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Re-imagining Employability: an Ontology of Employability Best Practice in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This paper uses a macro, meso and micro level analysis of employability best practice in higher education institutions (HEIs) to question how employability is being conceived within higher education settings alongside academic goals. Thematic analysis is applied to: a range of academic articles and papers containing HEI employability best practice case studies (macro-level); papers from the 2016 Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities' Employability Conference (meso-level); and Swansea University Department of Media and Communication employability activities from 2013 to 2018 (micro-level). The results are visualised as an ontology of higher education employability, which has the notion of 'entrepreneurial spirit' at the centre. The paper finds that embedding an entrepreneurial approach can help drive innovation in subject-level teaching in a way which can enhance, rather than inhibit, critical academic enquiry.

Key Words: employability, entrepreneurialism, authentic assessment, arts and humanities

Introduction

This paper analyses employability best practice in higher education institutions (HEIs) to question how employability is being conceived and delivered within higher education

settings, addressing a need for further conceptualisation and understanding of graduate employability (Minocha, Hristov and Reynolds 2017). In particular, it tackles the question of whether employability is synergistic with, or contrary to the academic curriculum. Existing critical approaches to higher education (HE) employability have conceptualised a binary opposition between employability and academic goals, but this paper will argue instead that the entrepreneurial spirit offers a new way to approach employability, which sees it as complimentary, rather than in opposition to, the academic endeavour.

Employability, Capitalist Hegemony and Academic Endeavour

Employability has been defined as ‘a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy’ (Yorke 2006, 8). It has internal components relating to learned abilities and skills, as well as uncontrollable external factors (Batistic and Tymon 2017), such as labour market forces, which are driving students to regard employability potential as the most important factor in deciding to go to university (Jisc 2015). Employability has become an important focus for higher education (HE) (Bell 2016), caused by: globalisation and the knowledge economy (Kalfa and Taksa 2017); increasing numbers of students (Helyer and Lee 2014); the massification and marketisation of HE (Farenga 2015; James and Yun 2018); devalued degree qualifications (Batistic and Tymon (2017); the Bologna Process (Sin and Amaral 2017); government policies (Huq and Gilbert 2013); skills shortages (Yorke 2006, Belwal et al 2016); and the fact that graduate employability has become a publicly reportable statistic (Rae 2007; Rowe and Zegwaard 2017). Many contemporary HE policies aim to strengthen the relationship between universities and the free market, leading to increased managerialism of academia (Valenzuela 2013, Bell 2016). Personal performance indicators are used to compel

academic staff to adopt teaching practices which enhance graduate employability, and governing bodies and employers exert increasing influence over the content and delivery of curriculum (Kalfa and Taksa 2017). Academic management and culture, in opposition to such academic capitalism, can often be a counterforce to the successful introduction of employability within curricula (Rae 2007).

Employability is also conceptualised as a constituent of governmental regulatory systems, supporting a neo-Liberalist restructuring of education as a servant of economic productivity (Frauley 2012). As such, employability becomes a legitimisation strategy used by education policy makers to encourage more vocationally-orientated education approaches, underpinning a hegemonic capitalist view of the social system which restricts exploration of alternative sociologies. To achieve this, HE is often historically aligned with specific industry sectors where graduates are seen as human capital to be developed to support particular economies (Yorke 2004). In Vietnam, for example, Tran found that employers were looking for professional knowledge, language skills, generic soft skills and work experience (Tran 2015). Exactly the same set of employability needs have been identified as being in urgent need of further development in Oman, where double-digit unemployment for the under 30s has been triggered by the specific labour market conditions in the gulf states. Private industry jobs are being predominantly filled by skilled immigrant workers, leaving the public sector labour market saturated with job-seeking indigenous graduates. With an identified gap between university curriculum and the needs of the business world, research has identified a need for a comprehensive shift in educational philosophy towards training programmes which include industry experience and soft skills (Belwal et al 2016). In Qatar, which faces similar labour market issues, El-Kassem et al (2018) found that parents perceived a university education as an investment, with employability seen as an expected return on that investment. Career

prospects and graduate job expectations are therefore key drivers for parents in forming opinions of HE reputations and influencing their childrens' choice of universities and courses.

