

## **‘Skills for employability? No need thanks, we’re radiographers!’ Helping graduate healthcare professionals to stand out from the crowd.**

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### **Abstract**

Graduate healthcare professionals are facing increasing competition for jobs and where the baseline qualification is common to all applicants, the need to ‘stand out from the crowd’ becomes of particular significance. The dilemma for higher education institutions (HEI) that provide education for the healthcare professions (hcp) is that the skills and attributes for those professions are specific and identified within regulatory and professional standards. These standards mould the curriculum requirements for hcp education whereas generic skills for employability are largely left to HEIs to interpret and embed within a curriculum that is already full in ensuring that professional competencies are achieved. Within this study, radiography and radiotherapy managers from a range of healthcare providers were asked to define and rank their top 5 employability skills and to identify how they would test for these in job applicants. Alongside this, the expectations and perceptions of employability of a cohort of final year undergraduate radiography students at one university were explored and it was found that while students acknowledged the need for employability skills, they considered these to be integrated into their degree programme. Following on from this, students were invited to attend and evaluate a series of employability skills development sessions. Findings further suggested that student radiographers are ill equipped to recognise the skills and attributes for employability valued by employers as a discriminator of applicants for band 5 radiographer jobs. The value of the skills development opportunities offered to this cohort was acknowledged but they recommended that sessions are offered earlier in the course.

**Keywords:** Healthcare professionals, student radiographers, employability, skills development

## Introduction

In the current economic climate, Baker and Henson (2010) acknowledge that even an excellent degree in a vocational subject cannot assure graduates of obtaining employment. For example, graduate healthcare professionals, including nurses (Dray, Burke, Hurst, Ferguson, & Marks-Maran, 2011), are facing increasing competition for jobs and where the baseline qualification is common to all applicants, the need to 'stand out from the crowd' becomes of particular significance. For these graduates, jobs are often applied and interviewed for before graduation making the 'value' of the classification of degree achieved less important as a discriminator of applicants although there has been some suggestion that the status of the higher education institution (HEI) awarding the degree may have a part to play in employers' decision making (United Kingdom. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009). Washer (2007) also contends that major employers increasingly base their shortlist on an applicant's educational attainment and proposes that students from high status universities may do better in finding employment, indeed Harvey (2001, p.103) describes a "pecking order of higher education institutions" that have good graduate employment rates and suggests that this may be due more to employers' perceptions that the 'best' students go to those HEIs than how well students are prepared for employment whilst at them. This being the case, all HEIs that provide education for the healthcare professions have a duty to their graduates to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills and attributes to assure their 'employability' to potential employers and the ability to demonstrate their 'fitness for purpose' in meeting the needs of healthcare services. This paper recounts an exploration of contemporary definitions of employability and considers how these fit within the context of modern healthcare education, specifically radiography education. The views and opinions of students and radiography service managers were sought in order to establish the perception of stakeholders with regard to the skills and attributes for employability required of a 21<sup>st</sup> century graduate band 5 radiographer. These views were then used to develop a series of opportunities for employability skills development, offered to final year radiography students within one university and evaluated for their perceived efficacy.

## **Employability – concept and conundrum**

### ***Skills and attributes***

There are many definitions and explanations of what could be deemed 'skills for employability' but Washer (2007, p.58) contends that the terms core skills, generic skills, personal skills and employability skills are often used interchangeably.

Within the author's HEI, the accepted definition of employability is taken from the document, 'Future Fit: preparing graduates for the World of Work' (United Kingdom. Universities United Kingdom/Confederation of British Industry [UUK/CBI], 2009), and is said to be;

*a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy. (p.8)*

The Welsh Assembly Government's Higher Education Strategy, 'For Our Future' (2009), identifies employability as a key outcome of a graduate's higher education experience and is informed by the report, Review of Higher Education in Wales (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2009). The report supports the need for enhancing the employability of Welsh graduate leavers and further defines the attributes required to ensure preparedness for the world of work. Students themselves acknowledge an increasing need to be perceived as 'marketable' but complain that HEIs concentrate on preparing students for specific jobs and do not actively encourage development of the generic skills that underpin employability.

Rosenberg, Heimler, and Morote (2012) cite the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development (2010) which states that employability skills represent personal qualities, the development of these being the responsibility of the individual. Bok (2006 as cited in Rosenberg et al., 2012) suggests that employers will have the expectation that educators will provide graduates with the required skills for employability, however, Harvey (2001) suggests that where once employability being translated into employment was seen as the responsibility of the graduate, expectations of contemporary higher education suggests that responsibility is reciprocal, with HEIs

providing opportunities for students to develop their skills and students taking up and engaging with the opportunities offered. Rosenberg et al. (2012) also acknowledge that graduates will expect that their higher education experience will have provided them with the opportunity to develop the skills they will require for employment and with specific programmes for the healthcare professions this expectation may be particularly pertinent.

