



**“The ability to get a job”: Student understandings and definitions of employability in a Marine Sport Science context**

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## “The ability to get a job”: Student understandings and definitions of employability

### Abstract

**Purpose-** The purpose of this paper is to explore employability in the context of Higher Education from the students’ perspective. Limited attention has been paid to student understandings of their own employability and Tymon (2011) refers to them as “the missing perspective”.

**Design/methodology/approach-** This paper presents the findings of a study of Marine Sports Science students (n=63) at a post-1992 Higher Education Institution which through the qualitative element of a mixed methods survey explored their changing articulations of their employability as they progressed through their studies. The students surveyed were in receipt of a comprehensive programme of enterprise and employability activities embedded within their programme.

**Findings-** Qualitative results showed that Marine Sport Science students’ articulations of employability expanded in vocabulary as the students progressed through their studies. Definitions also shifted from those that centred on what employers want (extrinsic) to what the student had to offer the employer (intrinsic).

**Originality/value-** There are very few examples of papers that explore employability from the students’ perspective and this paper adds understanding on this “missing perspective”. It also addresses a specific discipline area; Marine Sport Science, which has yet to feature in any literature on employability.

**Keywords** Employability; Careers education; Enterprise; Employers; Curriculum.

### Introduction

*Why is employability an issue?*

Helping our students improve their employability has been a significant theme in Higher Education (HE) in OECD countries since the 1990s, due to the substantial pressure of assorted stakeholders including government (e.g. BIS, 2011, Dearing 1997), employers (Archer and Davison, 2008), and students (e.g. CBI/NUS, 2011). These stakeholders exert pressure as a result of a number of factors including massification,

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3 graduate labour market congestion and government policies related to the expansion of  
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5 HE.

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7       Massification has led to increased competition for graduate employment and a  
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9 reduction in the currency of a degree (Brown et al 2011). Whilst new forms of graduate  
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11 employment have emerged in the changing workplace (Elias and Purcell, 2004),  
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13 demand for graduate jobs remains high. As evidenced in the careers advice directed at  
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15 graduates through careers websites and services (e.g. Sharp, 2012), and as reflected in  
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17 media discussion of graduate employability (e.g. Ardehali, 2015), graduates find that a  
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19 degree is only a pre-requisite for their employment and that they must also deliver  
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21 “value added” experience, skills and qualities (Tomlinson, 2008).  
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24       Awareness by students of graduate labour market congestion, coupled with the  
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26 high cost of HE, means that employability is one of the most significant factors that  
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28 affects their choice about where to study (Diamond et al, 2012). 76% of students who  
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30 took part in the 2014 Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey reported that a key reason for  
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32 attending university had been to improve their job prospects (Sodexo, 2014). It should  
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34 be noted that institutional reputation, as well as employment opportunities are both  
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36 components of the “employability” choice being made (ibid; Brown et al, 2011). In the  
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38 UK, increased transparency of data on graduate employment prospects through  
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40 mechanisms such as league tables, assists students in making informed choices about  
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42 the anticipated return on their degree investment.  
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46       Government policies have promoted the expansion of HE on the dual premises  
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48 of the need for graduate skills in a “knowledge economy” and on the personal, social  
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50 and economic benefits provided through the attainment of a degree. HE has been seen  
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52 by governments to be a “shared investment between the individual graduates and the  
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54 state” (Tomlinson, 2008, p50) and a means of promoting economic growth. The ability  
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3 of this human capital approach to deliver, in terms of economic benefits to individuals,  
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5 has been called into question (Brown et al, 2011, Tomlinson, 2008). Also, despite the  
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7 focus on improving graduate employability, and having a larger pool of graduates to  
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9 select from, employers have continued to express concern about students' "work  
10  
11 readiness", complaining variously about their skills, experience and attitudes (e.g.  
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13 Lowden et al, 2011).  
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#### 15 16 17 18 *What has been HE's Response?*

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20 Since the publication of the 2006 edition of Pedagogy for employability (Pedagogy for  
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22 Employability Group, 2006), a substantial amount of work has been undertaken (Pegg  
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24 *et al*, 2012), with HE Institutions and academics responding in diverse ways (Hillage  
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26 and Pollard, 1998; Holmes, 2001; Knight and Yorke, 2002; Pierce, 2002, Wilson, 2012)  
27  
28 falling into three broad areas: encouraging students to make the most of extra-curricular  
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30 opportunities; making available and promoting co-curricular activities (i.e. activities  
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32 that sit outside the curriculum but which operate in tandem and are supportive of the  
33  
34 curriculum); and embedding employability within the taught curriculum.  
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38 Recognition of the need for employability to be addressed by HE Institutions -  
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40 both within curricula and through the holistic experience of university - is reflected in  
41  
42 the guidance of UK government agencies. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)  
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44 (2010) urges providers to embed employability in the curriculum, either as discrete  
45  
46 modules or across a programme of study. "Joined up" implementation is encouraged  
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48 with programme designers asked to "consider how staff and resources within the careers  
49  
50 service, including career information and destination data, can be used to facilitate  
51  
52 student learning" and to provide "clear links between subjects and career planning" in  
53  
54 order to assist students in engaging with Careers, Education, Information, Advice and  
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3 Guidance (CEIAG) provision. Similarly, the HE Funding Council for England  
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5 (HEFCE) states that;

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7 Embedding employability into the core of HE will continue to be a key priority of  
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9 Government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring both significant  
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11 private and public benefit, demonstrating HE's broader role in contributing to economic  
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13 growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development.

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15 (HEFCE 2011, p5)  
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19 *But what does employability mean anyway?*

20 There are a great number of definitions of employability available in the literature.  
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22 According to a classic review of the literature by Hillage and Pollard (1998) the  
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24 following aspects can be recognised within most definitions of employability:  
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- 26 • the ability to gain initial employment;
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- 28 • the ability to maintain employment and make “transitions” between jobs and
- 29
- 30 roles within the same organisation to meet new job requirements;
- 31
- 32 • the ability to obtain new employment if required;
- 33
- 34 • the quality of work or employment.
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38 Examples of commonly cited definitions of employability that accord with this  
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40 classification are given in Table 1 and a useful recent summary of employability  
41  
42 definitions and models is given in Cole and Tibby (2013).  
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46 In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and  
47  
48 keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to  
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50 move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through  
51  
52 sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the  
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54 knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and  
55  
56 present them to employers and the context (eg personal circumstances and labour  
57  
58 market environment) within which they seek work.  
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Hillage and Pollard (1998)

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) (ESECT)

...a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy

CBI (2009, p8)

Table 1. Commonly Used Stakeholder Definitions of Employability

Hillage and Pollard (1998) proposed a much-used model comprising four components that make up an individual's employability, these being:

- 1) Assets (knowledge, skills and attitudes);
- 2) Deployment (career management skills, job search skills and strategic approach);
- 3) Presentation (the ability to present one's assets through CVs, interviews, references, qualifications etc.);
- 4) Personal and Labour market context (caring responsibilities, disability, job openings, selection behaviour of employers etc).

Yorke and Knight (2003) offer an alternative model, popular with academics because of its focus on learning. They identify four employability facets that they call the USEM model – USEM standing for Understanding; Skilful practices; Efficacy Beliefs; and Metacognition. However, the academic-facing USEM model is not simple for non-experts to understand (Cole and Tibby, 2013). Cole and Tibby suggest that the

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3 model by Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) may be more usable. This model identifies career  
4 development learning; experience; degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills;  
5 generic skills; and emotional intelligence as necessary aspects of employability but that  
6 these must then be reflected upon and evaluated in order to maximise the learning and  
7 articulation of these aspects. Finally, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem are  
8 seen as further moderating one's employability.  
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15 From these definitions we can see that employability is a multi-faceted and  
16 sometimes elusive concept that is hard to pin down (Cranmer, 2006, p172) and there is  
17 "a wealth of interpretations and measures across different disciplines" (Vanhercke *et al*,  
18 2013, p592). However, there is general agreement in that it involves the following  
19 aspects: the capability of obtaining work, functioning effectively within work; moving  
20 between jobs/roles; and having the skills, knowledge and attributes that make this  
21 possible.  
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### 30 31 *Students' perspectives of Employability*

