Learning & Employability

Reflection and employability

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Learning and Employability

The 'Learning and Employability' series is intended for staff in higher education institutions who may be at an early stage in considering the enhancement of student employability. The publications will also be of interest to those who are already engaged in developing employability and who wish to broaden their understanding of the topic.

The series currently comprises six publications:

1. **Employability in higher education: what it is – what it is not** (Mantz Yorke)

2. **Employability: judging and communicating achievements** (Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke)

3. **Embedding employability into the curriculum** (Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight)

4. **Reflection and employability** (Jenny Moon)

5. **Widening participation and employability** (Geoff Layer)

6. **Entrepreneurship and higher education: an employability perspective** (Neil Moreland)

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The series editor is **Professor Mantz Yorke**.

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The 'Learning and Employability' series will be extended under the aegis of the Higher Education Academy and will reflect changing challenges and priorities in the relationship between higher education and the many work opportunities likely to need – or benefit from – graduate or postgraduate abilities.

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1. Introduction

In a situation that occurred very recently, a senior professional manager in a high-status role was describing his experience of being required to reflect in the context of a brief course. He talked about his initial resistance, how he had seen reflection as 'inward-looking and self-destructive indulgence' and how he was afraid that it would 'unravel his survival strategies'. He went on, however, to talk about how it led him towards re-evaluating his role and the behaviours traditionally associated with it – of being distant and faintly aggressive. He talked about how those junior to him were now beginning to talk to him and to ask questions, even about matters other than work. What sort of worker do we want? Those who have a set professional role in relation to others – including those whom they teach – or those who are flexible and approachable and can purposefully re-evaluate situations in order to change them? Reflective learning is making a difference to this man's pattern of work long after he qualified professionally: what reflective skills do we need to develop and engage in those who are preparing for work?

This paper is an exploration of the rationale for treating reflection as an achievement which can not only help a student to become employed but is also an achievement which will help them in their employment. It also considers how reflection can be integrated into the higher education curriculum. It is important to recognise that reflection is an essential element both in the higher qualities of all higher education learning and in the employment context. The paper does not deal with the concept of employability in depth, or with the more theoretical aspects of reflection. Employability is discussed on the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) website <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT>. The literature on reflection is summarised elsewhere on the LTSN website (Moon, 2001b) and is described in Moon (1999a, forthcoming).

2. Setting the scene: employability in higher education

In many non-vocational subject areas of higher education there was, until the beginning of the 1990s, only a hazy awareness of the link between higher education and work. With the evolving governmental expectations of higher education, there has been a substantial effort to reorientate programmes in response to what we in higher education understand that 'employers want' in their graduate recruits. The spur to this change is both an economic need for a more appropriately skilled and able workforce and the requirement for the country to make better use of its higher education system, particularly with greatly increased student numbers. An influential early study was that of Harvey and Green (1994) who researched what employers said they required from their recruits. A number of other studies followed, often with lists of the same kinds of attributes in different sequences. These lists tended not to mention reflection as such because it is simply not part of the vocabulary of employers or of recruitment activity. However, ideas such as willingness to learn, self-motivation, self-evaluation and self-management were cited frequently. These both underpin and are underpinned by what we now understand as reflective activity – as is illustrated by the introductory example. It is evident from many studies that different attributes and abilities come at the top of the list for different employers, and even for different recruiters in the same company. We should not consider employability as a distinct set of achievements that can be added to the curriculum, but as a broad area which students should be encouraged to develop themselves so as to enable them to become more effective more rapidly within a work situation and to continue to grow and change within their working lives as they meet new situations. This idea is developed in more detail in Yorke (2004).

While the discussion above implies a role for reflection once the student is in the workplace, there is another role for reflection in the development of employability. It was observed in the studies of the 1990s that, while many students had the skills and attributes that employers want, they did not seem to have either the self-awareness or the language in which to express or describe them at recruitment interviews. They were not able to reflect on what they had gained from higher education. It was this observation, in particular, that led to the personal development planning (PDP) initiative.

Both of these roles for reflection are implied in the working definition of employability adopted by ESECT:

A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.