Participants' evaluations of a project by Dray et al. (2011), set up to enhance the employability of new graduate nurses, indicated that students were more likely to engage with opportunities and activities designed to develop skills for employability where these were specific to the real workplace environment. Dray et al. (2011, p.306) also found a fundamental lack of understanding of the importance of the person specification and its role in selection, with nurse managers reporting that new graduates were weak in terms of selling themselves on application forms and in writing personal statements that reflect the requirements of the person specification. Nurse Managers also reported that applicants lacked interview skills and failed to present themselves with confidence at interview. This suggests that within the context of healthcare education, students were unaware of and unable to demonstrate these key attributes even though they are acknowledged as requirements for employment.

### ***Employability and healthcare education***

A study by der Van Schoot and Streumer (2003) concluded that the design of the curriculum has an influence on the employability of nursing and healthcare graduates. They suggest also that over recent years, curricula have been broadened in order to address the increased diversity of skills required to meet the ever more complex requirements of healthcare services. Stubbs and Keeping (2002, p.4) suggest that by embedding skills within the curriculum students will, by virtue of delivery of that programme, acquire skills for employability. However, the dilemma for those HEIs that provide healthcare professional education lies in the fact that the specific skills and attributes for employability within healthcare services are specific and are identified within regulatory and professional standards. These standards set the professional and clinical priorities for practice delivery and development and consequently mould the requirements of healthcare professions' education; the more generic skills for employability, however, are largely implicit and are left to HEIs to interpret and embed

within a curriculum that is already very full in ensuring that the required professional competencies are achieved.

Yorke (2006) contends that the adoption of employability as an educational aim requires reconsideration of the curriculum design and so with the content of the curriculum for the healthcare professions largely predetermined, it can be assumed that facilitating the opportunities for development of these skills would depend on the creativity and resourcefulness of educators; indeed Yorke (2004) maintains that the usual, traditional methods employed within higher education may not be sufficient for the development of employability skills. In addition to these constraints on the curriculum, evidence suggests that barriers to addressing employability within the curricula of the healthcare professions' programmes arise from educators themselves who see the sole requirement for employment as being the award of a profession specific degree (Harvey, 2001), however, it should be noted that being on a vocational course does not mean that employability is automatic (Harvey, 2003 as cited in Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac, & Lawson, 2007).

### ***Employability and the healthcare professions***

Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that for many people, employability is simply about getting a job and is often confused with outcomes, furthermore Harvey (2001) notes that the crude measure of 'first destination returns' is frequently used as a performance indicator for institutional employability. Harvey (2001) also suggests that with programmes linked to learning in a practice setting, such as healthcare, medicine, nursing and teacher training, the specific skills required for employability are deemed to be integral to the education provided and so for these graduates, the development of generic employability skills are often considered superfluous and unnecessary. Cox and King (2006) suggest that graduate education focuses on the development of analytical and critical thinking skills rather than didactic knowledge for employment within a specific job, yet this cannot be considered as such for graduates of the healthcare professions where explicit knowledge is required alongside the academic skills inherent within higher education. Literature also suggests (Cox & King, 2006; Pool & Sewell, 2007) that the key motivation for attending university is not to study in a specific subject but to enhance employment prospects for getting a better job; however,

the majority of students who study for vocational degrees do so for altruistic reasons and intrinsic reward and not simply for prospective employment, although this may be implicit. Rothwell and Arnold (2007) describe a commitment and sense of loyalty to a profession which links with intrinsic reward and fits with what Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004, p. 27) describe as an individual's career identity, furnishing the 'who I am' or 'who I want to be' and providing the fundamental motivation for graduate study and employment in the healthcare professions.

### ***Employability and healthcare employers***

Graduates are interviewed for employment by health service managers and practitioners so it is important that their perceptions and interpretation of priorities and attributes are compatible with those of the higher education provider and of the graduates themselves. The issue, however, may be compounded by the graduates' lack of experience and awareness of the skills required by employers (Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). Although it goes without saying that employers of healthcare graduates expect applicants to have the required skills and competencies for professional practice, person specifications for band 5 healthcare professional jobs also ask that applicants provide evidence of a range of employability skills. Yorke (2006) states that although employers see a graduate's achievements related to the subject discipline as necessary, these are not necessarily sufficient in themselves for an individual to be recruited. Raybould and Sheedy (2005, p. 263) note that there is now a focus on the ability of applicants to demonstrate 'all round skills' such as team working, leadership and problem solving as well as competency. Clarke (2008) concurs, stating that employability is linked to a broad range of personal skills and abilities as well as those that are profession specific whilst Clarke and Patrickson (2008) acknowledge that employers place a high value on transferable, generic skills when recruiting.

