CETL for employability: identifying and evaluating institutional impact

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the aims, objectives and approach to change adopted by the e3i CETL for Employability at Sheffield Hallam University and illustrates the impact of change via three thematic case studies and an organising framework for understanding the *locus* of change with respect to work-related learning: module curriculum and pedagogy (micro level), Faculty and Departmental strategies and operations, course design, structure and delivery (meso level), and institutional policies and processes (the macro level). These experiences are distilled to formulate recommendations for a *modus operandi* for those interested or involved with transforming higher education institutions (HEIs) to create a greater emphasis on and enhanced opportunities for students to engage with work-related learning.

Design – A case studies approach is utilised to illustrate the work of the CETL in practice and generate insights.

Findings – Findings suggest that HEIs can successfully embrace the WRL agenda and make a significant contribution to achieving its aims and objectives. Central to this success is encouraging institutions to absorb WRL into their mission in an overt manner, providing guidance, support, encouragement, inspiration, resources and reward to colleagues involved in creating and facilitating WRL, and adopting a *modus operandi* with regards to change that resonates with institutional academic culture.

Practical implications – The paper suggests an approach to strategic and transformative change in HEIs that will be of interest to change agents across the sector.

Originality/value – The paper adds insights to the expanding literature on managing large-scale change initiatives in HEIs.

Keywords United Kingdom, Higher education, Centres for Excellence, Change management, Work-related learning, CETL, Employability, Institutional impact

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

There is considerable interest in the notion of employability in contemporary higher education institutions (HEIs). This can be seen as the outcome of a complex historical process of interaction and debate between the state and HEIs on their role and purpose, and a current view that HEIs have much to contribute to the economic development of (particularly advanced) nations through the fostering of intellectual property and human capital formation, and that there is room for improvement in this context. In the UK, Prime Minister Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College in 1976 started the "Great Debate" about the role of education in contemporary society and emphasised the economic dimension. In British higher education (HE) in the post-war period the vocational curriculum developed mainly in the Polytechnic sector, and was entrenched in a functional divide evidenced by the missions of polytechnics and universities. Since the abolition of the binary divide in 1992 when polytechnics were awarded university status the boundaries of such a functional divide have become less clear cut, and competition between universities for funds, status and students within the marketisation of HE generally has led to an increasing emphasis being placed by HEIs

on how they (can and do) prepare students for the graduate employment market. This has been encouraged by successive governments in terms of policy statements, e.g. the government response to the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997) and resourcing interventions, e.g. the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative (Whiteley, 1995). In 2005 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announced the successful bids for funding to establish Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in England. These centres were awarded £0.5 million for each of the next five years, plus £2.5 million capital spend. The role of the centres (82 in total) was to undertake innovative educational development work in specific aspects of the HE curriculum (which included employability) within their own institutions, and to disseminate their work across the HE sector. Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), UK was awarded three CETLs, one of these being a joint undertaking with the University of Coventry.

The SHU Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Employability (branded as e3i) had the mission to enhance, integrate and embed employability within both course provision and the student experience at the university. It therefore had an institutional focus and was concerned with institutional change. It worked at a number of levels within the university to effect change: module curriculum and pedagogy (micro level), faculty and departmental strategies and operations, course design, structure and delivery (meso level), and institutional policies and processes (the macro level). Its *modus operandi* was to engage positively with agents that could influence, either directly or indirectly, the student experience, and encourage them to incorporate and expand employability aspects within their thinking and practice. The CETL team was made up of academic members of staff seconded from faculties, colleagues from the university Careers and Employment Service, and a number of researchers and administrators.

The specific goals of the CETL were to:

- increase the number of courses within the university that incorporated employability dimensions within their design and delivery;

- deepen the impact and imprint of employability within course curricula;

- foster and support innovative approaches to employability learning and teaching;

- support specific and named individuals and projects that were actively involved in innovative approaches to embedding, integrating and enhancing employability within provision; and

- support the establishment of employability as a core value of SHU.

