

# Work-related learning – a challenge for us all

Sabine McKinnon  
Lecturer in Employability  
Caledonian Academy



## The policy background

“Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Learning Strategy”  
(Scottish Government , August 2007 (p. 48)

Universities need to ...

- “provide high quality, relevant learning opportunities that have value in the workplace”
- “emphasise and prioritise *employability as a key outcome* from learning”
- “work closely with business to develop courses that will lead to individuals having the knowledge and skills that meet both business need and individual aspirations”



*SFC “Learning to Work: Enhancing Employability and Enterprise in Scottish Further and Higher Education” (2004)*

“ every learner should have the opportunity to benefit from their education in terms of their employability – not just those on vocational programmes or those who take the initiative themselves.”



## What do we want to achieve?

### **The employable GCU graduate**

- can make effective and informed choices about learning and employment throughout their lives
  - build up their knowledge, understandings, skills and attributes in ways that are relevant to the labour market
  - understand employers' needs
  - know how to recognise their achievements and understand how these are relevant to employers
- (adapted from SFC, 2004, p.5)

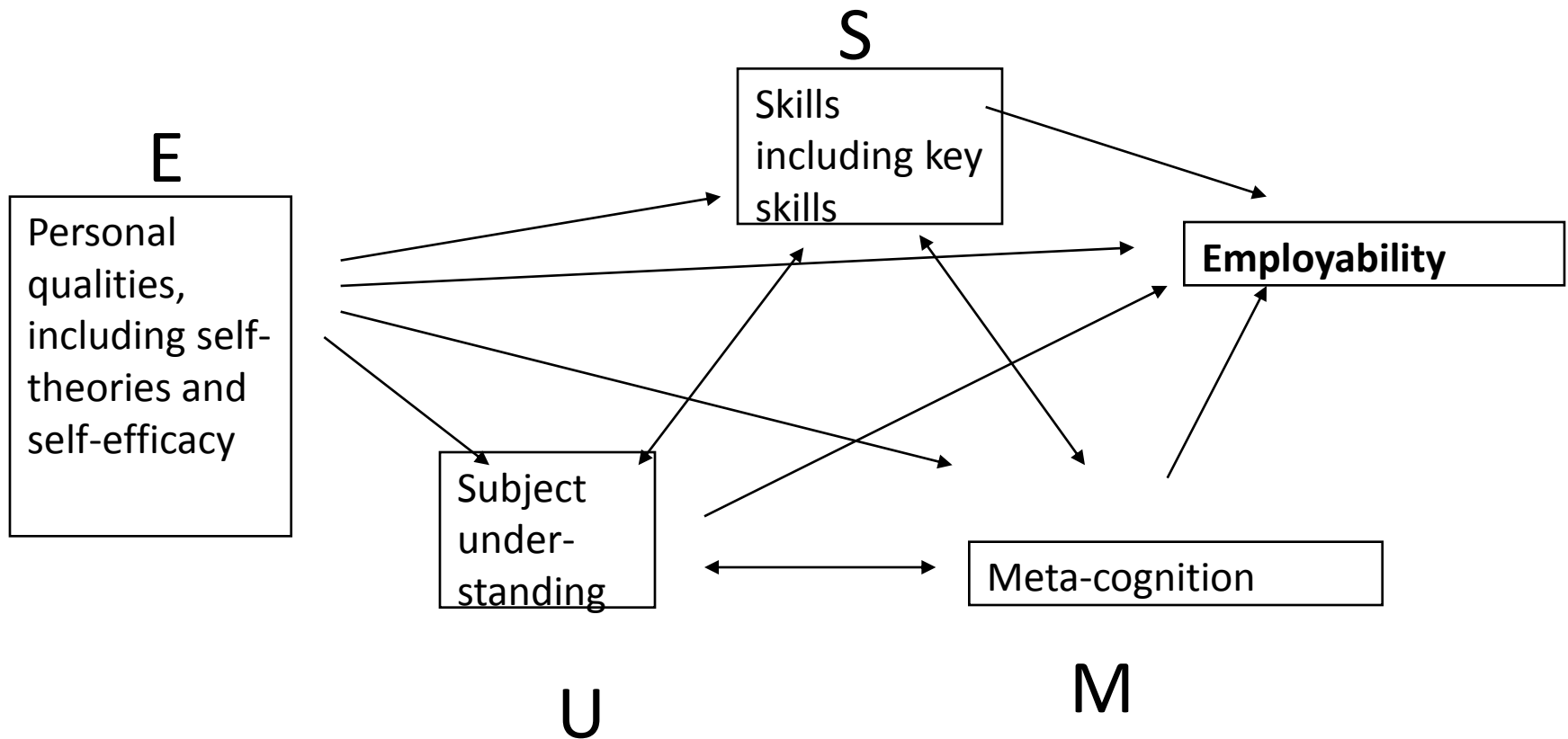


## What is employability?

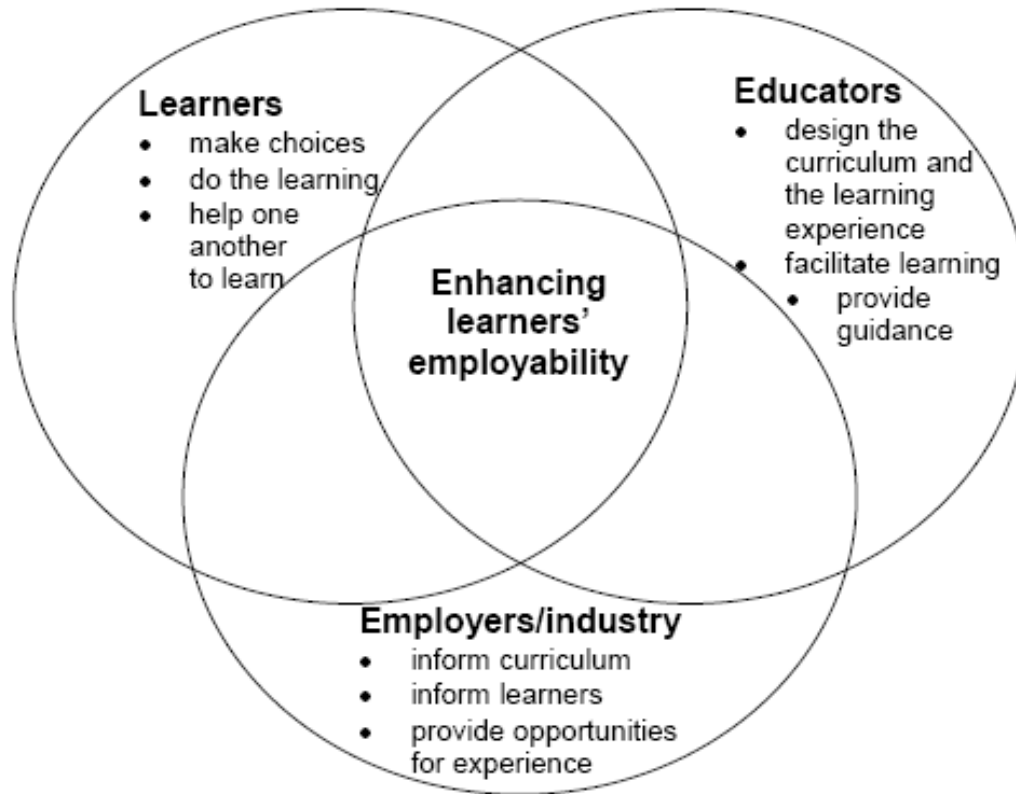
“ ... a set of *achievements, understandings* and *personal attributes* that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefits themselves, the work force, the community and the economy.” (Knight and Yorke, 2003, p.5)



## The USEM model (Knight and Yorke, 2005, p.8)



## A shared responsibility



## Questions to guide an employability oriented curriculum

### **Are students helped to steer their university experience towards improving their employability?**

- Do we know the employment outcomes of our students?
- Do employers have a voice in our curriculum planning?
- Are our students aware at an early stage what opportunities are open to them?
- Are potential employers aware of our students' skills and attributes?
- Do our students have confidence and high aspirations?
- Are students helped in making job applications?
- Does our curriculum offer work-related learning opportunities?