As Cox and King (2006) explain, the "ultimate arbiters of employment are employers" (p. 265) and so there is clearly a need to ensure that graduates' skills match the expectations of employers in order to successfully secure employment (Yorke 2004). Within healthcare this is of equal importance since the person specifications are noted as additional to a professional qualification and could be considered to be a managers' 'shopping list' for the demonstrable skills and attributes required for the job and, as Dray et al. (2011) found, healthcare graduates appear to lack the experience and insight into

the role of the person specification in the employability stakes. Recent events suggest that this may also be the case with 'about to graduate' radiographers from the author's HEI since several were unsuccessful in either securing an interview or in being offered a job as a band 5 radiographer following an interview and so provided the incentive for the undertaking of this study.

### ***Employability and healthcare students***

Yorke (2004) reported the findings of three studies that explored students' perceptions of the value of their respective programmes in terms of the employment opportunities they offered. One of these, a study by Mason et al. (2003, cited in Yorke, 2004), showed that graduates of the more classical degree programmes, such as history, felt that only about half of their course specific content was appropriate to employment but considered that the generic skills acquired alongside this were of equal importance since the majority of graduates went on to use their degree for employment in areas unrelated to history. In that study it was interesting to note that graduates of business studies did not appear to acknowledge the inclusion of generic skills within their programmes, even though these formed the majority of their course content. This leads to an assumption that students may not be equipped with an insight into what employers consider to be employability and as such would not be able to identify these abilities within themselves and would be unable to project these as a personal attribute when seeking employment, as suggested by the comments of nurse managers in the study by Dray et al. (2011). As such, it is important that HEIs signpost the opportunities for development of the skills for employability that are inherent within or available alongside the programme's curriculum in order that students are able to recognise and quantify these for themselves. Of equal importance is the need for students to be able to evaluate and market their own skills and knowledge (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008).

Students need to engage with strategies that help to develop their confidence and self-esteem in order to be able to 'sell themselves' in the competitive market of employment. Where skills development initiatives are offered as an extra-curricular activity, HEIs should ensure that the value of this to employability is made clear so that students will recognise the benefits of participation and take ownership of these opportunities (Baker & Henson, 2010). However, Pool and Sewell (2007) note that students must be able to

reflect on and evaluate these learning experiences so that they can consider how far they have come in developing their employability and what else they may need to do in order to develop their skills further.

The nature of healthcare professional degrees is such that they are considered, rightly or wrongly, to be 'self-contained' packages for employment within a specific discipline and would enable students to develop the skills they need for working as a graduate professional. Yorke (2004) however, quotes a newly employed graduate nurse who complained that whilst her course provided her with the theory and philosophy of managing a ward, she felt that she would have benefited from advice on how to implement that knowledge in practice. This suggests that although the need for employability skills, such as organisational and management skills, are addressed within healthcare programmes, students need more guidance on how to relate this to 'real-life' and professional practice.

In recognition of this, this project aimed to identify the perceptions of what would be deemed skills for employability of a cohort of final year radiography students in one HEI and to offer the opportunity for these students to engage with a series of skills development sessions. In tandem with this, radiography managers were asked to rank the essential and desirable skills asked for within the job description for a new graduate, band 5 radiographer in order to determine which skills should be targeted for the development sessions.

