**YEAR 1 Resource 1**

[**The importance of recognising and recording skills**](http://www.realie.org/the-importance-of-recognising-and-recording-skills/)

Trainor (2009: 3)[1] in the “Future Fit” report stated that it is promising that students are generally aware of skills which employers look for. Nevertheless, *generally* being the operative word; it will not be beneficial to merely be “vaguely aware” of them; while it *is* important to understand them, it is even more important to know how to develop them and put their experiences into concise examples which will demonstrate how they exercised a certain skill; as shown from the above questionnaires analysis;

***“Students, too, need to engage with this agenda from day one of their course… they need to understand how to articulate the employability skills they have developed as part of their course, as well as what they have gained from extra-curricular activities and part-time work.”*** *(CBI 2009: 6) [2]*

A report by the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) entitled “Advice for personal tutors preparing for employability-based tutorials with Modern Languages finalists” (Harrison 2011)[3], highlights the fact that many ML graduates go into non-graduate jobs after graduating, the main reason for this being students failing to recognise the skills they have gained during their degree; “other issues, including a failure to recognise the full range of employability skills they have developed during their studies and/or to articulate these effectively to prospective employers (Harrison 2011: 3). The majority of ML graduates do not fall into the category of “teachers, translators or interpreters” once they finish their degree, but those who do go on to have a graduate career will therefore need more than their languages skills to help them acquire a job, many graduate employers offering positions to those from any degree background; “here the employer’s priority is the graduate’s generic employability skills (of which ML graduates potentially have a rich offering; they need to demonstrate this however)” (Harrison 2011: 6).

*Similarly,* ***“When it comes to their employability some ML graduates may have a tendency to think quite narrowly (‘I have language skills: in which jobs can I use them?’) and consequently overlook the full richness and complexity of what they have to offer.”*** *(Harrison 2011: 6)*

Even though employers value the skills a graduate in modern languages gains during their course[4], it is important for the students to recognise these skills, not only for personal development and growth, but for a professional one as well, knowing how to market themselves in today’s competitive job market; “UK graduates did not make an explicit connection with the potential career benefits of getting involved in international experiences such as living, volunteering, working or studying overseas” (British Academy 2012: 9). Likewise, the report by the UCML (2012) on “Valuing the Year Abroad” urges students to;

***“Recognise the great potential benefits of a year abroad for their future employability, and for a satisfying graduate career in an increasingly international job market.”*** *(British Academy 2012: 11)*

Apart from today’s many modern languages graduates not making the connection between their year abroad and potential graduate employment, it is also not well known that the year abroad is their “Unique Selling Point” when up against other graduates.

A survey carried out by University of Portsmouth (2000) found that 86% of students who undertook a year abroad believed that it helped them get a job[5]. Similarly, a study by thirdyearabroad.com concluded that 51% of respondents claimed that the year abroad played a “significant” factor in landing their first job and for 18% it was the determining factor[6]. This links in to the above findings in which students think that their time abroad will “enhance future career prospects”. Nonetheless, these statistics are from students who have completed a residency abroad placement and so it is important for students to be aware, before they undertake their year abroad, to know more about employability skills and of ways in which they can develop them once they are away, thus making the most out of their time abroad; **“There is no doubt the earlier you get started in thinking about your future career the better use you can make of your time at University”** (UoBath 2004: 3)[7]. The following statement from the University of Bath summarises the importance of early planning in order to get the most out of one’s time at university;

***“Engaging with personal development planning, you can: increase your self-awareness – who you are and what you want; identify the skills and experience that you already have, and those that you need; create a plan to acquire the skills you may need for your academic studies or your chosen career path; keep a record of your achievements that you can then draw upon when you apply for further study or employment.”*** *(UoBath 2011)*

It is important, however, to note that even though a languages degree (and a year abroad) may be equipping students with the skills employers are looking for, and the fact that unemployment amongst ML graduates rates are low, does not automatically mean that once they graduate they will automatically get a job. Just as the term **“employability [skills]” does not equal “employment”; rather acknowledging what set of skills one possesses.** Therefore, in order to succeed in recognising the transferable skills gained during the modern languages degree, particularly focusing on the year abroad, it is important to recognise the skills you are developing whilst you are developing them instead of reflecting back on them once you have returned.

