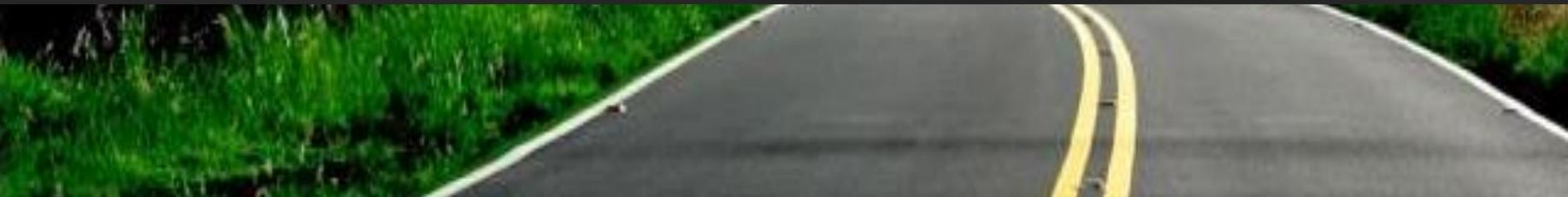# From employability to employment – the pivotal role of work-based learning placements in higher education

Professor Lisa Taylor Professor of Employability and Learning Innovation Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences University of East Anglia *Email* Lisa.Taylor@uea.ac.uk *Twitter/X* @drlisataylor #PEEPModel *LinkedIn* https://www.linkedin.com/in/professor-lisa-taylor-10010464/

Acknowledgements

Huge thanks to Professor Gilly Salmon (Education Alchemists Ltd) for our partnership, working together to develop and share the Peer Enhanced e-Placement (PEEP) model.

Thank you to the work-based learning placement teams who have adopted the PEEP and continue to champion the PEEP model, and the support received from NHS England.

What is employability?
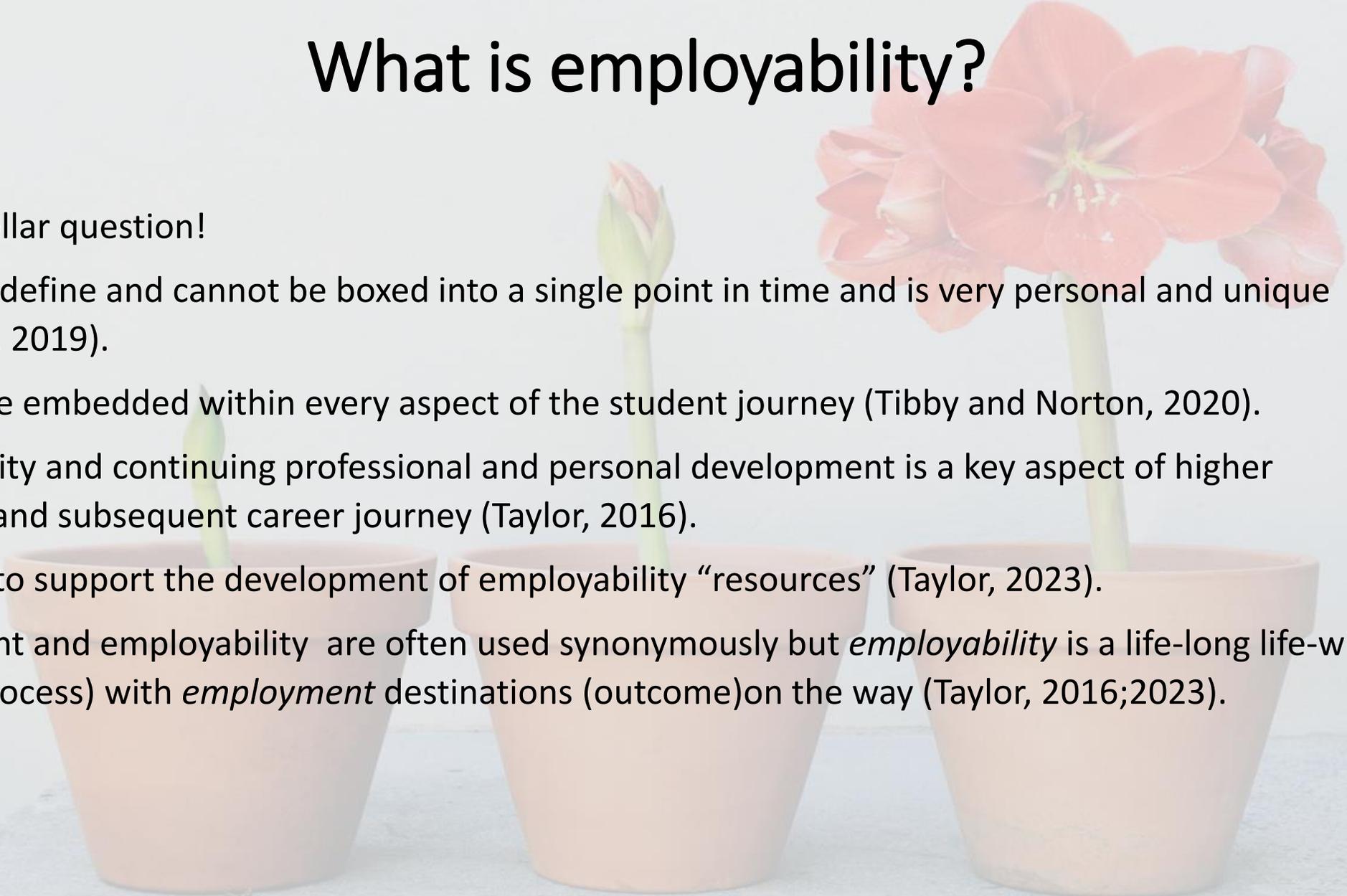
$64,000 dollar question!

Difficult to define and cannot be boxed into a single point in time and is very personal and unique (Crisp et al. 2019).

Needs to be embedded within every aspect of the student journey (Tibby and Norton, 2020).

Employability and continuing professional and personal development is a key aspect of higher education and subsequent career journey (Taylor, 2016).

Important to support the development of employability "resources" (Taylor, 2023).

Employment and employability are often used synonymously but *employability* is a life-long life-wide journey (process) with *employment* destinations (outcome)on the way (Taylor, 2016;2023).

The evolution of employability

What is employability – definitions

Embedding within curriculum - course level

Capital and agency - individual level
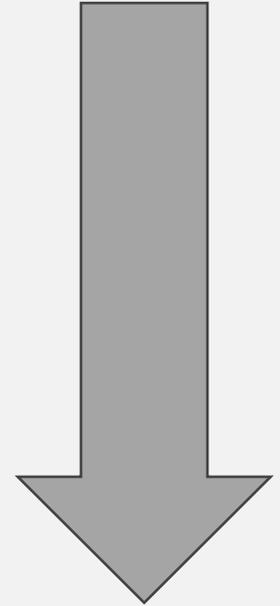
Employability has become one of the critical priorities within the higher education landscape across the world (Abelha et al., 2020).

Employability metrics have a financial impact on the universities as well as reputationally, as evidenced with HE across the world (Dollinger and Brown, 2019).

Still a gap between employer expectations and graduate work readiness (Institute of Student Employers, 2025; Orr et al., 2023).