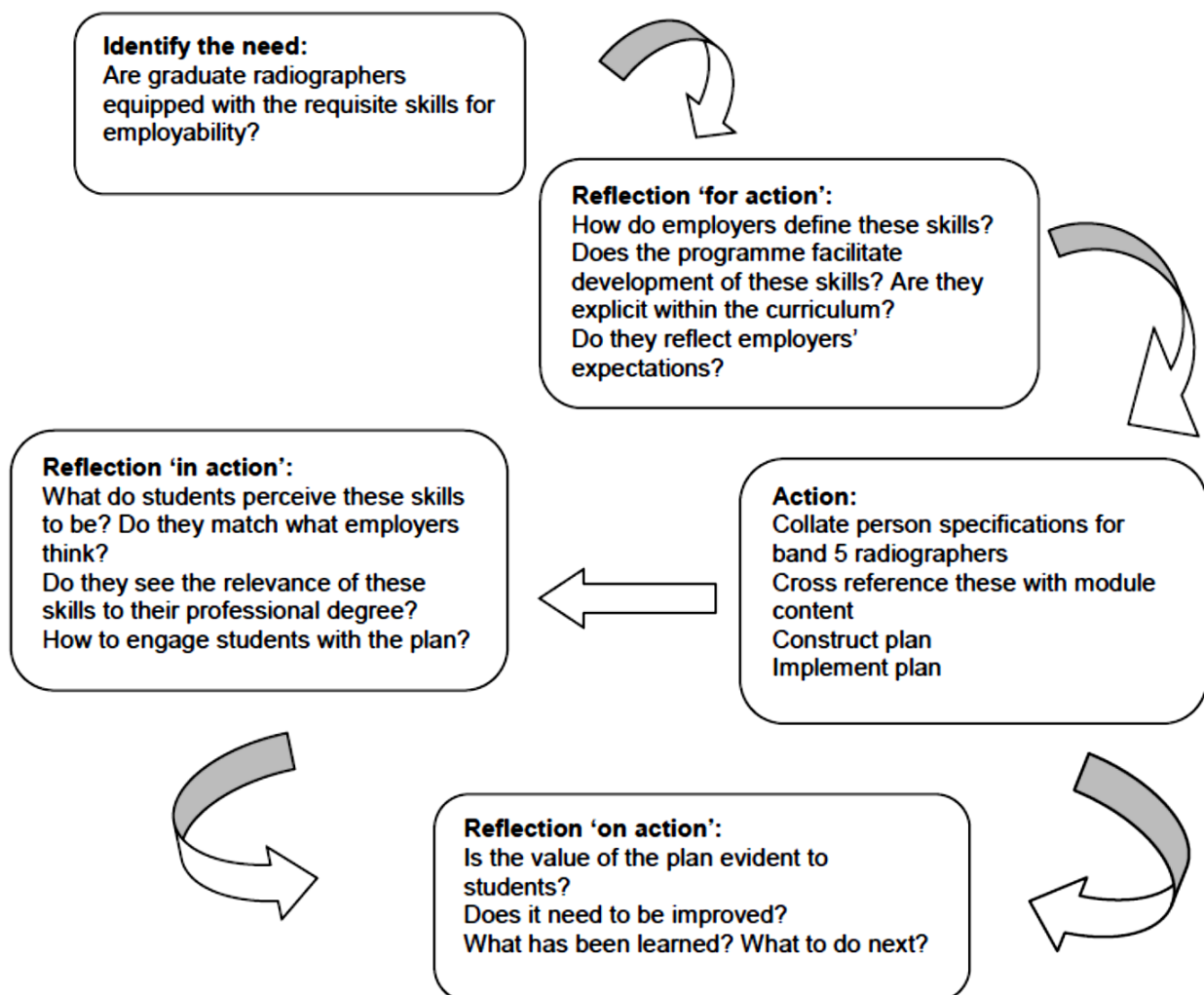
## **Method**

Fundamentally, this project was underpinned by the principle of action research which McNiff and Whitehead (2010, p.37) explain is a methodology that seeks to answer the question 'is it possible to ...'. For this project, the question 'is it possible to ensure that graduate student radiographers are equipped with the requisite skills for employability?' forms the basis for its undertaking. In order to answer the research question, the project's objectives were defined and set out within the phases of action research, as shown in Figure 1.



- To establish managers' requirements for skills for employability for band 5 radiographer posts within Welsh Health Boards as defined within person specifications;
- To identify and cross reference generic skills for employability within the radiography programmes, establishing any gaps in requirements;
- To determine radiography students' understanding of the concept of 'employability' and the relevance of such skills to employment;
- To establish and pilot a programme of skills development that meet managers' requirements for employability with final year radiography students;
- To evaluate students' experiences of participation.

**Figure.1.** Schematic to demonstrate the cycles of Action Research within the project.



### ***Ethical considerations***

The project was undertaken as an evaluation of the current undergraduate radiography programmes and as such did not require ethical approval.

### ***Managers' expectations***

Utilising a bespoke Bristol Online Survey, radiography and radiotherapy services managers from three Welsh Local Health Boards were asked to rank their top 5 essential skills and / or attributes from a list of 12 taken from UUK/CBI definitions (2009) and NHS Jobs person specifications. For the skills / attributes not ranked as top 5, respondents were asked to state whether these would be 'essential but not top 5' or 'desirable but not required' and to indicate how they would test for these.

In addition, managers were asked to state whether a certified course acknowledging specific training for development of these skills would be of benefit to applicants for band 5 radiography jobs.

### ***The curriculum***

The learning outcomes for an undergraduate radiography module relating to healthcare management were examined and specific skills for employability inherent within the module were identified and cross referenced with those ranked as most important by radiography managers. Any skills that were not evident within the modules were also noted. The outcome of this activity was used to inform the content of the skills development programme.

### ***Skills Development Service***

In collaboration with the university's Skills Development Service, a programme of skills development sessions was established based on the skills ranked as top 5 by the radiography managers, cross referenced with the curriculum of the healthcare management module. The programme design consisted of five 2 hour training sessions delivered by peer trainers using scenarios adapted to ensure relevance to the context of healthcare and specificity to the profession of radiography.

### ***Students' perceptions***

In order to establish a baseline of students' perceptions of employability, a cohort of 65 final year undergraduate radiography students were surveyed, using the TurningPoint™ pupil response system, as part of a teaching session within a healthcare management module. In addition, with the aim of establishing their understanding of the skills and attributes specific to radiography, examples of person specifications for a range of healthcare jobs were downloaded from the NHS jobs website and made anonymous. Students were asked to identify which of these was specific to a band 5 radiographer.

