (and should be) working towards a curriculum that is

- Holistic and aligned TLA
- Encouraging and motivating students for extra curriculum learning (sometimes involving bolt-on activities)
- Having direct application towards students learning
- Having employability as one of the key themes going through the curriculum
- Mixing well with subject and professional knowledge and skills.

Clearly, such principles are not only relevant to meaningful employability development, but also applicable to meaningful HE learning in general as they reflect the principles Biggs and Tang (1999) suggest for deep learning at HE level.

The findings in this study regarding lecturers' understandings and perceptions seem to differ to some of Barrie's findings (2006, 2004). Perhaps because the two programmes are in education, lecturers in this study seem to generally have a sophisticated understanding on employability and the teaching and learning of employability development. While in Barrie's studies, there were many academics held 'surface' level views on employability and having indifferent attitude towards it, lecturers in this study all appear to understand the concept from multi-perspectives and feeling they have great responsibilities in developing their students' employability.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Barrie's studies (ibid), it seems our lecturers' practices on teaching, learning and assessing employability are strongly associated with how they understand and perceive the concept. Though the aims and scopes of this study are somewhat different comparing to Barrie's, some of the details in our findings share similarities. For example, employability development cannot be achieved through bolt-on approaches alone, and those complex attribute must be developed through an embedded curriculum which aims for developing students' life-long learning as individuals.

With those similarities in findings in mind, some of Barrie's recommendations and suggestions seem to be also applicable to mine study: a student-centred learning (Ramsden, 2003; Biggs and Tang, 1999) approach needs to be integrated into the curriculum. However, the challenges such approach opposes in relation to focusing on what's being learnt by students rather than what's being taught by teachers must be considered and dealt with (particularly considering most degree programmes tend to set prescribed learning outcomes) (ibid). In addition, very complex attributes often are implicitly embedded within the learning experiences which can be challenging for the learners to identify them (Knight and Yorke, 2003). Nevertheless, from mine findings and Barrie's findings, a key message is that from our lecturers' point of view, degree programmes should not hold the sole responsibility to develop and enhance students' employability. Students themselves are the key, and they must act as active agents to engage with opportunities within and outside their formal education settings.

Finally, there seems to be a shared issue amongst all the lecturers in this study regarding the institution's employability initiative and projects. Though our lecturers seem to feel in theory the graduate skills and world of work projects are excellent in terms of the skills, attributes and components they try to develop and enhance; in practices, those projects seem to be

highly problematic from our lecturers' point of view (Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003): first, those skills and attributes seem to be repetitive and too generic to the OE and PE programmes which lead our lecturers to feel they have little value to their students as the programmes; second, regardless to lecturers concerns, university management insists the programmes to participant in the projects which seems to be a waste of time and resources; third, within this top-down approach, there is insufficient communication and support to our lecturers to implement the projects into their teaching learning and assessment; finally, our lecturers believe those projects are much more political and economic driven than focusing on students' learning and development.

Though it appears our lecturers have shared understandings on what employability is about and what employability development consists of, there are clearly dissonances regarding how much employability development their programmes should include and how employability development should be carried out in teaching learning and assessment. Those dissonances seem to be strongly associated with how our lecturers perceive the roles and responsibilities themselves, their programmes, the institution and HE in general have in relation to the employability for their respective profession/industry and the society in general.

Diversity is one of the key characteristics of HE (Barnett, 2000) and it is expected in this study, but there appears to be an assumption amongst our lecturers that they have shared understandings on the 'how much' and 'how' issues, thus those differences amongst their understandings and perceptions are overlooked. This assumption (due to lack of communication) runs a risk of sending out conflicting messages to students through inconsistent practices within the programme. This inconsistency potentially can cause further confusion and conflict – this seems to be one of the key reasons that employability development at programme level is problematic. As argued by Barrie (2006), curriculum reforms and interventions are not likely to be successful unless the key stakeholders acknowledge and address the fact that there are diverse understandings and perceptions, and such diversity leads to variations in practices. Adding to Barrie's suggestion, this kind of transparent dialogue needs to be not only between the authorities (e.g. policy makers and university management) and lecturers, but also amongst lecturers themselves in order to progress current practices on employability development in higher education.

In short, there are shared academic and professional values, principles and philosophies amongst our lecturers which lead to shared understandings and perceptions on what employability is and what employability development should consists of; though diverse understandings on how employability development should be carried out are expected, many problematic dissonances amongst our lecturers at the programme level are due to lack of communications and clarifications on perceived definitions, roles and responsibilities.

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4.2   Emerging themes from lecturers' interviews

After synthesising and evaluating the initial themes of lecturers' interviews (based on the 'structured' questions of the interviews) via the first data analysis circle of the spiral analysis (Creswell, 2007), further themes and issues have developed. In this section, I am going to focus on those emerging themes which developed through the second analysis circle. The key purpose here is to further explore our lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions in order to illuminate those vital employability and employability development issues from their perspectives as well as through their perspectives (interpreted by me). In addition, I will further examine those crucial dissonances and congruence amongst our lecturers regarding their understandings and perceptions on employability and employability development in order to further understand the problematic nature of employability development in HE at programme-level.

4.2.1   Similarities and differences between programmes

As highlighted in the methodology chapter, because the natures of the two programmes involved in this study can be perceived differently as one is a HEFCE funded degree programme and another is a professional credited degree, there is a new sub-aim (under Aim 2) to see if there is any significant dissonances and congruence between the two programmes' lecturers' and students' thoughts and experiences.

Through the initial data analysis and discussion, it is apparent that a great amount of lecturers' understandings and perceptions of employability and employability development are related to their understandings and perceptions of the nature and purposes of their respective programmes. Evidently, there are some differences between OE and PE lecturers' understandings and perceptions on certain issues (e.g. the roles and responsibilities of their respective programmes in relation to their students' employability development). Perhaps, as pointed out by some lecturers, this is because they perceive there are differences between their own programmes and other HE programmes regarding their purposes and pedagogical underpins (Knight and Page, 2007).

It is interesting that, many PE lecturers share the view that employability is the negotiation between what their students can offer and what the schools are looking for. When asked to justify their answer, all of those lecturers pointed out that because the nature of the programme, the students have always known what they will be doing as a PE teacher after their degree, the schools as their employers share similar employability requirements as they are bound by the government's and professional bodies' guidelines and policies, and the graduates will be competing with people who have similar knowledge and skill sets as they come from similar degree programmes; as a result, identifying and developing those

employability requirements for the employers seems not relevant, instead, PE lecturers suggest their students' focuses are and should be on enhancing their own strengths and overcoming their weaknesses in order to be employable. On the other hand, the answers from OE lecturers seem to be more diverse - ranging from focusing on what employers/the industry want to focusing on what students need to a very broad view that employability is about being able to do something 'meaningful and productive' to contribute to the society.

Evidently, PE lecturers seem to be more concerned about the requirements for a specific profession than OE lecturers. PE lecturers believe their programmes are different from HEFCE funded programmes as 'everything on the programme is directed towards a specific future career'; whereas the lecturers in the OE programme consider that there are various career routes within their profession which as a result the programme can only 'introduce students to the possibilities'. Interestingly, it seems our lecturers share similar perceptions about each other's respective programmes (i.e. PE lecturers believe OE employability development is generic; and OE lecturers perceive PE employability development is specific).

In addition, the lecturers from the PE programme suggest that their students tend to arrive in HE with a clear career choice in mind (i.e. being a teacher after HE education). As a result, the lecturers believe their students are more likely to work towards that specific career choice than students in HEFCE funded programme. In these respects, the purposes of specific HE programmes in relation to employability development seem differ from lecturers' perspective, even though they agree that the generic purpose of HE education is aligned with the transformative model. This seems to effect on how our lecturers perceive the pedagogical underpins of employability and employability development in their programmes.

PE lecturer: "I think that's something driven in our teacher training programmes because they have professional standards about 'you are not coming here to take part in a degree, you are here, it's teacher education, it's a training programme, you are training to be a teacher, and therefore your work ethic is very visible and it does map across, and the fact that you don't turn up to lectures or you don't do the work or you don't prepare for the lectures, that's work ethic, isn't it?"

OE lecturer: "well, I definitely feel things have changed here… In the past, this programme solely focused on the environmental and practical side of the outdoors, hence it was just one programme on outdoor education and environmental studies…Now, because the expansion of the outdoor industry and the increasing interests from our prospective students, the programme has split into three programmes-outdoor education with environmental studies, outdoor education with adventure therapy and outdoor education with PE. The number of students in each cohort has also increased steadily. And because all those changes, the focus of our programme has changed. It uses to be introducing students into outdoor education with a specific focus on environmental side of things, now it's so much wider. And I believe the employability side of things have also changed because of this. Now, we have less those traditional outdoor students who came to the programme with a focus on outdoor education career and a lot of experiences in the outdoors, now we have a wide range of students with very different backgrounds and experiences…yeah, I think we are definitely

focusing more on introducing them to the different aspects of outdoors rather than solely the education with environment side of things."

As most of PE lecturers seem to believe their programme has a sole purpose on 'developing trainees to become high quality PE teachers' and our OE lecturers seem to perceive their programme as 'an introduction to different areas within outdoors', there are a number of differences between their approach to the design and delivery of their employability development, though collectively they share the five essential employability components and the three key principles. Noticeably, as I already pointed out in the previous section, the quantity, quality and the nature of WBL/WRL between those two programmes varies. Underpinned by the ethos that professional teacher training should be carried out in their 'nature settings' (i.e. schools) in order to gain understandings and experiences on their professional culture and values, the PE programme consists of a large amount of school-based placements every year companied by students' professional development portfolios, personal and professional reflections and problem-based assessments related to their school placements. In contrast, though OE only offers a module on WBL which consists of three weeks of work experiences in any outdoor related areas, OE lecturers believe that other modules (e.g. practical development) also contribute to their students' work related learning because the context of their practical learning and assessment is similar to outdoor industry's practical working environment.

In addition, the two programme teams seem to have somewhat different attitudes toward the university employability initiative. Though, as discussed before, lecturers seem to share a lot of concerns regarding the Graduate Skills project, the OE lecturers generally welcome the idea of additional support for their students employability, but they are cautious on the details of how it should be delivered and they are concerned about the lack of staff development for themselves in relation to the implementation of such project; in contrast, the PE lecturers seem to be much more resistant towards the whole initiative due to their perceptions on the repetitiveness of such project to their own curriculum.

Those differences between the two programmes and their lecturers' understandings, perceptions and experiences are indications to that employability and employability development certainly have subject specific traits (Knight and Page, 2007). Consequently, just as Yorke suggested (2006) 'one size fits all' does not work for employability development, though generally speaking there are some shared essential components and principles. To individual programme and individual lecturer, it seems the nature and the purposes of the programme and their own modules are keys to what should be delivered and how they should be delivered. Certainly, individual lecturer's understandings and perceptions on those

issues need to be shared amongst their programme teams, but more importantly between the academics and the university management groups. Like the issues appeared in last section, it is apparent that though our lecturers have clear and sophisticated understandings on the differences between different subject areas, there seems to be lack of clarifications and communications amongst our lecturers on their understandings which as a result makes the implementations and delivery of certain employability development aspects problematic.

Those differences at institutional, programme and module level, arguably are related to the dissonances our lecturers have amongst them in relation to the 'how much' and 'how' issues on employability development. Indeed, it seems according to our lecturers there is a complex relationship amongst various factors such as programme purposes, employability focuses and their student cohort identity, which has further implications on their programmes. As the outdoor lecturer pointed out, the changes in outdoor industry triggered adjusts in their programme which seem to further triggered changes in their student cohort identities. As a result, the pedagogical underpins and the curriculum design and delivery of the programme have also changed accordingly. This further supports Yorke's suggestion on 'one size fits all 'does not work (2006) even at the programme and module level.

4.2.2   Ownership of employability

As highlighted in last discussion section, though our lecturers seem to share a similar definition on what employability is, there are some differences amongst their understandings and perceptions on the concept in relation to how they perceive the purposes of their programmes in relation to employability development and how they feel employability development should be delivered. Taking a closer look on those differences, it appears though the general definitions on what employability is seem to be similar, how our lecturers perceive the ownership of such employability seem to differ.

"a skill of an individual that I would want to work with me."

 Or

"skills, qualities, attitudes, experiences, to enable them(students) to undertake a role which they would apply for. "

Or

"in its widest sense, it (employability) is not just about having a job and making money. It's about doing something meaningful and productive. It's about being prepared to live life in its full."

Evidently, although many lecturers in this study feel employability is defined by employers and the industries/professions that their students are going into, some definitions suggest that the lecturers feel their students are the ones who should have the ownership of

employability and should be negotiating it with their future potential employers through matching what the students feel they can offer with what the employers are looking for. In other words, rather than solely focusing on identifying and developing what the employers want the students to have as their employability attributes, some lecturers suggest students should focus on their own learning and development in areas that they are interested in and good at (i.e. the student-centre approach, Ramsden, 2003; Biggs and Tang, 1999). Through this process, students are no longer passive entities but pro-active agencies who act on their own wishes and visions of employability development.

Apart from the employers and the students, there are a number of other key stakeholders' requirements and obligations seem need to be fulfilled. As I have already pointed out in the previous section, the government's policies (particularly for teacher training), professional/industry requirements and standards, and the university's guidelines and initiatives are all crucial factors that effect on the focus of the programmes' employability development. In other words, as well as the employers and the students, the government, the outdoor industry/PE profession and the university have also claimed some ownership on employability by directly impact on how employability is defined and what need to be developed. As discussed before, those factors can also interfere with each other, thus create an even more 'complex' situation for the lecturers to consider when it comes to define employability and characterise the focuses of employability development for their programmes.

PE lecturer: "The programme is quite reactive to policy changes and changes impose to organisations from the above like the teaching development agency or the teaching training agency. So for example, the standards for ITT which the students work toward have changed a couple of times since I have been here (from the mid 90s). So that in some respects it has impact on how the programme is delivered because we need to demonstrate our students have gathered those competences. So that's an example of change. But as results of students' feedback, module evaluations and professional discussions, we made changes to the degree course over that time. We have a new programme now which is in its third year, which is developed on the back of the old programme. So there are various small changes, but also some large ones which relate to programme structure."

Nevertheless, some lecturers pointed out that they feel, as experts and experienced practitioners themselves, they have the responsibility to define and shape the future of their respective profession/industry. Indeed, when asked 'why you became a lecturers', many of them said it was because they feel a sense of responsibility and duty to share their knowledge and experiences to people who will be the future of their beloved profession/industry, as well as using the opportunities to educate those future teachers/outdoor educators in the direction they believe their profession/industry is going down to.

OE lecturer: "For me, it (employability development for this programme) is about training future outdoor educators. Therefore, it's about giving them the opportunities to experience a range of different avenues. It's giving them the platform to understand the breadth of outdoor education and its application, to understand its history, its development and its application… So when they go out, they have the knowledge and skills to recognise and develop the application of outdoor education. And I think they are the future ambassadors of outdoor education. So that's a perspective for the industry, you know, what we can do for the outdoor industry. As an educator in the university, you have to think about what you do and how you do things which have impact on the industry… So it echoes what's going on now in the field, but it also has to, in a way predict the future, so that's what I mean by students are future ambassadors because whatever they do here will shape the future of outdoor education… I think often when we talk about employability, we only think about students, we forget about how important the staff's contributions to their subject areas, to their industry can be."

Clearly, having too many different stakeholders claiming ownerships on employability has certainly created some issues for our lecturers (Knight and Yorke, 2003). Taking the PE programme for instance, in order to ensure their graduates are 'highly employable as PE teachers', those key teacher training professional standards must be fulfilled. As our lecturers explained, those standards come from a combination of expectations and requirements from the government, teaching professional bodies, schools, pupils, parents, wider public and so on. Any changes in one or several of those stakeholders' expectations and requirements on teachers can lead to some of the current students' employability becoming invalid. As a result, though Gazier's theory suggests we are moving towards the interactive employability where individuals claim their own employability and negotiate it with the labour market (2001), certainly for our PE and OE lecturers, their students have to follow certain external employability requirements and rules. Although this is not to say our students do not 'own' their employability in a sense that they are the ones who have to hold and be able to demonstrate their employability, nevertheless, they do not hold the autonomy to define what their own employability is consists of. Certainly for PE and OE students, an element of their employability development is to be able to understand and negotiate that 'ownership' between themselves and the external bodies (i.e. key stakeholders), which in a way can also be viewed as the interactive employability – but with much professional/industry boundaries.

An important issue that must be pointed out to our lecturers is that fulfilling industry/professional requirements is different from satisfying employers' needs. As some lecturers point out, in their respective industry/profession, certain requirements must be achieved by the students if they wish to enter the OE/PE working world. For instance, to be able to work in the outdoor industry, particularly as an instructor or a teacher, graduates must be able to perform comprehensive first aid procedures confidently and competently. This, from our lecturers' point of view, is a key industry requirement that their students must be able to fulfil, and as a result, first aid training and assessment is part of the OE degree programme. However, if the programme receives feedback from their graduates or certain

employers to require a very specific kind of first aid training which only (a) certain employer(s) use(s), the programme will not complete change its first aid training just to suit that specific requirement.

This kind of multiple ownership of employability clearly has created certain challenges and dilemmas to our lecturers (Knight and Yorke, 2003). As discussed in the previous section, many lecturers feel that the purpose of HE should be supporting and directing individual student to discover and fulfil their personal career aspirations, and to achieve such purpose, HE degree programmes cannot primarily focusing on 'producing oven ready graduates through a production line just to satisfy employers'. Clearly, to those lecturers, HE learning (including employability development) should be primarily student-centred approach which as a result letting students take the primary ownership of their employability (ibid). Indeed, as highlighted by some lecturers, the varieties of their students' future employments are immense considering the number of students nowadays entering higher education; in addition, in today's job market, people seem to change their career directions rather than stick with one career for life (Bridgstock, 2009); taking into consideration that new jobs and careers are consistently emerging in the labour market, some of our lecturers believe that university degree cannot and should not focus on preparing their students for a handful of specific employments via teaching and assessing their students on those employers' requirements (Harvey, 2005).

On the other hand, many policies have led HE programmes into a culture in which the government and the employers have the primary say on degree programmes' employability and employability development (Lees, 2002). As I pointed out in my literature review, currently how degree programmes are valued and judged by measurements such as the First Destination Survey, leave a large number of academics to feel they have very limited autonomy and control over their programmes, because instead of focusing on those long-term student-centred employability development, academics feel they have to constantly fulfil policy and employers' requirements to be able to 'score' well in those evaluations to ensure their future funding and student recruitment. Amongst all those key stakes, for our lecturers, there is also their subject value and academic solemnity[14] which are crucial to their identities as academics. Because for our lecturers, they hold the future of their subjects and higher

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[14] When I was writing up this issue regarding lecturers' feeling and perceptions on how the government policies seemed to have taken away academics' autonomy, I was looking for a word which demonstrates how serious this issue is. From what the lecturers have said in this study, clearly they felt their academic integrity has been questioned by the vigorous involvement of the government and businesses on the matter of employability development. As I was struggling to come up with the word, I translated the Chinese word 庄严 (which what I feel is the most appropriate description of what I wanted to say here) into English, and I ended up with solemnity. As the noun form of solemn, here solemnity means seriousness and respect.

education, not only by educating students who will be future professionals in their respective profession/industry, but also through their engagement with innovative research and practices which to them shape the future of PE and OE.

This conflict, between what employability focuses and ownerships should be and what employability focuses and ownerships are, certainly has left many of our lecturers very concerned about the current employability agenda in HE at various levels: practical, strategic and philosophical. As discussed so far, the practical and strategic issues and challenges regarding how employability development should be designed and delivered are very apparent. And this is indeed connected to the dilemmas our lecturers are facing at the philosophical level regarding some fundamental questions about HE such as 'what is the primary role of HE to its society', 'what is the primary role of HE to its subject area?' and so on (Barnett, 2000).

Ideal

Primary
- Professional/industry reqruiements
- Subject value
- Academic solemnity and autonomy
- Students' (real) aspirations

Secondary
- Specific employers' needs
- Political requirements

Reality

Primary
- Professional/industry reqruiements
- Specific employers' needs
- Political requirements
- Students' aspirations

Secondary
- Subject value
- Academic solemnity and autonomy

Figure 5 Lecturers' perceptions on the ideal and reality of employability focuses and ownerships

As illustrated in Figure 5, there is a clear difference, according to our lecturers' perceptions, between their ideal HE and the reality regarding employability focuses and ownerships. Though the figure does not capture all the key stakeholders, it is apparent that some of the most important focuses and issues for employability development (i.e. subject value and

academic solemnity and autonomy) are believed to be secondary in reality from our lecturers' point of view. And it could be argued that this perception about the difference between their ideology and the reality is what makes many lecturers having an indifferent or even reluctant attitude towards the political employability agenda.

Indeed, how lecturers perceive such ownership and focuses can have an effect on how they approach their curriculum, teaching and assessment (Knight and Yorke, 2003). For instance, lecturers who feel that employability should focus on identifying and fulfilling employers' requirements are likely to focus their curriculum and their teaching on those aspects, whereas lecturers who perceive their students should hold the ownership of their own employability are likely to focus their curriculum and their teaching on their students' needs and aspirations. Though there is no right or wrong way of perceived employability ownership, clearly, having different perceptions and focuses within the same programme without clearly discussing what those perceptions are and how they affect our lecturer' practices potentially can cause confusions amongst the staff members and their students on what the programme's primary focus and expected employability development outcomes are (ibid).

Those dilemmas then lead to further issues and challenges in curriculum design and pedagogical practices – like a vicious circle. First, there are some students wish to be spoon-fed by their lecturers on employers' requirements, in which they can strategically develop during their degree in order to gain such employment after graduation. To our lecturers, those students seem to be indifferent or even disengaged when it comes to the learning experiences focusing on developing those complex and sophisticated employability attributes and competencies. The problem, from our lecturers' point of view, is that after their graduation, those students tend to find their narrowly focused employability is not as constructive as they thought they should be when they are competing in today's open and dynamic job market. However, those students will not come to term with this understanding, until they experienced such difficulties when they enter the job market. To solve this problem, one of the key solutions is to engage students with the real world working experience as much as possible (Knight and Page, 2007). Secondly, our lecturers feel that in today's target-driven higher education, it is difficult not to have narrow focused employability which targets on fulfilling employers' requirements because they are much more measurable than those complex and sophisticated personal and professional attributes and competencies that student-centred employability development tends to focus on. As a result, a carefully constructed curriculum where student-centred approach takes priority with the considerations of employers' needs and requirements seems to be what our lecturers feel the most suitable model when it comes to their programme design and delivery (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

4.2.3 Multiple versions of employability

The diverse understandings lecturers have on what employability is seems to be inevitable, providing they have different positions within the programmes and different personal background in their own education and professional working life. However, it is interesting to find that not only amongst the lecturers there are different definitions, but some lecturers themselves seem to perceive employability in multiple versions.

OE lecturer: "In its widest sense, employment is not just about having a job and making money. It's about doing something meaningful and productive. It's about being prepared to live life in its full…I think there is more to HE than just to get a job out of it. I think it's far wider than that. But I do recognise that nowadays, you need to have a job because the debts you have after you finish university."

Researcher: "What about employability in the content of HE?"

OE lecturer: "It means making graduates fit for purpose, fit for the needs of employers, but in a general sense. I heard a lot of employers talk about graduate skills. We can train the students to drive a bus, but it is sophisticated to educate students on things like communication, self-awareness. And for HE, it's about sophisticated education than training them for those skills. It's not just about train them what to do, but giving them the opportunities to think and question things."

Researcher: "When you talked about employability, you said it's more than just a job; but now you are talking about fit for purpose."

OE lecturer: "That's what the university wants us to do, isn't it?"

Researcher: "What about your personal believe?"

OE lecturer: "I've got to practice what I preach. I do like the idea of free hippy living in the country, but I haven't done that myself and I am glad I didn't do it. But if I lost my job tomorrow, I won't be bored. I have a lot of interesting things to do, and I have got enough money to do them as well. I heard the term resilience used, which is about copping in any kind of the situation. So I hope I have developed enough skills from my degree, my teaching training and my research training to be resilient. That's what we want our students to do. That's what we call employability development."

Researcher: "What about your programme?"

OE lecturer: "Questioning skills. As well as that, encouraging them to take research to help them ask and answer questions. But we do recognise the fit for purpose agenda. What the employers want are two main things: NGBs [National Governing Body Awards] and those sophisticated skills and competences like communication skills, leadership. NBGs are not enough, because people can just get them without coming to the university. And you can have people with some NGBs but lack of those sophisticated skills which you can get from a degree programme."

Clearly, through this conversation I had with OE lecturers, there are a number of versions of employability - from personal definition, to programme level definition, to university initiatives definition. Although some lecturers indicted that generally speaking, there is no difference

between how they perceive those different versions, and sometimes, they are just 'different words and terminologies'; most of them do feel employability is not the same in various contexts.

4.2.3.1 Personal vs. Official/Institutional

Throughout some of the interviews, it is clear that there is a clear line between what constitutes the 'official' definition of employability which lecturers have to stand by and promote in formal settings (e.g. recruitment events, lectures, etc.) and their personal definition which they personally believe and promote (sometimes 'silently') through their curriculum and their teaching. As an OE lecturer pointed out, by integrating and promoting the university initiatives and the government employability agenda, they sometimes (as a staff member/an employee of the institution) must follow and promote the institutional value. However, as I already discussed in previous sections, there is a strong sense amongst many lecturers that the government agenda and university initiative is primarily political and economically driven without consulting academic staff. A strong resistance to the political agenda by academic staff is very evident in this study, as well as in the wider UK HE community (e.g. Harvey, 2004; Barnett, 1994). Clearly, our lecturers feel they have been placed between Scylla and Charybdis, as some even reflected on the difficulties for academics nowadays to 'practise what we preach'. On one hand, our lecturers have a strong belief on what employability should really be about, and oppose the political and economic driven employability agenda which primarily focus on the short-term quantity and quality of graduates' employment. On the other hand, to survive in today's HE condition, where key statistic figures like the First Destination Survey results have great impact on essential issues like funding and recruitment that matter to a programme's quality even survival, lecturers feel they sometimes have no choice but to 'play the game'. This means, for instance as some PE lecturers pointed out, that even though they disagree with some government and/or institutional initiatives, they have to follow them and promote them to their students.

In those situations, some lecturers feel a vicious circle has been created between the political and economic initiatives, their students and themselves. Certainly, some pointed out that mixed messages have been sent out which might lead to confusion and even indifference amongst their students in relation to employability development initiatives.

OE lecturer: "I can tell, they (students) are not that interested (in Graduate Skills), and I think they know I am not that bothered about it."

Researcher: "How do they know?"

OE lecturer: "Well, we had informal discussion about it, me and some students. They know employers don't know what WOW is, what Graduate Skills is. They know spending time doing it is not going to help them to get a good job… I have to say, if I was to choose

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between doing Graduate Skills and actual skills like going out climbing or kayaking, I know what I would do…Students are not stupid, they know what's important and what's not."

Researcher: "ok, so why bother at all?"

OE lecturer: "Well, to be honest, we have to. It's funny, because this is the real world of work for us, you know, talking about employability, this is what academics have to do now so we can secure our jobs and make sure our programme is secure…I don't want to say it is a sacrifice, it's not that bad, not yet. (Chuckling) But I certainly think if we all had a choice, we wouldn't do it (Graduate Skills) like how we do it now…there are some many things, you know. Another day, we had our revalidation meeting, everyone wants to squeeze in something they believe are valuable to our students, but the fact is we only have some many hours… sometimes you just have to give up something in order to gain other things, I guess."

Clearly there is a sense that our lecturers have been taking the blame when the quantitative targets are not achieved even though they do not have the sole responsibility and accountability on what students are learning during their degree. Such strong sense of the conflict between the political and economic agenda and the lecturers' own vision of employability further strengthened the apathetic feeling some lecturers have towards the government/institutional initiatives.

In addition, an interesting point regarding the meaning of 'real world of work' suggested a different way in which our lecturers perceive the meaning of employability. While, on the surface, such statement makes a reference to the university's World of Work (WOW) initiative, which again displays the lecturer's disagreement with the impression made by such initiatives about the lack of understandings of 'the real world' our lecturers had; underneath, it appears that sit aside those key employability components (e.g. professional knowledge and skills, etc.), our lecturers feel an essential part of their own employability (to sustain and progress their own career) is about the realisation of their own real world of work (i.e. the current HE conditions) and importantly negotiate it with their ideology. What's more, this suggests a clear dissonance between lecturers' perceptions on the university's WOW initiative and what the initiative claims to offer - from the university employability initiative's point of view, self-awareness and organisational awareness are the key to students' employability development. Taking into considerations that the WOW initiative claims the reason behind such initiative is that

"Building upon its impressive record of working with industry (as cited in the Lambert Report 2003), LJMU carried out extensive research and consultation to identify exactly what is required from a university and its graduates in the 21st century. The message was clear and blunt: a conventional academic degree alone is no longer sufficient; graduates need both challenging educational development and high-level skills. LJMU listened and took action, developing degrees with added WoW™ factor. This involved remodelling all of the University's 230+ undergraduate degree programmes to make work related learning and the development of eight graduate skills explicit to every programme. Uniquely, students are also being encouraged to develop higher level 'World of Work' or WoW skills in parallel with their degree studies. With the backing of business leaders and the Government, LJMU launched its 'degrees with added WoW factor' in September 2007." (LJMU, 2010, online)

It seems our lecturers feel their own understandings and experiences in the 'real world' of academia is somewhat dismissed by the university's initiative as it is somehow invalid to the government and the business leaders. Clearly, such dissonance between the two sides' perceptions of each other is one of the critical reasons behind the conflicts between lecturers' own version of employability and the official version.

4.2.3.2 Wide vs. Narrow

Unlike the different versions between personal and political notions of employability, the differences between lecturers' wide and narrow conceptions are much more implicit. As stated by the OE lecturer and some other lecturers, there is a belief that the wide concept employability for HE graduates should be about being prepared to live a meaningful and productive life (Barnett, 2008). Within this wide concept, there are a range of different attributes, competencies and so on taken from a variety of perspectives (e.g. social, economic, etc.) at various levels (e.g. personal, interpersonal, etc.). For instance, as every OE lecturer pointed out to me, for them, their students should finish the degree with sophisticated understandings and views about the outdoor industry from social, economic, educational and environmental perspectives which in the long-term future can really contribute to the development and progression of the outdoor industry and the general public's understanding and attitude towards environment. To them, this is much wider and much more important than the First Destination results, though as the quote above suggests that our lecturers do recognise to be able to accomplish the wide concept of employability, their graduates also need to achieve the narrow employability (i.e. getting a job). Clearly, this is another take on the political employability agenda's measurements.

Within the wide notion of employability, a range of other complex and broad concepts are involved such as professionalism, skills and so on. From our lecturers' point of view, those complex concepts themselves are also wide conceptions, just like employability, which include great amount of small components. It is not to say, employability is wider than the notions of professionalism and skills; rather, within the wide concept of employability, professionalism and skills and the other notions are included.

Researcher: "What do you mean by something is not classed as employability but you consider it as employability?"

PE lecturer: "I mean we do evaluation for the employability stuff we run that classed as employability. So the WOW stuff and employability, whatever it might, getting that job day is also classed as employability. But all of our other modules, well some of our other modules are also having something to do with employability, stuff like PDPs, WBL, etc. For example, I think even in PE 001 and 003, they are the professional development module, and we do sessions on behaviour management, classroom strategies, and even just sessions like that, if someone doesn't have good behaviour management skills, they are not going to be employable, because they won't do well in the interviews; they won't manage the class well.

Time management, classroom organisations, all of these of specific employability skills for teaching, but that's much wider than what people normally would consider as employability."

This again, is a criticism on the political employability agenda which primarily focusing on skills. As suggested by our lecturers, the identification, teaching and assessment of employability skills is only a segment of what HE employability development should involve (Harvey, 2005). As well, there are also variations on details of what those smaller components should include which leads to the differences between subject specific and generic employability concepts.

4.2.3.3 General vs. Subject specific

It is clear that our lecturers feel there are two types of employability - generic and subject specific. In addition, it seems our lecturers feel that the generic and subject specific employability should be connected rather than opposing each other. Indeed, many lecturers, from both programmes, have pointed out that under the generic broad employability concept of preparing students for meaningful and productive careers, therein lie the subject specific employability requirements from the PE profession and OE industry. Those subject specific employability requirements are acting as guides to our lecturers and students. Nevertheless, only fulfilling those subject specific employability requirements are not enough for our lecturers because they are only part of the holistic HE learning experiences (Biggs, and Tang, 1999).

However, there seems to be some dissonances amongst our lecturers, which relate to some of the issues I have discussed earlier regarding how our lecturers perceive the purposes of HE and the purposes of their programmes as well as how they perceive specific employability development should be delivery via their teaching and assessments. Just like this PE lecturer suggested that there is a difference between perceiving students as students or trainees, there seems to be some conflicts with regard to how much subject specific employability should be in the programmes - some lecturers (particularly from PE) feel the primary purpose of their programme is to develop high quality PE teachers which as a result leads them to believe that 'everything here is geared towards PE teacher training employability'; whereas other lecturers feel there are rooms for generic employability development which can benefit students for not only PE teaching jobs but also a variety of careers.

In addition, some OE lecturers feel that too much specific employability development (e.g. practical learning and development on outdoor activities like climbing) can 'send out the wrong message to students as to what the purposes of HE learning experiences are and

what they should focus on for their HE learning and development'. Deep down, this is about our lecturers' concerns on HE losing its focuses and principles, not just over the issues with employability development but in general over its roles and contributions to the society (Barnett, 1994).

OE lecturer: "I am a bit worried…I came from a FE background, I worked in colleges as tutors, teachers and programme leaders before I came to HE. I have to say I find HE degrees nowadays are more and more like future education training programmes. They shouldn't be, otherwise what's the point of HE? We might as well just have apprenticeship for everything, mathematicians, physiologists, environmentalists (chuckling)."

The specific and generic employability also relate to how our lecturers understand what employability development is for. As discussed in the literature, clearly there are differences amongst the various conceptions on the purpose of employability development for HE students – on one hand, scholars (e.g. Yorke and Knight; Harvey; van der Heijden; etc.) suggest the educational conception of employability development is about developing students to be equipped for their career aspirations and to be capable of gaining and sustaining employments; on the other hand, the political and economic conception suggests graduate employability is about job acquisition (i.e. the ability of the graduate to get a job). For programmes like OE and PE which have clear career directions for their students, such difference between the educational and the political conceptions does create some conflicts as to what should be a co-existing condition between the generic and subject specific employability development. Too much specific employability development appears to run the risk of students not be able to attain a generic graduate employability outside their subject areas (which could be crucial when the labour market is in trouble). Not enough specific employability development could jeopardise their students' potentials to achieve their career aspiration in their respective profession/industry, (which seems to be the reason for students undertaking degrees like PE and OE). However, as our OE lecturer pointed out, although it is important to have employment and be able to financially support one's self, the value and fulfilment (not just financially) of such employment should be the be ultimate goal for developing employability.

4.2.3.4 Short term vs. long term

As I have already pointed out in previous discussions, there is a clear sense of the co-existence of short-term (immediate) graduate employability and long-term employability (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) as well as the conflicts between them. Here, the short-term graduate employability is very much viewed, by our lecturers, as the political and economic conception as it is primarily concerned about the immediate employment and financial gains of our graduates. In other words, as stated above, it is about graduates getting a job (any kind of jobs) as soon as they finishing their degree. This message, from our lecturers' point of

view, is clearly demonstrated by the excessive references to the First Destination Survey's results and the importance of such results made by politicians. Of course, every lecturer I interviewed clearly stated that they have sincerely wishes for all of their students to do well after their graduation, but it seems they feel the objective and narrowly focused political and economic conception of employability has misled some students to have a 'short-sighted' view on their own employability. Nevertheless, long-term fulfilment of career aspirations should build upon short-term achievements (but not in the pure political and economic sense).

Certainly, from our lecturers' point of view, one of the key ethos of HE is to promote and prepare people for life-long learning and fulfilment (Harvey, 2005; Knight and Yorke, 2003; Barnett, 2000).

OE lecturer: "in its widest sense, it (employability) is not just about having a job and making money. It's about doing something meaningful and productive. It's about being prepared to live life in its full."

PE lecturer: "What if they (students) one day decide they don't want to be teachers anymore? … I would like to think their university experience has prepared them for life, not just their first job."

However, while they are wishing for a life-long preparation in terms of their students' employability, in reality, there are a number of issues which challenge such wishful aim. As I have pointed out in the literature review and the previous discussion section, employability is understood as a process which consists of several stages – from gaining the initial employment after graduation, to attaining employment and progressing on from employment (either promoting to a better position or moving into a different career). Clearly, our lecturers wish that the degree could prepare their students for this whole process. In reality, the various unpredictable external factors (e.g. the very changeable labour market in current conditions), mean that it is not entirely possible to achieve such aim. On the other hand, some lecturers did argue, while 'specific' employability development cannot prepare students for their long-term employability, some wide attributes and competencies which students learn and develop through the overall learning experiences (e.g. critical thinking, reflective practice) are clearly useful for their life-long learning and development in relation to their employability. As discussed above, even our PE lecturers have considered the possibilities that their graduates will need not only PE teaching employability, hence the inclusion and promotion of wide employability attributes and competencies within the PE programme.

Importantly, there is also a sense that our lecturers aspire to prepare their students as future professionals in their respective profession/industry who will impact on and shape the future of PE and OE. Here, rather than viewing employability as a personal matter to individual students, our lecturers see it as defining and shaping the employability for their own profession/industry. Indeed, as our lecturers are considered as expert practitioners and

researchers in their field, they definitely feel their own responsibility to lead their profession/industry. In this respect, employability must be viewed as a long-term on-going process rather than a short-term target (Harvey, 2005; Yorke, 2004). Moreover, it goes back to the conflict between the political employability agenda and the educational conception; the question is – To what extend should our lecturers lead their own programme's employability development rather than following the political and economic agenda set by the Government and business leaders?

4.2.3.5 <u>Ideal vs. reality?</u>

After examining those four sets of conceptions, it is clear that, they are not all conflicting notions. In particular, the narrow and the wide, and the general and subject specific, and the long-term and short-term employability co-exist. This co-existence illustrates the relative, dynamic and complex nature of employability (which was discussed in the first section of this chapter). As I have pointed out, sometimes they have equivalent importance to the programmes from our lecturers' point of view, and often they are interlinked with each other – e.g. the wide and general conceptions do not exist without the narrow and subject specific employability. Certainly, those conceptions share their dynamic relationships according to our lecturers' understandings and perceptions on what employability and employability development in HE is about. Like pointed out by a number of other authors on this issue (e.g. Harvey, 2005; Yorke, 2004), the troubles are not the conceptions of employability themselves, but how they are perceived, interpreted and promoted.

Through looking at some of those conflicts emerged due to those different versions of employability, it could be argued that to some extent the problems exist because of the differences between the academics' understandings and perceptions on what employability and employability development *should be* about and what the reality of employability development *is at the moment* due to the political employability agenda – at least there is a clear *dissonance between academics' ideology and their interpretations of the political agenda's ideology*. To our lecturers, it is primarily about the differences between their personal understandings and the political version of employability.

From our lecturers' point of view, the political version of employability (that is constantly promoted to students and the general public via popular media) sends out the 'wrong message' about HE learning experiences, universities' roles and responsibilities, etc., which as a result leads students, their parents and the general public to an unrealistic expectations on what a degree can offer them in relation to their employability (i.e. according to the narrow employability conception the political agenda promotes: if an individual does not secure a decent job after graduation, the degree programme and the university take the primary blame

by graduates, their parents, the government and the other key stakeholders). This belief, from our lecturers' point of view, is that it encourages a vicious circle in today's higher education. For instance, our lecturers feel that in today's target-driven higher education, it is difficult not to have a narrow focused employability which targets on fulfilling employers' requirements, because they are much more measurable than those complex and sophisticated personal and professional attributes and competencies that student-centred employability development tends to focus on. In addition, nowadays, many students wish to be spoon-fed by their lecturers on employers' requirements, in which they can strategically develop during their degree in order to gain such employment after graduation. To our lecturers, those students seem to be indifferent or even disengaged when it comes to the learning experiences focusing on developing those complex and sophisticated employability attributes and competencies.

Certainly, from our lecturers' point of view, it is dangerous to let government and employers interfere with their curriculum design and delivery due to political and economic reasons. Underneath all the practical and strategic dilemmas, which our lecturers perceive their programmes are currently experiencing, is the ideological dilemma on the issue regarding the ownership and governing of employability, their subject, their perspective industry/profession and the HE sector. At the moment, it seems our lecturers are still struggling to find the fine balance amongst all those entities, which as one of the lecturers pointed out is 'the real world of work for academics' nowadays. Nevertheless, it seems such conflict, between their ideology and their perceived reality, within the individual lecturers is one of the key fundamental issues that troubles the employability development for students in contemporary English higher education.

4.2.4 Summary discussion on emerging themes

Through the second layer analysis of lecturers' interviews, further themes have emerged, particularly regarding the similarities and difference between the two programmes, the ownership of employability, and how lecturers understand and perceive employability in various conceptions.

While through this analytic layer, certain findings from the previous section are carrying on appearing (e.g. our lecturers' sophisticated understandings on employability, dissonances amongst our lecturers regarding the 'how much' and 'how' issues on employability development), this layer further explored the dissonances our lecturers have at their programme level. Such dissonances gives proof to Yorke's suggestion on 'one size fits all does not work' – while for Yorke (2004), this is largely about institutional approach to employability development, arguing university level initiatives and projects need to consider

the differences individual programmes have; according to the findings in this study, it also applies to programme level and module level approaches. Even within the same module and programme, different cohorts of students who have different needs and career aspirations mean that the 'same' module and programme must be flexible towards different student cohorts.

Apart from the nature and traits individual programmes have, the number of stakeholder groups who seem to claim the ownership of employability also appears to make the issue complex and problematic. In addition, there seems to be dissonances amongst our lecturers with regard to who should own employability – questioning how employability is defined and who defines it? This issue, again, closely relates to how our lecturers perceive the roles and responsibilities of their programmes and the HE in relation to employability development. In addition, it appears to add further dimensions to the complexity of employability: underneath the multiple perspectives from various stakeholders and the multiple conceptions of employability, there are deeper ontological and epistemological issues. An important point was raised on whether employability development is only about students' learning and development or much wider than that (e.g. the future of the society, professionalism in work place, our lecturers' own subject areas' values and professionalism).

In addition to programme level and institutional level dissonances and conflicts amongst our lecturers, individual lecturers also seem to understand and perceive employability from different conceptions. Though most of those opposing conceptions seem to co-exist and they do not appear to be conflicting, most of the time. It seems, one of the greatest conflicts our lecturers are experiencing at the moment, is the dissonances between their ideal employability development in HE and their perceived realities (which is largely appeared as conflicts and dilemmas our lecturers seem to face between their personal understandings on what employability development should be about and their perceived institutional/political agenda and practices on what is happening in HE regarding employability development). Though in this study, there seems to be less mixed and inconsistent messages comparing to Barrie's findings (2006, 2004), clearly, there are significant amount of conflicts and dilemmas our lecturers feel they are experiences in relation to employability development in their programmes.

Through the second-layer analysis, a number of differences and similarities regarding the conceptions of employability and employability development are examined - within the programme teams and at an individual level. Through illumination, it is apparent that one of the fundamental issues that troubles our lecturers is the dissonance between their ideology of HE and their perceived reality. Though there are many differences between the two programmes and amongst our lecturers regarding employability and employability

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development (as expected), the dissonance between their ideology and their perceive reality seems to be a shared dilemma. As demonstrated through my discussion on the issues regarding the ownership of employability and the multiple version of employability definition, such dissonance seems to have created a number of conflicts at the practical, strategic and philosophical levels within individuals, their programme teams and the wider HE sector in general. Similarly to what Barries' studies identified, while lecturers from the same programme sometimes do not share the same understanding, lecturers from different programmes sometimes share the same understanding. Accordingly (Barrie, 2006),

"Our understandings of phenomena are based in our prior experience of the phenomena and other relevant experiences. Understandings of graduate attributes are not unrelated to other understandings of university education and it seems likely that disciplinary differences in understandings of, for example, the nature of knowledge are likely to be relevant, as are broader understandings about the nature of learning, to our conceptions of graduate attributes." (p.234)

4.3 In-depth narratives – close up examinations

Through the second analytical layer, a number of different versions of employability are identified and examined. Those different versions of employability conceptions co-exist not only amongst lecturers' understandings and perceptions but also within an individual's own understandings and perceptions. The complex and dynamic relationship amongst those conceptions often seems to be troublesome for our lecturers as sometimes their co-existence does propose conflicted messages to their colleagues and their students. Indeed, having a complex, sophisticated and multiple-perspective understanding on what employability and employability development (Barrie, 2006) consists of should ideally be what every HE insider (students and lecturers) work toward; yet, in reality, knowing and understanding those issues critically from multiple perspectives also bring out a number of dilemmas for our lecturers. As I pointed out in my introduction and the NTF research proposal, by illuminating and exploring such issues more in-depth, more and more fine-grind questions emerge.

In this final analytical layer of the spiral analysis framework, I am placing my focus on examining and interpreting several in-depth narratives some lecturers provided in their interviews in an attempt to further illuminate some deeper issues regarding individual lecturer's understandings, experiences and perceptions, in order to identify and examine some 'new' issues (my original contribution to the subject area if you like) which current literatures on this topic have not really dealt with.

With a particular focus on the final emerging theme from the previous section regarding different versions of employability conceptions, I want to 'deconstruct' and 'reconstruct' how some of the individual lecturer's personal experiences and ideologies impact on their perceptions and practices. Within the scope of this study, three particular lecturers' narratives (two from PE and one from OE) have been chosen to represent different personal and academic backgrounds.

4.3.1 Lecturers' narratives:

PE lecturer 1: Ben

Biographical synopsis

Ben joined the programme in 2001 as a full time lecturer. At the time of the interview, he is the module leader for a number of modules across all three levels, mostly research related ones. He identified himself as 'the research one' in the programme team by leading the independent studies module and being the research correspondent amongst the programme team members. As well, Ben is also a personal tutor for final year students, mainly responsible for their professional development (particularly their placements).

Originally trained as a secondary PE teacher, Ben developed a particular interest in research while working as a PE teacher. Since then, he did a Masters degree in Sports Science in one of the UK leading universities, left school PE teaching, moved in HE in 1998 teaching sports studies and primary PE teacher training, completed his PhD in 2005 on secondary school PE's health-enhancing physical activities.

An extremely active and well respected researcher in the field of school-based physical activities, PE and health, Ben has over 80 publications (conferences, journals, reports etc.) nationally and international. Recently he has received his professorship as the recognition of such excellent contribution to research and PE.

About his work in PE: a researcher who teaches?

Ben's passion on research is very apparent throughout our interviews. As he called himself 'the research one', it is evident that research is the essential reason for him to be where he is and does what does.

Evidently, because his personal background and expertise specialising in physical activities, health promotion and secondary PE and his focused personal and professional passion on research, he sees himself having a more research role and responsibility than teaching comparing to most of his colleges. Nevertheless, his research does impact on the teaching and learning in the programme in relation to employability.

Ben: I would say the majority of my responsibilities are lie away from the programme. The majority of my work is probably not related to teach the four year programme, it's related to research activity.

Researcher: how do you see your work in relation to your students' learning then?

Ben: I think it's quite implicit though. So in terms of some of the skills and qualities that students develop as results of some of the things I teach can make them more employable. Some of the opportunities they get, so for example for the last 2 years, a group of year 3 students worked on an external project in schools, and it has been given them really good experience which they wouldn't get through the normal curriculum. So in terms of value-added, we can add some extra things in, but also we can deliver or help them to get better at some of the skills, the academic skills that kind of require for the working life.

However, this role and responsibility in contributing to students' employability development through his research and teaching research does not seem to be 'directly' related to employability in the programme according to him.

 Researcher: how do you think the employability development is going on in your programme at the moment?

Ben: to be honest, I don't know anything about it.

Researcher: but just now you mentioned your modules help students to develop research-related skills. Do you feel that helps them with their future as PE teachers?

Ben: ok, first, if they have good research skills they can do a good piece of research work. Currently, for the independent study module, it carries 36 credits, so it's a big weight for level 3. So, there is a benefit there in terms of their final grades on their degree. But also, research skills are transferable skills which you could turn them into employability skill in some respects, you know, the time management, organising information, locating information and using it, being critical, setting up appointments, all those kind of things, we can dress them as research skills or something else. I would suggest they are transferable not just for academic work, but also for day to day work.

Researcher: do you think the students pick up this idea of transferable skills and demonstrate it in other modules as well?

Ben: I would like to think so. It's very difficult to comment across other modules. From a personal point of view, I make it very obvious on why we doing certain things. It's not just about the module, we have to look beyond the module, because some of things you are doing are good practice anyway. Some of those things come out during the personal tutor process as well; we do things on managing time and organisation and so on and so forth. So you'd like to think those things are developed straight away with the students. The reality, again, the better ones do it, the better ones do it anyway; some of the weaker ones don't do it as well, because they don't value its importance. Generally, it will come to a point, normally in third year, they will realise they can't survive without doing things like managing their time well, and then the penny drops.

As I have already discussed in the previous section, some lecturers do not see themselves having a role and responsibility in employability development, because they perceive the terminology as the narrow employability agenda. Ben is one of those who clearly knows that every element of the PE programme has meaningful contribution to his students' employability (both short-term and long-term), but he does not want to associate himself with the narrow notion of employability. As suggested by some literature (e.g. Barnett, 1994) 'traditional' academics (i.e. those who perceive research as the primary goal of higher education) tend to have a negative attitude towards teaching and supporting their students' employability development, indicating that there is a conflict between the interests and beliefs as researchers and roles and responsibilities as lecturers. However, in Ben's case, it is not as simple as he just wants to be 'left alone to do his research', perhaps because of his own background as a former-PE teacher and his subject is in education, the conflicts again appear to be about how he perceives the political and economic employability agenda does not represent his personal belief regarding the importance of research to teacher training students' learning and development academically, professionally and employability-wise. This is very clear when he talked about his perceptions on the purpose of HE and the PE programme.

About the degree and HE: a safety bubble to educate future teachers

For Ben, the PE programme is "*about training young people to become teachers in schools who can stimulate children to engage in physical activities and sports, and the offshoots of that are the educational benefits, around self-esteem, around attitude, around being a good citizen, about enjoying what they do. So for me, that's what it is all about*".

However, when I asked him 'why did you say training rather than educating?' Ben replied:

"I probably will change it… we teach them or we help them to develop in that way. Because I refer our students as students, many of my colleagues refer our students as trainees. I think there is a bit distinction. From where I sit, the students aren't here just to train to be something; they are here to develop in a kind of holistic way. Their focus is about becoming a PE teacher, so in that sense they are trained in certain competences, but they are not training to do that, they are also studying an academic degree. So I think they are not just training, it's broader than that. Yeah, well spotted".

Researcher: So what's the difference between a training programme and a HE programme?

Ben: for me, a training programme trains a person to meet a particular outcome or aim, and that is it; whereas a HE programme needs to have more holistic sides to it. It's about the development of a person. At the end of the day, our students come in usually at age 18, they have never been away from home, they don't know much about life to be honest, but when they leave, they have grown a lot.

Clearly, Ben feels that his personal experiences with the subject and his personal beliefs on the purpose of HE and the programme are somewhat different to some of his colleges. It is apparent that Ben knows about the differences, but he is happy different staff members have different views and beliefs on what HE and the programme is about. Evidently, he feels as well as developing students to be future teachers, HE also has the responsibility to develop students as valuable citizens who can take responsibilities in the society. In other words, though employability is vital to programmes like the teacher training degrees, there are more to it than 'training students to be something'. This is where Ben has concerns about too much focuses on the employability agenda can lead students to overlook other learning experiences, such as doing research, even though for him, research contributes a lot to the 'wide' notion of employability.

In order for students to develop as responsible professionals and citizen, in a nutshell, Ben suggests HE programmes need to "challenge their students to act as professional but at the same time creating a safety bubble for them to learn how to be professionals because after all they are still students". However, this kind of 'experiential learning' runs the risks of letting students feel "they are in a relatively safety comfort zone. I think we get the best out of them, when they are taking out of that and they are pitched in when they are in a school or an external environment they are asked to do those kind of things without preparation, almost". Nonetheless, in reality "those things are more difficult to generate in terms of logistic of doing

that". As a result, Ben feels what the PE programme is doing regarding experiential learning to create professional learning environment as authentic as possible is the most suitable approach for PE students' employability, realistically.