Work experience in particular, can provide a catalyst for useful employer-university relationships for students (Helyer and Lee 2014). The Australian Government's Department of Education and Training commissioned an in-depth study of Work Integrated Learning in HE to share best practice from 13 Australian and two overseas universities (Sachs et al 2016). It found that the best approaches are well-governed, prioritised, supported by institutional and industry-based champions, and embrace both university-based, and in-situ, opportunities which are built through strong relationships and dialogue with industry. The purpose of the best-practice sharing is to help build the productive capacity of Australia's workforce, meeting employers' skills-needs, and improving graduate job prospects (Sachs et al 2016). The importance of liaising with industry, to identify the skills and attributes required for certain industries, was also found to be important in a survey of Greek sports and recreation organisations who claimed to be looking, in particular, for professional behaviour and interpersonal skills, as well as leadership, problem solving, communication, continuous learning ability and time management capabilities (Tsitskari et al 2017).

Education which facilitates access to business networking provides students with opportunities to use social contacts to access information and resources useful to employability outcomes, thus capitalizing their networking experience into employability (Batistic and Tymon 2017). Such work-based, problem-oriented experiential learning, which provides opportunities to learn theory in conjunction with practice, often receives overwhelmingly positive feedback from students (Huq and Gilbert 2013). Whilst these opportunities can be empowering, students can also be overwhelmed however by the abstract

concept of their working future, in which they must conceptualise their own specific value and compete with fellow students in the competitive job market (Valenzuela 2013). By investing both time and money to make themselves employable, students are effectively taking part in a commercial exercise in achieving employability (Bell 2016) and employability, therefore, becomes a product of education (Baumann et al 2014).

Gibbs (2000) argues that such competence-base employability approaches, linked to employment sustainability, hegemonically support a capitalist ideology. This is opposite to existential education aims, which should contribute to the creative revelation of an individual's potential (Gibbs 2000). It is also different to the notion of university as a life experience which leads to the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom (Minocha, Hristov and Reynolds 2017). Leaning on Aristotle's conception of education, Gibbs (2000) suggests that HE outcomes should be a balance of 'the mercantile, the civic, and the contemplative' in order to contribute to the moral and economic needs of society (Gibbs 2000, 561). A survey of Canadian graduates reveals that students may also feel this way. They choose university places based on employability potential, but once at university they are actually more interested in personal fulfilment, and achieving life goals through engaging with their subjects in a critical and indepth way (James and Yun 2018).

Entrepreneurship, Enterprise and Employability

Semantic differences between employability, entrepreneurship, and enterprise are often ignored and it is important therefore to seek definitions (Sewell and Dacre Pool 2010).

Entrepreneurship can be characterised as the teaching of processes and practices to facilitate the creation of start-up businesses for entrepreneurship, whilst enterprise education focuses on enterprising skills, capabilities and behaviours for enterprise, designed to enable students to

function better as employees and citizens (Jones and Iredale 2014). Whilst there is arguably a link between such education, and notions of societal empowerment, which might, for example, prepare students to contribute to the Big Society (Crayford et al 2012), the focus remains on outcomes which are seen in mainly commercial terms, relating to the acquisition of empowering competencies which support the wealth creation process (Jones and Iredale 2014).

Normative approaches to entrepreneurship research likewise focus on the development of specific entrepreneurial skills linked to start-up businesses, or strategies for encouraging a resilient entrepreneurial spirit in students, in order that they may be successful in their future working lives (Crayford et al 2012). A combination of explanation-based and experienced-based styles of teaching and learning, which use teamwork to tackle real-life cases and problems, is seen as best practice (Ramsgaard and Christensen 2018). A range of studies acknowledge that employability and entrepreneurialism are complimentary skills and find that having an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ makes students more likely to find higher level graduate employment (Bell 2016). A pro-active disposition, and motivation to achieve, can be significant contributors to students’ ability to find employability six months after graduation. The goal here is that HE should facilitate the call by captains of industry for innovative, employable graduates who have an ‘entrepreneurial mind-set’ (Crayford et al 2012).