Work readiness
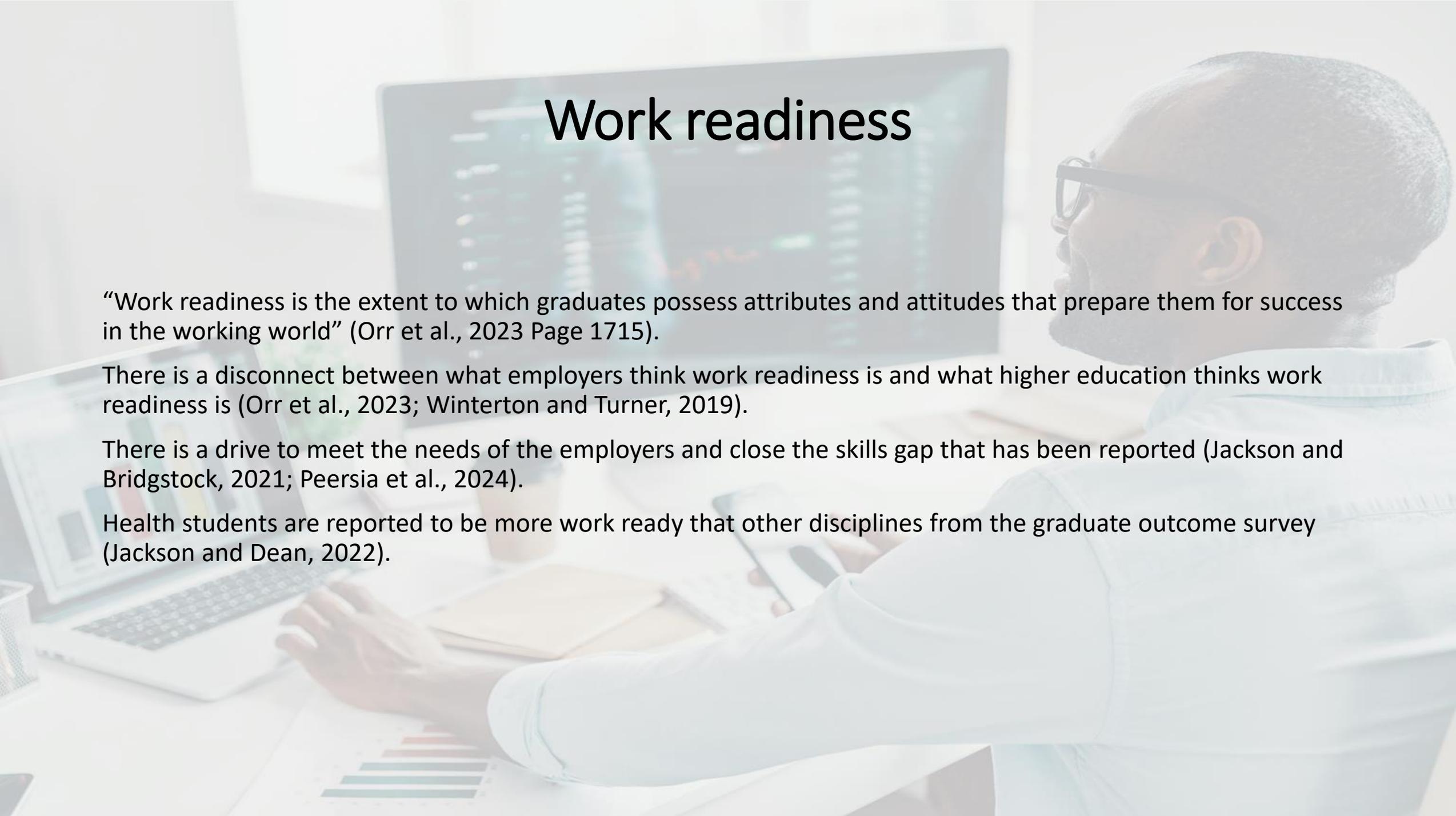
"Work readiness is the extent to which graduates possess attributes and attitudes that prepare them for success in the working world" (Orr et al., 2023 Page 1715).

There is a disconnect between what employers think work readiness is and what higher education thinks work readiness is (Orr et al., 2023; Winterton and Turner, 2019).

There is a drive to meet the needs of the employers and close the skills gap that has been reported (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021; Peersia et al., 2024).

Health students are reported to be more work ready that other disciplines from the graduate outcome survey (Jackson and Dean, 2022).

Factors contributing to work readiness

Differences between stakeholders as to how work readiness should be achieved (Winterton and Turner, 2019).

Multidimensions to work readiness - macro and micro perspective (Peersia et al., 2024).

Social support and self-regulation both influence student's work readiness with internal factors being reported to have greater impact than external factors (Tentama and Riskiyana, 2020).

Students were reported to not know what graduate attributes were and stakeholders all view graduate attributes differently (Rook and Sloan, 2021).

Activities focussed on graduate employability impacts positively on work readiness (Orr et al., 2023).

Curriculum provision is important to consider providing opportunity to develop work readiness in skills such as communication (Reid-Searl et al., 2021).

Students expect workplace experiences during their higher education experiences to help with their work readiness (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021).

Work integrated learning was the most important contributing factor to work readiness with different types of experiences providing benefit to students, not just workplace-based experiences (Jackson and Dean, 2022; Orr et al. 2023).

Models to support employability

4 components to employability as presented by Hillage and Pollard (1998)

Assets Knowledge, skills, attitudes

Deployment Career management, job searching and strategic approach

Presentation Curriculum vitae, references, interview technique, work experience

Context of personal circumstances and labour market External influences on employability

The USEM model presented by Yorke and Knight (2004)

U Understanding - Subject understanding

S Skills - Including key skills - also known as skilful practice

E Efficacy beliefs - personal qualities and a belief that you can make a difference

M Metacognition - to reflect upon learning and make/implement action plans as a result

Employability has evolved to become more focussed on a ***capitals-based approach***, facilitating ***individual agency*** (Tomlinson and Jackson, 2021).

Graduate Capital Model

Tomlinson's *Graduate Capital Model* (Tomlinson, 2017) presents five capitals that impact on employability.

1. Human
2. Social
3. Cultural
4. Identity
5. Psychological

(Please note the information for this presentation and image is taken from Graduate Capital Model | Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise | University of Southampton)
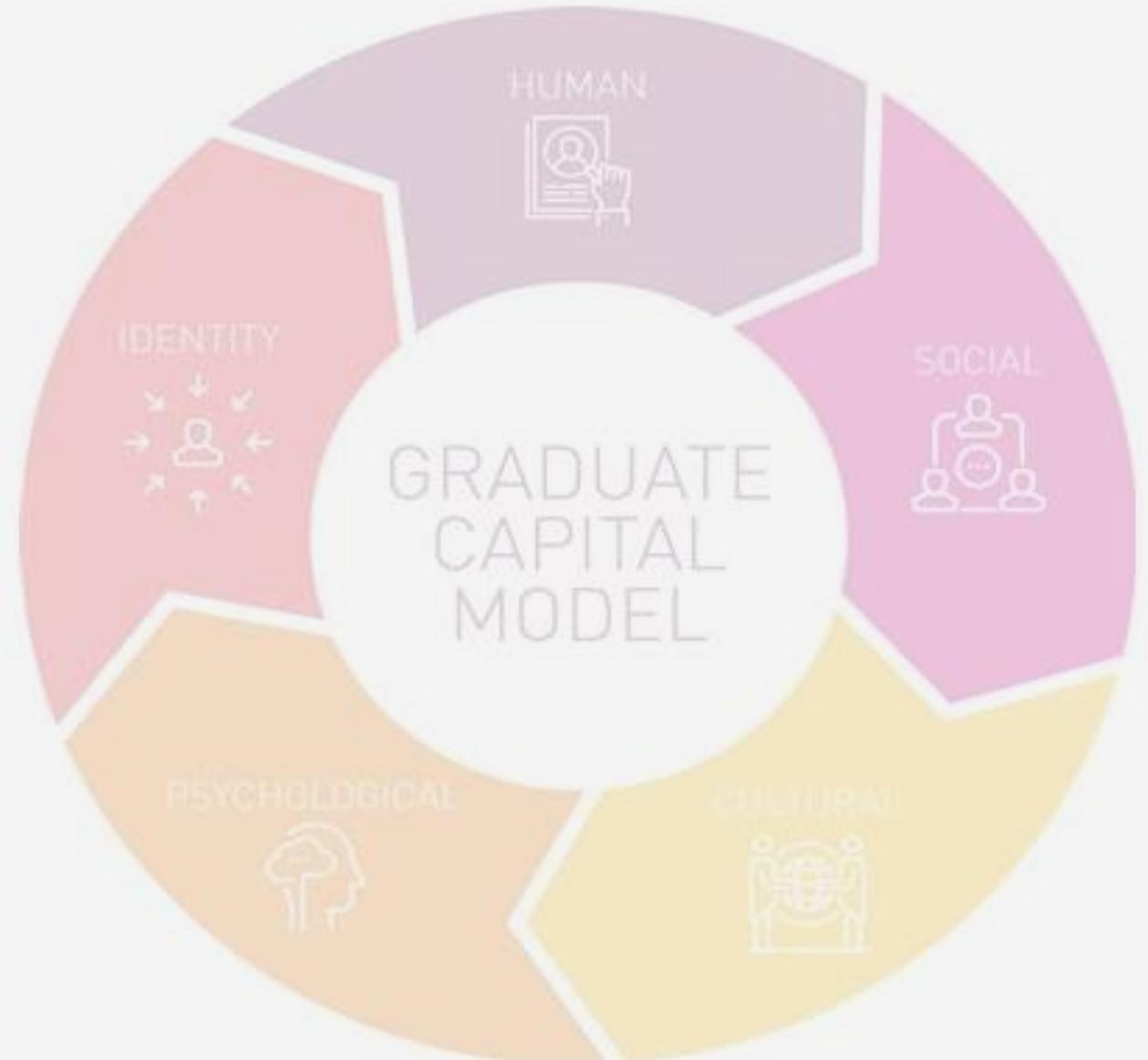
Human Capital