32 Like many academics focusing on graduate employability, Tsitskari *et al* (2014)  
33 believe employers are the most influential stakeholders and the literature on the  
34 employer's perspective is extensive. However, limited work has been done on  
35 what the term means to undergraduate students; a critical absent contribution.  
36 Tymon (2011, p9) terms this stakeholder group as "the missing perspective". As  
37 primary stakeholders, it is important that we understand student perspectives on  
38 employability as it gives the opportunity to focus on the individual and situate  
39 relationships with the factors that are input to employability (Vanhercke *et al*,  
40 2013), benefiting HE providers, students, and organisations (Van der Heijde and  
41 Van der Heijden, 2006). Vanhercke *et al* (2013, p593) define perceived  
42 employability as "the individual's perception of his or her possibilities of obtaining  
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3 and maintain employment” and note five important aspects of this definition; that it  
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5 is a subjective evaluation of employability; it concerns what Bernston and  
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7 Marklund (2007, cited in Vanhercke *et al*, 2013) describe as the “possibilities” of  
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9 employment; that employability is relevant across the labour market and throughout  
10  
11 a career; that it not only involves the current employer but other possible  
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13 employers; and finally, that it concerns both quality and quantity of employment.  
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16 Of the few studies that examine student perceptions of employability,  
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18 Tymon’s (2011) research is the most methodologically similar to this study. Tymon  
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20 collected data from first, second and third year students from Business studies/Business  
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22 administration, Human resources, and Marketing programmes at a Post 1992 university.  
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24 She found that overall the students had a narrower view of employability than that  
25  
26 observed in the wider literature. This was particularly so for first and second year  
27  
28 students: “They seem to believe that employability is a short-term means to an end,  
29  
30 being about finding a job, any job, or employment” (p12). Students also conceived of  
31  
32 their employability as being about the development of skills and personal attributes. The  
33  
34 skills and attributes described mapped onto those commonly described in the literature.  
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38 Rothwell et al (2008) sought to examine what students thought about their  
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40 chances of success in seeking a particular type of work, and what factors influence their  
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42 perceptions of this success. Their statistically-based study focused on second year  
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44 Business Studies undergraduates from three different universities. Their study  
45  
46 demonstrated a general lack of confidence in employability across the three institutions  
47  
48 in relation to how well the students perceived they would fair with their employability.  
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50 Worryingly for academics, they also found that students perceive that engagement with  
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52 their studies has limited influence on their employability (Rothwell et al, 2009, p159).  
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3 In a multi-disciplinary study of final year students from a pre-92 university  
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5 Tomlinson (2008) posed the question “How do higher education students view the role  
6  
7 of their degree credentials in shaping future employment prospects?” (p51). The  
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9 students expressed their view of employability being in part about the “credentials” of  
10  
11 their degree, and that this credential (what they studied, where, the grade) would assist  
12  
13 them to get a job in a hierarchical labour market. More than this though, they also  
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15 perceived the need for “extra credentials” such as their personal and social skills and  
16  
17 experience. This was in response to high graduate employment competition. As  
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19 Tomlinson describes, “students see the need to add value to their credentials in light of  
20  
21 their weakening currency” (p59).  
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24 Tholen (2012) provides a fascinating comparison in the perceptions of  
25  
26 employability of a group of final year students from Dutch and British Universities.  
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28 Tholen’s study (p13) shows British HE students expressing their employability in terms  
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30 of competition, measured by their exclusivity and distinction; it is all about standing out  
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32 from other graduates. They also view employability as relating to being adaptable,  
33  
34 flexible and possessing generic knowledge and skills. This interpretation echoes the  
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36 findings of Tomlinson (2008). By contrast Tholen interprets the responses of the Dutch  
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38 students as perceiving employability as being about finding one’s niche in the labour  
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40 market. This involves students in a reflective process of developing their understanding  
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42 of their own interests, strengths and weaknesses. Employability for these students seems  
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44 to be more about a “trajectory” towards a part of the labour market that matches the  
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46 students’ qualities, rather than, in the British context, “a hierarchy of jobs or a generic  
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48 competition for jobs” (p13). Tholen’s interpretation is supported by other literature e.g.  
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50 Tomlinson, (2012) and Little and Archer (2010).  
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3 From these few studies that examine employability from a student  
4 perspective, understandings and opinions represented are as diverse as they are in the  
5 wider literature on definitions of employability. They emphasise facets such short-term  
6 employability goals, employability “credentials” such as degree subject, institution and  
7 grade, extra-curricular experience and perceptions of employability as being a  
8 competitive pursuit. They have similarities to other stakeholder groups but they are less  
9 likely to emphasise the longer-term aspects of employability like sustaining and moving  
10 within the job market, and less likely to identify more holistic interpretations of  
11 employability such as contributing to the economy and society and finding fulfilling  
12 employment.  
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#### 26 *Sports Science Students and Employability*

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28 Minten (2010) notes that there is increasing concern about the employability  
29 of sport graduates in the UK, and goes on to highlight the low infiltration of graduates  
30 into the sport industry (Minten and Forsyth, 2014). Reflecting on the literature in this  
31 area, Tsitskari *et al* (2017) believe this is due to poor vocational preparedness, the sport  
32 industry’s deficiencies in industry management, and the ability to experience higher  
33 level jobs, challenges and better pay in other industries. More specifically, the graduate  
34 outcomes for Marine Sport Science programme students at the post-1992 HE Institution  
35 in this study, as reflected in the DLHE data (Destinations of Leavers from Higher  
36 Education), have been historically disappointing. For example, students graduating in  
37 2009, had average earnings of £13,500, and were employed in predominantly non-  
38 graduate occupations. In order to improve this scenario, a strategy to utilise the  
39 resources offered by the Careers and Employability service within Marine Sport Science  
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3 programmes was developed (Author, 2012a and 2012b). This was based upon the  
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5 QAA's (2010) guidance discussed above.  
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9 We intend to add to the literature on student understandings of employability  
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11 by presenting the findings of a study looking at Marine Sport Science student's  
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13 articulations of their employability. This is a discipline yet to be focused on in the  
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15 employability literature, and one which carries its own employability challenges. We  
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17 will examine changes in the sophistication of definitions of employability, shifts  
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19 between extrinsically and intrinsically viewed perspectives in employability and  
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21 comparisons to other stakeholders. In doing so, we will consider some of the influences  
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23 on these understandings such as: employability interventions in the curriculum; self-  
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25 efficacy; game playing tactics; and the temporal aspects of doing a degree (such as the  
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27 time spent on degree/ and the influence of nearing the end point).  
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## 33 **Methodology**

### 34 *Study Context*

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38 This paper presents an examination of the employability understandings of  
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40 students from Marine Sports Science programmes at a post-1992 HE Institution in  
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42 response to considerable systematic enterprise and employability interventions across  
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44 the curriculum. It seeks to establish how these interventions have impacted on the  
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46 developing employability understandings of the students as they progress through their  
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48 programme and become graduates, and uses the student's definitions of employability  
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50 to critically reflect on their enterprise and employability education. The findings  
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52 therefore are not generalizable across other undergraduate programmes but they do give  
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3 an insight into how embedded careers education can effect students in the sport  
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5 discipline.  
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9 In its development, it was important to consider how Marine Sport students,  
10 in general, differ from other HE students. Surfers, who make up the majority of Marine  
11 Sport Science students in this study, have historically been described as nonconformist  
12 (Stewart et al, 2008) and tend to belong to informal sport groups (e.g. surfing  
13 subculture). It was considered therefore, that embedding careers education within the  
14 programme through authentic experience, competitions and tailored activities and  
15 resources was seen as a means of tapping into their motivations and mind-set.  
16 Competitions in particular were emphasised because they are an integral part of sports  
17 (Vallerand and Losier, 1999), with these students potentially being driven by their  
18 extrinsic value to achieve. Similarly, a characteristic of enterprise activities and  
19 competitions is risk, and according to Ratten (2011:62) 'it is generally accepted that  
20 people participating in sport are risk-takers'.  
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35 The strategy therefore consisted of mandatory careers, employability and  
36 enterprise-related modules embedded within a core business strand of all three years of  
37 the Marine Sport Science programmes from 2011 (see Table 2). Contained within these  
38 modules were three competitive extra-curricular events: 1) FLUX, an annual inter-  
39 university competition taking students through the process of setting up a business ; 2)  
40 Hot Seat, an interview competition giving students from across the University the  
41 opportunity to win a chance to be interviewed by a selection of recruitment  
42 professionals from a wide variety of employers; and 3) the Business Ideas Challenge, a  
43 competition with business sponsorship which provides expertise to help teams develop a  
44 business idea. In their study focusing on the perceived employability of business  
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graduates, Pinto and Ramalheira (2017) found that engagement in extra-curricular activities might impact the students ability to “get ahead” in the selection process. They also found that extensive participation in extra-curricular activities such as those outlined above, coupled with high academic performance, lead to a perception that students were more employable in terms of job suitability, personal organisation and time management, and learning skills.

Year	Module	Embedded Activities within Modules
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing and Management in Marine Sport (2010-2011)</li> <li>Employability and Enterprise in Marine Sports (2011-2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mini FLUX competition run in class, winner progresses to regional FLUX</li> <li>Employability Portfolio (CV, Letter of application, Job seeking skills)</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work Based Learning in the Marine Sports Industry (2011-2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Securing Work Based Learning and undertaking placement</li> <li>Hot set competition</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enterprise in Marine Sports (2010-2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Ideas Challenge</li> <li>Enterprise in Marine Sport Trade Show</li> </ul>

Table 2. Summary of how employability and enterprise were embedded within core business modules across the Marine Sport Science Programmes

The above extra-curricular events were embedded into a module by including subject appropriate preparation activities in the module timetable, and involving the extra-curricular event within their assessment. Although the competitions themselves are not a new concept, embedding them within a module and using the events to form part of an assessment is (Smith et al, 2010). In his research on the impact of career management interventions in HE, Crust (2007, p17) found that undergraduate courses “typically used occasional teaching with little or no assessment to develop graduates’ ability to manage their careers and professional development”, suggesting that although

there may be attempts to embed careers education, it was yet to be an accepted form of assessment across HE curricula.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Initial data collection utilised a qualitative survey of Marine Sports Science students from a post-1992 institution. The survey, consisting of both open and closed questions, was conducted at the beginning (September) and end (May) of the academic year. The survey was used in part to identify current and past Marine Sport Science Students' perception and understanding of the term employability and in part to evaluate the enterprise and employability curriculum interventions on their programmes. This paper focuses solely on student responses in relation to their understanding of the term employability. The survey was conducted within class time to maximise response rates. A total of 63 (74% of the cohort) participated from all three years of the programmes. There was difficulty in obtaining responses with the most recent graduates, with a total of only 5 responding (13% of the 2012 graduate cohort). Full details on response rates and demographic details of the survey respondents can be seen in Table 3.

