Why are scientists afraid of employability?

Alex Crombie
Alex.Crombie@SHU.ac.uk
Running Order

- Defining the role of employability in the age of mass participation
- A history of employability
- Hope for the future
Mass participation in HE

Students obtaining university degrees, 1930 - 2011 (UK)

- First degrees (Women)
- First degrees (Men)
- Higher degrees (Women)
- Higher degrees (Men)

Key Events:
- Robbins Report and the granting of awarding powers (1963)
- Further and Higher Education Act (1992)
- Dearing report (1997)
- Bologna Declaration (1999)
Employability

“A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.”

Knight and Yorke (2003)
Benefits of Employability development in HE

- Improved employment outcome post-graduation
- Greater percentage of graduates in employment
- Varied and innovative teaching
- Increased confidence for students
- Satisfies government pressure
'[It is] no longer enough just to be a graduate, but instead an employable graduate’

Tomlinson, 2012
"there is a close relationship between employability and good learning..."
Resistance to employability

- The introduction of employability into curricula still experiences some resistance
- Academic staff often still consider employability to be something external to their course teaching
- Employability development can be see as bureaucratic and management speak
“employability is a different and separate issue from subject curriculum, teaching and learning”

(Quote from academic)
'Several academics worried about the potential dilution of their discipline if curriculum development to embed or integrate employability was imposed. The majority of staff and students felt that employability initiatives [...] should be “bolt-on” and additional to the mainstream curriculum, thus leaving disciplinary boundaries intact and allowing participating students to differentiate themselves from others.'

Speight, Lackovic & Cooker, 2013
The *Trends IV* reports revealed a tendency amongst academics to interpret employability strictly as preparing students for specific labour market needs, and as such a potential threat to the academic quality of courses. To many, this implied

‘...a surrender of higher education systems to the short-term requests of an unpredictable labour market’

Reichert and Tauch, 2003
What's your gripe?
Lamenting the loss of academia for pleasure/increase in the business of HE

"Employability is not just about students making deposits in a bank of skills"
Management Speak

“in the 21st Century, our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential.”
Inefficacy of interventions

TQA/TQSA/QAA
High vs low consensus

'But what's the right answer?!'
"there is a close relationship between employability and good learning..."
How about a re-brand?
Graduate Attributes?
How to fix this

• Time
• Training
• Bottom up interventions
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