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 **Campus to career: a graduate perspective on the usefulness of their degree**

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**Article**

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## Abstract

**Purpose**: Accessing Higher Education in the UK has been a primary pathway for school and college leavers for the past two decades. The present study, through a case study approach, aims to explore graduates' evaluations of the usefulness of university education by examining their evaluations of skill development, employability focused learning, and the usefulness of both over time as their career develops.
**Methodology**: Using a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews, this study involved 33 graduates who had completed their studies at the university within a 10-year period.
**Findings**: Over time, the programme components that initially helped graduates secure their first jobs lose significance. Within the first 1-3 years after graduation, the degree remains a positive factor in job interviews. However, for those who graduated more than four years ago, the focus shifts towards the overall university experience and the value of friendships. The utility of the degree diminishes as experience gained from previous job roles becomes more prominent. Graduates who left university 6-10 years ago recognise the usefulness of certain elements from their university experience, underscoring the importance of reflection, continuous learning, and seizing new opportunities for personal development. However, one factor remained important for all individuals: their transferable skills.
**Originality**: Despite evidence highlighting the importance of employability-focused activities for student development, there still needs to be more research on the link between learning perceptions, developed competencies, and students' readiness for employment. This case study aims to fill this gap by examining the perspectives of HE graduates.

**Keywords**: Employability, graduates, usefulness, skill development, learning.

## Introduction

In the UK higher education (HE) sector, employability has become a strategic directive (Smith *et al.,* 2018). Whilst universities strive to equip students with skills that meet employer expectations and address the demands of a globalised workforce, rising tuition fees and a more competitive graduate job market have led students to place greater emphasis on employability (Byrne, 2020). Traditionally the value of HE had been linked to the idea of the growth of the individual and more lately this has been extended to the productivity agenda focusing on where graduates add value to the economy through bringing innovation and cutting-edge digital techniques into the workplace. To ensure this can happen universities have increasingly integrated employability into their curricula through practical learning, placements, internships, and partnerships with industries. This shift reflects a broader understanding that academic knowledge alone is not sufficient for career readiness; instead, graduates need a combination of theoretical understanding and practical skills to succeed.

There are multiple methods of capturing the perceptions of the student experience whilst within the university (for example in the UK, National Student Survey, The Student Experience Survey) and once graduated the employability angle is followed up by the Graduate Outcome Survey (GOS). This survey takes place 15 months post-graduation to better understand a

graduate career path and experiences after leaving HE and is being seen as a key measurement of how successful a programme is. However, it comes with several issues: response rates have been relatively low; it is old data by the time it is reported; and it focuses on what is called highly skilled employment measures which have been difficult to classify (Universities UK, 2023). Exploring what graduates think and have experienced since leaving university in a qualitative way is needed to add the nuance to this information to enable the voice of the past students to inform the curriculum going forward.

The study employs the term 'usefulness' to reflect graduates' perceived value of their degrees, intentionally setting aside the complexities of various value aspects, which opens avenues for future research. It aims to explore graduates' evaluations of the usefulness of university education by examining their evaluations of skill development, employability focused learning, and the usefulness of both over time as their career develops. There are a multitude of studies focusing on the many elements of employability within HE (e.g. Lasrado *et al.,*2024; Scott & Willison, 2021: Graham, 2017) but limited research focusing on graduate's perceptions of their university education through their career. The perspectives of graduates are essential in providing the HE sector with insights into the transition to the workplace and beyond, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the education and experiences provided by universities.

The study continues by examining the significance of employability factors in the HE curriculum, including employability models, drivers, skill development, and experiential learning. It outlines the qualitative methodology used for the research, which involved 33 graduate interviews. The results and discussion highlight key themes from the data: project-based learning experiences, securing the first job, and changes over time. The study concludes by presenting a framework designed to enhance the development of employability within the curriculum.