These aims grew out of the existing university context, where employability was already established as an important value and mission via an evolutionary process that involved a number of key initiatives and stakeholder groups, and which had resulted in the adoption by the university of a formal employability framework as a curriculum statement and policy in 2004. This is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

The framework identified elements of knowledge, skills and attributes that should be embedded within the curriculum to boost employability, and was based on the literature on:

[…] constructivism (Biggs, 2003); experiential learning (Kolb, 1984); skilled behaviour (Elliot, 1991); reflective practice (Schon, 1987); transfer (Neath, 1998) and "situated" learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The critical concepts underpinning employability in HE are: *transformation*, the
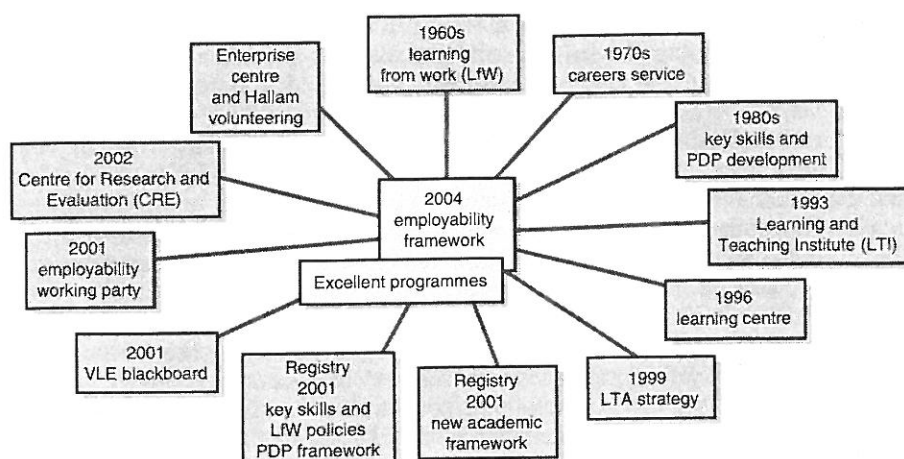
Figure 1.
2004 employability
framework

enhancing and empowering of students through knowledge and attribute acquisition; *transfer* of this to other contexts. Our pedagogy is underpinned by a distillation of theoretical work about transfer (Thorndike, 1906; Pea, 1987; Detterman and Sternberg, 1993) and transformation (Harvey and Knight, 1996; Astin, 1985), mediated by our evaluations and research (e3i CETL, 2005, p. 6).

In this sense the Centre was perceived as a motor for further enhancing, embedding and integrating employability and excellent practice within the student experience. This paper explores the aims, objectives and approach to change adopted by the e3i CETL for employability at SHU and illustrates the impact of change via three thematic case studies and an organising framework for understanding the locus of change with respect to work-related learning: module curriculum and pedagogy (micro level), faculty and departmental strategies and operations, course design, structure and delivery (meso level) and institutional policies and processes (the macro level). These experiences are distilled to formulate recommendations for a *modus operandi* for those interested or involved with transforming HEIs to create a greater emphasis on and enhanced opportunities for students to engage with work-related learning.

2. Strategy and approach to change

In order to effect the proposed changes described above, the CETL team formulated an initial *modus operandi* and approach to change that was described in the bid document to HEFCE. Four programmes, that had been judged as being "excellent" in terms of integrating and embedding employability features by an internal review panel headed by a SHU Pro-Vice-Chancellor, were identified. Representatives from these programmes would be seconded to the CETL in year one as employability champions. They would work with a number of other representatives from within the university, whose courses had been judged as being "good" in terms of embedding employability features. The aims were to facilitate a movement from "good" to "excellent" status for these programmes, by enhancing the employability dimensions of their curricula during the year, and to mentor and support the new members of the Centre, to become the next set of employability champions. At the end of year one, the original champions were to move out of the Centre, and have their place and role taken over by the new members, who would repeat this process for a further set of volunteers and courses

who wished to work with the Centre. This roll on-roll off process was designed to introduce new members to the Centre over a five-year period, encourage academics who had worked in the Centre to return to the faculties to use and spread their knowledge, and progressively increase the number of students who were enrolled upon "excellent" courses in terms of their employability aspects. Taken over a five-year period, the impact upon programmes and students was expected to be of large scale, and institutional in scope and dimensions.