While talking to Ben about the purposes of HE and the PE programme, it is apparent that he perceives his students with different identities. Sometimes, he clearly states that they are students, but at the same time, he talks a lot of the notion of being trainees (though he made clear that he personally perceive students more than just trainees, there is a sense that for the programme, students are generally treated as trainees). Above all those, he also feels that students are young adults who should start to take their own responsibilities. The conflicts here between being students, being trainees and being young adults are about how much responsibilities they need to take professional and personally – as a HE learner, as a future PE teacher, and as a valuable citizen.

Researcher: As you know, the government wants the universities to deliver employability development. From your personal view point, do you think the universities have the responsibility for this?

Ben: I think at the institutional level, the university has the responsibility for it, hence the World Of Work programme. From a micro level, if you like, you could argue, students are adults; they could make their own decisions on what they are going to do. You know, whether they will attend a lecture, whether they are going to use a lot of time to prepare for an assignment, or whatever it might be. It could be argued that how they prepare themselves for employment after university is a very personal decision. What we can do is signpost them, I guess, to where they can develop or how they can develop, and also we can embed some of the things we discussed today into the curriculum, so they doing those things also incidentally. But I think ultimately, like anything they do really, you can't force them to walk down a particular path.

This raises a question on how he perceives himself and his responsibilities. Though he expresses explicitly about his role and responsibility in the programme, implicitly he holds a number of identities professional – as a HE researcher, a HE lecturer, a former PE teacher, and a member of staff in LJMU faculty of ECL. While, as a lecturer, he teaches and assesses students, most time based on what teacher training standards require teacher training programmes to do. As a researcher, he questions and challenges some of the requirements, and he pushes knowledge boundaries on the subject of PE (which also questions and challenges what PE teachers do); as a former PE teacher, he reflects on his personal experiences when he teaches his students; and as a member of staff in LJMU faculty of ECL, he has to follow the policies and strategic directions set out by the institution and the faculty. Above all those, as a member of the UK HE sector (an insider), he is bond by the wide rules, policies and directions the UK HE sector holds. And Ben's story is just one of those 'typical' lecturers' experiences our academic teaching staff members have – though everyone I

interviewed has different personal experiences and backgrounds, this sense of conflict is apparent at personal, programme, institutional and sector levels.

PE lecturer 2: Joyce

<u>Biographical synopsis</u>

Joyce has been working in I.M.Marsh since mid-90s, during which she has had a number of different teaching and management roles within the faculty and the teacher training programmes. At the time of the interview, she is the academic manager for the QTS programmes, as well as lecturing on the undergraduate PE ITT programme. She is a module leader for a number of modules across the whole three levels on practical learning, pedagogical theory and current education issues). She also co-teaches and tutors undergraduate students at different levels, which helps her to have 'holistic and comprehensive views and engagement with the programme'. In addition, Joyce is also an active member in the wide PE professional community as members of a number of local and national professional bodies and projects (e.g. teaching schools alliance, TDA North West Network, etc.).

Educated and trained in LJMU as a PE teacher, Joyce has 20 years of great experiences as a PE teacher – head of her subject in a large comprehensive school, chair of national and local sports and PE organisations, member of a local PE teacher association and adviser for national and local sport and PE schemes such as Youth Sport Trust's Top Play/Sport project.

<u>About her work in PE: being role models as teachers</u>

Joyce came to HE with a very strong sense of responsibility as an experienced teacher helping future teachers.

"Over the 20 years, particularly when I was responsible for the department, I felt that I have gained a lot of knowledge and experience on how to deliver physical education in schools for our youngsters which then led me to think that I would like to pass on that kind of experience and knowledge to future teachers. And also because I have done a bit of the advisory work as well, working with teachers in other schools. So it was the next step, if you like, to advancing my career, and helping future teachers".

To date, she still calls herself a "*teacher*" rather than a lecturer because that is her background, and she feels she is here to teach "*future teachers*" about her experiences and knowledge on being a PE teacher. And being a teacher, for Joyce, means acting as a role model to her students. This is evident through the examples she gives me in the interviews about how she approaches her teaching. For example, in the practical modules she teaches gymnastics, she does all the practical activities with the students to stimulate the experiential learning environment as 'modelling' how a session should be like in schools.

Joyce: so as they warming up I will do it as well, so they will be coping or working with me. But sometimes I would use students to demonstrate, like I would do in school. So if I was teaching in school, I would perform the demonstration, but sometime I would also get the children to demonstrate. So yes, we do get on the floor and roll around a bit.

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But we would also say this will depend on the group of children you have in front of you because you need to match the teaching style to the learning needs of the children. So this is how I am going to deal with it with you now, but on the other hand you can use different ways to deliver, so if you want to challenge the children, you want to do this, so...we talk about situations, because I would also put the students into quite a lot of problem solving situation themselves rather than say 'practice like this'.

In addition, her professional values and approaches to her teaching and learning also 'model' how she feels a professional teacher should act to set examples to her students. Evidently, all those professional values and beliefs are ingrained in her teaching.

"well, I teach a module which is about the Every Child Matters because it's becoming more significant to make sure no child is slipping through the net, all pupils are attaining; and to make sure we are looking at the aspirations of all pupils. So it's not just attainment levels in schools, which is big on the agenda, but it's also about all pupils having aspirations, it's what we can do as teachers in schools to enable children in schools to realise that…Now, I have got to practice what I preach, so in my teaching, I need to make sure all my students feel they matter as individuals, that they take inspirations from me and other staff. Because this is what being a teacher is about, our professional values and philosophies. Only when my students feel they are valued and understand the importance of that, they can go into schools to be inspirational teachers".

Undoubtedly, for Joyce, her passion for her profession channels through her belief that her behaviours, attitudes and values as a teacher on the PE programme affect how her students develop their behaviour, attitudes and values as future teachers, who will then go into school to teach children about behaviour, attitudes and values. In this circle, she clearly feels she has profound roles and responsibilities as a teacher to educate the future, and this circle will carry on rolling, even though she does not seem to know exactly how much influence she will have on it personally, the strong sense of her being a role model teacher for the future generations of teachers and pupils are clear.

Being a role model as a teacher means taking up professional responsibilities. For Joyce, this includes a number of crucial attributes and values.

"Looking at personal and social development of pupils, for example; developing key skills of pupils, communication skills, problem solving skills through primarily their subject experience, for example. Subject knowledge and understanding, that's the bedrock behind what you are doing in schools, so we have got to develop trainees' underlining subject knowledge and understanding and the rationale behind their teaching. It's also got to encompass aspects where they go in and practice those skills, so they will do their subject study here if you like, which is academically related, with some understanding of the pedagogy of teaching, they will then have some opportunities to go in to transfer this learning into practice. But I would expect them to underpin that by their wider reading and research you give them to do about teaching and learning. And also we do a lot to encourage them to be reflective practitioners. So they think about what they are doing, and justify some reasons why they teach something in the school. So that's what I would see the programmes, the QTS programmes are all

about. But it's got to have that element of subject knowledge there first and foremost on which to build everything else".

For Joyce, there are two folds of employability for teacher training students; while they need to be able to demonstrate they have all those essential employability skills, competencies and knowledge when they enter the job market, when they are teachers, they also need to be able to teach their pupils about those essential employability skills, competencies and knowledge so the future generation can develop their own employability while they are in education. This makes employability development crucially important for teacher training students, because like everything they do on the programme, "*it is not only about their own understandings on the knowledge and issues, it is also about their applications of such understandings as teachers*". As a result, from Joyce's point of view, it is important for trainees to have a critical understanding about the employability agenda because "*whatever they learn from their lecturers will be passed on to their pupils in the future*".

<u>About teacher training: standards and accountability</u>

During the interviews with Joyce, the QTS standards seem to be a fundamental employability component to her programme and her students, because without the QTS, the students are not going to be able to become teachers. As a result, for Joyce, the QTS standards are employability for PE students, and they are embedded in the programme throughout. According to her, having those standards as clear targets and having the comprehensible framework which maps out the teaching learning and assessment of those standards do seem to 'make things easier for the trainees, the mentors and the schools' because they help students to set clear and achievable goals. Most importantly, those standards are embedded in many assessments, so while they are working on achieving their QTS, they also gain marks on coursework and portfolios which contribute to their degree.

From Joyce's point of view, standards are what the key stakeholders of education (e.g. government, local authorities, parents, etc.) use to ensure our teachers and teacher training providers all work under a consistent and accountable framework.

"What I think they (the government and the teacher training professional body) are doing now, it's to put a framework for quality assurance purposes. And also because they are trying to be the gate keeper, not let teachers going to schools without subject knowledge, without the professional skills, don't have very good professional attributes. So it comes down to measurement again…I think it helps with the consistency of the practice across other institutions that train teachers, so we all work under the same guidelines. And now of course they have extended this for teachers in schools. So it's not just our students have got to past this. Accountability is the word I am looking for."

For Joyce, accountability is *"historical, it becomes the expectations about how good teachers behave." It is a socially and politically constructed "unwritten expectation, that the*

government do expect our teachers to behave in a certain way, the local authorities do expect the teachers within the local authorities to behave in a certain way, and schools will expect teachers to behave in a certain way. But overall, even though there might be slight variations, they all work toward the same expectations, I think. Because if not, it would be very difficult. There were times when things went wrong, we all know, but the professionalism has always been there".

Nevertheless, though other professions all have professional standards and value (explicitly and implicitly), for Joyce, "*because it is QTS, and this is how teachers should behave in their relationship with children and other adults and the wider community; it is the atmosphere, it is the classroom, our classroom and the school's classroom; and also, people hear from the media as well about all the issues to do with teachers who don't have that professionalism. So it is high on the agenda, if something happened in school, let's all blame the teachers, if something happened in the society, let's blame the teachers. I know that's a crude way of putting it, but I think we are...because we want to teach, we have that professionalism. We are also mindful of the tremendous role and responsibility we have with our youngsters in school.*"

According to Joyce, this target driven accountability driven culture seems to have become more and more visible and rigid in current professional practices, particularly by schools. While this runs the risk of rigid target setting and accountability assessment, it also runs the risk of sending out the wrong message on what professional attributes and employability qualities are actually important to the trainee teacher students.

"So really if you are a head teacher, you want to know if you employ a member of staff, they are going to turn up on time and hopefully teach a good lesson while they are there. But it seems to be secondary; the lesson bit now seems to be secondary to all the other nitty gritty bits first. And Every Child Matters has come on to the agenda as well, so I think they want to know obviously about the CRB checks and all this sort of things as well. It seems it sort of turned itself on its head, you know, we are looking at those sorts of things rather than how that particular teacher works with the children in the school room. "

Clearly, for Joyce, while standards and targets are important for teachers nowadays to keep consistency in their practices, it sees the values and purposes of standards and targets are glorified by the wider culture of accountability in the society in general. While teachers are role models in the society, there seems to be too much pressure on our teachers to be the kind of teacher (a model) the government, the authorities and the society want. This is problematic from Joyce's point of view, because while being a teacher consists of individuality (i.e. how individuals' personal attributes and characteristics matter) and subjectivity, the authorities and the society seem to increasingly tightening the boundaries for teachers' professionalism. As a result, there is a concern that teachers and teacher training programmes are becoming more political and economic driven, which gives trainees teachers and their lecturers less freedom as individuals to push the boundaries and be innovative about their practices and theoretical underpins. This governance issue seems to

be very similar to the issues HE programmes in general are having in relation to the employability agenda. For professional programmes, like the PE programme, there are two folds of governance issues – the ones from their own professional areas and the ones from higher education. Looking at it from a political point of view, this involves the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as well as Department for Education, which shows how complex the issue is regarding developing trainee teacher students' employability in their degree.

OE lecturer: Ed

<u>Biographical synopsis</u>

Originally educated as an environmental scientist (BSc (Hons) and PhD), Ed then went on to be trained as a secondary teacher in science and outdoor activities. Though he liked certain aspects of teaching in schools, his interests and motivations in research drew him back to higher education. Ed came to the OE programme in mid 90s, since then he has been promoted to a senior management role as well as gaining his readership and professorship.

With a particular interest in Physical Geography and Outdoor Education, Ed teaches a wide range of subjects (e.g. earth science, applied geomorphology, outdoor pursuits, etc.) on his programme, in which he leads many modules on physical geography and outdoor environment education. He is also a personal tutor for students' personal development and final year research projects. Because of his senior role, he also has many administrative and management duties which allowed him to 'oversee the programme'.

A well respected academic in his field, Ed has many national and international research field works and publications in Physical Geography. A keen outdoor practitioner, Ed regularly participates in many outdoor activities (including a number of charity fund raisers) and holds many high level outdoor pursuits awards In addition, he is also one of the leading academics in his subject area and in LJMU developing and applying innovations in his teaching and learning.

<u>About his works as in outdoors: freedom, choices and risks</u>

As an experienced outdoor education researcher and practitioner, it is clear that Ed is an adventurous individual.

"A large part of the attraction of outdoor is the world of adventure. And adventure by definition is doing something which has unknown outcome, which is about taking risks. But it is calculated risks which you have control most of the time. I like to take a risk but I know it's a risk which almost will work. I will make sure it won't be a complete disaster."

Ed's adventurous personality is clear related to his work in the outdoors as a lecturer, a researcher and a practitioner. This is evident in a number of areas: his teaching, his research, and his professional practices.

Ed: when you are a module leader, you are overall responsible for setting the assessments, you have got a lot of control but you are also responsible marking it as well. At level-2 and level-3 you will have another 2nd marker who will do double check, yeah. Not at level-1 though, so you have got complete freedom to experiment. I love that, especially in 1st year, experimenting the way I do assessments, changing them and trying different configurations and that. So for example, this year I am volunteering to be a part of a pilot for electronic submission and feedback. This will be exciting. I have done a bit of that, parts of a module, but never a whole module from start to finish, no paper.

Researcher: I have got the sense that you are very innovative in your teaching. Why do you think you like to try out new things?

Ed: for the very reasons I left teaching in school. I wasn't innovative at all in school. I don't know what it was. The best way I can describe it is I was almost brain dead. I think it's to do with the intensity of teaching. Many of them would like to ask questions, especially the younger ones in Year 7, and they are very enthusiastic which is quite hard to deal with sometimes. Many of those questions are not very necessary, like' I forgot my book' or 'I forgot my pencil, what I should do?' I enjoyed teaching 6 forms. It wasn't too bad. But I found myself…it's quite shameful to say this, but I found myself setting in the coffee room at 11.18 knowing the class starts at 11.20, and thinking about 'what am I going to do in this session?' I didn't really plan enough for it. And I had the same class three times, so I had three Year 7 all doing the same curriculum, and three classes of Year 9 all teaching the same curriculum. So it was very difficult to teach them almost the same thing, and not to get bored about teaching the same thing for 3 times. So I found it was too same, everyday was just the same. So I came here and found myself to have opportunities to be good at things. I spend a lot of time planning things rather than having the whole week, not just doing 9 to 3.30 but I use to do extra-curriculum stuff as well, doing very intensive teaching. Having said that, I had 18 weeks holiday every year. And during those 18 weeks, I had nothing to do with school and I had great holiday. But that was my problem, I should spend time planning and developing my curriculum, which is what I do now. Now I have far less holidays, but it's more research. So I spend a lot of my time planning and trying out new things, and I enjoy experimenting. Maybe taking risks, that's what someone from the Learning Development Unit said to me. He calls me a risk taker. Not terrible gamble, but risks, cause I like trying out new things.

Clearly, for him, his personality and his profession require risk taking as an ethos of working in outdoors. Part of this risk taking ethos is the notion of choices which relate to the sense of freedom he feels he has as a lecturer and researcher in higher education, particularly comparing to his previous school teaching experiences. Evidently, he enjoys the freedom of 'creating' his modules and his programme (with his programme team) which can leave him to pass on this philosophy about experiencing different choices and being able to take calculated risks.

<u>About his degree and HE learning: trying different things to understand the real world</u>

There is a clear intention in Ed to create different learning experiences for his students to 'have a taste of different areas in outdoors'. On a module level, he tries to provide students with many choices for their assessments and seminar topics; on a programme level, he tries to provide students with different routes of outdoors to go into which can benefit him in terms of this employability. Indeed, as the programme leader, he led the last OE programme revalidation which saw the old Outdoor Environmental Education programme split into three different programmes covering Outdoor Education with Environmental Education, Outdoor Education with Adventure Tourism, and Outdoor Education with PE. One of the rationales behind this change is to reflect on the changes happened in the outdoor industry as it expands over the years. For Ed, the OE degree must reflect on what is happening in the real world of OE. Also, students must experience the real world of OE to be able to understand their learning in the university and to make decisions on what they want to do after university. However, too much emphasis on 'the real world' also risks students misunderstanding the purposes of the OE degree and overlook the value of academic learning because it has a lot of practical learning and assessments.

Researcher: why do you think having that experience (i.e. students making decisions for their work relate learning) is important?

Ed: it's important for them to make a contact in that area. And have a taste to see if they want to do it. I am a great believer that it's just as important to know the things you don't want to do, than the things you want to do. I remember when I worked in the caravan park in the summer, I use to clean toilets, cut the grass, empty the bins, and work in the bar. And I certainly know after that, I don't want to clean toilets too much. But I am glad I did it. I am also glad I worked in secondary school, so now every day I come here and I think ' oh, gosh, I don't have to teach 5 classes today from 9 to 4'.

…

Ed: the programme is expanding as the HE is expanding. Now we get a lot of students with different backgrounds and different needs. And the outdoor industry is expanding too. A lot of them come here, and they are experiencing a culture shock. For example, some of them come on the course who have been quite competent in outdoor pursuits, and they expect a lot of good credits for that…real world experience of OE can help students to understand their university learning experiences and purposes, in order to narrow the expectations gaps sometimes students have about what their degree and their employability. But that's not the thing some people thought it was when they signed up. It's a degree. It's an academic programme, and you don't get a degree for climbing a mountain. In terms of the assessment, the question is 'do I assess their improvement, or do I assess their actual performance by the end of it?' If I assess their improvement, then it's very subjective. However, considering some of them might never have climbed before, they have made great improvement. It's difficult, because you don't want to de-motivate them, but in fact, in the real world, they are only beginners. So it's actually fair, but some students don't see it that way. It's really important

for them to understand that, because they need to have a quite realistic view on their learning and their achievement. As a programme, we do recognise the fit for purpose agenda. What the employers want are two main things: NGBs and those sophisticated skills and competences like communication skills, leadership. NGBs are not enough, because people can just get them without coming to the university. And you can have people with some NGBs but lack of those sophisticated skills, which you can get from a degree programme.

The question Ed asks is significant on whether students' learning is about their improvement or their actual level judging based on 'the real world' requirement. Indeed, there seems to be a dilemma, for Ed and all the other lecturers, when it comes to employability development, because on one hand, university learning is about giving students different experiences to see and understand this world in different ways, the key aim is to inspire them to change and transform as unique individuals. On the other hand, the employability agenda promotes fit for purpose ethos and sometimes cruel judgement based on 'narrow' (quantified) criteria. Through Ed's interview, it is apparent, whilst he wishes to lead his students to experience the free and adventurous outdoors, he also understands what the real world living is about. While it is conflicting, the adaptability students develop through this system is what learning to live and work in the real world as a 21st century graduates about.

"I've got to practice what I preach. I do like the idea of free hippy living in the country, but I haven't done that myself and I am glad I didn't do it. But if I lost my job tomorrow, I won't be bored. I have a lot of interesting things to do, and I have got enough money to do them as well. I heard the term resilience used, which is about copping in any kind of the situation. So I hope I have developed enough skills from my degree, my teaching training and my research training to be resilient. That's what we want our students to do. That's what we call employability development".

4.3.2   Lecturer narratives Discussion:

Based on what I have already identified as lecturers' own real world experiences in those narratives, through the hermeneutics phenomenological means (Creswell, 2007), I have further explored the complexity of our lecturers' personal and professional constructions of employability and employability development, while illuminating some conflicts and dilemmas amongst their various versions of employability conceptions. Through those four lecturers' narratives, it is clear, employability as a notion is blurry, but it is definitely much wider than the narrow political and economic conception of employability (i.e. the narrow employability agenda with a core focus on skills and graduate employment rates and incomes). Certainly, those lecturers all have an indifferent attitude towards the narrow employability agenda, while acknowledging gaining employment is important to their graduates and they all trying their best to help students to achieve their career aspirations, they all believe that HE is much more than the employability agenda in terms of what the purposes are and what it can

achieve. In other words, for our lecturers, getting a good job is not the sole aim of high education participation, but one of the aims for our students (Barnett, 1994).

Clearly, those broad concepts, such as professionalism and the other key employability components (see Section 1 of this Chapter), are vital – not just to students, but also to our lecturers (as professional and experts in their own profession), the subject area, their profession/industry, and the society in general. Through these lecturers' narratives, clearly employability is not just about developing students to achieve their career aspirations, it is also about the professionalism and values of the profession/industry and the society in general. And to ensure an encouraging future for our lecturers' respective professions/industries and the society, our lecturers believe their own practices as lectures, researcher, practitioners and academics can have profound impacts on shifting current practices and values in their industries/professions through their teaching and their research. Though they are part of the larger system (e.g. their profession/industry, the HE sector and the society in general), within this reflexive circle of employability reproduction, they clearly feel they have the knowledge, expertise, qualities and the responsibilities to push boundaries, challenge traditions and promote innovations, and developing their students' employability is part of this, as they see their students as future professionals and ambassadors who can continue their responsibilities to push boundaries, challenge traditions and promote innovations. This, according to our lecturers, is how their profession/industry and the society move forward (Barnett, 2000).

However, because nowadays lecturers have a number of different roles within higher education, there seem to be conflicts amongst some of those roles. In their narratives, lecturers reflected on who they think they are in their respective programmes (e.g. 'the research one', 'the teacher', etc.) - as well as being the teacher, the researcher, the module leader, the tutor, the mentor, they also have administrative and management responsibilities. In addition, in relation to employability, many lecturers are still active practitioners within their industry and profession – working or advising professional bodies and organisations. It seems some of these roles and responsibilities clash in terms of what their primary purpose is.

Evidently, those conflicting roles and responsibilities have impacted on how our lectures understand and perceive employability. Not only do such conflicts happen at personal and programme level, it also occurs at institutional and sector-wide level. As discussed in the previous section on the dilemmas and conflicts individuals have within themselves, within their programme, and between them and the authorities, it seems they are strongly associated with the dilemmas and conflicts our lecturers have because of their multiple identities, roles and responsibilities.

Through those narratives, it is apparent our lecturers' own academic and professional backgrounds affect their approaches to teaching and learning, their understandings of the purposes of their programmes and the purposes of higher education, their attitudes toward employability development, and their beliefs on how themselves, their students, HE and their profession/industry relate together. Indeed, though we only examined four lecturers' narratives, the differences amongst their pedagogical and philosophical views toward employability, their degree programmes and HE are evident (Clarke, Hyde and Drennan, 2013).

Those pedagogical and philosophical views evidently have impacts on their practices (as lecturers, researchers, and experts in their field) (Rhoades, 2007; Deem, 2006). It could be argued, the differences amongst their pedagogical and philosophical views are the origination, though not entirely, of the dissonances amongst them in relation to their approaches to teaching and learning. Clearly, from how they perceive knowledge (e.g. how employability is defined, who defines it, etc.), there are fundamental differences amongst them – ontologically and epistemologically (ibid).

This then further explains the conflict our lecturers have with the authorities on employability. At the surface level, as discussed in previous sections, it seems our lecturers are indifferent or even opposing the employability agenda (driven largely by political and economic reasons) and the institution's employability projects (e.g. WOW which seem to be the outcome of the employability agenda); underneath, it is evident that this conflict is about issues on governmentality (Foucault, 1991). While our lecturers question how employability is defined, who defines it and so on, there is a sense that as academics and experts in their own field, they believe they have the knowledge, skills and qualities to lead their profession/industry through leading and governing the progressing of its value and practices. There is a clear struggle amongst our lecturers regarding leading and being led, governing and being governed. Through their attitudes toward the institution's project, it is apparent they are questioning how valid is such project (e.g. what's in it, who delivers it, how it is delivered, etc.).

In addition, there is another fold of such governmentality which relates to the autonomy of HE and academics. Through the first fold of governmentality, it could be argued that there is a sense on how lecturers view the decreasing autonomy they have individually and collectively, due to the increasing influence and control the government (ibid) has on higher education. On issues regarding employability, it is clear that many lecturers feel the government and big businesses' leaders wish degree programmes to produce graduates who are fit for purpose. Clearly, under all the dilemmas and conflicts, there is a struggle between power and

knowledge[15]. In short, in relation to developing their students' employability, there are conflicts amongst our lecturers on issues regarding the governmentality of their subject area and their profession/industry, as well as the governmentality of higher education. This governmentality holds two folds: first, it is about our lecturers mentalities on how knowledge (e.g. the wide sense of employability) should be governed; secondly, it is about the conflict between autonomy and how the government and corporations are trying to produce people to 'fit for their purposes'.

In this final analytical level, through taking a 'close up' examination of four lecturers' narratives, some deeper issues are illuminated. First, it seems some of the dilemmas and conflicts our lecturers (individually) have in relation to how they understand and perceive employability, the purpose of their programmes and the HE, and how to design and deliver employability development within their teaching and assessment are strongly associated with their perceptions on their own experiences working in their professional fields and HE. As today's HE requires lecturers to take on multiple roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, research, administrating, industry collaboration, etc.), sometimes there are conflicting interests and values amongst the different identities our lecturers have (Clarke et al, 2013). Secondly, due to the diverse academic and professional backgrounds our lecturers hold (within a programme team, in an institution and their own subject disciplines), there are diverse ontological and epistemological views and values. Though critically dealing with such diverse academic and professional values and beliefs is part of what being academics is about, this adds on further complexity to the issues regarding employability and employability development in higher education. Certainly, like on many academic and professional issues, different ontological and epistemological views and values can lead to dissonances and conflicts amongst our lecturers (ibid). Finally, as our lecturers all hold strong ontological and epistemological values and belief, the dilemmas and conflicts surrounding the knowledge production, governing and ownership in relation to employability are apparent. While our lecturers believe HE programmes and institutions should be leading the employability reproductions for their respective profession/industry, they feel in reality, most of time they are following the government's and authorities' requirements and rules.

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[15] The key concepts of governmentality here are taking from Foucault as my attempt to explain the conflicts and dilemmas our lecturers have, particularly in relation to their own ontology and epistemology and the government employability agenda. Within the scope of this study, I have no intension to further examine the issues relate to such perceptions in relation to governmentality, power and knowledge. Therefore, I am only making the claim that the conflicts between our lecturers' perceptions on their own ontology and epistemology and their perceived purposes of the employability agenda are strongly related to how they understand and perceive power and knowledge – personally, within their subject area, their profession/industry, the HE sector and the society in general.

4.4 Conclusion on lectures' experiences, understandings and perceptions

Through three layers of analysis of the initial findings, emerging themes and narratives of four lecturers, I have gone through a multi-dimensional illumination on some of the issues in relation to lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions on employability and employability development in higher education. Through this process, I have 'zoomed in' from surface to underneath in order to 'zoom out' the deeper and more fundamental issues. Certainly, the lecturers involved in this study have provided fine-grained accounts on their personal experiences and thoughts on employability and employability (Aim 1 of this study). It could be argued that those powerful insights our lecturers chose to share with me have indeed demonstrated the empowerment this study wish to achieve in order to let the other key stakeholder groups hearing what our lecturers experience and think in relation to employability and employability development. Through examining such fine-grained accounts, some insightful themes were generated in order to illuminate the dissonances our lecturers have in relation to employability and employability development in their programmes and in HE in general (Aim 2). Through this illumination, key concepts and themes are identified and examined in an attempt to understand the 'wicked' problem of employability and employability development in higher education. Clearly, the dilemmas and conflicts our lecturers perceive and experience at personal, programme, institutional, professional, and social wide levels in relation to employability and employability development, are some of core issues to this 'wicked' problem. Such dilemmas and conflicts, originated partially by lecturers' personal background and multiple roles, responsibilities and identities, lead to further philosophical, theoretical and practical issues in relation to the definition, ownership and governing of employability reproduction for our lecturers' respective professions/industries in particular, as well as for HE and the society in general.

Clearly, employability and employability development is a complex and 'wicked' problem – in this long-lasting historically, socially and politically constructed concept, its complexity, progressiveness, subjectivity and relativity creates messiness to the concept itself. It consists of multiple stakeholders' perspectives (e.g. students, lecturers, government, businesses, etc.), multiple conceptual perspectives (e.g. political, economic, social, pedagogical, etc.), multiple philosophical paradigms (ontological and epistemological) and multiple layers (i.e. individual, micro, meso, macro and global).

It is also a reflexive problem – it is evident, within this reflexive circle of employability reproduction, the HE programmes are reflecting on what their respective industries and the society in general are requiring, while the academics trying to challenge certain values and practice in order to move their industry and the society forward. While leaving HE with the

responsibilities to deal with employability and employability development, means the forward thinking and innovation comes from HE will certainly push the concept forward; on the other hand, due to its value to social, political and economic reproduction, HE is certainly not the solution itself but a key agent in such process. As demonstrated in this chapter, within the higher education, further complexity and conflicts are generated, which add more dimensions to the employability reflexive circle. However, as our lecturers suggested, students as the future ambassadors of their professions can and should certainly make some differences to this reproduction circle of employability. Though it seems this reflexive circle will not come to an end for a long time, and its complexity and wickedness means we will never be able to fully understand and solve the never-ending problems opposed by it.

Clearly, according to our lecturers, their students, as well as their own professional and academic research, teaching and practices, hold the key to shape and progress the future of OE and PE professions as well as the society in general.

Chapter 5 – Students' understandings, perceptions and experiences

As this study sets out to explore and examine

"What are the understandings, perceptions and experiences of academic teaching staff and students regarding students' employability development in undergraduate degree programmes?"

Through a three phase spiral analysis framework, in this chapter, I will present findings from students' interviews[16] which mainly focus on achieving the first, second and third aims of study to:

1. empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment,

2. identify perception 'gaps' by comparing and contrasting the opinions from lecturers in order to illuminate some of the vital problems in this issue;

3. sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE by exploring lecturers' views.

5.1 Initial findings from students' interviews

Similarly to lecturers' interviews initial findings, the themes in this section are mainly based on the following issues:

- Definitions and conceptions of employability and employability development

- Approaches to employability development in degree programmes (designs and implementations in teaching, learning and assessment)

- The role and responsibilities of HE, their programmes and themselves in relation to employability development

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[16] As noted in Chapter 3, students' interviews were analysis and wrote up after lecturers' interviews' analyses. As a result, this chapter follows a similar structured (regarding the themes and discussion patterns) to the previous one.

5.1.1 Defining employability

5.1.1.1 What is employability?

Through reviewing relevant literature, particularly Tomlinson's research, it is clear that employability for individual students' is about their own credentials, experiences and positioning in the labour market. Collectively, students have developed sophisticated understandings regarding the subjectivity and relativity of employability; at the same time, their perceptions are very much focused on their own problems and approaches in order to achieve requirements of the employers and markets (Tomlinson, 2008).

In my study, clearly potential employers' requirement is the key focus from students' point of view. On the surface, it seems for the students, employability is about what employers are looking for (which as I pointed out in the literature is the narrow definition on employability):

> *"employability is about how attractive you are to prospective employers. So the better employability you have, the more chance you will have for a company to employ you."*

Few students even went for the extreme end of this, stating "*you can only say you are employable when you are employed*".

Students have expressed this through different use of language. Some refer it as how much their personal qualities and attributes match up employers' requirements, others think it's about how much they stand out from the crowd; it also can be about how relatively easy/difficult it is to for individuals to gain employment. All in all, to the students, employability is about '*being the best fit to what employers want you to do*', in other words, how relatively good they are comparing to each other as well as comparing to the employer's requirements (i.e. two-layer relativity).

> *PE student: "I guess it means how difficult I have to try to find a job. If my employability rating is very high, for example, the way I see it, I wouldn't have to send many CVs out, I can send it to 1 or 2 places, and I can get an interview from both places. I guess employability is just how ready you are to be employed."*

> *PE student: "I think each school will have their own criteria for what they are looking for, and it's about meeting what they want, and matching your skills and all the best qualities you can bring out to the post."*

> *OE student: "employability is how attractive you are to prospective employers. So the better employability you have, the more chance you will have for a company to employ you."*

To a certain extent, those students seem to see employability like what Brown et al (2003) describe employability as a combination of the absolute and the relativ**e**. Indeed, as I pointed out in the literature review, although some personal qualities, experiences and qualifications are 'objectively' and 'absolutely' required as employability criteria (e.g. degree classifications), the real important employability factors are those to do with relativity controlled by the broad

economic, political and social rules (Brown et al, 2003). Certainly, all the students recognise that although having some key personal qualities, experiences and qualifications is essential, ultimately how employable they are is judged by those factors to do with relativities in the labour market. Particularly, the students have put a lot of emphasis on the competitions they will face once they finish their degree and enter the world of work.

PE student: "How employable you are is what makes you different from someone else, what talent or skills can you offer that no one else can, why you would be an asset to our department, and what would we miss if we didn't get you in."

OE student: "I guess it doesn't matter how prepared I am, if there is only one position, and the other people who applied are better than me, then I am not employable."

Like the example I used in the literature review about 10 suitably educated and trained teachers applied for two vacancies, students all understand that they need to appear to the potential employers that "I am their cup of tea" during the job application process to be able to gain this employment. And because of this understanding about employability relativity and competition, students seem to have developed a view that employability is a two-way street. It is about being chosen, but at the same time they can also choose because they feel there are great diversities in potential employers' requirements.

PE student: "Obviously it depends on the position you are going for. So if I was to go for a PE teacher job where they required a football specialist I would be very employable there because I have football qualifications, I play football to a good standard and my football knowledge is very good, whereas if they wanted a dance specialist, male or female, I wouldn't even consider applying. So I think employability depends on the position you are going for. But because I love football, I chose to be a specialist, so when I look for jobs, that's what I want to do. "

For all the students in this study, there was no concern about any of the broad employability concepts like the labour market policies, economic growth/contraction and social/economic equity. What's more, the students were not even too concerned about Hillage and Pollard's (1998) second phase of employability on 'maintaining employment' (i.e. long-term employability). Some of the PE students mentioned briefly about their Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) phase after their graduation, but their understandings on what it will be like are vague. At the point of our interviews, employability for those students is about a 'person's capability for gaining initial employment' (ibid) after their graduation (i.e. short-term graduate employability).

Certainly, a number of key findings in this study, regarding how students define employability, share similarities with Tomlinson's studies (2008, 2007). First, students saw employability as being a personal matter as they value factors relating to the individual, rather than the structural factors when they interpret employability. Though they acknowledged the relativity of labour market demands, the key for them is, as graduates what they can offer to the

labour market. As a result, they feel failures in pursuing employment are largely due to lack of personal qualities rather than problems in the system (e.g. economic and social exclusion).

Secondly, though students acknowledge certain employability is a 'must have' nowadays (e.g. a good degree), largely employability is about relatively how good they are in terms of competing to other jobs seekers (not only graduates but generally people in the labour market) as well as matching potential employers' requirements. As students perceive employability as a personal matter, broad *relative employability* like the supply-demand relativity and the relative hierarchy regarding social and human capitals were not concerned (ibid). It is a **narrow and short-term** take on employability, focusing on the employ side, rather than the ability side of the concept. Particularly, rather than focusing on fulfilling broad requirements of their respective industry/profession, students believe because employability is defined by whether an individual can be employed for a specific job, they need to focus on identifying and matching up their own qualities to individual employers' requirements. Indeed, having broad employability which fulfil general requirements of PE and OE does not mean they are employable, because students feel 'everybody has them'.

5.1.1.2 What does employability consists of? – Several key components

As I pointed out in the literature review, often, the lists consist of employability skills, attributes and competences. Although there is still no agreement on what employability includes (e.g. DOTS by Law and Watts, 2006; USEM by Yorke and Knight, 2004; Bennett et al's model of course provision for employability, 1999; and Hillage and Pollard's four employability elements, 1998), collectively, there are some elements that have been highlighted by different authors as essential employability components, such as subject/disciplinary knowledge and skills, workplace experience and knowledge, self-awareness and efficacy beliefs, and generic/transferable skills.

Considering how students see employability as a personal matter, to achieve their immediate graduate employment through better relative competition to other job seekers as well as fulfilling potential employers' requirements, collectively they have suggested a number of key employability elements which can assist them to achieve such aspiration.

- A good degree
- Work experiences
- Extra qualifications
- Insight knowledge about the industry/profession and network
- Suitable personality
- Job application competences

In addition, due to the nature of the PE degree, all the PE students felt that with their degree, they also need to have a highly rated QTS result because without it, a good degree on its own will not be able to grant them any chance to attain a graduate level PE teaching job. As a result, when the PE students talked about their degree, they also involved in their QTS.

- A good degree:

Although from those students' point of view, employability is about relativity and competition, there are certain employability components seen to be essential. A good degree and work experience, because students believe they are qualities almost every graduates has, so without them, other employability qualities seem insignificant for graduate level employment. Indeed, in today's mass participation HE, students all have a sense that 'nowadays everybody has a degree', but many students seem to be rational and critical about the value of their degree and what they can achieve in the job market after their graduation.

PE student: "Personally, I think obviously academically it's key, there's no denying that if you've got a degree you're going to be working to a specific level, a high level. So I think it's not simply about experience but I think, for arguments sake, everyone on out course passes and there's 60 people with a degree, what's different about the 60 people? I think that's when you bring in employability, that's when you bring in experience, awards and other things."

Clearly, for students, the degree reflects on the level of knowledge, experiences and skills they have developed over the past few years, for many students, it gives them certain advantages in the job market. However as suggested by Tomlinson's study (2008), today's HE students feel 'a degree is not enough' anymore – it only adds value to a person's employability. Certainly, this is how many students in this study felt as well. Nevertheless, PE students believe for certain professions (e.g. teaching), a degree is a 'must have' (employability base-line), whereas for OE students, it offers them the experience, knowledge and skills they might not be able to develop without coming to the university.

OE student: "For me, going down the outdoor education side of things, I think that's an important aspect of our degree, because if you working in the outdoors, maybe you are out in the hills or you end up working in a centre which has a field study department, that's beneficial, because you have got the knowledge there of being able to go out with groups, and apply the knowledge you have into their development, so for field studies, if you have school groups come in doing geography as a GCSE or primary school geography, you have got that knowledge and you can take them out to show them what you know of the area, and they learn the basics. I think that's very beneficial, in terms of the academic part of the degree, that's something maybe employers would look for."

On the another hand, students' understandings on the relativity of employability led them to feel that their degrees do not guarantee them any clear cut employment advantage over their competitors in the job market (their peers, graduates from other universities and other job seekers without degrees).

OE student: "Before I started this degree, I was under the impression I would leave with very high employability. Now, I feel that may have changed a bit, I may not have as much advantage as I thought I would have. And I know a lot of people who work in the outdoors, they left school at 16, 18 and they went straight into a centre or they went a broad and just started working somewhere. They had lots and lots of experience, and by the time they are 20, 21, they have been taking groups out for 3 years, they have got qualifications. And then you get us lot, who went to university. So we don't leave with the experience or the qualifications, yeah, we have a degree in outdoor education, you can say that puts us into the position we can do managerial works, but you could argue that the people who have got h grass roots experience are better suited for that."

All in all, students seem to feel, having a degree is an essential base-line for getting a good graduate level employment and certainly it gives them some competitive edge (Tomlinson, 2007), but it does not grant them any 'absolute' advantage in the job market.

- Meaningful experiences and extra qualifications:

Through some of the quotes above, it is clear students feel in order to be employable, they need to have experiences and qualifications as well as their degrees. Indeed, if the degree is the baseline for graduate employability, experiences and qualification are what grant students the competitive edge in the job market. As students feel employability is about how relatively good they are compared to employers' requirements as well as their job seeker competitors, they believe experiences and qualification are much more useful to demonstrate what they have done, what they can do and what potential they have (after all, 'the degree is just a piece of paper').

Certainly, students value their WBL/placement experiences which they had during their degree, because they felt WBL/placements were where they had opportunities to apply what they learnt in the university in 'real world work' situations. This is particularly true for PE students who had substantial amount of placements.

PE student: "I think the placement is pretty much the only reason that I feel employable. I learnt more in the first couple of weeks of my very first placement that I learnt in all the lectures I sat in and all the assessment that I done, because, you know you just sit there and they tell us about teaching strategies etc. and yet when we go into teaching it's kind of embedded into our heads that we need to try a different style to pass the assessment etc. but doing them and actually being there and seeing the other teachers doing them as well gives me ideas and makes me feel so, so much more comfortable in actual teaching. I think teaching is massively to do with confidence and if you feel confident in what you're doing you come across as confident and people feel a lot more at ease and I certainly".

Not only are WBL/placement experiences are something they can put in their job applications, those experiences also provide students opportunities to develop and enhance those crucial employability knowledge, skills and competences (Harvey et al, 2003).

PE student: "I think placements are the most important, if you can teach, that's what you will be able to do, at end of the day, if you are a teacher, you will be going out, you will be delivering practical lessons every single day, you have to be able to do that, you have to be

able to do that excellently and consistently, so the more practice we get doing that, the better you are going to be. And that's why it is most meaningful to me. And that's why like I said before I want to prove what I am. And the way I was going to prove it was by doing it, and by getting my mentor to say 'you are a good one'."

Apart from WBL/placements which clearly contribute to students' employability, students also feel other experiences, particularly practical learning experiences in their degrees were vital employability components, because they offered them something different which could potential give them competitive edge in the job market.

PE student: "In 2nd year we had to do a module where we had to video ourselves teaching and then analysis it with an instrument. It was practical and it's useful. Not a lot of schools have Dartfish, but it is the experience. And it is an added value thing. You know, I will stand out comparing to other university students. It is something new, something different. There was a group of us practicing it in the gym, so we can share ideas and have a look of what each others were doing. At the end, I filmed myself doing a sort of forward roll, and filmed it from different angles. It was a well organised module, and I don't think anything should be changed. We had enough .lectures, we had enough time to book the cameras and practicing it, and the assessment itself was good, and from when we started the module to the assessment we had a lot of time to practice it, so it was good. It is one of those things I can actually put down on my CV. I can actually say I can use it. It is CV building. Whereas in other modules, we wrote essays and I am not going to put it down on my CV."

OE student: "At the beginning of this year, the first years on this course went for some mountaineering experience for three days over in Wales, and I had the opportunity to take a group out. Take them up to the hills, show them the skills kind of required to interpret good map reading which is a very big part of being up in the hills, because you need to navigate your way around, if the weather gets misty, you know when the weather suddenly turns, you need to know where you are, and how to navigate safely. And one of the girls, she was struggling with the concept of how to interpret height, and be able to visualise the figures. Just sort of helping her from what I learnt and how I learnt it, like pass that information on, she started to understand and grasp the idea of interpretation. And it kind of clicked with her, she was like 'oh yeah, I understand that'. So that's an example of how my skills externally from university helped someone else."

Clearly, from students' point of view, during their degree there were many those meaningful employability development experiences. Students rated those practical learning experiences highly as they can see immediate value of such experiences to demonstrate their employability (e.g. putting on their CVs). In addition, those experiences also appear to give students opportunities to understand and apply what they learnt in the classroom in a practical situation. Student value such experiences because they feel those experiences certainly develop and enhance those crucial employability skills, knowledge and competences.

Students also feel other experiences which they did outside their degrees are value. This is because, first, they demonstrate students' commitment and motivation to work, as they feel

WBL/placements are part of their degrees, it is like the degree which 'everybody has done' so it does not necessarily make them 'stand out'; secondly, with those experiences, students feel they can also gain other employability components (e.g. insightful knowledge and network in the industry), particularly with OE students who felt their 3-week WBL was not comprehensive enough for them to achieve anything meaningful. Regardless whether the student had or did not have worked outside their degree, they all felt those extra work experiences are vital for their employability.

OE student 1: "I think having worked and still working in the outdoors outside the university, I think you can pick out what your employer wants a lot easier."

OE student 2: "I think the jobs helped me to be able to understand when people feel slightly down or struggling with something. It's kind of opened my eyes to interpret people, and then if I see people sort of struggling in trying to learn, or pick something up, or learn something, I really want to help them, and make them feel better about themselves, and make them feel better…let them know they can actually do something."

As well as positive practical/work experiences, some students also pointed out that having negative/bad experiences helped them to be realistic and be prepared for the difficulties they might face in their work places. Though they are not something students can put on their CV, it is the actual learning experience which develops awareness, understandings and competences students seem to value.

All in all, students seem to feel meaningful work/practical experiences (inside and outside curriculum) definitely give them the competitive edge over other job seekers in the market as those experiences demonstrate their uniqueness, their commitment, their knowledge, skills and competences, as well as provide them with opportunities to gain insights about their industry/profession and make crucial networks for their employments.

Similarly, students also feel extra qualifications can help them gain competitive edges.

PE student: "It's just more strength to your bone, I think. If I was looking into employ two people, one person's CV has got first aid, trampolining, rock climbing, something a bit different, instead of your average sort of basketball, football, games, things like that. Absolutely, your eyes will open. You take a look of all those, and you will be like this person looks employable, he has done all those things. I think it just looks better."

Clearly, students value experiences and qualification as crucial employability components for them to gain those essential skills, knowledge and competences, as well as demonstrating their employability competitiveness. However, students do not just go for any kind of experience and qualifications, and it seems they have different understandings and approaches to those experiences and qualifications which appear largely associated with how they understand what employers are looking for.

Generally, those understandings and approaches can be categorised into two: varieties and specialities. On one hand, some students believe today's job market requires flexible employability (Tomlinson, 2008, 2007), which means they need to have a range of experiences and qualifications. Particularly as they perceive graduate employments are not at expert-level, they feel to gain competitive edge, they need to have *more* than other job seekers. In addition, some students feel because the job market nowadays is flexible and unpredictable, having a variety of experience and qualifications can help their long-term employability as they will be able to have more choices (Stott et al, 2012). When it comes to make decision on what experience and qualifications to go for, some students tend to be strategic – they consider the popularity of the experiences and qualifications over employers as well as the popularity of those over their job market competitors.

PE student: "Mainly to develop my career, I think. I don't think that many on there (CV) I did it because it's of my own leisure. For example, cheer-leading, I didn't do it because I enjoy cheer-leading, I did it because the school offered it to me, and I did it because I thought it was an opportunity to develop myself. I did that course, and during my placement, I stayed after school did some extra curriculum work for them, and then when I left, I went back to the school carrying on doing it."

OE student: "Mainly for diversity, cause outdoor centres which is where I want to work, if you want to be an around instructor, work with kids in different sessions through programmes school groups come in, you have to be able to be diverse, your coaching ability and what you can actually give to the group, cause if you just go climbing for a week with a group, it will be great fun, but it may just get a little bit monotonous for you, you may get, not bored, but just repetition, which is really good for learning, but at the same time can be a bit draining for you. If you have a better range of skills and qualifications, then you always circulate around different things, different groups, you get the opportunity to show what you know, plus, it's also for legal reasons to have those qualifications, you know, to have a piece of paper to say you are qualified to actually take groups out."

On the other hand, some students believe developing speciality in certain fields can improve their employability, as most graduates would normally be at an 'entry level' in their industry/profession. Having speciality can certainly 'make them more attractive' to employers with their *in-depth* knowledge and experience. For certain OE jobs, students feel they have to be *experts* in order to gain employment. In addition, they believe that being excellent in one thing they are passionate about, is more enjoyable than being good at many things which they do not necessarily like. Of course, students all feel if they could develop the range and the depth of their experiences and qualifications, it would improve their employability greatly, but considering the cost of time and resources, they believe they need to be strategic about what kind of approach they take.

OE student 1: "If you want to become a more freelance instructor, you may just specialise in climbing and mountaineering, and that's your job title then, that's what you would pass on to people, that knowledge of being up in the hills because a lot of people now are sort of progressing into the hills rather than maybe out kayaking or any other water based activities, because walking and climbing is a little bit cheaper for people to afford. It requires less

personal safety protection equipment, just things like walking boots, rain coat, so that's a little bit easier for people to get into."

OE student 2: "When I first started, I was kind of being in the outdoors climbing and walking, and I have been doing that for most of the time, but along that journey I have been doing other activities, and picking up those skills as well. I would like to have those at base level, so I can go to centres and work in there, and then specialise in one area which is the climbing and mountaineering side, that's where I want to freelance, in that area. Because I don't really know much about freelancing as a kind of water based instructor, cause I know more about working outdoors as mountaineer."

- Knowledge and networks:

Students value those 'insightful' knowledge and networks because they believe they are keys to open the door to their industry/profession. While having 'measurable' employability components like degrees, qualifications and work experiences can certainly improve their employment potential, students feel it is those 'invisible' knowledge and networks which help them to utilise those potentials they have.

PE student: "I think it's really important, I think like without having an understanding, how can you ever know what the employer is looking for. You need to think about things like, what you can contribute, and make sure you can express your best qualities. So without knowing and understanding, I think you will become unemployable."

From students' point of view, this kind of knowledge and networks are what link their employability potentials with the real world of work. It is almost like showing their '*street wise*' awareness and contacts – demonstrating '*I know what I am talking about*', in which they feel without such knowledge and networks they will be perceived as naïve and inexperienced by their potential employers. For PE students, this is often about knowing and understanding what a school wants from their teachers, and being able to match their qualities with such requirements; for OE students, this often involves networks to find potential employments.

PE student: "I think from going on school placements, from like experience school like environment, I think you learn what is needed to fill the role, you understand the skills like communication, organisation and things like that, and things that are required from you. Whereas if I never experienced that, I would have thought I would be fine just because I am good at sport. It develops your knowledge and understanding of what is required of you in a school environment, whereas sitting in a lecture learning about child development or things like that, I think it's not realistic to actually dealing with the children."

Clearly, those knowledge and networks are closely linked with their past experiences in work settings. While working, students feel they can develop the kind of awareness and understanding about their work place (e.g. 'staff room culture' in a school) thus some awareness and understanding of the work culture in their future industry/profession (Harvey et al, 2002). This kind of awareness and understanding is vital for their employability, but tacit and implicit which cannot be obtained in classroom learning in the university. Like

experiences and qualification, students feel such knowledge and networks are obtained on a personal basis, which means they often are unique to individuals, and have high employability value by demonstrating to potential employers how different they are comparing to their job seeker competitors.

- Personality and interest:

Every student in this study believes that in their field (OE or PE), 'you have to have the right personality to do the job'. Though, it could be argued, for any HE degree, students pick the subject because they enjoy it, for OE and PE, personal interest and personality seem to be vital when it comes to employability.

Firstly, students, particularly OE students, feel their subject area is not one of those 'traditional'/'normal' degrees like Computer Science or Psychology. People only choose to do OE/PE is because they love the subject area and feel they *only* want to work in their respective industry/profession. Especially for OE students, their passion for the outdoors is a lifestyle choice (Stott et al, 2012), in which they would love to be able to 'live to work' not 'work to live'. As a result of such belief, students from both subjects feel if they cannot obtain employment in their respective profession/industry, they have failed, speaking employability-wise.

OE student: "Choosing outdoor education is not the choice you really make when you are in school, I think it's the choice you make when you are out of school …say you go over to New Zealand and you do kayaking and you go down white water, and stuff like that. And then you think 'wow, this is amazing, I wish I could do this as a profession'. For people choosing outdoors specifically, for lifestyle choices, they don't appear to have an outdoors hobby. It's not like all of them are studying it, and yet in their spare time, they don't want to go to do something outdoorsy, they'd rather stay inside playing on an Xbox or going to the cinema or something. They are all talking about how during the summer they went to do kayaking, or went climbing somewhere or something like that."

PE student: "I think coming here to do a PE degree, we all know we want to be PE teachers. There is nothing else…I mean the course is about preparing us to be PE teachers, and I can't think why else you would come here if you don't want to or not sure about it…It's one of those, you know, we all want to be good PE teachers, that's what we are all working towards, that's what keeps us going for four years. Yeah, you can have a PE degree and do something else, but why do you want to?"