### ***Professional Development Project – radiography students***

The sessions were timetabled within the curriculum and evaluations collected to establish student participants' perceived benefits as well as seeking their recommendations for taking the project forward. Those students who completed all the sessions were provided with a Certificate of Professional Development for inclusion within their individual personal development portfolios.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Essential skills***

Ten radiography services managers with responsibility for the selection of new band 5 radiographers within Health Boards across Wales were invited to complete the survey. Seven responded, providing a 70% response rate, however, it should be noted that this is a small sample of the total population of staff involved in selection procedures and the skills identified may not be fully representative of the whole.

From the list of 12 skills and attributes, there was clear agreement among respondents with *communication*, *team player* and *motivation* being ranked as the top 3. Of the remaining 9, there was a mix of responses between *good time keeping*, *willingness to learn*, *smart appearance*, *ability to prioritise* and *problem solving skills*. Those deemed to be 'desirable but not required' were *a commitment to continuing professional development (CPD)*, *enthusiastic* and *a flexible approach*. This is reflective of findings

by Clark (2008) and Raybould and Sheedy (2005) who suggest a shift by employers to focus on an applicant's personal and 'all round skills' as well as their competency to perform the job. It is possible that this would be the case with new graduate radiographers as their competency to work as a band 5 radiographer would be established as a prerequisite for the award of their degree. Interestingly, *leadership* was stated to be 'desirable but not required' whereas this skill is noted to be a requirement within the Health and Care Professions Council, Standards of Proficiency for Radiographers, Standard 13.2 (United Kingdom. Health & Care Professions Council, 2013).

It should also be noted that some of the attributes stated as essential by managers include aspects of employability that cannot be taught, such as '*smart appearance*'. Dray et al. (2011) found that student nurses had a lack of understanding of the requirements of the person specification and of how these related to selection for jobs; as such HEIs have a responsibility to ensure that students are made aware of such requirements that fall outside the traditional educational remit. In relation to the context of this project, student radiographers should be informed of the fact that they must ensure that their '*appearance is such that it inspires confidence*' as this is stated as a requirement within Society and College of Radiographers Code of Professional Conduct, Standard 3.5. (United Kingdom. Society & College of Radiographers, 2013).

### ***Skills testing***

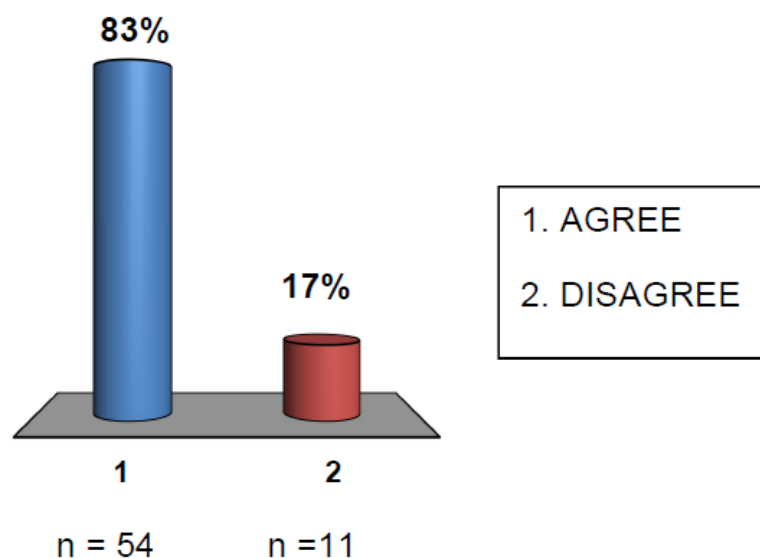
All respondents stated that attributes, such as *communication*, *enthusiasm* and *motivation*, would be tested at interview. Managers stated that applicants' claims of having particular skills, for example a *commitment to CPD*, would be tested by examination of a portfolio of evidence. Paradoxically, when asked if evidence of completion of a certified skills development course would be of benefit to applicants, only 4 of the 7 managers (57%) stated 'yes'. It may be of benefit to further explore reasons for the negative responses in order that HEIs are able to advise students on how best to evidence their skills. Perhaps it should be considered that, as Bok (2006, cited in Rosenberg, 2012) suggests, managers have an expectation that higher education will already provide students with the skills they require on graduation and so a certified course would be unnecessary; this could be especially so with healthcare programmes where curricula are defined by the professions.

### **Radiography students' perceptions of employability**

Students' perceptions of employability were collated through the TurningPoint™ pupil response system and key findings are represented in graphical format below.

Of the 65 students who participated, 83% (n=54) believed that their degree would provide them with the skills for employability required to work within radiography / radiotherapy (Fig.2).