However, in the early period of the actual operation of the CETL, a view emerged for the need to adopt a more organic and inclusive approach to change, one that encouraged transformational change (Bate, 1994) and challenged existing structures and practices, without jettisoning all of the structural mechanisms identified within the bid document. This new approach was informed by the emerging literature on change in HEIs, specifically that which viewed HEIs as complex-adaptive systems (Stacey, 2000; Jackson, 2005) and which explored large-scale change initiatives where participating agents have significant autonomy (Henkel, 2000). Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were established, based on the notion of communities of practice, to bring together colleagues from all parts of the university with an associated interest, and to help join-up the work of the CETL, Learning and Teaching Institute and other university Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) initiatives. More emphasis was placed on communication and positive engagement with a wider group of internal stakeholders. The focus on working with course planning teams was maintained, but also the validation process as a whole, e.g. the role that registry played in this. There was also an attempt collapse boundaries between the CETL, faculties, departments and teams.

The overall strategy continued to have a micro, meso and macro focus within the organisational structure of the university and these aspects are represented in the three case studies reported in this paper. Impact was envisioned as increasing the number of opportunities for students to develop their employability skills via the generation and implementation of mechanisms, processes and teaching approaches that facilitated this quantitative increase, as well as enhancing the richness, diversity and innovative aspects of such opportunities. In summary, the CETL aimed to impact on students through staff and organisational practices. The following discussion and evaluation of impact adopts a case study approach (Yin, 1994) which synthesises multiple sources of evidence and the author's personal experience of CETL activities to produce accounts in story telling and evaluative modes leading to "fuzzy generalisations" on the process of change (Bassey, 1999).

3. Case study one – micro dimensions of impact and change
A key objective of e3i was to increase the opportunities for work-based learning for students within the university. WBL (i.e. learning that occurs in workplace settings) is a proven testing ground for facilitating the development of employability skills and outcomes (see e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 2004), so it was an obvious practice to support and sponsor from an e3i perspective. However, it was acknowledged that accredited WBL may be difficult to include in some disciplines/courses, particularly those with a less vocational orientation. A parallel objective of the CETL became the promotion of work-related learning. WRL is defined as:

> Learning which results in knowledge, skill or attribute development derived from engaging with *tasks, processes and environments similar* to those that occur in specific organisational and vocational contexts (Laughton, 2010).

Clearly the nature of such tasks will vary with the specific discipline, but they could include relatively small adjustments/modifications, e.g. requiring students to produce a report (using appropriate conventions) as opposed to writing an essay, or larger and more ambitious initiatives, e.g. arranging for students to undertake research for local companies in relation to specific terms of reference as opposed to a synthetic assignment based on existing academic literature. The Venture Matrix (VM) was established within SHU to provide opportunities for students to develop enterprise and employability skills via a WRL pedagogy that offered a different type of learning experience to much of what students experienced on the rest of their course.

The VM offers a variety of learning opportunities for students: group projects with employers, projects with SHU as a public sector organisation, mentoring opportunities with school children in the region with the aim of facilitating their enterprise skills, and student group activities focused on entrepreneurial ventures to identify value adding activities with market potential. It was the development of the latter aspect with which e3i became particularly involved. Initially, this was the idea of a colleague who contributed to the bid document for HEFCE funding. After funding had been secured, this colleague developed a SIG for enterprise education, supported by e3i (e.g. through buy-out time for the SIG leader) which amassed a group of interested colleagues from across the different faculties in the university. Together they refined the idea of the VM and constructed the VM "world".

In summary, the student group projects engage students in the production of a good or service which can be traded either with other student groups within the VM, clients within the university, or clients outside the university. There is a wide variety of products or services offered by the student groups, which helps to create a vibrant internal market (student group to student group) for VM activities alongside the external possibilities, and there is a currency/financial framework for measuring the value added by group activities supported and regulated by the VM bank (all groups start out with a financial allowance in a notional currency, are able to supplement this by borrowing from the VM bank at advertised rates of interest, and earn extra funds through the internal market which develops for group services provided). The group mechanism and value creation/value adding focus provides a work-related dynamic to the process, which supports participants in the development of employability skills and attributes. Examples of student groups from 2009-2010 and their self-stated activities and offers of services provided include the following.