Secondly, it seems because of the belief on the importance of personal interests and passion for their subject area, students tend to feel such interests and passion are vital employability components that potential employers value. Some OE students even believe that for some OE employments, the 'right' personality and interests are more important than their degree. This is because they believe such interests and personality can translate into work experiences and knowledge, which employers value greatly – this intertwined notion of 'you do what you love, you love what you do' seems to really only matter to OE and PE students.

OE student: "I don't think it depends too much on whether or not you have a degree, which is a quite strange thing to say, but I think if an employer is looking for someone new for them to employ, I think definitely they will look at your experience and what you can bring to them in terms of your experience and your personality, if you are very ignorant, very self-centred, they may say 'that's not really what we are looking for. We want someone who is very flexible, friendly, and who can get along well with others, and be part of that team. Your degree will help, because you have got experience in certain field which maybe is what we require, but it's necessary'. I think employers will look for someone who has got good experience, who is friendly and flexible."

- Job application competences:

The process of applying for employment is a crucial part of employability – after all, this is when students feel they can really utilise all the other employability components they have to obtain their desired employment. For the students, being able to identify a 'suitable' position, write an 'attractive' job application (e.g. CV) and carry out an 'impressive' interview are essential, without these competences, their degrees, experiences and qualifications have no actual meaning to their employability. Particularly for PE students, those job application components can be critical because they feel, at the moment PE jobs are highly competitive (more supply than demand); the majority of PE graduate have similar employability (e.g. degrees, qualifications and experiences); and teacher job application has unique characteristics. This is very apparent in how PE students value the experience and feedback they had during the 'getting that job day'[17] because it offered them a '*real chance to see what it is like to be interviewed for a PE job in a school*'. Similarly to the tacit knowledge about their industry/profession, students feel they can only develop those job application competences through work experiences where they need to apply for jobs.

It is interesting to see how students understand the concept of employability – its meaning and its key components. Clearly, as suggested by Tomlinson (2008, 2007), students nowadays have somewhat sophisticated understandings on employability. They can see its different dimensions and those essential characteristics (e.g. complex, relativity, etc.). Students' understanding tends to be rather narrow, they focus on the immediate short-term graduate employability on individualised bases (though they acknowledge long-term employability), and they tend to feel employability is defined by their employment status (though some acknowledge employability and employment are not the same).

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[17] It is an extra curriculum event organised by PE lecturers where final year students applying for a made up PE position in a school. The whole process models a real PE job application: the schools' head teachers select few candidates out of all the students who made application for an interview day where the candidates carry out all the interview tasks like in a real interview in front of their peers. At end of the day, the school's head points the successful applicant and gives feedbacks to all candidates.

With the belief that employability is about how relatively good they are, compared to their potential job seeker competitors, as well as their potential employer's requirements. Students perceive the key components of employability are those essential qualities that they can develop and demonstrate to show their individuality, as well as being required and valued by employers in their respective profession/industry.

Unlike what most employability scholars suggest as employability (e.g. essential knowledge, skills and competences which grant graduates with the potential to be employed), students seem to feel employability consists of qualities and experiences which are mostly measurable and tangible to their job application. While knowledge and skills are important to them, they feel these are implicitly embedded in their degrees and qualifications. In other words, only by having certain experiences and qualifications, can they demonstrate to their potential employers their skills in areas like teamwork, communication and so on.

Even though this study takes place in a different type of institution with students from different subject areas, it definitely shares some similar findings to Tomlinson's study (2008, 2007). The sense of degree inflation, individualised approaches to employability, valuing the packing and presentation of their employability (job application competences), etc. Particularly, students seem to believe experience is perhaps the most important employability component (though for PE students, they have to have a degree). It is apparent that, experience is the element which ties all the other employability components together, it is where all the other components come from, and it is where all the other components can be meaningfully demonstrated. As pointed out by Tomlinson (2007), this is their way to further distinguish themselves in the labour market, creating unique individualised employability narrative which can reflect their own attributes and achievements, with the belief that employers tend to value what they have done outside their degree. All in all, students' understandings on employability components seem to largely consist of two kinds - the explicit evidences for them to show to their potential employers in their job application processes and those implicit learning experiences they have had which contribute to those crucial evidences.

5.1.2 Employability development

With how students understand employability in mind, the following conversation I had with a PE student (Nat) highlights some of the key messages about how students perceive employability development.

Nat: My first placement was quite good and there were only a few challenges there. My second year was more of a kind of challenging school were the behaviour was very bad, an all-girls school, and problems like pregnancy and stuff and I don't think that was covered at university, like ECM (Every Child Matters), that kind of agenda in the sense that what do you

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do when a child comes up to you with a note that says she's pregnant. I know that that should be covered in the school but it was kind of taken for granted there. And then coming into fourth year, that's when we started to learn about ECM and lots of other initiatives. And my last placement I didn't have any expectations really because my last placement was kind of tough but I just strived in it because it was a school that challenged me so much that it only made me try and prove myself and the department was so different, like no one really got along, my mentor didn't really talk to anyone and I just felt that I... I would never give up, so it only pushed me.

Researcher: So do you think that the degree should provide a bit more support and help for students to deal with those kinds of challenges in placements?

Nat: I don't think any student should be put into a school where what they've been taught isn't happening. So, for example, first essay we ever did, 'what characteristics would a good teacher need?' We can't learn something from someone who doesn't have the characteristics, like my mentor in the last placement was unapproachable, conflict with every member of staff, although I kind of relished in a situation like that in a sense that I only tried to impress her, it just made me want to try even harder to try and get her attention I just don't think it would be suitable for everyone.

Researcher: Because you talk about the behavioural problem with the children, do you think that the information and knowledge provided in the theoretical part is enough or appropriate?

Nat: The only reason that that wasn't a big issue for me was because of my experience with being a support worker with children that are going to get excluded. I feel like without that experience outside of university, whether I would be the same person or if I'd be able to deal with it in the same way, just because I've had so much training and experience in that kind of area...I think maybe every student should be put into a tough school in a sense that a lot of people on my course have had easy schools the whole way through.

Researcher: Going back to the programme, considering all those experiences you have just told me, how do these relate to the kind of employability development in your degree?

Nat: I think, we just done this module on World of Work, where... I think that would have benefitted us and made us more ready to be employed and the whole employability kind of scenario, but I don't think many people got captivate by it, in a sense it was just done completely at the wrong time. Maybe at the end of year 3 where we had a lot of time after.

Researcher: So you think people who organise that should link it in more with the program a bit more?

Nat: Yeah, I just think it was kind of done like a bolt-on rather than integrated into...I feel like it was brought in just as a kind of factor to contribute to our degree, like she (the faculty employability officer) was talking about getting a star, a WoW star and to me it doesn't really mean much in a sense, I had a dissertation due in, I need to try and pass it before I try and get a star so I don't think it was integrated into the curriculum.

Researcher: It's quite interesting where I asked you about employability development in your degree and you talked about WoW specifically.

Nat: I think, employability development, I see as just building and building and building like a bank of experience and knowledge and stuff, and think that when I do go for an interview I'll be able to portray all that, I think I will have all the employability skills, I just need to get them all together, and I think that's what WOW is trying to do, isn't it?

Researcher: Do you think that the degree has provided all those things?

Nat: I don't think they provided all of it but I do think they contribute to it in the sense of the experiences…I think it will contribute a lot, like placements, from having a variety of different schools and different children, you will be able to deal when you have a job in the situation and be able to adapt to suit the school. And also with the theory, you will be able to link it to practice, so when you do come across a child like portrayal, challenging behaviour, or if a member of staff like you have conflict with them, you will know what to do and stuff like that. So I think the degree has provided enough, you can't really expect them to give you everything, can you?

In this conversation, clearly, Nat felt developing employability is not just her degree's responsibility. Indeed, throughout interviews with students, evidently, regarding to their employability, students feel that themselves as well as the degree and the university all have the responsibilities to develop and enhance it.

5.1.2.1 Employability development at personal level

For students, developing their individualised employability at their personal level is crucial, because they believe as employability is an individualised matter, this is how they can differentiate themselves to their competitors (Tomlinson, 2008). Reading through how students feel about their experiences (see last section), clearly they believe they need to take the responsibilities into their own hands - developing their own employability accordingly by undertaking extra-curriculum work experiences and qualifications.

"I think their priority is to teach the stuff...to make you study the modules in the degree. I think employability is something you can work on in your own time."

Collective, students suggested such personal level employability development includes a number of different aspects: work experiences, extra-curriculum qualifications and trainings, past formal education, family background, personal interests and hobbies, etc. – generally speaking those kinds of personal employability development consist of pre-HE and during-HE, extra-curriculum and within their degrees.

Particularly, experiences outside their degrees seem to be vital because those are what students feel they have really differentiated themselves to their peers (ibid). Such experiences not only consist of work related experiences students have done outside their degree while they are in the university, they also include experiences before they entered HE. For students, clearly employability development is not just what they need to do to achieve their career aspirations during their HE years, it is a process of building up 'a bank of experiences and knowledge' (as Nat suggested) in which their formal education, work experiences, family background, personal interests and so on all contribute, in some way. For example, throughout the interviews, students all expressed where their career aspirations have come from (their gap years, school trips, PE teachers, etc.), and for them,

such a personal inspiration is crucial to their employability because it is where everything else started and it is what motivates to develop their employability.

Indeed, for students, the experiences which help them gain some of those crucial employability components (e.g. qualifications, networks) can certainly demonstrate their uniqueness to their potential employers. In addition, because of the individualised employability development outside their degrees, some students have pointed out that combining those experiences with their learning in the degree can make their HE learning experiences more tailored to their employability development needs, thus further develop their employability.

OE student: "I think certain things before the degree, I would be aware of certain things, presenting myself or my knowledge in certain ways. Like I have been told when I try to teach people or help people sometimes I give too much information away, because I get quite excited about passing on knowledge to other people. And I think through this degree, being given the opportunity to teach more made me more aware of the fact that I actually need to step back and just give people enough, and let them do their own thing, and experience...giving themselves their own experiences rather than me passing my experience on to them. So I think the opportunities that have been given to me made me grow in that sense."

Evidently, personal level employability development is not just about gaining work experiences and qualifications, which can help students gain a competitive edge in the job market. By reading their narratives (e.g. conversation with Nat), it is apparent students also feel that personal level employability development is about how they interpret their employability as an individual (i.e. self-awareness) and how they develop their own way of such interpretation through their experiences of employability development. More than just 'taking the matter into their own hands', personal level employability development seems to be about what Tomlinson descript as 'graduate identity construction' (Stott et al, 2012) in which students construct their individualised employability through personal level interpretation. As a result, even on paper, two graduates might appear to be the same (e.g. 'same' degree, 'same' qualification, and 'same' kind of work experiences). The construction and articulation of these employability components will certainly be different. I will further explore this point later with narratives from some students, to illuminate and examine the meaning of personal employability development.

5.1.2.2 Employability development within their programmes

As students feel their degree and their learning experiences during their degree contribute to some of those crucial employability components, apparently, employability development within their degree programmes is vital to them. As suggested by Nat, though students feel they have a lot of personal responsibilities to develop their employability at personal level, and they cannot expect their degree programmes to provide them with everything for their

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employability, they still expect their experiences in their degree programmes to greatly improve their competitiveness. After all, this is one of the primary reasons students participate in HE.

Students' expectations and perceptions toward their degree programme level employability development consist of a number of aspects – which largely reflect on how they perceive employability as an individualised matter and what they perceive employability involves (e.g. experiences, qualification, etc.). Although amongst those ten students, there were diverse expectations and perceptions, collectively there are a number of key elements and principles they feel their degree programmes should have for students' employability development.

First, for students, practical experiences are the most important employability development element in their degree programmes. As discussed before, students value such experiences because they allow them to develop their employability (learning experiences and job application evidences) through a personal way (for their uniqueness to gain competitive edge) (Tomlinson, 2008). As well as the WBL/placement module(s), students also felt their degrees should and need to provide more learning experiences and assessments which directly relate to their 'real world of work' environment – practical applications of theories.

When discussing with those students about 'which module(s) you feel have contributed to your employability development', all the students have suggested the ones which led them to go into schools/outdoors to do something which directly related to what they believe they will do as a PE teacher/OE professional. Indeed, to those PE and OE students, learning experiences which allowed them to apply and practice what they had learnt in their lectures into 'real world work' setting certainly provided them with opportunities to 'try' and 'test out' their knowledge employability-wise (i.e. they felt they had developed an understanding of their theories on what works, what does not work, and how it works) whilst immersed within their potential future work environment (e.g. in schools with pupils and teachers, in outdoors with 'clients'). At the same time being able to 'do things in their own way' (through combining their personal experiences and understandings), students felt their individuality has also developed.

PE student: "The module we've just done with Dan, that's the best one I've done since we've been at University. We had one lecture there and he said 'this is what you have to do, there's your BTEC specifications, go away and plan 6 lessons, deliver it in school and we'll see how that goes and we'll see you after the week and we'll discuss it' etc. We went away, in my group, we got the first aid specification, we all had to create resources, I created one for fractures things like that, and then we had the experience of delivering it and we had feedback from the teacher straight away while we were in the school. Being given, literally, 'right there's the specification, what you do is up to you', it was absolutely brilliant. Having the experience of doing it, you know we could have gone in and absolutely fell on our backsides

but then the teacher would have said to us don't do it like that, this is how you do it and it's the whole thing of even if you do something wrong you can still learn from it."

Throughout the interviews, there were many examples like this, where students reflected on some of the practical application experiences they had and unpacked their employability development values from their point of view. For OE students, their practical outdoor modules were the ones where they felt they have developed most of their employability (see last chapter for details about the module). While students believed some of the intended learning outcomes were achieved (e.g. developing their leadership; developing their practical abilities), often they felt those learning experiences happened in isolation. In other words, often, there was lack of *alignment* (Biggs and Tang, 1999) between theory and practice, which as a result led students feeling their theoretical knowledge was separated from their practical experiences.

OE student: I think leadership skills were very much within the practical modules, say like the MI training, the SPA training, just making us aware about how you can look after groups, what you would do in certain situation. I mean there have been lectures about leadership styles, but again there hasn't been that transition from the lectures to the practical. It was just 'here are the theories, we are making you aware of them. Here in a practical, what would you do'. There was that kind of period where they expected you to go away and learn about them, and think 'ok, how can I apply this in this situation.' But there hasn't been that connection, I think. That's just my personal view, maybe it's different to others.

Researcher: so did you learn and develop your own leadership then?

OE student: just from my past experience. On practical modules, using my past experience in those moments, trying to teach people in such a way to make it easier for them to learn, and think 'ok, how can I actually provide this to this group of people on a level that is beneficial for them. Not coming across as giving too much or too little information'. That's how I felt I developed in the practical side of things.

Clearly, for students, practical learning experiences allow them to translate their knowledge into understanding through making sense of experiences in the 'real world work situation', and because of this purpose of practical learning experiences, for students, their employability development needs to be integrated into a *holistic* curriculum (ibid) where every learning aspects are intertwined with each other rather than having those aspects 'standing alone' as separated parts of a degree programme.

As I presented in the previous chapter, both PE and OE programmes have a great amount of WBL/WRL in many different ways (e.g. WBL module, practical modules, theory application modules, etc.). While students recognise those experiences and acknowledge their values toward their employability development (see last section), there seems to be a number of issues according to students' perspectives on how WBL/WRL are delivered at their degree programme level.

For OE students, one of the key issues was the length of their WBL, which 'officially' only lasted for three weeks. As a result, students felt the potential of their work-based learning was not fully achieved, because more of them were strategic about where they should go for the WBL module. By doing it in their 'old' outdoor centres, many students felt that was the most 'efficient' way to go about the module – spending the least amount of effort to organise the placement to achieve the best marks possible for their assessment.

For PE students, the key issue surrounding their WBL was the 'hash' work environment they sometimes had to embrace (which was clearly highlighted in the conversation with Nat). Accordingly, students often experienced great difficulties when they were placed in a school with 'difficult' work colleagues or pupil with behaviour/attitude issues – a culture shock to their expectations, knowledge and experiences as a 'trainee student', feeling totally inadequate to deal with certain problems. Often, PE students described their placement experiences as being '*thrown in at the deep end*' '*sink or swim*'. However, it seems all those students I interviewed manage to come to term with their difficulties and deal with those issues, which as a result led them to feel they have learnt and develop greatly through such difficult experiences.

> *"I had a really bad placement...I hated it, I thought I virtually learnt nothing at the school other than how to just get through it. But after thinking about it, I think did learn how to get on with misbehaving pupils and not to sort of just blow up, so disciplining or sanctioning them."*

Such experiences show a great deal about how employability development needs to let the students take their own initiatives to *experience* and make sense of their potential future work environment. Of course, the nature of the PE programme and its extensive placements also contributed to their students' employability development during WBL. Nevertheless, those reflections from students clearly suggest students value challenging WBL/WRL experience which they can see the relevance to their employability development, they have a clear sense of personal engagement to such experience, and additionally they are undertaking such experience within the safe learning environment of university (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

Secondly, for students, their degree programmes should and needs to offer diversity and choices in the curriculum so they can develop some different employability qualities compared to their peers. Such diversity and choices should include not only different degree routes and optional modules, but also different varieties of WBL/WRL experiences, theoretical perspectives and practical activities (an issue highlighted in the conversation with Nat) (ibid). This is because students believe that by having diversity and choices in the curriculum, they can have more opportunities to 'test out' different areas in their respective profession/industry, diversity and choices also give students more 'rounded' experiences to enhance their existing employability. Crucially by having a number of different kinds of

experiences, students can 'pick and mix' different combinations which give them the opportunities to develop that vital individualised employability they are all looking for.

PE student: "I just think they could do so much more to make us feel more employable in terms of more teaching experience. In terms of the experience that school's give us; I haven't really had a range of schools, I had a huge school, amazing staff, great, second school, fine, nothing amazing, nothing really bad, quite a small department but very good and third school very similar to the first school, big department, big school, I never really went to a very bad school where I was challenged..."

All in all, giving students more options means they have the opportunity to '*take control*' their own learning experiences within their degree programmes.

However, in reality, diversities and options are often problematic to implement. Due to the limited staff and resources, having options in the curriculum often means those options are limited. Apparently, some students feel it is unfair that some of their peers' interests were addressed by those limited options, but others' were not. This was particularly an issue with OE students' practical modules where some students felt the heavy emphasis on mountaineering and water-based activities (primarily due to their limited resources and staff expertise) were unfair for them because they were interested in learning and developing in other outdoor activity areas.

In addition, some students acknowledged though having 'core modules' are necessary, often (particularly in their final year) they feel those modules are not relevant to the 'specific' career directions they are heading towards - those options come too little too late. In addition, many students felt some of their optional modules seemed to be attached to their 'core' curriculum rather as part of it. As a result, again, some students felt they could not see the relevance of certain modules. This was particularly an issue with the OE students who took the two 'new' degree routes (adventure tourism and PE) as they felt the core of the degree was still constructed around the 'old' environmental science route.

OE student: "I joined one tourism module in second year which gave me such a ridiculously small snapshot of tourism, it wasn't even worth going. I think I haven't taken anything from the adventure tourism side of this course. I came to study Outdoor Education with Adventure Tourism, and I have done the outdoor education side of things, but the adventure tourism side is so little. And eventually when you are doing the adventure tourism, you are not really sure…it's not like they have tailored it for us, they just took a module from tourism and then went 'yeah, that's the module', the module was not relevant at all…They make us to do ecology (as a core module) which was pointless. It was interesting to a very superficial level, but this is really life, it's not about how interest it could be on paper. If it was an option, that would be the last module I would chose to do. I just think the fact that they made us do that without putting anything up to do with PE or adventure tourism is imbalanced. I mean if year 1 isn't really worth anything academically, then it should definitely be used to encourage everyone to get involved on every aspect of the course."

Those issues, particularly with the OE degree, again reflected the importance of having an aligned curriculum (Biggs and Tang, 1999) where employability is embedded as a core element, which intertwined with other core elements of the degree. Without such alignment and embedment, it appears students could be confused about what employability development is about in their degree programmes. Additionally, it shows students' desires to have their own autonomy when it comes to their employability development, but at the same time, this needs to happen in a carefully structured way where their learning and development can carry out progressively and constructively.

Thirdly, employability development needs to be and should be carried out with support and guidance by experienced staff members. Such support and guidance not only should involve staff members providing a nurturing environment to help students with their employability development experiences (particularly regarding challenges and difficulties they face), but also should involve staff members providing clearly directions to students on where they are heading regarding their future working life (again, highlighted in the conversation with Nat) (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

The need for support and guidance was evident – as students felt they were still 'learning' to be PE teachers and OE professions, they believed one of the key responsibilities of their lecturers was to guide them through such learning journey with their expert knowledge and experiences (ibid). Such support and guidance can take on various forms. Noticeably, the direct support and guidance students receive from academic staff members was valued greatly. This mainly involved tutorial support for specific problems/issues (e.g. challenges in school placements, difficulties with particularly practical assessment, etc.). For students, such opportunities to have personal support and advice given by their lecturers (who they perceive as experts in their field), definitely provided them with a clear sense of direction in relation to how they could deal with similar issues in the future. Compared to generic lectures and workshop on employability, those experiences seemed to be tailored for students to ask questions and receive feedback on their learning and development at a very personal level.

PE student: "My tutor was just brilliant, she was just superb. She organised meetings for us to catch up, and she checked my work properly. She is just really approachable, you know, if I had problems, I can just email her or go to knock on her door. And I felt I can just sit there and have a proper chat with her, about my teaching. I was honest with her, I wanted to do my best, and it did really work."

As a contrast, some students felt the lack of such personal level support and guidance often left them feeling lost and confused about their learning. Though students acknowledged that they understood HE learning should be independent at times, as they expected such level of support and guidance for their employability development, they often felt let down by their lecturers. Moreover, this kind of inconsistency left students to be strategic at times when it

came to choosing their modules so that they could have the 'supportive' lecturer even they were not interested in the subject area itself.

PE student: "There are some lecturers I know I can go knock on the door and have a nice discussion with them, ask them questions, and I know they will give me a really good response. But there are others I feel like they are just not bothered. I think that's just bit of shame really, sort of not always consistent across the board where you feel the other people are a lot more approachable. That's being another running theme throughout the course, even there has been occasions where who assess you makes a difference. And people have picked modules not because they want to do that particular subject, but because that lecturer is leading the module, so I am going to pick that one. I think it's a shame people feel they failed because of a particular lecturer."

Clearly, for students, employability development is a personal matter in which constructive *personal* support and guidance is vital. Perhaps because those students were from educational programmes, they perceive such support and guidance as a pedagogical example that they can learn from for their future works as PE teachers and OE professionals thus developing their employability.

PE student: "I think Joyce is really efficient in that sense, she is just…feedback is constant, every piece of work I have done for her has got better mark than others, just because she just gives feedback and her expectations are very clear. And I know her module has made me more employable."

Researcher: why?

PE student: "Because the module, like every child matters, the way she goes about it, relating to current events, and assessment because assessment is vital in schools at the moment, assessment for learning is a kind of new assessment initiative, I think she relates it to actual teaching, not just assessment criteria, she relates it to the actual teaching. So for example, she would say 'if you were in school, and this happened, this is what you need to do in that situation'…it just clear and relevant to what we do."

Indeed, for student, guidance and support to their employability, development does not just mean what the lecturers can give them in terms of knowledge and skills, it also involves how such knowledge and skills are provided because this is how students understand the relevance of such knowledge and skills to their own employability (i.e. translating knowledge into practices).

OE student: "I just don't think there was enough application of one module to another in terms of how the lecturers can help you to pass that on. I think it was very much like 'here it's what we know, we are going to pass it on to you. And then it is your responsibility to go away, and learn it for yourself. If you have any questions or difficulties, come back to see us, we will help you'. It's not like 'we are passing this knowledge to you. You expect you to learn it and understand it, and we will look and help you progress with it, and make it link into other modules'. There seems to be lack of that. You know, kind of connection and progression from the lecturers in a way. I felt it's pretty much 'it's your responsibility. You are an adult. At this level you should be doing it yourself. You are not going to be spoon fed', which is right, you know, we shouldn't be spoon fed at this level, but there should be that aid in terms of getting people to become aware of why they do things. Some people might have the skills and they are using them sub-consciously, so they need to be aware of what they are doing to

improve maybe their emotional intelligence in that sense I think throughout the course, the opportunities to develop practical skills and be aware of how to use those skills were there. But then I think overall it lacked that personal development, for employability, in terms of how you can use the skills, and become a better person as a whole."

Apart from personal level support and guidance, and relevant constructive feedback on their learning, students also expected such support and guidance being provided through insightful professional knowledge and networks. This kind of expectation also took two forms. Evidently, students expected their lecturers to provide them with insightful knowledge about their respective profession/industry (e.g. what does work in schools as PE teachers mean?) as well as networks for them to establish potential employment opportunities because they perceive their lecturers as experts in their fields who have the responsibilities to nurture the students about their profession.

As well as receiving guidance and support from their lecturers through tutorials, feedback and insightful knowledge and networks, students also suggested that they perceive their lecturers themselves as their guidance for their employability (i.e. role model examples). Indeed, they found their lecturers' personal narratives about how they developed their own employability in the past were inspiring and informative. Such stories often motivate students to achieve their own career aspirations with the view that their 'lecturers are just like them who share similar experiences and passions for their profession/industry'.

Finally, employability development within degree programme needs to and should consist of personal development as well as professional development. Indeed, for students, most of the time, their practical experiences for employability development contributed to their understanding and application of theoretical knowledge into practices in a work related environment (i.e. professional development), but without similar level of personal development. Often the meaning of such practical experiences was unclear to them. This is apparent when many students reflected on what they felt was lacking in their degree programme employability development experiences.

OE student: "I think the course does provide opportunities for employability development. But I think just providing opportunities might not be enough, it's about making people aware more that they are getting those opportunities. I think there needs to be more done to make it as a whole throughout the course, rather than just specific modules. You know, because at the moment people are not taking away everything and putting it together as a whole thing over the four years, it still feels like just individual fractions."

Clearly, for students, employability development in the degree programmes is not just about gaining a good degree, meaningful work experiences and a valuable qualification (those 'measurable' employability components), it is also about developing their individualised sense of what they have learnt, how to translate such learning into employability, where they are heading towards for their future and most importantly who they are – employability-wise

speaking (Tomlinson, 2008). Though professional development is certainly vital for their immediate employability, as it provides evidence for them to demonstrate their knowledge and experience to their potential employers, personal development is what helps to understand themselves and their respective profession/industry better (i.e. self-awareness and employability-awareness). As behind all their 'uniquely' constructed individualised packages of knowledge, experiences and qualifications is such an awareness that 'makes them unique individuals'. I will come back to this issue later to future explore the issues regarding personal development and employability.

5.1.2.3 Employability development vs. Academic learning

One of the key issues regarding students' employability development in their degree programmes is how they perceive the relationship between their academic learning and their employability. According to Tomlinson's study (2008, 2007), students seem to place very little, if not no value on their academic contents when it comes to their employability development because they feel those contents are theoretical and irrelevant to the real world of work. As a result, students in Tomlinson's study felt they would rather take a strategic approach to their academic learning, i.e. trying to achieve as good as they can with their assessment result rather than trying to learn as much as they can. Nevertheless, this does not mean that students do not see the value of academic learning in general, rather they feel such learning does not contribute to their employability. After all, students did choose to come into HE studying an academic degree in which they expect academic learning and development.

Certainly, students in this study also seem to enjoy their academic learning, and understand that it is a crucial part of their degree. However, there seem to be some dissonances amongst students regarding how they perceive the value of such learning to their employability and employability development (as already presented in the previous sections).

For some students, learning academic contents was the key reason they chose to come to university to develop their employability in the first place. Particularly for OE students who felt they had choices for their employability development between studying a degree or working and gaining qualifications in the industry, their academic content is what makes them different to those who stayed in the industry.

OE student: "For me, going down the outdoor education side of things, I think that's (academic learning) an important aspect of our degree and what's why I chose to come to university… if you work in the outdoors, maybe you are out in the hills or you end up working in a centre which has a field study department, that's beneficial, because you have got the knowledge there of being able to go out with groups, and apply the knowledge you have into their development. For field studies, if you have school groups come in doing geography as a GCSE or primary school geography, you have got that knowledge and you can take them out and show them what you know of the area, and they learn the basics. I think that's very

beneficial, in terms of the academic part of the degree, that's something maybe employers would look for."

Clearly, some students' work experiences lead them to believe that 'a degree doesn't guarantee a good job', because many employability components (e.g. work experiences, qualifications) can be achieved outside the degree (Tomlinson, 2008); but the academic learning experiences and the credentials offer something special and unique – '*anybody can get a qualification, not everyone has the knowledge and skills to be an excellent outdoor educator*' because such learning experiences can take students' employability to a new level with innovation, difference and excellence. With such expectation about their academic learning and its value to employability and employability development, those students tend to find themselves taking every opportunity they can to apply their academic learning into their practical work – making the link between theory and employability themselves.

Researcher: "Did you find anything you learnt in the university helped you when you were in work outside university?

OE student: "Yeah, definitely. Recently, I noticed certain aspects of leadership, you know kind of theories behind like the importance of being authoritative, you know like taking charge of certain situations depending on that moment in time, if you felt as a leader it was important for you to take in change because maybe a serious issue, so knowing when and why to use that. Or sometimes being autocratic, you know, let the group decide what they feel is best at that moment in time, but you still give an influencing factor, but they generally will come to some sort of agreement. So you rely on the group to make the decision, if you feel there isn't any element of danger or anything like that involved in that moment. So that's kind of an academic development for me I have learnt to use depending on the moment. So yeah, outside, that's the kind of connection I have made."

Clearly for those students, academic contents form part of the works they do (Knight and Yorke, 2003), and the decision on applying theories into their work made them feel they have improved their employability by 'offering something different and better' than their potential job competitors. In addition, as our students were in education subjects, pedagogical, psychological and social theories seem vital for them in terms of developing their professional knowledge which underpins their practices - this is particularly the case with the PE students. In addition, for PE students, nowadays to be a teacher, they must have a good academic degree with their QTS, and theoretical knowledge and understanding plays a big part of the standards. Furthermore, some students suggested in today's educational sector, to be a good PE/OE educator means they need to be good at their academic contents and academic learning to set examples to their pupils.

However, there were few students felt their academic learning has very little, or no value to their employability.

Researcher: "What about the theoretical or academic knowledge side of things? Do you think they are helpful for your employability?"

OE student: "Not at all. I think because 90% of the stuff I have studied are the kind of stuff I consider as not relevant, I mean obviously you can find relevance in anything, but as a whole because 90% of the stuff I have studied has been stuff in my mind I consider as irrelevant, so it's just the case of in one ear straight out the other."

Researcher: "I think this is interesting, I think I really want to know how you personally decide what it is relevant."

OE student: "I am not sure really, I think it's just kind of something…well relevance is something I consider that it's useful material will impact upon me once I have gone through university. I guess it's more previous experience, kind of you know, from working in the outdoor sector before, working during time in university, I have seen business operations, I have seen all sorts of things like…stuff I have asked 'why do you do things like that', you know that kind of stuff, that's the kind of things I consider as useful to know that university should teach you… I mean, for what I am interested in, university has been a waste, I mean academically as a course it has been a waste."

Similarly to what Tomlinson (2008) has suggested, students who place very little value on their academic learning in relation to their employability development, tend to fail to find the connection between the two. For those students in this study, certainly it was the case that their expectations on what they were going to learn were not met. It could be argued that those students do find academic learning is valuable to their employability development, but they felt what they have learnt in their degree was not the valuable academic learning they were looking for.

Certainly, personal expectations and perceptions on what is valuable play a big part of how students value their academic learning in relation to their employability development. Individual learners with different educational backgrounds, work experiences and career aspirations undoubtedly tend to value things differently.

OE student 1: "I do find the theories and conceptions we talked about in the philosophy module are quite interesting and useful, like people's reasons for doing outdoor activities, and things like risks associated with that. I did philosophy in my A-levels and I absolutely loved it. For me, it's about why people doing things which underpins everything."

OE student 2: "Things like learning style and teaching methods, you can apply them in your practical situation. And things like Glacial & Fluvial Processes, you can pass the knowledge on during your practicals, you know you can talk about the environment to you clients. I also think there are modules which I don't think are relevant to employability. Like the philosophy one we just did, we talked about things like echo feminism, different views on the environment, for what I want to do, you know quite practical things, I don't really think I will go into that."

Indeed, for every student, there are certain aspects of their degree that seem to be irrelevant to their employability development, but particularly all the students in this study seemed to find irrelevant assessment is a key issue. For students, assessments are what bring their academic learning together - encouraging students to learn academic knowledge and demonstrating what they have learnt and how they understood it (Knight and Yorke, 2003). In

this sense, students do seem to place great value on assessment – certainly a meaningful and relevant assessment does encourage their learning, and consequently achieve good marks. However, often students felt their assessments seemed to be irrelevant to their learning and development which as a result discouraged their academic learning.

For students in this study, they perceive their degrees as applied/vocational programmes which should focus on the applications of theories into practices. With such perception in mind, they felt their academic learning and assessments should be carried out through 'showing' and 'practicing' rather than 'lecturing' and 'writing'.

PE student: "I think all the lectures we have, all the assessments that we have, they assess our knowledge in terms of what do we know about teaching initiatives, what do we know about teaching strategy, what do we know about ECM agenda. We do need to know that which is fair enough but none of that makes me feel employable, none of that makes me feel ready to go into school and be a teacher. I think the problem for me is we don't have anywhere near enough experience of applying those things in a practical sense. We could sit here all day and I could write you a 3000, 6000 word essay but again that's not testing my knowledge about how to apply it, that's testing my knowledge about getting 6 books around me and take one quote from that book, argue it with another quote from that book, argue it... at the end of that essay I've not really learnt anything, I've just regurgitated the things I've seen in different books."

With such perception on academic assessment, students tend to feel their academic learning is less relevant to their employability development than it should be – questioning the purposes of their assessments. In addition, this has created a dilemma for students – on the one hand, essay writing does not meaningfully contribute to their academic learning and employability development; on the other hand, the marks they receive for their essays do reflect back on their degree classification which is an essential employability component.

PE student: "I think we should learn about the theory side of things, we are in university, we are doing an academic course, we need to prove that we are able to learn academically, so it's sort of catch 22. I am a PE teacher, and that's what I want to do, the practical side of things, sometimes it feels it's separate to the academic side of things, but at the same time, you need to be able to do both, but I am just not motivated to do it, because sometimes I can't see the point. To set down and write an essay doesn't interest me; being outside teaching and motivating kids interest me."

Clearly, for our students, perhaps due to their subject areas and professional requirement, they do value academic learning – for most of them, this is what they came to university for, to develop their employability. Indeed, students certainly value academic learning as they can see the relevance of it to their employability (e.g. their degree) and their employability development (e.g. knowledge and skills). However, what they value, how they value them and why they value them seem to differ. On the one hand this demonstrates the diversity of students' learning needs in today's mass participations HE; on the other hand, it reflects students' constructions of their individualised employability by having different and unique focuses on their academic learning.

5.1.2.4 Employability development within the university

Participating in HE is not just about doing a degree to improve their career prospective, for many students, it also includes a number of other experiences within the university but outside their formal curriculum. Indeed, those experiences, for students, also contribute to their employability development – directly and indirectly. For our PE and OE students, university clubs and societies which they were part of, certainly helped them to develop value-added employability, through practicing and competing in university sport teams, they had opportunities to improve their own practical skills and knowledge. Some PE students were involved with university sports teams as coaches, which they felt definitely contributed to their employability development as they improved their coaching skills, knowledge and competences as well as built up their CV with relevant experiences (Cui, 2012). Indirectly, students felt being part of HE has helped them to grow up and being independent. Meeting people from different social and ethnic backgrounds has also 'opened their eyes' and helped improve their interpersonal skill and social awareness. Although they cannot put those experiences down on their CVs, students felt those kind of experiences are what 'living and working in the real world' is about.

Another kind of employability development within the university was through the institution's own World of Work (WOW) and Graduate Skills projects. For those 2011 graduates, graduate skills were introduced to them as part of their curriculum while WOW was a voluntary project outside of their degrees.

As discussed in the literature review, university level employability projects potentially can provide sustainable and effective employability development, due to its institution wide impact and clear directions for its degree programmes (Tomlinson, 2008). However in practice they are often problematic as too many stakeholders' involvement can make sending out the right message to students' difficult (Harvey, 2004). This was clearly an issue for those PE and OE students, as many students did not even grasp what those projects were about.

OE student: "By the end of the module there is something, I think called world of work or something like that, you know, workshops. I don't really see the point. For me, those kinds of things happen naturally."

PE student: "We just had this lecture about this WOW thing, the lady was explaining to us those self-awareness things we can do to make us more employable. I am not sure…I don't really know how they can make us for employable, it was very vague. Do employers even value it?"

Certainly, amongst all the students, there were a number of attitudes toward the university projects. Firstly, students felt the graduate skills project within their curriculum was surface and repetitive.

PE student: "They (lecturers) kept saying to us if you do this, you'll be the first cohort to completely finish it and when everyone asks how does this make us more employable, we were never given an answer of right well it gives you this skills, it gives you that skills, when we looked at what we were doing everything was pretty much the same as what we've done. You know, the kind of evaluating your placement experiences, your strengths, your weaknesses, how you can develop yourself…it was a waste of time."

Indeed, many students questioned its repetitiveness, wondering if it was for their learning and development or university's marketing purposes. Clearly, from most students' point of view, meaningful development of employability skills and competences need to be carried out in a holistic and progressive way with subject context embedded (Knight and Yorke, 2003), whereas the university projects were box ticketing exercises which seemed to have no actual contributions to their employability and employability development.

OE student: "What I don't get it is from filling that sheet, you can pick out the skills from the assignment you have already done. I think it's just providing evidence for someone else. You know, the graduate skills, surely if you are a graduate, you have got graduate skills. I think it's a bit paper to fill in for someone else. It's like somehow by filling all the paperwork and ticking some boxes, I have essential graduate skills? ...it's just not for me"

Secondly, students questioned some of the practical implementation of such projects, wondering 'if those projects are for employability, surely they could organise them a bit better as they are experts in employability'. For some students, having additional employability development opportunities could potentially helping them to develop value added experiences and competences, however, the timing and implementation of the graduate skills and WOW projects seemed to be inappropriate to students which as a result led them questioning its seriousness (Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003).

PE student: "They brought in the WoW system which is good, but not many people did it because it was something they were told about in one lecture 5, 6 weeks ago, no one even knew what it was until 3 months before we were leaving so the interest in it was minimal. I did it and I had to change a few things to get it but people who've got dissertations to do and they've got WoW to do, which ones more important to them? They're going to do their dissertation."

Thirdly, students questioned the value of such projects regarding its validity to employers' recognitions, particularly in terms of its value to potential employers. Indeed, as students feel extra-curriculum learning is primarily for value-added employability development, such investment of time and energy needs to have returns to them as those crucial employability components (e.g. qualifications, meaningful experiences, networks, etc.). Considering this belief about extra-curriculum employability development, students felt WOW project had very little or even no value to their employability.

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PE student: "I'm quite good friends with Merseyside director of Sport and when I was talking to them about the WoW they said that if they had an application that had WoW on it, it wouldn't make it stand out any more than anything else. And that's kind of something that was bigged up to us a little bit, you know, do this WoW thing and it'll make you more employable. I think at that time we had our dissertation and we had another big thing to do and a lot of our time was taken up doing that and why should we take time out doing that to come and do this thing which, to be honest, doesn't make us any more employable. Again, I might not know all the ins and outs of it and I might be misinformed but it didn't really... in fact I didn't do it, I didn't go for it because I wanted to devote my time to my dissertation or the module. But that is something I didn't think... they said go and do this it will make you more employable but I didn't think it did at all."

Finally, students felt the support and direction university projects gave them were too generic and vague. They also felt they could not relate themselves to the Faculty's graduate employability development officer. This is solely because OE and PE students perceive employability development as a personal matter with strong subject focus, in which any academic staff member delivers employability development, must have expert knowledge and experiences within their subject areas (i.e. PE and OE). As a result, they felt the workshops, for example, were not relevant to their respective industry/profession.

All in all, students did feel there were some employability development opportunities within the university, but institutional-level projects need to consider more of those essential elements regarding relevant experiences and support, diverse choices and actual employability value. Most importantly, according to students, university level employability development needs to be voluntary because they felt anything compulsory must come from their lecturers with clear focus on their respective profession/industry.

OE student: "Transferable skills develop naturally. When you come to university, you meet new people, particularly we are in a teaching course, so we are good at those things anyway, and especially as we go into schools, so we had a lot of opportunities to develop them. And I think sport brings people together, you know, games and outdoor activities, things like that, they just bring people together. So through those experiences, you definitely develop those skills."

From the institutions' point of view, university-wide project provides excellent opportunities to work with employers (government agenda's requirement) and has crucial marketing value to perspective students (Harvey, 2004). Though in theory, they are sustainable and effective, due to its institution wide impact and clear directions for its degree programmes (Tomlinson, 2008), in practice, the levels of engagements and the numbers of key stakeholders make its implementation problematic (Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003), particularly considering the 'right' message is not easy to send to all its many insiders (academics and students) to buy into this top-down approach to employability development because often top-down initiatives are not taking seriously to fully utilise its potentials (ibid).

5.1.2.5 Overall discussion on employability development

Going back to the conversation with Nat, clearly students in this study have some sophisticated understandings on how their employability development should be carried out at various levels. Indeed, those personal experiences are intertwined with their learning in the degrees as well as extra-curriculum activities in the university, providing rich employability development that carries on rolling as students engage with more and more learning.

While extra-curricula activities within the university can enhance their employability by giving them value-added experiences, networks and confidences; for students, employability development within their degree programmes is crucial as most of taking part of HE to improve and enhance their employability (credentials and experiences) (Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003). Clearly, through looking at what students perceive as key elements in their degree programmes for their employability development, there are certain principles from students' point of view for their degrees to consider when it comes to their curriculum design and teaching learning activities:

- Individualised employability development (for students to develop uniqueness for gaining competitive edge), which can be achieved through diverse curriculum choices and work related learning experiences that are supported and guided by academic staff members for students' personal and professional development;
- Constructive learning experiences where students can see and understand their relevance to their career aspirations through translating knowledge into real world work related understandings and experiences, making sense of employability through 'testing out theories', 'trying different options', 'receiving practical advice and guidance from experts' and 'developing awareness of who they are and who their career aspirations require them to be';
- Controlled autonomous where students, within a safe nurturing learning environment, have certain degrees of freedom to make 'informed' choices on their own employability development directions;
- Progressive and holistic employability development, which is embedded within the programme as a key strand of the degree intertwined with other strands (e.g. theoretical understanding, research, etc.). Such progressiveness must consist of the development of students' subject and professional knowledge, skills and competences as well as their self-awareness and employability awareness (i.e. personal and professional development).

Clearly, students in this study perceived employability development similarly to Tomlinson's participants – they started to take individualised approaches, focusing on their own experiences, potentials and career aspirations (2007) in order to distinguish themselves from their peers. They value experiences as their employability development process, as well as a crucial employability component (i.e. outcome) as they believe creating their unique individualised employability narratives through finding, utilising, and being able to demonstrate the valuable 'economy of experiences' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004 cited in Tomlinson, 2007), can reflect their own achievements and potentials, which again distinguishes themselves from their peers. However, unlike students in Tomlinson's study (2008) who found academic content they learnt within their degrees have very little if any value to their employability, the students in this study clearly felt their academic learning is crucial. Perhaps because the nature of the programmes which has a strong vocational and professional learning focus, students felt they need to learn as much as they can in order to achieve as good as they can.

All in all, through examining students' understandings and perceptions regarding employability, employability development and employability development in higher education, it is clear that not all students perceive HE as the service which provides them with employability for jobs (consumer attitude). Not all students feel participating in HE is all about the end product (degree and employment) (Tomlinson's findings), and certainly many students feel university learning is much more than employability development (though employability is a crucial aspect). Clearly as suggested by (Harvey, 2005; Knight and Yorke, 2003), there are diverse expectations on what HE is for, different understandings and perceptions on what employability is about, personal preferences on topic areas and lecturers, and a variety of opinions on how employability development should be carried out in HE learning.

5.1.3 Summary discussion on initial findings

In this first analytical layer, I have focused on the 'structured' themes which emerged from the literature review to explore and examine students'

- Understandings and perceptions of employability;
- Understandings and perceptions of employability and higher education;
- Understandings and perceptions of TLA of employability in HE degrees.

Through looking at those findings, it is clear that students share some congruence in their understandings and perceptions on what employability is and what it consists of. Students also share the view that employability development is not just their degree programmes'

responsibility but they and the university also have great responsibilities for their employability development.

Students' understandings on what employability is about shares some similarities with some of the definitions in the literature in that it is about absolute and relative employability (e.g. Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003). On the one hand, employability is about the relative competitiveness individuals have to gain in employment; on the other hand, there are some absolute employability elements which the students feel are essential. For the students, (perhaps due to the timing of the interviews) the key emphasis seems to be on 'employ' rather than 'ability', which is different from what key scholars like Yorke, Knight and Harvey suggest. This is largely due to the belief that employability is defined by the employers' requirements, which as a result can only be fulfilled by gaining an employment as suggested by Hillage and Pollard (1998). Indeed, for final year students, though there is a balance between short-term immediate employability (graduate employability) and long-term employability, clearly most of them have placed their focus on the immediate employability.

However, with regard to how employability should be developed and what roles and responsibilities different key stakeholders have, there seem to be a number of different views from our students. Unsurprisingly, in today's mass participation HE, students' diverse educational background and previous work experiences mean that they enter HE with different expectations, perceptions and understandings on what HE learning is about, and how their participation in HE can contribute to their employability and employability development (Barnett, 2008).

Amongst the ten students in this study, there were clearly some very happy students, who felt their HE participation and their learning experiences in the university has helped them to feel employable, as they perceived all those essential employability components were developed and enhanced. They felt they can fulfil their potential employers' requirements, while exceeding the competitions with other job seekers. Armed with this great sense of their employability potentials, they all have developed a clear sense of direction (ibid) on their graduate employment with some even have already attended jobs. This reassurance of their employability seems to allow them to feel their HE experiences were successful.

On contrast, some students were very unhappy about their degree – even questioning whether participating in HE was a waste of time. Those students seem to feel after 3/4 years at university, they are still unclear about what they can do in terms of their employability and where their future career is heading. Although those students acknowledged their own responsibilities in developing employability, they felt their degree failed to provide the essential learning experiences for them - to direct them on what to develop and how to

develop (nevertheless, they did seem some of the employability key components have been develop).

In between these two extreme attitudes toward their HE experiences, there were few students feeling somewhat confused about the direction of their future. On the one hand, students felt they had learnt and developed essential employability components, thus feeling employable in the sense that they can fulfil employers' requirements and exceed their competitors. On the other hand, all those learning experiences led them to question whether PE/OE is the profession they want to go into.

Examining three different kinds of attitudes, it is clear that students did not enter HE with no employability expectations and employability development experiences, (i.e. students are not blank books waiting to be drafted and developed by HE learning experiences, they are already uniquely drafted books waiting to be enhanced and crafted by HE learning when they enter HE) (Tomlinson, 2007). How they perceive their HE employability development experience is very much based on their previous experience and expectations on what HE learning can contribute to their employability.

Looking at students' perception on their HE employability development experiences, clearly their expectations on what and how HE participation can contribute to their employability were vital to such perception, and in today's mass participation HE, there is a diverse collection of such expectations on key issues such as 'what HE is for', 'what the degree is for', 'how academic learning relates to employability' (see last section), 'how employability development should be carried out in your degree' and so on (Tomlinson, 2008). For instance, while many students expect their degree to help them develop networks with their respective profession/industry, some students felt it should be their own responsibility to develop such networks while undertaking employment outside university. Another example is on students' attitudes toward value-added qualifications. As discussed before, students believe those qualifications are a vital part of their employability because they evidence what qualities and experiences they have, as well as their interests and commitment to their industry/profession. Though both OE and PE programmes include extensive practical modules, only OE offers students the opportunities to gain those vital industry-recognised qualifications within their curriculum (see last chapter on the details). With the assumption that all students welcome such learning experiences and outcomes for their employability, I was proven wrong by students' attitudes toward having qualifications as part of their degree.

For PE students, the expectation for their degree programme to offer some qualifications was apparent and there was somewhat disappointment that '*after all the practicals, there is no certificate to show for it*'. Although students acknowledge that having their degree means

such employability component is included, they feel having the actual qualifications can make them stand out more, particularly compared to other universities' graduates.

PE student: "As I said before, all the people doing PE degrees have their degree certificate to say you are at degree level standard, but I don't think there's enough provision out there to make me different from anyone else, or someone else different from anyone else, and I think that links in with the governing body thing, I think that's one way they could do it. So I think, again, there are provisions there to improve employability but possibly instead of telling you, you need to do it why don't they offer it. Not necessarily spoon feed you but we'll give you a couple of governing body awards to get you going, maybe they could do a bit more on the employability side of things."

In addition, students felt because employability is such an important issue for HE at the moment, they expected their degree to provide value-added qualifications and experience to show their prospective students and employers what university can offer (Tomlinson, 2008). Considering students are now paying tuition fees, they expected the university to offer more than their 'normal' degree learning experiences to justify such investment.

For OE students, however, the expectations varied in terms of whether their degree should provide them with extra qualifications in the curriculum. Many OE students felt their degree had no responsibility to develop their employability in such way because students should take part in such experiences in their spare time. This, for those students, is how different kinds of employability can be constructed. In addition, these students also felt a degree should largely focus on academic learning on theories and applications. With such expectation about their degree, they believe people who want to pursue a career in practical outdoor activities should consider a different employability development route. However, few students felt their degree should provide them with qualifications because 'that's common practice now with the outdoor kind of degree in the country'.

Moreover, some students felt their expectations were changed after they had gone through the degree. Apparently, before they entered HE, they believed their degree should offer them extra qualifications, but after completing their degree qualification, they felt it should be an extra-curriculum activity. This is largely because these students felt there was too much emphasis and pressure on passing the assessment, and getting the qualification which sometimes distracted them from the learning experiences. As OE qualifications have high practical standards. Some beginner level students felt while they could only achieve few very basic level qualifications, their more experienced peers seem to improve greatly and gained more high level qualifications. This kind of 'unfairness', from a students' point of view, should not be promoted within the degree – especially considering their practical assessment results also contribute to their final degree classifications.

Through this example on students' expectations toward gaining extra qualifications in their degrees, clearly there are diverse multiple perspectives on their degree and university's roles and responsibilities (Barnett, 2000). In addition, it seems students' expectations change throughout their degree – often with their learning experiences. Within such circular motion development of experiences and expectations, one positive/negative experience can trigger a series of new expectations and experiences. This again suggests that employability development in HE needs to take a holistic approach, rather than focusing on specific elements or issues. As discussed before, students enter HE with pre-established experience and expectations, their employability development throughout HE is a process of enhancement.

While students' past and present expectations and experiences intertwine together and carry on evolving and developing – constructing diverse expectations and experiences in relation to their employability and employability development in their HE learning (Barnett, 2008). One key characteristic regarding such expectations and experiences is clearly the notion of *direction.* In the next section, I will further examine the issues of employability development and direction from students' perspectives.

Through examining expectations and experiences, it is apparent that how students' judge what learning experience is valuable, and what isn't is highly subjective and relative. However, two key concepts regarding their employability development in HE learning are certainly shared amongst those students: 'real world of work' and 'safe nurturing HE'. Indeed, it clearly appears that students believe to be able to learn and develop their employability, they have to immerse themselves into the work environments they potentially will go into. However, such learning experiences often leave students to feel insecure about their employabilities and qualities - while those 'harsh' learning experiences lead students to reflect and take action on what they need to develop and improve. There is also a sense that they are expecting more nurturing from their degrees as students seem to perceive HE learning should create a safe 'shield' for them to practice and enhance their employability. Certainly students find those two concepts often contradicting to each other which leaves them feeling challenged and somewhat confused about their own position and identity – while they are students and trainees in their degrees crafting their employability, they are also professionals in their work places and even sometimes in the degrees (e.g. PE students felt they are expected to behave like teachers in the university). Such conflicting roles and identities certainly create some issues for our students' employability development – which I will look into further.

