

Evaluation of a model for employability with level 3 WELS students

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At the OU, 46% of our students self-define as career changers and 44% as career developers

Therefore, higher education does not represent the ability to get that first job, but the ability to keep their current job and/or progress on to the next job.

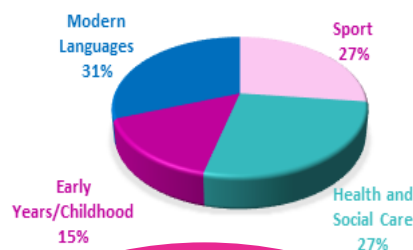
Rich (2015) proposed a broad definition of employability as being the ability to

“get a job, to keep a job and to get on in a job”.

In response, Kellett and Clifton (2017) proposed a three gains model of employability, where students achieve personal gains, learning gains and working gains.

This project set out to identify if WELS students who were studying a level three module had achieved these three gains as part of their study. A sample of 200 students were invited to participate in the study, from a broad range of level three modules across WELS. 92% of interviewees were in full or part-time employment when they were studying:

STUDENTS



Work & Personal gains

Developed:

- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Self-esteem
- ✓ Sense of achievement

‘... what it did give me was a better understanding of people.... because I had done the courses that I had done, I was confident in being able to talk to them about what was happening, and transitions.

Unexpected Gains

- ✓ Others view of them changed
- ✓ Colleagues admired and respected
- ✓ Colleagues sought advice from them at work
- ✓ Families had pride in them
- ✓ They became a role model for their children.

‘the feel-good factor, and being able to take control of something, do something, achieve something outside of the workplace. And that kind of almost mental health position I think feeds into the whole of your life, work, relationships, all aspects really.’

Learning gains appeared to arise from specific module or course material that was relevant to the interviewee’s current employment

Learning gains also related to study skills and transferrable skills that contribute to the interviewees’ confidence and ability to carry out their employment:

‘Studying with the OU, the benefit is I’ve been able to progress my knowledge.. in the field that I’, studying, but also my critical thinking and all the other things, and analytical skills that I needed for my job, buy doing that without it impinging on any of my work’

14/26 responses could be summarised as:

The module content had a direct relevance to my working life.

12/26 responses could be summarised as:

The module studied developed my transferrable skills, such as better understanding of people, better skills of analysis, knowledge of relevant theories, which were seen to be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

The three gains model appears to be a comprehensive way to evaluate what students gain through studying at the OU in relation to employability. The added use of CBI employability check list could be deemed to reinforce students’ responses to having benefited holistically from their study through distance learning.

Could distance learning study add a different dimension to the achievement of employability skills, as most students were already in employment (92%) and therefore having to juggle life, work and study all at the same time?

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