3.1 Cutting Edge Media
"We offer the best service in media. With a team of diverse, experienced, committed, and talented people, we will ensure that our service is a cut above the rest. We do: *Video editing, *Photography, *Posters, *Flyers, *Business Cards, *Logos, *Adverts, *Graphic Designs, *And much, MUCH more!!"

3.2 eXpert Management
"eXpert Management" are running a development scheme within local schools in order to effectively encourage young individuals to enhance their sporting development and healthy lifestyle. We require other ventures (research and marketing experts) in order to fulfil this entrepreneurial opportunity. Our venture consists of four entrepreneurs who promote organisation, team working and desire to achieve the best!

Initially the e3i funding contributed to the resource to employ four Enterprise Learning Fellows who were engaged to promote enterprise teaching and learning and

engagement with the VM across the faculties. In the latter stages of the CETL the resource supported the VM central team (project manager, enterprise assistant and placement student). This team has been responsible for the further development and expansion of the VM model, the systems and processes required to enable the VM to function effectively, and a strategy for sustainability of the VM post-CETL.

In terms of evaluation the VM is seen as being successful in its objective of developing a creative pedagogy to support the inculcation of enterprise and employability skills. Four sources of evidence can be drawn upon to support this conclusion. First, the number of students involved with VM. In 2010-2011 this is predicted to be of the order of 1,400 students. Students participate as a consequence of module teams using the VM to generate credit as part of a course of study. The growth of interest based on the recognition of the potential benefits of the VM experience within faculties, module teams and individual academics is evidenced by the number of students participating, the fact that all four faculties of the university are now engaged with VM, and a variety of subject/professional areas, e.g. law, sports studies, business and technology, events management, to name a few. Second, the Project Manager for VM was named Enterprise Educator of the Year in 2010 by the National Council for Graduate Enterprise in recognition of her work undertaken with VM. Third, a number of academic studies have evaluated the impact of the VM experience on student skills development. Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) who were researchers in the e3i team used a survey plus interview approach to distil the key learning outcomes from a student perspective as a consequence of engaging with the VM. These included enhanced motivation, the capacity for reflective thinking, enhanced confidence, the ability to work interdependently, the development of metacognition, as well as employability skills such as business communication and negotiation. Clark and Myers (2010) undertook a longitudinal evaluation of student (key) skills development associated with the VM experience, including first year, second year and final year students, using survey and interview methodologies. One of their key findings is:

> [...] a monotonic enhancement of competences from one year to the next in almost all the skills investigated (Clark and Myers, 2010, p. 31).

Laughton (2010) used a student focus group methodology to assess the extent to which participants in the VM developed skills and attributes via this WRL approach which were similar to those identified in the WBL literature. Findings suggested this was the case for skills such as team working, communication, flexibility, the ability to define problems and tasks and the practical and workable nature of the outputs produced, but that it was not the case for other potential WBL outcomes, e.g. the development of "personal theories"[1] above the level of "common sense".

And fourth, all four faculties are committed to supporting the future sustainability of VM via funding and the provision of resource, to maintain it as an organisational and cross-faculty innovation within the structure of the university, and enmesh this further as part of the infrastructure of student learning opportunity.

4. Case study two – meso dimensions of impact and change

An important feature of the organisational structure of e3i was the Director/Assistant Director roles, with academics who undertook these roles being seconded for part of the week to the CETL by their faculties/central departments. This meant they had a "foot in both camps", i.e. the faculty/central department and they acted as a way of

linking the work of these parts of the university, encouraging communication and dialogue, and identifying opportunities to transfer ideas or sponsor and support initiatives as these developed in a local context. This approach is illustrated by the revalidation of the undergraduate programme portfolio in the Sheffield Business School (SBS) in 2007, described in this context as change at the meso level within the institution. The Director of e3i was also the Head of LTA in SBS, and had a key role in the management of the revalidation process. This provided an opportunity to present and disseminate the work and learning and encouraged colleagues to discuss and embrace this in their own courses and modules, and thereby embed employability directly within the student experience. The revalidation of the entire undergraduate portfolio in SBS was perceived as a "window of opportunity" with respect to the employability agenda. SBS programmes were already highly vocational, with an emphasis on skills and attribute development, but the revalidation exercise created a space to review and critique the current practices, encourage a deepening and further embedding of employability skills, and a systematic and holistic approach to employability as the curriculum progressed through the levels. In addition, the key issue of resourcing would also be part of the revalidation discussions.

