



**The Open  
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# UK graduate employability – what about the workers?

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# Why question “what about the workers?”

- Discourse on graduate employability in UK focussed on undergraduates ‘entering’ the workforce
- Within UK higher education almost third undergraduates study part-time



# Part-time undergraduate population more likely to .....

- Be older than full-time students: minority < 25 years old (cf. vast majority full-timers <25)
- Already have some qualifications at HE level (8% postgrad; 13% first degree; 29% other undergrad)
- Be studying for qualifications/credits other than a first degree (cf. vast majority of full-timers on first degrees)
- Be employed whilst studying



# What do we mean by employability?

- A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful..which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy [ESECT definition]
- Is this applicable to those *already* in substantive jobs?



# What are the views of part-time graduates?

Some issues arising from recent study

- Overwhelming responses to open-ended questions about gains from studies - “increased confidence”
- But how did graduates express that confidence?
- Workplace activities centring around communication and problem solving + personal development and self-esteem



# Part-time graduates' voices (1)....

- “It has spurred me to do a full degree...even though my employer said ...I was not capable of doing [that]”
- “I wouldn't have gone for another job at work, but having done presentations and things..and have put forward your opinion in group work ...I had the confidence to apply”
- “the course has given me the confidence to try something [new] ..at work...don't assume someone will say 'no' to new ideas”



# Part-time graduates' voices (2)...

- “ I’m much more confident in my own abilities now...like when I have to do reports for my boss”
- “I’m more likely to look at the bigger picture, take things in a wider perspective”
- “I’m much more confident now to have an input..like commenting critically on a new project and am more confident with dealing with children ..but this hasn’t gone down well with the classroom teacher..she seems to see me as a threat”
- “...can bring fresh ideas and broader perspectives to our work...we’re much more reflective..even though sometimes our suggestions aren’t well received [at work]”



# Does data on graduate 'employability' capture these gains?

- Typically, 'first destinations' data captures 'if' graduate now employed + kind of contract + level of occupation
- First degree: managers; professional; associate professional

FT	8%	28%	30%
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PT	14%	27%	37%
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(but has level changed?)





# Are employers capturing these gains?

- From specific study, some evidence that not all workplaces (and/or work colleagues) welcomed part-time graduates' increased knowledge and skills + enhanced confidence
- Does more need to be done to transform potential of skilled workforce into reality of improved organisational performance?



# Workforce development versus skills utilisation?

- Within UK now some recognition that workforce development is more than ‘just’ increasing range and level of skills
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills looking at Scotland’s skills utilisation programme, whereby Scottish HEIs funded to mount projects with employers on workforce development/ innovation – interim evaluation raising questions, eg issues of job design/work organisation not figuring in projects; are projects looking for operational efficiency gains or creating potential to move up value chain?



# Future directions..

- UK coalition government looking to introduce major changes to HE, inc. increasing part-time student numbers
- HEIs need to capture more information about ‘whether’ and ‘how’ HE studies enhance part-time graduates’ employability
- Employers/workplaces need to be alert to opportunities to build-on part-time graduates’ enhanced knowledge and skills + their increased confidence