

# Faculty of Life and Health Sciences Employability Framework

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## BACKGROUND

One of the key strategic aims of the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy is 'to enhance Ulster's role as a sector leader for student employability as an integral part of the wider student experience'. The University's employability agenda provides many opportunities to ensure our students and graduates have the key skills to be employable. So in November 2012 the Faculty set up an Employability Working Group (members are detailed in table 1 below). The main aim was to develop a draft Faculty Employability Framework and prepare guidance on the promotion, implementation and integration of the University's Employability Agenda.

TABLE 1: Membership of the Faculty Employability Framework Working Group

School	Representative
School of Biomedical Sciences	Dr Helen McCarthy
Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science	Dr William Hagan
School of Environmental Sciences	Professor Brian Rippey
School of Health Sciences	Dr Mary Hannon-Fletcher (Chair)
School of Nursing	Mrs Mary Lindsay
School of Psychology	Mr William Anderson
Ulster Sports Academy	Mr Paul Kitchin
Careers/Employability Unit	Ms Moira McCarthy
Faculty	Professor Aine McKillop
Faculty	Professor Geoff McMullan
Chair Faculty Employability Sub-Committee	Mr Neal Cook

## AIMS OF THE WORKING GROUP

The working group was tasked to develop a framework that included specific Learning and Teaching focused items, they were:

1. Review DLHE statistics against benchmarks and comparators and be proactive and responsive to the needs of both students and the open workforce market.
2. Widen and strengthen relationships between programmes and employers/ industry/ PSRB/ public engagement to support, promote and enhance teaching & learning provision in the Faculty.
3. Promote placement and work based learning opportunities in the UK and internationally and build on new flexible models of provision.
4. Promote inter-professional and inter-disciplinary education and stimulate collaboration in learning and teaching.
5. Promote integration of research in curriculum and improve the Teaching/Research Nexus.
6. Facilitate reflection and implementation of the new Graduate Qualities in 2012/13.
7. Promote awareness and support activities to ensure that a fully operational HEAR is developed for UG students.
8. Facilitate further promotion of the Ulster Edge award across the Faculty and increase efforts to develop and broaden the portfolio of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities offered award.

## METHODS

The working group met on several occasions during semester 1 and 2 of the academic year 2012/13. Each member had responsibility for collecting the data under each of the 8 Learning and Teaching focused headings above, currently in practice in their School. At each meeting the working group received a report from each representative and the data was compiled. Additional data was received centrally from the University's Employability & Marketing Unit.

Once all the data had been compiled, the group highlighted areas of best practice and areas which required further enhancement. The group then selected the priority areas that were closely aligned with the original 8 Learning and Teaching Principles and prepared specific recommendations and targets. The Framework was refined and the actions strengthened (by MHF, NC and AMcK) over a number of meetings and through engagement with the Faculty Employability Sub-Committee.

At this stage, the working group met again to agree the recommendations, time lines and supporting actions. Following this meeting the report was finalised and the framework agreed in consultation with the Dean.

## OUTCOMES

Following consultation, the Faculty's recommendations, targets and supporting actions are being presented here, under each of the 8 Learning and Teaching focused areas.

TABLE 2: Recommendations for Each of the 8 Learning and Teaching Focused Areas

1. Schools to develop annual action plan to improve or retain their performance on DLHE statistics (by programme). These must include analysis and comparison against:
  - ▲ The previous year's performance
  - ▲ National benchmarks
  - ▲ Northern Ireland HEI performance.
  - ▲ Graduate and non-graduate employment
2. Every School should have an employer engagement mechanism to maximise employability opportunities for that School. This should have a clear reporting structure to influence delivery of programmes.  
Schools to detail their range of employer engagement strategies and how these influence:
  - ▲ Course design/development
  - ▲ Course delivery
  - ▲ Course evaluation
3. Schools to develop work placement opportunities for all courses to meet with DEL 2020 target. Solutions/opportunities should be flexible and should explore the use of short placements, internships and self-employed placements etc. Additionally, engagement with careers services modules should be explored to enhance these activities.
4. Each School to imbed into programmes explicit mechanisms to ensure there is inter-professional/discipline learning experiences.
5. All (re)validation documents to explicitly identify:
  - ▲ How research findings from both within and outside of the institution have been incorporated into and shaped the learning and teaching strategy of the curriculum.
  - ▲ How research activities of the School/Institute are being disseminated within courses.
  - ▲ How the research skills and expertise of staff are being best deployed in the delivery of research elements of courses.
6. Schools to determine final year students' perspectives on their experience of having graduate qualities being developed so as to inform strategies for further enhancement. Solutions should be developed and delivered in collaboration with the student body (eg with the Student Union). Positively evaluated solutions should be disseminated and imbedded in curricula.  
Graduate and entrepreneurship qualities should be explicitly mapped within course documents with a clear strategy for their development that is explicit to students and reflects an international context.
7. Develop/tailor specific activities suitable for Life and Health Science Students that are recordable on HEAR (eg through EDGE activities, modules/activities run by Employability and Marketing).
8. Schools to provide explicit objectives and strategies on how engagement with EDGE is deployed within programmes and across all years of programmes. These should be evaluated in partnership with students to seek their perspectives on engagement with and achievement of EDGE award activities in order to inform future strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Graduate employability is central to a student's pursuit through higher education, influencing the motivations behind their choice of higher education institute and course. The University of Ulster Learning and Teaching Strategy recognises the importance of employability, with one of its three strategic aims focused upon enhancing the University's role as a sector leader for student employability through integrating the necessary experience and learning within the wider student experience. Within this context, the employability framework intends to address the University's employability agenda in line with national and regional targets. It further intends to share good practice across the Faculty in order to facilitate cross-collaboration to maximise the effectiveness of strategic processes. The Framework sets out targets and performance indicators under each of the 8 principles. These will be achieved across a variety of committees within the Faculty and Schools and are set around a reporting mechanism to enable achievement and good practice to be evidenced. This is central to fulfilling the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