An early proposal by the Director of e3i/Head of LTA in SBS that all courses should have an "employability module" at each level was rejected by the steering group which managed the revalidation process as being too mechanistic and difficult to accommodate in an already congested and contested diet of subject-based modules. These ideas were then refined into the looser notion that all courses would include an "employability pathway" which would incorporate different aspects of employability at different levels:

- Level 4 – focus on key skills development (e.g. team working, communication, problem solving) and CV building;
- Level 5 – CV development, building industry/sector interest, placement application interpersonal and interview skills;
- Placement year (most students who do not undertake a placement study a work-based learning module in level 6); and
- Level 6 – "Springboard into work" – career management skills: defining industry/sector interest, matching skills and attributes against job specifications, employment search and networks of guidance and information.

To make the pathway "real" from a student experience perspective, each course identified a number of subject-based modules that would also include the relevant aspects of employability (identified above) as part of their curriculum and assessment strategy. The employability content was negotiated with programme and module leaders, with the Director of e3i/Head of LTA in SBS taking a lead role in this, supported by colleagues from e3i and the resources, materials and ideas the Centre had developed. A series of workshops, staff development events and away days were held with key module leaders as part of this process, which helped to gain commitment to the initiative and develop a community of practice around this particular project. These events were used to explore the central issue of integrating employability with traditional subject-based curricula to create an innovative fusion of knowledge, skills and attribute development which maintained the original curriculum integrity of the module. Another key aspect to the gaining of commitment in this context was the issue

of resourcing. Module leaders were worried that they would not be able to include additional employability aspects to their modules within the current resourcing model; they already found it difficult to include all the aspects of their subjects they deemed important, and did not want to displace any subject-based content/material to accommodate further employability teaching and learning. Discussions involving the Assistant Dean for Academic Development, the Head of Resourcing, and the Director of e3i/Head of LTA in SBS resulted in a restructuring of the overall resource available to the UG portfolio so that additional resources (in the form of additional seminar hours for modules involved with the employability pathway) were agreed to support this strategic initiative.

The revalidated programmes were phased-in for newly enrolled students one year at a time from 2007. As the employability pathway was implemented in practice a number of issues emerged which were worthy of consideration and response in an ongoing process of organisational learning. These included curriculum drift, from what was articulated in module specifications to what was actually being delivered; the capacity to deliver various aspects of the pathway, e.g. given the large number of students concerned and the desire for students to receive a "signed off" version of their CV, there was a need to engage external consultants to expedite this process; and the need to arrange additional and *ad hoc* support for a small number of courses where embedding the pathway in specified modules proved difficult at all levels. However, possibly the most common concern or issue that was experienced was that not all tutors involved in delivering the employability pathway modules considered themselves as "employability experts" and felt confident with all of the content, student activities and assessment that were now part of their scheme of work. The response has been to convince and demonstrate to such tutors that they do not need to be employability experts, to produce materials with associated team development to build confidence in this context, and provide strong and responsive module leadership to ensure that this aspect is perceived as a collective endeavour rather than simply an individual responsibility. The work of Becher (2001) and Henkel (2000) provides insights into this type of response and feedback from academic tutors. Academic identity is forged primarily through an association with academic disciplines. Where initiatives incorporate aspects which are not perceived as central to these disciplines, or when initiatives appear to originate from outside the considerations of disciplinary debates and imperatives, they may be embraced less enthusiastically or indeed not at all by those requested to be involved. The e3i approach to this issue was to engage both hearts and minds in discussion, debate and the development of practice: hearts, in relation to emphasising a key (moral) purpose of HE in preparing students to be functionally mature individuals so they can succeed in their chosen careers; and minds in relation to ways in which this can be done without jeopardising subject-based outcomes that course and module teams had a key interest in. The result has been an increase in the opportunities students have within SBS to develop employability skills and engage in WRL.

