Employability Skills in economics degrees

Based on Jenkins and Lane (2019), Employability Skills in UK Economics Degrees: a report for the Economics Network, available at: https://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability
## Is there a skills gap?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill area</th>
<th>Employer ranking</th>
<th>Department ranking</th>
<th>Employer concern about skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application to real world</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1=top priority
Potential explanations for the gap

a) Not doing enough and time lags?

b) Employers and academics define skills differently?

c) Teaching and learning activities not effective?

d) Difficult to get staff to engage?

e) Difficult to get students to engage?

What can we do?
Improve teaching and learning strategies

1. Department-led

2. Clear connection to work

3. Skills and knowledge together

4. Sustained and coordinated opportunities

5. Mix of best practice teaching strategies

6. Support and incentivise students to engage
• Share experiences internally
• Work with employers-alumni
• Economics Network Case studies and Guide for Lecturers Chapter (forthcoming)
• #econteach
Feedback/Comments/Questions
cloda.jenkins@ucl.ac.uk ; @UCLEconCareersT (Twitter)
### Department priorities

#### How often is each employability skill given each rank?

(1=most important; 5=least important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider skills</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying economics</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of responses**

- **1**: 100%
- **2**: 0%
- **3**: 0%
- **4**: 0%
- **5**: 0%
Departments spend time on priority areas

How often do students get the opportunity to practice developing the skill?

- **Academic writing**
  - Never at all: 10%
  - Hardly ever: 20%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 40%
  - Very regularly: 0%

- **Non-academic writing**
  - Never at all: 20%
  - Hardly ever: 30%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 10%
  - Very regularly: 0%

- **Academic presentation**
  - Never at all: 10%
  - Hardly ever: 20%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 40%
  - Very regularly: 0%

- **Non-academic presentation**
  - Never at all: 5%
  - Hardly ever: 20%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 40%
  - Very regularly: 5%

- **Applying economics**
  - Never at all: 10%
  - Hardly ever: 20%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 40%
  - Very regularly: 0%

- **Data analysis**
  - Never at all: 20%
  - Hardly ever: 30%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 20%
  - Very regularly: 0%

- **Working with economists**
  - Never at all: 10%
  - Hardly ever: 20%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 30%
  - Very regularly: 10%

- **Working with non-economists**
  - Never at all: 10%
  - Hardly ever: 20%
  - Somewhat: 30%
  - Regularly: 30%
  - Very regularly: 10%

*Back to compare*
How do you rate the general skills of graduates?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Not very High</th>
<th>Fairly High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse and interpret</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quantitative data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using IT/computers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying economics</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of respondents
How do you rate the general wider skills of graduates?

- Adaptability: 10% Not very High, 30% Fairly High, 60% Very High
- General creative and imaginative powers: 15% Not very High, 40% Fairly High, 45% Very High
- Problem-solving strategies and skills: 15% Not very High, 45% Fairly High, 40% Very High
- Independence of viewpoint and judgement: 10% Not very High, 30% Fairly High, 60% Very High
- Awareness of cross-cultural issues: 20% Not very High, 30% Fairly High, 50% Very High
- Critical self-awareness: 25% Not very High, 25% Fairly High, 50% Very High

Back to compare
a. Progress but more to do

Many changes are very recent/in pilot phase
b. Departments focus on academic

What aspects of communication are most focused on?

- Writing for academic audience
- Writing for non-academic audience
- Presentation to academic audience
- Presentation to non-academic audience

% of respondents

Top 3  Bottom 3
b. Application still ‘theoretical’

What aspects of 'applying economics' are most focused on?

- Applying economics to real world contexts
- Solving policy or commercial problems
- Simplifying complex ideas to make them accessible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applying economics...</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving policy...</td>
<td>25% Top 3, 10% Bottom 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplifying complex...</td>
<td>20% Top 3, 15% Bottom 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What aspects of data analysis are most focused on?