This paper does not seek to counter the argument that closer alignment between education and business can positively empower students in the workplace, neither does it dismiss the notion that universities have a key role to play in the growth and development of economies (Minocha, Hristov and Reynolds 2017), but it does address a less-researched area in the literature which considers the link between entrepreneurial and enterprise education with

socially-driven outcomes and endeavours which might challenge fundamental capitalist hegemony. Core attributes of a critical pedagogy, such as creativity, innovation and planning have been subsumed by the business-led focus of the employability teaching agenda but, they are still useful for critical enquiry and challenge (Lambert, Parker and Neary 2007). Similarly, Huq and Gilbert (2013) found that work-based learning within non-for-profit, and social enterprise organisations, can help produce more socially-aware, responsible graduates and this paper likewise seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how employability learning, and teaching, might aid holistic critical enquiry.

Materials and Method

Following Kalfa and Taksa's (2017) three-tiered approach for the analysis of the impact of managerialism on higher education, this paper employs a tripartite approach comprising: a macro-level thematic analysis of employability discourse in academic journal articles and higher education employability reports, relating to employability practice in UK HEIs; a meso-level thematic analysis of Swansea University's College of Arts and Humanities July 2016 Employability Conference; and a micro-level case study of how employability teaching practices have enhanced student satisfaction and teaching excellence for Swansea University's Department of Media and Communication.

For the macro institutional-level analysis, six peer-reviewed academic articles and four employability reports from Jisc (formerly the Joint Information Systems Committee) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) were used to underpin a study of employability strategies in UK HEIs. The non-for-profit organisation Jisc, and the UK's Higher Education Authority, have both funded research studies into employability, and to supplement these reports a search was conducted seeking academic research papers using the term 'higher education

employability' produced between 2010 and 2016. Papers were purposely selected to include those with case study material and those which addressed overall university strategy for the operationalisation of employability. The papers analysed included 29 separate case studies of employability best practice in higher education institutions. Thematic analysis was used to incorporate aspects of quantitative content analysis, whilst enabling a focus on themes, or grand discourses, favoured by Fairclough (2003) and Foucauld (1970). Themes were developed inductively from the raw data (Boyatzis 1998) and salient constellations of meanings (Joffe 2011) were highlighted to help interpret phenomena at both a manifest and latent level (Boyatzis 1998). Researcher subjectivity was avoided by explicit coding and staying close to the raw data, rather than focusing as much on the frequency of abstracted codes (Joffe and Yardley 2004).

For the meso college-level analysis a thematic analysis was undertaken of nine papers from the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Employability Conference July 2016. The Department of Media and Communication at Swansea University was then used as a case study for a micro department-level analysis of the characteristics of employability over a five year period. Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DHLE) figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) proved a problematic base for analysis, as the department was housed within the Modern Languages department before August 2016, and so the National Student Survey (NSS) 'Personal Development' question was used as a baseline. In August 2013, only 72% of students were happy with their personal development in the department (NSS 2013), characterised by comments such as 'we have very little information on what to do after university'. This score was well below the sector average for media and communication. The department identified a need to raise the expectations of graduates and a five year plan was put in place resulting in the NSS Personal Development score rising to

87% in the August 2016 (NSS 2016). The Department now has the highest score for graduate prospects for media departments in the 2020 Complete University Guide, and a 94% NSS overall satisfaction rating (NSS 2018).

Results

Macro Analysis: UK HEI Employability Best Practice Case Studies

Thirty-six themes and seven major discourse categories emerged (Table 1) from the macro institutional-level analysis of higher education employability case studies. The seven key themes were: 1) an employability outlook; 2) the provision of specific employability curricula content; 3) the need for training in specific employability skills; 4) a variety of distinctive employability activities; 5) the creation of a central employability service; 6) the need for delivery of some employability services by Colleges; and 7) the involvement of employers and alumni in curriculum development and delivery.