5. Case study three – macro dimensions of impact and change
Three types of CETL were funded by HEFCE: those that were focused on one discipline or subject area, e.g. geography; those that were interdisciplinary, e.g. the humanities; and those that were thematic in orientation, e.g. employability. The e3i CETL was a thematic rather than subject-based or interdisciplinary CETL with a strong institutional agenda and had the key aim of influencing institutional strategies,

structures and processes so as to increase the number and quality of opportunities that students have to engage with work-related learning and develop employability skills. This case study features several initiatives that were linked to this key aspiration: to impact on the mission, strategy and culture of the university, i.e. the context of individual practices which supported and constituted the student experience, and thereby mediate these with the values and ideas that would inspire individual academic practice to further student employability. The theory of change adopted by the CETL has been commented on above. This was also influenced by the work of researchers who had studied the HE system and how policy can be utilised in this context (e.g. Clark, 1986, 2004; Becher and Kogan, 1991).

Through lobbying, networking, persuading and influencing the CETL was successful in establishing employability as one of three key university values (alongside "forward thinking" and "supportiveness"). This was important as these values underpin the university brand and external profile, and are used in publicity and communications with external stakeholders. The CETL was also successful in embedding employability as a key aspect of the university's teaching and learning strategy:

> We will strive to enhance, embed and integrate employability skills and attributes within our learning, teaching and assessment activities. We do and will continue to do this through imaginative approaches that contribute to and expand the pedagogy of employability, and demonstrate the impact this has on student learning outcomes and achievements (Sheffield Hallam University LTA Strategy 2006-2010).

The material impact of this is that all programme planning teams, when devising new provision, are expected to demonstrate how they are embedding the university LTA strategy in their programme structures and design.

The CETL funded a number of faculty Employability Teaching Fellow posts. These individuals had responsibility for leading the employability agenda within faculties, supporting colleagues in developing WRL and advising course planning teams on the design of new provision. After CETL funding ceased these posts were maintained by the faculties themselves to continue the support and infrastructure for employability development.

Perhaps most importantly in terms of sustainability, the CETL refreshed and updated the initial university employability framework of 2004 with the aim of establishing the detailed practices included as mandatory in the experience of all students. Although this was agreed in principle by the Academic Development Committee of the university, it was never finally ratified as this became part of a wider initiative associated with a new Corporate Plan for the university instigated by a change of Vice Chancellor. This new initiative took the form of a "student entitlement" statement, and a minimum entitlement to employability skills development became a core feature of this work. The e3i team worked on this during 2009-2010 and established the following in the draft student entitlement (which has yet to be agreed within the university's governance systems):

All students will develop or experience:

- a range of employability skills (team work, communication, problem solving, etc.);
- work-related learning;
- personal development planning; and
- career management skills.

To further support the commitment to WRL, the CETL also produced a typology of work-based and work-related practices (Table I) that course teams could draw upon and design-in to their provision so as to be able to deliver on the above commitment.

These initiatives have contributed to the "flavour", "feel" and "colour" of Hallam University. Building on an historical interest in and commitment to vocationalism the university is keen to further infuse its educational practices and experiences with aspects and elements of employability and WRL. The momentum generated constitutes the sustainability of the work of the e3i CETL post 2010 as key aims and objectives become integrated in the strategy and processes of the university.