**Literature review**

Over the past 20 years, it has become widely accepted that for a degree programme to be useful to graduates, universities must meet dual expectations. They need to intentionally foster student employability within the programme curricula to produce work-ready graduates, while also providing intellectually stimulating learning experiences (Tomlinson, 2018).

Times Higher Education (2020) reported on the usefulness of an undergraduate (UG) degree, finding that most British graduates considered university worthwhile. Of their 1,296 respondents, 87% attributed this to the academic knowledge and skills gained, while just under 50% stated that their degree facilitated securing their first job. Entering the graduate job market can be challenging (Monteiro *et al.,* 2022), with literature revealing significant variation in job availability across different sectors. As the graduate landscape evolves, universities must remain vigilant to changes in the job market and the evolving definition of a graduate job which typically requires the knowledge and skills to perform the associated tasks. . Therefore, to produce work-ready graduates, it is essential for universities to have a curriculum that integrates all aspects of employability.

*Skills and capital as the driver to employability*

High academic credentials alone are now considered insufficient for securing employment (Rayner and Papakonstantinou, 2015); employability skills are crucial. Over the past three decades, several models of employability have emerged in the literature, all emphasising skill development. Notably, the USEM model (understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition) proposed by Yorke and Knight (2006) and the Career EDGE model (experience, degree discipline knowledge, generic skills, and emotional intelligence) by Pool and Sewell (2007) stand out. Both models connect to Bandura *et al.'s* (2001) theory of self-efficacy, which suggests that individuals with a higher perception of their efficacy to meet educational and occupational demands will better prepare for their careers through education. Additionally, Harvey (2001) proposed a model that includes categories such as self-promotion skills, career management, employability attributes based on subject knowledge, and willingness to learn. This aligns closely with the more recent study by Zhang,(2024), whose findings highlighted soft skills, adaptability, and personal competencies as positive outcomes, while placing less emphasis on career-specific and managerial skills. Reporting a different focus, Pazur et al. (2022) would have us consider that advancements in technology are reshaping the skill sets graduates need to develop during their time at university. As a result, universities must encourage students to engage in learning beyond the classroom, emphasising the practical application of skills and adaptability to emerging technologies.

Skills are often categorised into subcategories in many of the models. For instance, Yorke and Knight (2006) proposed a combination of personal qualities, core skills, and process skills. The QAA (2018) has consistently highlighted skills for employability and enterprise in their publications. The Entrecomp framework, (Bacigalupo *et al.,* 2016), acknowledges 15 competences essential for employers. Similarly, the Network of Business and Industry Associations (2014) outlines skills under categories such as personal, interpersonal, applied knowledge, and workplace skills. Dinning (2017) in a study involving both involving both students and employers, found that while students identified skills they developed in alignment with Yorke and Knight's (2006) categories, employers had broader expectations. However, employers' skills still fit within these categories and emphasised a positive mindset and willingness to learn in graduates.

Incorporating this range of skills, behaviours, and attributes into the curriculum is recognised as an initial step in preparing students to develop and transition effectively into the workplace (Tibby and Norton, 2020). This competency-based approach represents a major shift in education, with competencies becoming central to the learning experience (Ferreras-Garcia *et al.,* 2021) and graduate employability models being recognised as a multidimensional factor, citing human capital and other useful resources in our contemporary society (Römgens, et. *al.,* 2020). This supports the earlier work of Butam and Nicolescu (2019) who after reviewing various graduate employability models, found the common feature to be skills, experience and knowledge, which align elements of human capital theory, The work of these authors brings together research on employability both in HE and the workplace. Employability models from the likes of Pool and Sewell (2007) and Yorke and Knight (2006) are categorised as employability in HE and based on dimensions such as understanding, skills, and metacognition. On the other hand, employability in the workplace includes dimensions such as human and social capital, lifelong learning, and reflection (Cheang and Yamashita,2023). Tomlison (2017), in his research explored five dimensions of capital that a student requires as they transition into the workplace. He argues that graduate capital, which includes human, social, cultural, identity and psychological is a new way of understanding