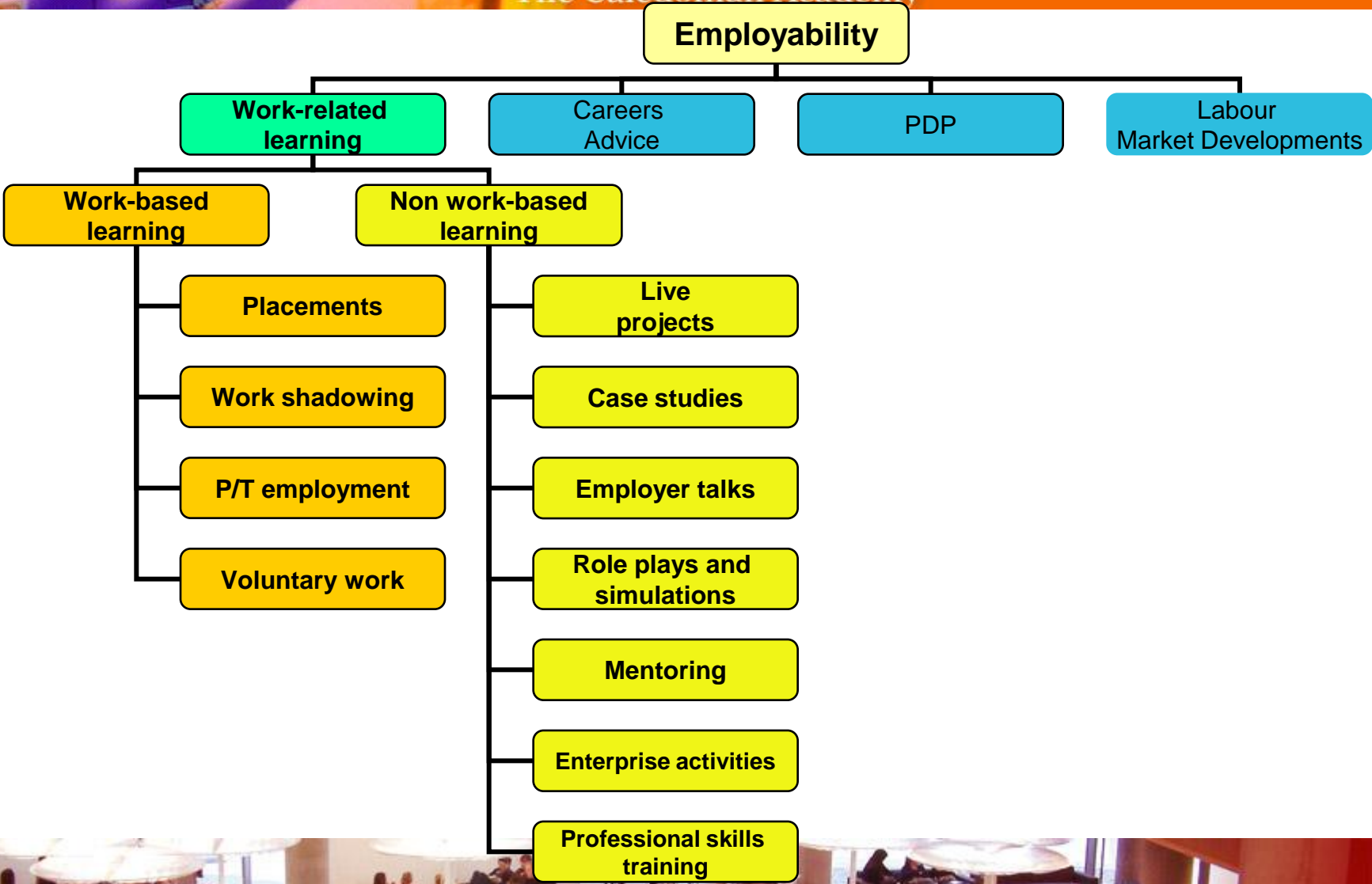
Adapted from <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/>



## What is work related learning?

“...planned activities that use the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding useful in work, including learning *through* the experience of work, learning *about* work and working practices, and learning the skills *for* work. “ (QCA , 2003, p.4)





## The Real WoRLD Project: GCU's employability initiative

Funded through dedicated SFC funding  
(£4m to the sector, from 2007-2011)

Aim: Improve and enhance students' employability skills by embedding work related learning activities across the university

- at institutional level : develop and support a coordinated, sustainable strategy for work related learning
- at programme level: encourage implementation of work-related learning activities in the subject specific curriculum
- at pedagogic level: develop innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment



## Project Plan (2008-2011)

### Phase 1:

Consultation exercise involving students, academic / support staff, employers

What are the opportunities for and barriers to embedding work-related learning?

### Phase 2:

Create a community of interested staff and students

Pilot and evaluate innovative solutions

Disseminate best practice to all subject disciplines

### Phase 3:

Develop guidelines and support mechanisms for implementation university-wide



## Scoping study (July 2008)

- 59 staff interviewed (49 academics from all schools, 10 support staff)
- 7 focus groups with 37 students from 6 schools
- many examples of good practice
- provision of work-related learning is uneven and can be improved
- some evidence of barriers
- need for shared understanding and joined-up thinking



## The way forward? Some suggestions

- generic employability related learning outcomes for each year of study for *all* students on *all* programmes
- generic principles of work-related learning to support staff
- central database of good practice examples
- pilot innovative practice and disseminate results
- dedicated administrative and academic support for embedding work-related learning in all schools
- improve engagement with employers and alumni
- one-stop shop *Employability Centre*
- high profile, university-wide placement scheme
- *'Aim High'* - central programme for developing students' personal and professional skills
- .....?



## References

Knight, P.T. and Yorke, M. (2003) *Assessment, learning and employability*, Open University Press and Mcgraw Hill Education, Maidenhead

QCA (2003) *Work-related learning for all at key stage 4: guidance for implementing the statutory requirement from 2004*, Quality and Curriculum Authority, London

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