Upon one’s return from their year abroad, it is all too easy to store away the experience as a “brilliant year” but it should be imperative to acknowledge that the year abroad can “act as a library full of responses” when it comes to showing how you solve problems, lead a group, adapt to change, stay motivated, etc.[8]. The year abroad is certainly useful in character building, whether it is spent working or studying; skills which employers are looking for are constantly being developed, and so it is important to have a record of when you displayed a certain skill, making it easier to give specific examples during interviews and application processes. It is also easy to remember the year abroad through rose-tinted glasses, but it is important to turn the problems or difficulties which were encountered whilst living abroad into positives and therefore be able to “show initiative to overcome a problem”. Students who have undertaken a year abroad should be able to provide concrete examples of the following competences-based questions employers use to screen candidates (©Civil Service Fast Stream 2011 in Harrison 2011: 10);

1. Describe a situation where your communication skills made a difference to a situation.
2. Give an example where your listening skills proved crucial to an outcome.
3. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way
4. Tell us about the biggest change that you have had to deal with. How did you cope with it?
5. Tell me about a time when you pro-actively sorted out an opportunity to develop yourself.
6. Describe an example of an occasion when something you’d planned for didn’t work out as you’d hoped. What did you learn from this?
7. What’s your greatest achievement? Of what are you most proud?”

To get the most out of the residency abroad placement, it is important to get organised early in order to identify the skills which need to be developed and understand they ways in which this can be done[9]. It is important to identify what you have done and learn from those experiences, but it would be more proactive to have a record as the year goes on instead of trying to recall specific moments a few months after the end of the placement, when a lot of useful examples would have been forgotten. Most people’s personal statements follow the lines of “I am able to work in a team as well as independently”, but it is being able to back up these skills with examples which of importance; “a great CV or application form depends on how well you can market your skills, but it’s also about recognising the skills you have developed” (Trought 2010)[10].

[1] Trainor. (2009). In CBI: Universities UK  – *Future Fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work.* Available: [www.cbi.org.uk](http://www.cbi.org.uk/" \t "_blank) p3

[2] Lammy. (2009). In CBI: Universities UK  – *Future Fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work.* Available: [http://www.cbi.org.uk/](http://www.cbi.org.uk/" \t "_blank) p1

[3] Harrison, J. (2011). *Advice for personal tutors* preparing for employability-based tutorials with Modern Languages finalists*.* Available: [www.ucml.ac.uk](http://www.ucml.ac.uk/" \t "_blank).

[4] British Academy. (2012) *Valuing the Year Abroad: The importance of the year abroad as part of a degree programme for UK students.* UCML. p11

[5] [http://www.liverpoolyearabroad.org.uk/using\_languages.htm](http://www.liverpoolyearabroad.org.uk/using_languages.htm" \t "_blank)

[6]  [http://www.slideshare.net/thirdyearabroad/valuing-the-year-abroad-thirdyearabroadcom-presentation](http://www.slideshare.net/thirdyearabroad/valuing-the-year-abroad-thirdyearabroadcom-presentation" \t "_blank)

[7] University of Bath. (2011). *Personal Development Planning ( PDP) – An introduction*. Learning & Teaching Enhancement Office  [http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/resources/pdp/](http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/resources/pdp/" \t "_blank)

[8] [http://www.thirdyearabroad.com/home/item/1188-how-to-use-your-year-abroad-in-interviews.html](http://www.thirdyearabroad.com/home/item/1188-how-to-use-your-year-abroad-in-interviews.html" \t "_blank)

[9] Swain, H. (2009 a). *The art of being employable.* Available: [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/mar/03/employment-higher-education](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/mar/03/employment-higher-education" \t "_blank)

[10] Trought, F. (2010) *How to Market Yourself.* All about careers. [http://www.allaboutcareers.com/careers-advice/looking-for-a-job/how-to-market-yourself](http://www.allaboutcareers.com/careers-advice/looking-for-a-job/how-to-market-yourself" \t "_blank)

**ACTIVITY**

1. Read the article and sketch out an action plan for recording your employability skills before, during and after your year abroad.

2. Consider:

What – you are going to record

When – you are going to start your record keeping and how you will keep it updated over time

Where – you are going to store the information (online/offline – on your own computer, on a social network, in the cloud)

How – you are going to record the information (what tools are you going to use for recording your experiences, e.g. blog, facebook, linkedin, portfolio, online CV etc.)

**Note:** Look in the REALIE Resource section of the website for help with this