employability and linked to a graduate's transition into the workplace. With employers expressing concerns about the ability of graduates to contribute effectively in the workplace (Sarkar *et al.,* 2016), these more multidimensional models of employability are addressing those concerns, taking into account, skills, competencies and now dimensions of capital A notable point however is the emphasis that employers put on the need for graduates to be ableto transfer skills into the workplace context (Dinning, 2017). This is not a new concern, Mason et al., (2009) reports that there are contextual barriers between the skills being developed in a university setting versus how the skills translates in the workplace context. There is a real need for graduates to have the ability to translate the skills or competencies developed at university into the workplace in order to demonstrate impact, thus supporting the work of Tomlinson (2017) on graduate capital.

*Experiential learning and skill*

Incorporating experiential learning into the curriculum helps students develop essential employability skills and knowledge. ACEN (2024) reports that their study found that this type of learning improved professional capabilities for improved job prospects and increased the awareness of other organisations where graduates could work. This integration spans from foundational knowledge and soft skills to enterprising attributes and behaviours (QAA, 2018), as well as professional skills (Benson and Enstroem, 2017). Jackson (2015) advocates for work-integrated learning, which involves exposing students to a blend of formal teaching and real-world work experiences. It is also reported that these type of experiences are considered significant in preparing graduates with the needed skills for the workplace through experiential learning (Martin and Rees, 2019) . Exposing students to experiences like live projects and involving them in solving problems for external entities provides first-hand exposure to applying skills within a disciplinary context through experiential learning (Pittaway and Cope, 2007). In this experiential learning approach, alongside applying knowledge, there is a significant emphasis on cultivating students' transferable skills (Obi, Eze and Chibuzo, 2022). Such experiential learning, coupled with reflection, allows students to rapidly develop their skills and apply them effectively in relevant contexts (McKeever *et al.,* 2014). Brown (2023) found that students reported significant skills development by using experiential pedagogies whilst Gallagher and Savage (2023) have highlighted challenge-based learning as an emerging pedagogy in this area.

*Usefulness of a degree*

Numerous studies have explored the perceived value and usefulness of a degree. Jackson and Dean's (2022) study of 8,400 Australian graduates revealed that students valued engagement in activities such as projects, placements, and extracurricular involvement, as these experiences enhanced their work readiness. Furthermore, the ACEN (2024) report, suggests approximately two-thirds of graduates reported that participating in work-integrated learning (WIL) enhanced their attractiveness to employers and expanded their professional networks, leading to improved job prospects. Similarly, Griffin and Coelhoso (2018) found that group work, presentations, and project work were perceived by students as useful in developing teamwork, time management, and communication skills. A study of Chinese students by Teng, et *et. al.,* (2019) echoed these findings, emphasising the importance of soft skills development in preparing for the workplace. Teichler's (2015) research with engineering students further highlighted that work-related experiences were most beneficial when connected to relevant

work contexts or professional practice, a view supported by Jackson's (2019) study, where work-integrated learning was also seen as vital for workplace preparation.

In summary, various studies highlight that both students and employers value the development of practical skills and work-related experiences gained through projects, placements, and extracurricular activities, as these are crucial for workplace readiness. While students recognise the importance of a degree, they also understand that it serves primarily as an entry point into the job market, with ongoing learning and skill development being essential for career advancement. However, there remains a gap between graduates' perceptions of their readiness and the actual application of skills in the workplace, indicating a continued need for alignment between academic experiences and professional expectations.

**Context of the study**

This study utilises the voices of past students, who had graduated over a 10-year period, from one UG business degree in a UK university. The programme these students had studied had a focused approach to both developing graduate skills through work-based learning experiences and supporting the personal development through authentic learning, reflection, and action planning. During their time at university, these students engaged in work-based learning (WBL) in their first and second years, involving placements in external organisations. In their final year, they undertook a project for an external host. The objective of these learning periods was to expose students to various work sectors, encouraging exploration, reflection, and skills development to enhance their CVs and expand their professional networks.