The whole point about employability in education is how to develop it as much as possible, in advance of the events associated with major employment, and to see it in terms of a lifelong capability. Such thinking transcends short-term 'fill-ups' of skills. While reflection underpins personal qualities within employment and the preparation for seeking employment, the ability to stand back and assess one's position in particular circumstances (work, age, education achieved and needed, ambition and other lifespan issues), is a third role for reflection which we will sum up as contributing to 'lifelong learning'.

In defining 'roles' for reflection in employability, it is important to recognise the more general role of reflection as an essential basis for good quality (meaningful) learning. Encouragement of that role in all learning is central to the activities of higher education, and while it transcends other aspects of employability, it is an assumed quality of graduates.

Where have we got to?

Reflection has at least the following roles in employability:

- within employment as a function that underpins other aspects of employability
- as the means for students to gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general, and particularly in recruitment processes
- preparation for lifelong learning
- as an aspect of good quality (meaningful) learning.

3. What is reflection?

Picking out 'roles' for reflection in employability, as above, seems a somewhat trivial treatment of a basic human capacity. However, if we are to enhance this function, there is a need to 'capture' it both in terms of its major purposes in employability, as above, but also conceptually. What is reflection?

The concept of reflection in education is represented in a number of different words – reflection, reflective learning, reflective writing and reflective practice. Reflection is part of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting, and the term 'reflective learning' emphasises the intention to learn from current or prior experience. The aim of reflective writing is to set down the steps that we worked through when we were trying to give a coherent shape to our reflections. What we learn from that process might be considered to be secondary learning. 'Reflective practice' is a relatively new phrase that emerged particularly as a result of the work of Donald Schön (1983; 1987). Schön emphasises the role of reflection in professional or complex activities, particularly where situations are relatively unpredictable (see later). Reflective practice has

become a significant component of nursing and teacher education and has spread across a range of professions and practices. On the basis of the reasoning above, we will be using the terms 'reflection' and 'reflective learning' interchangeably.

Moon (1999a) set out to explore the nature of reflection having observed the extraordinary complexity of the literature in this area. Some of it seemed to be suggesting that reflection is no more than a form of thinking – a word in common use and with common connotations. This is encapsulated in the 'common-sense definition'. A common-sense definition of reflection is developed by identifying how we use the word 'reflection'. Reflection is akin to thinking – but there is more. We reflect usually in order to achieve an outcome or for some purpose. In everyday life we may, however, simply 'be reflective', and an outcome may occur. Reflection is an activity that we apply to more complex issues. We do not reflect about the route to the bus stop, or how to do a simple arithmetical sum where there is an obvious solution: these are matters of routine. We might reflect, however, on whether or not to complain about something when complaint may generate difficult consequences. The content of reflection is what we know or have learnt already. It is often a process of reorganising knowledge and emotional orientations in order to achieve further insights.

> Reflection is a form of mental processing – a form of thinking – that may be used deliberately to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome, or there may be an unexpected outcome from a state of 'being reflective'. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and emotions that we already possess.

It became apparent that the manner in which reflection is used in academic contexts justifies a development of the simple common-sense definition to acknowledge the manner in which reflection is operationalised. This is added to the common-sense definition above.

> In an academic context, there is likely to be a conscious and stated purpose for the reflection, with an outcome stated in terms of learning or clarification – or, in particular, action. In this context, it is likely to be preceded by a description of the purpose and/or the subject matter of the reflection. The process and outcome of reflective work are most likely to be written and to be seen by others and both of these factors may influence its nature and the quality of the reflective process itself.

Both of these definitions are based on Moon (forthcoming).

Complicating the situation, however, is the literature that reviews reflection as an academic topic. While the literature is diverse and differs in nature from the approaches above, it does not seem to negate the idea of the common-sense definition. It seems to differ because it refers primarily to the outcomes of the reflective process – not the process itself – and, of course, there are many possible outcomes. From the evidence in the literature, the following can be outcomes of reflective processes:
- learning and material for further reflection
- action
- critical review
- personal and continuing professional development
- reflection on the process of learning or personal functioning (metacognition)
- the building of theory
- decisions or resolutions of uncertainty
- problem solving

- empowerment and emancipation
- unexpected outcomes such as images and ideas that may be the solution to problems
- emotional development in some form – see later

(Based on Moon, 1999a.)