5.2 Emerging themes from students' interviews

After synthesis and evaluation, the initial themes of students' interviews (based on the 'structured' questions of the interviews) via the first data analysis circle of the spiral analysis, further themes and issues have emerged. In this section, I am going to focus on those emerging themes which developed through the second analysis circle. The key purpose here is to further explore our students' experiences, understandings and perceptions, in order to illuminate those vital employability and employability development issues from their perspectives as well as through their perspectives (interpreted by me). In addition, I will further examine those crucial dissonances and congruence amongst our students, regarding their understandings and perceptions on employability and employability development in order to further understand the problematic nature of employability development in higher education.

5.2.1 Similarities and differences between programmes

As highlighted in the methodology chapter, because the natures of the two programmes involved in this study can be perceived differently, as one is a HEFCE funded degree programme and another is a professional credited degree, there is a new sub-aim (under Aim 2) to see if there is any significant dissonances and congruence between the two programmes' lecturers' and students' thoughts and experiences. In addition, through reviewing similar research studies (e.g. Tomlinson, 2008, 2007), it is within my research interest to see if there are any differences between various degree programmes regarding their students' understandings and perceptions.

Through the initial data analysis and discussion, it is apparent that a great amount of students' understandings and perceptions of employability and employability development, are related to their understanding and perception of the nature and purpose of their respective programmes. Evidently, there are some differences between OE and PE students' understandings and perceptions on certain issues (e.g. the roles and responsibilities of their respective programmes in relation to their students' employability development).

Firstly, PE students seem to be more concerned about the requirements for a specific profession than OE students. Indeed, students on the PE degrees seem to believe their programme is '*all about training to be the best PE teacher they can*'. Whereas, OE students consider their programmes had various career routes within their profession, and they also consisted of different levels to cater for the needs and interests, from beginner outdoor educators to quite experienced ones. As the OE students believe their industry has diverse employment opportunities (e.g. outdoor centres, self-employment, schools, etc.). With those different opinions about their respective degrees in mind, it seems PE and OE students

approached their employability development in their degrees to some extent differently as well. PE students seem to have a very determined sole focus on developing as much as they can and as well as they can in order to become high quality PE teachers. Whereas OE students, though they are still determined to become outdoor professionals, seem to have more choices on what they do and what they do not have to do. This is reflected in their somewhat different attitudes toward the university employability initiatives. While OE students seem to completely reject Graduate Skills and WOW, as they feel they can/should choose something else to do to enhance their employability, PE students seem to feel they should do them just to be better (employability and employability development-wise speaking), even though some of them did not understand what those projects are about.

In addition, it seems PE students felt because their degree has a sole purpose on training PE teachers, there is not much alternative to their employment destination. As a result, they perceive employability solely in relation to teacher training rather than wide, generic employability development that experts like Harvey (2001), Knight and Yorke (2003) talk about.

PE student: "I think the degree I am doing is absolutely tailored towards PE teaching, I am going to be a teacher, whereas my sister did a history degree, it's not so tailored to a specific job. And because of that, my sister, doesn't have a clue what she is going to do, she has been doing all sorts of things. She got a 2.1 in history, she went travelling with her friends from university. And then she came back and thought 'what am I going to do? I have got history degree. I am good at writing, and I can analyse all those journals and things like that. Actually I want to be a journalist.' And then she started going down that route, did some voluntary work for magazines and stuff, and then she thought 'oh my god, I hate this, this is nothing like what I thought it's going to be like'. And now she is going back to college to do her science A-levels, because she wants to be trained to be a nurse. So that's completely different degree path. Those experiences were very different because I always knew what I wanted to do, and that's why I am here."

Secondly, students felt, due to the nature and characteristics of their programmes, they have a different kind of makeup of student cohorts. Accordingly, OE students felt that outdoors is not a 'normal' subject that students participate in schools, it often starts as a hobby in extra-curriculum activities, and it takes time for people to get into it and develop their knowledge and skills in it as a formal subject area. As a result, students felt that an OE degree needs to cater to the diverse academic backgrounds and professional work experiences their cohorts have. From these students' point of view, this is challenging for their degree programme in terms of employability development because often OE students enter HE with diverse work experiences, and they graduate with diverse career aspirations. Indeed, as highlighted in Stott et al (2012), between 2006 and 2009, the average age of OE fresher was 21.3 with only 3.4% of them coming directly from school, 93% had paid work experience, 37% worked in outdoors and the majority of them had undertaken more than two jobs before university (often combining an outdoor job with a part time service industry job). It could be argued that

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many OE students come to university already are employable for certain outdoor jobs, which as a result suggests they might look for more than graduate-level employability development in their degrees.

Clearly, the differences between the two programmes and their students' perceptions on their employability and employability development, suggest HE degree programmes cannot and should not approach employability development with a 'one size fits all' ethos (Yorke, 2004). However, it seems although the different characteristics and natures of the programmes mean that their student cohorts are different, and their students' perception about the programmes are different. There are also some similarities regarding employability and employability development. For the OE and PE programmes, the biggest similarity seems to be the students focus and determination on gaining employment in their respective subject area. Indeed, as PE students clearly stated, they come to university with a clear purpose to gain employability so that they can become PE teachers; for OE students, the niche outdoor industry, the somewhat 'vocational' focus of their degree and the personal lifestyle interests in outdoors mean that they also entre HE with a clear career focus on the outdoors, because 'it is not one of those generic degrees people have so they can work in any kind of graduate jobs. People do not come to do an outdoor degree if they do not want to work in the outdoors. As a result, even though the two programmes do have their differences, there are some similarities between them regarding their student cohorts and students' perceptions on employability – their enjoyment and passion for their subject, their dedication to their extra-curriculum work experiences and qualifications, their interests and motivations on developing and enhancing their employability.

5.2.2 Role models

One of the similarities OE and PE students share is how vital they perceive the part their role models play for their employability development. For those students, role models are crucial because as well as providing inspirations, they are the ones who give out guides and examples as what to develop, and how to develop. Accordingly, for those students, they often look up to their former-teachers, lecturers, and sometimes family members, industry-practitioner and their peers.

PE student: "I think when we grow up, we all change our minds 3 or 4 times, when I grew up the first thing was I want to be was a lawyer, but I wasn't really interested in it. I think a lot of it is down to my personal experience with sport, I looked up to my PE teacher, he was someone I felt I could speak to about a lot of things. I was very active when I was at school, I loved playing sport, there wasn't a night in a week I wasn't doing something. So basically, it's just down to personal experience, I was really interested in PE, I really enjoyed it. I was doing quite a bit of coaching at the time…For me the first thing that really got through to me was playing basketball for the county. We would often practice basketball in the gym during lunch times, we were approached by our PE teacher saying 'why don't you boys take up some

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coaching for me. Why don't you help out with some of the younger ones'. And we did, it was really good. When I went to sixth form, I went back to the school and carried on doing some coaching and things like that, just felt this was something I really enjoyed doing. I sort of made up my mind, that's it, there is no doubt this is what I want to do. Personally it's down to positive experiences with PE in school."

OE student: "it started when I was probably about 14, 15. My technology teacher in school who was a kind of outdoor instructor took a group of us to an outdoor centre for a week, and they did a programme for us, and we did all that, and I just got hooked straight away with everything they did. They had an association for teenagers, and I signed up for that, and then just went to that centre on a regular bases. And then we ended up going on holidays, trips, and then I got to a point where they had a scheme for young people to start the outdoors, and I joined that, and then got the ball rolling."

In their degree programmes, students certainly see their lecturers as role models as they are the experts in their fields. But it is not always a case of positive examples. Sometimes students can also see some of their lecturers as negative role models to remind them about poor practices in their own works. Certainly, students acknowledged that individual lecturers should have their different qualities, and they felt having diverse expertise in their programmes is essential for them to learn a great variety of knowledge, experiences and qualities from different lecturers. Perhaps because of the subject areas our students are in, they seem to pay close attention to how their lecturers carry out their works and reflect upon those practices in relation to their own. Having lecturers with different qualities also means that students can learn from positives as well as negatives through their lecturers' own practices.

PE student: "for example, George, he walks in with a smile on him every day, I know that sounds basic but that's always a positive, you know he is happy, committed. You sit there and listen, not because you feel you have to, but because you feel you want to know what he is going to say. If you wanted help, and you went to him, he will stop what he is doing and he will help you. He is not authoritative, he never shouted, he never needs to because he is so good at what he does, and he is so passionate, I think I speak for a lot of people when I say I look up to him. If I ended up half the lecturer he is, I will walk out thinking I have done a good job…other lecturers have got their own qualities, Alice is a great lecturer, she has got her own different ways, Kate is the same, Ben obviously…for example Ben is a little bit the other way, he is not the most approachable person in the world because he doesn't seem the happiest chap around (chuckling), but no disrespect to him, he knows his stuff, and you give him respect in a different way, you know he knows what he is doing, you know he knows his stuff, he is so clever, you can trust whatever he teaches you is very high quality stuff. And I think it's an advantage to have lecturers like that, because they have different qualities. If you need to see someone, I mean personally I had a lot of family issues, Kate helped me a lot on that, she didn't have to, but she was very approachable, very honest, , if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be back for my fourth year, therefore I wouldn't secure the job I have got. Obviously, there are people, like the one I mentioned before, I won't name her… But you learn from it, I certainly know that I won't be like her when I become a teacher. Overall, I think the modules, the course leaders and the tutors are all brilliant. It's easy for me to sit here and say about the negatives, but you have got to recognise that some things have been done. And I think they have been done for the positives."

Researcher: "how important is this kind of inspiration?"

PE student: "really important, I think when you are in the job or when you are on placement, kids are looking up to you, and when you were started fresh in first year, second year, you needed someone to look up to too. And apart from the teachers in the schools, you don't really have anyone to look up to apart from your lecturers. And if they come across as positive, they know their stuff, they come across as helpful, and then it gives you that emphasis like, I want to be like that, I want my pupils to think about me, the same way I feel about you."

In addition, students have different personal preferences. While some lecturers are seen as great role models for certain students, that might not be the case for others. Students look for different inspirations and qualities when it comes to their employability development, as they all have uniquely individualised aspirations.

OE student 1: "oh, they are excellent, I mean Ed is obviously a really good lecturer, Ken is a bit of a legend (laughing)."

Researcher: "when you say a lecturer is good or a legend, what kind of things you look for?"

OE student 1: "I am probably a bit biased giving my climbing background; Ken and Tom are obviously quite accomplished climbers. And Ken is a really experienced mountaineer. You can learn so much from people like them. I think with Ed, I think he is very keen, and also very talented in a way he can...you know, some of the heavy stuff you can understand quite easily."

Researcher: "so do you think you see them as role models for you?"

OE student 1: "yeah, definitely, a role model. It's about...like some instructors just stand there and instruct, but those guys are still very active in terms how they teach. So like Tom is still climbing, and Ken is still sailing, so it's good to have people who are enthusiastic rather than just instructors. On the other hand, you have people like James who is...you know Dr James, he is very very academic. When he teaches, he teaches in a completely different style compare to Ken or Tom. It's quite nice to see different approaches, you know how they teach the same thing differently, and obviously you can take that element out and put into your own work."

OE student 2: "Ken for example is just… I found he is not very good in terms explaining things… like if he can see someone is struggling, he is not very good at explaining it in a different way, he will just skip over it. It's just frustrating. For his module, he will give us an assignment and some marking criteria as guidelines, you know the sort. 'If you do this, this is the mark you are going to get' to help us write the piece of work. If you follow those, he then will mark your work and you will get a bad grade, get it back, and then he will contest the things you have done. So when you say to him 'I emailed you about this, and you told me specifically to read the module handbook and everything I need to know is in there. I have gone by what's in there, and now I have been marked down for it'. He will just say 'well, whatever you have done, I didn't get that from your work'. It makes me feel like he hasn't read my work."

Clearly, as employability development is an individualised process for each student, their perceptions toward their lecturers differ in relation to the kind of inspiration and quality they learn from them. Generally speaking, students have collectively identified certain lecturers in their programmes as great role models. Those lecturers often share certain traits, knowledge

and experience, passion for their own work, good at communication with students. Student-centred and flexible with their TLA, they practice what they preach, having some key qualities which students really look up to (e.g. research, practical skills and knowledge, etc.).

As students acknowledge that they do not expect their lecturers to be role models for every aspect of their employability development, while they are in university, they have other people to look up to. For example, for PE students, the teachers and tutors they have in their placement schools are powerful role models as they reflect the pragmatic values and practices of 'being a teacher' (e.g. how to teach; how to behave in front of pupils; how to work with other teachers etc.). For OE students, the external practitioners they have on the programme for their practical learning and assessment are role models as their practices and ethos reflect on what the industry requires for those kinds of professions at the moment.

However, for students, not all external experts can be valued as good examples for their employability development. For instance, it seems career services' staff members have had difficulties to work with students. This is mainly because they are not identified as students' role models in their industry/profession - students feel they don't know anything about PE/OE, they don't know anyone from PE/OE, they don't speak their language. Most importantly, staff members don't know them, because to students, employability development in HE is a very personal matter.

The importance of role models in education and in career development is not a novel topic, as many educational theories and career development theories suggest that identification with role models is critical to individual growth and development, employability-wise speaking (Lunenberg, Korthagen and Swennen, 2007; Gibson, 2004). This is because while "the concept of 'role' and the tendency of individuals to identify with other people occupying important social roles", "the concept of modelling is the psychological matching of cognitive skills and patterns of behaviour between the observer and the observed" (Gibson, 2004, p.136). This suggests not only learning and development for one's employability is a psychological cognitive process, but also recognising and identifying 'role models' for one's employability development is socially constructed which includes attitudes, values and motivation to enhance that desirable similarity between the students and their lecturers.

Indeed, students feel their teachers should be more than just 'lecturers' who pass on their knowledge and skills for them to learn and develop (i.e. the cognitive learning process), in education, nurturing vital values such as ethics is essential (Barnett, 1994). It is as important to develop 21st century graduates' employability as those skills and knowledge, particularly considering the nature of the OE and PE programmes and the professions those students are going into. Clearly, for those students, the most powerful learning for their employability

development is through the practices carried out by their lecturers, and the values and ethos embedded in such practices. As a result, it could be argued that our students perceive their lecturers have great roles and responsibilities in their employability development which are more than just passing on knowledge and skills that are key components of employability – often, they look up to their lecturers as apprentices looking up to their masters for those 'tacit' values and culture in their professions as well as learning their expert craftsmanship.

Through this process of learning and modelling from their role models, students carry out an important employability development process that is an active and cognitive construction devised by individuals to construct their own ideology on what kind of person they want to be based on their own career aspirations and needs (Gibson, 2004). As stated by some students, there is a clear sense that rather than taking inspirations from one role model, they tend to piece together a number of different kinds of role models (positive, negative, generic and specific), to create this individualised model of who they want to be when they are working in their respective industry/profession. As a result, while students look up to their role models, there is also a sense that they want to construct their own identities for their future careers.

All in all, while unsurprisingly students use role models for their employability development, it highlighted for employability development in degree programmes, it is vital that lecturers know and understand not only what to deliver (i.e. contents), but also how to deliver in order to connect and engage with students (e.g. demonstrating the relevance) while passing on those crucial 'tacit' practices, values, culture and philosophies. Within this process, lecturers need to be aware and understand that students perceive their roles and responsibilities are more than just 'teachers', and such roles and responsibilities do not only include pedagogical learning experiences, but also involve the social aspects of learning and development. In addition, while programmes tend to include academics with diverse subject backgrounds, which as a result offers varies employability development learning experiences, students should be encouraged and guided to recognise the appropriate learning experiences for themselves individually in order to construct their employability uniqueness.

5.2.3 Multiple dimensions of employability

Through examining how students perceive their subject traits (through looking at the similarities and differences between programmes) and how they construct their own unique employability identities through learning from their role models, it is apparent that underneath the surface of how students understand and perceive employability and employability development, there are different dimensions of the issues. Clearly, through developing and enhancing those all-important employability components via their personal, degree

programme and university levels, employability development for HE students is not just about gaining their degree, learning subject and professional knowledge and skills, attaining value-added qualifications, developing networks and improving job application competences. It is also about constructing an individualised identity which consists of all those crucial components in a unique way to be able to differentiate themselves from their job seeking competitors while still fulfilling their employers' requirements. Within this construction, there appears to be several dimensions for students to understand the meaning of their own employability and employability development experiences.

5.2.3.1 'Playing' vs. Working

Firstly, for those students, their employability in their respective profession/industry consists of two levels. As PE teachers and OE professionals, they must be able to demonstrate excellent level of their practical abilities in their physical activities (e.g. being able to play sports/do outdoor activities well), as well as being able to deliver those activities in their jobs as teachers, instructors, facilitators etc. Such employability requires students to have not only knowledge, skills and competences to carry out physical/outdoor activities, but also abilities, knowledge and competences to teach/lead/manage other people to learn and develop those knowledge, skills and competences to carry out physical/outdoor activities.

Many students, particularly those in OE, felt that their employability development experiences during university had led them understand such two-fold employability in their industry. Accordingly, 'enjoying being outdoors and doing outdoor activities' is essential but NOT enough to warrant OE students with good employment prospective, and 'just because someone is good at doing outdoor activities, does not mean this individual is going to enjoy and be good at working in the outdoor industry as a professional'. Although, clearly for those OE and PE students, their career aspirations started as their interests and hobbies in outdoor activities and sports, to be employable in their profession/industry means they need to have their passion and interests in the educational aspects of their subject areas rather than just enjoying the activities themselves.

Evidently, many students (both OE and PE) came to university with the belief that their initial interests in sports and outdoors can be transferred into their employability which will allow them to 'live to work' rather than 'work to live'. Whereas some students, particularly those with work experiences, already know that their career aspiration in OE/PE is built on their enjoyable experiences working in their profession. As a result, such different attitudes lead students to approach their learning and employability development in university differently, thus perceiving their HE participation differently. While some who came with initial interests in sports and outdoors, thought they knew what they wanted but they did not achieve it

through their degree, others came with work experiences thought they knew what they wanted, and they felt through their degree they have achieved it.

Such differences between enjoying sports/outdoors and enjoying working in PE/OE often challenge students' attitude and value toward their employability. While clearly the primary focus is shifted from 'playing' to 'working', the changing roles and identities in the situation means students are no longer just experts in their sport/outdoor activities, enjoying taking part as participant. Instantly they have had to adopt roles as learner/trainees in PE/OE to develop a 'new' identity as teachers, educators or outdoor professionals.

5.2.3.2 Specific vs. Generic

Secondly, it is apparent that for our students, employability is often about requirements from their specific profession/industry (i.e. PE and OE), thus their employability development tends to focus on developing specific qualities to be able to attain employment in their respective profession/industry. Indeed, as discussed before, particularly with PE students, it seems they feel the sole purpose of their HE participation is for them to develop into the 'best PE teachers' they can be. Nevertheless, some students, especially those from OE acknowledged the fact that under current financial downturn and mass participation in HE, considering the limited jobs in the market and the number of graduates seeking employment, they need to apply their employability more flexibly in order to attain any kind of job, while looking for their desirable employment.

As discussed in Stott et al (2012), certainly, our students do understand that many of the qualities they have learnt and developed in university are generic and applicable to a number of graduate level employments (e.g. in banking or retail sector). However, for students study degrees like OE/PE (which has clear focus in specific careers), the issue is not about their 'specific' employability, but the employability they 'specifically' develop for their career aspirations. Indeed, as I have already pointed out in previous sections, OE and PE students often came to university with a clear career in mind – such 'pre-established' career vision on the one hand motivates students' employability development, on the other hand 'limits' OE/PE students' employment opportunities in the wider labour market context. As a result, for OE in particular, the majority of their graduates settle for any outdoor related jobs in order to 'stay in the industry' in order to be able to move up the career ladder when the opportunity arises (ibid).

Unlike some research suggesting that students fail to recognise and apply their generic employability skills into the wider labour market context, is one of the key reasons for their unemployment or under-employment (i.e. low level employment which does not require degree level employability) (see Crebert et al, 2004), for students from programmes like PE

and OE which have a strong focus on specific professions. The issue between specific and generic employability can be a personal-level negotiation between their career aspiration and any kind of employment, as not being able to attain a job in their desired career due to lack of employability, is considered as a failure of their HE participation. As a result, rather than perceiving graduate employability generically, like the majority of policies, research and practices in HE employability development considers and addresses such issue. Students in PE/OE perceive their HE employability development as a specific matter. In other words, rather than placing themselves as graduates with employability in the job market (that is better than many job seekers in the labour market with lower level academic qualifications), they position themselves as beginner PE teachers/OE professionals (which means they need to start from the lower level of their profession/industry). While, for PE students, it is clear their Initial Teacher Education is only the beginning of their career which leads onto their Newly Qualified Teacher stage of their employability development; for OE students. In their ever growing specialist niche job market, they will carry on developing their professional knowledge and skills with their industry's own professional progression and development (Atfield and Purcell, 2010).

5.2.3.3 Process vs. Product

Thirdly, it is clear that students see employability development as a process which carries on rolling while they gaining experiences and knowledge. Indeed, as discussed above, our PE and OE students definitely felt their mission to achieve their desired career does not end with their graduation and attaining first employment after university. For them, their HE participation is part of their employability development journey. Certainly their employability development began before their HE entry, and it carries on afterwards.

Here, an important issue regarding students' fresher employability and their employability when they graduate must be addressed. Accordingly, many of OE/PE students came to university with significant employability development experiences such as full-time/part-time/voluntary work, professional qualification and so on (Stott et al, 2012; Cui, 2012). Those experiences not only inspired our students to choose their degree programmes in order to carry on their employability development to achieve their desired careers, but also formed the unique bases each student had regarding their employability when they entered HE.

As discussed before, students in this study seemed to choose to participate in HE with very clear pre-defined employability presumptions – what they wanted to do after university, and what they believe they needed to develop in order to achieve their goals. Such presumptions often came with their engagement in their respective industry/profession through working as instructors, coaches, leaders and so on. As such, their degrees, from their point of view, play

an essential part of an enhancement role when it comes to their employability development, i.e. offering them the opportunities to develop in the way they want to rather than 'telling them' what to develop, because clearly their early engagement with their industry/profession made them believe they had already established many essential employability qualities. Nevertheless, having already had employments at an early age made some of our students feel they were employable for certain jobs even when they were a fresher. As a result, employability development in university is certainly about enhancing those qualities they already have.

While entering HE is not the beginning of their employability development, graduating from university is certainly not the end. However, students seem to perceive their immediate graduate employability, as a concept, rather than a product. Clearly reflected through how they understand the components of employability, students felt while they will carry on developing, for them to attain employment, they need to be able to package and present their employability to their potential employers. As a result, it could be argued that students perceive their graduate employability as the end of their HE stage, though employability development carries on, some measurable employability must be achieved at this stage. In addition, as discussed in Stott et al (2012), there is a clear association between their fresher employability and their graduate employability – as fresher employability informs what students believe they need to develop, and at the same time it is the baseline students measure against to evaluate how much they have developed. Thus, as well as the relativity in terms of how much they can fulfil employers' requirements and compete with other job seekers, employability relativity is also about how much each student perceives they have developed towards their aspired career. In other words, though students in general develop employability during university, if they perceive such development is irrelevant to their vision of employability, it is a wasted employability development experience.

Clearly, employability consists of short-term immediate graduate employability and long-term employability from our students' point of view. While in the interviews, students were largely focusing on their 'graduate employability' i.e. what jobs they are aiming for after their graduation, and how ready they feel they are able to attain those jobs (considering the time of the interviews), they clearly have an understanding on how their HE participation contributes to their short-term and long-term employability. Similarly to Tomlinson's findings (2008), while today's HE students believe there is somewhat degree inflation, and the degree probably will not lead them to immediate success in relation to achieving their career aspirations, students seem to value their degree for a much long term benefit in relation to their employability. For instance, many OE students felt they might not be able to attain a good job in the outdoor industry, having the degree means they can progress better and

quicker than those without the degree. In addition, students felt the ways of thinking and learning they developed during their degree can benefit them for a very long time while they carry on developing their employability when they are in employment.

Through examining how students perceive their employability and employability development, certainly, the development is an ongoing process which carries on building based on past experiences. Employability itself is a product which students use to measure how much they have developed towards their aspiring career at certain stages of their ongoing development process.

5.2.3.4 What is HE employability development for? –professional, subject and personal

While clearly employability development in HE is about students developing and enhancing those all essential employability components through diverse experiences supported by expert academic staff, such learning and development holds another kind of meaning to our students.

Regarding the professional development elements of employability, students felt that HE experiences should be at a higher-level learning experience, which enables them to understand not only what professional qualities they need to develop and how to develop them, but also what those qualities stand for, thus what their profession stands for. For instance, according to students, developing their professionalism as part of employability is not just for them to attain their aspiring employments, it is also, and more importantly, about being able to work professionally as educators in PE/OE. Here, the focus has been shifted from employers' requirements to the requirements and needs of their potential pupils and clients.

PE student: "definitely, I think every teacher will tell you they have got strengths, every teacher will tell you they have got things you enjoy to teach, or they will tell you things they don't enjoy teaching or not their strengths. Hockey is one of mine, rugby is another area of weakness I have got, athletics was one, so I went on an athletics course, tennis was one so I went on a tennis course. I haven't got chance to address all of my weaknesses. I definitely want to get into teaching, and I will try to improve those areas. I think that's the difference between a good teacher and a teacher who is not that bothered, I think you will get most teachers on our courses who all want to improve. I think the most important thing is the pupils, which is why I am trying to make the awards as diverse as possible. If the pupils want to do athletics, I will teach them, if the pupils want to do dance, cheerleading, I will teach them, that's my role, my role is not to say 'I enjoyed football, so you are going to play football'. My role is to help them be what they want to be within a reason, obviously if I can teach them. And if I have been given the tools to carry on after school, then I will."

Clearly, from the students' point of view, fulfilling employers' requirement is how they can attain their employments, ultimately they are developing their employability to fulfil their professional roles and responsibilities. In other words, developing those employability components can certainly make students more employable, but the purposes are much

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greater than gaining employment. Thus it could be argued that although students enter HE to improve their employment prospect (i.e. the political employability agenda's perspective), it certainly is not the only reason for their HE participation. Also their employability development is not just for them to attain an employment (i.e. the narrow political employability definition), but for their learning and development to fulfil their roles and responsibilities professionally.

Fulfilling professional roles and responsibilities as PE/OE educators, also means that students perceive their HE employability development contributes to their higher-level learning and understanding on what their subject stands for. Previously, we have established that students clearly felt subject knowledge and skills are important to their employment in OE/PE, and learning and developing their subject knowledge and skills is one of reasons for them coming to university to improve their employment prospect. It seems their employability development has deeper meaning to their subject than just knowledge and skills. Indeed, perhaps because our students were in educational programmes, they appear to consider their employability more than 'just being able to do a job'.

> OE student: "The way I see outdoor education is it offers a means of recollecting your passion for life, and I think that's why people choose to take part in extreme sports, it's because the fact they are feeling that risk, the fact that everything may not be ok. So you know, just feeling something again. So yeah, that's what I think outdoor programme is about."

> PE student: "I think the course is very demanding, but you can understand why it is so demanding…at end of the day, we are all trying to make us to be as good as possible, because it is about education. And there is no denying that being a teacher means you need to work to a special level, a high level…I think 'if you don't have a degree you can't be a teacher' is the right message. I think you need to work at a high level if you are going to be teaching and making an impact on the young people of today. How could I stand there asking those kids to do something, to be someone if I couldn't even do it myself?"

Such beliefs and attitudes toward their subject and their 'being' as PE/OE educators seem to lead some students questioning some ontological and epistemological issues, regarding the ideologies of their subject and the realities of graduate employability development in HE.

> OE student: "Sometimes I question what this outdoor programme is about. The negative side of me would say, there is nothing apart from a business at end of the day, the other side of me will say they are trying to get people within it to have a higher level of education, so it's not just a case of any kind of instructors, you actually have got education in it. I think that outdoor education has been used as the means to teach people different new things, I think that's true.. I think nowadays there is too much political stakes in higher education, which is kind of sad because it supposes to be above and beyond a lot of things, you know, higher, education, but I think the system has been twisted and I know a lot of people going to university for the sake of it, that's just not right!"

> PE student: "I think it's good that the university is trying to make everybody employable, but I am just not very sure…some people on the course are quite sceptical, like they just saying 'what's the point of that graduate skills thing? No schools I know cares about it and it's just repeating stuff, a waste of time.' Well, I don't want to be very negative about things because I

always believe there is a point of anything, but sometimes I do think they are right. You know, there are so much to do, so much to learn, so why don't they use that time and resources for something actually meaningful?...I don't want to think that our course didn't try to do their best, but maybe there is too much pressure... I mean the university is under a lot of pressure to do something to make people employable, I don't think anyone wants to see their students not getting a job after university. But are they doing it for the right reason? I don't know. I think for us, there are definitely better things to do than graduate skills."

Clearly, underneath the surface of students' somewhat cynical attitude towards university's employability development projects is a conflict between what they believe they should do to develop as future PE/OE professional and what the reality offers. On one hand, our students trust their lecturers to offer them all its necessary to be future OE/PE professionals who can carry on building their subject and their profession; on the other hand, those students doubt the motives of some values undertaken by the university questioning if they are right for HE to take on considering its wide and deep impact to the society. It seems that being caught in the dilemmas between their ideology and the reality led students to be critical about their HE experiences and their employability development – though the degree and the university are where they develop their employability and their lecturers are whom they learn from. Ultimately it is up to themselves to develop and shape their own future with the future of their subject in sight.

Personal level employability development means students seem to feel though the university and their lecturers have essential roles and responsibilities, it is up to themselves to develop and enhance, in order to create and shape their own employability. In addition, students seem to perceive personal level employability development as a kind of personal development which enables them to understand their 'being' regarding their employability.

OE student: "I think developing my employability is a combination of developing it for myself as a person to become a better instructor and a better person overall; and for the employers themselves. Like I said earlier, if I develop my employability for myself, it helps me to become a better provider of those skills and knowledge, so I will be teaching at a very high standard, and if I am employed by someone, that passes on to the clients and hopeful that will make them think that this employer has got a very good standard of employees because they are providing a service at a very high level. And overall, I certainly feel all this is about being a good person, the kind of values, I think there are lot of employability related things I certainly feel are relevant to everyday life. So definitely I think it's a combination, both for myself and for the employers."

Researcher: what kind of things do you mean?

OE student: "I mean for example in outdoors you have to place a lot of trust in people and you need to make people feel you are trustworthy, so that's a value I feel people should have no matter whether they are in the outdoors or not. There are a lot of things like that, and I think while I develop values and qualities for my employability, I also develop as a better person. In a way, outdoors is a very important part of our society, so those values are important to have. I don't think any good employability values should be separated from my personal development, I need to work hard, I need to be honest, I need to constantly improve and challenge myself, I need to take risks, and most importantly I need to take care of the

outdoors and educate other to do so as well. And I think this is not just for outdoor students, if you are doing sport science or art or whatever, your employability is always part of the society we live in, so it's definitely relevant to your work and your personal lives."

Through such interpretation of their employability, it seems students feel although they are developing 'specific' employability for their individual career aspirations, no matter what they develop and what employment they attain, they will always be part of the society, thus their employability is also 'generic' as they reflecting on what values and qualities the society requires for its citizens.

Through looking at how students interpret their HE employability development for their profession, their subject and their personal development. It is clear that employability on the surface is about being able to offer the most suited qualities to fulfil a specific employer's requirement, beneath, it is about the 'higher' values and qualities students develop and enhance through HE regarding their profession, their subject and themselves (Barnett, 2008). As a result, employability development does not only involve fulfilling employers' requirements better than job seeker competitors, it also involves fulfilling the needs and requirements of other stakeholders (e.g. schools, pupils, educational bodies, etc.). Amongst them, students feel their employability development is also for their degree programmes and the university, as it reflects the quality of their degree and the university which in term builds their reputation.

OE student: "When we were in first year, we were given the opportunity to write a small report on the taxpayer's money report, that indicated that the outdoor education in Liverpool John Moores was what's called a mickey mouse course, because it was something that didn't develop students in anyway, it was just something like David Beckham studies. That's what it was classed as. But we were given the opportunity to research that, and say 'no, it's not.' And I think for people to actually say it isn't a Mickey Mouse course, introducing employability development within the course to say 'look, we are teaching people, we are giving people the opportunity to learn about outdoor education, but at the same time we are giving them the chance to actually become employable in that area, if that is what they want to do.' And I definitely think employability is important for this degree."

For students, many of those key stakeholders' interests and demands co-exist, which as a result form the vital part of what they believe their employability should consists of, and what their employability development is for. Often, the conflicts students perceive existed amongst those key stakeholders led them to feel puzzled about who they are developing their employability for, and what they need to develop.

In addition, it seems the ontological and epistemological values has an effect on how students perceive and approach HE employability development. Evidently, beneath the subject knowledge and skills is what the subject stands for philosophically – in the case of PE and OE, they are about education, progression, risking taking, ecology, sustainability and so on. Through the 'higher' learning students engage with, in their HE degree programmes,

those philosophical values seem to shape our students construction on their professional and personal 'beings' in their work settings, as well as in society in general. It could be argued, students' constructions of what employability to develop and how to develop them is a reflection on what they believe their subject means to them.

Clearly, there is a reflexive process of students doing the subject because of their career aspirations, which led them to construct a particular way of perceiving and developing their employability based on their subject ethos (in this study, the meaning of being PE/OE educators) which then transfer back to their subject area through their engagement with their industry/profession. Within this employability development circle, students clearly see themselves as agents who develop 'higher' level professional and personal qualities and values from their HE learning, which they then 'give' back to their profession/industry and the society through their employment as graduates of PE/OE. Such construction of their identities and responsibilities regarding employability, gives a different meaning and dimension to the notion 'graduate employability', rather than looking at it through the narrow quantitative political and economic perspective. It could arguably also mean the production and reproduction of work-related values and qualities, through the representation and reconstruction of individualised employability by graduates with their subject and profession-led knowledge, skills and values.

5.2.4 Summary discussion on emerging themes

Through the second layer analysis of student' interviews, further themes have emerged, particularly regarding the similarities and difference between the two programmes, the role models for employability development, and how students understand and perceive employability in various ways.

While through this analytic layer, certain findings from the previous section are carrying on reappearing, this layer further explored the differences our students have at their personal- and programme level, which prove that Yorke's suggestion on 'one size fits all does not work'. While for Yorke (2004), this is largely about an institutional approach to employability development, arguing university level initiatives and projects needs to consider the differences individual programmes have. According to the findings in this study, it also applies to programme level and module level approaches. Even within the same module and programme, different students have different needs, and career aspirations mean that the 'same' module and programme is interpreted and approached differently by individual students, thus degrees need to consider its varieties and depth to suit students' diverse needs.

Though students differ on 'how' they approach their employability development, one of the similarities they seem to share is their perception and attitude towards the notion of 'role models' regarding their employability and employability development. Clearly, regarding employability, students perceive themselves as apprentices crafting their knowledge, skills and components under the wings of their masters (i.e. their lecturers, external teachers and mentors in WBL/WRL). While this suggests that students expect their HE learning to be carried out in a nurturing environment, it also shows how students perceive their relationship with their lecturers, and what roles and responsibilities their lecturers have in relation to their employability development. Clearly, for students, their lecturers are successful experts in their profession/industry, whose practices, knowledge, personality and values must be 'copied' through deconstruction and reconstruction by students to create their own version of a role model based on their existing role models (particularly their lecturers).

Through looking at the similarities and differences between students from two different programmes, it is clear that for final year students (at the time approaching their graduation) HE employability and employability development are not just about gaining a graduate-level employment, through fulfilling specific employers' requirements while bettering than their job seeker competitors. It consists of a number of dimensions which reflect the meaning 'higher' education to differentiate their HE participation to other forms of formal education and/or employability development experiences (e.g. work in the industry/profession). Such shifts from playing to working, from students to professionals, from seeing PE/OE as what they do to perceiving being PE/OE educators as who they are, are fundamental 'higher' level changes students feel their HE participation, has granted them their employability.

Certainly, for students, the narrow political economic way of looking at graduate employability is only the surface and simple conception, as for them graduate employability has the deeper meaning of how ready they are to be the professional they want to be, and how well their individualised employability development has constructed. Through their individualised graduate employability, it is each student's personal construction on what their subject and profession stands for; as well it is each student's personal development, to become the kind of professional and person who represents the values and philosophies of what they believe their profession and subject are about. It is in this reflexive process of employability production and re-production through higher education, our PE and OE students have developed as individual agents, with unique employability qualities under their subject and profession's employability ethos, but at the same time their uniquely constructed individualised employability will empower them to shape their future career at the same time shape the future of their subject and profession as well as the society (as PE and OE educators).

5.3 In-depth narratives – close up examinations

Through the second analytical layer, a number of different dimensions of employability are identified and examined – within them are the shifts that students make during their HE learning experience to transform themselves from who they were to who they want to be – employability-wise. While making such shifts, students have experienced challenges, problems and conflicting concepts. Though at surface level, employability development is explicit in HE as initiatives, projects, modules and so on; certainly, for students, the learning underwent in those difficult experiences implicitly formed an important part of their employability development as they are part of the on-going unique employability construction each individual students embarked during their higher education.

In this final analytical layer of the spiral analysis framework, I am placing my focus on examining and interpreting two in-depth narratives to further illuminate some deeper issues regarding individual student's understandings, experiences and perceptions in order to gain some fine-grained understandings (Prichard and Trowler, 2003) based on findings from previous two sections. With a particularly focus on the final emerging theme from the previous section regarding students' transformation through HE for their employability development. Here I want to 'deconstruct' and 'reconstruct' how some students' personal experiences form their 'being' as HE students and the meaning of such 'being' to their employability development.

Within the scope of this study, two particular students' narratives (one from each programme) have been chosen to represent different personal and academic backgrounds. As this research is carried out in a post-92 university, I have decided to use the stories from a mature student and a first generation HE student as they often are 'underrepresented' minorities in HE but 'typical' kind of students for post-92 universities (Stevenson and Lang, 2010).

5.3.1 Student narratives:

PE student 1: Ste

<u>Biographical synopsis</u>

Unlike most PE students who came to university straight way after their A Levels, Ste came to university after his BTEC, and he also had to take a year out because he was wrongly informed about the qualifications he needed for doing his degree.

Ste made it very clear to me about his background: from a "working class family" in a rough area in Manchester, he is the only person in his family who came to university. He was training towards being a professional footballer, but he had to give it up due to a serious back

injury. Due to his football background, Ste has a good amount of working experiences as semi-professional football player and football coach. He also has some qualifications in difficult sports and physical activities, but his back injury has been restrictive for him to participate in some activities.

At the time of our interview (which was February 2010), Ste was happy about his university experience. He felt he was doing quite well in terms of his marks (which were pushing to First) and his placement experiences. After his graduation, Ste started working in Ashton On Mersey School (where he had one of his placements) as a PE teacher.

Training to be a PE teacher - Aspirations and inspirations

Unlike most PE students I interviewed in this study, being a PE teacher was never Ste's original career aspiration.

"I never specifically planned to be a PE teacher, I wanted to be a footballer, and I was on the right track until I got injured. I played for Oldham back then and I had big team scouts come to watch me. I was destroyed when I knew I couldn't carry on anymore. I guess because I got injured at a quite young age, I had to be realistic about what I needed to do next. My coaches back then were brilliant, we had really good relationships, and they kind of advised me to go into coaching, and I did. I really enjoyed coaching, but it wasn't viable because I was only doing junior stuff and I didn't have the money to do all the qualifications and work experiences to get into senior leagues. So I guess being a PE teacher is a good alternative. Again, it came up when I was having a chat with one of the coaches, and I thought it was a good idea because it's something I thought I would enjoy and make a viable career out of it. And I think I made the right decision (chuckling)"

For Ste, this dramatic career change at a young age means he had to look for career aspirations from his coaches and draw on his previous football experiences for inspirations and motivation.

"I think the whole experience of playing football at that level has helped since. But if wasn't for my coaches, I am not sure I'd come to university. Like I said, I always thought I was going to play football professionally, so university wasn't really in my plan. It was a massive thing, you know, moving away, start fresh and all that. So I think the support and encouragement my coaches gave me back then was a real boost of confidence. You have to remember it happened right after I realised I couldn't play football anymore, so it was a very hard time. Sometimes I think if it wasn't for them, I'd be labouring on a yard right now (chuckling). I really owe so much to them for the fact that I've come to university."

"Well, you are here now, so how you feel about that experience now?"

"Like I said, playing football at a high level really helps. It helps standing out in placements and interviews, particularly in Liverpool where football is popular. That's important when you are a PE teacher here, kid look up to you. And I think because I played at such level, I can pick up other sports really quickly. I think the attitude as well, I was very determined but it didn't happen, so I thought to myself 'ok, there's something else that I'm going to go and do now'. If I'm going to do something, I'll do it properly. So, the experiences that I've had, I'll take into my teaching. Now if I ever come across pupils who have similar things, I'm obviously very, very quick to, having been through it myself to help them through it."

It is clear that while Ste never planned and prepared himself to come on to a PE teacher programme like other students did, his past aspirations and experiences as football player have made vital influence on his current career choice as a PE teacher and how he perceives and approaches his teaching profession. In addition, it is clear that though coming to university to study a PE teaching degree was not in his original career plan at all, Ste was able to draw from his past experiences and advices from others to quickly adapt to the new situation and be reflective about such experience when it comes to his teaching practices now.

<u>Training to be a PE teacher – School placement experiences</u>

As discussed in previous section, school placements are valued by PE students as the most important part of their teacher education. From Ste's point of view, '*placements were what made him feel employable*'.

> *"I think there was high expectation because it's a teaching training course, the most important part is the placements, that's where things happen, you know, the learning and experience, because you can't set in a lecture room to learn how to be teachers, you need to be out there with the pupils, teaching them and learning for that teaching experience."*

Throughout the interviews, Ste provided me with vivid images of all his placement experiences and reflections on his learning through this whole process. As discussed before, school placements provide students with powerful learning experiences. In Ste's case, while positive school placements gave him the opportunity to develop his conference as a teacher, a particular negative placement experience uncovered some deeper issues in relation to class and culture which is not explicit to professional learning and employability development in university programmes.

> *Ste: "When I first went into placement I didn't feel at all ready to be a teacher, because I was very, very nervous. I still felt kind of like a pupil myself, I didn't feel going into it that I could be a teacher but being around teachers, observing teachers, taking lessons myself and teaching lessons, that's what made me feel like I'm ready to be a teacher now… When you are on a placement, you are a teacher, yes, a trainee teacher, but you stand in front of the kids and educate them. I think that's where I feel the most valuable learning happened…From my point of view I had three brilliant schools. The school itself, the facilities were unbelievable. But in one of the schools, I didn't enjoy my experience because I didn't quite get on with the staff all that well. That's what I was talking about before about my background and coming from that sort of area and I've come to university and so I get on with a lot of people from different backgrounds. But that school, I think one of my first days I turned up and got my bag out of my car and pulled up next to me was a brand new red Ferrari pulled up and when the kids get out with his bag and says 'see you later Dad' and just toddled off and that just sort of summed up for me. The children in that school were born with silver spoons in their mouths and they basically... a lot of the children there I felt knew that at the end of school, college, whatever they were going to go into their parents business or they already had their future planned out; so in terms of PE, although if you said to them go and dribble a basketball they'd go and do it as much as you told them to do it that's fine but they didn't care about it, because they knew that has nothing to do with their future. The kids who had a lot of*

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potential in sports wouldn't pay attention to the PE teachers unless they are an absolute specialist."

Me: "was that a culture shock?"

Ste: "Yeah, definitely. It's their attitude. I taught a lot of rugby at that school because it's a big rugby school and my rugby isn't good at all, it's a sport that I've never played until that placement, and I've never had any experience teaching it. So you can imagine how nervous I was. To be fair the rugby coaches at that school were outstanding, I think one of them was the England selectors. I feel bad kind of coming away from there because they were... they were helpful, but not anywhere near as helpful as my other placement schools. For example, my mentor, I never actually had a meeting with him. It was always 5 minutes at dinner, right yeah, there you go. I mean they always said to me 'if you have any problems you can come and see me' but they never actually giving me the feeling that I was ok to go and see them. You know, it kind of felt like empty words, like they had to say that to me. To be fair I know we suppose to get on with our work, and every was busy, but back then I was still a trainee student, and I was put in to teach something I didn't have any experience in, so clearly I was struggling and I needed help, but they didn't help me at all. I showed them my lesson plan for a couple of days and they'd look at it and go yeah that's fine and I'd teach the lesson and they'd say I maybe would have done that differently and I'd think well I showed you my lesson plan two days ago and you surely could have said that then.

But again, I think, the staff there were very much like the pupils, they were all from very good backgrounds, a couple of times I sat down for dinner and they'd all be talking about investing 20-30 thousand pound and to me that's just... I just can't sit there, I had no clue what they were talking about and on my other placement they spoke about what sports they were doing or what they were doing on the weekend and I've been able to get involved with them and have a good laugh with them. Whereas there they were talking about buying BMW cars and etc. and I just kind of felt like an outsider I never felt, when I was there, like I was part of the department, I always felt like a student. Whereas in my other placements, obviously I was aware I was a student, but I always felt like I was part of the team. For example, my first school was absolutely fantastic, they said to me when I went in 'look, we're not looking for you to be the finished article and the best teacher in the world, we're looking for you to develop as much as you can', whereas in another placement I was at, they sort of graded me against an NQT which I felt was little bit unfair when I'm still, sort of training.

But like I say, you know, I always throw myself into my placements, so in terms of new experiences, my rugby is a lot better now as a result of that, again it wasn't a result of them sort of helping me, that was a result of me coming to the library getting a book reading up on rugby and I went in there once with a book called a 101 rugby drills, something like that, and they all just looked at me and started laughing saying I wouldn't do anything out of there and I thought you can see that my rugby isn't good and I'm trying to see what I can do with rugby and your just laughing at my book. But I think I definitely learnt a lot of about being a teacher. I kind of learnt what kind of schools I would like to go into. I know at this stage I can't be too picky, but if I don't feel I am part of a team or I don't feel…I mean, I certainly will consider the type of school very carefully in relation to that side of things, because if I can't enjoy myself and motivate myself, then I don't think it's the right school. I went for that interview at Calderstones another day, I met all the PE staff and I was a little unsure to be honest, they were all very, it was a very young department and the one I knew from football I got on with very well, but the other members I didn't really get the best vibe from, they were cocky, they were very... the pupils I didn't really… when they were there, they didn't seem cared, they were just saying 'so are we going to have a game', they'd all come in with big caps on and hoods up and I was just thinking out of my experiences in the other schools. So that just didn't happen."

Ste's placement experiences were very powerful. Although many PE students in this study all had both positive and negative experiences and they all took a lot from their negative placement experience, particularly in relation to negative role models (e.g. unsupportive mentors). Ste's culture shock experience with this particular placement goes beyond such learning. Clearly, school placement is not just about the apprenticeship style learning, where a student learns and practices the trades of teaching (e.g. what to teach and how to teach), there is also an embedded culture within the school which is bound by issues like class, ethnicity and so on. In this study, Ste is not the only student finding such tacit issues were difficult to cope. For example, Jamie found his placement in a mixed race inner city school was particularly challenging. Through those reflections during the interviews, students clearly felt that employability is so much more than skills and standards, and employability development needs to provide students with the 'real world' working experiences as well as the opportunities to meaningfully reflect on such experiences to make sense of those tacit social and cultural issues embedded in their future profession.

Training to be a PE teacher –The meaning of being a PE teacher

For all those PE students I interviewed, their own understandings on the meaning of being a PE teacher are what guide them through this initial teacher training process.

"For me, I know this sounds cliché, but the most important thing is if the kids have learnt something... and that's sort of the set answer that the children have learnt something but it really is even if they come out and learn something that wasn't the learning objective but they've come out with some new knowledge or new concept that they've got a great grasp of then I feel I have done my job as a PE teacher."

Me: "So what do you need to do to achieve this?"

Ste: "obviously I need to know my stuff, we had a lecture today and we were talking about you know, going for jobs as PE teachers we need to be physically active, even if is recreationally. I think that's important. From my own perspective whenever I go to schools I like to have fun with the pupils. Like when your are teaching a basketball session and you're having a bit of banter with them, a little laugh. So when you make a great shot and say that's how you do it. You know, it gets that relationship and if they see that you can do it they think, 'I'm going to listen to him and I've got to pay attention to what he says because he's obviously shown me there that he can do it'. Whereas, if I teach a basketball lesson and I couldn't do any of the skills I think the kids would think 'well you can't do so how can you teach us to do it'. And I think, when we talked before about my employability, from what I learnt I sort of feel I'm employable for a certain position, but I don't think I was employable for that position in Calderstones because of my experiences, because of the way I am I just would not have liked that school. I think, teaching is so stressful in terms of you've got the expectation of grades to hit, you know, I take it very seriously in that I want to get the best out of pupils.

Throughout the interview, it is clear that Ste feels the most important element of teaching is pupils' learning. Certainly, almost every student in this study echoes this perspective. Through such perspective, there is a strong sense that being a teacher does not just mean

having certain knowledge and skills and being able to pass such knowledge and skills to pupils (e.g. knowing how to kick a ball and being able to tell pupils how to kick a ball). Although such knowledge and skills are vital, more importantly, our students believe being a teacher is about building relationships with pupils in order to maximise their learning through enjoyment. Together with those tacit social and cultural issues discussed in the previous section, it seems our students feel the explicit employability agenda lacks focus on those areas. It could be argued that this is a key reason for why when talking to PE students, they often describing their employability development experiences as 'being threw into the deep end'.

OE student: Kevin

Biographical synopsis

Kevin was a mature student (25 by the time of graduation) on the BSc (Hons) Outdoor Education with Environmental Education programme. Before coming to the university, Kevin worked in various outdoor employments in Northern Ireland, mainly sales assistant in outdoor shops and instructors for outdoor activity businesses. While he was working in those jobs, he also gained a number of outdoor qualifications in Mountaineering, Kayaking, Canoeing and Archery.

During his time in the university, Kevin also worked in a walls climbing centre as a part time instructor. He also passed his Mountain Leader assessment at the beginning of this Third Year. In the end, Kevin achieved a high 2.1 for his degree, and he was 'reasonably happy' about it because his main intention was to 'put a lot of time and effort into study' to 'prove to himself that he can do it'. After the graduation, Kevin did some part time and casual work while applying for full time employment for the first few months.

Coming to university – I didn't feel ready when I was 18

As discussed before, many OE students come to university after one or two years 'gap' year experiences working and/travelling in the outdoors. For Kevin, he had four years work experiences in the industry doing various 'entry' level outdoor jobs.

Researcher: "so why did you decide to go into work rather than university after you finished school?"

Kevin: "I think when I was 18 after doing my A-levels, a lot of my friends decided to go to university, I just kind of thought 'I am still just a kid', being 18 I kind of still felt I was 12. I thought that was too scary for me, I didn't want to leave home, so I just thought 'no, it's not for me', I didn't even bother looking at university at the point, I just thought ' I want to work, I want to be outside all the time, I want to enjoy myself for a while'."

Researcher: "do you feel that was the right decision?"

*Kevin: "Definitely. I think those years of working and doing activities in the outdoors have really given me the level of **maturity** and understanding of people, and it made me realise that you need that level of maturity when it comes working at the outdoors, just be open to learning, taking on board what people tell you, rather than at a young age not really understand that, I felt that I wouldn't understood what was given to me. So having those years has been very very beneficial for me."*

For Kevin, those years of working experiences provided him opportunities to gain insight about the Outdoor industry and develop his knowledge and skills as an outdoor professional. More importantly, he felt those experiences made him feel ready for HE learning. Clearly, from his point of view, to engage with subjects like outdoor education, it is crucial for students to have the level of experiences and understandings as foundations for university learning. In addition, having a mature attitude towards university learning seems helped him to appreciate the kind of independent and open minded learning that HE requires from its students.

Researcher: "before you came here, did you have any idea about university?"

Kevin: "I thought it would be difficult, based on my sister's experience, who went to university, and my dad, he is doing his PhD part time, and he has been in university for over 30 years. So I just thought 'this is going to be tough', that was my initial perception. But I knew as well, it's going to be fun as well, in terms of the new things you are going to be doing, so I kind of thought 'it's going to be a bit scary, but I am really excited'. Looking back, I don't think it was as tough as I thought it would be. I think the programme and the lecturers are fantastic, the programme has been designed in such way that you progress through your learning, so you don't feel lost in the sense that there were massive gaps between things. I don't want to sound big headed, but I think maybe what I learnt from my previous work experience helped a lot as well, the kind of maturity I have, I am eager to learn and I can see the purposes of things."