**Figure 2,** 'My degree will provide me with the skills for employability within radiography / radiotherapy'

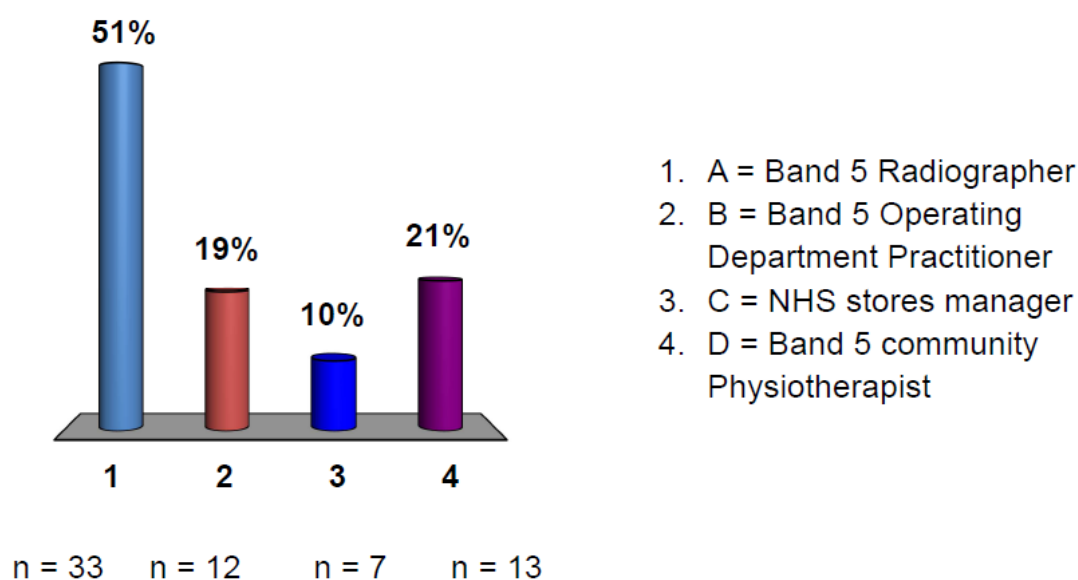


This finding agrees with Rosenberg et al. (2012) who maintain that students expect their degree programme to equip them with the necessary skills for employment. This also concurs with Mason et al. (2003, cited in Yorke, 2004) who identify a lack of understanding amongst students of what constitutes skills for employability and further reinforces the need for HEIs to be explicit in how students are introduced to the development of such skills. Nevertheless, it should be made clear to students whether these skills are integral to their degree programme or should be addressed as an extra-curricular activity as they lack the experience to be able to discriminate these for themselves. In this study, the majority of students within the cohort (83%, n= 54) perceive that the curriculum would ensure they are equipped with the required skills for radiography and it may be the case that, as Harvey (2001) claims, students consider

development of generic employability skills to be superfluous and an unnecessary extra workload.

When students were asked to identify the person specification for a band 5 radiographer job from a selection of 4, only 51% (n=33) correctly identified the job that they would apply for on graduation (Fig. 3). This served to demonstrate that employers sought more than just competency in employees and placed value on generic, transferable skills in addition to those that are profession specific, a similar finding to that reported by Clarke and Patrickson (2008).

**Figure 3.** Which of these person specifications is specific to a band 5 radiographer?



### ***Skills development – the programme***

Having highlighted the expectations of potential employers, students were offered the opportunity to attend the pilot programme of skills development training. Sessions were timetabled within the curriculum but attendance was voluntary. Using the managers' responses cross referenced with the content and learning outcomes of the radiography programmes' health management module, the five training sessions chosen for the programme of skills development were:

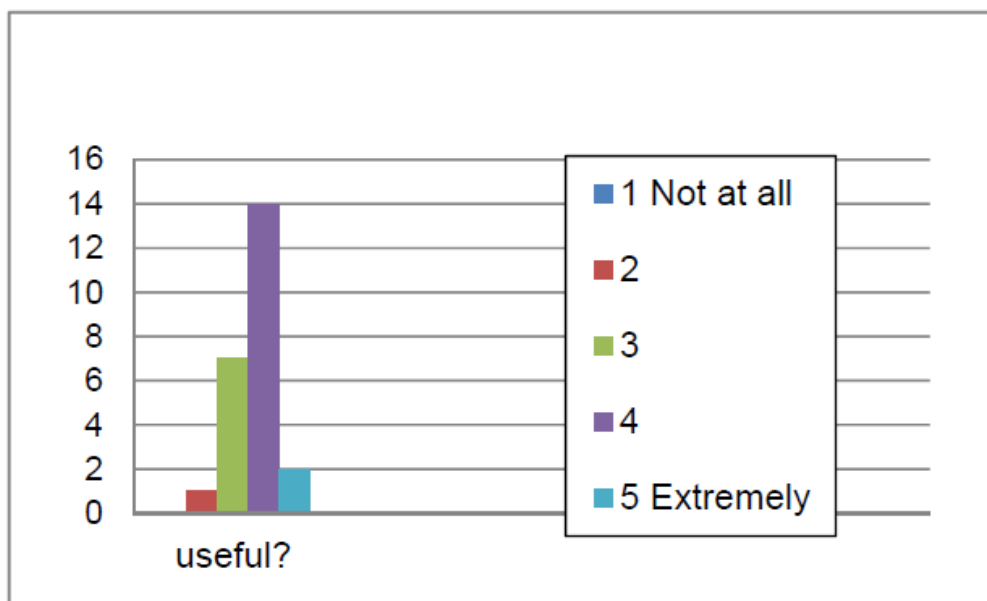
- Speaking and presenting
  - *How to present yourself*
- Team working
  - *Team roles*
- Problem solving
  - *Decision making*
- Organisational skills and time management
  - *Prioritising, record keeping, self-motivation*
- Dealing with difficult people
  - *Working effectively with others, skills for negotiation*