		1 <sup>st</sup> years	2 <sup>nd</sup> Years	3 <sup>rd</sup> Years
<b>Response Rates</b>	Total Population (N)	16	36	33
	No. of responses (n)	11	26	26
	Response Rate (%)	69	72	79
<b>Age (%)</b>	< 20 yrs	82	50	0
	20 – 25 yrs	18	50	92
	>25 yrs	0	0	8
<b>Gender (%)</b>	Male	73	77	81
	Female	27	23	19
<b>Degree Course (%)</b>	Applied Marine Sports Science	100	42	54
	Surf Science and	0*	58	46

	Technology			
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Table 3. Survey response details and demographic details of respondents. \* No responses due to discontinuation of the programme.

Themes emerging from the questionnaire responses were identified and used to code the data. This coding enabled both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the former in relation to the frequency of terms used; the latter to provide a more detailed and nuanced interpretation of the attitudes and understandings expressed.

## **Discussion**

The students' articulations of employability obtained in this study provide four noteworthy insights. Firstly, the definitions demonstrate a differentiation in the student perspectives of their own employability as they progress through their studies moving from definitions being about potential employer to definitions being more about oneself. This can be seen as a shift from an extrinsic to an intrinsic focus. Secondly, they show a changing sophistication in how they define the term employability. Thirdly, the learner definitions reveal differences in emphases to the definitions of employability of other stakeholder groups. Finally, a brief exploration of the career plans of the students are discussed which reveal a degree of uncertainty and short-term career plans emerging among third year students. These insights will now be explored.

### ***An extrinsic to an intrinsic shift in defining employability***

In response to the survey question "what does employability mean to you?", the majority of students framed their definitions through the notion of who considers their employability traits: the student/applicant or the employer? This created two distinct groups: One where students felt employability was more about an employer's

perception of the applicant; and one where students believed employability to be more about an applicant's perception of themselves (Table 4). Batistic and Tymon (2017) note that this is a typical feature of perceived employability where there exists an internal component relating to perceptions of oneself, and an external component considering factors outside of the individuals control, such as the employers perception. For the 1st years, there was an evenly distributed view of employability between those emphasising the employer's perceptions and those focusing on the applicant's self-perception. This ratio changed with the 2nd years to favour more the latter of the definitions, and was pronounced with the 3rd years.

	1 <sup>st</sup> years (n)	2 <sup>nd</sup> years (n)	3 <sup>rd</sup> years (n)
<b>Employability is more about an employer's perception of the applicant (extrinsic perspective)</b>	5	7	3
<b>Employability is more about an applicant's perception of themselves (intrinsic perspective)</b>	6	11	20
<b>Student response did not conform to either category</b>	0	8	3

Table 4. Frequency of extrinsically focussed and intrinsically focused student definitions of employability.

Those who felt employability was more about an employer's perception of the applicant included definitions for employability such as "how employable I am to an employer" (1st year student), "how an employer views a candidate's qualities for a job" (1st year student) and "the skill set, qualifications and attributes which make you attractive to an employer" (2nd year student). The employer was clearly the lens through which employability was seen for these students. In contrast, those who felt employability to be more about an applicant's perception of themselves included definitions such as "how well you are able to apply your skills to a desired job" (2nd



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3 year student), “the cultivation of skills and experience relevant to my interests and  
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5 aspirations for my career” (3rd year student) and “owning the traits and skills that make  
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7 you appealing to the employer, as well as showing an interest and enthusiasm for the  
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9 job” (3rd year student).  
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12 It is possible that this extrinsic to intrinsic shift in understanding occurs in part  
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14 due to three reasons; 1) the embedding of careers education within the curriculum; 2)  
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16 time in a degree programme; and 3) a game playing approach taken by students. Each  
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18 year, the Marine Sports Science students come into contact with enterprise and  
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20 employability modules (see Table 2) that help build their understanding of  
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22 employability. Their ability to perceive employability over time as a concept that they  
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24 have control and ownership over becomes more apparent, either through increased  
25  
26 understanding and/or self-confidence. This apparent ownership may also be in part an  
27  
28 expression of self-efficacy. Berntson *et al* (2008, p421) make the points that, whilst  
29  
30 employability per se is not an expression of efficacy beliefs, “enhancing employability  
31  
32 through, for example, education and training” could impact on employability. From the  
33  
34 student responses, it is not evident that any one of these above reasons are more  
35  
36 dominant in causing the extrinsic to intrinsic shift in understanding employability.  
37  
38 Rather they may all play a role to varying degrees for different individuals. Tymon’s  
39  
40 (2011) study of Business undergraduate students’ perspectives of employability, found  
41  
42 an indication that confidence in self-expression increased year on year, and that final  
43  
44 year students “were extremely confident in expressing their views” (ibid, 10). This was  
45  
46 thought to be evidence of “enhanced communication skills and self-confidence”,  
47  
48 suggesting that these skills have been developed over the academic years. Finally, there  
49  
50 is also evidence that students are taking a game playing approach. The careerist student,  
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52 as identified by Tomlinson (2007) and “player” as identified by Brown and Hesketh  
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3 (2004) understands the need to “play the game” in order to progress within the graduate  
4 labour market. Tomlinson (2007) noted how students had a high degree of self-  
5 location, taking an instrumental approach to developing their graduate profiles and  
6 highlighting their added-value credentials. Brown and Hesketh (2004) also noted the  
7 strategic nature of the “player” but in contrast to the findings in this study, they report  
8 that students’ attempt to align themselves with the employer.  
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### 18 ***The developing sophistication in defining employability.***

19  
20 When reflecting on student definitions of employability it was evident there was a  
21 changing sophistication in their definitions as they developed through the stages of their  
22 programme. Table 5 lists the key terms taken from the definitions of employability  
23 given by students and their overall percentage use within definitions per stage of their  
24 programme. From this table there can be seen a heavy weighting on three particular key  
25 terms in stage one (ability, qualifications and skills). Although the emphasis on skills  
26 remains throughout all three years, the development of a more diverse terminology  
27 increases year on year, expanding the sophistication of their definitions of  
28 employability. By their third year students have doubled the number of terms within  
29 their definitions of employability. These findings are comparable to those of Tymon  
30 (2011) who noted that students, in the first and second year of their programme, had a  
31 narrower view of employability than that observed in the wider literature. To address  
32 this limitation, Tsitskari *et al* (2017) and Minten and Forsyth (2014) note that the sport  
33 discipline in HE needs to cultivate a wide range of attributes among students.  
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50 In Yorke and Knight’s (2006) “Skills *plus*” project, they developed a list of 39  
51 aspects of employability, each categorised (although they admit there are gaps and  
52 overlaps) under the following headings: Personal Qualities, Core Skills, and Process  
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3 Skills. If these category headings are applied to the terms put forward by students in  
4  
5 their definitions of employability (See Table 5.), there is evidence that students  
6  
7 predominantly use terms that fall within the Personal Quality categorisation and that  
8  
9 Core Skills terms are limited, with little to no use of Process Skills (Such as planning,  
10  
11 decision making and negotiating). Yorke and Knight (2007) believe efficacy beliefs  
12  
13 and other personal qualities are one of four broad student attainments which make up  
14  
15 employability and in particular “Personal qualities pervade employability”. In their  
16  
17 2004 study, Knight and Yorke found that the more process driven qualities, such as “the  
18  
19 disposition to get things done, the taking of initiative, and the preparedness to stick at  
20  
21 difficult tasks” (Yorke and Knight, 2007, p160) were less immediately visible. Our  
22  
23 study mirrors this finding, with a lack of process skills and indeed process driven  
24  
25 qualities featured in student’s responses. This is a concerning finding as in their work  
26  
27 on the factors that influence graduate employability, Finch *et al* (2013) found that  
28  
29 consistent with previous research, they noted that employers identified problem-solving  
30  
31 skills such as critical thinking, similar to Process Skills, are viewed by employers as an  
32  
33 important factor when reviewing a graduate’s employability. More specific to the  
34  
35 context of this study, in their work with Greek sports employers, Tsitskari *et al* (2017)  
36  
37 found that process skills such as “professional behaviour and development, leadership  
38  
39 and influence, problem solving...[and] (inter)personal skills and communication  
40  
41 ability” were the factors that sports employers expect from their employees. This is an  
42  
43 incongruence that will need to be addressed by those working in the sport discipline  
44  
45 within HE. However, it is worth noting that sports employers also indicate the  
46  
47 importance of capabilities in all skills (Tsitskari *et al*, 2017), a finding confirmed by  
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49 Asuquo and Inaja (2013).  
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There were several terms that did not fit the categorisation put forward by Yorke and Knight (2006) such as qualifications and money/salary. “Qualifications” were predominantly put forward by Year one students, and support an extrinsic focus of employability at this stage of the programme. In their study focusing on the perceived employability of business graduates by employers, Pinto and Ramalheira (2017) found that academic performance exceeds the worth of participating in extra-curricular activities at the expense of academic performance. A focus on qualifications may therefore be a worthwhile and necessary focus of student employability. Interestingly money/salary emerges only for Year 3 students, perhaps for those with a more strategic “game playing” approach. Some terms couldn’t be categorised easily, not because they fell outside of the categorisation, but because they sat above the three categories, encompassing all of them at once; these include terms such as “ability”, “capabilities”, and “requisites”, all of which could be seen as including elements of Personal Qualities, Core Skills and Process Skills. These were identified as “Cover all” categories in Table 5, and indicate that students were taking a more overarching approach in their choice of terms to define employability rather than drilling down to indicate specific elements. In this study, students were asked to define employability but were not asked to go further into dissecting the term. Further work on students’ understanding of employability could benefit from a more detailed examination by asking students to deconstruct the terms they provide or define its structure.