Although 'learning' is listed as an outcome of reflection in its own right, we could say that all of the outcomes in the list are concerned with how we use learning and knowledge to achieve other purposes. In other words, they link reflection with learning and thus, in the more general sense, they link reflection with employability.

There are a few common conceptions of reflection that need further examination. The first concerns the role of emotion in reflection and learning. Some see the involvement of emotion as central to reflection. For others, emotion is seen only for its negative connotations – as a 'block' to learning, for example. It would seem that emotion is intimately involved in all psychological activity and not only reflection, though we may pay more attention to it in reflective modes. It is probably involved in the process of reflection and learning in different ways – as an outcome, as a facilitatory or blocking influence and so on, but emotion can, itself, also be the subject matter of reflection (Moon, forthcoming). Goleman (1995) has done much to encourage recognition of the role of emotion in professional activity in his adoption of the concept of 'emotional intelligence'. The ability to reflect on personal behaviour is central to much of his material.

Another conception is that reflection is always about the role of the 'first person' – the self. There is no reason why this should be the case. Reflection on external events is a usual form of learning activity, for example as in critical appraisal or evaluation. However, in several of the roles that we identified above for reflection in employability, the self does tend to be the subject matter of the reflection.

The third conception that we examine is that some people cannot reflect. The quotation from the senior professional at the beginning of this paper shows how people may feel threatened by the idea of being asked to reflect. However, we should see reflection as a normal human function that is involved in learning. The issue may be the acceptability of reflection on self and there may be variation across disciplines as to the acceptability of written reflection. In the arts and humanities, where interpretation is often the mode of work, reflective writing is an accepted form. In the scientific disciplines, it seems that reflection occurs before a report is written, because the accepted mode is to write objectively, presenting the results of the reflection rather than the process.

Where have we got to?
- Reflection seems to be a complex concept within the literature, but most users of the term accept a common-sense definition.
- Reflection is operationalised in particular ways in many academic contexts, and this justifies further definition beyond the common-sense definition.
- The theorising about reflection in the literature tends to focus on the outcomes of reflective processes, not on the process itself. Many of the outcomes that have been identified are directly related to employability.
- We have examined three common conceptions of reflection – the role of emotion, the idea that reflection is only about the self, and the suggestion that some people cannot reflect.

We continue to explore the nature of reflection within the higher education context in order to lay a basis for a discussion about employability and reflection.

4. The relationship between reflection, learning and learning behaviour

From the sections above, we could say that learning and the development of knowledge are the main outcomes of reflection, whether it is learning about the self or acquiring specific factual knowledge – 'know-how'. It was noted also that reflective work in an educational context may need to be supported with evidence, and sometimes the acceptable evidence will be in action itself or planned action. But is all learning reflective, and in what ways, more precisely, is the learning process related to reflection?

Work on the relationship of reflection to learning is ongoing as the nature of reflection and learning becomes clearer. There is limited understanding of the process of complex learning and sometimes we have been researching it on the basis of inadequate concepts (Moon, 2001a). Much useful work on learning has emerged in the last twenty years that has focused on the learner's experience of learning (see, for example, Marton *et al.*, 1997; Marton and Booth, 1997). This focus on what the learner brings to a learning situation now enables there to be further elaboration of the links between learning and reflection. We explore some of the links below. In that exploration we distinguish between 'meaningful learning' in which the learner is interested in attaining a sense of meaning by relating prior understandings to the new learning, and (relatively) non-meaningful learning where learners attempt to memorise material in isolation, without making sense of it or relating it to what they know already.

- Reflection is involved in meaningful learning where learners are seeking to make sense of new material for themselves, linking it to what they know already and, if necessary, modifying their prior knowledge and understandings to accommodate the new ideas. An example here is when a new employee is trying to understand an unfamiliar program on the computer. Initially they relate it to prior practices, but it functions on a different basis, and they will need selectively to reject some of their current ideas about how programs work.

- Reflection is also involved in meaningful learning where there is no new material of learning. The learner makes (greater) sense of ideas (knowledge and understandings) that they have already learnt. The term 'cognitive housekeeping' captures some of the essence of this sorting out of ideas (Moon, 1999a). The result of this reflective process is often the development of new ideas and new understandings. An example is in an appraisal situation where a student nurse is asked to evaluate the development of their patient care skills over the past placement. They need to recall difficulties and achievements and to relate them to the level of skills that they understand to be required. It is not a straightforward process, but one of moving around in different ideas – but they knew the material already.