All scenarios used in the training sessions were based on examples of practice within radiography / radiotherapy so as to ensure relevance. This was deemed essential in order to secure students' engagement with the programme, as also noted in the study by Dray et al. (2011).

### ***Students' evaluations***

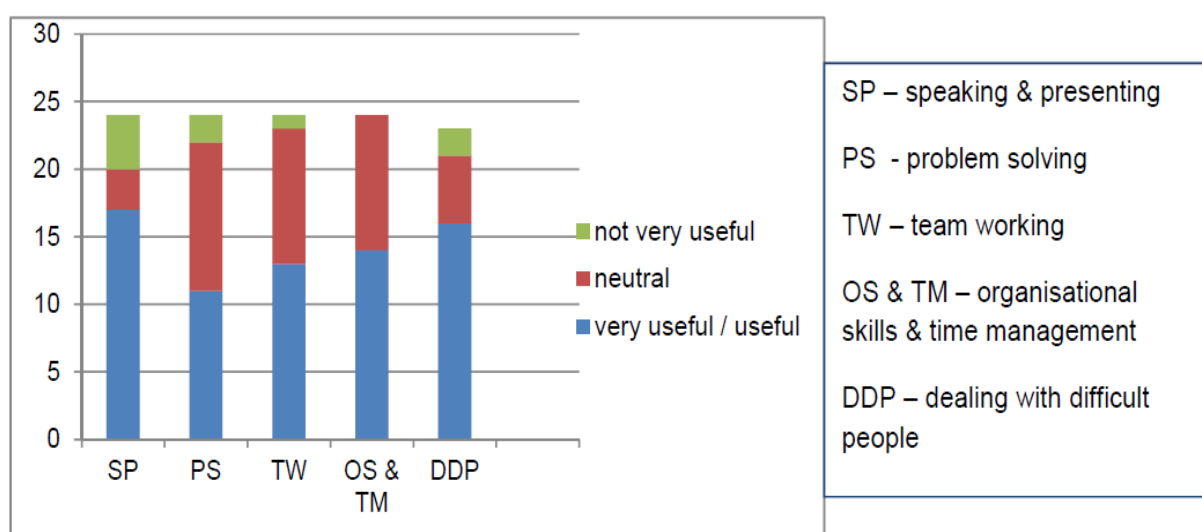
Of the 65 students in the cohort, 54 completed the programme having attended all five training sessions. This represented an uptake of 83% suggesting that the majority of students acknowledged the relevance of gaining an understanding of the skills for employability and how these would translate into opportunities for employment. Pool and Sewell (2007) acknowledge the importance of reflection on and evaluation of learning experiences for employability in order that students accept the value of the opportunities offered. However, only 24 (44%) of those who attended the programme completed an evaluation; nevertheless, those that were completed were consistent in the feedback given. Analysis of the results provided considered information regarding the benefits perceived by students and also recommendations for improvement in taking the programme forward (Figs 4, 5 & 6).

**Figure 4.** How useful was this course for you?



Overall, students considered the programme to be of value with the majority of students agreeing that it was either *'useful'* or *'extremely useful'* with supporting comments stating *'I wanted to gain and improve upon skills that an employer considers important'* and *'all sessions had something that you could take away with you'*. This again suggests an appreciation of the expectations of employers and the need for graduates to be equipped with the skills required of a twenty-first century healthcare professional.