Researcher: "Do you feel because you are a mature student, you had some advantage then in terms of understanding and applying the knowledge better?"

Kevin: "Yes and no. I definitely think my experiences have helped me on the course. I had worked as instructors and I have got quite few qualifications. But some of the other people on the course who are younger than me also have a lot of experiences and they are very good at understanding things and applying themselves. I don't think maturity is just an age thing, but having those few years out definitely helped me."

Outdoor education – it's what I believe

Like many outdoor students, participating in outdoor activities and working in an outdoor education started as a hobby for Kevin which later developed into a lifestyle.

Me: "Let's talk about outdoor education then, why did you choose to do this subject?"

Kevin: "I think when I was young, I always enjoyed the outdoors, and it properly started when I was about 14, 15. My technology teacher in school who was a kind of outdoor instructor

took a group of us to an outdoor centre for a week, and they did a programme for us. I just got hooked straight way with everything they did. They had an association for teenagers, and I signed up for that, and then just went to that centre on a regular bases. And then we ended up going on holidays, trips, and then I got to a point where they had a scheme for young people to start the outdoors, and I joined that, and then got the ball rolling. All that experience just kind of made me realised that's where I want to be. Then I ended up working at the centre I went to as a teenager, just shadowing and following instructors. And when I had free time, I went out with my friends, and just gathering that experience. Then the ball started rolling, I was learning while working, I went to different centres, worked for different jobs with different people."

As discussed previously, unlike traditional academic subjects, outdoor education as a subject area requires students to engage working in the outdoors with practical skills, as well as knowledge about the environment. For OE professional, while those practical skills and knowledge are essential to their works, unlike professions such as teaching, HE experience is not mandatory for gaining employment in the outdoor industry. Indeed, during the interviews, students all reflected on whether they felt their university degree has made them more employable than their fellow outdoor professionals, who do not have degrees. In Kevin's case, it is interesting to see why after five years in the industry, he felt coming to university can help him with his employability.

Kevin: "I guess I felt that being an instructor, I can only give my clients so much. But when I was working, I met lots of people like teachers and scientists, and they didn't just instruct people to do things, they were using their practical skills to educate people. And I thought that is what outdoor education should be all about. I think physical and psychological challenges are important, because they are what draws people to the outdoors, and you can certainly learn a lot through these kinds of experiences. But personally, I think we should also educate people about the outdoors. So those geography teachers, when taking groups out, they actually use their knowledge of being teachers in geography to teach at the same time, while taking them out walking. Because taking groups out walking is all well and good, but a walk can be very dull and boring. You can make it more exciting and interesting by stopping and looking at things, and using your knowledge in geography to actually educate children, teenagers or adults, they can learn a lot more, rather than being stuck in a classroom. So I thought, for me to be a good instructor, I want that as well. So I kind of felt I needed to go away and work for a while to get money and gather qualifications to be in those centres. I then had the opportunity to go to university and I thought that's going to help me to get that academic knowledge of geography and sciences to actually incorporate with the outdoor qualifications. I think that's the reason for me going to university. I can read all the knowledge through books and stuff, but actually being in university and getting the opportunity to do things, learning how to research and having that knowledge embedded more, was a better opportunity for me."

Clearly, Kevin's past experiences as a participant in outdoor education who was led and taught by science teachers, really had impact on how he perceived the meaning of outdoor education. Such experience and understanding led him to have a different attitude towards practical learnings in the programme compared to some of the other outdoor education students I have interviewed throughout this study.

Researcher: "So for you, outdoor education is educating people about the outdoors through the outdoors."

Kevin: "Yeah, definitely. I think when I was young, it was very much about the challenges and the risks. But through working with people like the teachers, I definitely have developed this understanding about outdoor education. And I think it is what our degree is trying to show us. Again, I don't want to sound big headed, but I think the experiences and the maturity did help me to see this. I think some people came on to the course thinking outdoor education is about doing activities, I think they are right, but it's not just about the activities. I think they probably see outdoor education differently from me. Like I said, you certainly can learn a lot from doing outdoor activities. For example, we had modules on leadership, development training, those are all important for outdoor education, and I think they are also relevant to employability because you develop group work, leadership and communication through those experiences. But for me, there is another side of outdoor education which is educating people about the outdoors, the science of outdoors, ecology, and environment. And I think it is a very important part of outdoor education, particularly in today's world."

Certainly, Kevin's experience and understanding as a mature student have some uniqueness to how he perceives outdoor education, the degree programme and his employability development. Throughout the interviews with outdoor students, few others have also expressed similar understandings based on their reflections on their own experiences. As discussed before, the OE programme has its unique characteristics regarding students' identities (Stott et al, 2012), particularly in relation to employability, many students come to the programme with substantial work experiences. It seems for the outdoor education programme, students' diversity does not only mean a wide range of age groups and social backgrounds, but also it means diverse work experiences. This means underneath a range of employability skills, competences and qualities OE students bring to their programmes, are many different perspectives on the ontology and epistemology of outdoors, outdoor education and being an outdoor educator.

<u>Being a mature student – some opportunities wasted</u>

Having a diverse group of students with various kinds of experience in the outdoors, means the OE programme sometimes utilises its students' knowledge and experience as resources in their teaching and learning activities. For example, Kevin and some other students were asked to assist their lecturers on some mountain leadership training sessions with students with lower year groups.

Kevin: "We (Kevin and two other students) were very privileged to stay with the lecturers in Scotland and helped out with the second years on their winter skill course. We worked with the three different groups who came up for the two weeks. We covered the same stuff, so it was repetitive for us, but it was new learning, so I was very thankful. The same stuff but for different people in the winter environment, that has been very beneficial for me, because it's a new kind of route I am going down, but I can still take what I have learnt and add to that, and then just teach that to other people. And because of my previous work experience, I think I was able to understand when people are slightly struggling with something. It's kind of opened my eyes to interpret people."

Researcher: "but only few of you had chance to go out helping your lecturers?"

Kevin: "yeah, I guess it's the focus of the course, there is a lot of focus on mountaineering and water sport side of things, so if you came here as a mountain biking expert, probably you are not going to get as much opportunities as a climber. A lot of it is down to the resources and staff expertise, I think the lecturers all want us to do well, but there is a lot of pressure on them to offer everything everybody wants. However, I think there were some opportunities lost there, because it could potentially give those people an opportunity to actually gain the experience they need to go down the road they want to go down. I think it takes a little bit pressure off the lecturers. From my experience, I think that definitely helped me in building up awareness and understanding, I think I grasped this idea when I was younger, working the centres, but definitely working through university, working with my peers, rather than with children in primary school, where it was mainly looking after them, and giving them a very limited amount of information to make sure they understood the importance of being safe. Whereas working with peers and people at similar age, you can give them a lot more information, and they will sort of understand the concepts and ideas of why we do those things, why it is important for people to learn in that way, or picking those up while teaching the safety side as well."

Through those peer learning experiences, Kevin felt he had developed and enhanced his employability significantly. However, regarding employability development, he believed there were a lot learning opportunities wasted, perhaps between the dissonance between staff and students' views.

Kevin: "Throughout the degree, there were few things I thought it definitely could be better. For example, in first year we did some goal setting for our leadership module, but back then it was just about getting professional development goals for our qualifications. But for me, in terms of goal setting, it should also be about personal development, and I think there should be more of a role from the lecturer saying 'we are helping you to come up with a plan that is realistic for yourself and for the time you spend at university', rather than just for the practical module. I think the lecturer should help us to come up with a realistic goal of what we want to achieve within the three years of our time in university. I think that's a very good way to help people progress. And I think overall, the personal development side of things is a bit lacking compared to the academic side and practical side of things."

Researcher: "so how did you go about your goal setting?"

Kevin: "We did some lectures about goal setting for that module. We were told the benefits of doing it, how to incorporate it into our report and then being given some idea of how to go about doing it. But it was left for us to go away, and try to understand the idea of it. The lecturers were there if you wanted to go to speak to them, but I don't think it carried on afterwards. It was just for this module. I think I have learnt how to make a plan, I kind of learnt don't rush in when you want to make a plan for yourself, you should actually spend a bit of time to think about it thoroughly, about what is realistic for you first of all. But the plan I made for that module was just for the purpose of that module, to make the report. After that, I don't think it was much used by anyone.

But I feel it is one of those important things we should practice more in outdoor education, because working in the industry means you have to set goals for yourselves and other people as well. For example, if you want to do your ML, you need to go and fill in the pre-record sets, and come back to them when they are done. I think some of the academic aspects of the module about how to set up a plan, were basically there to help you understand how you can go about setting up a plan for yourself, and maybe when you are coaching others, you can set up a plan for the others to suit their needs. I think for me, if you had done that properly throughout the three years, and you go on then afterwards to help

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people set up plans for themselves to help them to develop, you have got that experience throughout the three years to actually be able to say 'look, through my experience, this may benefit you from setting up a plan for yourself and making realistic achievable goals which you can change, depending on how you feel your progress is going over a set period of time'. I think that's definitely something that would benefit the students. I think you can't learn things like goal setting and self-assessment by just having some lectures, you need to experience it and reflect on those experiences.

I think there are a lot of things for us to do in three years time, and the lecturers can't possibly cover everything. I think it is also a learning experience for them, with each cohort of students, and they probably will take our feedbacks on board and change things for the next cohort. The problem is, we won't know. Every cohort of students is different from the previous or the following year, so I think it is difficult for the lecturers to get everything right. But I definitely feel the programme can utilise the students' experiences a bit more, developing their abilities to self-reflect, self-assess, peer learning and peer-assess."

Researcher: "you do have peer assessment though?"

Kevin: "yeah, but that was again a lost opportunity from my point of view. From what I have experienced in peer assessment, it's difficult in terms of how peers give marks for academic purposes, because you become friends with those people, and you may say 'if you give me a good mark, I will give you a good mark'. I think there is a problem with how it is delivered. I think people should understand the process a lot more than just say 'here is a sheet, follow this marking criteria and then give the mark which you feel is beneficial for that person'. For me, this is something you will really use later on, be honest and do your best, kind of put the friendship to one side and look at it as if it is 'right I have to mark this person based solely on their ability, rather than me looking at another friend'. I found peer assessment was particularly hard for academic works, because it's not as visible as things in practical learning. In practicals, you have to look at the kind of safety issues if something does go wrong, you have to be able to say 'listen, you need to look after yourself and help your peers out', it is better that way. But overall, I think the few peer assessments we had were problematic. Based on the feedback and debates we had with some of the lecturers, I think they didn't go the way the lecturers intended them to go.

Researcher: "Did you just give everyone the same marks?"

Kevin: "No, …I don't want to be big headed, but I'd like to be honest, because it's kind of more honest to myself, knowing that I have done the right thing to make that person learn, rather than giving a 10 out of 10… you know, they won't reflect on why they have done so badly, and then go 'right, what can I do then to make that better for the next time'. So I'd like to know I have been honest to myself for that person, for their benefit. It can be challenging because that person is your friend, and they may think 'oh what are you doing? I thought you were going to help me out here.' Oh well, really I am helping you by making you realise that getting a 10 doesn't mean anything, because you don't learn; you will learn from getting bad marks and developing yourself. But that's through talking to them afterwards. I think one of the issues is how you give peer feedback, and I don't think a piece of paper and an individual mark means anything. I think the most important part of peer assessment is the feedback because like I said you can learn so much from your peers because they have similar perspectives, whereas lecturers have a different perspective. So if I was struggling to understanding something, rather than having a lecturer to explain to me which I probably still won't fully understand it afterwards, I found sometimes having someone on the course to explain it was much better, because they probably had the same issue and they can see what I was struggling with. And as well, going back to outdoor education employability, I think being able to explain things to people is a very important skill we should have, so I think peer learning and peer feedback is definitely a good thing, but it has to be done properly. I think there needs to be more time put into giving people the opportunity to understand the concept of peer reviewing and assessment."

Kevin's narrative provides insight as to how students perceive their teaching and learning activities during their degree. While it is clear that for programmes like OE, almost every aspect can connect to a students' employability development depending on the student's career aspiration, it is also interesting to see how students make such connections based on their own experiences and interpretations. In Kevin's case, being a mature student does not only mean that he has the knowledge and experience of the outdoor education profession, he also applied such knowledge and experiences into his university learning without separating his HE experience from 'the real world of work'.

5.3.2 Student narratives discussion:

Similarly to lecturers' narratives, I have, firstly, illustrated the complexity of individual students' personal and professional constructions of employability and employability development. Clearly, such construction is an on-going process which embraces individual student's past experiences, which they believe have been, and still are influential to their employability decisions (e.g. subject choices, university choices, etc.). Clearly, for PE student Ste, the devastating experience with ending his 'dream' career as professional footballer was significant. Ending a life-changing decision often means the beginning of another life-changing decision (Merriam and Clark, 1993) and through Ste's experience, clearly his 'old' career aspiration had a major impact on his 'new' career path to be a PE teacher. Particularly, beneath the skills and passion of playing sports, Ste has taking inspiration from his experiences and the people who were involved with such experience to inform his values and practices as a teacher.

Student's past experiences form a vital part of their on-going professional identity construction, as such experiences continuously shape individual student's ontological and epistemological understandings about their professions and their own roles within their professions. Here, we have also seen their construction on their personal identities through how they use their past experience to make sense for themselves of HE and their HE participation, in relation to employability and employability development. In OE student Kevin's case, the on-going thread of 'maturity' clearly shows such identity construction. In the past, the feeling of 'immaturity' led his decision on entering the world of work, rather than participation in HE. During his HE participation, the feeling of 'maturity' and the 'labelling' of mature student, led him to form a social and pedagogical identity as a student who has 'mature' views on the matter of employability, based on his personal experience. Underneath such construction of maturity, is the on-going process of his readiness. In this case, his readiness for 'higher' education to shape his personal and professional identities through 'mature' ontological and epistemological understandings of the society, of his subject and of himself.

As I identified, on examining our students' experiences (via their own narratives) with their past, present and future, it is clear that students' sense changes through their learning and work experiences. In this process of change, the complexity of their personal and professional, social and pedagogical identities and identifications, sometimes challenges their philosophical views and values on their employability (i.e. who they are and what they hold employability-wise speaking). Through PE student Ste's experience with 'posh' school pupils and colleagues, there is a clear cultural and social identity clash that led him to form his view on his employability

> *"when we talked before about my employability, from what I learnt I sort of feel I'm employable for a certain position, but I don't think I was employable for that position in Calderstones School, because of my experiences, because of the way I am I just would not have liked that school."*

In both cases, whether it is Ste's past experiences with football and his personal background as 'a working class lad' or Kevin's personal passion for outdoor education (i.e. education about the outdoors through the outdoors) and his on-going construction on his maturity, their past and their present as well as their personal background, their subject trait and their social identities are clearly intertwined to form their uniquely constructed individual employability. Such complexity of individual student's construction of their employability, further suggests that a narrow, 'objective' and quantitative approach to graduate employability is inappropriate, as clearly numbers are not enough to represent the complexity graduate employability hold, from individual student to collective cohorts of students.

In addition, employability development is not just about acquisition and demonstration of those measurable competences and qualities (though they are part of it), as suggested by Barnett (2008; 1994), clearly students' narratives in this study show employability development, as a vital part of our students' learning in HE to prepare them for the future world of work, holds much deeper meaning to the students and their subject areas. Indeed, the students' being and becoming, employability wise, are intertwined with their subjects' values and philosophies at the time of their study. Accordingly, when students enter the world of work in their chosen professions, they are applying their subjects into their profession through their uniquely individual-constructed experiences, which represent their 'own' interpretation of their subjects' ontology and epistemology.

As a result, it could be argued that, beneath the employability 'skills' development and enhancement, is the development and enhancement of one's employability ontology and epistemology. This, again, suggests that employability must be embedded into the curriculum as a vital part of the subject and professional learning, as well as students' personal development; because clearly it forms part of a student's personal and professional identities,

which are far greater and more complex than those measurable skills and components that one assumes could be acquired and enhanced through bolt-on learning activities and generic employability development programmes.

Secondly, through students' narratives, I have illuminated some of the conflicts and challenges they experience for their employability development and the learning undertaken while they experienced such conflict and challenges. Particularly as the 'context' of their employability development changes between university, placements and/or extra curriculum works, their roles and identities in those contexts change accordingly into students, trainee teachers or employees in their respective industry/profession. Though in all these contexts, they are learners who still 'craft' their employability under the guide and supervision of their masters (e.g. lecturers, mentors or senior staff members), they clearly perceive themselves different in relation to their employability development.

For instance, while being in university and on placement, means they are still developing themselves to be employable, in a work environment, they are already employed. Such experience is challenging, because while learning in different contexts means that students have diverse opportunities to gain different experiences. It also leaves them with potential conflicting messages from different 'masters'. In addition, such multiple identities, due to those various contexts, sometimes lead students to hold dissonances on how they value certain issues within themselves because there are conflicts amongst their different identities. Clearly demonstrated through OE student Kevin's experiences, the complex social, professional and pedagogical identities he held, had led him to some problematic times during his degree when he needed to carry out peer assessment 'professionally' as a 'student' to other 'students' who were also his 'friends'.

This adds further complexity to student's perceptions and understandings, regarding their 'being' employability-wise. It also consists of experiences of past, present and future, values and philosophies of personal, subject, professional and society-wide. It is also highly contextual. As a result, it could be argued that the 'same' learning experience could be interpreted differently in different contexts, thus as well as considering the individual students' needs, the profession's requirements and the subject's philosophical values, employability development also needs to consider the situation of the learning accordingly.

5.4 Conclusion on students' experiences, understandings and perceptions

Through three layers of analysis of the initial findings, emerging themes and narratives of students, I have gone through a multi-dimensional illumination of some of the key issues in relation to students' experiences, understandings and perceptions on employability and

employability development. Certainly, through this research, those students I interviewed provided me with very personal and insightful thoughts and stories regarding employability and their employability development experiences. During the interviews, there was laughter, tears, happiness and frustration. Evidently, students felt such in-depth reflection on their HE experience and employability development which proved valuable, as while they have provided me with fine-grained accounts, they also took the opportunity to carry out a 'think-loud' personal reflective process to become aware of 'who they have become' and 'what they are capable of doing now'. It could be argued that those powerful insights our students chose to share with me, have indeed demonstrated the empowerment this study wishes to achieve, in order to let the other key stakeholder groups hear what our students experience and think in relation to employability and employability development (Aim 3).

Through examining such fine-grained accounts, some insightful themes were generated in order to illuminate the complex learning experiences our students have in relation to employability and employability development in their programmes, and in HE in general (Aim 3). Through this illumination, key concepts and themes are identified and examined in an attempt to understand the 'wicked' problem of employability and employability development in higher education. Clearly, the complex learning process our students experience at personal, programme, institutional, professional, and social wide levels in relation to employability and employability development, have led to some of the core issues arising from this 'wicked' problem (e.g. the highly individualised and contextualised needs our students have regarding their employability development).

In addition, through some of the students' narratives, it is clear that our students experience challenges and conflicts during their employability development, and many of those issues are originated partially by their complex personal and social backgrounds as well as their professional and pedagogical roles and identities. Through 'zoom in' to students' narratives, we have seen employability as a deep concept which, from a students' point of view, intertwines with their personal past, present and future. Their subject and professional ontology, epistemology and philosophical values, and their social and pedagogical 'being' in higher education, work environment and the society in general, thus giving 'wide' meanings to the notion of graduate employability.

Through this research, it is clear that every student has their own inspirations for going to university, and aspirations for choosing a particular career path. Currently, there is a popular assumption that students take a somewhat 'casual' approach towards their HE participation and career choices, suggesting an 'immature' attitude our students have regarding their future and their responsibilities to the society. Certainly, in this study, none of the students had such casual immature attitude towards their HE participation and their future career. It is

evident that students consider their decisions on HE participation and their future career choice are life changing, and such life changing decisions have been made, based on careful consideration of the value of HE participation to individual students. What this research has demonstrated is the richness and highly unique experiences each individual student has had to construct their own employability, in order to achieve the aspiring career that motivated them to come to university in the first place. Clearly, such a powerful and complex notion of graduate employability cannot, and should not be represented solely based on quantified measurements. And the complex and rich learning experiences for employability development cannot, and should not be designed, delivered and assessed through 'objective' surface level skills programmes that the government's employability agenda promotes.

Chapter 6 – Dissonances and congruence between students and lecturers

In the previous two discussion chapters, I have focused on our lecturers' and students' understandings, perceptions and experiences separately. As this research also sets out to examine the dissonances and congruence between the two groups (Aim 2), in this discussion chapter, I am going to focus on cross-examining some of the key findings from the previous two chapters to illuminate some essential dissonances and congruence, in order to further demonstrate the complex and wickedness of employability development in HE degree programmes.

As established in the previous two chapters, there are certain dissonances and congruence within the two stakeholder groups, also, each individual student and lecturer holds some conflicting views regarding the conceptions of employability and employability development in higher education. Evidently individual students' and lecturers' personal, education, professional and social backgrounds contribute to their understandings and perceptions, and as such backgrounds are all unique and diverse, it is unsurprising to have dissonances and congruence amongst them. In the previous two chapters, we have also seen students and lecturers hold various social, pedagogical and professional roles and responsibilities in relation to employability development in higher education, evidently one of the main causes for individuals' dissonances is the conflicting values different identities represent.

To avoid repetition of data and discussion points, this chapter will mainly consist of critical syntheses of some of the findings from previous chapters (with signposts to relevant data and findings when necessary), with its main focus on illuminating dissonances and congruence between students and lecturers, I will also present some fresh data.

6.1 Congruence – some shared conceptions among the insiders

Reading through the previous two chapters, it is apparent that our lecturers and students share some similar views and understandings on certain issues. Though, it could be argued that there is no absolute similarity between students and lecturers, as each individual has their unique views and understandings, which are not the same as anyone else's. Collectively, among our HE insiders, there are clearly some shared conceptions.

Overall, our students and lecturers all see employability as a relative and subject notion that includes a number of essential components. Between the two groups, they share some agreements on some of those essential components which include meaningful work experience, personal competence and traits, insightful knowledge about one's

profession/industry and professional qualification. In addition, our students and lecturers all see employability as a progressive concept which consists of different stages through an individual's working-life span, and students' employability development during their university is only part of such process – it is not the beginning and certainly not the end (Yorke and Knight, 2006).

In regard to employability development, clearly our students and lecturers feel that all the key stakeholders (e.g. students, lecturers, universities, employers, etc.) hold a responsibility to help one's employability development enhancement (ibid). Certainly, students themselves hold the major role in their own employability development, but their degree programmes and universities also have certain responsibilities. It seems the degree programmes hold the primary role, while the university's strategies and initiatives are supplementary to the programmes' teaching, learning and assessment, in relation to employability development (Harvey, 2004). While students and lecturers clearly share some agreements on several of the key principles on employability development in degree programmes, such as holistic and aligned curriculum with embedded employability development as one of the 'core' curriculum elements, and relevant 'real' world work experiences that have 'direct' applications to students' learning and development (Yorke and Knight, 2006). The most noticeable congruence between students' and lecturers' perceptions is their indifferent and sceptical attitudes toward institutional level employability development projects.

Overall, students and lecturers all seem to agree that employability development is one of the vital roles and responsibilities HE holds to their students, although it is not the only purpose of students' HE participation. HE degrees and institutions should be primarily directing and enhancing students' employability to help them achieve their aspiring careers, by providing them with a meaning to construct their individualised employability. Employability as a concept in HE should hold strong subject and professional values and philosophies, to ensure graduates can promote such 'higher' understandings and values when they enter the world of work as graduates to their future employer, profession and the society in general.

Through those shared views regarding employability and employability development, it seems our lecturers and students all have sophisticated understandings toward the concepts and their associated issues. Similarly to the congruence students and lecturers have within their own groups, the congruence they share seems largely to consist of 'universal' knowledge regarding definitions and key characteristics of such concepts. It could be argued that, perhaps because the nature of those two degrees as education programmes, students and lecturers have shared 'common' knowledge towards issues and concepts that are considered as part of their subject knowledge, and employability and employability

development through formal education is one of those issues. Indeed, compared to the lecturers in Barrie's study, and students in Tomlinson's study, lecturers and students in this study clearly have all demonstrated their educational conceptions, not only defining the concept and its related issues as an educational matter, but 'thinking' about the concept and those issues through their educational 'critical' ways as educators. This is perhaps why all lecturers in this study showed highly sophisticated and critical views (e.g. 'translation' and 'enabling' according to Barrie), and all students can critique the teaching, learning and assessment rationales and implementations regarding their employability development in their curriculum. As such, students in this study no longer just viewed employability as their personal matter, and lecturers no longer viewed employability as the means for their students to gain employment, instead, they have all viewed it as an educational issue in today's HE.

In addition, the congruence between students' and lecturers' understandings on 'what employability is as a concept', and 'how employability development should be carried out on principle', demonstrates lecturers and students certainly have 'shared' views as 'insiders' of HE. Particularly through their sceptical views toward political employability agenda and the institution led initiatives, it appears their 'common' ground had formed a partnership to oppose the 'authority' - building on their 'shared' values and understandings as educators, their concerns toward political agenda's impact on education again suggest the 'common' knowledge and values educators have regarding employability and employability development in education.

6.2 Dissonances - different perspectives

While clearly our lecturers and students shared some similar views and attitudes regarding employability and employability development in HE as educators, it is unsurprising that reading through their accounts, they have demonstrate their different views as students and lecturers on a number of issues. Indeed, as demonstrated in the previous two discussion chapters, within the students and lecturers group themselves there are some differences largely regarding the 'how' and 'how much' issues (e.g. should OE have qualifications as part of their curriculum?). Often such different views and opinions toward a particular issue are largely due to individual's different experiences with the issue (Lees, 2002). As such, it could be argued that students and lecturers have different perspectives toward almost everything as they all have different experiences as individuals, but their 'shared' values and experiences as two 'opposing' groups i.e. students and lecturers have led them to have certain dissonances, due to their different perspectives as students and lecturers (Barnett, 2000).

Evidently, students personally still take employability as an issue regarding their own abilities, to attain their aspired jobs (though they also see it as an educational issue from their academic prospective). Such perception, compared to the lecturers' is somewhat narrow, short-term focused and individualised (Tomlinson, 2008). With such differences between their perceptions in mind, it is evident that there are a number of dissonances between students' and lecturers' perceptions, even though they perceive the concept and its key characteristics in similar ways. This is evident when students and lecturers expressed their personal views and thoughts toward the concept and its relevant issues.

Taking the notion of 'change' as an example – clearly students and lecturers all thought the employability development is a *process* in which 'change' is a crucial characteristic to evaluate what had happened and to plan ahead for what is next. One of the significant notions that clearly demonstrate such dissonances is how students and lecturers perceive 'change' in employability development. For lecturers, change is about change in policies, change in their profession/industry, change in HE, change in their programmes (staffing, student cohorts) etc. For students, change mainly concerns their own differences over the years regarding their employability, which is clearly illustrated through the previous discussion chapter).

> *PE lecturer 1: "I think one of the key characters of this programme is its quite reactive to policy changes, and changes imposed on organisations from the above, like the teaching development agency or the teaching training agency. So for example, the standards for ITT which the students work toward have changed a couple of times since I have been here. So in some respects has impacted on how the programme is delivered for employability development, because we need to demonstrate our students have gathered those competences. Also as results of students' feedback, module evaluations and professional discussions, we made changes to the degree course over that time. We have a new programme now which is in its third year, which is developed on the back of the old programme. So there are various small changes, but also some large ones which relate to programme structure."*

Certainly, students do not, and cannot have the 'same' perspective as lecturers on the notion of change because their *focuses* are different, whereas change in the wider context (e.g. their industry, HE, the degree programmes), affect both students and lecturers regarding the curriculum design and the teaching learning and assessment activities. Those changes do not seem to be directly relevant to student experience. For example, the changes of staff personnel can be a crucial issue, as they affect the curriculum content and programme direction. However, students could not possibly know what such changes could be, and how those changes could impact on their employability.

In a deeper level, even when students expressed their understandings regarding the philosophical, ontological and epistemological values of their subject, profession and their employability, those understandings are mainly focused on how such realisation is a process

of change in their understandings at their personal level. Whereas for lecturers, they are mainly concerned about the dynamics and the reflexive affects between the changes in their profession and subject's philosophical values, the changes of programmes on those values and the changes of their student cohorts regarding how they reflect such values. After all, for lecturers, the purpose of employability development is more than 'helping their students to get jobs'. As professionals in their respective industry/profession, our lecturers clearly expressed their beliefs that employability development is for their subject area and their industry/profession.
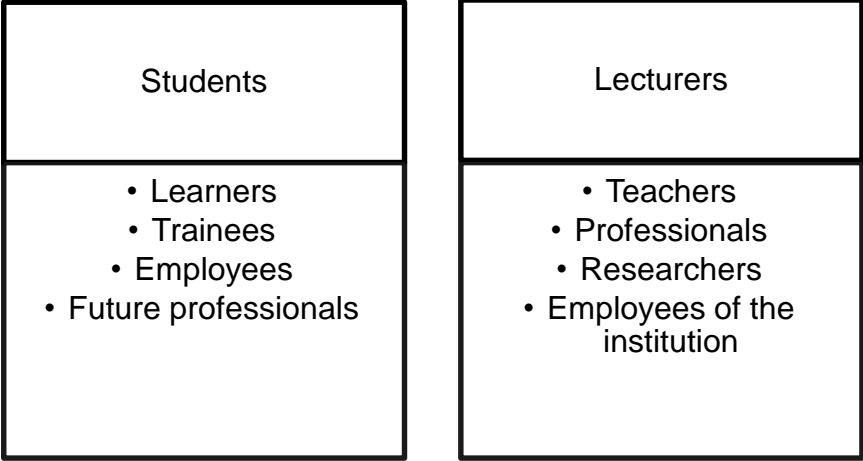
It could be argued that one of the fundamental differences between lecturers and students is that for students, employability development is about their personal level development on their own employability, qualities they developed in HE to progress their respective industry/profession. For lecturers, employability is about developing and progressing their respective industry/profession through their students (as 'ambassadors' of the programme to their industry/profession). Such different attitudes toward the purpose of employability development in HE, arguably is one of the main reasons for dissonances between what the lecturers felt they were doing and how well they were doing it, and what the students believe they experienced in their degrees, (e.g. lecturers believe employability development in their programmes is about possibilities and opportunities, whereas students feel it should be about directing them to exactly what they want to do. Although from a lecturers' point of view, offering possibilities and opportunities is to serve the diverse needs students have, for students, what their programme is doing, is not enough for their individual needs).

Taking into account that employability is also subject, relative and contextual, the expectation was that our lecturers and students have some dissonances between them. Indeed, considering lecturers and students are two groups of people with very different roles in their programmes and in HE, their perspectives and values should be different. However, as discussed in the previous two chapters, even within the two groups themselves and within each individual, there seem to be conflicting values and confusing roles. Certainly, when putting the two groups together, such issues regarding the multiple roles and identities seems to become a very significant problem to the dissonances between students and lecturers.

6.3 Dissonances – complexity of identities

In previous chapters, I have identified and examined some of the multiple roles and identities our lecturers and students seem to have, regarding employability development in higher education. As employability development in HE is a complex issue that spreads across many conceptions, political, social, educational and so on. Individuals who are involved with the

issue, have all adopted multiple roles and identities in those various conceptions, (the following figure lists some of those roles and identities that students and lecturers in this study perceived they have adopted regarding employability development in HE).

Students	Lecturers
• Learners • Trainees • Employees • Future professionals	• Teachers • Professionals • Researchers • Employees of the institution

Figure 6 Students and lecturers perceived roles and identities

Clearly demonstrated in the previous two chapters, as those different roles and identities have different values and perspectives regarding some of the employability development issues, our lecturers and students have demonstrated that they feel they have multiple and often conflicting views and attitudes toward certain issues. As a result, when putting the two groups together, those multiple roles and identities and what they stand for, seem to have contributed to the dissonances between lecturers and students. For instance, with regard to the institution level employability projects, clearly students largely perceive themselves as learners and students within the pedagogical context of university, whereas lecturers are teachers and employees of the institution. The roles and identities, and their somewhat conflicting values, are arguably some of the reasons that students feel confused and disappointed about the inclusion of Graduate Skills in their programmes. On one hand, they believe they share pedagogical values with their lecturers, in which they have 'similar' views on such politically driven initiatives. On the other hand, in reality, as the lecturers they must embrace institutional values as employees, such institutional initiatives had to be implemented.

Table 6 Students' perceptions on their roles and identities and their lecturer' opposing roles and identities

Themselves	Lecturers
PE/OE students	PE/OE teachers
HE learners	Academics
Partners in their degree programme	Partners in their degree programme

232

Trainees/apprentices	Masters
Future OE/PE professionals	Role models
'Guinea pigs'	'Lab researcher'

Table 7 Lecturers' perceptions on their roles and identities and their students' opposing roles and identities

Themselves	**Students**
Adults	Adults
Lecturers	Learners
Academics	HE students
Experts	Trainees/apprentices
Ambassadors of their professions	Future ambassadors of their professions
Providers	Consumers

Evidently, such dissonances between students and lecturers, due to multiple roles and identities, are not just about the conflicting values and perspectives as I discussed in the previous two chapters. When putting the two groups together, there are further complexities to such dissonances. First, it appears that as well as perceiving their own roles and identities in various contexts differently, students and lecturers also perceive and construct different roles and identities to each other, and such roles and identities are often opposing to those self-perceive roles and identities. For instance, from a lecturers' point of view, students nowadays have adopted a consumer attitude to their education, largely due to their tuition fee payment. With such perception in mind, some lecturers felt often their students were 'demanding them to offer employability as a guaranteed product of students' HE participation', and within this context, lecturers have perceived themselves as providers of employability to their students. The following highlights some of the key roles and identities each group perceive themselves, and the other group to have.

Through examining how they perceive each of those roles and identities represents, clearly, there are significant dissonances and conflicts amongst them. For example, students have suggested that they sometimes feel their lecturers were 'running tests on them in relation to what to teach and assess in the programme', which itself is a dissonant view on what HE should be from students' perspective.

OE student: "For our year it was the new process of doing outdoor education and PE, and adventure tourism, and all them, I think it's a bit of a joke. We were given the impression that we would be doing different routes, so for me, I would be doing a lot of adventure tourism

stuff, but in reality, it didn't happen. I think because this is all new to everyone, they are still trying things out. I guess it's just unfortunate that they have to test it on us."

On the other side, lecturers feel the increasing tuition fees and pressure from the government and popular media, have led the students to 'behave like customers rather than learners, demanding the programme to provide whatever they want the programme to provide'. Which itself is a dissonant view on what students in HE should be like from a lecturers' perspective. Then putting the two sets of perceived roles and identities together, there is a clear dissonance between what students believe their lecturers are doing, and what lecturers feel their students are doing. What is more, the values represented by those two sets of opposing roles are dissonant to each other.

Beneath those pedagogical roles and identities, there are also a number of social roles and identities, which add further complexity to the issue. The students and lecturers' gender, class, age and other social capitals, as demonstrated in the past two chapters, all contribute to how they perceive themselves, with regard to employability development in their programmes, as employability is a social concept (Brown et al, 2003). University is a social institution, and teaching and learning are social relations and interactions (Palincsar, 1998).

Secondly, as such perceptions on their own roles and identities and each other's roles and identities are highly contextual, there is often mismatch of roles and identities. The following sets of a lecturer and a student describing their feeling towards the 'same' experiential learning scenario, highlight some of those mismatch perceptions and their problems.

OE student: "I mean, the module is basically a sociology module, so we are learning a lot of sociology terminologies to do with groups, it's about working with people who might have learning difficulties, things like that. I think it is useful, but there is a lot of jargon because as soon as you start to work with other people, it becomes like there is a framework you have to stick to. I mean…look, I am one of those guys, I don't like health and safety laws, I think it's rubbish, I don't like political correctness, I don't like sociological terminology and processes, and I really don't like the fact that there is a really rigid framework you have to stick to when you are dealing with other people."

Researcher: "but for working in outdoors, health and safety rules are really important, so maybe by working in some kind of frameworks, the lecturer is trying to get you understand how it work in the industry."

OE student: "from that point of view, she does it very well. I don't want to take that away from her, it was delivered well. Every lecture, we had activities, we worked in groups, mock interviews, learning about assessing the situations, that's all really cool. But within that, sadly, there is always the kind of tedious processes you have to go through, I don't really live my life like that. it's not like I have problem with authorities, you know when I am in work I do work very hard and I respect my boss, I worked with people before, and I understand that. I find the whole sociology thing really…sometimes I have to hold myself like 'just listen, don't say anything, be quiet' (laughing). I mean the module is definitely useful if you are going into doing group work and consultation works. You know, it is the module that gets you to understand how to develop a programme, how to give people feedback, how to speak to people, it's like a councillor's thing if you know what I mean. But for me, I just don't find the

whole setting around pretending we are in a 'professional situation' works for me. I mean I don't talk like that to my mates, and it's like I had to be a different person…that's not real."

OE lecturer: "With the current 3rd year, I find it very hard, because I don't feel I have that level of engagement, that level of relationship with them. So they are not responding in the way they should, a lot of them are quite defensive about it. So they will be like 'why are we giving people advice like this? I won't give my mates advice like this.' And I am like 'you really haven't got it, have you?' I think because it is a level 3, I expected them to have higher level of reflective skills and knowledge. It's not they don't have them, it's not they can't think critically and reflectively, it's just…because they are 3rd years, there are certain things you expect them to have. So for example, in terms of critical thinking, I want them to be critical about certain discourse. I want them to challenge certain discourse, that's what I mean by critical thinking. So I am talking about, they are level 3, so as well as the act of critical thinking, what is the concept of critical thinking? So things like, challenging dominant discourses, different ways of thinking, so like Feminism. Not that I want them to be all Feminists, but to be able to understand things from a Feminist point of view, as well as other perspectives, and be critical about them. So not just taking things at face value, but challenging values and beliefs. That's what HE is about, because you can go out to get qualifications and you can go out to do training and practical activities, but you won't get this level of critical thinking by just doing that. You walk in there, they are supposed to be doing a facilitation, and they are sat on a table, having a cup of coffee, having a giggle. Its' just not professional. Maybe because they don't have the professional experience, they can't change their roles, they don't see things from different perspectives. So they don't know what a professional facilitation should be like, and they can't take on the responsibilities."

Throughout the interview, there were many examples like this one, where lecturers felt their students should adopt certain roles and identities to behave in a certain way, students' perceptions differ (and vice-versa). One justification is that the intended learning approach and learning outcomes are not communicated effectively between the two groups, thus a 'lost in translation' moment happens within such learning context. However, it could be argued that underneath the 'lost in translation' problem is the mismatch of roles and identities that led students and lecturers to read and apply themselves in the context different to each other's expectations. As a result of such mismatch roles and identities, often we see the two groups holding themselves as 'us v them'.

Clearly, because the assumptions on 'shared' perceptions of each other's roles and identities failed to be achieved, each group believed the other group 'read the situation wrongly', which led them to fail to achieve their intended goals. This is clearly illustrated through how lecturers and students in PE felt about their practical learning session. On one hand, the lecturers intended that students learn as pupils to understand and appreciate the learning process of a specific physical activity. On the other hand, the students intended to learn from their lecturers, as teachers, to understand and practice how to teach the learning process of a specific physical activity. As a result, the students felt they failed to achieve their learning outcomes as 'trainee teachers' which led them to disagree with their lecturers' approach to such learning experiences.

Finally, as each group constructed the roles and identities for themselves and the other group, it could be argued that some roles and identities have been imposed by students and lecturers to each other without acknowledgement. Throughout the interviews, it is clear that our lecturers and students constructed those sets of roles and identities as listed in Table 6 and 7, how they perceive their imposed identities (Dunning, 2003 in Leary and Tangney) is unknown. Accordingly, (ibid), imposed identities are often constructed with assumptions on 'shared understanding' of the situation, which as a result are implicit. Perhaps, sometimes our students and lecturers are not even aware how the other group perceives their roles and identities in a certain context. Nevertheless, such tacit imposed identities certainly add further complexity to the dissonances between students and lecturers.

6.4 Discussion and conclusion on students' and lecturers' dissonances and congruence

In recent years, there has been an increase in using the identity approach to look at employability development issues (e.g. Tomlinson, 2008, 2007; Holmes, 2006), and such an approach has certainly added rich dimensions to our understandings on the 'wicked' problem of employability development in higher education. So far, many of those researches have focused on students/graduates interpretation of their own identities in the labour market, suggesting how they perceive themselves in relation to their employability, is a crucial element to their success/failure in the job market. Such findings clearly highlighted the importance of identities and perceptions in relation to students' employability and their employability development. However, there has been very limited attention on how such perceptions on identities relate to the process of employability development in HE degrees.

Through exploring and illuminating, it seems one of the key issues behind the complex dissonances and congruence our students and lecturers have, (between the two groups as well as within each group) is about individual's roles and identities on the issue of employability in the HE setting. Through examining the interviews, particularly those in-depth narratives, it could be argued there are several sets of identities on this matter: first, in an educational setting, there are students, teachers, lectures, researchers, programme leaders, etc., which are pedagogical identities. Secondly, through a social-construction point of view, there are also social-identities: male, female, mature, working class, etc. In the past, those two sets of identities are often combined together when it comes to complex social issues in education, mature + students, BME + students, foreign + lecturers, etc.

However, in relation to employability, there seems to be a third set of such identities which are work related. Trainees, masters, future professionals etc., so far, this kind of identity is largely overlooked in HE employability literature. As demonstrated in previous discussion

chapters, this set of identities clearly has impact on how students and lecturers perceive themselves and each other in relation to their roles and responsibilities on employability development, as well as the affect it has on how they understand the concept, and their perceptions on how employability should be developed (the how and how much issue). Taking the OE lecturer Lisa as an example: An only female lecturer in a traditionally male dominated profession (outdoors), who feels she has a vital responsibility to educate her students as future ambassadors to the outdoors, to make social and professional differences in the profession (challenging class and gender inequality through the theories and practices which she pass on to them via her teaching and assessment). In addition, in recent years, there is a growing belief that the funding structure changes to HE have bought in economic identities: e.g. students as consumers, lecturers as providers, etc. Finally, as discussed in previous chapters, there are also theoretical and philosophical related identities: e.g. Feminists, Marxists, Radical Environmentalists, etc.

Considering some of the key characteristics of the problems regarding the roles and identities, Goffman's (1959) theory on the presentation of self in everyday life could be applied here to illuminate some of the theoretical issues. Accordingly (ibid), people's everyday lives can be interpreted as performances they have consciously chosen to perform, individually or as part of a group, in front of their perceived audiences. For such performance to work the performers must have clear and particular objectives, and it is within their interests to control the conduct of the other performers to achieve those objectives. Such control is often dependent on the definition of the situation in which every performer involved has their own saying towards the shared understanding (i.e. the working consensus, p. 21). Crucially, for such performance to achieve its goal,

"the individual's initial projection commits him to what he is proposing to be and requires him to drop all pretences of being other things." (ibid, p. 22)

For a group of performers to achieve their goal, a cooperation of shared understanding must be established and maintained often through dialogue.

For Goffman (1959), performers need to ensure that every different performance they are conducting is in front of different audiences as they hold different objectives:

"We may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about those opinion her cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. Many a youth who is demure enough before his parents and teachers, swears and swaggers like a pirate among his 'tough' young friends." (ibid, p. 48).

In addition, the framework for performance must be established and maintained:

"Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation. This will include the conception of own team and of audience and assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained by

rules of decorum. We often find a division into back region, where the performance of a routine is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented. Access to these regions is controlled in order to prevent the audience from seeing backstage and to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them…a tacit agreement is maintained between performers and audience to act as if a given degree of opposition and of accord existed between them" (ibid, p. 231).

Clearly, through the findings and discussions in this study, such performance has not succeeded. And it's not succeeded because many of Goffman's rules have been broken regarding students' employability development in HE degree programmes. Indeed, there is clearly a lack of dialogue among all the performers (students and lecturers) as to what are this performance's objectives, and what each individual's part is in the performance. Such lack of clarity and certainty on the objectives and roles, also means that performers are likely to play 'out of character', as they have established a different set of objectives for themselves to achieve, which as a result sees individuals playing various roles within a context. Such contradictory performances not only prompt confusion among all performers, but also causes conflict within the performer his/herself. This inconsistency also means that often each performer has presented 'different' performances (that means to be for different audiences) to the same group of people. As such, the framework of performance is broken, and rules for such performances are no longer applicable. Indeed, through the narratives used in previous discussions, clearly, the objectives of our lecturers and students involvement in employability development are vague. Their roles and identities change according to their own perception of the 'framework', and they are uncertain and sometimes indifferent to other's perceptions of the framework and each other's roles and identities. The complexity of their identities (perceived and imposed), and the mismatch and uncertainty of identities are clearly some of the key reasons for students and lecturers to have dissonances between them on employability development in higher education.

Taking into account employability is also subjective and relative, it was expected that lecturers and students would have some dissonances between them. Indeed, considering lecturers and students have different roles in their programmes and in HE, their perspectives and values should be different. As discussed in previous two chapters, even within the two groups themselves, and within each individual, different contexts and different roles mean that there is no fixed answer to the how and how many questions. On one hand, individuals all hold their personal ideologies toward how they believe employability development in HE should be carried out. On the other hand, in reality students and lecturers have a number of challenges and issues they must deal with regarding employability development in their programmes. Through the previous literature reviews and discussion chapters, the complexity of those different challenges and issues are clearly illustrated. What's more is that this research has only illuminated some of the issues. As the findings in this study clearly

demonstrated the wickedness of employability development in HE degree programmes, it is certain that:

- There is no one 'correct' view of employability due to its variety of stakeholders;
- There is no definitive formulation and definition of employability; it can be explained and understood in many ways depending on the viewpoint and how the issues are framed;
- It can never be fully understood by its all stakeholders, and it can never be solved completely.

Chapter 7 – A reflexive research study

'But what, then, is philosophy today - philosophical activity, I mean - If not the critical labour of thought itself? And If It does not consist, in place of legitimating what one already knows, in undertaking to know how, and up to what limit, it would be possible to think differently?'
(Foucault; 1980: preface)

In the first part of my methodology chapters, I have displayed and justified my methodological rationales, designs and the process in which this research was carried out. However, as I explained before, methodology is an embedded 'way of thinking' for any piece of research (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006) in which I feel a 'fixed' chapter cannot fully demonstrate such thought process from when the research started to this point when the research is almost finished.

Though it could be argued that a piece of research at this level will never be finished, to serve the purpose of this thesis (as an outcome of the past four years if you like), the thought process to date needs to be displayed and examined. Firstly, since the design of research was three years ago before the data collection and analysis took place, what originally was planned (see Chapter 3) has changed accordingly. Considering the context, the research setting and the participants are all 'alive' and 'changing', the constant methodological alterations need to be demonstrated to clarify the differences between the 'plan' and what actually happened. Secondly, as I explained in my preface, as a researcher, my views, knowledge and understandings are also 'alive' and 'changing' – not only in relation to **what** I know and understand, but also regarding **how** I know and understand, methodologically and philosophically.

As I intended to document such process of change, I feel this second methodology chapter is needed because certainly the realisations and understandings here are not what I had in mind years ago when I designed and wrote Methodology I. Certainly, what I reflected in this chapter happened during my data analysis and the process of 'making sense' of my findings, but as such parallel thought process cannot be displayed along with the discussion chapters, I feel having this second methodology chapter is the best way to 'going back' to methodological issues. As demonstrated in the paper, I wrote with fellow PhD students on de-skilling data analysis, such 'way of thinking' is a reflexive process of learning in which researchers come to understanding of their research with and through their 'doing' the research (Frankham et al, 2013). And it is this 'doing the research', I want to focus on for this methodology chapter in order to illustrate the 'real' ontological and epistemological underpins of this study.

7.1 Reflexivity – 'what is truth?'

As this research sets out to phenomenologically examine lecturers' and students' experiences, understandings and perceptions regarding employability and employability development in their degree programmes through the use of interviews, I have always been aware of the subjectivities and bias such a methodological approach holds. As discussed in Chapter 3, because employability is such a subjective concept and the experiences and perceptions of such a concept can be viewed as socially constructed, studying the participants' conscious thoughts has always seemed appropriate, because (as discussed in literature review) their conscious beliefs, attitudes and perceptions on the issue are affected by their past experiences, which will in term affect their future experiences. For this study, such conscious thoughts are what I am interested in. In terms of employability and HE teaching, learning and assessment, awareness and perceptions play a vital part in how students and lecturers perceive and approach employability and employability development. As a result, I was not very concerned about the reliability of what my participants had told me until I had few critical moments when I questioned "did that person tell me the truth?" (See Section 3.2.1 Data collection).

While to demand the 'truth' from my participants is not a suitable solution to the reliability issue, I started to realise that what the participants have told me in the interviews was what they thought best represented their views *in front of me in those interviews.* In other words, like the highly contextualised experiences of employability development, interviews regarding such experiences are also contextual. How the participants perceive my role in the research and my identity in the institution is highly relevant to how they approached the interviews and how they answered the questions. What I overheard in the staff room between two lecturers was a context out of my research settings. In there, the lecturers were concerned about how their colleagues think of themselves, whereas in my interviews, the lecturers were concerned about how I would report their answers as a PhD student who worked for the NTF project. Such realisation has led me to take a reflexive approach to my data and also the research framework as a whole. And indeed as demonstrated in those discussion chapters, I have consciously interpreted my data reflexively to illuminate the issues regarding context and identities.

Through identity construction and sociology of knowledge theories (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), it is clear to me that in this kind of hermeneutic study, where the researcher and the researched are all in our 'nature' social settings to illuminate and examine socially constructed issue,

>*"Reality and knowledge pertain to specific social contexts, and that these relationships will have to be included in an adequate sociological analysis of these contexts" (ibid, p. 15).*

Such ontological interpretation about knowledge, reality, truth and relationships, does not only accurately illustrate the methodological nature of this study regarding my experience as the researcher, my interpretations of my data and my relationships with my participants. It also appropriately underpins the empirical findings in this study regarding lecturers' and students' experiences with employability development, their understandings and perceptions of their experiences, and their relationships with each other. Such epistemological realisation about reflexivity in this research has guided me through my analysis and discussions of my findings – as a reflexive researcher doing a reflexive research.

7.2 Being

In the previous sections, I have already mentioned my awareness on the impact I have to this study as the researcher. To me, qualitative research is a subjective practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), because the researcher brings to the data collection, the analysis and the report writing, some of themselves (Darke and Shanks, 2000). As I have already discussed, the inspiration for this research came from my own experiences, which generated the research questions and design. Clearly, as the researcher for this study, I have brought certain biases into this research. Those include my beliefs, knowledge, experiences and attitudes toward the issues on graduates' employability development and Liverpool John Moores University. This research subjectivity issue is widely acknowledged by scholars (e.g. Heywood and Stronach, 2005), regarding hermeneutics research studies in educational settings. For me, rather than attempting to ignore my own experiences, knowledge and feeling to try to be objective about this research, I feel, like Schultze (2000) pointed out, I should acknowledge my subjectivity and embrace it – after all, this is about 'real' life experiences in their authentic settings.

As this research progresses, my knowledge and understanding progresses also. Such progression does not only regard the knowledge and understanding about employability (e.g. its theories, literatures, etc.), but also involves my methodological and philosophical understandings of how to conduct a Close Up research in HE. Certainly, as my research progresses, I progress as the researcher, and indeed as the research study and I are connected deeply, my personal, professional, social, practical and philosophical being is part of this research – as such, I have intended to demonstrate the meaning of such being to this research.

First of all, it is regarding the being and the environment. In the discussion chapters, there is a clear interpretation of the highly contextual relationship regarding how individual lecturers and students perceive their roles and responsibilities. Such interpretation has been developed with my realisation and understanding on being the researcher of this study. How

I interpreted my role and responsibilities, and how I feel the external environment has influenced my views and interpretations as a graduate turned into an early academic, attempting to phenomenologically examine the issue of employability and employability development in my own faculty (where I studied and worked) as part of a NTF project.

As the insider at I.M.Marsh and UK HE in general, I clearly feel I share some views with our lecturers and students, particularly regarding the political agendas. Such emotion developed greatly when I became more and more involved with the issues professionally, particularly when I started working as a member of staff in the university. As I perceive myself as a researcher in the discipline of higher education, I feel I have the responsibility to contribute my knowledge and understanding to my subject area, at the same time, the core values of HE must be maintained. As I perceive myself as an academic staff member of LJMU and UK HE society, I feel this research has the responsibility to represent some of the academic staff's perspectives (Aim 1). And as a graduate myself, I increasingly feel the system has let me down through its simple calculated way to manage an issue like employability, which has a significant impact on individual student lives. And such views clearly had an impact on how I interpreted the lecturers and students views on employability development. While developing students' employability is an important responsibility of HE, the core values of HE and those degree programmes' subject values must be maintained.