- Reflection is involved when we learn from the representation of learning. For example, a work-experience student is asked to give a presentation to colleagues on what they have learnt from the experience. The student learns from the process of putting together the ideas in the written form – and from hearing themselves talk about the experience. In addition, they may learn more from the feedback from colleagues.

- Reflection facilitates learning by enhancing the conditions that seem to favour learning (Moon, 1999b). Some of these conditions are as follows.

- The process of reflection usually means that we slow the pace of learning and give ourselves 'intellectual space' (Barnett, 1997) to muse on ideas.

- Reflection is a means of developing a sense of ownership of the material of learning – relating ideas more effectively to our previous knowledge (Rogers, 1969).

- It also facilitates learning through the development and improvement of the process of learning to learn. Students who achieve well are more often students who are aware of their own learning processes – their weaknesses and strengths (Ertmer and Newby, 1996). Metacognition is directly associated with employability by Yorke (2004).

- Reflective – or personally expressive – writing may be more effective than academic or more objective writing as a medium for learning (Elbow, 1973) and problem solving (Selfe and Arbabi, 1986).

- Reflection probably helps the emotional side of learning in providing for the opportunity to recognise the role of emotion in all learning. In simplified terms, it could be said to support the development and maintenance of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

From the list above it is evident that reflection not only plays a part in the process of good quality learning itself, but is also important in the development of important aspects of learning behaviour. Sometimes these behaviours, when they are consciously engaged, will be summarised in the term 'reflective practice'.

Where have we got to?
- There are various relationships between reflection and learning – all of which are relevant to employability.
- Sometimes it is the meaningful learning that is an outcome of reflection that is most significant, and sometimes it is the conscious engagement in the processes of reflection that is more important.

So far, we have discussed the nature of reflection and its relation to learning, learning processes and knowledge. This would be fine if we were considering only the theory of how reflection relates to employability – but that is not the case. In terms of reflection, what abilities will students show that will be helpful to employers and how, in higher education, can we help them to develop the ability to reflect?

5. Reflection in employability
Earlier in the paper, it was suggested that reflection is important in employability at least in the following ways:

- within employment as a function that underpins other aspects of employability
- as the means for students to gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general, and particularly in recruitment processes
- preparation for lifelong learning
- as an aspect of good quality (meaningful learning).

These points overlap. For example, the capacity to reflect on one's own abilities is not only an asset in employment situations but is also a key issue in the process of recruitment. We treat these separately because they have different implications for the process of preparation within higher education. We look first at reflection as an employability achievement itself.

Reflection as an employability achievement

We said above that there are many listings of 'what employers want' in their graduate intake, that the lists are broadly similar, and that reflection itself does not usually feature but is implied in the development of other abilities. The list of employer requirements provided by Harvey and Green (1994) starts, as is shown above, with 'willingness to learn'. It continues (in rank order) with:

commitment,
dependability/reliability,
self-motivation,
teamwork,
communication skills… and so on.

Out of the 25 requirements, only three or four would not obviously be underpinned either directly or indirectly by the ability to reflect – exceptions might be drive/energy, for example. This is because most involve meaningful learning.

We look more closely at the kinds of learning situations in which employees are likely to need to reflect. Our first example is general. Often the learning in employment is in situations where there is no-one telling the learner what to do – or how to do it. The learning will come from a learner's perception of the demands of a situation, which is then related reflectively to their ability to perform or actual performance. The success or failure of the performance can engage further reflection. Sometimes the reflection will be of the nature 'what do I need to do to function better in this situation?' Sometimes it will be a matter of 'this situation reminds me of a prior experience – at home/in my higher education modules', and so on, or 'how can I apply what I learnt in that in that situation to this situation?' It might be a matter of 'I realise that I do not know what to do. How can I best sort this out?', and so on. These forms of learning are often described as 'experiential learning' (Moon, forthcoming).

Sometimes the reflection is more directly involved in the intellectual functions listed. Reflection in our second example is that which is involved in the ability to solve problems using analytic ability and logical argument, especially in the kind of problem which does not have one 'right' solution and which requires deliberation.