Graduate level knowledge and skills and confident to access the labour market.

- Able to apply transferable skills and knowledge
- Ability and understanding to identify job opportunities
- Able to realise job opportunities
- Competent with the job application process
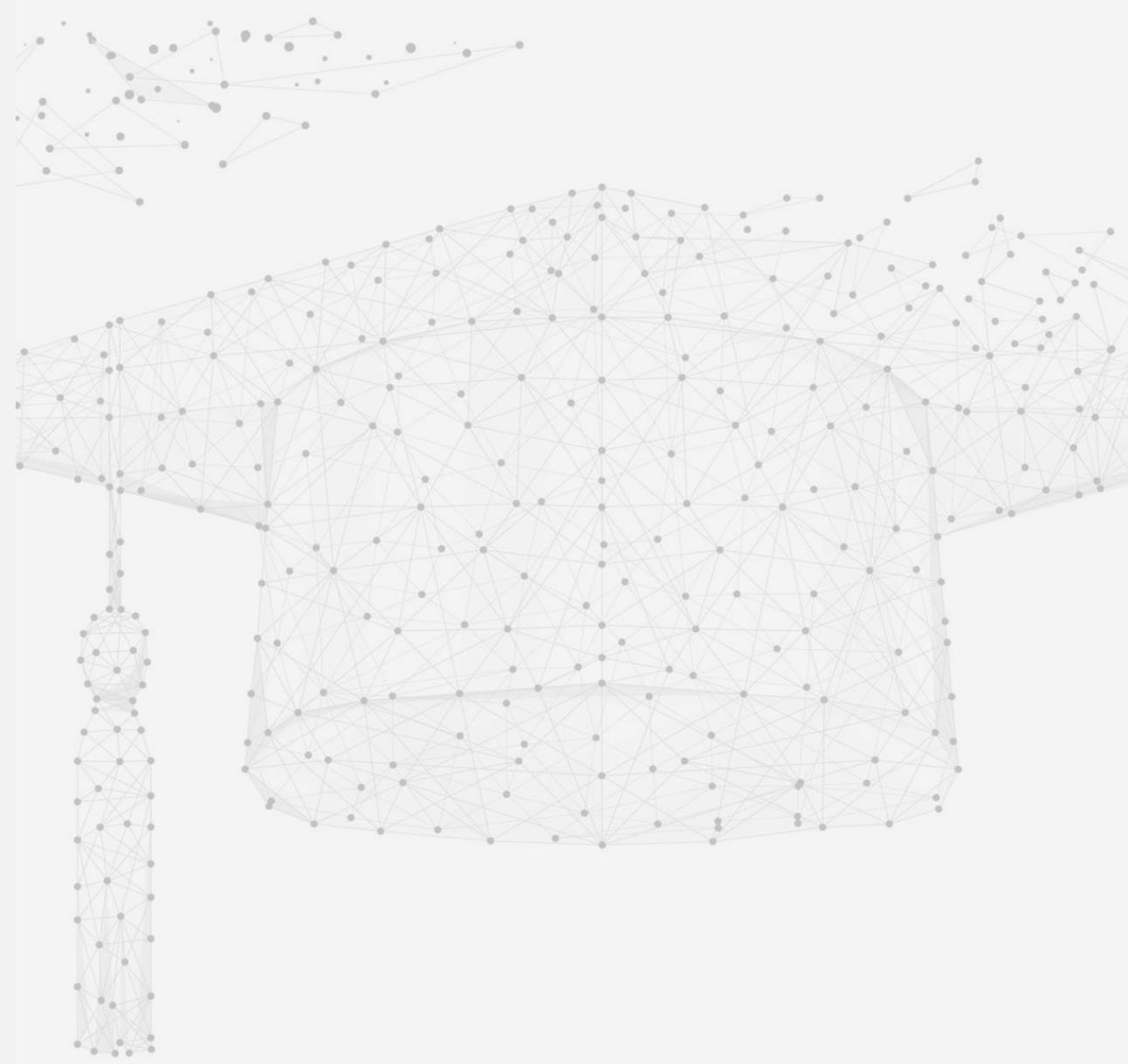
Social Capital

Identifying and accessing employment opportunities through development of networks.

- Aware of changing work landscapes
- Knowledge of key individuals within the area
- Making and taking opportunities
- Build networks within their chosen area
- Develop online networks and profile
- Bold to promote themselves within their networks

Cultural Capital

Cultural awareness within the sector and organisations and how they would fit within this.

• How they would add value through extra-curricular activities they have undertaken
• Use a range of mediums to present themselves
• Develop knowledge and understanding of different cultures within their area
• Demonstrate an appreciation of different cultures

Psychological Capital

Flexibility and ability to cope with work challenges.