Certainly, in this study, the researcher and the researched are all looking at these issues through an 'educational' lens. Being part of the research setting means my perspective always needs to be reflexive, and such a methodological approach is also embedded in my interpretation. In Chapter 3, I pointed out that this research was originally intended to examine the issues from a students' perspective, as my roles and identity in the faculty change from a graduate to a staff member, the dynamics of my role as the researcher and my relationships with my participants have certainly changed. In addition, my perspective was no longer a student, but a mix of student, lecturer and researcher. This has certainly made the research study complicated, but at the same time provided me with experiences and perspectives to be reflexive about such complexity regarding identities, relationships and context, which led to the interpretations based on Goffman's (1959) work. Clearly illustrated in the paper I wrote with fellow PhD students on the meaning of being reflexive and doing reflexive research (Stronach et al, 2013), there are four different praxis of reflexivity and four different reflexive researchers. The personal, the professional and the wider social, in this study, all are present and reflect on each other. Such process of reflexive thinking is also present within my participants. How students and lecturers looked into their own selves personally, professional and socially and found conflicts, dilemmas and complexities, when trying to make sense of employability through their own experiences and perspectives.

Secondly, as stated in the preface, my past experiences have had a profound impact on my being, not only as the researcher for this study, but also as who I am now. Such relation between the past and the present self is clearly demonstrated through the discussions on the meanings of my participants' past, to their present views on employability. My present being is a collection of my past, organised through my reflexive narrative, a dialogue between my present and my past. It is through this similar approach, the participants in this study also underwent their own reflexive narratives to connect their past with their present. Through such approach, I was able to draw out the final layer of the rich and deep analyses on our students' and lecturers' experiences and understandings, to finally achieve the phenomenological purpose of this study. That is to present a study which reflects "(a) research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life-world of individuals, that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively" (Smith, 1997, p. 80) in an attempt to understand the meaning of 'being' a student/lecturer in today's HE through the phenomenon of employability development.

Clearly, research is a process that holds the past and the present. The immersiveness of the research itself, the researcher, the researched and the research topic (i.e. employability and employability development), mean that not only the reflexive self needs to connect with the past to make sense of the present, but also the reflexive research needs to connect to where it started to illuminate the issues toward where it's heading. The progressiveness of the reflexive being and the reflexive work allow the interpretation to have its richness in two-fold.

In between the reflexive self and the reflexive research, the being and the context, the past and the present, I have come to realise and understand the meaning of reflexivity according to Giddens (1991):

"Everyone is in some sense aware of the reflexive constitution of modern social activity and the implication it has for her or his life. Self-identity for us forms a trajectory across the different institutional settings of modernity…each of us not only has, but lives a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life." (p. 14)

And it is within such reflexivity, I have come to realise and understand the meaning of hermeneutic phenomenology, being and context. As a sociological researcher and the researcher for this study through connecting my own understandings of my personal being with my research being, and my participants' sense of being, and linking the complex immersive process of doing research, with the complex immersive process of employability development. Certainly, in terms of one's employability, it is a reflexive process of awareness of the past and the present, the awareness of the self and the external environment (Yorke, 2004).

7.3 The challenges of close up research in HE

Through my experience with those critical moments where I questioned my participants' intensions and reliabilities, I also started to reflect on the challenges and difficulties of conducting close up research in HE (Prichard and Trowler, 2003). As one of the aims of this study, I have always found the lack of in depth research on HE insiders' views is intriguing, and through doing this research, I have come to the realisation of why it is so 'difficult' to study what is going in HE, and its insiders' experiences and thoughts.

Throughout this research, I have found myself holding multiple identities (some constructed by myself and some imposed by the researched). First of all, there has been a dual identity as the inside outsider. As stated before, I have been in I.M.Marsh Campus since my undergraduate degree from 2004. For me, I am a researcher who is **being native** in the sense that I have been in the I.M.Marsh environment for eight years, in which I am fully aware of the culture of the campus (e.g. ECL and LJMU policies, practices, LTA activities, staff and students, key personnel). In other words, I have always identified and presented myself as a member of I.M.Marsh. However, to my research participants from the OE and PE, I am also an outsider to them because I was never part of their respective programmes. Although I had brief encounters with some of the staff members, I was completely a 'stranger' to their programme cultures (e.g. how they go about their everyday life in their programmes).

Secondly, I also have held a dual identity as a student who was also a member of staff in LJMU. Until now, I have always been a student in ECL ever since I started my undergraduate degree eight years ago. As a result, not only have I presented myself, and have been perceived by some of my participants as a student who knows the students' culture, more importantly, I am also an ECL student who knows the ECL student culture. On the other hand, since I started my doctoral research, I was also involved with a number of research and teaching roles within LJMU. This means I was working with some of the staff members as colleagues in a number of occasions. As a result of this, I also have gained experiences and knowledge about academic staff culture particularly in ECL and LJMU in general.

Finally, because I am part of the NTF project, I also hold this dual identity as a researcher in the project (who belongs to the NTF project) and an independent doctoral research student. This has some effect on my participants who are staff members, as they are aware of the NTF project, especially the people who are involved in it. The major impact this identity has had on my research is my decision on the research questions and directions. Although at times I wanted to have a completely independent doctoral research, which was separated from the project aims and questions, I found this is impossible, as the two things intertwined

with each other. However, as the project was completed in 2012, I realised my research did not solely belong to the project, rather they were overlapping at certain points.

The following diagram presents the positioning of me as the researcher in relation to my research sitting. This is not only a physical representation of where I am as a doctoral research student in this tangible research sitting, it is also positioning of me in the intangible and complex relationships in my research sitting.
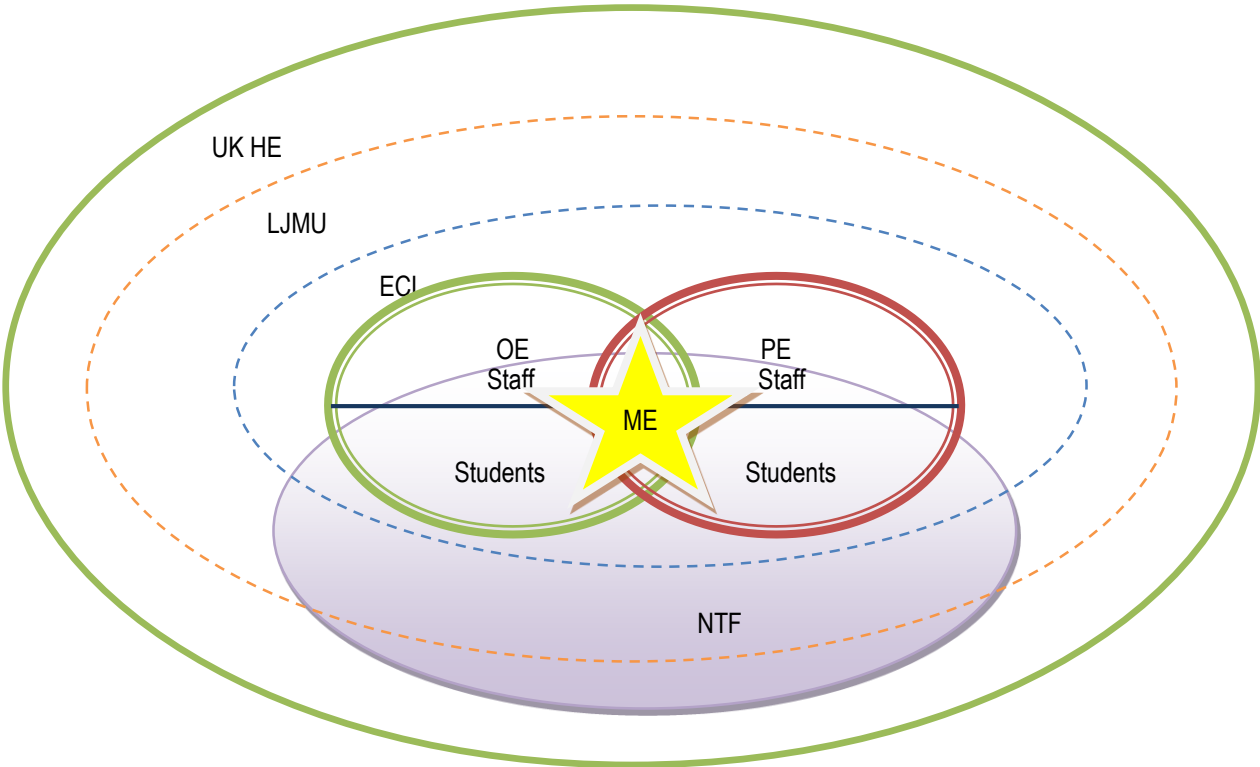
Figure 7 Positioning of me and my research sitting

On one hand, I feel such unique and authentic perspective is the foundation for the original contributions this research can offer to the research community. As a recent graduate from this particular setting (English HE, LJMU and ECL), I have generated the research questions and inspirations based on my own experiences, as opposed to 'political research agendas' (Prichard and Trowler, 2003). This means, those issues are relevant to the questions and problems the research participants have as well. As a result, the participants can feel that they were 'collaborators' in the research process, as opposed to 'subjects' being interviewed by the 'researcher' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Certainly, research participants in this project can really relate themselves to the researchers because they share similar identities as students and staff members from those subject areas in this particular setting. The familiarity the researchers had with the university culture, due to them being recent graduates and staff members, meant that they were able to empathise with their participants'

experiences (e.g. using 'common' language with their participants), and that in turn, the participants were able to relate to the researcher and the research study itself.

Reflecting on the impact my identities had on this research methodologically, it is apparent being a 'native' is beneficial in terms of gaining the research participants' 'real' experiences and thoughts towards issues on how lecturers and students understand and interpret employability and their experiences with employability development. As suggested by Malinowski (1922), "to grasp the native's point of view, his relations to life, to realise his vision of his world" (p. 290) the researcher should "go native". Through this, I have achieved what this research set out to do – empowering the HE insiders through their 'real' life experiences and thoughts. This means, in the research study, I am one of 'us' (to my participants) rather than one of them (i.e. outsiders). As a result of this, the 'insider' perspective has really enhanced the depth and breadth of understanding students' and staff cultures, perspectives and experiences which may not be accessible to an 'outsider' researcher. However, this is not as simple as it seemed in first sight, as discussed in the previous section, considering the immersive and contextual nature of the research, the researcher and the researched.

On the other hand, because of the complex multiple identities I have, as the researcher in this study, there have been a number of methodological dilemmas and issues I experienced during the whole research process.

Dilemma/issue 1: whose voice?

It is always my personal belief that conducting research is about resolving the tension between what we know, and what we don't know (no matter what the researched is.) Research, therefore, is mainly regarding the reflection of our sense of 'self': what is our question; why do we need to know the answer; how is this going to help us. And the fundamental question is who we are. Particularly for social researchers, the process of conducting research is just as important as the result of it. Some people might argue this is not neutral or objective, but no researcher can deny the questions we ask, the methods we adopt and the manners we carry out our research all reflect our personal and professional selves. Indeed as Bell (2003) pointed out:

"Our questions, and by implication, our research interests, reflect our world-views, our beliefs and biases, and ultimately our identity." (p. 171 in Prichard and Trowler, 2003)

Prichard and Trowler (2003) called these questions 'real questions' (p. xiv) (they hold a view that 'the best research comes from people who are close to the action' (p. xv)) which address important issues that have greater impact on HE practices, compared to researches

addressing questions for policymakers, because those questions came from their daily lives. Although I do agree with the point about 'authentic' research, I would like to point of that perspective is vital for close up research. As discussed in Chapter 3, originally, this study started with a student perspective, later it moved on to complex perspectives due to the changes in my roles and identities. Such multiple identities not only brought in issues regarding how my participants perceive me, they also led me into problems regarding how this study is framed and interpreted. As I am longer was the research student using the student-perspective, I have started looking at the issues from those multiple lenses. Going back to the first research aim of this study, I wonder whose voice this study is empowering.

Working through the data reflexively, I came to realise that this dilemma is indeed a 'real' representation of the situation. At this critical point of UK HE when change and uncertainty are the key characteristics, students and lecturers all have their dilemmas on how to balance the reality and their ideologies, as well as those multiple identities they have, and multiple conceptions they hold (Barnett, 2000). Though those multiple identities and conceptions certainly bring conflicts and dissonances to individuals, through reflexivity, one can construct his/her unique identity and perspective for certain context, while still holding his/her general being in the wider context. In this study, while my experiences and perspectives as a former student and a member of staff are part of who I am, ultimately I am the researcher in this context, and all the experiences and perspectives are 'tools' to help me carry on my work as the researcher.

Dilemma/issue 2: How close?

It appears that, it is almost impossible to have a piece of unbiased close up research about HE insiders' experiences and thoughts, as the researcher and the researched are both insiders of the system. Unlike many other organisational/anthological research studies, where often the researcher is an outsider looking in with a pair of critical eyes. For HE close up research, the researcher is already inside and the researched also have their critical eyes – in my case, some of them are more critical than mine. This has created greater challenges to my data collection, as many of my participants are highly aware of the research issues and matters associated with those issues (e.g. its sensitivity, the power dynamics etc.). Sometimes they were deliberately 'leading' the direction of the interviews to where they wanted to go (e.g. how students have clear agenda for their participation – Methodology I, student interview). On one hand, this is a kind of empowering research study setting out to achieve; on the other hand, such highly subjective data led me to question the principle of Close Up research which is about 'real' life experiences of the researched.

Indeed, through my experience with Close Up research, I certainly feel often I am not able to be close enough. Though I am an insider of HE and LJMU, I am not an insider of the two programmes studied in this research, and I am certainly not to those I interviewed. What's real will always be what they feel is the 'reality' in those interviews, and such reality is always interpreted through my perspective. Certainly, any piece of phenomenology research runs the risk of participants 'deliberately' choosing what they want to say *consciously*, but when a research student asks a senior academic staff member on a highly sensitive issue like employability development in their programmes, the matter is beyond ethical issues of anonymity, and therefore the dynamics of the situation must to considered. While questioning whether my participants have told me the 'truth' about their real life experiences and thoughts, I realised this situation itself is a 'real' reflection of HE and the social life we live in general.

Certainly, I have found reporting some data in this study is challenging. On the one hand, there are some very interesting reflections from some participants which adds great richness to the findings and discussions; on the other hand, often such data is confidential and clearly cannot be reported straightforwardly. While I tried my best to present the essence of such data, the 'real' life experiences and thoughts were lost (at least partially). With such experience of conducting close up research in higher education, I realised how important context and identities are to such research, and it is within this reflexive realisation, I looked into Goffman (1959) to interpret my research methodologically and philosophically.

Through looking at Goffman's (ibid) theory on how people present themselves, I reflected on my identity within the research. For instance, in a few interviews with senior lecturers, they always contradicted themselves. Firstly, saying employability should be 'more than just getting jobs', and secondly saying, 'it is about being fit for purpose'. After I pointed out their own contradictions, they admitted 'that what the university wants us to say isn't it?' Certainly, at the front stage of this show, the lecturers felt they needed to adopt the role to reinforce the university's employability agenda, but in the background, in their own safe and personal space, many of them seem to have different ideas and opinions about it. Nevertheless, within the context of my interview, the answers they gave me were the ones they felt appropriate in those circumstances. Even they have other thoughts about certain issues, their answers to my questions during interview were the valid ones to this study.

Such realisation to my own performance in this research as the researcher, further highlighted the challenges of having a piece of unbiased close up research regarding HE insiders' experiences, when the research is an insider herself. One of the biggest issues was that I was perceived differently by my participants in the 'same' framework, as I intended to perform the 'same' act. Indeed, for me, I am the researcher in this study who conducts interviews with volunteer students and lecturers on what their thoughts and experiences are

in relation to employability. However, I soon realised I was never just the researcher in the study. To students, I was one of them, who has shared experiences and values as a fellow student of I.M.Marsh in LJMU; to lecturers, I was a graduate, who then became a colleague. As I hold this unique identity, I believe what I encountered in my interviews, and how I went about interpreting those interviews, were also unique to my identity. Arguably, this research cannot be repeated by a different person with the same procedure, because another person's identities, perspectives and experiences will be different from mine, thus generating a different piece of research.

Through those reflexive examinations of the methodological issues this study has had, it is clear that close up research in HE is certainly a challenging approach to explore and examine those critical HE issues in its authentic settings with its insiders' real experiences and thoughts. As well as having those dilemmas and issues in relation to my identities and perspectives, I have certainly experienced some of the other issues Prichard and Trowler (2003) pointed out as limitations of close up research. The narrative approach to lectures' and students' experiences and thoughts to generate fine-grained data to some people, is certainly not a general representation of HE overall. However, such an approach certainly illuminated vital issues on the dissonances and congruences our students and lectures have, which can inform future research, policies and practices. Although there is no one 'right' answer, this research certainly provided one of the ways to look at the issue, as employability development is such a complex and 'wicked' problem, it could be argued that through the complexity demonstrated in this study, the 'right' answer will never be achieved for such a subjective, contextual and immersive problem.

7.4 Spiral triangulation – doing a reflexive research

In Chapter 3, I have established that Creswell's Spiral (2007) framework was adapted for the data analysis (see Figure 8 below) to illuminate issues through multiple layers, and to ensure the consistency of the analysis. As the analysis process progressed, Creswell's Spiral started to become an overall framework for the research – not only the data analysis but also the overall methodological thinking. Particularly in relation to the reflexive approach I undertook to make sense of the data and the research. Through the Spiral framework, a methodological, theoretical and data triangulation has been established to allow me to connect my methodological thinking into my data interpretation and writing up
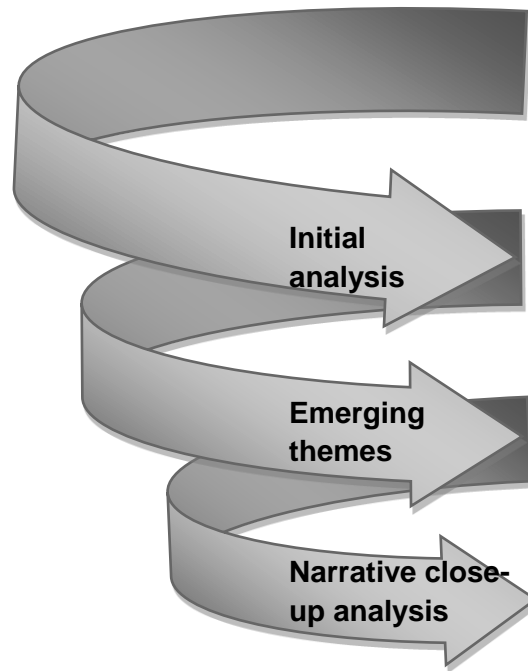
Figure 8 Spiral analysis framework (adapted from Creswell, 2007)

Clearly illustrated in the previous sections of this chapter, the study and I are intertwined together, which I feel is the project I undertook over the past four years. Through carrying out the research, I have developed as a researcher and as I grow as a researcher my research also develops. Particularly for this study, the reflexive ways of thinking are literally applicable in both the research methodology for this study, and my methodological way of thinking. Certainly, I have drawn a number of similarities between the process of doing this research and the process of employability development, its content, frame and context (Stronach et al, 2013). During this process of realisation and reflexivity, the Spiral framework has been used to triangulate the essence of phenomenology (the complex meaning of being and context), the characteristics of close up research (insider's real life experiences and thoughts) and the different ways to reflexivity (personal, professional and social). Here, the data is used to illuminate issues regarding employability and employability development from students' and lecturers' perspectives, but it is also used to make sense of such a methodological way of thinking. A clear example is how my reflexive thinking of my roles and identities in this research connected with how I interpreted the dissonances between students and lecturers views.

As a result, in addition to the two methodological approaches I discussed in Chapter 3, I have also adopted reflexivity as a methodological approach. Though it was not originally intended, I believe its flexible nature means that I certainly can apply it later on in the study without jeopardising the whole methodological validity of the research.

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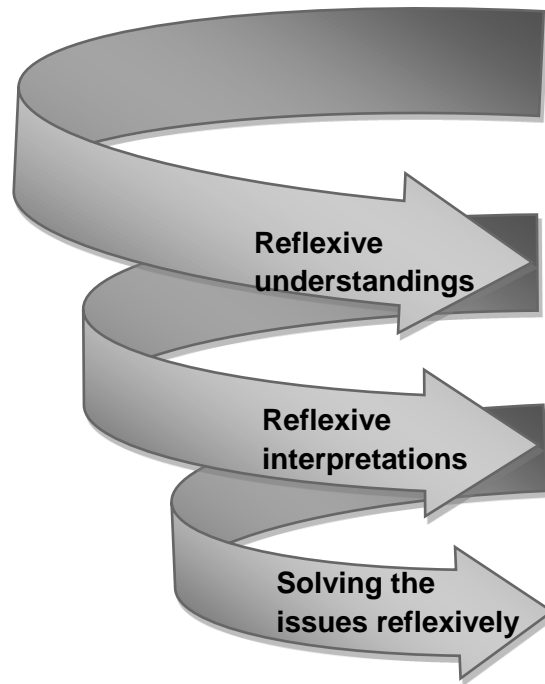
Figure 9 Methodological Spiral framework (adapted from Creswell, 2007)

Here, reflexivity carries three-fold through the Spiral framework (whilst the essence of phenomenology and the characteristics of close up research remain throughout). Firstly, it is my understanding of my research, my research participants and how I affect the study and those participants as the researcher of this study (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). This is a critical social research approach, where the researcher reflects on issues such as those critical moments I had with my participants. Secondly, it is the reflexive interpretations I carried out in the sense as Foucault suggested (1970) that man is both knowing subject and the object of his own study, where I applied my reflexive thinking on the relationship between the research, the researched and the researcher to the relationship between the students and the lecturers. Thirdly, through the first two ways of reflexivity, I argue such ways of thinking can also become the way to solve some of the issues identified in this study – as demonstrated by Giddens (1991), who argued that between the modern structure and agency lays the reflexivity modernity, where reflexive individuals live in an increasingly more self-aware, reflective and reflexive society.

As suggested by Giddens (1991) and demonstrated in my discussion, through such reflexive thinking, individuals can operate under certain structure, as well as pursuing their uniquely constructed personal identities and values, because through this on-going self-reflexive project, individuals can be freer of the ties of traditional roles and positioning, which *"allow the self to achieve much greater mastery over the social relations and social contexts reflexively incorporated into the forgoing of self-identity than was previously possible"* (ibid, p.

149). Through my methodological realisation, though such reflexivity cannot, and will not completely solve the complex and 'wicked' problems themselves, it certainly untied many of the dilemmas I faced, and illuminated a number of deeper issues. This, to me, certainly has achieved the aims this research set out to do, and made progress on the methodological, theoretical and practical understandings regarding the complex and 'wicked' problem of employability development in HE in today's world.

Part IV: Concluding thoughts

In this final part, I will draw together those key findings in this study, particularly in relation to the empirical data and my methodological realisations, in order to answer the research question and aims I set out to achieve. This study was planned to explore:

> "What are the understandings, perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students regarding students' employability development in undergraduate degree programmes?"

Through the use of close up research in HE(Prichard and Trowler, 2003) to generate 'fine-grained' details of the thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding students' employability development that lecturers and students encounter in their degree programmes, in order to:

1. empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment,
2. identify dissonances and congruence in perceptions by comparing and contrasting the experiences and thoughts from the two groups in order to illuminate some of the vital problems in this issue;
3. sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE;
4. develop methodological understandings regarding conducting research on and about higher education, particularly those focusing on the culture and everyday life of HE insiders.

Here, I do not intend to summarise all the key findings from each chapter as I have already done so at the end of every chapter in their own summary sections; rather it concludes with the issues it has illuminated in order to prompt the next stage for understandings and practices regarding employability development in HE, and research studies in employability development in HE. As I pointed out before, although this is the end of the thesis, the PhD study carries on. After the final conclusion, a brief examination of methodological, theoretical and practical   recommendations will be made in relation to the future directions and actions for employability development in HE, and employability development research studies.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

8.1 Some general thoughts

Through the literature, methodological and empirical examinations carried out by this study, it is clear that employability is certainly a complex concept that holds multiple conceptions – political, economic, social and educational. As such, the employability development policies, practices and theoretical understandings are also complex and multi-dimensional. Not only has it to connect the macro with the micro-level concerning the balance between the structure and the agencies, but also has to consider the diverse perspectives from its various stakeholders.

In this study, two of the key stakeholder groups' (i.e. the students and the lecturers) experiences, understandings and perceptions were explored and examined. Although the number of participants in this study is small, it clearly demonstrated significant complexity in relation to what experiences individuals encounter, how such experiences have been interpreted for future actions, and how individuals perceive the meaning of employability and employability development through their experiences. The key issues illuminated in this study are that there are significant dissonances between the two groups' understandings and perceptions; as well within each group, there are dissonances and conflicts. What's more, within each individual, there are conflicts and dilemmas. The complexity is contextual, subjective, relative, reflexive and immersive which again underlines the wickedness of employability development in higher education.

Despite more than a decade ago, the political employability agenda has placed the great responsibility of developing highly skilled HE graduates with great employability, in order to improve Britain's economic competitiveness globally. Graduate employability development remains a significant issue and challenge to HE in the UK and around the globe. Certainly, as demonstrated in this study, employability development in HE is a complex and 'wicked' problem which might not ever be fully understood, examined and solved. This is not only because there are too many stakeholders with different, sometimes conflicting understandings, interests and needs, but also as its immersive nature leads to complex changes all the time. As illustrated in this study, such change is not only factual but also subjective and contextual. As Fullan (2001) pointed out that "education change is technically simple and socially complex" (p. 69). Thus, we must face the challenges of the issues as being socially complex, coming up with ideas and solutions that deal with such complexity socially.

To fill the research gaps many quantitative research studies have left, this study certainly has demonstrated the need to research HE insiders' views and experiences, as although quantitative studies have identified what to develop, and justified why HE through numbers, they failed to examine how such agenda is perceived and experienced by the people who are directly involved with employability development in this daily practices. Rather than primarily focusing on the economic and political perspectives, objectively and quantitatively identifying employability skills and skill gaps, and pedagogically examining how teaching, learning and assessment of such skills are happening and should be happening. Employability development in HE should also focus on socially related issues and problems. Through different research approaches, we can illuminate different aspects of graduate employability development in order to better our understandings of the issues and problems, and inform our policies and practices.

8.2 Some thoughts on lecturers' experiences, understandings and perceptions

Certainly, in this study, the lecturers have presented fruitful thoughts and comprehensive narratives, which demonstrate their sophisticated understanding on employability and their rich experiences and perceptions toward employability development in their degree programmes and in HE in general. Clearly, how they perceive the issues is vital because such perceptions affect their pedagogical principles and practices.

In this study, lecturers clearly displayed their interests in supporting their students' employability development because for them, it matters not only to the students themselves, but also to the programmes, and their own professional reputation, as well as the future of their respective profession/industry. Any simple assumptions on their indifferent attitude towards employability development are incorrect and inappropriate. Certainly, beneath the skills, knowledge, experiences and competences for employability, it's a deep ontological and epistemological connection between their subjects, HE and their students' learning and development. Although employability development is not the only purpose of higher education, it certainly is one of the primary roles and responsibilities HE holds to its students, and it should be embedded within HE teaching and learning with other key aspects as such academic learning, professional development and personal development.

Due to their individual differences in personal experiences, positions in the institution, professional and academic beliefs and so on, lecturers certainly have different views and understandings toward particular issues regarding employability development. Considering diversity and autonomy are two of the key characteristics of higher education, such differences are expected. While diversity should be encouraged, some of the conflicts

caused by differences seem to be because of the lack of communication, which could be avoided. In addition, there is a clear clash between their belief on their academic autonomy, and their perception on the political employability agenda, which as a result seems their apathetic and sceptical attitude towards institutional level employability initiatives. And such conflict is deep rooted. Underneath their apathetic and sceptical attitude, is the clash between their ideologies on the values and meanings of their subject, their profession and the HE and their perceived realities.

Through lecturers' understandings and perceptions, it is clear that being a lecturer in today's HE has complex roles and perspectives. Through exploring and examining their experiences and thought on employability and employability development, it is evident that the issue is much wider and deeper than the pedagogical design and practices on teaching and learning for employability development. There is a clear link between their personal, academic and professional ontological and epistemological beliefs and values, and how they perceive and approach employability development in their programmes and in HE in general, considering the significance of their roles in employability development. While policies are focusing on convincing academics to take part in employability development, and research studies are focusing on identifying what employability development in HE should include, and telling academics how to teach and assess those components, there is a need to place significant focus on making connections between academics values and beliefs, with the political and economic values of employability development. After all, top-down approach alone only leads to misunderstandings, dissonances and conflicts which is ineffective and destructive to the 'actual' employability development in higher education.

8.3 Some thoughts on students' experiences, understandings and perceptions

Barnett (2008) has argued it is inappropriate to talk about HE without knowing the students' views and experiences. Certainly students in this study have demonstrated the complex meaning of being a university student in today's HE through their immersive, contextual and highly subjective and relative experiences with their employability development. Reflecting upon those experiences, students displayed sophisticated understanding toward employability, their own employability development and employability development in their degree programmes and in HE in general. In this study, students have proven that a simple assumption on their consumer attitude towards HE and surface level understanding towards their employability development is incorrect.

For students, employability development is clearly an ongoing process that connects deeply with their personal and educational past, thus looking at employability development in HE in isolation is inappropriate. Employability is also highly relative and subject, which means, on the one hand, certain knowledge, skills and qualities are essential; on the other hand, it all depends on the context in which students apply essential qualities, knowledge and skills. Finally, employability is contextual, which means the development of employability is also contextualised. Through those perceptions and understandings from a students' perspective, clearly for students, employability development should be an interactive learning process – rather than focusing primarily on certain 'objectively' defined employability skills, competences and qualities. It is about their awareness of themselves, their subject, their profession and the society they live in, and applying themselves accordingly. Through students' reflections in this study, it is also clear that their HE learning experiences have provided them with necessary opportunities to gain those essential employability qualities, competences and skills. Thus any assumptions on the lack of appropriate employability development by universities on those skills and competences seem to be incorrect.

Like the lecturers' understandings and perceptions, it is expected to see individual student's unique personal take on employability and employability development. The key challenge is how to affectively channel those personal experiences and thoughts, to develop unique employability traits and characteristics, because for those students, such uniqueness is a vital characteristic for them to be employable. Like the lecturers' dilemmas regarding their complex roles and perspectives in higher education, students also have their own conflicts, dilemmas and challenges, and in this study we saw the issues regarding the conflicts between their ideologies and perceived realities, their personal and their professional values, and their pedagogical and professional identities. Again, although some of the deep conflicts and issues are complex and 'wicked' problems; others could be solved through reflection and communication at personal and interpersonal levels - as demonstrated through the reflections and communications students made in this study to achieve better self-awareness on their employability and meaningful feedback to their programmes on their learning experiences in higher education.

8.4 Some thoughts on the dissonances and congruence between students and lecturers

Originally, this study set out to contribute to the overall objective of the NTF project, in relation to curriculum design and pedagogical practices (see the figure below) (Cable et al, 2008). Since the research started, it is clear that the perception dissonances are not just misunderstandings by key stakeholders on what to develop and how to develop them, as employability is a complex concept. Some of the dissonances will remain as different

perspectives from different stakeholders and are always going to have disagreements and conflicts. As a result, instead of focusing on closing the gaps, this study focused on exploring and examining what are in those gaps and why they are there.
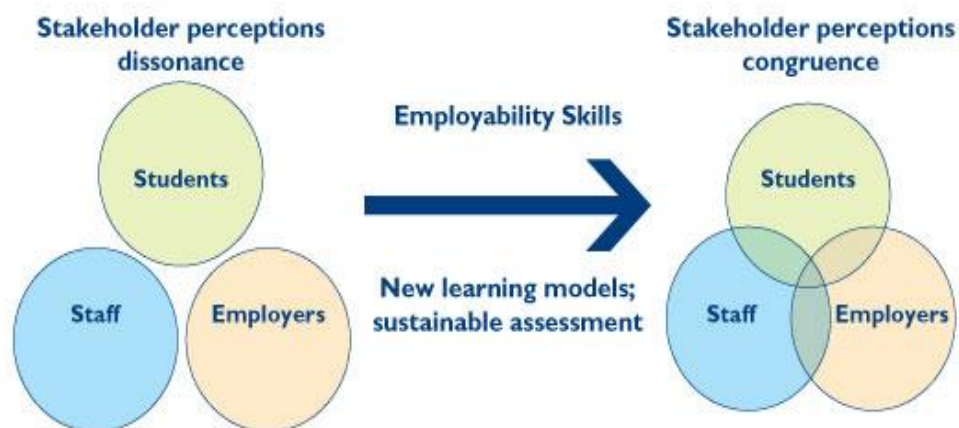
Figure 10 Original NTF project objective

Clearly, our lecturers and students share a range of congruence on their understandings and perceptions. Such congruence is not just surface level definitions, but consists of deeper ontological and epistemological understandings regarding the value and meaning of higher education, their degree subjects and their respective industry/profession. Perhaps because the nature of the two programmes with their deeply rooted professional learning and training aspects and clearly defined vocational routes, students have demonstrated an apprenticeship attitude towards their lecturers and their learning, which as a result could argue that they have been closely following the footsteps of their lecturers.

However, certainly students have a much narrower and more personal level understanding and perception towards employability and employability development than their lecturers, it is expected there would be some significant dissonances, due to their different perspectives. While clearly the lecturers experience and perceive the issues on their programme, subject and profession level, thus having much more and wider aspects to consider, compared to their students. Such perspective should be communicated to their students through their teaching and learning practices in order for the students to have a higher level awareness on their employability in relation to their subject area and their profession/industry.

Finally, as illuminated by this study, there is a clear mismatch of identities between students and lecturers, as such identity construction and presentation in relation to employability development is highly contextual and subjective. Again, the dissonances and conflicts associated with such problematic identities could be better understood by students and lecturers, through personal and interpersonal level reflections and communications. Though

a total agreement on every issue is not achievable, at least when disagreement and conflict appears, lecturers and students could have a more transparent understanding on each other's perspectives. As argued by Barrie (2007), curriculum reforms and interventions are not likely to be successful, unless the key stakeholders acknowledge and address the fact that there are diverse understandings and perceptions, and such diversity leads to variations in practices. Adding to Barrie's suggestion, this kind of transparent dialogue needs to be not only between the authorities (e.g. policy makers and university management) and lecturers, but also amongst all the stakeholders themselves in order to progress current practices on employability development in higher education.

8.5 Some thoughts on methodology

When this study was undertaken in 2008, I understood methodology as the theory behind my chosen methods (in other words, it explains why I picked specific tools to do this research). Today, I conclude this study's methodology, with the view that it is the philosophical, methodological and theoretical underpinning of not only what tools I used, but also how I view my topic and my participants, and why I have done what I have done. In other word, it consists of the triangulations of the ontology and epistemology of my theories, my methods and my philosophical perspectives. With such view, I believe the phenomenological reflexive close up approach does not only apply to how I studied my participants, but also concerns the methodological, theoretical and practical implications and applications to how my participants themselves could use to examine and understand employability and employability development.

Throughout this research, many participants (students and lecturers) have expressed how much they appreciated the opportunities they had to engage with some deep personal reflections on their experiences, their roles and identities, and the contextualised issues they have had. This phenomenological approach to reflection certainly has brought out students' and lecturers' conscious awareness which is vital to their approaches to HE employability development.

In this research, I have had troublesome experiences dealing with the double hermeneutic nature of social science (Giddens, 1987). It is through different approaches to reflexivity, I was able to understand those problems and deal with them accordingly. Certainly, many of those problems share similar nature and characteristics to the issues our lecturers and students are facing in their employability development experiences, thus a reflexive approach to employability development could indeed illuminate and solve some of the problems, particularly in relation to the dissonances between lecturers and students.

Chapter 9 – Recommendations

Considering the findings in this study, here, I will make a brief summary on the methodological, theoretical and practical recommendations to the future of employability development in HE and the future of research on employability development in higher education.

- Listening to insiders' voices:

In Chapter 4 and 5, there are a number of recommendations made by the students and lecturers in this study, regarding what employability development should consist of and how they should be implemented. Those recommendations need to be considered and implemented critically in order to address some of the problems employability development in HE is facing at the moment in relation to the lack of consideration of insiders' voices.

Moving towards and beyond the Interactive employability (Gazier, 1998) through letting individuals taking ownership of employability - although different perspectives would suggest a different starting point of this reflexive circle of employability production and reproduction. Through this research and the perspectives of the insiders (particularly the lecturers), students and graduates are the future of our work force, hence the starting point of new generations of PE teachers and outdoor educators. While certain industry and political requirements must be fulfilled (as the political, economic and social implications of HE politics and practices are at high stake), it is clear from the perspectives of our insiders, greater de-centralised employability governance from the government and business leaders, and greater individual's ownership of employability, seem to be the way to move the current employability issue forward. To our lecturers and students, this is the purpose of HE in today's day and age, in relation to its contribution to employability in a wide sense (dealing with issues such as social mobility and inequality) (Barnett, 2000, 1997). It can also help to reduce the level of conflict at their various levels by first identifying, realising and understanding the conflicts themselves. This also deals with the needs of individual students, as it focuses on letting them taking the matter of their own employability through learning and understanding themselves, their own learning and the meaning of higher education, employability and real life experiences.

To further explore and examine those findings from this study, more research is needed to conduct with a variety of degree programmes in different disciplines and different institutions, through different approaches (e.g. observation) with the aims to, firstly, examine the impact of subject traits on lecturers' and students' ontological and epistemological thinking in relation to their teaching, learning and employability development. Secondly, explore the dilemmas

and conflicts the insiders hold amongst and within themselves, in relation to the contextual nature of HE teaching, learning and employability development. Finally, investigate the dissonances caused by multiple roles and identities in different contexts.

- Reflective and reflexive research and practices:

While asking the government and business leaders to leave HE alone is not practical (considering the social, political and economic values of graduate employability), realistically, students and lecturers should engage with their understandings and perceptions, not only reflectively but also reflexively (see Giddens, 1991), as many of the current problematic employability issues are socially and politically constructed.

While reflective practices (e.g. see Knowles, 2008; Moon, 2004 for reflective practices in HE curriculum) deal with the practices and the practical applications of theories in one's professional work, reflexivity can certainly help individuals to deal with concepts like one's identities, conflicts, change, etc., which as illuminated in this study, are vital to modern employability conceptions (vital to modern life in general), as well creating many problems to today's employability development in higher education.

It could be argued that reflexivity could help students move away from the belief that there is only a right way of being employable (the narrow employability agenda's way), which risks them becoming acquiescence and strategic learners, who naively follow the political and economic agenda (Biggs and Tang, 1999). As autonomy is a goal of employability (to students and lecturers) and HE(ibid), being reflexive is a way of thinking, professionally and philosophically, which I believe can shift how we perceive the notions of employability and employability development in higher education. While academics have the ability to do so, they lack the time and opportunities to engage with in-depth reflection and reflexivity individually and collectively, with opportunities and the ability to carry out reflective and reflexive thinking and practice in higher education. Consequently, it will have impact on policies, strategies and our practices, as suggested by Giddens (1991), that a high level of reflexivity means that an individual can shaping their own norms, tastes, desires, and so on.

This can also build professional and academic trust between students and lecturers, in which a neutral and professional partnership can be established, where students and lecturers can learn from themselves, amongst their peers and colleges as well as from each other. The mass diversities of learning experiences can be utilised, which as a result can lead to fulfilment of the ideal HE ethos.

For the future research directions, certainly a reflexive approach to close up research in HE could be further developed based on the discussions in Chapter 7. Such approach needs to

consider the three-fold of reflexivity: reflexive researcher (Stronach et al, 2013); reflexive interpretation (Foucault, 1970) and reflexive solutions (Giddens, 1991), to appropriately address the double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1991) nature of close up research in higher education. In addition, a reflexive theoretical and practical framework to employability development in HE needs to be further researched and developed, through reflexive close up research approach to inform the policies and practices in HE institutions regarding employability development in degree programmes.

- Research informed policies and practices:

Finally, going back to the NTF project which this study was part of, it is clear that the research informed approach (Healey and Jenkins, 2005; Griffiths, 2004) the project took, has had many positive impacts on the institutions' policies and practices, as well as the practices of those programmes involved in the project (Cable et al, 2012). Firstly, through the three doctoral research students, we were able to research some of the key stakeholder groups in-depth via different perspectives and approaches – individually as three pieces of doctoral research studies and collectively as a project work. Secondly, our close relationship with the participants and programmes involved in this study through our close up research approach, meant that we were able to feedback to the programmes to inform their curriculum design and pedagogical practices timely and accordingly. Through my work with the OE programme, a new PDP strand has been put in their revalidated curriculum which is a positive and practical outcome of this study. Thirdly, as the project was led by senior academics who are also in management teams locally and at institutional level, the localised research informed practices were able to feed forward to institutional level policies and practices. In short, the approach this research and the NTF project took seems to be effective in many ways, producing doctoral researchers who will carry on working in this topic area, developing theoretical and methodological understandings to contribute to this topics area, while informing practices at local, institutional and possibly national levels.

Certainly, this approach faced a number of challenges, some of them I have reflected on in this study regarding the ethical and methodological dilemmas. In its final report to HEA (Cable et al, 2012), the project team has reflected on some of the significant challenges we had. Nevertheless, this approach should be further implemented at a sector level for individual degree programmes, using research to inform their curriculum design and pedagogical practices, while creating a critical but effective communication process between the lecturers and the students. For institutions, connecting those local research and practices to act and react accordingly to its institutional characteristics, while effectively promoting good practices (to avoid reinventing the wheel), for the HE sector, subject centres certainly can utilise 'local' research and practices and promote and share findings and thoughts

through their websites, conferences and so on. For central organisations like HEA and HEFCE, this is a way for them to listen to 'local' voices. Through this research and the NTF project, clearly this approach can effectively link all the key stakeholders together to have a more holistic, comprehensive and authenticity (Prichard and Trowler, 2003) understanding regarding the issues on employability development in higher education.

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Volume 2

Appendix 1 NTF bid

**NTFS Projects 2007-08
Stage Two Project Bid**

Project Title (not included in the word limit):

Developing Learning and Assessment Opportunities for a Complex World

Lead Institution (not included in the word limit):

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)

Executive summary (Maximum 200 words)

The employability and skills agenda has highlighted a range of curriculum design challenges for the learning, teaching and assessing of what have been described as 'wicked' competences or 'soft' skills, graduate attributes and complex achievement most valued by employers. These competences are often hard to define and problematic to teach and assess and require development of a pedagogy for supercomplexity.

This project seeks to identify aspects of dissonance and congruence in perceptions, understandings and expectations of staff, students and employers in relation to preparing students for employability in the 21st Century.

The project will examine the role of the curriculum in developing students' self-awareness and ability to articulate their skills. It will do this through a triangulation of employer, academic and student perceptions in order to identify gaps and dissonance in their respective linguistic frameworks. Close up research will be utilised to develop new integrated learning models via professional practice, interviews, student and staff 'immersive experience' stories and reflective accounts. As an outcome, the project seeks to establish how 'gaps' can be narrowed to produce authentic assessment strategies, new learning opportunities and more closely aligned learning and assessment models. **190 words**

Background

There is a clearly stated national skills agenda (Leitch 2006) for the role of higher education in delivering the well-educated, highly skilled workforce that employers need to stay

competitive in the global economy, and, where working in partnership with a growing number of stakeholders will be important in responding to the complex challenges of global competition and rapid pace of change in an increasingly diverse society (Hefce 2007).

In addressing the employability skills agenda, LJMU has adopted a distinctive and unique approach. All undergraduate programmes now include an integrated curriculum model of work-related learning and the opportunity to develop higher-level World of Work (WoW) skills. This student-focused skills agenda has been developed in consultation with key figures from the world of business and work, securing employer engagement at an unprecedented level.

Our experience of developing an institution-wide employability skills agenda has, however, highlighted the curriculum design challenges for the learning, teaching and assessing of what have been described as 'wicked' competences, the 'soft' skills, graduate attributes and complex achievements most valued by employers, competences that are often hard to define and problematic to assess (Knight and Yorke, 2003; Page and Knight, 2007; Knight, 2007; Yorke, 2008).

The employers that have worked with the university to develop 'World of Work' skills tell us that they want emotionally intelligent employees who can demonstrate a clear awareness of organisational cultures and ethics, work related behavioural skills and professionalism. This highlights issues of ethical engagement more complex than codes or prescriptive theories and that are more concerned with character, identity, virtues and related skills that help students develop their 'ethical literacy' (Robinson 2005), critical thinking and reflection skills. Students need to develop self-awareness, critical understanding and 'intelligent scepticism', (Portwood 2000) to operate effectively in a complex and uncertain world. Preparing students for this super complex and uncertain world itself requires a pedagogy for supercomplexity (Barnett 2000).

If the level of students' self awareness of their own skills, attributes and values serves as an indicator of their ability to 'succeed' in certain situations, rather than simple possession of 'skills', a key issue is the role that the curriculum can play in developing students' levels of self awareness and their ability to articulate skills and knowledge. More specifically, it raises issues about the role of assessment in this process. As Knight (2007b:5) says, *"when it comes to 'wicked' 'competences', a radical curriculum reappraisal leaches into a radical assessment appraisal."* Recent work on assessment and grading (Knight, 2007a; Yorke, 2008) brings into sharp focus ongoing challenges for the sector in meaningfully assessing complex achievements. Boud and Falchikov (2007) see the engagement of students as participants in this process as key in promoting 'sustainable' assessment for lifetime learning.

Purpose

In our own exploration of the 'wicked' problem of the curriculum design challenges for the learning, teaching and assessment of 'wicked' competences, it was a third year BSc Sports Science student's assignment for an 'Applied Science and Football' module that encapsulated the key purpose of our proposed project. The assignment, written in the format of an academic paper entitled *'Critical Reflections from the First Step into Professional Football: A Self Narrative from a Sport Science Student on Applied Practice,* is a reflective account of a work placement in a professional football club. In describing initial difficulties in adapting to an unfamiliar and culturally different environment, the student highlighted a reality gap between his course experience and his first days on placement. He went on to give a critically reflective account of his subsequent learning in terms of acquisition of craft and professional knowledge and skills of communication, working in a team, people management, innovation, leadership and sense of responsibility, *"all tacit knowledge that could not be learned from textbooks and PowerPoint presentations"*. Importantly, in analysing what he learnt from working with skilled performers and experienced professionals, the student was able to draw on published literature and a taught module on reflective practice, *"I now fully appreciate the value of reflective practice….it has allowed me to think deeply about myself, to learn about my strengths and weaknesses, my emotions, and my reactions to things"*.

The assignment, and the authentic student voice within it, is used here not because it provides an account of an effective work placement in which much good learning took place, but because it serves to illustrate the curriculum design challenges for the learning, teaching and assessing of 'wicked' competences, 'soft' skills, graduate attributes and complex achievements. Prior to placement, what might have been the BSc Science and Football student's perceptions of his skills and expectations of working in a football environment? What dissonance was there between his perceptions and the reality of the situation? What was it about this student that enabled him to turn a potentially very difficult/challenging situation into one where he thrived? What role was played by personality and prior learning? To what extent was the placement integrated into curriculum and assessment design? How appropriate was the assessment design in terms of judging what learning had taken place? To what extent did it promote sustainable learning for the longer term? These are the sorts of questions that we hope to explore and illuminate through the proposed project.

It is clear that there is a sector-wide issue here that would benefit from more 'close-up' work to further knowledge and practice (Knight and Page, 2007:3). It is also clear that the issue is not just about assessment, it is also about integrative learning and aligning assessment with curriculum. Boud and Falchikov's (2006; 2007) ideas on sustainable assessment provide useful starting points from which to review our own assumptions and practices. They give

consideration to how students might be better prepared for learning in what can be termed informal or non-deliberative (Eraut 2000:115) learning settings that might dominate the rest of their lives, for example, home and workplace . Boud and Falchikov's features of sustainable assessment (2006:407-410) resonate with some of our own findings in respect of employers valuing authentic forms of assessment. The project will, therefore, illuminate the practical and pedagogical issues of designing curriculum and assessment strategies that support notions of sustainable assessment and satisfy subject-based requirements.

Key questions will be: how can teaching, learning and assessment practices take more heed of workplace needs and how can the workplace be better informed of HE objectives? HE, employers and students speak their own languages and the project aim will be to promote two- way knowledge transfer that provides a means of bridging understandings.

Prior work that we have undertaken in the context of the research and evaluation strategy of our Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) has highlighted the problem but it is beyond the scope of the CETL's remit and funding capacity to take this work forward. However, our research focused on CETL employability initiatives provides us with strong foundations from which to work. Furthermore, the project will be able to draw on our nationally recognised subject based research on reflective practice in Sport and Exercise Science and on developments associated with the university's strategic employability initiative. Collectively, these have identified gaps and tensions between what individuals believe (particularly about themselves) and what they actually experience or do in particular situations. A particular interest of the project will be to explore how the experience of discomfort or dissonance motivates individuals (students, academic, employers) to act. In drawing on cognitive dissonance theory from the area of social psychology (Festinger, 1957; Aronson 2003) we are interested in how students can be encouraged to use dissonance as an opportunity for learning and development rather than for developing avoidance strategies.

4.   Objectives

The project will have two key objectives:

i.   To identify dissonance and congruence in the perceptions, understandings and expectations of academic staff, students and employers of the employability skills and competences expected of 21st century graduates

ii.   To use outputs from (i) as a basis for working with key stakeholders to develop and evaluate aligned learning and assessment opportunities that will bridge perceived gaps in stakeholder perceptions and understandings.

A sub-set of these key objectives will be:

iii.   To investigate how complex attributes and skills can be meaningfully demonstrated by students (and who should be involved in the assessment)

iv.   To determine how the curriculum can be designed to develop higher-level skills and build in a more structured reflection process

v.   To evaluate whether the attributes for integrating the taught and applied aspects of experiential learning are best supported by whole programme delivery or through modular based learning activities.

The institutionally driven strategic employability initiative and the change models being adopted by our employability focused Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), with its strong internal and external connectivity, means that we are well positioned to address these questions. In addition, the fact that our portfolio of programmes includes those that operate and are regulated by professional standards and bodies (e.g. teacher training and coaching), and those that do not, means that further insights and understanding will be gained through evaluation of the impact of these approaches in different programme structures.

5.   Methodology

The research focus of our project will be the subject areas of our Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Professional Learning, spanning programmes in the disciplines of Education and Science in sport, exercise, dance and physical activity. Our rationale here is that the National Teaching Fellows who will lead this project are closely associated with the CETL, which has already built on a common subject focus and a generic employability theme to develop distinctive change models reflecting different disciplinary contexts and cultures. In Science this has resulted in planned, wholescale curriculum change to embed employability within the curriculum. In Education, the approach has been to develop a diverse range of concurrent, projects and activities to develop students' employability, enterprise and leadership skills, both within and outside of the curriculum. Furthermore, the Project will draw on the CETL's well developed research and evaluation strategy and the expertise of the

university's educational development unit which coordinates the CETL as a University-wide learning and teaching initiative.

Mixed method approaches involving 'close up' research will be applied and triangulated. The rationale for adopting this approach is that its distinguishing feature comes from concerns and issues raised by the daily practice of higher education (Prichard and Trowler, 2003). The intention is not necessarily to find the solution, but rather to gain further insights and more finely grained knowledge and understanding of the problem to inform intervention strategies and further debate. Qualitative methods will include observation of professional practice, interviews, student and staff 'immersive experience' stories and reflective accounts. Supplementary quantitative data will be obtained through questionnaires and surveys of stakeholders.