We have, so far, mentioned situations in which the reflection is covert, where it is part of a learning process that is designed to achieve something other than reflection. The role of reflection might not actually be recognised as such. Our third example of reflection in the workplace relates to situations in which the role of reflection is more overt and the word 'reflection' might actually be used. Sometimes the reflection may be collective as in 'think-tanks' or evaluative, review or appraisal sessions. In these situations, both ideas and thoughts of a group of people are processed in an open-ended manner, or there is a gathering of loose information and an attempt to make sense of it or to reach agreement. For an individual this might be a session of reflection on what they have learned and how they have progressed in their work situation for the purposes of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Sometimes the reflective work will be written-up in a more objective report or as simple bullet points, but sometimes the actual 'meanderings' of the reflective process are themselves valued as evidence of the ability to be reflective (as in the CPD work). In any of the situations, however, an outcome to the reflective work will be expected – just reflecting is not sufficient.

Our fourth example of reflection in learning at work concerns the role of reflection in the management of one's own or others' feelings or emotion. To be able to manage one's own functioning in a work

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situation, and to be able to manage others, it is important to reflect on and thereby to learn from the experience of specific incidents, and to tune into others' reactions, as expressed through language, body language, and more deliberate behaviour.

Reflection in the exploration of personal abilities at recruitment

This is not so much an employability achievement in the sense of being 'what employers want' as an employment interview ability, which is a lifelong capability, in view of the decline in 'careers for life'. As was suggested above, just being able or skilled is not always sufficient in recruitment situations when, perhaps, many are considered for one post. There is not time for the recruiter to absorb all that can be inferred from a curriculum vitae without the applicant drawing attention to relevant achievements. The employer, further, needs to infer capability directly from the interview. The applicant should be able to discuss what they can offer the employer within the context of interview, having presented in their application some form of reflective record of their development and achievements. Many applicants need preparation for this over a period of time and usually with some guidance.

Reflection as a preparation for lifelong learning

Now that the notion of 'a career for life' is under increasing challenge, people need to be able to stand back from situations and reflectively assess what they want, where they want to go in work, the constraints and the facilitating influences. Being able to write down this kind of thought process over a period of time, or reflect on it with another, enables people to make better decisions. In particular they may need to reflect on their current level of learning and what and how they need to learn in order to meet new needs or targets.

Reflection as an aspect of good-quality learning

We have said above that reflection is an aspect of meaningful learning. The kind of learning that is required in the workplace will be determined by the context. It may be more focused and strategic than that on a higher education programme and part of the reflective learning is the knowledge of how to be efficient and effective as a learner in the work context.

Where have we got to?

- This Guide began with an identification of ways in which reflection is linked with employability.
- We considered what reflection is and how it relates to different aspects of learning and learning behaviour.
- Having established a broad definition of reflection, we considered in greater detail what reflection might mean and explored some examples of the ways in which reflection is linked with employability.

The next part of this Guide relates to the processes of fostering reflection or reflective learning in the context of higher education.

6. The integration of reflection within higher education

As demonstrated by the senior manager described in the Introduction to this Guide, it is not possible to make someone reflect. We can only set up situations and conditions in which reflection is likely to occur. The higher education curriculum should imply an essential role for reflective learning because of its requirement for meaningful and good-quality learning. But the whole point about employability is

that just being a good learner is not enough. Some of the time it needs to be a deliberate and focused activity. There is a need to make the process and its functions more explicit. A series of initiatives and activities is described below which explicitly or implicitly fulfil this role. They are not mutually exclusive. A learning journal, for example, may be part of learning from work experience or personal development planning. The aim in this section is not to go into any substantial depth in describing these initiatives but broadly to consider their range and provide one or more key references as all are well described elsewhere. It is important to recognise that reflection is part of all good quality and meaningful learning, and reflective activities should support disciplinary learning as much as they should support employability initiatives.

Personal development planning (PDP)

In 1997, the Dearing Report on Higher Education (NCIHE, 1997) proposed that progress files should be introduced. These would consist of a transcript that is an institutionally-maintained record of a student's progress as well as a more personal record of achievement (developed in the process of personal development planning) that is owned and maintained by students themselves. The latter element is incorporated in the process of personal development planning, which addresses employability.

