

Embedding Employability in the Curriculum: Experiences from New Zealand

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Abstract : The global and national employability agenda is changing the higher education landscape as academic staff are faced with the responsibility of developing employability capabilities and attributes in addition to delivering discipline specific content and skills. They realise that the shift towards teaching sustainable capabilities means a shift in the way they teach. But what that shift should be or how they should bring it about is unclear. As part of a national funded project, representatives from several New Zealand (NZ) higher education institutions and the NZ Association of Graduate Employers partnered to discover, trial and disseminate means of embedding employability in the curriculum. Findings from four focus groups (n=~75) and individual interviews (n=20) with staff from several NZ higher education institutions identified factors that enable or hinder embedded employability development within their respective institutions. Participants believed that higher education institutions have a key role in developing graduates for successful lives and careers however this requires a significant shift in culture within their respective institutions. Participants cited three main barriers: lack of strategic direction, support and guidance; lack of understanding and awareness of employability; and lack of resourcing and staff capability. Without adequate understanding and awareness of employability, participants believed it is difficult to understand what employability is let alone how it can be embedded in the curriculum. This presentation will describe some of the impacts that the employability agenda has on staff as they try to move from traditional to contemporary forms of teaching to develop employability attributes of students. Changes at the institutional level are required to support contemporary forms of teaching, however this is often beyond the sphere of influence at the teaching staff level. The study identified that small changes to teaching practices were necessary and a simple model to facilitate change from traditional to contemporary forms of teaching was developed. The model provides a framework to identify small but impactful teaching practices and exemplar teaching practices were identified. These practices were evaluated for transferability into other contexts to encourage small but impactful changes to embed employability in the curriculum.

Keywords : curriculum design, change management, employability, teaching exemplars

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