**Figure 5.** How useful was each skills training session?

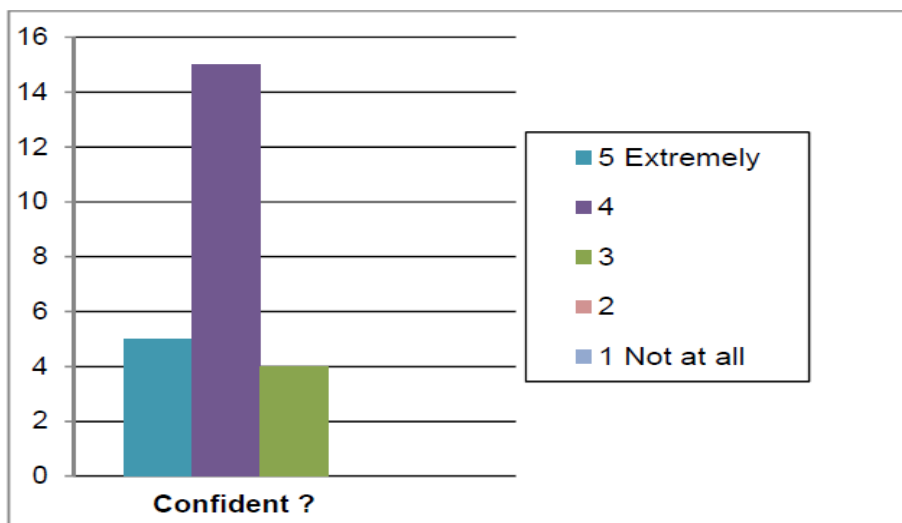


Evaluation of individual elements within the programme highlighted *speaking and presenting* to be of particular value. Supporting comments offered with the ranked



responses suggested that students considered that these skills would help with confidence building; *'I can use these skills when applying for jobs'*. Dray et al. (2011) reported that nurse managers found graduates to be lacking in interview skills and confidence; skills that could be developed within this aspect of the programme. The true value of a programme of skills development would be in its application to real life. As reported by Yorke (2004), student nurses acknowledge the need for theory but would appreciate advice on how to apply that theory to clinical practice. Students of these radiography programmes undertake academic modules where they have theoretical learning of the skills required to underpin practice but with the skills development programme running alongside healthcare management theory, students had the opportunity to see how utilising these skills could improve their practice and enhance their employability. Evaluations appear to confirm this as students reported increased confidence in using these skills (Fig 6).

**Figure 6.** 'How confident do you feel that you will use these new skills?'



### **Students' recommendations**

Students were asked if they would recommend the programme to their peers and 23 of the 24 respondents (96%) said that they would, supporting this with comments such as *'I really enjoyed it'*. A key suggestion for improving the outcomes of the course was repeated by several students; *'It (the programme) would be more beneficial if offered 6*

*months earlier, before we start applying for jobs*'. This again illustrates the value that students placed on being given the opportunity for development of these newly identified skills for employability and the importance of being able to demonstrate the acquisition of these to potential employers.

## **Conclusion**

Employability is often confused with first destination returns and this seems to be particularly so in the case of graduates of healthcare programmes. However, this suggests a concentration on institutional achievements rather than an individual student's ability to get a job. This somewhat linear relationship does not acknowledge the increasing competition for jobs within healthcare or the expectations of potential employers who will translate employability into employment. This study suggests that student radiographers are ill equipped to recognise the skills and attributes for employability valued by employers as a discriminator of applicants for band 5 radiographer jobs.

There is a perception that the required skills for employability are inherent within professional degrees since the curricula for these programmes are predetermined and regulated by professional and statutory bodies, a perception shared by student radiographers in this study. Evidence suggests otherwise however, and is borne out by the fact that person specifications for band 5 radiographer jobs are stipulated in addition to the core requirement of a professional degree. Where these skills are not explicit, higher education institutions should identify to students how they can best articulate acquisition of these or else provide students with skills development opportunities. Fundamentally, it will be the employers and their interpretation of how well an applicant meets the requirements of the person specification that will decide an individual's employability and ultimately, employment. Being mindful of this, it is vitally important that the expectations of healthcare services managers and those of new graduate healthcare professionals are aligned. The value of understanding the role of the person specification should be perspicuous and where skills development opportunities are offered, the expectations of managers and their projection of these through the person specification should underlie any decisions made regarding the content and format of those opportunities.

As only 44% of the cohort of student radiographers who attended the skills development sessions in this study chose to evaluate and reflect on their learning experience it is not possible to ascertain the full understanding and benefits of employability skills perceived by the group. Nevertheless, it appears that the value of the skills development opportunities offered was acknowledged since the majority (83%) chose to voluntarily attend the sessions. Recommendations that the sessions be offered earlier in the academic year, before applications for jobs were made, also suggested that the students had accepted the link between skills for employability and their ability to gain employment.

The key outcome of this project is seen as an established opportunity for final year radiography students at the author's institution to engage with personal development sessions aimed at empowering them with the ability to demonstrate the requisite skills for employability within radiography. These skills development sessions were created and undertaken as profession specific opportunities and driven by the skills defined by potential employers within person specifications for band 5 radiographer jobs. Although taught within a profession specific context for this project, interrogation of person specifications across the range of band 5 healthcare jobs show that these skills are fundamentally transferable to all healthcare professions. Employability skills development sessions should be offered to students of all healthcare disciplines and, where this would be a challenge to include within the curriculum, it is suggested that training sessions could be offered as an extra-curricular activity.

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