Table 1 here

When looking at specific employability activities undertaken by HEIs, eight activities were identified as best practice. These were: 1) employability workshops (30%); 2) careers and employability information which is autonomously available to students (40%); 3) the opportunity to practice and learn interview skills (20%); 4) an employability certificate or award (40%); 5) the opportunity to take part in work placements (50%); 6) the provision of work-based mentors (30%); 7) opportunities to take part in volunteering (20%); and 8) the provision of pathways to graduate internships (20%). Eighty per cent of the articles talked about the importance of embedding employability within curriculum, although this was often identified as particularly challenging. As examples of embedded employability practice, some HE institutions are using virtual workplace environments to simulate workplace experiences, some are setting student projects with employability elements, and some are

running compulsory employability modules. Evidence showed, however, that many students objected to the compulsory nature of specifically employability-related components of curricula. Forty per cent of the case studies talked about using employers to deliver employability sessions and workshops, whilst other universities use alumni mentoring (40%) and external advisory boards (30%). According to the research, employability best practice often involves different institutional-, college- and subject-level delivery approaches for HEI employability services, and whilst employability awards are currently popular (40%), there is a worry about commodification in the same way that a degree alone is no longer a differentiating characteristic for students (Farenga 2015).

Many HEIs are providing a combined service (30%), with professional central units providing 'bolt-on' services and support for colleges and schools. Liverpool John Moores, for example, gave cohesion to its combined provision through 'super-convergence', bringing employability and careers services together under the World of Work Careers Centre umbrella brand (Tyrer, Ives and Corke 2013), and Southampton University likewise created its Mission Employable brand to bring together college-based employability services (Medland et al 2015), but in many institutions there is a lack of joined-up approaches between the central careers services and individual academic departments. Other success factors identified in relation to central services were: the setting of employability Key Performance Indicators (KPI)s (10%); the use of surveys to measure student satisfaction (40%); vigorous marketing of employability programmes to both students and academics (10%); and the integration of technology to support the implementation of e-portfolios (40%).

The thematic analysis reveals that, despite the general belief that HE learning outcomes have inherent value, a functionalist view of the role universities play in relation to employability

prevails (Oria 2012). Career skills acquisition is seen as the most important element of employability curriculum content (90%), with many case studies incorporating elements of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) 2009 list which includes: self-management; team working; business and customer awareness; problem solving; communication and literacy; application of numeracy; application of IT; and entrepreneurship. The key issue, however, seems to be ensuring that students self-manage skills acquisition (70%) and can reflect upon, identify and communicate these skills to employers (70%). Employability implementation also includes the capacity of the graduates to function in a job (Oria 2012), leading some institutions to focus on the type of graduates they want to produce (Medland et al 2015).

Meso Analysis: Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Employability

Conference

Three broad discourse categories were identified from the meso college-level analysis: 1) Arts and Humanities Employability; 2) Industry Facing; and 3) Professional Employability Process. The study found that for the Arts and Humanities, employability must be embedded in the curriculum and must be subject-specific. Many Arts and Humanities programmes have inherent work place skills entrenched within traditional subject teaching and assessments, and many employers acknowledge that graduates from traditional subjects display useful skills of information-seeking, problem-solving and independent working (Yorke 2006). Nevertheless, the embedding of employability outcomes is seen as important even for non-vocational subjects, with a focus on the idea that employability skills and academic learning could be constructively inter-related and not oppositional to the subject area curriculum. It is important that employability outcomes are identified for students and mapped against the kind of skill-based language used by employers. Swansea University Arts and Humanities College did this by mapping traditional and non-traditional assessment outcomes against CBI identified skill

sets. Attributes built into many arts and humanities subject-area assessments include, group-working, problem-solving and reflection - skills which enable students to flourish in work-place environments (Tyrer et al 2013).

Subjects within the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities use a very wide range of assessment techniques which enable students to research, analyse and present data in a variety of ways. Even traditional subjects, like classics and history, incorporate an interesting range of alternative assessment formats such as blogs, websites, on-site presentations, journals, critical reviews, heritage site proposals, catalogues of historic phenomena and even the manufacture of an item of ancient technology. By including employability skills, and connecting them to the subject matter, students engage with the ancient world in a way which would not be possible in a traditional classroom setting, and their reflective academic work on the employability assignments is often of a higher quality than other academic assignments. Of particular importance is the concept of critical thinking, in which subject areas encourage students to challenge hegemonic views, develop arguments and construct solutions for societal-level problems.