**Methodology**

*Research design*

The study set out to explore how graduates interpreted their time at university related to their current experiences in the workplace, thus, a qualitative approach was needed to understand the reality of the individuals and their circumstances. Qualitative research aims to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of a particular group (Kumar, 2014) which was the aim of this study and therefore chosen as the approach taken for the research. Due to the need to capture the individual stories, semi-structured digital interviews were utilised as the data collection method. Digital interviews offer accessibility and flexibility for both researchers and participants (Iacono *et al.,* 2016) and have been found to be as good as in-person interviews (Thunberg and Arnell, 2022).

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study (Arifin, 2018). Prior to the study, ethical approval was obtained through the university's ethics procedures, authorising data collection from the sample group using the proposed questions. All participants were sent an information sheet about the study and completed a consent form prior to the interview taking place.

*Participants and data collection*

Purposive sampling was used to select volunteer participants, who were approached through a LinkedIn alumni group where an overview of the study was shared with a request for volunteers. All graduates that showed an interest were contacted with further details and thirty-three graduates agreed to participate in the study. The demographic profile was 55% male and 45% female with ages being between 21 and 45. All interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes and conducted by a single researcher to ensure research consistency. All interviews were conducted digitally, recorded and auto transcribed via the online platform.

The alumni who participated in the study graduated between 2012 and 2022. They were categorised into three groups based on their graduation years: 1-3 years ago [n=11], 4-6 years ago [n=10], and 7-10 years ago [n=12]. The participants included 18 females and 15 males. All but one were based in the UK with a spread across the country.

*Data Coding*

The coding of the data roughly followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage guide which according to McLeod (2015: 147) is "a good choice for researchers who feel confident that they know what they are trying to achieve" Braun and Clarke (2022) tell us that thematic analysis helps researchers make visible the various elements of information whilst also considering how they connect and build on each other.  All researchers read and re-read each interview transcript and produced their individual codes, they then came together to discuss the analysis. The agreed themes and sub-themes can be seen in Table 1

**Results and Discussion**

The interviews revealed that only five students stayed in their first graduate job, all of whom had graduated within the last six years. In contrast, the remaining 28 students had moved on to other positions. Among those who graduated 1-3 years ago, most were in their second job. Graduates from 4-6 years ago had held between 2-4 different roles, while those who graduated 7-10 years ago reported having 2-5 jobs.

Most graduates had entered similar positions in the job market, such as assistant, administrative, internship, and supervisor roles, with some keeping their student jobs. Over the 10-year period, there was little variation in initial roles, often seen as a 'foot in the door' (Jackson, 2020). Graduates employed for 4-6 years transitioned to roles like marketing executives and department heads, while those employed for over 6 years held positions such as CEOs and senior account managers, reflecting typical career progression within the alumni cohort (Tomlinson and Nghia, 2020).

Table 1: Overview of thematic analysis

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Project-based learning experience | Transferable skills |
| | Linking theory to practice |
| | Developing networks |
| | Self- confidence |

| | Professionalism |
| --- | --- |
| | Ability to reflect |
| Getting their first job | Transferable skills |
| | Experience linked to interview success. |
| | Working with the careers team |
| Changes in perception over time | Transferable skills remain pertinent. |
| | Positive mind-set |
| | Continuing to seek developmental opportunities |

Source: Authors work *Project-based learning experience*

Graduates across years highlighted the importance of developing transferable skills, teamwork, communication, decision-making, and adaptability, during their studies, aligning with Yorke and Knight's (2006) skills-based employability models. They agreed that real-life projects were crucial, with many crediting practical experience for securing their first, and sometimes second, job. This aligns with the findings of Martin and Rees (2022), who concluded that the skills gained through experiential learning positioned students advantageously within the workplace. These projects helped bridge the gap between theory and practice, enabling graduates to better understand theoretical concepts through hands-on learning. They mentioned phrases like "*making this more real to me*" and "*helping me understand what the theory was saying*" to underscore the value of hands-on learning in enhancing their understanding of academic concepts.