PDP is not one initiative but many different initiatives with the common aim of enabling students to monitor, build on and reflect upon their personal development (NCIHE, 1997, recommendation 20). Usually the notions of planning, and the encouragement of 'taking responsibility for own learning' are added too. Policies for PDP are expected to be in place in higher education institutions by 2005-6. Further information about general aspects of PDP and examples of PDP systems are available from the PDP link from the Learning and Teaching Support Network Generic Centre website <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre> in the form of published articles and references to paper-based information.

PDP activities aid the development of a link between reflection on personal progress and the programme curriculum, encouraging greater awareness of how different aspects of learning develop relate to each other and how learning experiences contribute to employability. Most schemes are explicit about the role of reflection on current and past experience and subsequent planning. PDP initiatives are not necessarily new since they may build on existing relevant activities – for example, personal tutoring systems, careers work or skill development activities. They may be co-ordinated in different areas of the institutions – careers, educational development units, student services – and they may be common across the whole institution or represented by a set of principles that are adapted to suit different subject areas.

A wide variety of activities is included in PDP, usually with a thread of activity that involves recording experiences and achievements. There may be reflective activities structured by a computer programme which all students follow. These records are often subject to discussion with a tutor at various intervals. There may be workshops or on-line tools for self-assessment of skills, interests, career possibilities, learning patterns, strengths and weaknesses, and so on. These may have tutorials or action-planning work associated with them. There are likely to be activities on the development of a curriculum vitae and there may be direct links into modules, particularly those that involve reflective activities. Alongside direct PDP activities, there may be a review of modules for evidence of reflective activities such as learning journals (so that they might be considered as part of the PDP initiative) though the types of relationship between modular provision and PDP activities vary.

Reflection within modules or curricula

Beyond current PDP activities, reflective activities may play an important role in some modules, particularly those involving professional and continuing professional development. These initiatives were boosted by the increasing awareness of the notion of reflective practice, particularly in the work of Donald Schön who explored the nature of professional knowledge. He noted that 'being professional' does not necessarily accord simply with expert knowledge of espoused theory (such as is taught), but with a reflective orientation to professional situations with an emphasis on reflection and learning from experience (Schön, 1983; 1987). Following the work of Schön and others in the 1980s and 1990s, there has been an increased emphasis on developing 'reflective practice' during initial programmes. There are sometimes modules that involve a reflective overview of learning experiences. Where this is prior learning that is being presented as a claim for credit, the term 'accreditation of prior learning' (APEL) may be applied

Learning journals

Learning journals are often a vehicle for the support of reflective learning. They take a variety of forms, from being completely unstructured (in which students are asked to 'write about their experiences') to highly structured (with no 'free writing'). In a highly structured – perhaps computerised – journal format, students may be asked to respond to questions that might, for example, take them through a sequence of recording an experience, being asked to reflect, detailing what they learnt and how they will test that learning, etc. There are many exercises that encourage students to reflect on aspects of experiences that they might not otherwise have noticed (Moon, 1999b).

Learning journals are becoming more common in non-vocational programmes where they may serve a wide range of purposes. While most involve reflective writing, their main purpose may be different. For example, they have been used to improve student writing, to increase creativity, to enhance problem-solving skills, for personal development purposes, to link theory (in the curriculum) to practice, and so on. Moon (1999b) lists eighteen purposes for learning journals and notes examples in the literature of their use in thirty-two disciplines. Perhaps one of the most interesting purposes that links directly to many employment situations is the use of journals to accompany project work. The journal provides a location for planning, the collection of ideas, notes on progress, contacts, and reflection on any or all of these. It seems particularly important that the reflection can take account of the emotional aspects of the engagement and self-management of the project work.

Other reflective activities within the curriculum

There are many other activities that can be included in the curriculum as 'one-off' sessions or as a series of sessions that encourage reflection. Sometimes these will be individual, but often they will utilise the collective reflection of a group towards a particular purpose. Action learning sets, for example, can be effective in supporting learners who are working alone on projects or tasks (Brockbank and McGill, 1998; Cowan, 1998). There are different ways of using story and story-telling activities that engender reflection on personal or collective topics – often in professional practice or development contexts (McDrury and Alterio, 2002).