The most frequently occurring themes in the Industry Facing category, identified from the Swansea University Arts and Humanities Employability conference, were the provision of either credit or non-credit bearing work placement and volunteering opportunities, and also the use of authentic assessments. These engage students in working on either real-life scenarios, or live briefs from industry partners, such as the creation of a simulated translation company in languages, or media students pitching creative ideas and plans to members of the department's Industry Panel. Also included within subject-specific programmes were the acquisition of employability skills, such as report and CV writing and networking, as well as

talks and collaborations with industry partners and alumni, exemplified in MA summer translation and communications modules which lead students through applying for, delivering and reflecting on a work-based project or experience.

The distinctiveness of employability for the Arts and Humanities is identified by a range of academic researchers. Bennett's (2016) Employability Development Framework visualises how music students go through a cyclical process of developing skills and career awareness before interacting with the world of work. The key need is for graduates to develop a capacity to engage as professionals and innovative thinkers to prepare them for precarious, ill-defined, complex and rapidly transforming employment contexts. Dance graduates similarly perceive their careers as a journey in which they have to continuously network and re-invent themselves in order to find, create and meet the requirements of new employment opportunities. For them generic employability programmes, preparing them for the world of jobs, have no relevance, and instead they welcome focused work placements and insight into creative organisations in order to explicitly identify opportunities and assist their future career self-management (Higdon and Stevens 2017). Arts graduates are often pushed into entrepreneurship, self-employment and freelance work by necessity and such students might benefit from entrepreneurial learning, which encompasses new venture creation, learning entrepreneurial behaviours such as resilience, opportunity recognition and career management strategies (Bridgstock 2012).

In the Swansea University Arts and Humanities College, employability learning is embedded within subject areas, and is not delivered via a bolt-on pan-College type of module.

Academic staff are forging their own relationships with subject-relevant partners and cleverly devising modules and assessments which connect traditional subjects with work-place

environments and skills. A good example of this is politics-based modules which provide students with specific experience in UK and Welsh Assembly parliamentary environments. The conference revealed that lecturers embedding employability are at the cutting edge of using online learning technologies and experimental experience-based pedagogical techniques. Across the sector, the Arts and Humanities are experiencing pressure to address the employability agenda, despite the fact that there is an intellectual discomfort with this routed in tradition. Whilst US universities have traditionally embraced industry-focused learning and research programmes, such themes are only recently being explored in UK arts and humanities institutions (Barrow et al 2010). Embedding employability in arts and humanities programmes is not an easy task given tight deadlines, competing priorities and limited resources (Dowling, Rose and O'Shea 2015). There is often a misalignment between what academics perceive as important skills and the view of employers, resulting in a notable lack of practice-based perspectives in many arts and humanities programmes, which remain constructed on a traditional knowledge framework, rather than a practice framework. And yet, even non-vocational subjects report that many programmes benefit from significant connections with outside organisations which help students understand real working environments and connections (Tyrer et al 2013). The experience within the College of Arts and Humanities at Swansea University has shown that it is possible to creatively embed the learning of employability and enterprise attributes, whilst also nurturing a student mind-set capable of going beyond traditional hegemonic thinking and institutional practices.

Micro Analysis: Swansea University Department of Media and Communication

Employability

A micro case study analysis focused on the department of Media and Communication at Swansea University. The analysis covered a five year period from 2013 onwards, and found

that the department had incorporated a range of employability best practice activities every year during that time period. The innovations started with the appointment of an academic employability champion within the department in 2013 which helped privilege employability within the curriculum and led to the introduction of a range of authentic assessments and industry facing skills modules which address specific industry skill requirements (journalistic writing, digital communications practice and media production for example). In 2014, the employability champion worked with College and University professional employability staff to embed information sessions, and the University's Swansea Employability Academy (SEA) Award, within credit-bearing modules. Employability workshops focusing on specific employability skills were also started in 2014. Other innovations included the creation of a work placement module, an advisory industry panel and sponsorship of academic prizes by employers in 2015. The following year industry-accreditation was achieved for the undergraduate public relations programme, and latterly a Year in Industry programme was created.