• Able to manage and plan around uncertainty within the workplace
• Able to adapt and absorb any setbacks or changes
Develop their own strategies that work for them to manage workplace stress and challenges
•Have alternative routes for their career as contingencies
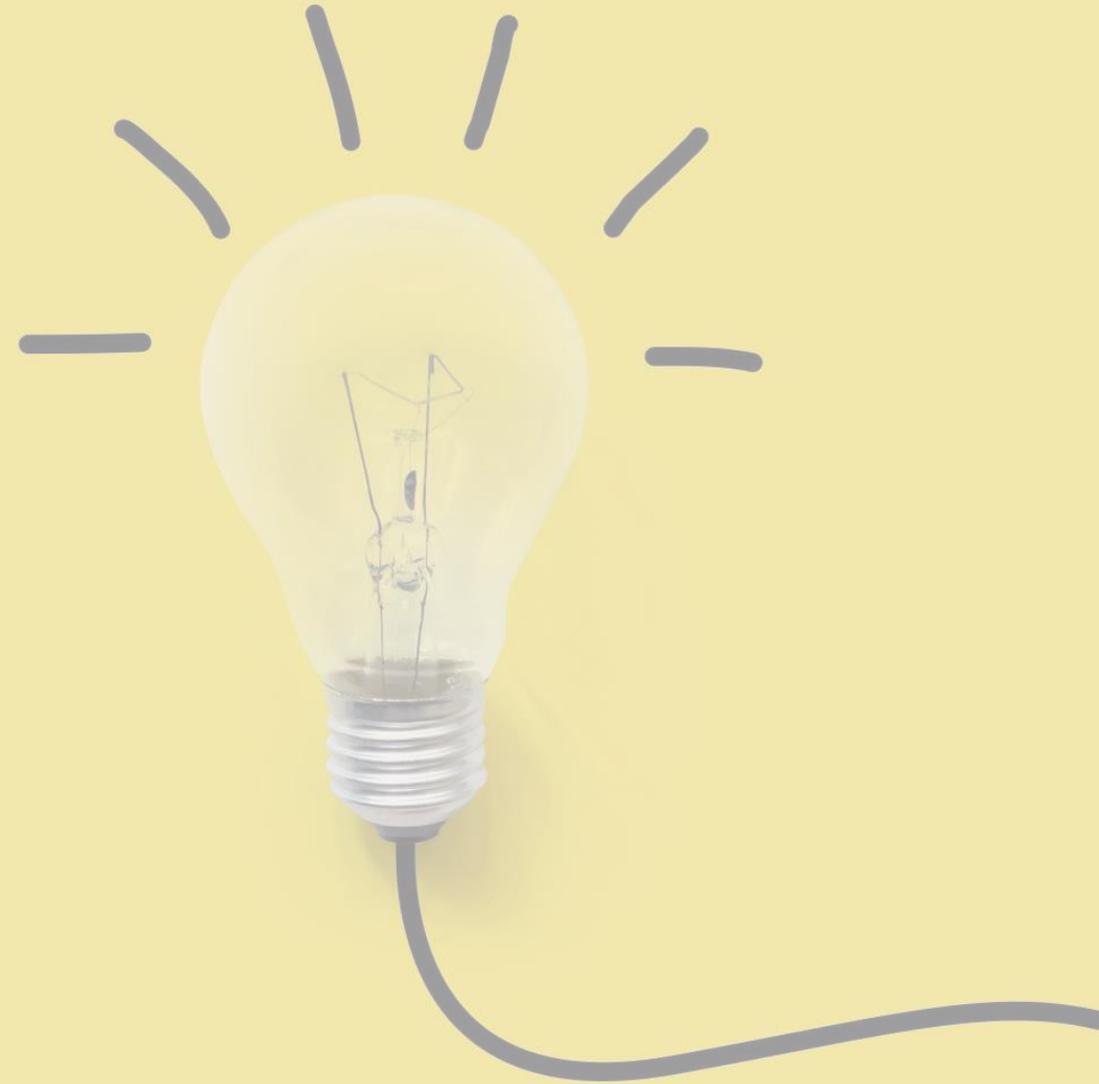
Identity Capital

Understanding themselves and what they can bring to the job market and what they may want to achieve through their career.

• Able to articulate and evidence skills, attributes and experiences but also aware of any gaps that need to be filled
• Consider what is important to them values and motivation wise
• Evidence their strengths but also areas for improvement
• Use placements and other work experiences to ascertain what is important to them
• Use their knowledge and understanding of themselves to establish jobs and careers that will fit their profile
• Reflect and evidence their progress

Individual ownership and agency

Metacognitive approach to employability - students need to understand their thinking and learning processes to have an individualised approach to their employability through a range of literacies.

- Basic literacy (skills and knowledge);
- Rhetorical literacy (problem solving, goal achievement);
- Personal and critical literacy (theory into practice, self-awareness and efficacy);
- Emotional literacy (feelings of self and others);
- Occupational literacy (career awareness and paths);
- Ethical, cultural and social literacy (individual responsibility, behaviours, beliefs and values, global citizenship).

Bennett (2017, 2018)

Pham and Soltani (2021) build on Tomlinson's capital model (2017) to include agentic capital.
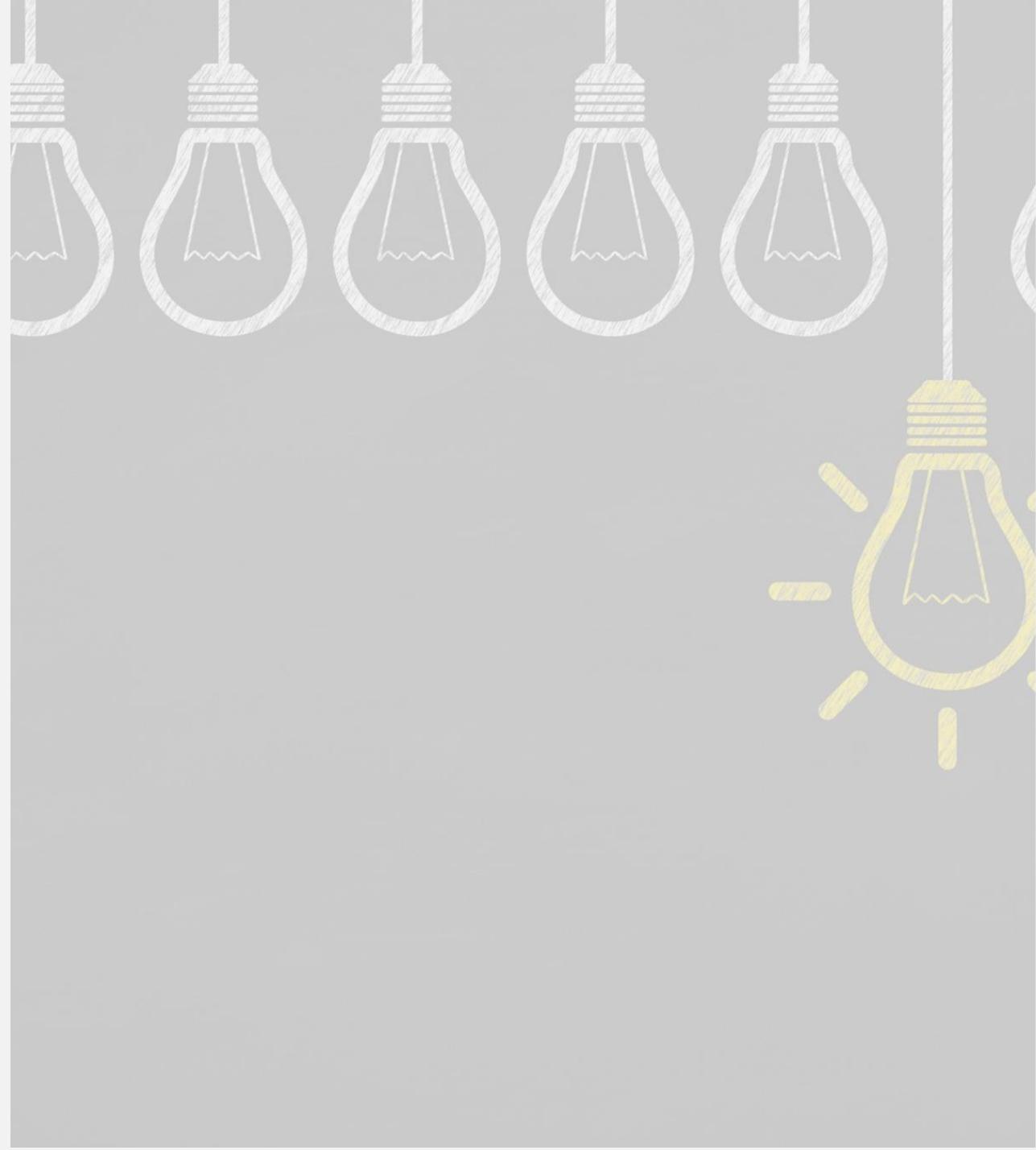
Individual reflection and action planning

Reflection aids individuals to gain a self-identity, agency and ownership of their employability Bennett (2017, 2018).

Supports metacognition.

What? So what? Now what? (Borton, 1970).

Action planning - a crucial looking forward aspect of reflection.

Links with professional requirements - portfolios – evidence of employability – confidence in articulation.