Work-related learning

There are an increasing number of work-related learning activities in higher education programmes, but these do not automatically involve reflection. It is useful to differentiate between these activities either as 'work-based learning' in which the curriculum is the work situation or as 'work experience' where the work situation is not necessarily related to the student's discipline, but where there is learning from the experience of work.

In work-based learning the nature of the work will accord with the student's discipline and the student may be an employee – and there may be no deliberate reflective activity (Portwood and Costley, 2000). There is usually a reflective component to work experience and this form of learning is excellent for the support of employability. It is likely that this learning from experience will be mediated by structured reflective activities such as learning journals, and oral reflective activities such as action learning sets or group presentations. Watton *et al.* (2002) provide examples of the manner in which work experience modules may be organised. It is worth remembering that the reflective learning on work experience does not just enhance the student's employability – it also supports other learning within the conventional curriculum (Moon, 2002b).

Other fieldwork experiences

There are many other forms of field experience during which learners may be required to reflect on their experiences – year-abroad placements, professional placements (in a school, on the ward, for example), some aspects of field trips, and so on. The essence of this kind of learning is that there is no mediation process to guide exactly what it is that learners need to learn. They are, instead, expected to make sense of unstructured situations and learn from them.

7. Issues, practical problems and some resolutions

Although reflection is involved in all good-quality learning, overt reflective activities are not always easy to introduce and manage. This section explores some of the issues that arise in the introduction of reflective activity to higher education.

Differing attitudes towards and capacities for reflection

It was suggested above that we probably all reflect within learning. However, when reflective activity is overt and represented on paper (or screen), some difficulties will arise. Some people appear to reflect easily and as a matter of habit and some, such as the professional person described at the beginning of this paper, do not find it easy and, indeed, fear that it will destroy their mode of professional survival. Some staff and students believe that reflection is 'touchy-feely', and that it is not only unnecessary but even dangerous for them. A member of staff who wants to introduce reflective activity is likely be one who reflects easily and habitually, and they may not understand that it is a difficult process for others. In addition, it is often the case that staff will have different understandings of words like 'reflective practice', even though they have written them into tasks for students. They may not notice that there are varied understandings until they realise that they are marking students' work on the basis of different sets of criteria. The potential for varied reactions and understandings in the area of reflective work suggests that before introduction of reflective activities, there should be staff sessions in which understandings, proposed methods, and any assessment techniques are explored and approaches agreed.

In terms of student understanding, it is also important to bear in mind that in many languages there is no word for 'reflection' as used in this Guide. Students whose first language is not English may need help with its interpretation.

Presenting and deepening reflection

Two observations prompt the use of a two-stage approach to the introduction of reflective activities.

Reflection and employability

We have already noted the different patterns of ability to settle down to reflective tasks in a student group, some persistently coming back to staff saying 'I still don't know what you want me to write' – others taking to it easily. The second observation is that once students are writing reflectively, it is often difficult to encourage them to go beyond the superficial.

On the basis of these observations, it makes sense to introduce reflection in two stages – in the first stage, to use introductory materials that encourage reflective writing, even if it is descriptive. At a later stage, activities can be introduced to deepen reflection. These encourage students to write more profoundly, and as a result, to learn more usefully. A range of these activities and exercises are detailed in Moon (forthcoming). There are frameworks for reflective writing available that detail the qualities of work in superficial and deeper reflection – usually in three of four stages. One of the best known frameworks is that of Hatton and Smith (1995). A new framework with more detail in it is in Moon (2002c; forthcoming).

Activities that work particularly well at both stages use examples. In terms of the initial stage of introducing reflective activities, it is worth saving some work from a previous year and asking permission to show it. Alternatively, if it is possible, getting the students who have gone through a period of reflective writing to advise groups new to the activity can be very helpful.

Managing assessment of reflective activities

The assessment of reflective writing is difficult in the sense that we may be unsure of what reflective activity is, but technically the issues are no more difficult than those involved in the assessment of anything. Like other activities it adheres to all of the same principles – that for a learning task we write learning outcomes and develop assessment criteria from the learning outcomes or directly from the assessment task (but the assessment criteria must still meet the learning outcomes as well: Moon, 2002a). A crucial decision in the development of assessment criteria for reflective tasks is whether we are assessing the content of the reflective learning or the reflective process itself. For example, in a learning journal for teacher education, it may be that a student has been asked to reflect on their experiences in the classroom with a focus on issues of discipline. There may well be two different things being assessed here. Clearly some element of the assessment concerns what the learner has learned about discipline. The student could have learned about discipline from a video or from textbooks and in either of these cases the assessment criteria need to relate to the content (discipline). This learning could be assessed by presentation or essay as well as directly from the learning journal. In fact, it is likely that the student will learn more about discipline from an essay task based on the journal than from being assessed directly on the journal itself, since they will have to 'secondarily' reflect on their initial reflections (Moon, 2002a).