Key Terms	Skills <i>plus</i> <i>categorisation</i>	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
		Pct	Use	Pct	Use	Pct	Use
		(%)		(%)		(%)	
<b>Ability</b>	Cover All	36		19		19	

<b>Qualifications</b>	Does Not Fit Categorisation	36	15	12
<b>Skills</b>	Core Skills/Process Skills	27	65	50
<b>Attractive to employers</b>	Cover All	9	7	4
<b>Experience</b>	Cover All	9	12	15
<b>Personality</b>	Personal Quality	9	7	12
<b>Qualities</b>	Personal Quality	9	4	
<b>Requisites</b>	Cover All	9		
<b>Characteristics</b>	Personal Quality		15	4
<b>Communication of attributes</b>	Personal Quality/ Core Skills		4	
<b>Knowledge</b>	Cover All		15	4
<b>Attributes</b>	Personal Quality		23	4
<b>Traits</b>	Personal Quality		4	4
<b>Capabilities</b>	Cover All			12
<b>Money/salary</b>	Does Not Fit Categorisation			8
<b>Attitude</b>	Personal Quality			4
<b>Level of suitability</b>	Cover All			8
<b>Interest</b>	Personal Quality			8
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Personal Quality			4

Table 5. Frequency (%) of use of key terms to define employability

The expansion in how employability is expressed -from definitions emphasising skills and experience to more diverse definitions - may be seen as evidence of a more holistic and nuanced attitude and understanding of employability by the Marine Sport

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2  
3 students. It is of note, for example, that in their third year some students recognise the  
4  
5 necessity of attitudinal traits such as “interest” and “enthusiasm”. Also of interest is the  
6  
7 fact that the data shows an emergence of longer-term expressions of employability.  
8  
9 None of the Year 1 students consider employability beyond “getting a job” but of the  
10  
11 Year 3 students, a number spoke about employability in more sustainable terms. For  
12  
13 example “the ability to be adaptable with your skills, experience, qualifications and  
14  
15 personality in order to remain employable in the career paths you wish to follow” (Year  
16  
17 3 student). It is possible that having careers education embedded within the programme  
18  
19 gives the students a more holistic view of employability, enabling them to think of  
20  
21 employability as more than just finding a job.  
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### 26 ***Learner Definitions versus other Stakeholders***

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28 We have seen from the discussion above that, in tandem with their careers education,  
29  
30 student definitions of employability become more sophisticated, nuanced, and  
31  
32 demonstrate a greater degree of ownership of the term as they progress through their  
33  
34 studies. Despite the developing understandings shown by these students, the focus of  
35  
36 their definitions across all three years is very much about getting a job, irrespective of  
37  
38 whether this is expressed in terms of what the employer wants from the applicant or  
39  
40 what the applicant has to offer the employer. For example, “the cultivation of skills and  
41  
42 experience relevant to my interests and aspirations for my career” (3rd Year). This  
43  
44 provides a contrast to the definitions of employability cited in Table 1 by other  
45  
46 stakeholders. In these definitions, in addition to stressing the act of gaining  
47  
48 employment, these definitions also talk about how the individual “benefits themselves,  
49  
50 the workforce, the community and the economy (ESECT, 2006) or “being effective in  
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52 the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy  
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3 (CBI, 2009, p8). As Thijssen *et al* (2008) highlight, the attention of many of these  
4 definitions is wider than the individual gaining employment, encompassing wider  
5 stakeholders (the individual, the employer and the economy/community at large). For  
6 students, these definitions would appear to offer too broad a perspective to consider  
7 when offering definitions of employability that they can relate to. They, quite naturally,  
8 are more concerned with the context that is about themselves directly and which they  
9 may have control over rather than any benefit to others. As such, their definitions are  
10 more uni-dimensional compared to the multi-dimensional definitions, a feature noted by  
11 Forrier and Sels (2003, p105).  
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### 24 ***Career Plans***

25  
26 Students were also asked to consider what career plans they had when they graduated.  
27  
28 There was a mixture of responses from students across all year's including short term  
29 and long term career plans, targeted ambitions, and those that were uncertain of their  
30 career plans after graduation. There was a fairly equal number of students with long  
31 term plans across all three years, however there was an increase in students with short  
32 term career plans at Year 3 (Year 1; 6.25%, Year 2; 2.75%, Year 3; 21%) and a number  
33 that were uncertain or had unspecified plans (Year 3;12%). Students have the  
34 opportunity to be more idealistic in their career aspirations at the beginning of their  
35 programme. However, as they near graduation, the realities of "just getting a job"  
36 become necessary and therefore short term plans are more dominant. This finding  
37 therefore may be reflective of a pragmatic and emotional response to the imminent  
38 prospect of having to find employment. Similarly, Purcell *et al's* (2009) study on  
39 findings from the 2006 Futuretrack Survey showed that during the application process,  
40 students were convinced that they had a very clear idea about their future occupations  
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3 yet as they progressed through their programme they were exposed to different ideas  
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5 and so became less clear about their vocational orientation leading to the uncertainty in  
6  
7 this study.  
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## 10 11 **Conclusions**

12  
13 The definitions of employability offered in this research indicate that, as they progress  
14  
15 through their studies, student definitions of employability become more sophisticated.  
16  
17 In their first year of university the students tended to articulate their employability using  
18  
19 simplistic language, and focus their definition *extrinsically*, on what an *employer thinks*  
20  
21 *of the applicant*. By their third year, a wider range of terms were used to talk about  
22  
23 employability, suggesting a more developed and sophisticated understanding *and*  
24  
25 definitions were also more likely to be expressed *intrinsically*, *i.e.* what they had to  
26  
27 offer to employers. This mirrors the findings of Tymon (2011) with students showing  
28  
29 greater ownership of the term. However, none of the definitions provided by the  
30  
31 students in this study encompassed the more holistic and multi-dimensional views of  
32  
33 employability reflected in academic and employer definitions. The similarity in  
34  
35 findings to that of Tymon (2011), who worked with Business students, also suggests  
36  
37 there is no discernible “discipline” dimension to the definitions of employability offered  
38  
39 by the Marine Sports students in this study.  
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45 Were the considerable careers interventions across the three years of their  
46  
47 programme responsible for the observed shift in how employability is expressed or was  
48  
49 this simply a result of maturity or a “game playing” approach? Most likely all these  
50  
51 factors are at play. Yorke and Knight (2006, p7) emphasise that “development takes  
52  
53 time – months and years”; that “development takes practice”; that students “need to hear  
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55 repeatedly what it is intended that they learn” and that “programme level planning” for  
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3 employability is necessary. One would therefore hope that the embedding of  
4  
5 employability in *the* curriculum discussed here did have a role, but we cannot know for  
6  
7 sure. The more reflective and developed articulations of employability voiced by many  
8  
9 of the third year students could also be interpreted as displaying a level of the  
10  
11 metacognition (i.e. self-awareness) discussed by Yorke and Knight (2006). Perhaps  
12  
13 then, student definitions can potentially be used as a qualitative measure of  
14  
15 employability development.  
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17  
18 The terms that the students used to define their employability were  
19  
20 predominantly those that expressed Personal Qualities and not Process or Core Skills as  
21  
22 defined by (Yorke and Knight, 2006). The terms they did use were often very broad and  
23  
24 overarching, such as ability, capabilities and requisites, which provide limited detail as  
25  
26 to how students understand the structure of employability.  
27

28  
29 Student career plans highlighted uncertainty and short term intentions becoming  
30  
31 more evident for third year students. This has been interpreted as reflecting a pragmatic  
32  
33 and emotional response to nearing the end of their studies and therefore the imminent  
34  
35 need to get a job.  
36

37  
38 The increase in sophistication in defining “employability” coupled with students  
39  
40 becoming increasingly uncertain of their career plans as they near the end of their  
41  
42 programme highlights a dissonance between their understanding of employability and  
43  
44 their ability to act on it.  
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### 48 **Limitations**

49  
50 There are a number of limitations that should be highlighted concerning this study.  
51  
52 Firstly, approaching employability from the students’ perception does not provide any  
53  
54 understanding as to why students perceive their employability in a particular way. It  
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3 therefore limits the ability for HEI's to implement specific actions. A second limitation  
4  
5 is that like many studies in employability, this study used a case study approach which  
6  
7 offers little opportunity in the way of generalisability, making it difficult to extrapolate  
8  
9 or compare findings (Finch *et al*, 2013). Finally, there were difficulties in collecting  
10  
11 data from recent graduates which led to low participation numbers in this population.  
12  
13

### 14 15 **Future Research**

16  
17 This study also provides several recommendations for future research. These include  
18  
19 the application of a students perceived employability in future research as it “integrates  
20  
21 all possible personal and structural factors and their interactions” and provides an initial  
22  
23 indication on the labour market position (Vanhercke *et al*, 2013, p599). Also, a need to  
24  
25 address the difficulty in collecting data from graduates which has led to a lack of  
26  
27 information available around the graduate transition from HE in to employment  
28  
29 (Wickramasinghe and Perera, 2010).  
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3 **“The ability to get a job”**: Student understandings and definitions of  
4 **employability in a Marine Sport Science context**  
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7

8 **Abstract**  
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10 **Purpose-** The purpose of this paper is to explore employability in the context of  
11 Higher Education from the students’ perspective. Limited attention has been paid  
12 to student understandings of their own employability in a Sport Science context  
13 and Tymon (2011) refers to them as “the missing perspective”.