6. Conclusion and recommendations – creating impact via a systemic approach to institutional change in a HEI

The three case studies in this paper examine purposeful approaches to embedding employability and WRL at different levels within a university via the activities and experiences of an individual CETL: module level (micro), course level (meso) and institutional strategy and processes (macro). The impact of these approaches was measured by evaluating the opportunities students had to develop employability skills and engage in WRL as part of their course experience using quantitative and qualitative methods. An example of the former is the longitudinal analysis undertaken with course leaders using a survey method (http://employability.shu.ac.uk/resources.html); an example of the latter is the documentary analysis of course validation documents that was undertaken by CETL researchers. There is a danger, however, in the construction of case studies, of giving the impression of linear, mechanistic and relatively straightforward experiences of change and development. As discussed previously, universities are large organisations which are loosely coupled, complex-adaptive systems, where individual agents have a great deal of autonomy over what they do and how they do it. An approach to change for maximum impact therefore needs to reflect this messy organisational reality, and eschew the simplicity of change via fiat, or the notion that policy is, or can be immediately translated into, practice (Ozga, 2000). The experience of the e3i CETL can be distilled into a number of key learning points, experiences and recommendations in this context. They are offered as insights that may be of value to colleagues involved in promoting employability and WRL, and to those interested in approaches to strategic change initiatives in a HE context. In this sense they are one of many outcomes of the CETL project overall, and add one small element to the sustainability of learning from it:

- Adopting a theory of change relevant to the organisational context to inform practice is crucial – e3i changed its approach early in the post-bid implementation phase from a singular focus on the validation process to a more diverse range of educational development and supporting practices. These were more difficult to manage as a package but at the end of the CETL the e3i team felt more had been achieved in relation to employability and WRL as a consequence of this change.

- Working simultaneously at different levels within the university is beneficial – this creates a reinforcing dynamic of "bottom up" and "top down" such that colleagues working to develop employability and WRL feel they are contributing to the university agenda and senior managers have evidence and examples of policy being turned into practice; ultimately this helps to impact on the culture of the organisation and make it more accommodating to WRL initiatives.

Type of WBL	Objectives	Location/context	Duration
Sandwich work placement (year long as part of course)	Application of knowledge in a practical context; development of skills and attributes relevant to a professional/vocational area	Company or organisation	Two semesters/one calendar year
Sandwich work placement (short, less than a year as part of course)	Application of knowledge in a practical context; development of skills and attributes relevant to a professional/vocational area	Company or organisation	One semester/six months
Integrated practice placement where the student may also be a trainee or employee, e.g. teaching, nursing, social work, Foundation Degree	Application of knowledge in a practical context; development of skills and attributes relevant to a professional/vocational area; introduction to a community of practice; professional accreditation	Block placement in a professional environment	Up to 50 per cent of programme, often divided into blocks
Employment-based learning programme, e.g. sector focused Foundation Degree	Sector recognised vocational qualification	Company or organisation	In a work environment for most of the programme
Assessment/accreditation of learning from work outside SHU, e.g. part-time employment	Integration of theoretical and practical knowledge; reflection on development of skills and attributes relevant to a professional/vocational area	Company or organisation, including third sector	Can be short term involving students for a few days up to a semester or year long activity
Student project with a commissioning organisation	Application of knowledge in a practical context; project and client management skills	Company or organisation, including the third sector	Can be short term involving students for a few days up to a semester long activity
Student project using SHU as the commissioning organisation	Application of knowledge in a practical context; project and client management skills	SHU	Can be short term involving students for a few days up to a semester long activity
Hallam Award (offered by the Student Union, based on the assessment of learning from voluntary work)	Development of employability skills, in particular "soft skills"	Voluntary organisation	Can be short term involving students for a few days up to a semester long activity

(continued)

Table I.
A typology of work-based
and work-related learning
practice

Table I.

Type of WBL	Objectives	Location/context	Duration
SHU Venture Matrix (a unit within the University that brokers student teams, work-related and WBL projects)	Application of knowledge in a practical context; project and client management skills	VM organisations or external company/organisation	One semester
Residential/block week activities with outside clients/organisations as participants, e.g. MSc Real Estate Management	Application of knowledge in a practical context; project and client management skills; working under pressure to a professional standard	Company or organisation, including the third sector	Usually several days
SHU Student Ambassador Scheme (students undertake official activities on behalf of the University, e.g. at open days for prospective students)	Development of personal and interpersonal employability skills	SHU	Open days and others as required

Sources: e3i CETL (2005); structure of table based on *Work-Based Learning Handbook*, De Montford University, UK (2006, p. 4); Raelin (2008); Bailey *et al.* (2004)

- A proactive approach to identifying and working with colleagues with aligned interests within the university helps to create momentum – whether these be senior managers within faculties or central departments, or colleagues that are strategically positioned to raise or publicise initiatives, this helps to provide visibility and momentum for key ideas and developments, e.g. the colleague who originated the VM in case study one was also recognised as the University Enterprise lead in a teaching and learning context.