This will involve:

- Drawing on existing theoretical frameworks for professional learning (eg Eraut, 1994, 2000) and assessment (*op.cit.*) and locating the project within current regulatory frameworks (codes of practice, benchmark statements, professional competency frameworks) and in the context of work on, for example, the teaching of ethics and critical thinking (Day, 1999; Kienzler, 2001; Wals and Jickling, 2002)
- Triangulating the perceptions, understanding and expectations of key stakeholders (academic staff, students, employers) in relation to the employability skills and competences expected of 21st century graduates
- Building on nationally recognised research expertise within the university on reflective practice (Gilbourne and Richardson 2005, 2006; Knowles et al 2001, 2005, 2006) and research outputs from the university's Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Professional Learning (LJMU, 2007)
- Staff-student collaborative research. In addition to Student Fellowships, student involvement will be easily incorporated into existing curricular activities, such as placements, projects and assignments (as exemplified, by the earlier reference to the student assignment).

Appendix 2 MPhil to PhD transfer

Title: *Teaching, learning and assessment for employability development in Higher Education to effectively prepare 21ˢᵗ century graduates for the world of work: experiences, understandings, perceptions and attitudes of lecturers and students*

This report is an MPhil to PhD transfer for the proposed research study (as stated above). The main aim of this report is to update the progression of this research study since December 2008. In this report, the context of this research and a brief literature review will be examined to seek the current understanding and research gaps within this topic area. Then, research question, aims, rationale and purposes will be presented. Research methodology and methods will also be stated with theoretical underpins, and reflections from pilot studies. In addition, as well as presenting all the milestones (e.g. research proposal) achieved so far, findings from the Phase 1 of the initial research will be reported and discussed. Finally, plans for the PhD stage of this research study will be presented.

1. Introduction and context:

Employability, as a social phenomenon emerged over the last 100 years in contexts related to industrial development, labour markets and requirements on employment related issues within the society, can be defined in many perspectives (Gazier, 1998). Although, employability was about addressing issues in relation to social inclusion, poverty and employment through quantitative measurement methods (e.g. the number of people employed or unemployed) during the early and mid 20ᵗʰ century, the concept of employability has taken a central place in labour market and economics policies in the UK during the past decade (e.g. Leitch, 2006, McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). Within its theoretical, political and practical concepts, employability has been used as both a predominantly labour supply (i.e. 'narrow' concept) and a labour demand-supply concept (i.e. 'broad' concept) at a macro-level (McQuaid et al, 2005). Accordingly, the 'narrow' concept of employability is affected by three broader labour demand factors, namely the rise of service based economy, embracing education and work to end poverty and social exclusion, and the notions of lifelong learning and boundary-less careers (McGrath, 2007). As suggested by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), the 'narrow' concept of employability are a subset of a 'broad' approach in which the narrow approach relates primarily to individuals' readiness for work whereas the broad approach focuses more external factors that influencing one's employment as well as individual's personal employment quality.

Since the mid-1990s, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been encouraged by government policies (e.g. the Dearing Report, National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education [NCIHE], 1997) and labour market demands to promote the 'narrow' concept of employability throughout curricula and pedagogies (McGrath, 2007) which build up on the long-standing relationship between HE and economy since the 1960s (e.g. Robbins, 1963). Accordingly (e.g. Department for Business Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2009; *Higher Education Funding Council for England [*HEFCE], 2008; Leitch, 2006; NCIHE, 1997), HE plays a fundamental role in making the country more competitive by promoting the knowledge-based aspects of an economy in order to fulfil the 'broad' requirements from the market by providing graduates with the types of knowledge, skills and qualities to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy (Tomlinson, 2007). As a result, employability is centrally located as one of the most vital curriculum and pedagogy challenges for 21ˢᵗ century English HE (Maher and Graves, 2008) together with other key economic, social and political concepts (e.g. internationalisation) (Shiel and Takeda, 2008).

This agenda is reinforced by the new government plan for HE for the next 10 years (BIS, 2009). It is clear that the concept of employability for HE from the government point of view is to supply graduates to the labour market with skills and qualities to fill the skill gaps in order to sustain the country's economical strength among developed and developing countries in an increasingly demanding and competitive environment (BIS, 2009), which supports Gazier (1998)'s theory on the concept of employability in terms of reflecting social demand and requirement on employment issues. In order for HEIs to fulfil this purpose, the government is pressuring HEIs to 'produce a statement on how they promote student employability, setting out what they are doing to prepare their students for the labour market, and how they plan to make information about their employment outcomes of their provision available to prospective students' in order to address the 'top concern' of business in which 'students should leave university better equipped with a wider range of employability skills' (BIS, 2009, p61). As result, HEIs have stated to promote and deliver institutional level employability development programmes (e.g. the 'World Of Work' [WOW] initiative in Liverpool John Moores University [LJMU], BIS, 2009).

1.1 Employability in HE: Wicked and complex

Defining employability in HE is not as straightforward as might appear (Maher and Graves, 2008). According to Harvey (2004) and Knight and Yorke (2003), employability is neither about the actual acquisition of a 'graduate job' (which is affected by the 'broad' employability concept) nor the graduate employment rates. Rather, it is about students' achievements (i.e. skills, competences, understandings and attributes) and potential to obtain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations with benefits to themselves, the community and the economy. Although these definitions and justifications by Harvey (2004) and Knight and Yorke (2003) are widely acknowledged by the employability development circle in HE (e.g. the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team [esect]); in the wider HE environment, the concepts and definitions of employability still appears to be unclear and confusing (see Lees, 2002). For example, Knight and Yorke (2003) highlighted five meanings of employability in which multiple perspectives and views (e.g. politics, education, economics, etc.) are addressed. With regard to Yorke and Page (2007), because employability as a concept is problematic to define, it creates 'wicked' problems for HE in relation to curriculum design, deliver and understanding. For instance, in terms of terminology, employability often also refers or relates to graduate skills (Lees, 2002), generic skills (Barrie, 2006), graduate attributes (ibid), soft skills (Lees, 2002) and transferable skills (ibid). Without an apparent concept, the purposes of employability development are likely to be unclear and confusing hence inappropriate and in effective pedagogy and curricula can emerge in HE (Yorke and Page, 2007; Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003).

With regard to Yorke and Page (2007), employability is also 'wicked' because it echoes the notion of 'wicked' problems (Conklin, 2003 cited in Yorke and Page, 2007). Accordingly (Yorke and Page, 2007), employability shares the key features of 'wicked' problems, which are that:

"1. The problem is not understood until after formulation of a solution;

2. Stakeholders have radically different world views and different frames for understanding the problem;
3. Constraints and resources to solve the problem change over time;
4. The problem is never solved." (p. 11)

Moreover, the skills sets, attributes, knowledge and competences students develop regarding their employability are also 'wicked' because they are complex aspects which are difficult to teach, learn and assess within HE curriculum (Yorke and Page, 2007; Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003).

As a result of this 'wicked' nature of employability, Yorke and Page (2007), Harvey (2004) and Knight and Yorke (2003) suggested that employability development in HE has highlighted a range of challenges for curriculum design, delivery and understanding. These competences, attributes, knowledge and skills are often hard to define and problematic to teach and assess and require development of a pedagogy for supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000). These changes have encouraged the construction of a 'new' HE, which will be developed within the modern contemporary society (ibid). This is because the complexity of the combination of theoretical frameworks and practical situations is considered too simple for the contemporary society (ibid). As for Barnett (2000), professional life in this supercomplex world is about managing "multiple frames of understanding, of action and of self-identity" (p. 6) as well as "handling overwhelming data and theories within a given frame of reference" (p. 6). Within this supercomplexity contemporary society is the 21st Century contemporary HE (Lapworth, 2008; Strathern, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Barnett, 2000) which appears to be uncertain, unpredictable, challengeable and contestable (Barnett, 2000). It is this contemporary society that HE students are studying in and studying for. As stated by Curzon-Hobson (2003), at the macro level, universities have to react to supercomplex society with research, policies and practices like QAA; at the micro level, students have to respond to the supercomplex situation with universities and the society (e.g. dealing with learning, working, fees and social life).

1.2 Employability development in HE: the views of the 'insiders'

As employability development in HE is widely viewed as a government reinforced socio-economic function of HE, it has led to an increasing debate within the HE community. Accordingly, some academics (e.g. Barnett, 2008; Fearn, 2008) suggest this narrow view of the purpose of HE should not be promoted and encouraged. This is because, it is believed HE should serve a wide range of purposes culturally, socially, personally and economically (ibid). Indeed, Schwartz (2003) argues that if the purpose of HE can be constructed into a hierarchy structure, the economic function should be placed as the foundation, because a fine economy is a necessary resource to achieve social goals, which is to make society a better place for people to live in. To Schwartz (2003), HE contributes to society in two ways: by producing graduates who improve social life and by promoting social mobility. Moreover, it is believed that employability embedded HE can offer students the political, social and economic aspects of work (Fearn, 2008).

Although many (e.g. Barnett, 2008; Fearn, 2008) have criticised this economic function of HE, some have argued it is not inappropriate (e.g. Schwartz, 2008). With regard to Schwartz (2008), many students come to university to be prepared for a career and HE has the responsibility to deliver this desired education. However, Barnett (2008) argued that this idea on students' desire of HE learning is often an assumption by others (e.g. policy makers) in which it is dangerous and misguiding. In addition, the debate on the purpose of HE by authors such as Barnett (2008), Schwartz (2008) and Love (2008) has brought another key issue on whose interest HE should be concerned. Students, parents, academics, businesses and the government are the key stakeholders of HE. However, which group or groups should be put in the centre of the consideration on HE's purpose is still unclear. Although the purposes of HE can be viewed from different stakeholder groups and perspectives, one thing is certain that the theme of HE is 'learning' (Barnett, 2008). Regarding the employability development agenda, there has been an increasing focus on developing an employability-centred curriculum (Barnett, 2008; Fearn, 2008; Schwartz, 2008). Barnett (2008) states that students in HE have two objects: "their intellectual or professional field and themselves" (p.60). For decades, there has been an ongoing discussion on educating students to effectively learn how to learn through HE (Winch, 2008). As knowledge is unpredictable, people need to know how to keep learning in order to develop and advance.

Schwartz (2008) and Winch (2008) also suggest students need to learn how to learn to be able to become a life-long learner from university lecturers who are themselves life-long learners.

For some, HE is for students to gain higher and further education which is much wider than just learning and developing employability skills (Barnett, 2008; Fearn, 2008). However, with regard to Barnett (2008), students are hardly mentioned and considered within the issues on HE development in relation to curriculum and pedagogy. As there has been an increasing engagement of businesses within HE, academics are concerned about the development of HE for the future. This conflict among the 'outsiders', academics and students has left many to question, wonder and search for the 'real' purpose of HE (e.g. Barnett, 2008; Love, 2008; Schwartz, 2008). As stated by Cleveland, "the outsiders want the students trained for their first job out of university, and the academics inside the system want the student educated for 50 years of self-fulfilment. The trouble is that the students want both. The ancient collision between each student's short-term and long-term goals, between 'training' and 'education', between 'vocational' and 'general', between honing the mind and nourishing the soul, divides the professional educators, divides the outside critics and supporters, and divides the students, too." (1974, p. 4).

With regards to Barnett (2008), it is inappropriate to discuss HE without knowing what the students really think HE is about. In recent years, the importance of 'student voice' in HE has been increasingly stressed. However, according to Seale (2009), there is still only a handful of works that has been done in HE to address this issue. Nevertheless, these works tend to be conference papers and institutional or project reports in which the majorities are descriptive and lack of in-depth knowledge on students' perceptions (ibid). After viewing recent literatures, Seale (2009) summarised that those works, which across a huge variance in students' identities (e.g. sciences or arts, home or international, etc.) tend to serve the purposes of quality assurance and staff development. As there is generally a lack of research studies with the aims of empowering students and exploring their perceptions and attitudes regarding employability development within their degree programmes, it is important for this research study to address this issue. This suggestion is further supported by Yorke and Page (2007) and Barrie (2006) to carry out qualitative research on students' understandings, perceptions, attitudes and experience regarding learning and developing employability within HE curriculum.

As in the wider HE environment, the concepts and definitions of employability still appear to be unclear and confusing (see Lees, 2002), academics' views on this issue is still vague. Although studies have been conducted by researchers like Yorke and Page (2007) and Barrie (2007, 2006), academics' understandings, perceptions and attitudes toward developing students' employability in HE is still an under researched area. So far, it appears academics' view on employability in HE is neither entirely the same with nor as simple as political view, as HEIs are social institutions for not only developing employability but promoting learning and research to advance knowledge and practices (e.g. Barnett, 2008). Results from Barrie's (2007, 2006) phenomenographic study of academics' understandings and perceptions on graduate attributes development suggest that 'the academic community does not share a common understanding of graduate attributes as the core outcomes of university education' (2006, p. 238). As a result, Barrie (2006) concluded that this unclearness and confusion regarding HE academics' understandings toward employability is one of the key reasons for inconsistent design and implementation of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) of employability in curricula. Regarding TLA of employability in HE curriculum, results from Yorke and Page's research study (2007) with academics highlighted the 'wicked' problems of assessing employability in curriculum, in which they suggested further 'close-up' research to investigate lecturers' understandings, perceptions and attitudes in relations to TLA of employability in HE.

This lack of knowledge on lecturers' views and feelings not only restrain the empowerment of academic teaching staff in every environment they work in; it also limits people's understanding of lecturer's personal experience, philosophy and attitude in relation to TLA regarding employability development. Studies relate to teachers' perceptions on TLA in schools have demonstrated the importance of this understanding. For instance, Rich's (2004) study on female PE teachers' perceptions revealed how teachers' personal experience, understandings and perceptions affect their pedagogical believes, thus their everyday act in TLA. As a result, there is a need to explore lecturers' understandings, perceptions, attitudes and experiences in relation to employability development in HE via TLA. This will not only provide an insight of their views and feelings; it also will present the relationship between their experiences, perceptions, decisions and every acts in TLA.

2 Research question originality and design:

With regard to all the literature, it is evident that there is a need to examine students' and lecturers' experiences, understandings, perceptions and acts regarding employability development in their respective degree programmes. As suggested by Barnett (2008), Barnett and Napoli (2008), Yorke and Page (2007), and Barrie (2006) this examination must consider HE 'insiders' (i.e. students and academics) as current trends on studies related to learning in HE are moving away from students and academics. To date, according to Tomlinson (2007), the majority of the research around the graduate labour market and employability development in HE has been conducted to a large-scale quantitative manner, focusing mainly on the labour market outcomes of graduates and inferring from ideas about the employability. Moreover, studies in the late 1990s and early 21st century has investigated employability development during the early stages of mass HE and labour market restructuring were beginning to understand future career progression (ibid). In addition, Studies on employability skills and competences development often focus on identifying the skills and competences thus implementing appropriate activities and models into curriculums (Knight and Yorke, 2003). This kind of studies is often conducted with employers, policy makers and decision makers in universities (e.g. Vice Chancellors) (ibid). Although there have been some studies on students' lecturers' perceptions and experiences in relation to teaching learning and assessment of employability skills and competences in degree programmes, this kind of study often approaches the topic quantitatively (e.g. evaluating students' skill development via an instrument or a list of skills) (e.g. Burke, Jones and Doherty, 2005). It is still unclear how lecturers and students understand and perceive this employability development agenda. Particularly, there is a lack of understanding on the transformations of students' understandings and perceptions after their graduation. Moreover, although academic teaching staff is implementing this skill agenda into teaching activities and curriculum, it is unclear how they understand and perceive this issue. As stated by Rothblatt (1996, online), "inundated with information about nearly every aspect of higher education, we lack sustained discussion of the changing inner culture of universities".

2.2 Research question, aims, purposes and stages:

With literature in mind, this research is going to explore:

"What are the understandings, perceptions, attitudes and experiences of academic teaching staff and students in relation to curriculum design, delivery and understanding for employability development?"

Research aims:

The main aim of this study is to add to this under-researched area by examining the experiences, understandings, perceptions and attitudes of academic teaching staff and students regarding teaching, learning and assessing employability development in undergraduate degree programmes. The intentions are to empower the 'insiders' of HE to have their views heard and consider suggestions about how they might improve HE curriculum for effective teaching learning and assessment, as well as identifying perception 'gaps' by comparing and contrasting the opinions from the two groups in order to highlight some of the vital problems in this issue. In addition, it intends to sketch a holistic picture to demonstrate the level of complexity on the issue of developing employability in HE by combining lecturers' and students' views.

Research purposes:

As part of the LJMU National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) project, this research study will contribute to the overall aims and objectives (see http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ntf/index.htm) of the project. Results and findings from this research study will be fed back to the programmes for their curriculum designs and programme revalidations to assist them in improving their TLA for employability development. It can also assist in improving the understandings between lecturers and students by highlighting the perception gaps. As a result the overall TLA can be improved as well as their employability development within the programmes. By highlighting some of the key problems and issues, this research can also offer recommendations for further studies about the effectiveness and appropriateness of particular TLA methodologies and approaches for developing undergraduate students' employability within their curriculums. Last but not least, findings from this study will aid the understandings on how lecturers' and students' past experience in employability development affect their present decisions and actions regarding this issue in the HE environment.

Research stages:
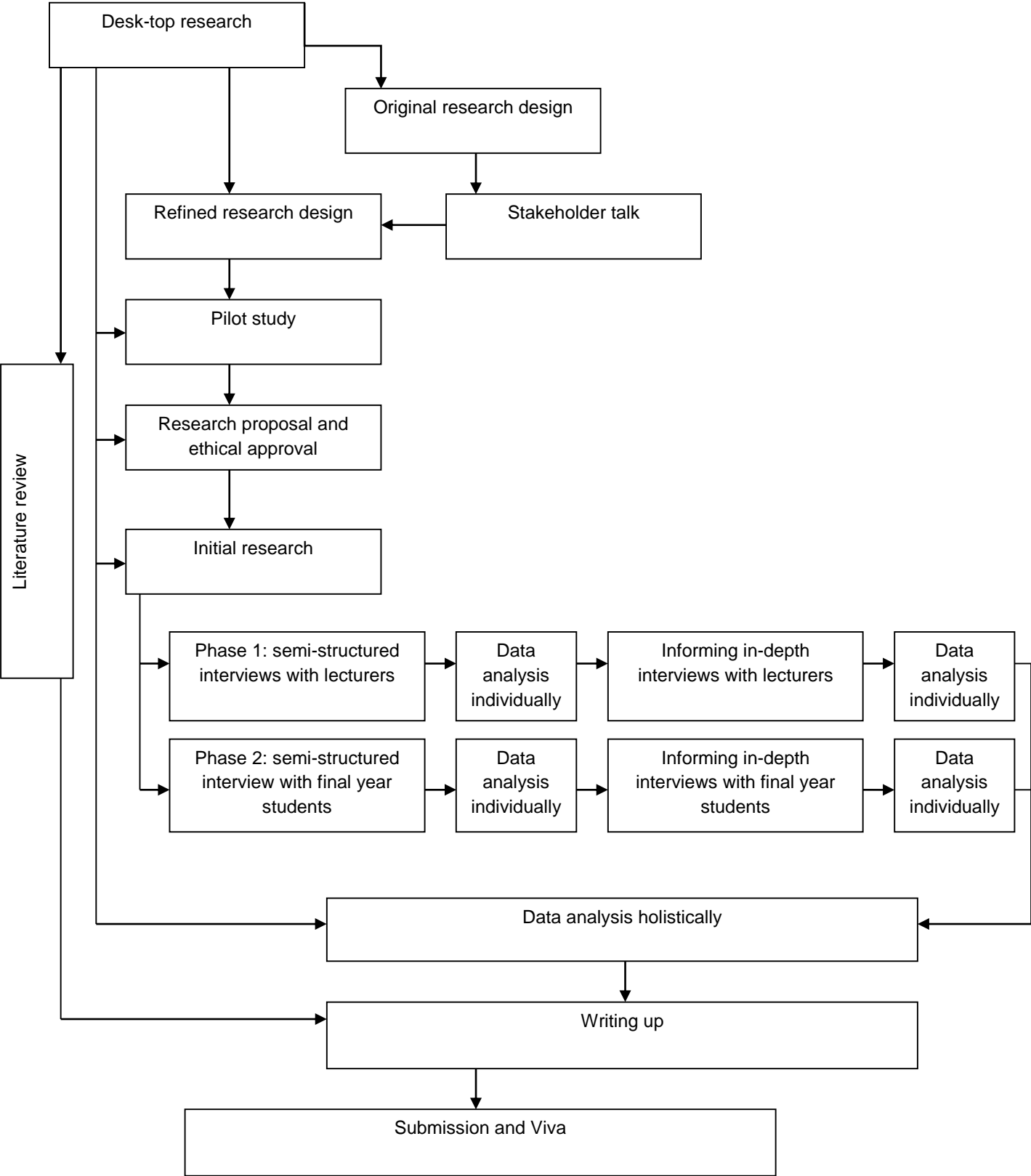
Figure 1: Research stages flowchart

(Please see Appendix 1 for the complete Research Philosophy table)

2.3 Progress to date:

Since beginning this research study in December 2008, progression has been by completing a number of targets presented in Figure 1. These included:

- Carrying out stakeholder talks to understand context, identify research questions, and justify research methods (especially participant groups).
- Beginning and making progress with literature reviews.
- Completing the pilot study to refine methodological design, and test interview questions with different groups of potential participants.
- Gaining approval for my research from the University Ethics Committee and Graduate Research Committee.
- Beginning interview data collection for the main phases of research.

Each of these will be discussed in turn:

Stakeholder talks:

During December 2008 to June 2009, stakeholder talks were carried out with a number of undergraduate degree programmes that are related to sport development, coaching education (CE), physical education (PE), outdoor education (OE), and dance within a North West English HEI. There are three main reasons for choosing these programmes as case studies for this research:

1. The researcher's personal background is in this subject area which is very vital as the research interests and problems were originated from the researcher's personal experience;
2. The availability of the resources. The advantages and disadvantages of convenience sampling are fully understood by the researcher (e.g. Yin, 2009; Bryman, 2004). However, for the time scale and purposes of this research (see above), this sampling method seems appropriate.
3. As part of the NTF project, it was required by the project team for this study to take a 'close up' research approach to explore and examine specific cases in great depth and detail. As a result, it is important to consider the level of cooperation the programmes can provide for this study.

Meanwhile, stakeholder talks were also carried out with some experts in this topic area (e.g. Yorke) and the NTF project team to identify research gaps and questions. As a result of the stakeholder talks, two major issues were addressed:

1. Research methodology: this pure qualitative research study is going to use a HEFCE and an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programme as case studies. This is because, although government employability development agenda is aiming at HEFCE programme (e.g. BIS, 2009), at institutional level, employability development initiatives are promoted and implemented to all the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes.

   As far, there is very little empirical research evidence on the similarities and differences between HEFCE programmes and professional development programmes like ITT in relation to employability development from the 'insiders' viewpoint. With regard to Knight and Page (2007), it is vital to recognize and illuminate the strengths, problems and challenges regarding to current TLA of employability development through 'close-up'

research, in order to identify and understand 'wicked' competences to be able to design, deliver and understand appropriate and effective curriculum for employability development. As a result, it will be valuable to explore and compare views and experiences of students and lecturers from a HEFCE and an ITT programme as case studies to closely examine the current strengths, problems and challenges regarding TLA employability development within curricula from the 'insiders' perspectives. Although, the two programmes will be compared, in some areas regarding employability development (e.g. professional standard like QTS for ITT programmes) each case will be analysed separately. This is because employability development for specific professions has explicit requirement and 'wicked' competences for students to learn and development, as identified by Knight and Page (2007).

It is also important to note that a specific HEFCE and ITT programme were chose because the level of interests and commitment the programme leader and staff members expressed throughout the stakeholder talks. These choices were also supported by the NTF project leaders and the external expert consultants. However, the differences between the two types of programmes (e.g. professional requirement like TDA Qualifying to Teach Professional Standards for Qualified teacher status and requirements for Initial Teacher Training for ITT programme) are noted when comparing the two.

2. Research methods: interviews will be used for data collection. This is because, out of all the qualitative methods (e.g. interview, observation, documentation, etc.), interview is the most suitable method to fulfil the aims and purposes of this study. Time scale, resource availability and the researcher's own research background (Yin, 2009; Bryman, 2004) were also taking into account when deciding the data collection method.

Literature reviewing (ongoing):

To date, literature review chapters are in progress to address the key themes listed in research philosophy table (see Appendix 1). A complete draft of the first chapter provides an overview of government policy and literature relating to the concepts employability and its development within HEIs. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a context for the research. Key issues and arguments in this area have been highlighted and summarised with the context and literature review above. Although other chapters are still in working progress, literature review notes have been made in order to highlight key issues for designing interview questions (which is demonstrated in research philosophy table). Literature review on the topic area and research methods also have informed the draft interview procedure and questions which were tested through the pilot studies.

Pilot studies:

Pilot studies were conducted with a HEFCE programme within a North West English University in which different potential participants, questions and interview procedures (e.g. settings, recording, etc.) were tested for the initial data collection. The first study was conducted with 2 lecturers (both are experienced staff members who have senior roles in the programme and the centre) and 2 graduates (as originally graduates were identified instead of final year students to be interviewed). Through this pilot study, it seems the first draft questions for lecturer interview (see Appendix 2) needed completely re-written as the aims and purposes of the study was totally

unachieved. The questions were too generic in relation to exploring lecturers' understandings and perceptions on employability development within the programme and within HE broadly. This was mainly due to the lack of literature knowledge the researcher had at time. The two interviews all lasted near 1 hour, answers were repetitive as well as the themes and the structures of the interview was not very clear. As a result, the interview was re-designed for second pilot (see Appendix 2) with much more theoretical underpin. This is a result of the progression on literature review.

According to the original research plan, this study was going to interview graduates for understandings and perceptions on employability development in the degree programme they did. After interviewing 2 graduates (one from the 04-07 cohort and one from the 03-06 cohort) for pilot study 1 (Appendix 2), it is clear that current final year students should be involved within the study. This is because one of the key aims for this study is about identifying dissonances and congruence between lecturers and students in relation to their understandings, perceptions, attitudes and experience regarding TLA of employability development within their curriculum rather than the differences and similarities between lecturers and graduates; although the transformation of students' understandings and perceptions is also interesting, for the time scale and research scope of this study, graduates will not be included. Moreover, like the first pilot with the lecturers, the questions appeared to be too generic and unclear. As a result, a new interview schedule was designed for pilot study 2 to interview current undergraduate final year students.

Pilot study 2 (see Appendix 2) was conducted with another 2 members of staff from the same HEFCE programme as the first pilot study (one is experienced staff with more than 10 years of HE experience, another one is a new member of staff) and 2 current final year students from this programme. The questions were sectioned into 4 themes with clear aims (see research philosophy table). However, the length of the interview became a major problem in this pilot study due to the in-depth nature of the interview. It took one hour for the lecturer interview to go through 1/3 of the questions. From the participants' reactions and feedbacks, it was clear that they started to lose focus and interest. To overcome this problem, the interview for the initial study (see Appendix 4) is spited into two parts in which the first is a semi-structured interview focusing on understandings and perceptions whereas the second is an in-depth interview about personal experience in relation to employability development. Moreover, the questions for the second interview are informed by the first one. Moreover, for the student interview, the participants felt the interview was too formal to express some personal feelings and viewings. Although having a structured and clear schedule was good in terms of guiding the direction of the interview, it seems a more informal interview with the questions in mind of the interviewer can bring out more of the interviewee's personal understandings, perceptions and experiences. As a result, for the initial study, a set of in-depth interviews will be conducted after the first semi-structured interview in which participants' have the freedom to raise any personal issues within the boundaries of the research aims and purposes. This also gives the students to reflect their experience within their respective programmes which suits the close-up nature of this research.

Reflection of pilot study and research methodology for initial research study:

The main purposes of the pilot studies were to refine research methodological design and test interview procedures and questions with different participant groups. As a result of pilot studies, it was decided that semi-structured and in-depth individual interviews (Bryman, 2004) will be conducted with all the full-time lecturers (13 in total) and volunteers (12 in total) from final year student cohort. In each semi-structured interview, a set of standard questions will be asked in order to compare and contrast participants' answers. The answers from semi-structured

interviews then inform the questions for the in-depth interview (see research philosophy table for details). Standardised interview procedures and questions were conducted with the knowledge from literature review and pilot studies. All the interviews will be conducted individually in a private, comfortable and quiet environment (Bryman, 2004). All participants will be briefed about research aims and procedures. This research is completely overt to all participants, and research consent forms will be signed before interviews (ibid). The interviews will be recorded by a camcorder. Permission for recording will also be asked in the interview consent letter (ibid). All the verbatim transcriptions will be produced by the researcher as soon as the interviews finished. It will then be saved as RTF in order to be loaded on QSR NVivo for the analysis process. The nodes within the interview transcripts will then be developed and coded for thematic analysis which will be conducted to explore (inductively) participants' expectations, beliefs, experiences and actions regarding to the research questions.

Ethical Approval and Research Committee Approval:

Research proposal and ethical approval were conducted after pilot studies which then were sent to the university Graduate Research Committee. The research proposal and ethical approval were approved by the University Graduate Research Committee with no alterations to the intended research plan and methodologies.

Main Phases of research so far:

As stated above, the initial research has been conducted with lecturers and selected final year students from two programmes within a North West English Institution. Programme A is a four-year Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course which leads to a degree classification with a professional qualification (i.e. QTS). Programme B is a three-year HEFCE programme, merged from an ITT programme in 1998, leads to three degree classifications (i.e. one BSc and two Bas) with an education nature. So far, eight lecturers (four from each programme) participated in the semi-structured interview about their understanding, perceptions and attitudes toward employability development in their respective programmes. Four of them also undertook the in-depth interview (informed by the answers from the semi-structured one) which explored their personal experiences regarding employability development.

Analysis of these semi-structured interview results has been conducted using NVivo 2.0. So far, thematic analysis has been conducted to examine the results from the semi-structured interviews in which Theme 1 in Table 1 was addressed. In addition, it was noted further dimensions were emerging out of this theme, which have been used for the in-depth interviews. For the scope of this report, the key findings in the following areas are going to be discussed:

- Definitions and concepts of employability and its development in HE
- Purposes of employability development in HE
- Models and approaches for employability development in curriculums
- Elements affect employability development in curriculums

The key theme regarding employability development is a 'wicked' and complex issue (e.g. Yorke and Page, 2007) carries through all the present findings. As demonstrated by Lees' (2002) literature review on graduate employability, employability in HE is complex and contested, and its concepts and definitions are still unclear and messy. With regarding to Yorke and Page (2007), Barrie (2006) and Knight and Yorke (2003), this is one of the reasons that employability development is such a 'wicked' problem. Although the findings of this research so far indicate that lecturers have different views and understandings regarding developing students' employability in

their programmes, it appears that the issue might not be as unclear as suggested. In general, all the participants so far acknowledge that employability is not about having a job, thus HE education is 'more than just to get a job out of it'. It seems the majority of the lecturers are of the same opinion with research findings by Barrie (2006), and suggestions by Yorke and Page (2007), Harvey (2004) and Knight and Yorke (2003) as they define employability as students' achievements (e.g. skills, qualities, competences, understandings) which enable them to obtain a potential employment and to be successful in their chosen career. However, one of the lecturers believes that employability is about 'doing something meaningful and productive' and 'being prepared to live life in its full'. Although this lecturer recognises the need of financial support from an employment in today's society, he suggests employability is about having enough skills and knowledge to be 'resilience' in any kind of situation in order to contribute to the society as well as having an interesting life. This notion of 'flexperts' (Van der Heijden, 1996) has been acknowledged by a number of authors (e.g. Harvey, 2000), in response to the growing number of career changes experienced through life for many people (Lees, 2002). However, as suggested by participants in this study, employment is part of the graduates' life hence if they are developed to cope life well, they will be able to effectively manage changes within their career.

The concept of employability in this study is linked with participants' attitudes towards the purposes of HE education in general and their respective programme. Although the two programmes in this study have distinctive differences between them in relation to their nature, these four lecturers share the view that HE education for students is about a holistic development of individuals. As a result, it is suggested that employability development in HE is about a holistic process in which students have 'a taste of working and learning in a lot of different environments' in their respective subject areas so they can make their own way through life and future career. Moreover, the lecturers argue that because the majority of students in HE nowadays are 18 year-old school leavers, as well as educating with professional and academic skills and knowledge, university is also about balancing and copping with life in a new environment in which students can gain and develop skills, attitudes and competences that have lifelong effects (e.g. making friends, part-time jobs, etc.). Additionally, the lecturer who suggests that employability is about 'doing something meaningful and productive' also expresses the Liberal view of the HE purposes; but once more, the financial and employment demand from the modem is acknowledge.

The view expressed by lecturers in this study so far seems echo the transformative model Harvey and Knight (1996) suggested in which HE education is viewed as a fundamental change of students' form qualitatively. The key of transformative learning is about encouraging students to think about education as a process in which they are engaged, not some 'thing' they tentatively approach and selectively appropriate (Harvey, unpublished) which is also recognised by the lecturers as they suggest that employability development in HE needs to focus on the process rather than the specific content so that when the students going to new environments, they will be able to transfer and adapt. However, so far, lecturers from the ITT programme seem more concerned about the requirement for a specific profession (i.e. teaching) than the participants from the HEFCE programme. ITT lecturers believe their programmes are different from HEFCE programmes as 'everything on the programme is directed towards a specific future career'; whereas the lecturers in the HEFCE programme consider that there are various career routes within their profession which as a result the programme can only 'introduce students to the possibilities'. In addition, the lecturers from the ITT programme suggest that their students tend to arrive HE with a clear career choice in mind (i.e. being a teacher after HE education). As a result, the lecturers believe their students are more likely to work towards that specific career choice than students in HEFCE programme. In these respects, the purposes of specific HE programmes in relation to employability development seem differ from lecturers' perspective, even though they agree that the generic purpose of HE education is aligned with the transformative model.

As well as expressing their beliefs on transformative model for HE education and employability development, all the lecturers also state their concern on outcome-based model for HE education and employability development. As stated by the lecturers, they believe some of the current employability development initiatives in HE are 'making graduates fit for purposes' in which 'we are almost producing students off a production line'. As pointed out by Lees (2002), even though Knight and Yorke's (2001) concept of employability development in HE has been widely accepted and adopted by HE insiders, the government is using an outcome-based model (i.e. the Employability Performance Indicators [EPIs]) to judge HE employability development. One HEFCE lecturer argues that 'training a person to meet a particular outcome or aim is the purpose of training programmes; whereas a HE programme needs to have much more holistic sides to it'. This is echoed by an ITT lecturer who pointed out that

> 'students aren't here just to train to be something; they are here to develop in a kind of holistic way. Their focus is about becoming a teacher, so in that sense they are trained in certain competences, but they are not training to do that, they are also studying an academic degree'.

With this transformative model (Harvey and Knight, 1996) in mind, lecturers also point out reasons for resistant some of the current employability development initiatives. Lecturers perceive many of the top-down initiatives as an outcome-based model (see Lees, 2002) which is just another add-on for the students and the academic staff. They suggest any add-on initiatives are likely to be viewed as paper exercise in which lecturers and students are just ticking boxes, filling paper works and receiving certificates. This approach is not perceived as the appropriate and effective way to development students' employability, because lecturers suggest it is often repetitive, surface, and lack of professional and subject specific knowledge and skills. This is because lecturers believe that top-down initiatives are not merged from the core natures of the programme, even though these elements are directly or indirectly affected by some policies and initiatives. For example, the HEFCE lecturers pointed out that because the nature of student cohort on the programme has changed in recent years due to the increasing number of students on the programme, the curriculum has changed to offer greater professional and subject knowledge and skills. This increasing number of HE students thus increasing the diversity of student cohorts is a result of the government's widening HE participation. This challenge regards implementing top-down initiatives further highlights that the current practice on TLA of employability development in programmes is a 'wicked' problem (Knight and Page, 2007), as it seems the designing, delivery and understanding of these initiatives are misunderstood thus chaotic.

As identified by this research so far, lecturers believe although government and university initiative and policies is one of the elements which affects the curriculum and the TLA of the programme, it does not appear to be the most influential element. So far, it is suggested by the lecturers that the following seven elements affect the curriculum design in relation to employability development:

- Student
- Nature of the programme
- Policy and initiatives
- Industry
- Academic progression
- Programme personnel
- Technology

As discussed before, those elements can also interfere with each other, thus create an even more 'complex' situation and 'wicked' problems for the lecturers to consider when design and deliver their curriculum. More evidence will be collected with other lecturers in the PhD phase of this research to explore the level of complexity regarding the elements to determine curriculum design and delivery.

As suggested by lecturers, employability should not be developed through add-on approaches. However, add-on is not bolt-on approach according to the lecturers believes. Bolt-on approach (Lees, 2002), as oppose to embedded approach (ibid), is where specific skill-based training is offered to the students within or outside the curriculum. For example, a HEFCE lecturer suggests that workshops for students to learn how to write a job application before their work-based learning (WBL) module is a bolt-on approach. So far, all the lecturers in this research suggest that bolt-on approach should not be the priority for employability development in their programmes. However, this is not to say bolt-on approach is completely inappropriate and ineffective. One of the HEFCE lecturers suggests that bolt-on approach can be used to offer students qualifications which are required by the industry but not offered as part of the university degree. Because transformative model (Harvey and Knight, 1996) promotes individualised development for students, sometimes a well designed bolt-on approach can help students to achieve their personal goals in their own pace. An ITT lecture also suggests that the highly focused environment sometimes provided by bolt-on approach can offer students some specific skills in short period time. Moreover, the HEFCE lecturers suggest that bolt-on approach should be outside curriculum in which students' performance and achievement in their degree is unaffected. However, the ITT lecturers believe that students nowadays are developing within the assessment-driven culture (see Lees, 2002) in HE in which all their learning activities are directed by assessment. One lecturer states that:

> "At the end of the day, students turn up to things and engage to things more often if they are assessed in some shape or form. And they know what that assessment is and they work towards it. So if it is part of the degree programme, they are going to do it; if it is not mandatory, then that's when it's going to be difficult to get the whole cohort to actually tow the line."

As a result, the lecturers suggest that employability development should be embedded into the curriculum for appropriate and effective outcomes. Key qualities of embedded employability curriculum are suggested by lecturers:

- Valid by students and lecturers
- Holistic and aligned TLA
- Encouraging and motivating students for extra curriculum learning (sometimes involving bolt-on activities)
- Having direct application towards students learning in which is almost incidental
- Employability as one of the key themes going through the curriculum
- Mixing well with subject and professional knowledge and skills.

In between bolt-on and embedded employability development (see Lees, 2002), one of the HEFCE lecturers argues that there is a grey area in which industry recognised qualifications are offered as part of the programme. Accordingly, some assessment criteria are solely based on professional qualification conditions rather than academic requirements. This lecturer believes this can cause problems because they "intent to assess students on acquisition of the skills, acquisition of bolt-on skills which seems contradict the academic and the holistic side of the programme". As discussed before, although lecturers view employability as a key element within the degree programme, the nature of HE education is still academic development (like suggested

by Barnett, 2008, etc.). As a result, it is suggested that for HEFCE programmes, industry requirement need be mixed in TLA with academic knowledge and skills, in which professional qualifications should be offered as options for students to gain in extra curriculum activities.

When discussing embedding employability development into the curriculum, lecturers also point out one of the greatest benefits of doing so is that employability development can aid to academic development (see Lees for debate on academic and employability development) which is the best for students' learning in HE education (like suggested by Harvey, 2004; Knight and Yorke, 2003). Importantly, HE degree programme mustn't be driven away with developing employability; academic development is what HE education is primarily about (like suggested by Barnett, 2008), even in professional programmes like ITT. The challenge now is that in reality, students who achieve highly academically/employability-wise do not necessarily achieve highly for employability/academic as pointed out by lecturers in this study. So far, two lecturers (one from each programme) suggested that experiential learning (e.g. Kolb, 1984) is one of the most appropriate approaches to combine academic and employability development for TLA within HE curriculum. So far, lectures have suggested that the elements stated below are the keys for meaningful employability development:

- Meaningful experience
- Insight knowledge about the industry
- Network with the industry
- Industry recognition
- Professional knowledge, skills and attributes
- Personal competence

These elements can be viewed as a combination of Yorke and Knight's (2003) USEM model and Bennett et al (1999)'s model of course provision. Further research is needed to explore more elements for meaningful employability development from both lecturers and students perspectives. So far, it can be suggested that TLA of students' employability development within curricula is complex from lecturers' perspectives. Furthermore, evidence from this research indicates that students' employability development in HE is a 'wicked' problem regarding curriculum designing, delivery and understanding as misunderstandings and dissonance were identified among lecturers' understandings, perceptions and attitudes. It seems the definition and concept of students' employability development is still unclear, thus the implementations of current practices are not effective and efficient. The later stage of this study will determine a broad picture on the level of complexity regarding TLA employability development in HE education for undergraduate students. In addition, students and lecturers experiences will be examined to highlight the sources of some of the 'wicked' problems in order to propose appropriate solutions to tackle current problems and overcome challenges.

3. Plans for PhD phase:

It is intended that the PhD phase of the research will allow for the methodology to be further examined, providing more scope for participatory research with lecturers and final year students from the two programmes. Data analysis for lecturer interviews will be further conducted to explore other participants' understandings and perceptions regarding to the research themes in the philosophy table (Appendix 1). In addition, result from stage 1 of lecturers' interview will inform stage 2 of data collection with them in which in-depth life-story telling method has been employed to explore lecturers' personal experiences, beliefs and actions. In addition, Phase 2 of this research project will be carried out in which selected final year students from the two

programmes will participate in semi-structured and in-depth life-story telling interviews. The 2 phases of this research provide not only insight views of lecturers' and students' understandings, perceptions, believes and attitudes toward employability development in their respective programmes, they also offer an opportunity to compare and contrast these two groups' views to identify similarity and differences between them in order to illuminate the problem areas. As a result, this will allow lecturers to design and deliver a curriculum which provides appropriate and effective employability development for students to learn and understand. In addition, by putting all participants' views together, this research can sketch a broad picture to demonstrate the level of complexity of this issue.

The intention for the continuation of this research to PhD is as follows:

March-August 2010: analysing the lecturers' interviews, and conducting the second interviews with the other 8 lecturers. This will focus on their experience, beliefs and actions on TLA in HE in relation to employability development. After completing the data analysis for the lecturers' interview, a journal article will be produced to submit to one of the British HE journals.

Interviews with selected final year students will also be conducted during this period. Student participants from the HEFCE have already recruited and briefed. Student participants from the ITT programme will be recruited and briefed during March following the same process as the HEFCE programme. Interviews will be transcribed as soon as the interviews are conducted.

In June, a presentation on lecturers understandings and perceptions will be delivered in the UCLan 'employability in curriculum: beyond the bolt-on?' conference.

Abstract is also submitted to International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching Learning conference in October 2010.

August-January 2011: Analysing student interviews. Another journal article will be produced based on findings from student interviews.

February-November 2011: thesis write-up.

December 2011: Thesis submission and VIVA

Research Philosophy Table

Research stage	Theme(s)	Sub themes/questions	Rationale	Method
Stakeholder talk	Identifying research gaps, issues. Understanding context. Justifying research question, aims, purposes and methods	N/A	This stage focuses on refining original research questions and designs, by talking to experts within the topic area (e.g. Professor M. Yorke), potential participants and NTF project leaders. It also involves requesting information from potential participants which relates to this research study. For example, research studies and programme documents, relate to employability development in the programmes, which were conducted by programme staff members were collected and studied to inform research questions for this study.	Informal face-to-face interviews with potential participants (especially programme leaders from a number of undergraduate courses), NTF project leaders, and employability development research and literature experts. Document review of information provided by some of the potential participants, NTF project leaders and employability experts.
Desk-top Research	Identifying research gaps, issues. Understanding context and literature. Justifying research question, aims, purposes and methods	N/A	This stage provides the bases for the introduction, literature review and the theoretical underpins for the research methodology.	Searching websites, other electronic data through Google, and paper sources (e.g. textbooks) to collect information (e.g. theories, research studies, projects, etc.) which relates to the topic areas of this research study. Using EndNote X1 to store, organise, summarise and reference all the literatures.
Pilot study	Refining methodological design. Testing interview questions with different groups of potential participants	N/A	As suggested by Yin (2009), a pilot study will help the researcher to "refine data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed" (p.92). For this research study, an undergraduate programme, within the same university as initial cases, was selected on the bases of accessibility and nature of the programme (similar to the initial data collection cases) to carry out a pilot test to develop data collection and analysis procedures, as well as relevant	Data collection process was carried out as stated in the original research design with the pilot study to refine the procedures. Participants were recruited, briefed and interviewed like for initial data collection process to test the details of the procedures. Each participant was interviewed on the bases of semi-structured

			lines of interview questions, with three different types of participants (i.e. full-time lecturers, graduates and final year students).	voice recorded interviews, and a brief data analysis was conducted in order to refine interview questions, structures and participant groups.
Semi-structured interviews with lecturers and final year students	Personal understanding and perceptions in relation to employability development in the programme (curriculum design and delivery; TLA) Personal understanding and perceptions in relation to employability development in HEIs	1. Personal understandings of the programme, employability, employability development in the programme, purpose of HE, and employability development in HE (e.g. Barnett, 2008; Maher and Grave, 2008; Schwartz, 2008; Lees, 2002). 2. Personal understandings and perceptions on key issues regarding TLA of employability development within the programme: e.g. bolt-on or embedded (Lees, 2002); academic and employability development (ibid). 3. Key stakeholders' responsibilities (e.g. Schwartz, 2008)	This stage seeks lecturers' and students' understandings and perceptions about the programme they are involved in. It will examine their beliefs and opinions regarding to the purposes of the programmes and employability development in order to identify the connections between the two from their perspectives. This will provide empirical data of HE insiders' voice, which is vital for appropriate and effective curriculum design, deliver and understanding to enhance students' learning and development (e.g. Barnett and Napoli, 2008; Knight, 2001). As well as comparing and contrasting differences and similarities between the two groups and within the two groups in order to highlight problems of current TLA, this also aims to sketch a bigger picture of 'insiders' views to demonstrate the level of complexity of the issue (Barnett, 2000).	Interviews with all the full-time lecturers and volunteers from final year student cohort from the two programmes. Recording on MP3 voice recorder (with permission). Verbatim transcription, by the researcher, will be put into RTF format for loading into QSR NVivo programme for node coding. Thematic analysis will be conducted to explore (inductively) and examine (deductively) participants' understandings and perceptions regarding to the research questions (Bryman, 2004).
In-depth interviews with lecturers	Personal background and role in relation to the programme Personal experience, believes and actions in relation to curriculum design and delivery for employability development (regarding to TLA).	1. Personal academic and practical background; career path way; role and responsibility in the programme. 2. Expectations of HE and the programme; 3. Personal experiences and actions in designing and delivery curriculum; 4. Personal beliefs behind these actions.	This stage seeks lecturers' individual expectations, beliefs, experiences and actions in relation to the design and delivery of their curriculum (regarding TLA in the programme). It will explore how their past experience influences their beliefs and expectations thus affect their actions in their curriculum design and delivery (like Rich [2004] demonstrated in her research on school teachers' experiences affected their beliefs and actions in teaching). As well as collecting narrative data from individual lecturers to develop understandings	In-depth interviews, which are informed by the semi-structured interviews, with all the full-time lecturers from the two programmes. Recording on MP3 voice recorder (with permission). Verbatim transcription, by the researcher, will be put into RTF format for loading into QSR NVivo programme for node coding. Thematic analysis will be

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			on their actions regarding to curriculum design and delivery and the reasons behind them, this stage will also sketch a bigger picture of lecturers' views to demonstrate the level of complexity of the issue (Barnett, 2000).	conducted to explore (inductively) participants' expectations, beliefs, experiences and actions regarding to the research questions (Bryman, 2004).
In-depth interviews with final year students	Personal achievement so far academically and practically within and outside university Personal plans and expectations for the future after university education Personal experience, believes and actions in relation to curriculum understandings for employability development (regarding to TLA).	1. Personal academic and practical achievement so far; academic and career development path way; activities within and outside university regarding academic and employability development. 2. Expectations of HE and the programme; 3. Plans for the future after university education 4. Personal experiences and actions regarding to understanding the TLA activities within curriculum; 5. Personal beliefs behind these actions.	This stage seeks final year students' individual expectations, beliefs, experiences and actions in relation to their understandings of the curriculum (regarding TLA in the programme). It will explore how their past experience influences their beliefs and expectations thus affect their actions in learning and developing themselves within their respective programme. As suggested by Barnett (2008), one of the most important knowledge for enhancing students' learning and development in HE is the understandings of what the students really think and feel about HE education. As well as collecting narrative data from individual students to develop understandings on their actions regarding to their own learning and development, and the reasons behind them, this stage will also sketch a bigger picture of students' views to demonstrate the level of complexity of the issue (Barnett, 2000).	In-depth interviews, which are informed by the semi-structured interviews, with all the volunteers from the final year student cohorts from the two programmes. Recording on MP3 voice recorder (with permission). Verbatim transcription, by the researcher, will be put into RTF format for loading into QSR NVivo programme for node coding. Thematic analysis will be conducted to explore (inductively) participants' expectations, beliefs, experiences and actions regarding to the research questions (Bryman, 2004).

Pilot studies

<u>Pilot 1: Lecture Interview</u>

1. General questions (introduction)

    1.1 What is your role within the programme (in relation to employability development in the programme)?

    1.2 How long have you been in this role? What specifically do you do?

2. Understandings on employability and its development

    2.1 How do you understand the term 'employability'?

    2.2 What does employability development involve?

    2.3 Why do you understand and perceive employability development in this way?

3. employability development in the programme

    3.1 What does your programme do in relation to employability development?

    3.2 Why does your programme deliver such curriculum in relation to employability development?

    3.3 Do you think the employability development in your programme is effective and appropriate for preparing students?

    3.4 How do you perceive the impact that employability development has on academic development?

    3.5 Is there any concern you have in relationship to employability development in your programme?

4. knowledge about employability requirement from the industry

    4.1 Are you aware the employability requirement from the industry?

    4.2 How do you receive this awareness? (Where do you receive your information from?)

    4.3 How do you perceive this requirement from the industry in relation to employability development?

    4.4 Why do you perceive it in this way?

5. knowledge about the students' demands and engagement

    5.1 Are you aware the requirements and demands from your students on academic and employability development?

    5.2 How do you receive this awareness?

    5.3 How do you perceive these requirements and demands from the students?

    5.4 How do you perceive the level of engagement students have on employability development?

6. Action on employability development

    6.1 What do you do to implement employability-focused curriculum in your teaching?

    6.2 Why do you implement it in such way?

Pilot 1: Graduates Interview

1. General questions (introduction)
    1.1 What do you do at the moment? How does this relate to your degree programme?
    1.2 How did you do on your degree programme?
    1.3 What did you do when you undertook your degree programme? (e.g. work, etc.)

2. Understandings on employability and its development
    2.1 How do you understand the term 'employability'?
    2.2 What does employability development involve?
    2.3 Why do you understand and perceive employability development in this way?

3. employability and academic development in the programme
    3.1 What did your programme do in relation to employability development?
    3.2 Why did your programme deliver such curriculum in relation to employability development from your viewpoint?
    3.3 How do you perceive the teaching and support your programme provided in relation to your employability development?
    3.4 How do you perceive and relationship between academic and employability development in your programme?
    3.5 Look back, do you think the employability development in your programme was effective and appropriate for preparing you?
    3.6 How do you perceive the impact that employability development in your curriculum has on your academic development?
    3.7 Do you think employability development in your programme promoted good learning to you? In what ways?
    3.8 Did you have demands or requirements on your employability development when you were on your programme? Were they addressed? In what ways?
    3.9 When you were on your programme, did you have any concern in relation to your employability development?

4. Action on employability development
    4.1 What have you done to learn and develop your employability while you were in university?
    4.2 Why have you done such things?
    4.3 How do you perceive your learning and development on your employability?
    4.4 Look back, how much engagement you had on employability development when you were on your programme? How did this relate to the curriculum your programme provided?

5. knowledge about employability requirement from the industry
    5.1 Were you aware the employability requirement from the industry?
    5.2 How did you receive this awareness?
    5.3 How did you perceive this requirement from the industry in relation to employability development in your programme?
    5.4 Why did you perceive it in this way?

6. knowledge about employability-focused curriculum from University
    6.1 How do you perceive this employability-focused curriculum from University in general?
    6.2 Why do you perceive it in this way?

6.3 At the moment, there are a lot of tensions on employability development in HE (e.g. the balance between academic and employability development, curriculum design and student engagement), how you perceive the problems? And do you think your programme addressed these problems?

