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‘One for all and all for one’; The 3Es (Employability, Enterprise, and Entrepreneurship)

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Employability, enterprise, and entrepreneurship (commonly referred to as the 3Es) are topics firmly established in the rhetoric and practice of the Higher Education (HE) sector and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK and beyond. It has been suggested that due to the recent global pandemic that now more than ever, there is a *‘is a renewed recognition, and indeed emphasis, on positively supporting student trajectories through and beyond university by enhancing a range of activities linked to the 3Es’* (Norton and Sear, 2021:website). However, the relationship between enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability is not well understood, and so an ‘enhanced range of activities’ seems unachievable. This is primarily due to the fact that employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship are addressed *‘as distinct, if not mutually distinctive concepts’* (Dean, 2010:21), existing in silos, with employability frequently separated from enterprise and entrepreneurship, the latter two being regularly ‘lumped together’. Evidence of this can be seen in HEIs where there customarily exists a ‘Careers and Employability Service’, operating independently from any Enterprise and Entrepreneurship offer. Even Norton and Sear of Advance HE (2021), despite their call to enhance the range of activities linked to the 3Es, present the solution as an ‘Advance HE Guide to the Framework for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education’. This chapter aims to explore why the siloed approach to employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship exists and considers its consequences. At the same time, an alternative [re]freshed approach for HEIs to collectively address the 3Es is presented, suggesting the significant impact adopting this could have.

The dominance of Employability

In the past 30 years, HE has experienced an employability agenda that has advanced both in terms of knowledge and understanding, but also in significance making employability a priority for Universities (Quinlan and Renninger, 2002). According to Dean (2010) this can be attributed to a number of factors;

- the then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills commenting that *'We want to see all universities treating student employability as a core part of their mission'* (DIUS, 2008, p. 6);
- employability growing in strength by incorporating concepts such as key skills and career development learning;
- the belief that some students are attracted to 'safe' options and subsequently the language of employability, over the portrayal of enterprise and entrepreneurship as 'risky';
- And the growing presence of proxy measures for employability featuring strongly in external metrics and reporting (such as university league tables and graduate destination data and starting salaries).

At the same time, there has been a global increase in the provision of enterprise and entrepreneurship in HE (Bae *et al.*, 2014; Nabi *et al.*, 2017) and yet it has failed to match the magnitude of the employability agenda. Whilst all of the above are potential reasons for this, cynics may suggest the proxy measure for employability; the Graduate Outcomes (GO) Survey, and its presence and prominence in published league tables such as The Complete University Guide, The Guardian University Guide, and The Times League Table are the most pervasive and persuasive of reasons for employability's dominance over enterprise and entrepreneurship in HE. In this perspective, employability is deduced to an outcome; employment, with little consideration of its broader context;

Employability is taken as: a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

(Yorke, 2006:8)

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has been surveying the employability of graduates since 1994 through the Destination of leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. HESA only recently evolved DLHE into the GO Survey to allow a longer period between a student's studies and the survey (from 6 to 15 months), whilst

enabling a richer insight into outcomes through more meaningful subjective questions (HESA, 2022). Whilst both the DLHE and the GO Survey are repeatedly argued against as being valid measures of employability; '*employability is not something that can be quantified by any single measure*' (Coles and Tibby, 2013:6), HESA continues to operate such instruments, the results of which feed into external facing University league tables.

University league tables are now a common feature of HE and despite a multitude of criticisms, they are widely accepted as a helpful source of information for stakeholders. Beyond being 'helpful', the research group YouthSight created a perception of reputation index that illustrates a close relationship between league table scores and the perceptions that students have about university reputation (Catchside, 2012). Additionally, Chevalier and Jia (2015) found a positive (albeit rather small) effect, of league table score on number of applications received. Subsequently, '*in spite of the controversial nature of rankings, there seems to be a persistent desire on the part of universities to assert their international rank by the position they clinch on league tables*' with institutions increasingly using rankings for goal setting purposes (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007:22).