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16 **Design/methodology/approach-** This paper presents the findings of a study of  
17 Marine Sports Science students (n=63) at a post-1992 Higher Education  
18 Institution which through the qualitative element of a mixed methods survey  
19 explored their changing articulations of their employability as they progressed  
20 through their studies. The students surveyed were in receipt of a comprehensive  
21 programme of enterprise and employability activities embedded within their  
22 programme.  
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27 **Findings-** Qualitative results showed that Marine Sport Science students’  
28 articulations of employability expanded in vocabulary as the students progressed  
29 through their studies. Definitions also shifted from those that centred on what  
30 employers want (extrinsic) to what the student had to offer the employer  
31 (intrinsic).  
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35 **Originality/value-** There are very few examples of studies that explore  
36 employability from the students’ perspective and this paper adds understanding on  
37 this “missing perspective”. It also addresses a specific discipline area; Marine  
38 Sport Science, which has yet to feature in any literature on employability.  
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42 **Keywords** Employability; Careers education; Enterprise; Employers; Curriculum.  
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48 **Why is employability an issue?**  
49

50 Helping our students improve their employability has been a significant theme in  
51 Higher Education (HE) in OECD countries since the 1990s, due to the substantial  
52 pressure of assorted stakeholders including government (e.g. BIS, 2011, Dearing 1997),  
53 employers (Archer and Davison, 2008), and students (e.g. CBI/NUS, 2011). These  
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3 stakeholders exert pressure as a result of a number of factors including massification,  
4  
5 graduate labour market congestion and government policies related to the expansion of  
6  
7 HE (Brown *et al*, 2011; Diamond *et al*, 2012; Tomlinson, 2008).  
8

9  
10 Massification has led to increased competition for graduate employment and a  
11  
12 reduction in the currency of a degree (Brown *et al*, 2011). Whilst new forms of graduate  
13  
14 employment have emerged in the changing workplace (Elias and Purcell, 2004),  
15  
16 demand for graduate jobs remains high (Universities UK, 2015). Graduates now find  
17  
18 that a degree is only a pre-requisite for their employment and that they must also deliver  
19  
20 “value added” experience, skills and qualities.  
21

22  
23 Awareness by students of graduate labour market congestion, coupled with the  
24  
25 high cost of HE, means that employability is one of the most significant factors that  
26  
27 affects their choice about where to study (Diamond *et al*, 2012). Overall, 76% of  
28  
29 students who took part in the 2014 Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey reported that a  
30  
31 key reason for attending university had been to improve their job prospects (Sodexo,  
32  
33 2014). It should be noted that institutional reputation, as well as employment  
34  
35 opportunities are both components of the “employability” choice being made (Sodexo,  
36  
37 2014; Brown *et al*, 2011). In the UK, increased transparency of data on graduate  
38  
39 employment prospects through mechanisms such as league tables, assists students in  
40  
41 making informed choices about the anticipated return on their degree investment  
42  
43 (Gibbons *et al*, 2015).  
44

45  
46 Government policies have promoted the expansion of HE on the dual premises  
47  
48 of the need for graduate skills in a “knowledge economy” and on the personal, social  
49  
50 and economic benefits provided through the attainment of a degree (Bathmaker, 2003).  
51  
52 HE has been seen by governments to be a “shared investment between the individual  
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54 graduates and the state” (Tomlinson, 2008, p50) and a means of promoting economic  
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3 growth. The ability of this human capital approach to deliver, in terms of economic  
4 benefits to individuals, has been called into question (Brown *et al*, 2011; Tomlinson,  
5 2008). Furthermore, despite the focus on improving graduate employability, and having  
6 a larger pool of graduates to select from, employers have continued to express concern  
7 about students' "work readiness", complaining variously about their skills, experience  
8 and attitudes (Lowden *et al*, 2011).  
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### 18 **What has been HE's Response?**

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20 Since the publication of the 2006 edition of Pedagogy for employability (Pedagogy for  
21 Employability Group, 2006), a substantial amount of work has been undertaken (Pegg  
22 *et al*, 2012), within HE Institutions (HEIs). Academics have responded in diverse ways  
23 (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Holmes, 2001; Knight and Yorke, 2002; Pierce, 2002,  
24 Wilson, 2012) falling into three broad areas: encouraging students to make the most of  
25 extra-curricular opportunities; making available and promoting co-curricular activities  
26 (i.e. activities that sit outside the curriculum but which operate in tandem and are  
27 supportive of the curriculum); and embedding employability within the taught  
28 curriculum.  
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40 Recognition of the need for employability to be addressed by HEIs - both within  
41 curricula and through the holistic experience of university is reflected in the guidance of  
42 UK government agencies. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2010) urges  
43 providers to embed employability in the curriculum, either as discrete modules or across  
44 a programme of study. "Joined up" implementation is encouraged with programme  
45 designers asked to "consider how staff and resources within the careers service,  
46 including career information and destination data, can be used to facilitate student  
47 learning" and to provide "clear links between subjects and career planning" in order to  
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3 assist students in engaging with Careers, Education, Information, Advice and Guidance  
4 (CEIAG) provision (QAA, 2010: p12-13). Similarly, the HE Funding Council for  
5 England (HEFCE) states that;  
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9 “Embedding employability into the core of HE will continue to be a key priority  
10 of Government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring both  
11 significant private and public benefit, demonstrating HE’s broader role in  
12 contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural  
13 development.”  
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20 (HEFCE 2011, p5)  
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#### 24 **But what does employability mean anyway?**

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26 There are a great number of definitions of employability available in the literature  
27 (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). According to Hillage and Pollard (1998) the following  
28 aspects can be recognised within most definitions of employability:  
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- 32
- 33 • the ability to gain initial employment;
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- 35 • the ability to maintain employment and make “transitions” between jobs and  
36 roles within the same organisation to meet new job requirements;
- 37
- 38 • the ability to obtain new employment if required;
- 39
- 40 • the quality of work or employment.  
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44 Examples of commonly cited definitions of employability that accord with this  
45 classification are given in Table 1 and a useful recent summary of employability  
46 definitions and models is given in Cole and Tibby (2013).  
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51 Table 1. Commonly Used Stakeholder Definitions of Employability  
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Hillage and Pollard (1998) proposed a much-used model comprising four components that make up an individual's employability, these being:

- 1) Assets (knowledge, skills and attitudes);
- 2) Deployment (career management skills, job search skills and strategic approach);
- 3) Presentation (the ability to present one's assets through CVs, interviews, references, qualifications etc.);
- 4) Personal and Labour market context (caring responsibilities, disability, job openings, selection behaviour of employers etc).

Yorke and Knight (2003) offer an alternative model, popular with academics because of its focus on learning. They identify four employability facets that they call the USEM model – USEM standing for Understanding; Skilful practices; Efficacy Beliefs; and Metacognition. However, the academic-facing USEM model is not simple for non-experts to understand (Cole and Tibby, 2013). Cole and Tibby suggest that the model by Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) may be more usable. This model identifies career development learning; experience; degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills; generic skills; and emotional intelligence as necessary aspects of employability but that these must then be reflected upon and evaluated in order to maximise the learning and articulation of these aspects. Finally, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem are seen as further moderating one's employability.

From these definitions we can see that employability is a multi-faceted and sometimes elusive concept that is hard to pin down (Cranmer, 2006) and there is “a wealth of interpretations and measures across different disciplines” (Vanhercke *et al*, 2013, p592). However, there is general agreement in that it involves the following aspects: the capability of obtaining work, functioning effectively within work; moving

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3 between jobs/roles; and having the skills, knowledge and attributes that make this  
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5 possible.  
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### 8 **Students' perspectives of Employability**

