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# Employability Strategy.

## Developing Young Professionals

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2021/2022

## Background and context

Over recent years the College has identified changes in the following

- The decision to go to University now reflects a major financial commitment rather than a 'safe', default choice. This has contributed to student desire to explore progression routes other than traditional Higher Education
- Growth in quality alternatives to university - an increase in the availability of Level 4 and 5 qualifications gained through routes other than traditional degrees
- The requirements on young people from employers, Universities and other providers – they are looking for a wide range of employability skills and not just a set of good academic qualifications
- Changing labour market
- A more competitive external environment
- A desire and a need to engage with employers to help us understand what they need from young people (and to communicate this effectively to students)

This strategy outlines a consolidated and holistic WQE approach to addressing a changing environment.

A challenge is to establish what we mean by what we say. There is a range of terminology used for example

- Employability Skills
- Enterprise skills
- Career Management skills

WQE will use the term 'Employability' to cover all of the above and will aim to develop these skills in our students through the 'Developing Young Professionals' framework, and the WISE Award.

The Higher Education Academy's broad definition of employability is: 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates [young people] more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.' We see the work we are doing with our students as fitting this definition. It is about preparing students to become active citizens as well as to be successful in the labour market throughout their lives.

This document seeks to address what we need to do and outlines the following

- **Developing Young Professionals – the WQE employability brand**
- **The Employability Strategy**
- **Employer engagement**
- **Careers Entitlement statement**

The strategy is supported by an operational Action Plan - for improving employability skills and enriching student experience. This Action Plan is available on request.

## Gatsby Benchmarks

Implementation of this strategy will ensure that we continue our progress towards achieving the eight Gatsby Benchmarks

1. A stable careers programme
2. Learning from career and labour market information
3. Addressing the needs of each pupil
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
5. Encounters with employers and employees
6. Experiences of workplaces
7. Encounters with further and higher education
8. Personal guidance

## Developing Young Professionals

WQE recognises that in order for the strategy to be effective across the whole College (encompassing both campuses), all staff and students must understand what is meant by employability and be fully engaged in and have ownership of the strategy. 'Developing Young Professionals' is our brand and a framework to help this happen.

Developing Young Professionals is a commitment to an understanding that whilst academic qualifications are important (and what our students primarily tell us they come here to achieve), in a changing and competitive labour market (both graduate and non-graduate) students also need to develop a range of employability and career management skills to enable them to progress from College and be successful in their career.

In addition to the College's commitment to this work, the need is also being driven by Universities, employers and a range of other external drivers including the Gatsby benchmarks<sup>1</sup> and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) Skills for the Future 2016 report<sup>2</sup>. Our job is to ensure that students are aware of these drivers and are given opportunities to develop accordingly.

To be successful all staff and students will need to work together to make **Developing Young Professionals** part of our vocabulary and embed this across all areas of the curriculum and wider College life.

A developed young professional will be ready to take their next step whether this is University, an Apprenticeship, employment or something else, and to progress beyond this throughout their lives.

We see the following skills as key to achieving this – but there are plenty more!

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<sup>1</sup> Sir John Holman, *Good Career Guidance*, Gatsby Foundation and PwC, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, *Skills for the Future 2016*

• <b>Communication &amp; Interpersonal relationships</b>	• <b>Planning and organisation</b>	• <b>Problem Solving</b>	• <b>Commercial Awareness</b>
• <b>Decision making</b>	• <b>Drive and enthusiasm</b>	• <b>Self-awareness</b>	• <b>Time management</b>
• <b>Flexibility</b>	• <b>Literacy &amp; numeracy</b>	• <b>Digital &amp; technology awareness</b>	• <b>Resilience</b>
• <b>Negotiation</b>	• <b>Initiative</b>	• <b>Creativity</b>	• <b>Team working</b>

WQE also aims to encourage students to consider their career planning, to reflect on their aspirations, to identify their personal and professional priorities, and to establish aims and ambitions. This will in turn encourage students to better engage with employability initiatives, which will make them more rounded and marketable.

A key element of this approach is to encourage students to become independent learners and thinkers regarding their career planning and development. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem have stronger commitment to move from higher education to a career or straight into employment or an Apprenticeship after College and will be more likely to persist in the face of external obstacles (student resilience).

## Employability Strategy

WQE's commitment to improving the employability of all our students is explicit in the College Development Plan. Latest research finds there is an 86% reduction in the chance of students being NEET following 4 or more encounters with employers – therefore a key objective is to

***Increase the number of students who benefit from work related experience and encounters with employers to aid their understanding of the world of work and the demands of their possible careers.***

This strategy sees student employability as far more than the acquisition of a particular job. It aims to empower students to develop the employability skills to function in whatever career they choose to pursue at whatever time.

We see this being achieved through the following strands of activity

- **Embedding employability across the curriculum** and ensuring engagement from staff and students through the framework
- Using the brand - **Developing Young Professionals** to formalise activity
- A centralised **Careers Education and Employability programme** facilitated by the Careers team and underpinned by the one to one advice and guidance service
- Offering the opportunity for **work experience** and **work related learning**
- **Capturing, recording and analysing** employability related activities that students are engaged with and ensuring they are able to articulate the skills that they have developed through taking part

Running through all of the above strands is

- The provision of up to date, relevant and accurate **Labour Market Information (LMI)** for staff and students
- Effective **employer engagement**
- Continuous **evaluation (including through the Student Voice)** to identify what works well and where changes can be made
- the **advice and guidance** service ensuring that students are able to access one to one careers guidance tailored to them and their individual needs throughout their time at College

## Key Employability Values

In a competitive world, we are committed to employability development and implementation through the following values:

- **Getting Ahead:** Encourage students to maximise their potential and prepare themselves for the ever-changing world of work. Ensure up to date awareness of the labour market both locally, nationally and internationally where appropriate
- **Getting Inspired:** Inspire students through our values, ideas and commitment to academic excellence and professionalism, supporting all to achieve their potential.
- **Getting Challenged:** Encourage students to think creatively and innovatively, and to take initiatives to challenge themselves and, take responsibility and ownership of their career planning.
- **Getting Committed:** Commit to providing quality learning experiences for our students and promoting student engagement, commitment and success through academic, personal and professional development.