- Sourcing data: 30% (Top 3), 10% (Bottom 3)
- Analysing data: 70% (Top 3), 5% (Bottom 3)
- Data using Excel: 25% (Top 3), 15% (Bottom 3)
- Data using econometrics package: 60% (Top 3), 10% (Bottom 3)
c. Room for improvement in T&L

- Lots of careers support, led by Department
- Opportunities for placement experiences
- Skills mainly developed in economics modules, alongside content
- Across years of degrees
- Reasonable proportion assessed, of priority skills
- Use mix of large group and small group teaching and various types of independent activities

- Much of the good stuff is optional
- Overly focused on academic-related skills
- Are students *learning by doing* in small tutorials and large lectures?
- Are take-home activities and closed-book exams related to what people do at work and variety of outputs?
- Handful of people leading the way
C1: Lots of support from across university

Type of support provided to students

- Careers module
- Organised short-term internships
- Year on placement
- Organised mentoring
- Careers advisor local
- Department alumni events
- Department employer events
- Support from personal tutor or academic
- Societies events
- Careers service 1-to-1 support
- Careers service events

% of respondents

- Available to all and integrated in degree
- Available but not to all or optional
- Not available at all
- Unable to comment or not promoted

Circle
C2: Increasing workplace opportunities

How common are degrees with placement year experience?

- Not available
- Available but not actively promoted
- Available to proportion of students
- Available to all and actively promoted as optional
- Available to all and fully integrated

Availability:
- All
- Russell Group
- Non Russell Group
In what year of study do students develop skills?

% respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employability Skill</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic writing</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic presentation</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic presentation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying economics</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with economists</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with non-economists</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C5: Are students ‘watching’ or ‘doing’?

Where are students developing skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employability skill</th>
<th>Large lecture</th>
<th>Small group activity</th>
<th>Computer lab</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic writing</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic presentation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic presentation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying economics</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with economists</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with non-economists</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C5: data analysis well developed

Which areas of data analysis do students get the chance to develop their skills in?

- See others doing
- Find and download
- Clean and organise
- Charts and basic stats
- Econometrics
- Present data
- Coding
- Other

% of respondents

- No opportunity
- Optional modules only
- Compulsory modules only
- Both compulsory and optional modules
C5: Written outputs very traditional

What type of written outputs do students produce?

% of respondents

- Short answer
- Academic essay
- Academic report
- Non-academic report
- Newspaper article
- Wiki
- Blog
- Poster
- Dissertation

Legend:
- Red: No opportunity
- Green: Optional modules only
- Grey: Compulsory modules only
- Yellow: Both compulsory and optional modules
C5: how developing oral communication?

What types of oral and visual presentations do students engage with?

- Lecture discussion
- Small group discussion
- Small group (academic)
- Small group (non-academic)
- Poster
- Video
- Podcast
- Conference
- Other

Legend:
- No opportunity
- Optional modules only
- Compulsory modules only
- Both compulsory and optional modules
C5: Staff not able or not willing?

Potential challenge was a problem or significant problem

- Staff not aware how to do: All 62, Russell Group 69, Non Russell Group 58
- Staff not interested: All 46, Russell Group 46, Non Russell Group 46
- Department sees employability as job for careers service: All 21, Russell Group 38, Non Russell Group 12
C5: How much learnt in closed-book exam?
Potential challenge was a problem or significant problem

Students do not choose optional economics modules with skills development
- All: 36
- Russell Group: 46
- Non Russell Group: 31

Students do not engage with skills activities
- All: 54
- Russell Group: 62
- Non Russell Group: 50

Students do not recognise that they are developing skills
- All: 74
- Russell Group: 62
- Non Russell Group: 81
C6: students should be incentivised

What proportion of work is summatively assessed in each skill area?

- Academic writing: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Non-academic writing: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Academic presentation: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Non-academic presentation: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Applying economics: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Data analysis: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Working with economists: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)
- Working with non-economists: 0% (0%), 1%-25% (0%), 26%-50% (0%), 51%-75% (0%), 76%-100% (0%)