

# Foreword

Jocelyn Wyburd<sup>1</sup>

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Graduate employability is a sector-wide priority in an ever more competitive and global environment. UK Universities already publish metrics related to the employability of their graduates, including by subject area and degree programme, alongside others such as satisfaction ratings. Such data can serve to attract applicants, but are also increasingly being used to rate universities on the quality of their degree provision. This is particularly so since the Government announced the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework for universities in England, whose outcomes will then link to the right to increase fees. For students facing increasing levels of graduate debt, it is also vital that they will be highly employable by the end of their degree.

In a context of declining numbers of students taking degrees in languages, raising the profile of the employability of languages graduates and enhancing their employability through their courses is particularly important. This may seem ironic, given the increasing numbers of students who choose to take language courses alongside another subject of study, often in recognition of the value of language skills for employability purposes. Language skills are indeed valuable. However, what comes through loud and clear in this volume, is that employers are arguably much more interested in a wider set of transversal or soft skills, which are implicitly developed in higher education languages students, or can be explicitly enhanced by educators. This is what *Enhancing Employability*, the latest in the *Innovative Language Teaching and Learning* series, focuses on.

Some chapters consider initiatives which explicitly incorporate employment experience (e.g. Leggott; Organ), while the majority explore how a range of innovations can develop skills which are transferable to an employment context.

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1. University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom; jmw234@cam.ac.uk

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What is notable throughout this volume is the recurring concept of a failure of recognition of these by graduating students and prospective employers alike and the need for them to be more explicitly identified and articulated. The key buzzwords which emerge centre around the ‘global’ or ‘transnational’, ‘value-added’ graduate, equipped with transcultural skills and a global mindset. To these, in some chapters (notably Deacon, Parkin, & Schneider; Campbell; Guadamillas Gómez; Plutino) are added a focus on digital literacies and e-skills as intrinsically valuable as well as providing an additional dimension to cross-cultural communication. Three contributions (López-Moreno; Organ; Guadamillas Gómez) focus particularly on different aspects related to residence abroad – an experience recognised as one of the richest seams of transferable skills for languages students.

What shines through in this volume is that addressing employability dimensions need not (as I myself point out), require an overhaul of the content of higher education languages degrees and courses. Indeed, two authors (Almeida & Puig; Parks) make the case for an enhanced set of transferable skills coming from the study of ‘content courses’ which focus on literature and other expressions of culture and society. What becomes clear is that enhancing employability may require techniques to be introduced which help students to reflect on and articulate the range of skills they are acquiring (e.g. Organ), or to tweak assessment methods to incorporate these (Campbell). Several chapters also focus on the processes not just of language learning but of ‘living’ the use of a second language in real contexts and of experiential learning as providing the strongest basis for transferability of skills and competence (Leggott; Federici; Plutino).

This volume is a call to action for higher education practitioners to make more explicit what the unique range of employment related skills their students are gaining, and to assist students in owning and articulating this skillset through experiential learning and reflection. It makes a timely and welcome contribution to the sector.

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