Enhancing student success – Advance HE

Curricular and extracurricular experiences support development of capitals (Tomlinson, 2017).
Students can process and internalise experiences to develop and shape their individual identity and aspirations (Holmes, 2013).
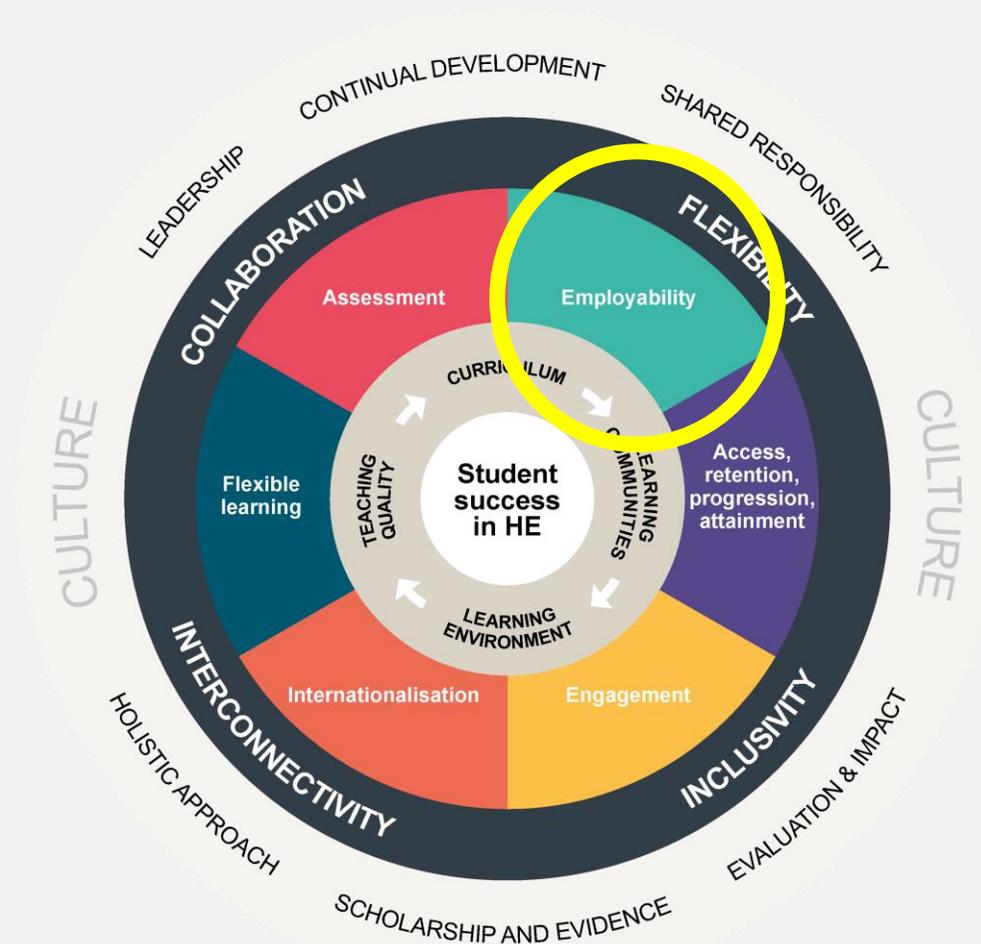
Embedding employability in the curriculum - strategy

Institution strategy, policies and practices to support embedding employability

Course or programme teams to take a holistic approach to employability, connecting it with pedagogic practice within and across the curriculum

Identify the attributes and competencies a student should have the opportunity to develop and practice to enhance their success
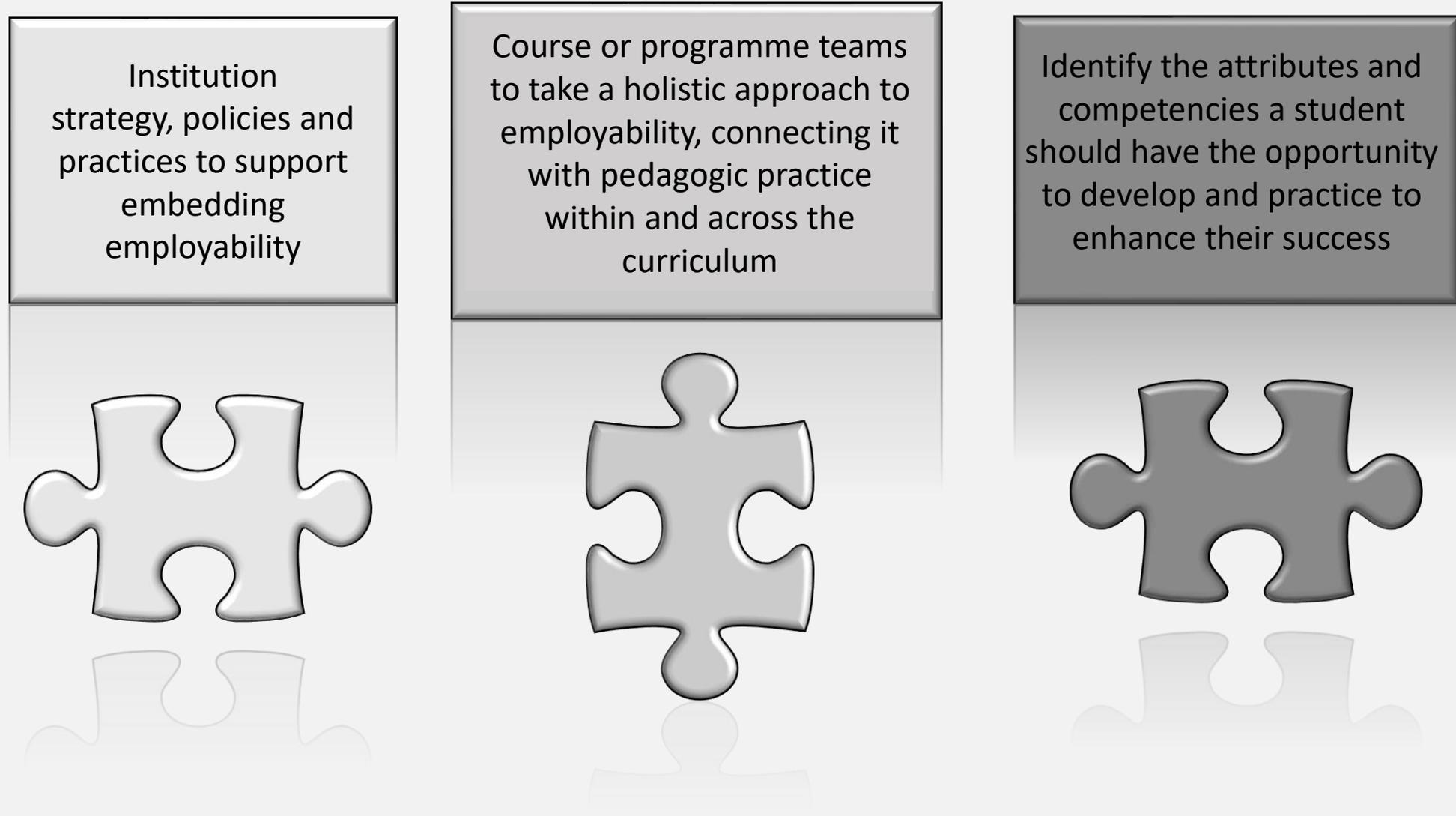
Extracurricular employability

"Extracurricular activities are crucial if you want to boost your graduate career prospects" (Lewis, 2024).

Quotes below taken from Lewis (2024).

"What I look for most in graduate candidates is if they've done something other than their degree course such as volunteering or being involved with their university sports club" Rod Flavell, a founder and the chief executive officer of FDM Group.

"The extracurriculars on a CV can tell you a lot about a candidate" Ian Yeulett, global head of enterprise sales at Bloomberg L.P.