> *"I struggled to know why we needed to understand all the theory and what use it was to know this. I went on my final year placement and suddenly what I learnt made sense. It helped me understand the context of that workplace and be able to work well in the organisation" (Graduate 2018).*

Mason (2009) highlighted the ongoing challenge of translating university-taught skills into workplace settings, suggesting project-based learning as a solution for both new and seasoned graduates. Graduates here reporting that project experience helped them apply theory to practice. Pool and Sewell's (2007) EDGE model also emphasises the importance of workplace experience, which universities should prioritise despite the additional resources required, such as industry connections and staff support.

The graduates identified several factors associated with their project experience, particularly in the development of their professional network and contacts. Recent graduates emphasised the significance of social media in this aspect, highlighting its prevalence in their networking strategies. However, they also emphasised the importance of maintaining a professional online presence. Many acknowledged the role of linking workplace practices to their education, which aided them in developing a polished online profile. This integration of workplace teachings with their educational background facilitated the cultivation of their professional identity.

> *"Learning how to develop your online presence was critical to building my own profile and this was one factor that helped me get the first job and having built on this the subsequent one. I remember thinking what a waste of time those sessions were – I was very wrong" (Graduate 2020).*

Findings indicate that employability is complex and requires contemporary thinking, as Römgens et al. (2020) argue it goes beyond skills and experiences. Managing an online presence, though less covered in literature, emerged as a crucial future skill for graduates. Learning experiences should help build graduates' social and human capital (Römgens et al., 2020). Graduates also highlighted self-confidence, developed through project work, as essential, providing valuable discussion points in job interviews.

> *'At the start of the project I had to speak to the host on my own, this is not something I had ever had to do before, but if really helped be believe in myself and gave me the confidence to ask the host questions when I was unsure' (Graduate 2021).*

All graduates mentioned learning how to prepare professional reports and presentations for external clients.

> *"The detail on formatting reports was something I have never forgotten – I left 6 years ago- I still think of the tutor when I put a report together" (Graduate 2017).*

This is consistent with the findings of Griffin and Coelhoso (2018), who observed that students regarded presentations and group work as beneficial. However, this current study introduces an additional aspect: the significance of reflection. Individuals who had graduated over four years ago discussed the importance of reflection beyond their project experiences.

> *"I remember hating the reflective pieces we had to do for some modules; I thought it was a waste of time as we had already done the assessment. It was only later that I realised that looking back helped me work out a way forward" (Graduate 2015).*

Reflection was not something these individuals had valued or enjoyed during their studies. However, they now recognise its significance and the skill it entails. These graduates appreciated that they were encouraged to reflect on their development, as it has enabled them to continue this practice as a valuable personal development activity.

> *"I know how to look back at something I have done and think about the elements of that I relation to what I need to go forward. I don't label it as a reflective cycle but essentially that's what I do" (Graduate 2016).*In addition to acquiring knowledge, skills, and experiences, the graduates found that various types of assessments they completed—such as reports, in-person presentations, and video presentations—proved to be valuable assets in the workplace.

> *"Whilst doing assessments I just thought they were to get me marks, I didn't really connect to the fact that what I was doing would help me in my career. I still think about this especially in terms of how to produce a professional report" (Graduate 2012).*

This finding underscores the importance of integrating reflection into student assessments, enabling students to practice articulating their skills and competencies. Reflective abilities allow graduates to offer employers more than just a degree.

*Getting their first job*

The graduates identified several factors they believe contributed to successfully securing their first job. These included transferable skills such as teamwork, confidence, networking, and presentation skills acquired during their programme. and specifically in relation to their placements. Martin and Reese (2019) found that this type of *experience is providing a point of difference for students in enhancing their employability.* Aligning with the ACEN (2024) findings about the benefits of work-integrated learning. Interestingly, these elements appeared unaffected by the time since graduation.

