

## Overview:

I-SEE provides an online resource to extend employability provision for Postgraduate (PG) students. Students complete a self-assessment of employability skills which aligns with PG attributes and receive individualised, automated responses with tailored feedback which identifies development areas and signposts appropriate support.

## Background:

Enhancing students' employability is increasingly being recognised as a priority for Higher Education Institutions. As self-awareness underpins employability, a strategy of self-assessment through identifying individual strengths and development areas seems appropriate. This would enable students to develop an individualised plan of action to address their identified development needs. Signposting to resources to support this development is essential as well as providing support for reflection and articulation of these skills.

The resource was developed for students following taught MSc programmes in the Division of Applied Health Sciences. All students registered for the 2012/13 academic year were recruited to take part in the evaluation of the I-SEE resource, which was implemented as part of the non credit-bearing induction programme. Students were informed of the resource at the beginning of the academic year and participation was encouraged. I-SEE was developed and disseminated to students via the Blackboard-based virtual learning environment utilised for blended learning at the University of Aberdeen, namely MyAberdeen. A logo was designed to give the resource an easily recognisable identity. The process involved three stages, an employability skills audit, followed by a reflection stage and a final articulation stage.

- **Self-assessment employability skills audit** - Prior to completing the self-assessment questionnaire, students were asked to complete assessments for academic writing and IT skills and selected psychometric testing. The academic writing skills assignment required students to summarise a given text in a maximum of 150 words. The summaries were marked by programme coordinators using a standardised rubric relating to the accuracy of summary and language usage (grammar, punctuation and spelling). The rubric provided tailored feedback and signposting to resources for specific mark ranges. The IT skills questionnaire includes 50 multiple choice questions regarding basic IT skills deemed essential to follow the programmes, covering aspects of e-mail, Excel, PowerPoint, Word and general internet use. Students are asked to respond yes, no or unsure to whether they are able to conduct specific tasks. Any 'no' or 'unsure' responses received feedback via the quiz tool, signposting students to online guides for that specific task. Four psychometric tests were identified to be included in I-SEE – abstract, numerical and verbal reasoning skills and a Type dynamics indicator form for personality typing. Each of these tests are time-limited to 10 minutes. The scores and individualised feedback is automatically emailed to the student from the website. A self-rating skills audit was developed based on the HEA employability profile for Health Studies and the University of Aberdeen's Postgraduate Attributes. In addition to providing feedback on the scores from the six assessments completed, self-rating was required for other aspects such as communication skills/academic writing (essays, exams, oral and poster presentations, publications, referencing); IT skills (basic word processing, TurnitinUK, track changes, data base search); group work and self-development (identification of strengths and weaknesses). Automated feedback indicating areas needing development was provided via the quiz tool according to responses provided by the student with signposting to relevant online support or workshops/courses within the University.
- **Reflection stage** - Students were asked to upload evidence of development activities onto e-portfolios over the next few months of study. Explicit instructions on how to create their own e-portfolio in MyAberdeen to act as a resource depository were provided. They were then requested to reflect on their progress by completing a checklist after six months. This involved having to reflect on identified areas of development, the progress made and future/planned actions.
- **Articulation of employability skills stage** - A template for a UK-style CV as well as supportive documentation on how to articulate these skills was provided. Links to helpful online resources within the Careers Services was also available.

Students were invited to focus group discussions nearing the end of their academic year to provide their opinions on the impact of I-SEE, what they found most and least helpful and any suggestions for improvements. They were also asked whether they felt that development should be followed up by programme coordinators or be on their own initiative.

**Key points and challenges:**

I-SEE is a useful resource especially for those with no or limited previous exposure to employability support. Students need to be made aware of the importance of the resource and potential benefit to their future employability. In addition to online resources, more practical sessions should be included but these need to be relevant, appropriate for the skill level and self selective. Engagement can be improved by providing training in the use of the VLE, discussing the benefits of the resource and reconsidering the timing of the various stages of I-SEE.