- Aligning with and supporting key strategic objectives of the university creates support, sponsorship and legitimacy – e3i was part of a university that was committed to vocationalism, WRL and employability, and in this sense was "swimming with the tide"; however, as described in case study three, it was proactive in linking its work to that of the university branding initiative, reformulation of the LTA strategy and scoping of a "student entitlement" which contributed to an acceptance of and status for the work it undertook within the university.

- A focus on course design and validation processes provides opportunities for manifesting change – in terms of educational development this is a key process in any university, and a mechanism for transforming policy on employability and WRL into practice at the level of the student experience, as highlighted in case study two.

- Bold ideas/suggestions for university-wide initiatives help to generate debate, interest and awareness, even if these are not ultimately successful – e3i suggested and provided a template for a SHU "Employability Guarantee", based on a similar scheme offered by Manchester College in the USA; the idea was that all SHU students who completed courses which had a SHU employability kite mark would be guaranteed to obtain employment within six months of leaving the university, or they would be offered a further course at the university at a subsidised rate; ultimately, this idea proved too problematical for the senior management within the university, but it did contribute to the university adopting the notion of a "core minimum entitlement to employability skills" for students (case study three).

- Communication issues prove more complex than anticipated and significant time and attention needs to be devoted to these – e3i found it difficult to publicise its work widely outside of the university, apart from using the traditional methods for academic work (conferences, publications, web site, etc.); internally, employability was one of a number of competing initiatives, which meant that the university governance system and internal marketing communications could not be used as extensively as was perhaps initially envisaged.

- Eliminating or collapsing boundaries between the project and the everyday work of faculties is beneficial, e.g. by seconding faculty colleagues into the project team to provide a two way flow of activity and communication – e3i made the choice that it would be a virtual organisation to a significant extent: apart from a small secretariat, members were secondees and had dual roles as faculty/central department members as well; in this sense, the work of e3i was not "other" to the work of the faculties, but part of it; physically, it was not associated with a specific location as a separate part of the campus, but had an actual and symbolic presence throughout the university via its associates.

- It is important to place a heavy emphasis on "hearts and minds" and allow accommodation to proposals and customisation in different disciplinary contexts – throughout the five years of operation the e3i team were involved in presenting the case for employability and WRL and the argument that there is no difference between teaching and learning for employability and good teaching and learning practice; this viewpoint is, of course, contested, but the e3i experience suggests that it is possible to encourage colleagues to change practice; the e3i team did not work from a detailed blue print but rather a set of concepts and ideas which were broached with colleagues and which encouraged them to explore WRL in the context of the specificities of their own disciplines.

- It is important to demonstrate the impact of any changes made and provide evidence in relation to broader institutional objectives – this is usually less than straightforward in an educational context, but helps to build confidence across the institution that time, energy and resource is leading to desired outcomes. Particularly important in this context are graduate employment rates (which are becoming a key performance indicator across the sector), feedback from employers and alumni. At SHU the evidence on embedding employability in the curriculum has encouraged the university to resource post-CETL employability and WRL initiatives from its own funds; this is the most significant example of the sustainability of the work of e3i, i.e. via embedding in university strategy and processes. Interestingly, this strategic approach to employability was recognised as an aspect of good practice by the QAA Audit Team which undertook the audit of the university in December 2010.

The experience of the e3i CETL demonstrates that HEIs can successfully embrace the WRL agenda and make a significant contribution to achieving its aims and objectives. Central to this success is encouraging institutions to absorb WRL into their mission in an overt manner, providing guidance, support, encouragement, inspiration, resources and reward to colleagues involved in creating and facilitating WRL, and adopting a *modus operandi* with regards to change that resonates with institutional academic culture. In doing so HEIs can align themselves with the notion of "real world learning" which is sought after increasingly by learners themselves.

Note

1. See Raelin (2008) for an account of the characteristics of knowledge derived through work-based learning.

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