> *"All to do with transferable skills - you don't always appreciate things that you're doing are actually going to transfer over. It's the skills and the way you communicate with people and things are all the same" (Graduate 2017).*

Griffin and Coelhoso (2018) found similar insights, but Cheang and Yamashita (2023) note that students often overlook the gap between their skills and employer expectations. This suggests a need for greater awareness and preparation to ease their workforce transition.

> *"Being able to talk about the projects and applied experiences at interview really interested the employers" (Graduate from 2015).*

Over half of the graduates emphasised the value of setting goals and collaborating with career teams, which helped with job applications and interviews. Five graduates admitted they didn't initially see the importance of career activities, like updating LinkedIn, but now recognise their value after gaining work experience.

> *"Writing a personal statement, I found helped me get ready for my first interview. It* forced *me to sit down and think about how I matched to the job role and all the stuff that you need to do it. Only afterward did I realise how useful the careers stuff was" (Graduate 2020).*

Studies such as Soares, Carvalho, and Silva (2022) have examined student views on career services during university. This study, however, suggests that some students only appreciate career support's value post-graduation, revealing a gap in understanding its benefits during their studies.

*Changes in perception over time*

As time passes, the importance of the programme's components, which were instrumental in assisting graduates in securing their initial jobs, appears to diminish. The findings indicate that during the first 1-3 years after graduation, the degree serves as a positive factor in job interviews. This is attributed to the associated transferable skills, which have enabled graduates to secure a wide range of jobs.

> *"I went from the degree into a marketing role for a large conglomerate, and soon recognised that the skills I developed whilst on the programme were going to*

*useful to me in my job……………… skills such as problem solving, and communication" (Graduate 2013).*

Building on Jackson's (2020) idea of a degree as a 'foot in the door', this study suggests that while the degree's importance fades for later jobs, work experience and transferable skills become increasingly valuable. Graduates recognise that university laid the foundation for these skills, which they continue to develop in the workplace. However, specific aspects of workplace learning contributing to later roles are unclear, highlighting a need for further research into how employability develops in both higher education and the workplace.

*"When I get together with my friends from the course we talk about what we did, not so much what we learnt. The skills are there still there through, the ability to research, problem-solve, reflect. I might have got better at them but the fundamentals are the same" (Graduate 2017).*

Graduates with 4-6 years of work experience highlighted the importance of a positive mindset and continuous learning, a perspective they hadn't fully valued while studying. Half agreed that learning is ongoing, supporting Brooks and Everett's (2009) findings on the need for lifelong learning to enhance career prospects. This study adds to research on workplace employability, underscoring the role of continuous development for career success.

Graduates highlighted that actively seeking opportunities at work and volunteering has been crucial for their success in subsequent job interviews. Additionally, just over half of the graduates emphasised the importance of continually building networks within their sector, both face-to-face and through social media.

*"It's been a whole since I studied but I guess I still know how to learn and have a passion for finding things out. I have just got better at it over the years. What we learnt maybe not be that important anymore but how to learn has been crucial to my success" (Graduate 2018).*

This aligns with the idea of building both knowledge and networks through work-specific activities, yet the study could have explored these aspects in greater depth to further contribute to the existing research. A deeper investigation into how these opportunities shape long-term career progression would provide valuable insights into effective workforce development strategies.

Graduates who left university 6-10 years ago now appreciate aspects of their university experience, with eight out of twelve emphasising the importance of reflection and continuous learning. This cohort demonstrated a deeper awareness of their growth and highlighted the value of lifelong learning for career advancement, including securing new roles and promotions.

*"I always put myself forwards for projects and opportunities. At university I remember always being told to volunteer for things and I have continued and will continue to do this" (Graduate 2014).*

This has important implications for graduate employers as if they aim to develop their workforce, they need to consider the types of opportunities they provide. Further research could explore what specific opportunities graduates value as they transition into their second

and third jobs, helping employers better support long-term professional growth and satisfaction.