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10 Like many academics focusing on graduate employability, Tsitskari *et al* (2014)  
11 believe employers are the most influential stakeholders and the literature on the  
12 employer's perspective is extensive. However, limited work has been done on  
13 what the term means to undergraduate students; a critical absent contribution.  
14 Tymon (2011, p9) terms this stakeholder group as "the missing perspective". As  
15 primary stakeholders, it is important to understand student perspectives on  
16 employability as it gives the opportunity to focus on the individual and situate  
17 relationships with the factors that are input to employability (Vanhercke *et al*,  
18 2013), benefiting HE providers, students, and organisations (Van der Heijde and  
19 Van der Heijden, 2006). Vanhercke *et al* (2013, p593) define perceived  
20 employability as "the individual's perception of his/her possibilities of obtaining  
21 and maintain employment" and note five important aspects of this definition; that it  
22 is a subjective evaluation of employability; it concerns what Bernston and  
23 Marklund (2007) describe as the "possibilities" of employment; that employability  
24 is relevant across the labour market and throughout a career; that it not only  
25 involves the current employer but other possible employers; and finally, that it  
26 concerns both quality and quantity of employment.  
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47 Of the few studies that examine student perceptions of employability,  
48 Tymon's (2011) research is the most methodologically similar to this study. Tymon  
49 collected data from first, second and third year students from Business Studies/Business  
50 Administration, Human Resources, and Marketing programmes at a Post 1992  
51 university. Tymon found that overall the students had a narrower view of employability  
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3 than that observed in the wider literature. This was particularly so for first and second  
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5 year students: “They seem to believe that employability is a short-term means to an end,  
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7 being about finding a job, any job, or employment” (p12). Students also conceived of  
8  
9 their employability as being about the development of skills and personal attributes. The  
10  
11 skills and attributes described mapped onto those commonly described in the literature.  
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14 Rothwell et al (2008) sought to examine what students thought about their  
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16 chances of success in seeking a particular type of work, and what factors influence their  
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18 perceptions of this success. Their statistically-based study focused on second year  
19  
20 Business Studies undergraduates from three different universities. Their study  
21  
22 demonstrated a general lack of confidence in employability across the three institutions  
23  
24 in relation to how well the students perceived they would fair with their employability.  
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26 Worryingly for academics, they also found that students perceive that engagement with  
27  
28 their studies has limited influence on their employability (Rothwell et al, 2009).  
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31 In a multi-disciplinary study of final year students from a pre-92 university  
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33 Tomlinson (2008) posed the question “How do higher education students view the role  
34  
35 of their degree credentials in shaping future employment prospects?” (p51). The  
36  
37 students expressed their view of employability being in part about the “credentials” of  
38  
39 their degree, and that this credential (what they studied, where, the grade) would assist  
40  
41 them to get a job in a hierarchical labour market. More than this though, they also  
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43 perceived the need for extra credentials such as their personal and social skills and  
44  
45 experience. This was in response to high graduate employment competition. As  
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47 Tomlinson describes, “students see the need to add value to their credentials in light of  
48  
49 their weakening currency” (p59).  
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53 Tholen (2012) provides a comparison in the perceptions of employability of  
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55 a group of final year students from Dutch and British Universities. Tholen’s study (p13)  
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3 shows British HE students expressing their employability in terms of competition,  
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5 measured by their exclusivity and distinction; it is all about standing out from other  
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7 graduates. They also view employability as relating to being adaptable, flexible and  
8  
9 possessing generic knowledge and skills. This interpretation echoes the findings of  
10  
11 Tomlinson (2008). By contrast, Tholen interprets the responses of the Dutch students as  
12  
13 perceiving employability as being about finding one's niche in the labour market. This  
14  
15 involves students in a reflective process of developing their understanding of their own  
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17 interests, strengths and weaknesses. Employability for these students seems to be more  
18  
19 about a "trajectory" towards a part of the labour market that matches the students'  
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21 qualities, rather than, in the British context, "a hierarchy of jobs or a generic  
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23 competition for jobs" (p13; Tomlinson, 2012; and Little and Archer, 2010).  
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27 From these few studies that examine employability from a student  
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29 perspective, understandings and opinions represented are as diverse as they are in the  
30  
31 wider literature on definitions of employability. They emphasise facets such short-term  
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33 employability goals, employability "credentials" such as degree subject, institution and  
34  
35 grade, extra-curricular experience and perceptions of employability as being a  
36  
37 competitive pursuit. They have similarities to other stakeholder groups but they are less  
38  
39 likely to emphasise the longer-term aspects of employability like sustaining and moving  
40  
41 within the job market, and less likely to identify more holistic interpretations of  
42  
43 employability such as contributing to the economy and society and finding fulfilling  
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45 employment.  
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49 The study intends to add to the literature on student understandings of  
50  
51 employability by presenting the findings of a study examining Marine Sport Science  
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53 student's articulations of their employability. A discipline yet to be considered in the  
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55 employability literature, carrying its own employability challenges. The study proposes  
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3 to do this by answering the following research questions; how do Marine Sport Science  
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5 Students define employability and how are these definitions effected, if at all, over time  
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7 in their degree and by any interventions experienced? Finally, how do their definitions  
8  
9 compare to that of other stakeholders?  
10

### 11 12 13 **Marine Sports Science Students and their Articulations of their Employability**

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15 This paper presents an examination of the employability understandings of students  
16  
17 from a Marine Sports Science programmes at a post-1992 HEI in response to  
18  
19 considerable systematic enterprise and employability interventions across the  
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21 curriculum. It seeks to establish how these interventions have impacted on the  
22  
23 developing employability understandings of the students as they progress through their  
24  
25 programme and become graduates, and uses the student's definitions of employability  
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27 to critically reflect on their enterprise and employability education. The findings  
28  
29 therefore are not generalizable across other undergraduate programmes but they do  
30  
31 provide an insight into how embedded careers education can effect students in a sport  
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33 discipline.  
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#### 39 *Context and Curriculum*

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41 Minten (2010) notes that there is increasing concern regarding the employability of UK  
42  
43 sport graduates highlighting the low infiltration of graduates into the sport industry  
44  
45 (Minten and Forsyth, 2014). Tsitskari *et al* (2017) suggests this is due to poor  
46  
47 vocational preparedness, the sport industry's deficiencies in industry management, and  
48  
49 the ability to experience higher level jobs, challenges and improved pay in other  
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51 industries. More specifically, the graduate outcomes for Marine Sport Science  
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53 programme students at the post-1992 HEI considered here, as reflected in the DLHE  
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3 data (Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education), have been historically  
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5 disappointing. For example, students graduating in 2009, had average earnings of  
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7 £13,500, and were employed in predominantly non-graduate occupations. In order to  
8  
9 improve this scenario, a strategy to utilise the resources offered by the Careers and  
10  
11 Employability service within Marine Sport Science programmes was developed  
12  
13 (Author, 2012a and 2012b). This was based upon the QAA's (2010) guidance discussed  
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15 above.

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18 In its development, it was important to consider how Marine Sport students,  
19  
20 in general, differ from other HE students. Surfers, who make up the majority of Marine  
21  
22 Sport Science students in this study, have historically been described as nonconformist  
23  
24 (Stewart et al, 2008) and tend to belong to informal sport groups (e.g. surfing  
25  
26 subculture). It was considered therefore, that embedding careers education within the  
27  
28 programme through authentic experience, competitions and tailored activities and  
29  
30 resources was seen as a means of tapping into their motivations and mind-set.  
31  
32 Competitions in particular were emphasised because these competitions are an integral  
33  
34 part of sports (Vallerand and Losier, 1999), these students potentially being driven by  
35  
36 their extrinsic value to achieve.  
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40 The strategy therefore consisted of mandatory careers, employability and  
41  
42 enterprise-related modules embedded within a core business strand of all three years of  
43  
44 the Marine Sport Science programmes from 2011 (see Table 2). Contained within these  
45  
46 modules were three competitive extra-curricular events: 1) FLUX, an annual inter-  
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48 university competition taking students through the process of setting up a business ; 2)  
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50 Hot Seat, an interview competition giving students from across the University the  
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52 opportunity to win a chance to be interviewed by a selection of recruitment  
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54 professionals from a wide variety of employers; and 3) the Business Ideas Challenge, a  
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3 competition with business sponsorship which provides expertise to assist teams develop  
4 a business idea. In their study focusing on the perceived employability of business  
5 graduates, Pinto and Ramalheira (2017) found that engagement in extra-curricular  
6 activities might impact the students ability to “get ahead” in the selection process. They  
7 also found that extensive participation in extra-curricular activities such as those  
8 outlined above, coupled with high academic performance, lead to a perception that  
9 students were more employable in terms of job suitability, personal organisation and  
10 time management and learning skills.  
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21 Table 2. Summary of how employability and enterprise was embedded within core  
22 business modules across the Marine Sport Science Programmes  
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28 The above extra-curricular events were embedded into a module by including  
29 subject appropriate preparation activities in the module timetable, and involving the  
30 extra-curricular event within their assessment. Although the competitions themselves  
31 are not a new concept, embedding them within a module and using the events to form  
32 part of an assessment is (Smith et al, 2010). In his research on the impact of career  
33 management interventions in HE, Crust (2007, p17) found that undergraduate courses  
34 “typically used occasional teaching with little or no assessment to develop graduates’  
35 ability to manage their careers and professional development”, suggesting that although  
36 there may be attempts to embed careers education, it was yet to be an accepted form of  
37 assessment across HE curricula.  
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## 51 **Methodology**

52 Initial data collection utilised a qualitative survey of Marine Sports Science students  
53 from a post-1992 institution. The survey, consisted of both open and closed questions,  
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3 was conducted at the beginning and end of the academic year. The survey was used in  
4  
5 part to identify current and past Marine Sport Science Students' perception and  
6  
7 understanding of the term employability and in part to evaluate the enterprise and  
8  
9 employability curriculum interventions on their programmes. This paper focuses solely  
10  
11 on student responses in relation to their understanding of the term employability. The  
12  
13 survey was conducted within class time to maximise response rates. A total of 63 (74%  
14  
15 of the cohort) participated from all three years of the programmes. There was difficulty  
16  
17 in obtaining responses with the most recent graduates, with a total of only five  
18  
19 responding (13% of the 2012 graduate cohort). Full details on response rates and  
20  
21 demographic details of the survey respondents can be seen in Table 3.  
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26 Table 3. Survey response details and demographic details of respondents. \* No  
27 responses due to discontinuation of the programme.  
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29  
30 Themes related to the research questions emerging from the questionnaire  
31  
32 responses were identified and used to code the data. This coding enabled both  
33  
34 quantitative and qualitative analysis, the former in relation to the frequency of terms  
35  
36 used; the latter to provide a more detailed and nuanced interpretation of the attitudes  
37  
38 and understandings expressed.  
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## 42 **Discussion**

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44 The students' articulations of employability obtained in this study provide four  
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46 noteworthy insights concerning the research questions posed in this study. Firstly, the  
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48 definitions demonstrate a differentiation in the student perspectives of their own  
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50 employability as they progress through their studies moving from definitions being  
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52 about potential employer to definitions being more about oneself. This can be seen as a  
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54 shift from an extrinsic to an intrinsic focus. Secondly, they show a changing  
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sophistication in how they define the term employability. Thirdly, the learner definitions reveal differences in emphases to the definitions of employability of other stakeholder groups. Finally, a brief exploration of the career plans of the students are discussed which reveal a degree of uncertainty and short term career plans emerging among third year students. These insights will now be explored.

#### *An extrinsic to an intrinsic shift in defining employability*

In response to the survey question “what does employability mean to you?”, the students framed their definitions through the notion of who considers their employability traits: the student/applicant or the employer? This created two distinct groups: One where students felt employability was more about an employer’s perception of the applicant; and one where students believed employability to be more about an applicant’s perception of themselves (Table 4). Batistic and Tymon (2017) note that this is a typical feature of perceived employability where there exists an internal component relating to perceptions of oneself, and an external component considering factors outside of the individuals control, such as the employers perception. For the 1st years, there was an evenly distributed view of employability between those emphasising the employer’s perceptions and those focusing on the applicant’s self-perception. This ratio changed with the 2nd years to favour more the latter of the definitions, and was pronounced with the 3rd years.