"I'd rather take through to interview a candidate who has a 2.2 but has been involved with student societies and had a part-time job than a candidate who has a first but has done nothing but study" Emma Simpson, early careers talent partner at ISG.

Activities can show personality more to employers and an opportunity to develop employability (Ghoshal, 2021).

Employability and work-based learning placements

One of the most common activities to support employability (The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, Shortlist Me, 2022) to support learning achieved through experiences related to the workplace context.

Links theory and practice life and learning beyond the classroom to students (Carter, 2021).

Aligns student knowledge and skills to the market needs, harnessing higher education institution and employer partnerships (Dadze-Arthur et al., 2020).

Crucial to offer students a trial run in the transition into employment, and a safe space to explore their learning (Inceoglu et al., 2019).

Repeated reports that graduates lack work readiness (Gallagher et al., 2019; Singh and Singh, 2021).

Importance of work-based learning to bring these two worlds of academia and the work context together to support the work readiness of students (Fowlie and Forder, 2020).

There are arguments made for compulsory in-person and e-placements to widen student access and employability (Bracken et al., 2022; Delis and Jones, 2023).

Impact of work-based learning placements

Attributes and skills such as teamwork, reflection and communication can be developed within the work-based learning context (Konstantinou and Miller, 2021) and are key for students to develop their employability (Thompson and Brewster, 2022).

Focussing on employability attributes and skills were found to be best for the returns on placements, in preparing students for the workplace and their success in job applications (Singh and Singh, 2021).

The impact of work-based placement learning has been reported to extend to academic achievement (Inceoglu et al., 2019).

Evidence suggests that work-based learning placements support employability during higher education studies (Artess et al., 2017).

Reflection facilitates student's realisation of their learning and development (Helyer, 2015; Smith and Curtis, 2020).

The work-based learning placement experience needs to be designed and delivered to support a consistent and quality learning experience for students to maximise impact (Smith et al., 2019).

Work-based learning placements in practice

Is increasingly theorised to support learning for students when well designed and supported – with evidence-based pedagogies underpinning the learning process (Lester and Costley, 2010).

Traditional lengthy placements within industry can be burdensome for students (Hayes and Cejnar, 2020).

Travel and accommodation costs can limit accessibility for all students (Thompson and Brewster, 2022).

Can be seen as an inferior "add on" to the academic curriculum

A perceived lack of pedagogical design and delivery that is an expected part of the academic curriculum provision within higher education

Online provision of placements removes some of the barriers, with a more flexible and accessible approach of delivery in many cases (Gamage, 2021; Sophonhiranrak, 2021).

Online work-based placements are well-suited to facilitate digital skills like digital communication as well as attitudes such as self-directed learning, proactivity and time management (Bayerlein and Jeske, 2018; Irwin et al., 2022; Roy and Sykes, 2017which are all competencies that are increasingly relevant for a digital world. Use of existing systems so all students have access to the learning (Crompton and Traxler, 2018; Sophonhiranrak, 2021).

Work-based placement learning to reflect online/remote working context

70+% of graduates still work from home one or two days a week (Institute of Student Employers, 2023).

"55% of Gen Z graduates of Class 2023 prefer remote or hybrid work"(Kashyap, 2023).

Early Career Survey of approximately 5000 students and graduates - 51% working remotely or hybrid (Prospects Luminate, 2023).

A different set of skills and can be challenging (Hughes and Thambar, 2023).

A sustainable online placement model – case study

The Peer Enhanced e-Placement (PEEP) was initially created as an emergency response (Taylor and Salmon, 2021).

Built around placement learning outcomes "anchors", delivered entirely online, harnessing robust evidence-based online (Salmon, 2011) and peer-learning pedagogy (Tai et al., 2021; Topping et al., 2017).

The PEEP was a catalyst for reimagination of placement provision - offering sustainability as a placement model (Taylor, 2023).

Formal evaluations of the PEEP demonstrate that students develop team working, communication and in-depth critical reasoning employability resources as well as experience and confidence of online/remote working within the placement/workplace context.

Recognised by professional and statutory bodies (Council of Deans of Health, 2022) Erasmus+ research project (Erasmus+, 2023) and recommended within Higher Education Commission Policy Connect report (Policy Connect, 2024).

PEEP core components

Professional standards and specific placement learning outcomes "anchors".

PEEP pedagogical principles and timetable design.

Online placement environment using existing VLE/LMS/other technology platforms.

Online delivery pedagogical underpinning

Meaningful online learning is possible (Salmon, 2019)

Offers learning in complex and high-pressure situations not always possible in the real world (Savin-Baden, 2020)

Pedagogy of combining human teaching and technology to facilitate active engaged online learning (Salmon, 2013; Salmon,2019)

Underpinned by the application of the **five stages of learning** (Salmon, 2011)

Work-based placement learning goes beyond "hands on" in person/in situ clinical/professional skills (Taylor, 2020)

Peer group pedagogical evidence base

It is not just about bringing groups of students together.

Encourage social interaction to support student learning (Topping et al, 2017).

Common and individual goals maximise learning journeys (Topping et al, 2017).

Provides a rich learning opportunity (Tai et al., 2016; Topping, 2005).

In depth learning preparing for the clinical world of work (Ravanipour et al., 2015).

Using observation of peers supports more in-depth learning (Tai and Sevenhuysen, 2018).

Enhanced communication, collaboration skills and critical reflection (Carr et al., 2018; Chou, 2011) with consolidation and metacognition (McPake, 2019; Pratiwi, 2019).

Equivalent and quality learning gains whilst helping with work-based placement capacity challenges (Tzu-Chieh, 2011).

The peer group pedagogy supports cognitive and social constructivism to underpin agency of students and the metacognition of their learning (Lidster and Wakefield, 2022).

Learning outcomes – "anchors" – the purpose

Linking academic curriculum with WBL (Morris, 2016)

Interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristic to support employability and graduate readiness (Stek, 2022)

Development of relevant and authentic employability "resources"

Provide a common and clear purpose

Learning contracts with individual goals support engagement (Bale and Seabrook, 2021)

Help to inform assessment design and offer the route for the learning journey
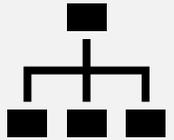
Clear roles and responsibilities

PEEP local lead

Students – individual and peer group

Allocated supervisor

Case study/scenario/project lead

Engagement in learning

Ground rules.

Scaffolding learning.

Choice of learning activities.

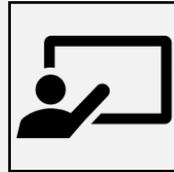Application of universal design for learning (UDL) principles https://udlguidelines.cast.org/
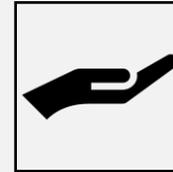
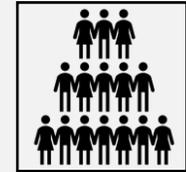# Supervision

A two-way process

Agreed principles of supervision – "contract"

Guiding hand towards learning outcomes

Support

Can consider group supervision (Egan et al., 2021) – mindful of drawbacks of group dynamics but also the benefits of team building and reduced reliance on supervisor (Kettle, 2015)

Assessment

Assessment and feedback are linked but distinct differences (Winstone and Boud, 2020)

Consideration of assessment literacy (Quilter and Gallini, 2000)

Formative assessments – supporting the student learning continuously along the leaning route

Summative assessments – assessment of the learning at the destination of the learning journey

Authentic assessments supporting progress towards learning outcomes (Pitt and Quinlan, 2022)

Feedback

Feedback impacts significantly on learning (Morris et al., 2021)

Reported as the least positive aspects of courses (Dawson et al., 2019)

Complex and can be difficult to manage across placement teams

To maximise the feedback potential – needs to be designed considering key principles
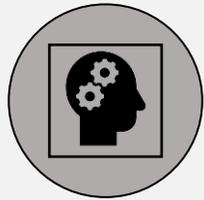
Winstone (2017) awareness, agency and lack of volition/readiness