Like employability, proxy measures for enterprise and entrepreneurship also exist, yet they are limited to a reliance on venture creation as an outcome and measure of impact. Despite criticism of this approach, Venture creation data has been routinely collected (annually) for policy driven metrics such as the Higher Education Business & Community Interaction survey (HE-BCI). Yet this data does not feature in any of the three prominent university league tables, and Smith *et al* (2020) noted that the graduate spin out data collected as part of HE-BCI does not contribute to the formula for calculating the Higher Education Innovation Fund pot for each HEI, subsequently limiting a university's 'interest' in enterprise and entrepreneurship in comparison to employability. There is potential however for the KEF to change this and include a ratio of the number of new start-ups created by the student FTE for the institution (Smith *et al*, 2020:10). Whether or not this can compete with the well-established significance of employability, is at this point in time unknown.

At present, HEI's subservience to proxy measures and University league tables leads them to take a reductionist outcome focused approach where employability equals employment, and enterprise and entrepreneurship equals venture creation. Due to the significant impact employability proxy measures have on league table position in comparison to their enterprise and entrepreneurship equivalent, employability inevitably retains a spotlight from which enterprise and entrepreneurship cannot distract.

Time for a [re]fresh perspective

Whilst we might not agree with the current circumstances, we find the 3Es in, it is perhaps understandable given the various external influencing factors at play. However, is it possible to find a fresh perspective to the 3Es which appreciates the value of each individual concept, recognises the relationship between them, and yet still delivers on the proxy measures that will inevitably still influence HE and HEIs for the foreseeable future. In short, yes, but it is not necessarily 'fresh' but in need of a [re]fresh.

A knowledge, skills and competencies-based approach to employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship is popular (REFERENCES). ADD MORE HERE. Despite the frequent discourse, the most definitive statements in reference to the relationship of the 3Es appears when there is recognition that the knowledge, skills and competencies of one (employability), in turn enhance the other[s] (enterprise and entrepreneurship) (Bauman & Lucy, 2019; Chandler & Broberg, 2019; Decker-Lange *et al*, 2022.; Dhaliwal, 2017; Gibb, 1996; Nabi *et al.*, 2018). Discussion has subsequently move towards the overlap between the '*broad set of skills, attributes and competencies that contribute to graduate employability and the characteristics of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship*' (QAA, 2018). Norton (2019) recently professed that the '*over the last five years, there has become more of a blurring rather than distinction between the two: The components of enterprise are fundamental to the components of employability and vice-a-versa*'

The most significant illustration of this to date has been by Dean (2010:21) who once presented employability with enterprise and entrepreneurship on a continuum, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, and suggests that '*For those graduates who opt for*

traditional full-time employment, enterprise skills still come into play...However, many other employees act either as intrapreneurs or 'job crafters', employing enterprise skills in the workplace'

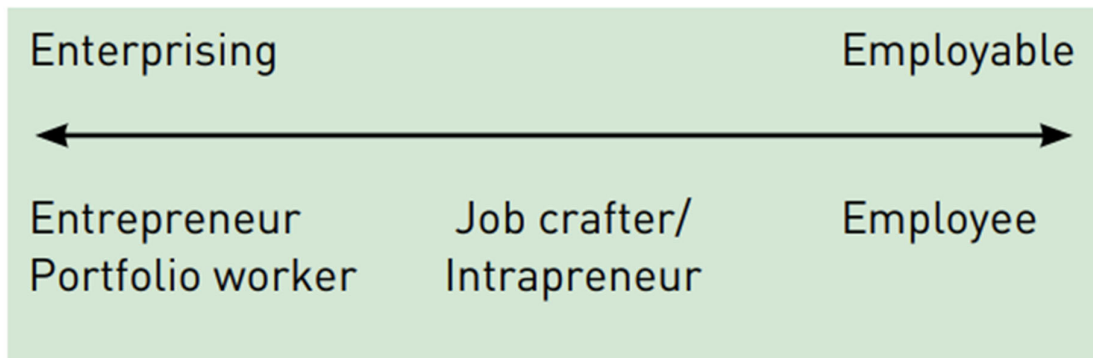


Figure 1. Continuum of enterprise and employability (Dean, 2010)

Significantly, Deen (2010) believes that if enterprise and entrepreneurship, and employability are viewed collectively as one concept, they can have significant benefit to the economy as a whole (Dean, 2010).

It is therefore not surprising that students then approach these topics as a binary choice related to their future, effectively limiting their development and constraining their opportunities for the future.

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