Table 2 here

Authentic assessment, in which critical and practical media theory is linked to problem-solving, creativity and real-life scenarios, emerges as a particular characteristic of employability in the department. In addition there is a focus on reflection and self-empowerment, with students often taken out of their comfort zone through creative group working. Embedded employability tasks are specifically linked to best practice, and critical theory, to encourage students, not only to apply best practice, but to critically consider its impact and effectiveness. In addition, strong contacts have been formed with a wide range of local employers, university departments and non-for-profit organisations to set up a range of short and long term placement and work integrated learning projects. Working with

departments within the university has provided opportunities for many international students, whilst internships and recruitment partnerships with local companies has enabled the department to become a pipe-line for local businesses looking for skilled and capable media and communication graduates.

What is particularly striking about the Department of Media and Communication at Swansea University is the trajectory of activity documented in the case study over the course of the five year period analysed, as illustrated in Table 2. This suggests an *entrepreneurial spirit* exists in the department, manifested in a willingness to innovate and try new teaching and assessment. The academic team is using and exploiting the same skills it wants to empower in its students – skills of networking, resilience, problem-solving and creativity. As well as rising to become the top media department for employability in the 2020 Complete University Guide, the NSS results overall for the Swansea University Department of Media and Communication went up dramatically during this period, suggesting that this type of content and teaching approach was received extremely well by students. Perhaps the sense of purpose, and the interactive nature of much of this teaching, is an important aspect to consider in itself. High attendance rates in modules which have been adapted to include entrepreneurial skills suggests this may be a way forward, not only to facilitate the acquisition of employability skills and capabilities, but also as a more compelling way to engage with subject knowledge. In accordance with Riebe et al's ideas, the linking of conceptual frameworks with practice experience seems to have empowered students to take a critical academic view of their own subject areas (Riebe et al. 2010).

Discussion

The macro-, meso- and micro-level research results reveal distinct layers of employability best practice used by higher education institutions which combine: the use of employers; the acquisition of specific skills; an institutional employability outlook; subject-level embedded activities; specific career workshops; and professional careers services and advice. The research also found that best practice in employability activities and services empowers an entrepreneurial approach in its professionals and academics, which is then manifested in entrepreneurial characteristics engendered in self-motivated and resilient students. The findings have led to the following recommendations, developed from the research, which might be used to inform the operationalisation of employability in HE.

Guidelines for Enabling Entrepreneurial Spirit: Institutional Level

1. Put employability and student skill outcomes as a strategic institutional objective, supported by specific operational plans.
2. Ensure institutional-level support for curriculum reform, empowering learning and teaching committees to be more flexible in terms of supporting different types of assessment.
3. Provide professional central and college resources to support employability and entrepreneurship projects.
4. Understand that work integrated learning is not just about placements; the most effective programmes develop ideas with outside partners to create in-situ and in-industry projects, tasks, assessments and placements to facilitate a broad range of engagement available to all students.
5. Formalise recruitment channels and career pathways for lecturers with industry experience.

Guidelines for Enabling Entrepreneurial Spirit: Subject Level

1. Embed employability throughout all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
2. Use authentic assessments in which students respond to case studies and real-life briefs.
3. Be imaginative about the ways in which critical academic work can be presented to introduce students to a range of work-orientated formats which combine creativity with critical thinking (eg reports, blogs, catalogues, presentations, vlogs, web sites, group work).
4. Set up and maintain relationships with a wide-variety of partners from commercial, non-for-profit and public sector organisations to jointly develop work integrated learning opportunities and to understand the skills they are looking for in graduates.
5. Require students to use skills of deep research and critical enquiry to interrogate and re-interpret data and situations, which challenge existing societal norms and practices.
6. Set up discussions points at all levels of study with students to encourage them to explore volunteering, travel, work placements, employment and student society roles and experiences which will extend their skill base but also broaden their outlook and civic understanding.