Henderson et al. (2019) capacity, design and culture

Authentic feedback – mode and method

Feedback literacy needs to be aligned between all stakeholders (Tai et al., 2017)

Reflection

Essential to support consolidation of learning and metacognition
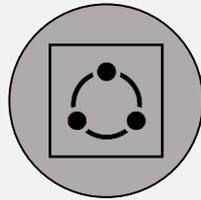
Assists with the theory practice link (Griffiths and Tann, 1992)
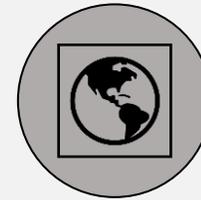
Crucial to support life- long employability journey (Taylor, 2022)
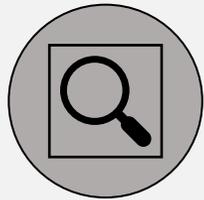
Identifies learning needs
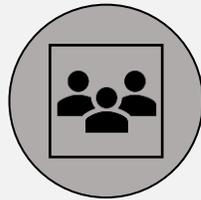
Different models and frameworks exist
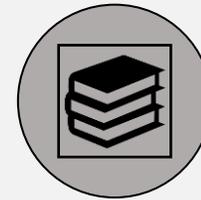
Portfolios are a useful tool to use within higher education to link curriculum and placement learning (Syzdykova et al., 2021)

Structure and scaffolding of the PEEP timetable
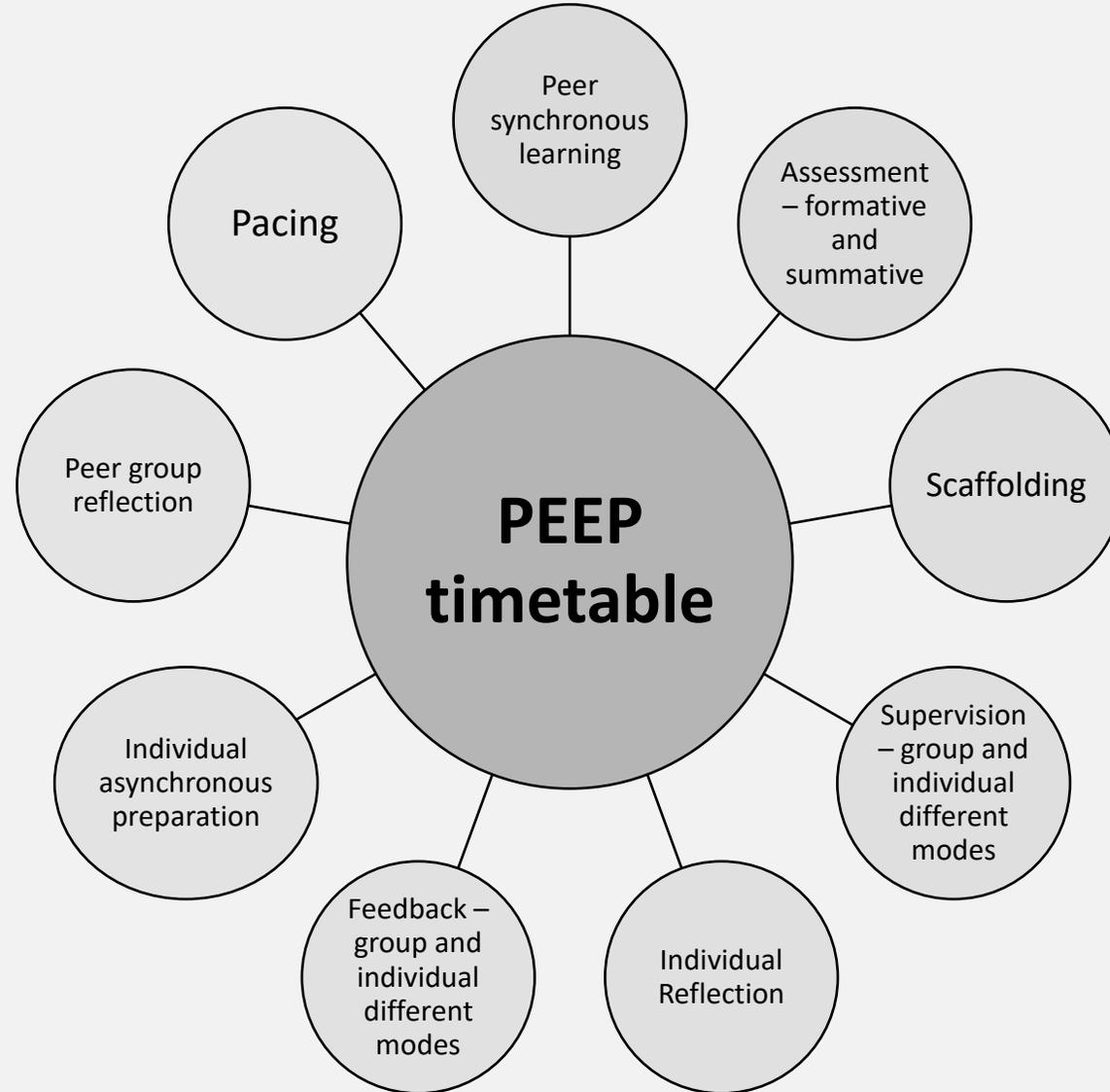
Linking work-based placement learning employability and the curriculum

✓ Importance of highlighting the pedagogy of employability.

✓ Linking theory and practice through scaffolding of learning in the design and delivery at a course level.

✓ Development of capital and agency of capitals to make the link at an individual level.

✓ Authentic learning through targeted learning outcomes and experiences.

✓ Embedding experiences for all students – quality not quantity.

Building the link between higher education and employers

- ✓ Collaborative approach for design and delivery.

- ✓ Working in partnership to develop understanding of needs.

- ✓ Develops a mutual understanding between students and employers through supervision and feedback.

- ✓ Bridging gap between higher education and employment through learning outcomes focussed on key identified and agreed areas of learning.

- ✓ Identification of gaps through assessment and reflection with action plans to work on.

- ✓ Development of student autonomy and agency to guide their graduate transitions.

Scaling up the PEEP – 2020 - present

An online synchronous PEEP acquisition experience workshop was created and piloted and is delivered by Professor Lisa Taylor and Professor Gilly Salmon.

The online synchronous workshop and associated learning aims to enable PEEP placement teams (including higher education academics, employers, and possibly other employees or customers) to work collaboratively in the design and delivery of their own PEEPs.

The objectives of the PEEP acquisition experience is to maximise the team's understanding of the robust pedagogical principles and transferability of the PEEP, and to support contextualisation and application of those principles for their own individual team's local and profession specific needs.

Examples of evaluated PEEPs across professions

- ✓ An Occupational Therapy PEEP for 100 students in the Northeast of England received positive evaluation from the students. In depth understanding from their participation in the PEEP (Payne and Downes, 2021).

- ✓ Orthoptists PEEP delivered by an NHS Trust in Yorkshire with positive evaluation. Subsequent joint PEEP was completed with orthoptists in Scotland.

- ✓ A physiotherapy PEEP evaluation in Scotland - strengths included a range of different teams, the peer group learning and support, the clarity of the structure of the PEEP, the opportunity to follow a patient journey and the good support from the staff leading the PEEP (Stears et al., 2022).

- ✓ PEEP for mental health pre-registration nursing students. The success of this project led to the development of the Northwest and Southwest London PEEP involving the roll out of PEEP across 5 universities and 3 mental health practice learning providers. Positive evaluations and plans for expansion and further evaluation.

- ✓ A pilot Hospice E Learning Placement (HELP) Child and Young Person PEEP. Designed and delivered for children's student nurses and learning disability student nurses to work in collaboration across fields. First cross-field nursing PEEP. Positive evaluation and plans for increased students in 2025 then will be compulsory for children's nursing and learning disability nursing students from then onwards.