This study explored graduates' views on the long-term value of their degrees, emphasising the importance of skill development and project-based learning to bridge theory and practice. It supports contemporary employability models, suggesting that employability extends beyond academic preparation into the workplace. Further research is needed to better understand workplace-specific employability and provide targeted insights for both employers and graduates.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

This study aimed to explore graduates' perspectives on the usefulness of their degrees after graduation. The findings reinforce the ongoing debate about the importance of skill development within academic programmes, emphasising project-based learning as a key method where students can apply theoretical knowledge to practice and better understand the coherence of their studies. Additionally, the research supports contemporary employability models by highlighting that employability extends into the workplace, beyond just academic preparation. To gain a clearer understanding of workplace-specific employability, further research is needed to provide both employers and graduates with targeted knowledge.

Graduates across years emphasised the importance of skill development during their degree programmes, highlighting networking (especially via social media), self-confidence from project work, and the value of reflection as key contributors to their professional growth. They found that integrating theoretical learning with real-life projects deepened their understanding and enhanced their job performance, impressing potential employers in interviews. Over time, graduates noted that while work experience becomes more relevant than their degree for career progression, transferable skills and a positive mindset remain essential. Graduates with 4–10 years of experience now recognise the importance of reflection, continuous learning, and adaptability, underscoring these as critical to career development and aligning with evolving models of workplace learning.

In conclusion, these findings underline the importance of a well-rounded educational experience that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical skills, fosters reflective practices, and promotes continuous learning. They also emphasise the evolving nature of graduate priorities and the ongoing relevance of transferable skills in navigating career trajectories. HE institutions can use these insights to tailor programmes that effectively prepare graduates for the dynamic demands of the professional world.

By adopting a broad perspective on employability, this study offers several recommendations to enhance current models. Graduates must recognise that their learning journey continues as they transition from university to the workplace. In this context, four key elements of employability should be considered:

- Refection: Ensure reflection is built on continuous self-appraisal.

- Experience:  Clarity and specificity regarding workplace opportunities depending upon the maturity of the graduate.
- Mindset: Foster a growth mindset in the workplace. Time specific:  A temporal approach emphasises the need to consider an individual's career stage when assessing employability. Early-career graduates may need foundational skills and networking, while those further along may focus on leadership and industry expertise. Employability strategies should be tailored to support these different stages of career development.

Incorporating Reflection, Experience, Mindset, and Time (REMT) into the workplace offers the foundation for developing a broader employability model that can be tested and refined. This holistic approach acknowledges that employability is not static but evolves through ongoing reflection, the accumulation of experience, a growth-oriented mindset, and the passage of time. By integrating REMT, employers can better support the continuous development of their workforce, creating an adaptable framework that aligns with the dynamic needs of both employees and the labour market.

**7.0 Implications**

The findings highlight important implications for HE institutions, emphasising the need to incorporate work-related learning that combines theoretical and practical knowledge to better prepare students for real-world challenges. This integration not only enhances job readiness but also improves job interview performance and employability. The emphasis on developing self-confidence and transferable skills through experiential learning highlights the need for programmes to evolve with industry demands, ensuring that students acquire skills like resilience, adaptability, and diligence.

From a student perspective the proposed REMT framework—Reflection, Experience, Mindset, and Time—provides a flexible model for graduate employability, adaptable to meet changing workforce needs and support professional growth over time. This may help encourage students in reflection and the development of a growth mindset throughout education which should then equip them as graduates to handle career challenges more effectively, promoting lifelong learning as a foundation for success.

Organisations need graduates who can work at the appropriate level as they come into the business. What a student has achieved at university should set them up to be an asset for the organisation. To this end this type of learning experience needs to be facilitated by external organisations offering quality and extensive work experience opportunities. The better the experience for the student the stronger the graduate skills should become.

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