7. How do you perceive the relationship between university, students and employers on employability development?

Pilot 2: Lecturer Interview

1. General questions (introduction)

    1.1 What is your role within the programme (in general and in relation to employability development in the programme)?
    1.2 How long have you been in this role? What specifically do you do? (level of engagement in teaching and assessment in general and in relation to ED)
    1.3 What is your academic background? (e.g. PhD, MA, PGCert, etc)
    1.4 What is your practical background? (e.g. professional experience in the industry)

2. Understandings, perceptions, expectations and experience in relation to ED in the programme (curriculum, teaching and assessment)

    2.1 What do you think the programme is about?
    2.2 What do you think ED in your programme is about?
    2.3 Where does ED fit in your programme?
    2.4 How do you think ED in your programme is going at the moment?
    2.5 How do you think ED is fitted in your programme at the moment?
    2.6 How do you perceive the relationship between academic and employability development in your programme at the moment?
    2.7 SWOT the current programme in relation to ED
    2.8 What do you think the limitations are on ED in your programme? Why?
    2.9 What is your main concern on ED in your programme? Why?

3. Understandings, perceptions, expectations and experience in relation to the concept and key elements of ED in HE
    3.1 As a concept, how do you understand ED in general and in relation to HE? (What is ED about in general and in relation to HE?)
    3.2 For you, what the HE's responsibility is in relation to ED?
    3.3 What are the key elements of ED in HE from your viewpoint? (What does ED in HE involve?)
    3.4 From your point of view, what a good/bad curriculum in relation to ED is (both teaching and assessment)?
    3.5 For you, how ED relate to students' learning in HE?
    3.6 For you, what good learning is about?
    3.7 From your point of view, how ED relate to good learning?
    3.8 From your point of view, what good/bad learning on ED is from students?

4. Personal believes and experiences
    4.1 Personal awareness of expectations and requirement from students and industry (What and How)
    4.2 Personal attitude towards the current ED in the programme in relation to address the expectations and requirement from students and industry
    4.3 Personal actions on implementing ED in curriculum (teaching and assessment) (What and How)
    4.4 Personal perceptions on the relationship among lecturers, students and employers (What is the relation at the moment? What is the ideal relation? Why?)

Pilot 2: Final year student Interview

1. General questions (introduction)
    1.1 How are you doing on your course at the moment?

1.2 What have you achieved so far? (academic, professional development and employability development)

1.3 What have you done in relation to work experience? (within the programme and extra curriculum)

1.4 What is your plan or desire for employment after university?

1.5 Why did you choose to come to university? Why did you choose this programme?

2. Understandings, perceptions, expectations and experience in relation to ED in the programme (learning and development on employability)

2.1 What do you think the programme is about?

2.2 What do you think ED in your programme is about?

2.3 Where does ED fit in your programme?

2.4 How do you think ED in your programme is going at the moment?

2.5 How do you think ED is fitted in your programme at the moment?

2.6 How do you perceive the relationship between academic and employability development in your programme at the moment?

2.7 SWOT the current programme in relation to ED

2.8 What do you think the limitations are on ED in your programme? Why?

2.9 What is your main concern on ED in your programme? Why?

3. Understandings, perceptions, expectations and experience in relation to the concept and key elements of ED in HE

3.1 As a concept, how do you understand ED in general and in relation to HE? (What is ED about in general and in relation to HE?)

3.2 For you, what the university's responsibility is in relation to ED?

3.3 What are the key elements of ED in HE from your viewpoint? (What does ED in HE involve?)

3.4 From your point of view, what a good/bad curriculum in relation to ED is (both teaching and assessment)?

3.5 For you, how ED relate to your learning in HE?

3.6 For you, what good learning is about?

3.7 From your point of view, how ED relate to good learning?

3.8 From your point of view, what good/bad learning on ED is?

4. Personal believes and experiences

4.1 Personal awareness of expectations and requirement from university and industry (What and How)

4.2 Personal expectations for university on ED

4.3 Personal attitude towards the current ED in the programme in relation to address the expectations and requirement from the industry and students

4.4 Personal actions on learning and developing employability in and outside university (What and How)

4.5 Personal experience towards employability development in various university settings (e.g. lectures, tutorials, assessment, etc.)

4.6 Personal perceptions on the relationship among lecturers, students and employers in relation to ED (What is the relation at the moment? What is the ideal relation? Why?)

Appendix 3 Research settings

In this kind of study, the understanding of the setting and the context is crucial - it provides the researcher with the background information which is useful when talking to the participants, but more importantly when the research is looking to generate fine-grained data and discussion, **settings and context become part of the data**. Indeed, for instance, without knowing and understanding what the university's employability agenda is, it is meaningless to ask participants what their attitude is towards employability. Here, I have gathered some key information about the university, the campus and the programmes. Arguably, this information is selected through a student's perspective (i.e. what students said looked for in relation to employability and university experiences) –highlighting what kind of experience students normally have in their respective programmes in LJMU.

Liverpool John Moores University

Established in 1852 as a mechanics institution, this ex-Polytechnic university has a long history and track record of providing vocational training and education. LJMU in recent years has put improving students' employability at its heart, with its mission to

> *"serve and enrich our students, clients and communities by providing opportunities for advancement through education, training, research and the transfer of knowledge".*

The World of Work® (WoW®) programme was established in 2007 as a strategic vision in response to the challenges from growth in the HE sector which included: increasing competition in the region from other HE institutions; the increasing competitiveness of the graduate job recruitment market; and consistent employer feedback that students have a poor understanding of the jobs market (Nixon and Dray[18], 2011). The university believes its vocational excellence and significant contacts with employers and organisation regionally, nationally and internationally can provide students with employability advantage when they enter the job market. According (ibid)

> *"LJMU has taken a different, more radical approach which can be summarised as 'Connecting both students and staff more closely to the World of Work (WoW)' (LJMU 2007). The unique element of this strategy is the role of employers, who are working in partnership with the University in defining and verifying employment-related skills. Alongside this the students are working towards a*

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[18] Sarah Nixon: Faculty Learning Development Manager in ECL; NTF; specialising in personal development planning, employability and student learning experience.
 Terry Dray: Director of the Graduate Development Centre at LJMU; professional interests in graduate employability and career development.

separate accreditation where they start to define their own development, skills, knowledge and experience." (p.2)

The key of the WOW programme consists three parts: Graduate Skills, Work Related Learning and the WOW Skills. WRL has been mandatory for all LJMU undergraduate programmes for quite a long time. Since 2007-2008 academic year, the Graduate Skills project, has become mandatory to all LJMU undergraduate programmes at all levels. The Graduate Skills project includes a list of eight 'generic skills', which must be taught and assessed during the course of an undergraduate degree programme. And finally all students have the opportunities to participate in the WOW skills programme (a three stage developmental programme consists Self Awareness, Organisational Awareness and Making Things Happen) in order to culminate in employer-validated WOW certificate. Unlike WRL and the Graduate Skills, WOW skills were not mandatory to all the degree programmes when this study was carried out, but students were encouraged by the GDC to take the programme to gain crucial employability qualities.

IM Marsh Campus-Faculty of Education Community and Leisure

Under the generic university characteristics, the faculty itself has its own specific traits - in general and in employability development. As it was founded in 1900 as a PE teacher training college for girls, IM Marsh campus has always had a strong educational and teacher training focus, hence a number of vocational and professional degrees particularly in sports, dance, outdoor education and PE. Because its strong tie with teacher training, even the HEFCE programmes here have placed strong emphasis on professional development and WRL.

Between 2005-2010, the faculty was awarded HEFCE funding as one of the 74 Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to establish the Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Professional Learning address the themes including employability, leadership and enterprise with specific subject focus on Sport, Dance, PE and OE. According,

"The over-arching aim of the CETL is to develop existing innovative approaches to work-related learning, to enhance students' employability, leadership and entrepreneurial skills. In developing curriculum approaches that promote good learning for employability, the CETL's primary aim is to enable students to become 'leading learners' who are also 'learning to lead'. A strong focus of the work being undertaken is on ICT and how through these mediums learning can be enhanced and developed."

Clearly, employability development is a primary focus in the faculty during the time this study was carried out. With the university's clear employability initiative and the faculty's CETL

employability focus, a number of curriculum interventions have been made in those CETL programme to support and enhance their students' employability development during their time in LJMU.

Undergraduate PE

The BA (Hons) Secondary Physical Education, Sport and Dance Programme was an academic degree combined with a professional teacher training qualification. This means "the programme award is with a recommendation for Qualified Teacher Status on successfully meeting the degree classifications as well as passing all the QTS standards and all the work-based training" (LJMU, 2010, p.5). In other words, unlike an ordinary HEFCE degree in which students only need to focus on their degree classifications, students on the PE programme also need to be concerned about their placements and their QTS standards. Consequently, this programme ran for four years instead of normal three years for a HEFCE degree.

Through a quick glance of the programme handbook, it is clear that everything in this programme seems to gear towards developing students' employability as an early career PE teacher. School placement, which ran through the whole four years of the degree, was the obvious employability development element of the programme. "Passing all the work-based training" was one of the crucial criteria for achieving the Programme Award at the end of the degree, which was clearly stated in the student programme handbook. Throughout the degree, the intensity of the placement experiences gradually increases. Year on year, students undertake a block of four weeks, six weeks, ten weeks and 12 weeks of placement experiences in which they are offered more and more firsthand teaching responsibilities gradually. Another key element of the degree, in relation to employability, was the professional standards for QTS (known as The Standard, see Appendix 5 for details). This list of 33 varieties of skills, qualities and competencies expected from qualified teachers was then combined with the LJMU Graduate Skills, and embedded in the programme for students to achieve throughout the four years.

Unfortunately, while I am writing up this thesis, this programme has been stopped in 2012 due to changes government made in teacher training policies.

<u>Outdoor Education</u>

Established in the late 1960s as a QTS teacher training programme, the OE programme was one of the first in the country. In 1998, programme was revalidated as a HEFCE programme, though it has still kept some QTS traits. Described by its lecturers as a semi-vocational programme, the OE programme has all the employability development elements LJMU requires for its programmes – Graduate Skills and WRL (e.g. Year 2 Work Based Learning Module). In addition, the OE programme has strong ties with its industry. The programme provides students with opportunities to gain industry recognised qualifications like the National Governing Body Awards in Mountain Leader and Rock Climbing within its curriculum through their practical assessments. The programme is particularly proud of its teaching staff's individual specialties, with a good mix of academics and practioners (internal and external), the programme strives to provide its students with a high quality variety of experiences which can equip them for the outdoor working world. To ensure students can gain a good variety of experiences and be able to have high quality employability development, in the recent revalidation, the programme has also added optional routes so that students from Year 2 can take one of the three options (i.e. environmental education, adventure tourism, and PE).

Appendix 4 Interview procedures

Dear colleagues,

In regards to: Participating in interviews for Liverpool John Moores University National Teaching Fellowship PhD studentship research project on employability development

I am a PhD student in LJMU Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure (ECL) undertaking my doctoral research on '**Employability development in Higher Education curriculum for effectively preparing 21st century graduates for the world of work: experiences, understandings, perceptions and expectations from academic staff, students and employers'**. I am writing to ask for your consent to take part in face-to-face semi-structured taped individual interviews for my doctoral research. All the information will not be used for any other purpose than that connected solely with this research. All the data will be stored safely during the study and will be destroyed immediately when the study is completed.

This research study is set to investigate to what extend does the current employability development in your respective degree programme effectively prepare 21st century undergraduate students for the world of work. This study is going to interview university teaching staff, graduates and employers as well as reviewing relevant documents to gain a holistic view on the understandings, perceptions and experiences of employability development in your respective degree programme. Due to this purpose, **all the interviews will be audio taped and verbatim transcribed.** At any stage of the study, **you have wholly rights to withdraw your information**. At any stage during the interview, **you hold completely rights to refuse to answer any question if you feel unnecessary or uncomfortable with**. Throughout the research, **you also hold complete rights to ask any further questions about the study that occurs to you.** When the study is concluded, **you will be given access to a summary of the findings from the study.**

Your participation would be a great contribution to this study which can enrich the understanding of current employability development in your respective programme.

If this is agreeable to you, please sign the attached research consent form.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to help me with my research. If you have any queries, please feel free to contact via email: F.Q.Cui@2004.ljmu.ac.uk; mail: Room 203, Holmfield House, IM Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, Liverpool, L17 6BD.

Yours Sincerely

Fengqiao (Vanessa) Cui

PhD student

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Employability development in Higher Education curriculum for effectively preparing 21st century graduates for the world of work: experiences, understandings, perceptions and expectations from academic staff, students and employers

Principle researcher: Fengqiao (Vanessa) Cui

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.

3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential

4. I agree to take part in the above study

Researcher Name: Fengqiao Cui	Date:
Signature:	
Participant Print Name:	Date:
Signature:	

Lecturer Interview 1 (semi structured):

1.   General questions (introduction)

1.1   What is your role within the programme (in general and in relation to employability development [ED] in the programme)?

1.2   How long have you been in this role? What specifically do you do? (level of engagement in teaching and assessment in general and in relation to ED)

1.3   What is your academic background? (e.g. PhD, MA, PGCert, etc)

1.4   What is your practical background? (e.g. professional experience in the industry)

2.   Understandings, perceptions, expectations and experience in relation to ED in the programme (curriculum, teaching and assessment)

2.1   How do you define employability?

2.2   What do you think the programme is about?

2.3   What do you think ED in your programme is about?

2.4   What are the key elements of ED in your programme?

2.5   Where does ED fit in your programme? How necessary is the ED agenda for your programme?

2.6   How do you think ED in your programme is going at the moment?

2.7   What do you think the limitations are on ED in your programme? Why?

2.8   What is your main concern on ED in your programme? Why?

Lecturer Interview 2 (unstructured themes):

What attracted you for your HE career? How do you personally perceive your subject and your profession?

How do you perceive the relationship between HE and employability development?

How important is employability for you, your students, your programme and the institution?

Dear students,

In regards to: Participating in interviews for Liverpool John Moores University National Teaching Fellowship PhD studentship research project on employability development

I am a PhD student in LJMU Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure (ECL) undertaking my doctoral research on '***Teaching, learning and assessment for employability development in Higher Education to effectively prepare 21st century graduates for the world of work: experiences, understandings, perceptions and attitudes of lecturers and students***'. I am writing to ask for your consent to take part in face-to-face semi-structured taped individual interviews for my doctoral research. All the information will not be used for any other purpose than that connected solely with this research. All the data will be stored safely during the study and will be destroyed immediately when the study is completed.

This research study is set to investigate to students' and lecturers' understanding, perceptions, beliefs and experience regarding current employability development in your respective degree programme. This study is going to interview university full-time lecturers and final year students as well as reviewing relevant documents to gain a holistic view on the understandings, perceptions and experiences of employability development in your respective degree programme. Due to this purpose, **all the interviews will be audio taped and verbatim transcribed.** At any stage of the study, **you have wholly rights to withdraw your information**. At any stage during the interview, **you hold completely rights to refuse to answer any question if you feel unnecessary or uncomfortable with**. Throughout the research, **you also hold complete rights to ask any further questions about the study that occurs to you.** When the study is concluded, **you will be given access to a summary of the findings from the study.**

Your participation would be a great contribution to this study which can enrich the understanding of current employability development in your respective programme.

If this is agreeable to you, please sign the attached research consent form.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to help me with my research. If you have any queries, please feel free to contact via email: F.Q.Cui@2004.ljmu.ac.uk; mail: Room 203, Holmfield House, IM Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, Liverpool, L17 6BD.

Yours Sincerely

Fengqiao (Vanessa) Cui

PhD student

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Liverpool John Moores University

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Teaching, learning and assessment for employability development in Higher Education to effectively prepare 21st century graduates for the world of work: experiences, understandings, perceptions and attitudes of lecturers and students

Principle researcher: Fengqiao (Vanessa) Cui

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

5.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily

6.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.

7.   I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential

8.   I agree to take part in the above study

Researcher Name: Fengqiao Cui Signature:	Date:
Participant Print Name: Signature:	Date:

Student Interview 1:

1.   General questions (introduction)
1.1   How are you doing on your course at the moment?
1.2   What have you achieved so far? (academic, professional development and employability development before and during university)
1.3   What have you done in relation to work experience? (within the programme and extra curriculum)
1.4   What is your plan or desire for employment after university?
1.5   Why did you choose to come to university? Why did you choose this programme?

2.   Understandings, perceptions, expectations and experience in relation to employability development (ED) in the programme (learning and development on employability)
2.1   How you do define employability?
2.2   What do you think the programme is about?
2.3   What do you think ED in your programme is about?
2.4   How do you think ED in your programme is going at the moment?
2.5   How do you perceive the relationship between academic and employability development in your programme at the moment?
2.6   What do you think the limitations are on ED in your programme? Why?

Student interview 2:

Further exploring their work experiences

Their understanding and perceptions on the relationship between their subject, their profession and their employability

Using examples of their curriculum and assessments to establish what they consider as good employability development and poor employability development

Appendix 5: Participants' profiles

Lecturer participant profiles:

To protect those lecturers' anonymity, here I am only providing some very brief details about their background.

Participant	Programme	Background	Time joint LJMU
Ben	PE	Professor of Physical activity education. Educated, trained and worked as Secondary PE teacher	Early 2000
Joyce	PE	Experienced practiner in PE with more than a decent of teaching and leadership roles in secondary PE	Mid 1990s
Heather	PE	Experienced practiner in coaching and secondary PE with experience as head of PE	Mid 2000
Michelle	PE	Experienced practiner in coaching and PE with international and UK coaching and PE teaching and leadership experiences	Early 2000
Ron	PE	Experienced secondary PE practiner with nearly 30 years of teaching experiences	Late 2000
Lisa	OE	Experienced academic and professional in Outdoor Education, established and internationally renowned in OE adventure therapy.	Late 2000
Ed	OE	Professor of OE. A wide range of academic and professional experiences in outdoor education.	Mid 1990s
Tom	OE	An active and experienced outdoor education researcher and practiner with over 30 years of outdoor education experiences in various areas.	Late 2000
James	OE	Experienced OE professional with more than 20 years of OE teaching experiences.	Late 2000
Kenny	OE	Experienced OE professional with more than 40 years of OE teaching experiences.	Early 2000 (retired recently)
Michael	OE	Experienced OE professional with more than 40 years of OE teaching experiences in many areas, including senior board member of national and international outdoor associations.	Late 1990s (retired recently)

Student participant profiles:

<u>OE students:</u>

Kevin:

Kevin was a mature student on the BSc Outdoor Education with Environmental Education. He joined the degree when he was 23 because he "did not feel ready at 18". His sister and his dad all had higher education experience, which influenced his perception of university life. He thought "university was going to be hard", and he wanted to enjoy himself for a while working in the outdoors before he makes the commitment.

Kevin is a keen outdoor practitioner and participant. Since 16, he has been working in outdoors. He worked full-time after he left school, and had been working part-time and self-employed as an instructor during his degree. He has nine different qualifications in a number of different areas, which allowed him to work in different jobs in outdoors. He chose to come to university to study an outdoor degree because he is passionate about working in outdoors as a professional. He felt after working in the industry for five years, he was ready to move to a "higher level" academically and professionally.

At the time of our first interview (which was January 2010, six months before his graduation), Kevin felt he was doing "reasonably well" on his degree because he felt he has achieved what he wanted in the university.

> "*I came to university with the intention to prove that I can sit down, and study, and learn, and understand, and take that knowledge in and come out with satisfaction knowing that I put in the efforts to deserve that mark I have got.*"

For him, the knowledge and understanding he gained during his degree was important because he thinks that's what makes him a better professional in an outdoor work setting. Overall, he was pleased with his time in the university, particularly he liked the balance between practical modules and theories because "theories like physical geography makes practical experiences more meaningful and fun"; but sometimes he felt disappointed because some things did not work out (e.g. peer learning and assessment).

Work is very important to Kevin. It provides him the opportunities to be up to date about the requirements from the industry and the employers. Being able work in various vacations in outdoors also provided him with opportunities to gain qualifications, experiences and knowledge for career development, networking with other people and developing his

personal qualities which he felt are all important for career in outdoors. Working also gives the maturity which if beneficial because it made him being and willing to learn; the experiences he had outside the university gave him advantages especially in practical modules.

We met twice for the interviews (first in the university, second time in his student accommodation). During this time, we also met occasionally on campus and had few informal conversations. We still message each other sometimes on Facebook in which Kevin updates me with his work. At the moment, he is working in an outdoor centre in Scotland and contract there for 2 years. His job title is a multi-activity instructor mainly working with kids but then in the summer it is with young adults and teenagers.

Tom:

Tom came to university after a year out of education during which he was working full time in outdoors. Being a keen outdoor practitioner, Tom has a number of qualifications in different outdoor activities but with a specific focus on climbing. He has been working as a climbing instructor fulltime, part-time and freelance.

Tom came to university to do a BSc Outdoor Education with Environmental Education degree because he wanted to gain a degree in outdoor education for future career development. When he just started his degree, he had a very vague career direction as he just wanted something outdoor related, but after three years in the university he has developed a quite clear plan for his future. Although he felt the degree will not make an immediate difference to his career, in the long term, it definitely will help him.

At the time of our first interview (which was January 2010, six months before his graduation), Tom felt he did fairly well in university. He was working towards a 2.1 for his degree, and he has developed very strong practical skills and abilities. He is very pleased with what the degree has offered to him, and felt everything in the programme can be relevant in work situation in the future.

Being able to work while doing his degree was very important to Tom. It does not only provide him with financial support for his degree, it also gives all the key elements for his employability: contacts, valuable experiences, and confidence. When he is not working, he is always practicing his outdoor activities. To him, the university course is just where he studies for his academic knowledge, and he did not practically speed a lot of time in the university enjoy a 'student lifestyle' when he has no lectures to attend to.

We had two 'formal' interviews in the university. We did not meet on the campus as much as I met the other students, but we talk to each other on Facebook occasionally. After his degree, Tom went to the Mid East to work as an outdoor trainer for the army for eight months, after his return he has been working as a freelancing instructor as well as climbing.

Michael:

Michael is a mature student on the BSc Outdoor Education with Environmental Education programme. He joined university at 22. Not particularly enjoyed his sixth form years, Michael did have a good time during his school trip to Tanzania. After finishing school, he did labour work with his family, travelled, and worked during the ski season where he fell in love with the lifestyle of being outdoors. This was when he made a career choice in outdoors. As he did not have required academic qualifications for doing an outdoor degree in the university, he went back to education to gain appropriate qualifications in a college before he came to LJMU.

Michael has a general interest in hospitality and recreation. He has few qualifications and some work experiences, mainly due to personal interests. He would loved to do more, but an unfortunate accident in his first year left him with a broken leg which meant he could pursue an outdoor career at the moment like he wanted to. This also led to a career change into chiefing. Despite this, he still finished his degree because he wanted to finish what he started, and having a degree in something he likes gives him a back up for the future in case chiefing does not work out. However, this injury did have a big impact on his attitude towards his degree that he just wanted to finish and get a degree rather than 'trying his best', but at the same time, he did place more emphasis on enjoying the degree overall rather than focusing on specific things.

At the time of our first interview (which was January 2010, six months before his graduation), Michael was fairly happy, but looking forward to the end of this degree and the beginning of his new training and career in chiefing. Although he had the accident, he enjoyed the course generally, especially the social elements. He also thought the practical side of the degree was good, even though he couldn't participate as much as he wanted.

To him, working experience outside university is vital, because it gave him the awareness and confidence about himself and the working world. For him, a degree is an added proof for what he can do, but it is important that he has the actual experiences in work. He did a lot of works during his degree, but because his injury, most of those works were not outdoor

related. To him, the enjoyment and the accomplishment he gets from working is the key drive, and he loves working on something he enjoys even the environment is stressful and the financial reward is not very great.

We had two 'formal' interviews (first time in the university, second time in his student accommodation). Although they were the 'formal' interviews, which structured around my semi-structured interview questions and recorded on my addict phone, they were also casual (we had chocolates and Michael showed me his garden where he grew some of his cooking ingredients). We also met each other occasionally on campus. Like other participants, I still communicate with Michael on Facebook. Currently, Michael is enrolled to start a Secondary OE with PE PGCE course.

Ian:

Ian joined the BA Outdoor Education with Adventure Tourism programme after his gap year. He did not particularly enjoy schools, and when he friends all went to university he didn't, because 'conventional' subjects (like computer science or business studies) are not his interest. He had a lot of outdoor experiences when he grew up, partially because his father is in the army. He particularly enjoyed his life while they were living in Africa where he had a lot of great outdoor experiences. Since then, he worked in some outdoor related jobs (part time or volunteering), and gained some basic outdoor qualifications.

At the time of our first interview (which was January 2010, six months before his graduation), Ian did not feel he achieved what he wanted from university, particularly in terms of his career development. He had a quite clear plan about his career, and came to university with a high expectation on what he wanted to achieve. However, he felt the degree had let him down by not providing what was promised to him. On the other hand, he did enjoy the social aspects of university life as he felt he has grew up a lot during this process, particularly learning through reflections on mistakes. He felt he is a more self reliance person after these three years.

"*University is for different purposes, different people. I mean, for what I am interested in, university had been a waste. Academically as a course, it had been a waste, in terms of personal attributes such as growing up, it had been fantastic.*"

During our interviews, we didn't really talk a lot about his work experiences in outdoors, partially because he didn't really work a lot during his degree. There were some holiday works, but it wasn't anything substantial like Kevin's or Tom's work. For Ian, he wished the university experience could give him more confidence and valid credential to start working in

outdoors, but it seemed people who benefit the most of this degree are those who are already working.

We met twice for the interviews (first in the university, second time in his student accommodation). During this time, we also met occasionally on campus and had few informal conversations. We still message each other sometimes on Facebook in which Ian updates me with his work. At the moment, he is working in London for an online lead generator as a sales executive selling enquiries for people looking for services.

Ron:

Ron came to the Outdoor programme when he was 20. Before came to LJMU to study BA Outdoor Education with Adventure Tourism, Ron went to another university and did one year Marine Biology which he did not enjoy at all. He also had a gap year in which he worked and travelled. He is very active-enjoying a variety of sports and outdoor activities, but did not gain a lot of instructing or coaching qualifications and experiences. Although some of his work experiences were outdoor related, most of them have been barmen jobs which he really loves.

Ron is one of the student representatives for the Outdoor Education degree. This makes him having different views about the degree comparing to the others. During the interview, Ron likes to use the word "we" to refer the experience of his whole cohort rather than his own experiences and thoughts. It seems this has some affects on his attitudes toward the course as he generally felt disappointed about it. Personally, Ron felt happy about the social side of the degree, he enjoyed the lifestyle in LJMU and happy about the friends he made. However, he felt disappoint about the course, particularly the Adventure Tourism route he took. He felt there were a lot of empty promises and inappropriate arrangements for the modules. Because he was a student representative, he felt even those problems were raised in student representative meetings with the staff, they were never solved, which made him quite angry.

Personally, doing the degree and working in something he enjoys is very important to Ron, because he had a lot of problems and distractions. The degree and his work provided him with focus, and helped him to develop a direction for the future. However, he is not very confident about his future, particularly in relation to career in outdoors as he does not feel prepared by the degree.

"There was no direct link between LJMU and employers out there. That's weird consider we suppose to be quote 'the best place in the country to do this', and centre for excellence, and world of work. All those things, once you go through the system, you just think 'it's rubbish'. "

Ron's frustration and disappointment was very clear during the interviews. It was quite clearly he wanted to tell me his side of the story. Even though I had semi-structured schedules for the interviews, I found we chatted a lot more comparing to all the other interviews. There were a lot of occasions, Ron had talked a lot, then asked me "sorry, what was your question?" We managed to have two formal interviews in the university. We also met few times on campus and outside the university (by accident), and had some informal conversations. Ron took one more year after our interview to finish some of his resetting modules. After he finished his degree, he moved few times with his family which to him was not ideal for finding work. We talk to each other on Facebook sometimes. At the moment, he is back in Liverpool and working as a barman while starting up his t-shirt business.

PE students:

Ben:

Ben is one of those 'typical' students: white male who came to university after his A levels. He is a very keen football player and coach. He worked towards professional level until he was about 15. Since then he started coaching football in his school, and gained coaching qualifications in football. While he was in university, he still played and coached football in his spare time, but at as much as when he was in school.

When we first met (which was February 2010, five months before his graduation), Ben felt he was doing ok. He was pushing for a 2.1 classification which he was pleased as academically he was not always strong. He was very proud to receive a Grade 1 for his teaching because that was what he always wanted and he worked hard for it. To Ben, coming to university was to prove that he is an excellent teacher, and he felt the teaching side of the course was what he felt most passionately towards.

Ben knew he wanted to be a PE teacher since he started coaching football at a young age, because he enjoyed coaching sports and got on well with children he worked with. He always has had a passion for sports, so teaching PE is an obvious career path for him. However, he had doubt about if he wanted to be a teacher particularly after his Second Year

placement which was a negative experience to him. At the same time, he also wanted to pursue a professional football coaching career.

To Ben, school placement was where he thought he improved his teaching the most. He really treasured the opportunities he had during his placements to watch other excellent teachers teach. He felt he learnt everything about how to teach through watching other teachers. On the other hand, he did not really enjoy the academic side of learning, finding it not very relevant to actual teaching and not very interesting. Especially ever since Ben received a Grade One for his teaching, he found very difficult to motivate himself to do any academic work, because he felt he has already achieved what he wanted.

We met twice for the interviews in the university. Occasionally we talk on Facebook. After his graduation, Ben went travelling, and he is in Australia at the moment.

Ste:

Ste was introduced to me through Ben because I mentioned to him I needed more participants. Unlike Ben, Ste came to university after his BTEC, and he also had to take a year out because he was wrongly informed about the qualifications he needed for doing his degree.

Ste made it very clear to me about his background: from a "working class family" in a rough area in Manchester, Ste is the only person in his family came to university. He was training towards being a professional footballer, but he had to give it up due to a serious back injury. Ste never specifically planned to be a PE teacher, but because the football career did not work out, it just happened to be something he felt he might be good at and enjoy doing. This decision about coming to university to do a PE teacher training course was also advised and supported by his football coaches and college teachers who he has a lot of grateful respects to.

Due to his football background, Ste has a good amount of working experiences as semi-professional football player and football coach. He also has some qualifications in difficult sports and physical activities, but his back injury has been restrictive for him to participate in some activities.

At the time of our interview (which was February 2010), Ste was happy about his university experience. He felt he was doing quite well in terms of his marks (which were pushing to First) and his placement experiences. He was also very happy about the general university

students' experience, that he felt he had opportunities to meet different people, opened his eyes and changed his life perspectives. Particularly with school placement experiences, he thought was eye opening because he had some very different schools in terms of their social backgrounds. Some schools also helped him with some coaching qualifications and extra-curriculum work experiences. Most importantly, the grades and the comments he received had give him the confidence.

I only met Ste once, during which we chatted for an hour and 40 minutes. Unfortunately, we never managed to meet up again, because he was busy finishing his last few coursework, then went back to Manchester to apply for jobs. After his graduation, Ste went back to one of his placement schools to work as a PE teacher.

Jamie:

Jamie was also introduced to me by Ben as they are good friends and housemates. He came to LJMU to do a PE course because when he was growing up, he always looked up to his PE teacher. He joined the course after a gap year in which he did Camp America to gain some more experiences working with children in order to make his mind up about doing a teacher training course. Like Ben and Ste, Jamie is also a very keen football player and coach. He has a lot of extra-curriculum experiences of coaching football in schools and in the university. At the same time, he also gained some coaching qualifications in various other sports and physical activities to improve his employability.

At the time of our first interview (which was in February 2010), Jamie had quite mixed feelings about his degree. He was happy about the different qualities and expertise offered by most of his lecturers. And he felt his placements went well (he received a Grade One). School placements were the most important learning experiences, because that's when Jamie learnt the most about how to be a good teacher from good and bad experiences. However, he did have a very unpleasant and upsetting experience with his dissertation tutor who wrongly accused him cheating. Eventually the matter was resolved but he was very stressed. He also struggled financially during his degree that he nearly dropped out the degree before his final year started. He did not enjoy university as much as he hoped, as there were not as much practical teaching elements in learning and assessment as he had expected.

He is very focused and career-driven when it comes to his degree, qualifications and work experiences. Almost everything he has done since he came to the university was aiming to

build up his CV. During his final placement, he was very pro-active which as a result, he has secured a job with them.

"for me, the most important thing about his course is to pass it and get a teaching job, and luckily I have already secured one."

We met twice for interviews, and occasionally chatted on Facebook. After graduation, Jamie went to work in a Sixth Form College in London as PE teacher.

Michelle:

Michelle and her flatmate Claire were introduced to me by one of the PE lecturers because I needed help to get more participants. She came to the university after a gap year. She is a very active person with many different interests in sports, physical activities and dance. Before she came to the university, she had some work experiences in coaching, and she also gained some different coaching qualifications. For her, although those work experiences are good for her CV, that was never her intension, she just loves working with children and young people.

Michelle had ups and downs during her university time. In our first interview (in February 2010), she cried about her terrible experience during her school placement, but at the same time she very proud about how she grew up and became independent throughout this experience. She was happy that her confidence and independence has developed dramatically during her degree which was very important to her because she use to rely on other people to help her with her work, but now she feels she knows what to do without other people's advice.

Overall, there was this sense of disappointment from her about the whole university experience. She was not sure if university has provided her with added value to her professional development, because "all they have done is to give us assignments to do". As a result, she did not feel she has anything to show for apart from her degree. She was also disappointed about the support from university at times, particularly when she had the bad placement experiences. There was also a sense of unfairness, because her placement arrangements were always late comparing to other students on the course. But for me, behind the sense of frustration, I can really feel how proud she is about her own growth. I can really feel this journey she went through, and the way she talked about herself and her experiences was very sure.

The two interviews were emotional, particularly our first one when we talked a lot about her placements. After her graduation, Michelle went back to her home town, and now is teaching in her local school.

Claire:

Claire was a national level athlete for high board diving and trampolining before she joined her degree. She has few different coaching qualifications and working experiences in sport and SEN. She has a particular passion in working with and helping children and young people with SEN. During her last two years in university, she worked in a special exclusion unit from May to September, in which she felt very important to her personal and professional development. Because her love for sports and working with children, Claire always wanted to be a PE teacher, and she has been very focused and pro-active to achieve this goal.

School placements were important for developing her self-awareness and awareness about what's required by schools to be a good teacher.

 "If I never experienced that, I would thought I will be fine just because I am good at sport".

But because the challenges she had through her placements and her work with SEN children, she felt she has become more confident and mature that she can deal with difficult situations in schools.

Overall, Claire enjoyed university, but she felt sometimes practical learning and theories did not join up very well, especially for assessment. She did not feel the academic side of assessment was very realistic in relation to teacher's actual knowledge and skills.

We met twice in the university, the first interview lasted and the second lasted. After her graduation, she started working as a PE teacher in a school in Luton.

Appendix 6 PE programme's employability development

THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE STRANDS (example)

Q2: teach lessons and sequences of lessons across the age and ability range for which they are trained in which they begin to develop skills in:

a) using a range of teaching strategies and resources, including e-learning, taking account of diversity and promoting equality and inclusion;

b) building on prior knowledge, develop concepts and processes, enable learners to apply new knowledge, understanding and skills and meet learning objectives.

Q10: begin to have a knowledge and understanding of a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies and know how to use and adapt them, including how to personalise learning and provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their full potential.

Q14: begin to develop a secure knowledge and understanding of their subject/curriculum areas and related pedagogy to enable them to teach effectively across the age and ability range for which they are trained.

Q15: begin to develop knowledge and understanding of the relevant statutory and non-statutory curricular frameworks, including those provided through the National Strategies, for their subjects/curriculum areas, and other relevant initiatives applicable to the age and ability range for which they are trained.

Q18: begin to develop an understanding of how children and young people develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences.

Q21a: begin to develop an awareness of the current legal requirements, national policies and guidance on the safeguarding and promotion of the well-being of children and young people.

Q22: begin to plan for progression across the age and ability range for which they are trained, designing effective learning sequences within lessons and across a series of lessons and demonstrating secure subject/curriculum knowledge.

Q29: begin to evaluate the impact of their teaching on the progress of all learners, and modify their planning and classroom practice where necessary.

Q30: begin to develop an awareness of establishing a purposeful and safe learning environment conducive to learning and identify opportunities for learners to learn in and out-of-school contexts

Q31: begin to develop an awareness of establishing a clear framework for classroom discipline to manage learners' behaviour constructively and promote their self-control and independence.

Placements

Every year, the work based learning unit in the university places each student into one of their partnership schools where they are allocated a mentor who works in the school and supervises and supports their placement experiences. The university also offers a liaison tutor (who is a member of staff from the PE programme) to check the students' placement experience once or twice during the placement. This normally takes place through meetings with the student and his/her mentor to discuss the student's learning and development through the placement, and observing their work experiences (e.g. teaching).

Work-Related Experience

Professional Competence Module		Work-Related Placement
Year 1 ECLPE1003	An Introduction to Teaching and Learning in PE	Orientation Primary 2 weeks Phase 1a Secondary 4 weeks Phase 1b
Year 2 ECLPE2003	Planning for Inclusion, Differentiation, Teaching and Learning	Beginning Planning, Teaching and Class Management Secondary 8 weeks Phase 2a
Year 3 ECLPE3006 ECLPE3007	Monitoring and Assessment Whole School Issues	Developing Teaching and Class Management Secondary 10 weeks Phase 2b
Year 4 ECLPE3005	Professional Study of School-Based Issues	Qualifying to Teach 12 weeks Phase 3

During this period time, the student is "training" in the school as a "trainee" teacher. This involves a number of activities: observing other teachers' sessions, planning teaching and reflecting on their own sessions, completing various tasks set by the university programme as part of their QTS standard folder. Each placement phase is underpinned by one of the Professional Competence Strands (Table) which is developed by the programme to "develop

and raise awareness of competency related issues in preparing trainees to make the most effective use of time spend on work-related experience and to encourage reflective practice".

Apart from those teaching related learning experiences, students also often involve with the schools' activities: organising and teaching after school clubs, participating in staff meetings and parents evenings, socialising with the staff members from the school. Those experiences help the students to immerse themselves into the culture of working in a school as a teacher.

Getting that job day

Sometimes, a meaningful learning experience for employability development can also be a bolt-on activity organised by the programme for a very specific employability development purpose in which students can participate directly or indirectly. One of the employability development experiences PE lecturers feel practically meaningful and constructive is 'Getting That Job Day' which is organised by the programme as an formative learning experience for their employability. For it, the lecturers arrange a school's head teachers and a class of pupils to go to IM Marsh campus in order to 'go through the whole interview process with some of the final year students for a made up job'. All final year PE students are informed about the job, and they all applied as they applying for a real PE NQT position. The school then makes the decision on the few final candidates for the interview day in IM Marsh. On the day, the interviewees go through the whole interview process (i.e. interviewed by the head teachers, then giving a PE session to the pupils). Finally, the head teachers give feedback to each interviewee, and make their decision on who is successful on gaining the job. The whole interview process is observed by all the other final year PE students and the lecturers. After the interview day, students then reflect on what they learn through the whole process with their tutor groups.

All the PE lecturers feel that 'Getting That Job Day' is one of the best employability development opportunities they offer to their students because it makes the students become very clear on how to apply themselves when they enter the job market. No matter the students are observing or being interviewed, the whole process gives them a very clear ideal on what happens during such job application process, and more importantly what they need to do to be successful in such application. Because a real school is involved within the process, the lecturers feel such experience is much more effective and constructive to students' employability than the traditional CV writing workshops and interviewing role plays.

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Graduate skills in PE

An example of LJMU Graduate Skills in Module Handbooks: PE1006 The Fundamentals of Gymnastics and Dance[19][20]

This module will enable trainees to develop the following Graduate Skills:		
Analysing and Solving Problems	Consideration of appropriate Gym/Dance learning activities	T/P
Team Work & Interpersonal Skills	Working with others in lectures and for preparation materials	P
Verbal Communication	Be able to voice an opinion based on considered thought	T/P
Written Communication	**Production of quality learning materials/and in assessed work**	**A**
Personal Planning & Organising	Meeting the QTS Standards for Professional Attributes	P
Initiative	Leading small group sessions in both activities	P
Information Literacy & ICT	**Production of quality learning materials/and in assessed work**	**P/A**

(P.1)

So 'officially' (stated in LJMU Graduate Skill statements), students have been promised opportunities "to develop a range of skills that maximise employability, giving them a competitive edge when moving into the world of work" through "ample opportunities to practice and be assessed in the skill areas identified" by their programmes (LJMU, 2008, p). All module leaders and tutors now have the responsibility to integrate those skills into their curriculum and teaching, to support their students' development on those skills, and to assess and to provide feedback on their students' performance on those skills. In theory, it seems like a straightforward implementation of integrating some graduate skills into curriculum and assessment for the lecturers. For the students, this should be a welcome initiative (as claimed by policy documents), as it sets out to improve those vital employability skills which seem to be valuable in today's world of work.

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[19] This is a First Year 24 credits module which runs through the whole academic year. The learning and teaching activities consist of a combination of theories and practical sessions in the gym. The four pieces of assessment tasks include written assessment to produce a dance teaching resource card; to perform a dance composition; to perform a short gymnastics sequence, and to analyse thee gymnastics sequences.

[20] In the table: T = skill is taught in the module; P = skill is practiced in the module; A = skill is assessed in the module.

LJMU Verbal Communication Graduate Skill Criteria

Skill Descriptor	Skill Criteria
Expresses self effectively in both group and one-to-one situations.	1. Communicates clearly in one-to-one conversations, listening and responding appropriately. 2. Makes useful contributions to group discussions, listening and responding appropriately. 3. Presents information to a group, demonstrating understanding of the subject material, explaining terminology in language appropriate to the audience, and listening and interacting appropriately to maximise audience understanding. 4. Presents an argument or opinion in a structured way, using evidence to make the case.

PE QTS Professional Standards Verbal Communication related Criteria

Communicating and working with others
Q4 Communicate effectively with children, young people, colleagues, parents and carers.
Q5 Recognise and respect the contribution that colleagues, parents and carers can make to the development and well-being of children and young people and to raising their levels of attainment.
Q6 Have a commitment to collaboration and co-operative working.
Teaching
Q25 (a) use a range of teaching strategies and resources, including e-learning, taking practical account of diversity and promoting equality and inclusion.
Q25 (b) build on prior knowledge, develop concepts and processes, enable learners to apply new knowledge, understanding and skills and meet learning objectives.
Q25 (c) adapt their language to suit the learners they teach, introducing new ideas and concepts clearly, and using explanations, questions, discussions and plenaries effectively.
Q25 (d) demonstrate the ability to manage the learning of individuals, groups and whole classes, modifying their teaching to suit the stage of the lesson.
Assessing, monitoring and giving feedback
Q26 (a) Make effective use of a range of assessment, monitoring and recording strategies.
Q26 (b) Assess the learning needs of those they teach in order to set challenging learning objectives.
Q27 Provide timely, accurate and constructive feedback on learners' attainment, progress and areas for development.
Q28 Support and guide learners to reflect on their learning, identify the progress they have made and identify their emerging learning needs.

Team working and collaboration
Q32 Work as a team member and identify opportunities for working with colleagues, sharing the development of effective practice with them.
Q33 Ensure that colleagues working with them are appropriately involved in supporting learning and understand the roles they are expected to fulfil.

Appendix 7 OE programme's employability development

WBL

According to the Outdoor Education WBL module handbook (LJMU, 2005)

Rationale and Introduction to work based learning

This module sets out to help students place the background knowledge which they have been developing through their course in the context of the workplace. It gives students the opportunity to make direct links between practice and theory and gives the student knowledge of the operation of relevant agencies not available in any other way.

The module:

Follows an active learning approach, involving students in designing and carrying out their own learning.

Sets the background knowledge gained through the course in context.

Encourages students to look at the fundamental structure and ethos of an organisation.

Encourages students to examine and learn from observing professionals in the workplace.

Allows students to observe the necessary day to day organisation of a relevant organisation.

This approach requires a considerable amount of hard work on the part of the student.

The student will often need to become involved in the work of the agency whilst attempting to observe, record and subsequently reflect and report on the activities of the agency. This will require a high degree of organisation, coupled with careful and sensitive observation.

Aims of work placement

- to enable students to become aware of the factors influencing the operation of the agency;
- to provide opportunities for students to develop perceptual and communication skills by producing written and verbal reports following the placement;
- to enhance students' practical and leadership skills by working with experienced professionals;
- to enable students to relate the academic content of their course to practices in the working environment;
- to develop students' confidence, self reliance, maturity, social skills and responsibility;
- to establish and consolidate links between the University and community agents;
- to provide students with an opportunity to appraise future career and employment options.

Assessment

There are three forms of assessment for this module

1 Poster presentation (30%) No larger than A2 in size, not submitted but peer and staff assessed . This is a poster displayed without any verbal presentation and is thus a stand alone exhibit.

2. Written Report (70%) which should be 2500 words in length. The report should be a well structured report and analysis of a selected aspect of the work of the WBL agency.

3. Report form completed by the student's WBL Supervisor

The report on the student's professional skills and abilities in the workplace made by the agency supervisor and added to the student's Profile of Professional Development. This report should be discussed with the student towards the end of the placement.   The student and the supervisor should discuss the agency report towards the end of the placement. Normally the report should be handed to the student who will submit one copy to the campus office. This will be submitted at the same time as the Report, but will be submitted as a separate item, that is it should not be included in the report

All of these elements must be completed satisfactorily for the student to pass the module.

Guidance on assessment is available via :

discussion during introductory sessions during year 2

tutorial advice available to students from personal tutors and theWBL module leader.

reading the report form (see appendices)

reading the criteria for the poster and written report (see appendix)

consulting other information within the module handbook

Rationale Elements of Assessment

The purpose of the report is to demonstrate how you have used your WBL experience by:

Recording some of your significant WBL experience

Reflecting upon that experience, (this may well use David Kolb's 1975 learning Cycle or some similar model/approach)

Reinforcing your reflection by discussing the experience in relation to- the industry in its' wider context, other experiences of your own and theoretical perspectives

The purpose of the poster is to encourage you to use a visual medium to convey the relationship of some part of the work of the agency. Your should note that this is not a poster in the sense of advertising but of a clearly defined part of the work of the agency including visual and diagrammatic relationships together with supporting information.

The more general purpose of the WBL experience is equally important, that is:

to give you practice at tuning in to situations and to learn from experiences. Using introspection and reflection to continually assess your actions and thus develop skills and understanding.

According to the OE programme leader:

"there is the official WBL module which is the level 3 outdoor education WBL module. And there are un-official opportunities. Most students on our programme all have experience in work. Some of them even have a significant full-time employment experience, especially those mature students…the official module is only 12 credits, which is for 3 weeks. It's only 15 days, but many of them will do more than that. Some of them might embed it into a longer employment in a camp or aboard...They go to all over the world, Africa, New Zealand, Australia, USA; and some go to places in the UK. The majority go to outdoor centres or holiday activity providers. Some go to school, and some go to camps, and some go to equipment suppliers. But we try to keep them all in outdoor education."

Industry recognised professional qualifications

Throughout the three years of OE programme, there is a strong practical thread of outdoor pursuits which include a number of summer and winter outdoor activities. Every semester, students are engaged with practical teaching and learning sessions and independent learning to learn and improve their abilities to carry out particular outdoor activities as well as their abilities to teach and lead such activity. Other key practical abilities and competences are also part of the practical thread, such as emergency procedures.

Level	Module	Credits	Classification	Assessment
1	Introduction to outdoor pursuits	24	Core	50%-3000 words written report 50%-practical activities
1	Outdoor pursuits leadership 1: psychology & practice	36	Core	15%- 1 hour exam 25%-2500 words report 25%-rock climbing/kayaking 35%- mountaineering
2	Advanced outdoor pursuits 1	12	Core	25%-800 words report 75%-practical activities
2	Adventure recreation in the winter environment	24	Core	40%-exam 60%-two 2000 words report
3	Outdoor pursuits leadership 2	12	Option	50%-1 hour exam 50%-practical activities

As well as being assessed based on the programme's practical assessment criteria, students on the OE programme also have the opportunity to enter professional qualification assessment as part of their practical assessment, with additional pay as external assessors are needed to carry out such assessment. For example, when carrying out their mountaineering assessment, students can also choose if they wish to enter assessment for their summer mountain leadership awards. Though this is voluntary, due to the diversity of students' abilities in a wide range of outdoor activities, the practical assessment criteria which contribute to students' final degree classification are largely based on those professional qualifications' syllabus.

An example of rock climbing practical assessment guideline (OE programme handbook, LJMU, 2005)

LJMU ROCK CLIMBING MODULES: PRACTICAL ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES (May 2005) **N.B. These should be used in conjunction with the relevant module learning outcomes.**		
AD. OP. 1 **Sem. 3**	**OP. LEAD 2** **Sem. 6**	**LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT: Competency statement**
85+	80+	**Very high level of skills/experience** *Displays excellent understanding, practice and technique:* movement; equipment and ropework; single/multi-pitch climbing; planning, safety and rescue; group supervision and coaching strategies; appropriate to wide range of groups and environments. **Extremely experienced rock climber e.g. MIA level**
65+	60+	**High level of skills/experience** *Displays good/very good understanding, practice and technique:* movement; equipment and ropework; single/multi-pitch climbing; planning, safety and basic rescue; group supervision; appropriate to a range of groups at single pitch crags. **Experienced rock climber e.g. SPA level and above**

55+	50+	**Good level of skills/experience** *Displays understanding, appropriate practice and technique:* movement; equipment and ropework; single/multi-pitch climbing; planning and safety; assisting with supervision of groups at single pitch crags. **Regular basic level rock climber e.g. good SPA Trainee**
45+	40+	**Developing skills/experience** *Displays some understanding, appropriate practice and technique:* movement; equipment and ropework; single pitch climbing; planning and safety. **Occasional rock climber e.g. needs more practice before SPA Training**
35+	25+	**Some skills/experience** *Displays some understanding, basic practice and technique:* movement; equipment and ropework; single pitch climbing; planning and safety. Novice rock climber, should go rock climbing more regularly

Graduate skills

Here is what the Graduate Skills is about according to the Outdoor Education Student Handbook 2008 (which is the cohort I worked with for my data collection). In the PE Student Handbook, similar information about the Graduate Skills can also be found.

The LJMU Graduate Skills has been developed in 2006, and introduced to all LJMU programmes in 2007-2008 academic year seeks to orientate LJMU students even more closely to the world of work. The overall strategic aim is for students to develop a range of skills that maximise employability, giving them a competitive edge when moving into the world of work.

The objective is to establish a set of minimum requirements for Graduate skills that all undergraduate programmes should contain. The important feature of LJMU Plus is that we should move towards not only defining what Graduate Skills are expected to be achieved, but also to make explicit to our students where there will be opportunities to practice elements of a skills, and to have them assessed, in their modular programme.

The programme team are very confident that all our students are offered ample opportunities to practice and be assessed in the skill areas identified. Additionally, module proformas have been updated to make these graduate skills more overt, particularly where they appear in module learning activities and learning outcomes. (P23)

The Handbooks then went on to introduce what those Graduate Skills are, and how the assessment of them works. The following table, taking from the OE Student Handbook, is a snapshot of what the Graduate Skills consists of.

As pointed out before, those skills are mapped out throughout the whole degree in each module. In theory, they should be gradually built up from Year 1 to final year. Some skills (e.g. team working and interpersonal skills) are repeated in various modules more than others (e.g. numerical reasoning); but each skill must be at least mapped into the curriculum and assessment at least once during the whole degree.

Graduate Skills

You should use this table to keep a record of the skills you acquire during your course. On completing each module your module leader will indicate which skills you have achieved. As you progress through the modules in the programme you should then indicate on here which skills your tutor/module leader has stated you have achieved on your module feedback forms.

Skill Descriptor	Skill Criteria	Any evidence you have for this skill?	Evidenced by tutor or module leader on module feedback form
A	**Analysing and Solving Problems**	√/x	
Relates and compares information from different sources, identifies issues, draws conclusions based on logical assumptions, and determines the most appropriate course of action.	1. Identifies potential problems, issues, and risks, identifying alternative courses of action and recommends a solution.		
	2. Seeks out and uses all relevant available information, and identifies strengths and weaknesses in arguments/situations.		
	3. Breaks down complex information and identifies the key information using logical arguments/reasoning.		
	4. Relates and compares information from several sources, reviewing evidence before coming to a conclusion.		
	5. Distinguishes between facts and assumptions, drawing clear conclusions from complex information.		

(P.59)