Table 4. Frequency of extrinsically focussed and intrinsically focused student definitions of employability.

Those who considered employability was more about an employer’s perception of the applicant included definitions for employability such as “how employable I am to

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3 an employer” (1st year student), “how an employer views a candidate’s qualities for a  
4 job” (1st year student) and “the skill set, qualifications and attributes which make you  
5 attractive to an employer” (2nd year student). The employer was clearly the lens  
6 through which employability was perceived for these students. In contrast, those who  
7 felt employability to be more about an applicant’s perception of themselves included  
8 definitions such as “how well you are able to apply your skills to a desired job” (2nd  
9 year student), “the cultivation of skills and experience relevant to my interests and  
10 aspirations for my career” (3rd year student) and “owning the traits and skills that make  
11 you appealing to the employer, as well as demonstrating an interest and enthusiasm for  
12 the job” (3rd year student).  
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24 It is possible that this extrinsic to intrinsic shift in understanding occurs in part  
25 due to three reasons; 1) the embedding of careers education within the curriculum; 2)  
26 time in a degree programme; and 3) a game playing approach adopted by students. Each  
27 year, the Marine Sports Science students come into contact with enterprise and  
28 employability modules (see Table 2) that helped build their understanding of  
29 employability. Their ability to perceive employability over time as a concept that they  
30 have control and ownership over becomes more apparent, either through increased  
31 understanding and/or self-confidence. This apparent ownership may also be in part an  
32 expression of self-efficacy. Berntson *et al* (2008, p421) make the points that, whilst  
33 employability per se is not an expression of efficacy beliefs, “enhancing employability  
34 through, for example, education and training” could impact on employability. From the  
35 student responses, it is not evident that any one of these above reasons are more  
36 dominant in causing the extrinsic to intrinsic shift in understanding employability.  
37 Rather they may all play a role to varying degrees for different individuals. Tymon’s  
38 (2011) study of Business undergraduate students’ perspectives of employability, found  
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3 an indication that confidence in self-expression increased year on year, and that final  
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5 year students “were extremely confident in expressing their views” (ibid, 10). This was  
6  
7 thought to be evidence of “enhanced communication skills and self-confidence”,  
8  
9 suggesting that these skills have been developed over the academic years. Finally, there  
10  
11 is also evidence that students are taking a game playing approach. The careerist student,  
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13 as identified by Tomlinson (2007) and “player” as identified by Brown and Hesketh  
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15 (2004) understands the need to “play the game” in order to progress within the graduate  
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17 labour market. Tomlinson (2007) noted how students had a high degree of self-  
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19 location, taking an instrumental approach to developing their graduate profiles and  
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21 highlighting their added-value credentials. Brown and Hesketh (2004) also noted the  
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23 strategic nature of the “player” but in contrast to the findings in this study, they report  
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25 that students’ attempt to align themselves with the employer.  
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### 31 *The developing sophistication in defining employability*

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33 When reflecting on student definitions of employability it was evident there was a  
34  
35 changing sophistication in their definitions as they developed through the stages of their  
36  
37 programme. Table 5 lists the key terms taken from the definitions of employability  
38  
39 given by students and their overall percentage use within definitions per stage of their  
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41 programme. From this table there can be seen a heavy weighting on three particular key  
42  
43 terms in stage one (ability, qualifications and skills). Although the emphasis on skills  
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45 remains throughout all three years, the development of a more diverse terminology  
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47 increases year on year, expanding the sophistication of their definitions of  
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49 employability. By their third year students have doubled the number of terms within  
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51 their definitions of employability. These findings are comparable to those of Tymon  
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53 (2011) who noted that students, in the first and second year of their programme, had a  
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3 narrower view of employability than that observed in the wider literature. To address  
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5 this limitation, Tsitskari *et al* (2017) and Minten and Forsyth (2014) note that the sport  
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7 discipline in HE needs to cultivate a wide range of attributes among students.  
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10 In Yorke and Knight's (2006) "Skills *plus*" project, they developed a list of 39  
11  
12 aspects of employability, each categorised (although they admit there are gaps and  
13  
14 overlaps) under the following headings: Personal Qualities, Core Skills, and Process  
15  
16 Skills. If these category headings are applied to the terms put forward by students in  
17  
18 their definitions of employability (See Table 5.), there is evidence that students  
19  
20 predominantly use terms that fall within the Personal Quality categorisation and that  
21  
22 Core Skills terms are limited, with little to no use of Process Skills (Such as planning,  
23  
24 decision making and negotiating). Yorke and Knight (2007) believe efficacy beliefs  
25  
26 and other personal qualities are one of four broad student attainments which make up  
27  
28 employability and in particular "Personal qualities pervade employability". In their  
29  
30 2004 study, Knight and Yorke found that the more process driven qualities, such as "the  
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32 disposition to get things done, the taking of initiative, and the preparedness to stick at  
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34 difficult tasks" (Yorke and Knight, 2007, p160) were less immediately visible. Our  
35  
36 study mirrors this finding, with a lack of process skills and indeed process driven  
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38 qualities featured in student's responses. This is a concerning finding as in their work  
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40 on the factors that influence graduate employability, Finch *et al* (2013) found that  
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42 consistent with previous research, they noted that employers identified problem-solving  
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44 skills such as critical thinking, similar to Process Skills, are viewed by employers as an  
45  
46 important factor when reviewing a graduate's employability. More specific to the  
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48 context of this study, in their work with Greek sports employers, Tsitskari *et al* (2017)  
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50 found that process skills such as "professional behaviour and development, leadership  
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52 and influence, problem solving...[and] (inter)personal skills and communication  
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3 ability” were the factors that sports employers expect from their employees. This is an  
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5 incongruence that will need to be addressed by those working in the sport discipline  
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7 within HE. However, it is worth noting that sports employers also indicate the  
8  
9 importance of capabilities in all skills (Tsitskari *et al*, 2017), a finding confirmed by  
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11 Asuquo and Inaja (2013).  
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14 There were several terms that did not fit the categorisation proposed by Yorke  
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16 and Knight (2006) such as qualifications and money/salary. “Qualifications” were  
17  
18 predominantly put forward by Year one students, and support an extrinsic focus of  
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20 employability at this stage of the programme. In their study focusing on the perceived  
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22 employability of Business graduates by employers, Pinto and Ramalheira (2017) found  
23  
24 that academic performance exceeds the worth of participating in extra-curricular  
25  
26 activities at the expense of academic performance. A focus on qualifications may  
27  
28 therefore be a worthwhile and necessary focus of student employability. It is noteworthy  
29  
30 that money/salary emerges only for Year 3 students, perhaps for those with a more  
31  
32 strategic “game playing” approach. Some terms could not be categorised easily, not  
33  
34 because they fell outside of the categorisation, but because they sat above the three  
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36 categories, encompassing all of them at once; these include terms such as “ability”,  
37  
38 “capabilities”, and “requisites”, all of which could be seen as including elements of  
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40 Personal Qualities, Core Skills and Process Skills. These were identified as “Cover all”  
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42 categories in Table 5, and indicate that students were taking a more overarching  
43  
44 approach in their choice of terms to define employability rather than drilling down to  
45  
46 indicate specific elements. In this study, students were asked to define employability  
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48 but were not asked to go further into dissecting the term. Further work on students’  
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50 understanding of employability could benefit from a more detailed examination by  
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52 asking students to deconstruct the terms they provide or define its structure.  
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Table 5. Frequency (%) of use of key terms to define employability

The expansion in how employability is expressed from definitions emphasising skills and experience to more diverse definitions may be regarded as evidence of a more holistic and nuanced attitude and understanding of employability by the Marine Sport students. It is of note, for example, that in their third year some students recognise the necessity of attitudinal traits such as “interest” and “enthusiasm”. Moreover of note is the fact that the data shows an emergence of longer-term expressions of employability. None of the Year 1 students consider employability beyond “getting a job” but of the Year 3 students, a number spoke about employability in more sustainable terms. For example, “the ability to be adaptable with your skills, experience, qualifications and personality in order to remain employable in the career paths you wish to follow” (Year 3 student). It is possible that having careers education embedded within the programme offers the students a more holistic view of employability, enabling them to think of employability as more than just finding a job.