In addition, the findings have been represented graphically in a proposed ontology of higher education employability best practice (Figure 1), which is designed as an illustrative, rather than a definitive model. Its aim is to stimulate debate, and suggest connections, which might be further tested. The layers of the ontology are presented as a framework for understanding the nature of successful employability practices and structures in higher education institutions. In addition, it is designed as a structure for further developing critical understanding of

employability, its relationship with the higher education academic endeavour, and the role of higher education in society.

Figure 1 here

The ontology is reassuringly analogous to Minocha, Hristov and Reynold's (2017) Literature Themes and HEI Response Map derived from a similar sample of current university employability best practice in the UK, and to Sachs et al's study of Australian universities which highlights the link between skills, work-place experience, resources, work context and stakeholder relationships (Sachs et al 2016). What is different is that at the centre of the Ontology of Employability in Higher Education is the notion of *entrepreneurial spirit*. Successful employability case studies, such as those presented in this paper, demonstrate clear evidence of innovation, authentic assessments and step-change developments in programmes of academic and professional activity. To be able to transfer useful skills to the student body, it is necessary to give students the freedom to experiment with methods and formats (Lambert, Parker and Neary 2007). This can make students feel uncomfortable, but often leads to high quality thinking and work which re-centres intellectual and critical enquiry. Seen in this light, employability, and the acquisition of useful skills and attributes, might be seen as serving the more social, rather than capitalist aims of the entrepreneurial ideal. Such a perspective fits more easily with the non-commercial aspirations of many higher education subjects, combining action and reflection (praxis), to ensure that learning is socially and intellectually useful.

The *entrepreneurial spirit* is not simply a reflection of a particular attribute that employers seek. It is important that the way in which enterprise and employability is connected must be relevant to the core degree subject in a stimulating and enjoyable way (Rae 2007).

Employability teaching should be integrated into the core academic provision and should not be its inferior partner. The argument presented in this paper does not deny that the teaching of employability skills helps provide resources for economic productivity but, by identifying that an entrepreneurial spirit and critical capacity is also enabled by employability education, the argument is that graduates are also being empowered to seek alternative social and cultural ideologies. They will be able to use their skills in an innovative way to seek practical solutions to society's problems, thus challenging Frauley's (2012) idea that employability is simply a tool to sustain a neo-liberalist governmental hegemony. The *entrepreneurial spirit* incorporates characteristics of problem-solving, innovation, resilience and good judgement and thus contributes to an existential view of education, called for by Gibbs (2000), in which employability is not simply instrumentalistic in providing skills, but formulative of the development of critical judgement which might contribute to the moral and cultural development of society. In such a view employability is not functional, but instead is a holistic concept which facilitates the development of independent learners (Bennett 2016). Seen in this way, employability might be part of an existentialist view of education, and not contrary to it.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has implications for understanding whether employability is a product of higher education (Baumann et al 2014), or whether it might be adopted more purposefully by the academic community as a tool for critical enquiry. This paper has used thematic analysis to pinpoint normative HEI employability delivery perspectives (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). By providing new case study material from the Arts and Humanities, it highlights how principles of employability have been embedded into HE curricula, but it also suggests that an embedded entrepreneurial approach can help drive innovation in subject level teaching and

learning in a way which can enhance, rather than inhibit, critical academic enquiry. This has led to the production of an Ontology of Employability in Higher Education and a set of employability guidelines which might be used to inform the practice of embedding the principles and practices of employability within higher education curricula.

In addition, in a post-modern way, the ontology might be used to inform critical pedagogy, building on debates around the integration of teaching and employability, and likewise challenge and critique the trend towards commodification and commercialisation in HE which supports a hegemonic capitalist ideology. This paper calls for an alternative employability discourse: when employability is embedded, and viewed as a way of enhancing subject-level teaching, through the acquisition of skills and attributes which are useful, not only in the workplace, but also supportive and empowering of educational aims and endeavours, then it stops being a product of HE and becomes an integral and useful part of the learning process. Students who learn how to develop creative responses and logical arguments, which challenge and critique society, including the role of their own education establishments, learn skills of problem-solving, independent thinking, team work and presentation skills, all of which are highly valued in modern day workplace environments. Lambert, Parker and Neary (2007), noted how entrepreneurial activity is central to neo-liberal ideology and predominantly connected to economic advancement, but they likewise noted that entrepreneurial values such as creativity and organisation are also useful for socially informed contexts. Linking to triple bottom line theory, Bridgstock (2012) similarly suggests that entrepreneurialism does not have to be linked to over-riding commercial and profiteering imperatives, and might otherwise be reframed for arts and humanities (or other) students in such a way that they might be encouraged to consider creating ventures and enterprises with social, community and cultural justifications and values. Specific work-integrated learning opportunities, might