- ✓ Nationally commissioned project for operating department practitioners. Within six months 175 ODP PEEPs were delivered, with positive feedback - a further 636 four-week PEEPs were delivered with programmes embedding PEEPs into their ongoing placement provision.

Reach and impact of the PEEP

Over 85 placement teams over 20 professions/ fields.

Over 2000 students formally recorded completed PEEPs to date.

Research completed on the synchronous online PEEP acquisition experience and completed PEEPs.

PEEP examples across occupational therapy, diagnostic radiography, orthoptists, speech and language therapy, nursing, physiotherapy, operating department practitioners and dietetics.
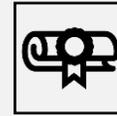
Positively evaluated across many health and social care professions, offering a quality, sustainable, collaborative, evidence-based, authentic placement option.

Multiple conference presentations, publications and awards.

Publication of a book https://www.routledge.com/Constructing-Online-Work-Based-Learning-Placements-Approaches-to-Pedagogy/Taylor/p/book/9781032326207

NHS England asynchronous online on demand e-learning for healthcare programme.

Implementing a PEEP

Challenges

Benefits

Culture change

Online access

Time to plan and deliver the PEEP

Travel/accom. cost and time saving, sustainability

Well-being

Learning gains and guaranteed placement capacity gains

Quality assurance, future workforce preparation
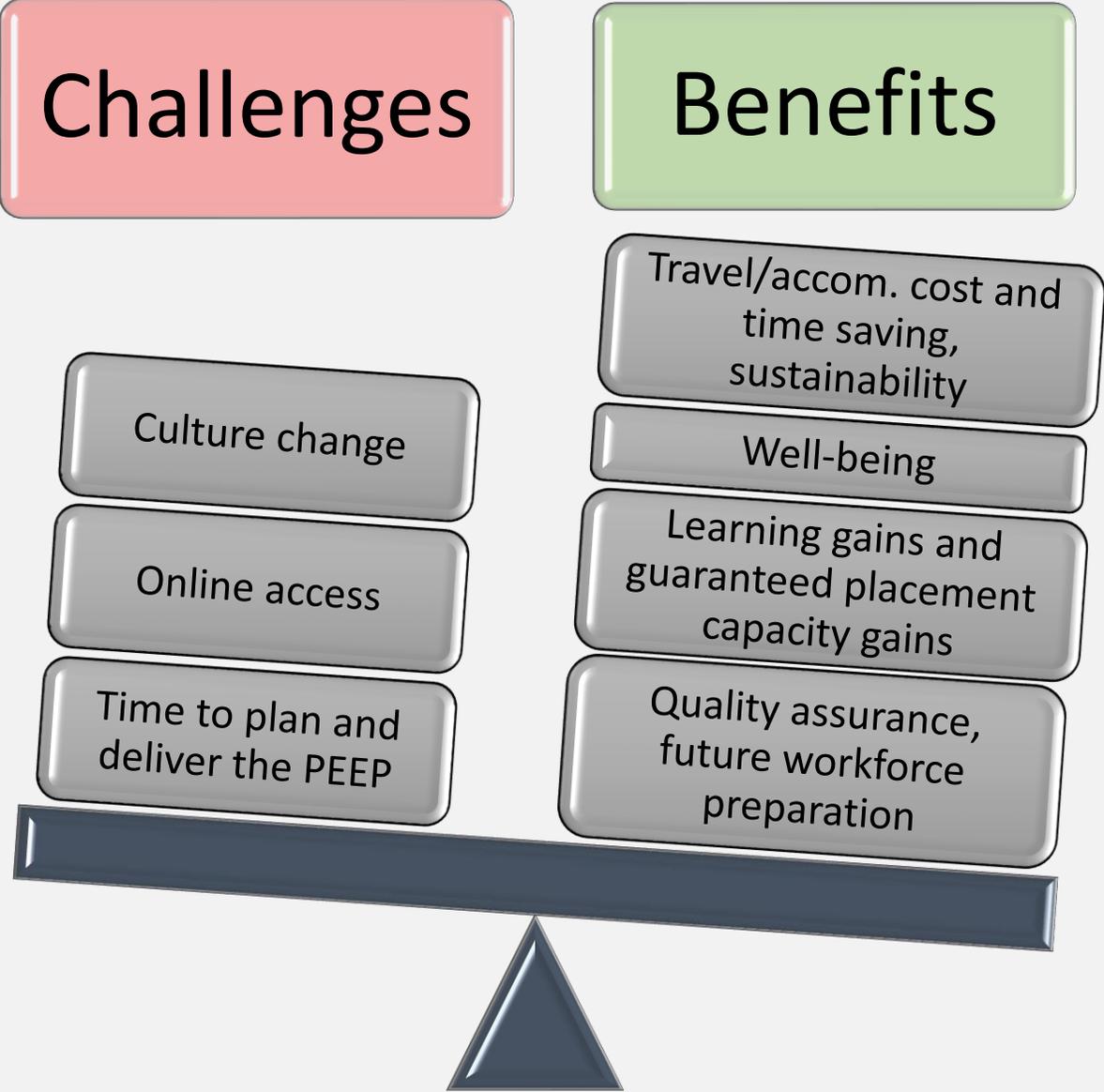
PEEP summary

Sustainable mitigation against further disruption & work-based placement learning capacity challenges	"Non hands on" employability and professional development gains for students and staff – future focussed	Quality, positively evaluated, robust design and evidence base underpinning the PEEP model built around learning outcome "anchors"	Flexible model for local adaption and adoption for local need with a breadth of bespoke learning opportunities across higher education sector

www.e-placements.net

Conclusions

Employability and "work readiness" are constantly changing in response to needs in the workplace.

Employability needs to be individual and students to have the confidence and agency over their own employability to adapt to the changing needs of employers.

Higher education institutes can support student employability through various activities during their higher education journey.

Work-based learning placements offer an opportunity to enhance core employability resources in tune with employer requirements.

Online work-based learning placements such as the PEEP is available as a quality, evidence-based option for placement teams across the higher education sector.

Thank you for listening

Reflection and action planning

✓ Build on key principles presented from the keynote presentation.

✓ An opportunity to explore some of the concepts in more detail and work through the application of these within your own contexts and organisations.

✓ Time to reflect, consolidate and action plan.

Reflective question: How do you already/how you could better support individual student development of capitals and agency through the student journey?

Human - Graduate level knowledge and skills and confident to access the labour market.

Social - Identifying and accessing employment opportunities through development of networks.

Cultural - Cultural awareness within the sector and organisations and how they would fit within this.

Psychological - Flexibility and ability to cope with work challenges.

Identity - Understanding of themselves and what they can bring to the job market and what they may want to achieve through their career.

Reflective question: Where is employability embedded within your curriculum? How could you apply the Advance HE strategic components within your curriculum provision?

Reflective question: What is the employability journey for your students through your curriculum provision?

Reflective question: How do you support student consolidation and metacognition of their learning and employability from the curriculum - reflection? action planning? portfolios?

Reflective question: How do you support students to engage with relevant extracurricular activities?

Reflective question: What is your current placement provision for your students?

Reflective question: How does your placement provision prepare your students for the future working landscape?

Reflective question: Could you consider a PEEP for your programmes/courses?

Reflective question: How do you support students to evidence and articulate their personal and professional development and employability from their placements and extracurricular activities?

Action plan from this keynote presentation

- Identify three goals that you will commit to focus on relating to the employability to employment transition for your students.

- Detail who you will work with to help to achieve your goal.

- List the resources you will need for each goal.

- Set a timeframe for each goal.

- Determine how you will identify successful achievement of your goal.

Goals	Personnel	Resources	Timescale	Measure/s of success	Achieved/not achieved

References/Bibliography available on the symposium website