However, it is possible that the learning outcomes for the module indicate that learners will become adept in reflection on practice – in other words, the assessment is concerned with the reflective process as well as the content. Now some of the assessment criteria need to relate to the representation of the process of reflection and we are faced with the question as to what this representation of reflection 'looks like' when it is of good quality – or when it is poor. There is no 'right' answer to this and there are many possible answers. It is legitimate to create criteria in conjunction with students. The important thing is that the criteria relate to the activity of reflection and are agreed. However, frameworks that relate to the depth of reflection (see above) are available which are beginning to tease out language that describes reflection, which in turn allows the development of criteria that can be related to the literature of reflection.

As with any assessment of learning, it is worth recognising also that the material being assessed is likely to be a minute aspect of what has actually been learnt.

Staff development

It will be obvious that reflection and reflective writing are not straightforward activities. We cannot just set tasks and expect students to fulfill the requirements. What is unusual here, though, is that if we set the same tasks for a group of staff, there might be the same difficulties, partly because some would feel that they cannot reflect but also because there are likely to be different conceptions of what is required. Staff development activities can help with the first issue. The second matter requires collaborative work by staff towards agreed tasks and criteria whenever reflective tasks are set for a group of students.

Where have we got to?

Reflective activity can be integrated into higher education, in particular when it is expected to appear in:

- personal development planning
- reflection within modules or curricula
- learning journals
- work-related learning
- other fieldwork experience
- other reflective activities.

There are issues in the introduction of reflection into higher education that require thought and development work, particularly in the following areas:

- developing attitudes towards, and capacities for, reflection
- presenting and deepening reflection
- managing assessment of reflective activity
- difficulties in presenting and then deepening reflective activity.

8. Conclusion and final comment

Most good learners in higher education are reflective because reflection is part of the process of good quality learning. We have suggested that being able to reflect as a part of meaningful learning is not necessarily to be aware of the process of reflection and, therefore, not necessarily to be able to apply reflection in employability contexts. Students need to be able fluently to review their processes of learning and their achievements in higher education that are relevant to a job and to use reflection to support further learning from experience on the job. The profile of reflection needs to be raised, and the abilities that can be developed overtly through a variety of reflective activities during higher education need to be made apparent. The language of reflection needs to become commonplace in higher education. Reflection is a key contributor to employability, both in its own right, and in its role in underpinning other employability achievements.

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Acknowledgements

Graduate Prospects

formerly Careers Service Unit (CSU)

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Formed by Universities UK (formerly CVCP) in 1972, Graduate Prospects is now a multimillion-pound turnover business in the graduate and postgraduate recruitment market. Each year its trading arm covenants its surplus to the charity (Graduate Prospects), which in turn redistributes around £1m of funds back into the HE sector in general and the careers services in particular.

Graduate Prospects not only supports financially the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) but works in partnership to produce careers information products for students and graduates, and engages in robust and relevant research, such as *Careers Services: Technology and the Future* (2001) and *Careers Services and Diversity* (2002-3).

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An initiative to support the higher education sector in its efforts to develop highly skilled, employable graduates who can contribute effectively to national prosperity in the 21st century.

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To find out more visit our web pages which we share with the LTSN Generic Centre: www.ltsn.ac.uk/ESECT.

LTSN Generic Centre

Employability, widening participation, e-learning, quality enhancement, assessment – these are just some of the issues which concern everyone in higher education today. No one person or institution has all the answers, and yet plenty of answers are out there. Within the UK's higher education institutions, there are some excellent learning and teaching practices. Many of these practices are common to a number of subject disciplines and are easily transferable. The LTSN Generic Centre aims to broker this expertise and promote effective practices in learning and teaching across all disciplines.

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Reflection and employability

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