for example, be linked to non-for-profit and community organisations to encourage social responsibility and civic engagement (Sachs et al 2016). We might thus simultaneously empower students with employability attributes, whilst stimulating their critical faculties in a way which is complementary to the critical enquiry so valued in the arts and humanities.

The entrepreneurial spirit at the centre of the ontology presented in this paper might be applied to teaching practice, as well as outcomes. Berry (2013) argued that ‘teacherpreneurs’ represent a new culture of ingenuity, incubating and executing innovative policies and pedagogies, in their own classrooms and in teams, revealing that when teachers collaborate and spread their expertise their students’ achievements improve too. Work integrated learning programmes often require significant curriculum renewal, and a change in pedagogical principles, to embrace authentic assessment, networking and inquiry-based learning (Sachs et al 2016). The argument is that to inspire our students we have to be inspirational, and to empower entrepreneurship and employability skills, we have to be entrepreneurial. In addition, the inclusion of experiential learning within the curriculum offers a different, reflective and developmental form of learning which enables students to link their formal learning with practice (Helyer and Lee 2014). The absorption and hi-jacking of useful managerial practices into pedagogical approaches, such as innovation, the use of technology, and an entrepreneurial spirit, can make students more employable and teachers more effective, but it can also help facilitate a critical view of managerialism and commercialism in society, freeing students to explore ideas about the mercantile, civic and contemplative (Gibbs 2000). Whilst this paper has focused specifically on the Arts and Humanities, it would be useful to apply the presented ontology of employability to different subject areas to test its voracity. The approach has also centred on the work of HEI institutions in relation to employability. As a counterbalance to this, it may also be useful to

include research into the experience of the student body both during and after higher education.

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Table 1: Categories and Themes of Higher Education Employability Best Practice

Category	Theme	%	Category	Theme	%
Outlook	Growing demand due to competition	70	Central Delivery	Combined services	30
	Skills gap	70		Content support for colleges	40
Content	Skill acquisition	90		More co-ordination needed	10
	Active career / personal dev & identity planning	40		Bolt on activities	50
	Ownership / self-management encouraged	70		Surveys (of students and employers)	40
	Reflection is required	70		Use of technology	50
Skills	Problem solving / leadership	70		E-portfolio	40
	Communications	60		Marketing	10
	Team work / interpersonal skills	70		Social Media used	40
	IT	60		KPIs	10
Activities	Workshops	30	College Delivery	Compulsory employability	60
	Information (autonomy)	40		Employability in curriculum / skills mapping	80
	Careers interviews	20		Virtual environments used	20
	Certificate / Award	40		Student project with employability	10
	Work placements	50		Employability modules	50
	Work based mentors	30	Employers	Alumni mentoring	40
	Volunteering	20		External Advisory Board / input into curricula	30
Graduate internships	20	Employers delivering services		40	

Table 2: Chronological Analysis of Employability Activity in the Swansea University

Department of Media and Communication

2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employer engagement (talks)• Industry facing skills modules• Authentic assessment (which change every year)• Employability champion
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site visits (media production & PR)• Scholarships with local big brand sports clubs• Linking theory & practice (signposting)• Embedded employability sessions
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry panel set up• Academic prizes secured from industry partners• Work placements / work placement module
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry accreditation successfully achieved• Extra-curricula skills sessions introduced
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Year in Industry approved & introduced
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entrepreneurship module re-focused on media skills• Practice elements introduced across MA programmes• Journalism accreditation explored• Media Summer School set up in Beijing

Figure 1: An Ontology of Employability in Higher Education