#### *Learner Definitions versus other Stakeholders*

The discussion above suggests, in tandem with their careers education, student definitions of employability become more sophisticated, nuanced, and demonstrate a greater degree of ownership of the term as they progress through their studies. Despite the developing understandings shown by these students, the focus of their definitions across all three years is very much about getting a job, irrespective of whether this is expressed in terms of what the employer wants from the applicant or what the applicant has to offer the employer. For example, “the cultivation of skills and experience relevant to my interests and aspirations for my career” (3rd Year). This provides a

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2  
3 contrast to the definitions of employability cited in Table 1 by other stakeholders. In  
4 these definitions, in addition to stressing the act of gaining employment, these  
5 definitions also talk about how the individual “benefits themselves, the workforce, the  
6 community and the economy (ESECT, 2006) or “being effective in the workplace – to  
7 the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy (CBI, 2009, p8). As  
8 Thijssen *et al* (2008) highlight, the attention of many of these definitions is wider than  
9 the individual gaining employment, encompassing wider stakeholders (the individual,  
10 the employer and the economy/community at large). For students, these definitions  
11 would appear to offer too broad a perspective to consider when offering definitions of  
12 employability that they can relate to. They, quite naturally, are more concerned with the  
13 context that is about themselves directly and which they may have control over rather  
14 than any benefit to others. As such, their definitions are more uni-dimensional  
15 compared to the multi-dimensional definitions, a feature noted by Forrier and Sels  
16 (2003, p105).  
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### 35 *Career Plans*

36 Students were also asked to consider what career plans they had when they graduated.  
37 There was a mixture of responses from students across all year's including short term  
38 and long term career plans, targeted ambitions, and those that were uncertain of their  
39 career plans after graduation. There was a fairly equal number of students with long  
40 term plans across all three years, however there was an increase in students with short  
41 term career plans at Year 3 (Year 1; 6.25%, Year 2; 2.75%, Year 3; 21%) and a number  
42 that were uncertain or had unspecified plans (Year 3;12%). Students have the  
43 opportunity to be more idealistic in their career aspirations at the beginning of their  
44 programme. However, as they neared graduation, the realities of “just getting a job”  
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3 become necessary and therefore short term plans were more dominant. This finding  
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5 therefore may be reflective of a pragmatic and emotional response to the imminent  
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7 prospect of having to find employment. Similarly, Purcell *et al's* (2009) study on  
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9 findings from the 2006 Futuretrack Survey showed that during the application process,  
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11 students were convinced that they had a very clear idea about their future occupations  
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13 yet as they progressed through their programme they were exposed to different ideas  
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15 and so became less clear about their vocational orientation leading to the uncertainty in  
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17 this study.  
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## 22 **Conclusions**

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24 The study proposed to answer the following research questions; how do Marine  
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26 Sport Science Students define employability and how are these definitions effected, if at  
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28 all, over time in their degree and by any interventions experienced. Also, how do their  
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30 definitions compare to that of other stakeholders.  
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33 This study has successfully answered these questions, and presents the following  
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35 conclusions. The definitions of employability offered in this research indicate that, as  
36  
37 they progress through their studies, student definitions of employability become more  
38  
39 sophisticated. In their first year of university the students tended to articulate their  
40  
41 employability using simplistic language, and focus their definition *extrinsically*, on  
42  
43 what an *employer thinks of the applicant*. By their third year, a wider range of terms  
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45 were used to talk about employability, suggesting a more developed and sophisticated  
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47 understanding *and* definitions were also more likely to be expressed *intrinsically*, *i.e.*  
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49 what they had to offer to employers. This mirrors the findings of Tymon (2011) with  
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51 students showing greater ownership of the term. However, none of the definitions  
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53 provided by the students in this study encompassed the more holistic and multi-  
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3 dimensional views of employability reflected in academic and employer definitions.  
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5 The similarity in findings to that of Tymon (2011), who worked with Business students,  
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7 also suggests there is no discernible “discipline” dimension to the definitions of  
8  
9 employability offered by the Marine Sports students in this study.  
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12           Were the considerable careers interventions across the three years of their  
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14 programme responsible for the observed shift in how employability is expressed or was  
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16 this simply a result of maturity or a “game playing” approach? Most likely all these  
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18 factors are at play. Yorke and Knight (2006, p7) emphasise that “development takes  
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20 time – months and years”; that “development takes practice”; that students “need to hear  
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22 repeatedly what it is intended that they learn” and that “programme level planning” for  
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24 employability is necessary. One would therefore hope that the embedding of  
25  
26 employability in *the* curriculum discussed here did have a role, but we cannot know for  
27  
28 sure. The more reflective and developed articulations of employability voiced by many  
29  
30 of the third year students could also be interpreted as displaying a level of the  
31  
32 metacognition (i.e. self-awareness) discussed by Yorke and Knight (2006). Perhaps  
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34 then, student definitions can potentially be used as a qualitative measure of  
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36 employability development.  
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40           The terms that the students used to define their employability were  
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42 predominantly those that expressed Personal Qualities and not Process or Core Skills as  
43  
44 defined by (Yorke and Knight, 2006). The terms they did use were often very broad and  
45  
46 overarching, such as ability, capabilities and requisites, which provide limited detail as  
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48 to how students understand the structure of employability.  
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51           Student career plans highlighted uncertainty and short term intentions  
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53 becoming more evident for third year students. This has been interpreted as reflecting a  
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3 pragmatic and emotional response to nearing the end of their studies and therefore the  
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5 imminent need to get a job.  
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7           The increase in sophistication in defining “employability” coupled with  
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9 students becoming increasingly uncertain of their career plans as they near the end of  
10  
11 their programme highlights a dissonance between their understanding of employability  
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13 and their ability to act on it.  
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15           These conclusions present the following implications for academics and  
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17 career educationalists. Firstly, they need to be aware that development in terms of  
18  
19 employability, takes time and that students benefit from repetition of key points. They  
20  
21 may also consider embedding employability into the curriculum and therefore  
22  
23 programme level planning is vital. Finally, they should reflect on the pragmatic and  
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25 emotional responses experienced by third year students and contemplate strategies to  
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27 support students at this crucial time.  
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30           There are several limitations that should be highlighted concerning this  
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32 study. Firstly, approaching employability from the students’ perception does not  
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34 provide any understanding as to why students perceive their employability in a  
35  
36 particular way. It therefore limits the ability for HEI’s to implement specific actions. A  
37  
38 second limitation is that like many studies in employability, this study used a case study  
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40 approach which offers minimal opportunity in the way of generalisability, making it  
41  
42 difficult to extrapolate or compare findings (Finch *et al*, 2013). Finally, there were  
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44 difficulties in collecting data from recent graduates which led to low participation  
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46 numbers in this population.  
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50           This study offers several avenues for future research. These include the  
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52 application of a students perceived employability in future research as it “integrates all  
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54 possible personal and structural factors and their interactions” and provides an initial  
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3 indication on the labour market position (Vanhercke *et al*, 2013, p599). Furthermore, a  
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5 need to address the difficulty in collecting data from graduates which has led to a lack  
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7 of information available around the graduate transition from HE in to employment  
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9 (Wickramasinghe and Perera, 2010).  
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4 In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping  
5 fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-  
6 sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable  
7 employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and  
8 attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers  
9 and the context (eg personal circumstances and labour market environment) within  
10 which they seek work.  
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17 Hillage and Pollard (1998)

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20 a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that  
21 makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen  
22 occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the  
23 economy  
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28 Yorke (2006) (ESECT)

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31 ...a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants  
32 should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace  
33 – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy  
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37 CBI (2009, p8)  
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40 Table 1. Commonly Used Stakeholder Definitions of Employability  
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Year	Module	Embedded Activities within Modules
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing and Management in Marine Sport (2010-2011)</li> <li>• Employability and Enterprise in Marine Sports (2011-2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini FLUX competition run in class, winner progresses to regional FLUX</li> <li>• Employability Portfolio (CV, Letter of application, Job seeking skills)</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work Based Learning in the Marine Sports Industry (2011-2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing Work Based Learning and undertaking placement</li> <li>• Hot set competition</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enterprise in Marine Sports (2010-2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Ideas Challenge</li> <li>• Enterprise in Marine Sport Trade Show</li> </ul>

Table 2. Summary of how employability and enterprise was embedded within core business modules across the Marine Sport Science Programmes

		1 <sup>st</sup> years	2 <sup>nd</sup> Years	3 <sup>rd</sup> Years
<b>Response Rates</b>	Total Population (N)	16	36	33
	No. of responses (n)	11	26	26
	Response Rate (%)	69	72	79
<b>Age (%)</b>	< 20 yrs	82	50	0
	20 – 25 yrs	18	50	92
	>25 yrs	0	0	8
<b>Gender (%)</b>	Male	73	77	81
	Female	27	23	19
<b>Degree Course (%)</b>	Applied Marine Sports	100	42	54
	Science			
	Surf Science and Technology	0*	58	46

Table 3. Survey response details and demographic details of respondents. \* No responses due to discontinuation of the programme.

	1 <sup>st</sup> years (n)	2 <sup>nd</sup> years (n)	3 <sup>rd</sup> years (n)
<b>Employability is more about an employer's perception of the applicant (extrinsic perspective)</b>	5	7	3
<b>Employability is more about an applicant's perception of themselves (intrinsic perspective)</b>	7	11	20

Table 4. Frequency of extrinsically focused and intrinsically focused student definitions of employability.

<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>Skills <i>plus</i> categorisation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>		<b>Year 2</b>		<b>Year 3</b>	
		<b>Pct</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Pct</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Pct</b>	<b>Use</b>
		<b>(%)</b>		<b>(%)</b>		<b>(%)</b>	
<b>Ability</b>	Cover All	36		19		19	
<b>Qualifications</b>	Does Not Fit Categorisation	36		15		12	
<b>Skills</b>	Core Skills/Process Skills	27		65		50	
<b>Attractive to employers</b>	Cover All	9		7		4	
<b>Experience</b>	Cover All	9		12		15	
<b>Personality</b>	Personal Quality	9		7		12	
<b>Qualities</b>	Personal Quality	9		4			
<b>Requisites</b>	Cover All	9					
<b>Characteristics</b>	Personal Quality			15		4	
<b>Communication of attributes</b>	Personal Quality/ Core Skills			4			
<b>Knowledge</b>	Cover All			15		4	
<b>Attributes</b>	Personal Quality			23		4	
<b>Traits</b>	Personal Quality			4		4	
<b>Capabilities</b>	Cover All					12	
<b>Money/salary</b>	Does Not Fit Categorisation					8	
<b>Attitude</b>	Personal Quality					4	
<b>Level of suitability</b>	Cover All					8	
<b>Interest</b>	Personal Quality					8	
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Personal Quality					4	

Table 5. Frequency (%) of use of key terms to define employability