## Key points

This strategy relates to **all students** and not just those entering the labour market straight after College through employment or an Apprenticeship.

Employability skills are crucial for students throughout their lives and are as important for those entering Higher Education (to give them a competitive edge in the Graduate Labour Market) as for those progressing straight into employment or an Apprenticeship.

We want all WQE students to stand the very best chance of securing the type of employment they want. This will focus not only on their immediate next step but on long term career management skills and planning.

**Currently in excess of 98% of students leave the college and progress to a positive destination.** We need to ensure students are comprehensively engaged in extending, recording and promoting their skills and abilities in ways that make them suited to the needs of a wide variety of employers locally, nationally and internationally.

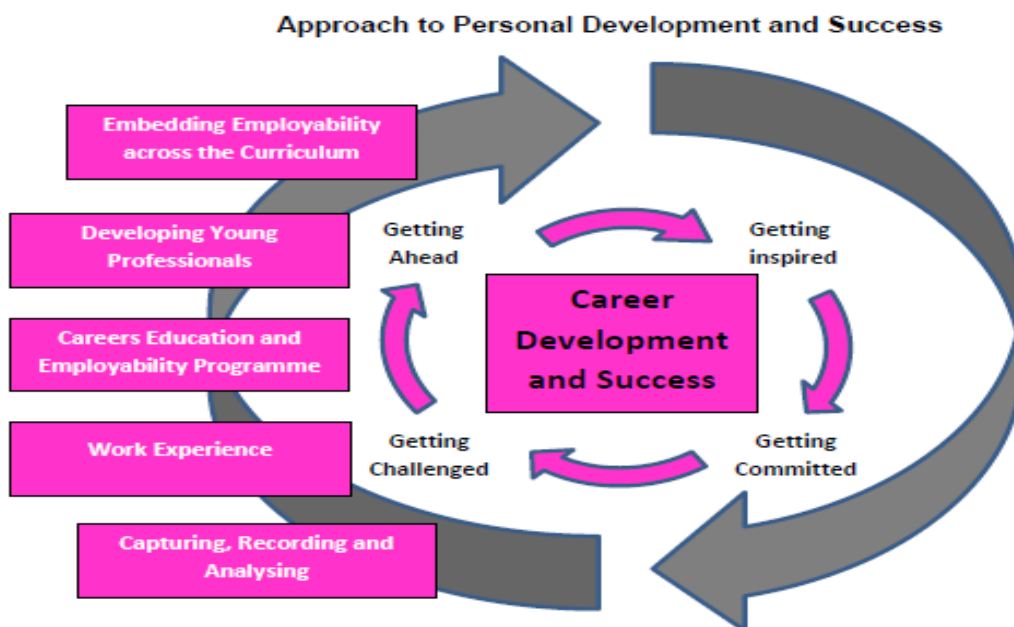
We need to ensure that students are able to effectively articulate the skills they have and what they can offer to an employer or other organisation.

The College offers a broad experience of academic and wider opportunities which combine to enhance students' employability. Rebranding enrichment activities and broadening access to volunteering and work experience contribute to this.

We need to ensure we are offering other activities to enrich our students' academic experiences by hosting presentations, discussions and seminars.

All students need to embrace the values and get ahead, be inspired, challenge themselves and commit to taking ownership of and responsibility for their career planning and employability skills development. This is a partnership to ensure that they are well prepared for their next step in progression.

## Employer Engagement



### What has WQE and its students gained by engaging with employers?

Employer engagement has enabled the college to:

- Understand employers' needs and develop a more joined-up approach to skills development for both general and specific business sectors, especially locally.
- Provide advice from individuals not employed by the college, contributing to a broader offer for our students.
- Offer students access to individuals and organisations that they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet (and to develop crucial networking skills)
- Increase awareness amongst our students of the local labour market.
- Provide students with increased awareness of the concept of employability and work readiness and opportunities to start to develop these skills.

## **How have employers got involved with the College?**

The College and employers have worked together to offer the following:

- One-off in-college sessions covering topics such as interview techniques and sector specific information
- Representation by local business at our annual Careers Fairs and other events
- Employers providing workplace visits, work experience or Apprenticeship opportunities
- Involvement in the Enterprise Adviser Network

## **How did we make it happen?**

The College has established relationships with employers over a number of years when opportunities have arisen but has now begun to formalise the process through the Enterprise Advisor Network and the Employer Engagement strategy. This strategy will provide a structured approach to engaging with employers based around the College curriculum, known destinations of students and the local labour market. It will actively seek to address gaps in sectors that are not represented or are under-represented.

## **Future vision and plans**

Survey our existing employer links and ask them what kind of skills and attributes they want from students and what support they can offer to achieve this.

Assess the success of our programme in students securing and sustaining employment with our partners.

Develop a formalised Employer Engagement strategy