THE MISLEM PROJECT:

Developing meta-level quality indicators for establishing a systematic linkage between educational institutions and the labour market: A Leonardo Da Vinci Project, Sponsored by the European Union.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: PROJECT MANUAL.

SEPTEMBER 2007

Jane Andrews (PhD) & Helen Higson (PhD)
Aston Centre for Research into Higher Education, Learning and Management, Aston Business School, Aston University.

Acknowledgements

Research Partners: Contributing Individuals

Dr **Jane Andrews** (PhD). HELM, Aston University, UK:
j.e.andrews1@aston.ac.uk

Professor **Ana Azevedo** (PhD). The University of Applied Sciences, FH Joanneum. Austria:
ana.azevedo@fh-joanneum.at

Phil Barnes. Matthew Boulton College. UK.

Jo Brown. Aston Business School, Aston University. UK.

Mag. **Christine Bauer-Langthaler**, bfi Steiermark. Austria:
christine.bauer-langthaler@bfi-stmk.at

Mihai Cosoveanu, University of Craiova, Romania.

Tony Dennant, Matthew Boulton College, UK.

Mag. **Bernadette Frech**, The University of Applied Sciences, FH Joanneum. Austria:
Bernadette.frech@fh-joanneum.at

Snr. Mag. **Doris Gomezelj Omerzel**, University of Primorska, Slovenia.

Mag. **Barbara Haubmann**, BIT. Austria:
Barbarahaubmann@bitonline.cc

Dr **Helen Higson** (PhD), Aston Business School, Aston University. UK:
h.e.higson@aston.ac.uk

Katarina Košmrlj, University of Primorska, Slovenia.

Professor **Mihnea Marin**, University of Craiova, Romania.

Asst. Mag. **Nataša Mithans**, University of Primorska, Slovenia.

Victoria Phillpot, PPS. UK.

Paul Rinderu, University of Craiova, Romania.

Dr **Nada Trunk Širca** (PhD), University of Primorska, Slovenia.

Mag. **Eva Maria Tusini**, The University of Applied Sciences, FH Joanneum. Austria:
eva.tusini@gmail.com

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Foreword: Helen Higson, Associate Dean, Aston Business School, Birmingham. UK.

Over the past two decades the massification of higher education has been matched by an increasingly global labour-force and work-environment. Thus, the requirement for graduates to possess high quality, transferable 'employability' skills is becoming increasingly important. Likewise, the need for higher and vocational education to offer high quality business and management programmes which create highly competent, innovative and qualified graduates is also vital if education is to continue to meet the needs of the contemporary society. By focusing on the link between education and employment, and by taking into account the quality of business and management education, the MISLEM Project adopted a distinctive approach to employability. The breadth of this approach has promoted a depth of empirical data, the analysis and interpretation of which makes a valuable contribution to current education debates.

The Employability Competencies conceptualised at the end of this Manual represent the culmination of two years work in four European countries: Austria, Romania, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. It is hoped that by taking into account a range of employer and graduate perspectives from such diverse countries, the Project's results will be of interest and of use in higher, further and vocational education across Europe. Moreover, in addition to enhancing business and management undergraduate education, the Employability Competencies identified in this Manual could have enormous benefit to the EU economy as a whole.

In participating in the MISLEM Project, Aston Business School and the other partners have developed strong academic and employment related linkages. Such linkages are both valued, and of value, adding to the richness and diversity of each individual institution. It is anticipated that the collegial and social contacts and linkages made during the two years of the Project will be long-lasting. In this way, one of the primary objectives of the Leonardo Programme has been achieved.

I would like to thank all of those involved with the MISLEM Project. This Manual is a testament to their hard work. I would also like to thank our EU funders for providing the opportunity for this work. I have no doubt that the Project findings will have a far-reaching impact on management education in Europe, and will be helpful to education policy makers, funders and employers alike.

Helen Higson

Project Summary

The MISLEM Project comprised representatives from Higher and Vocational Education in four partner countries, Austria, Romania, Slovenia and the UK. In addition to this, representatives from a major UK graduate employment agency and the Austria Quality Assurance Agency were also involved. At the inaugural meeting of the Project, partner teams discussed and agreed upon appropriate methodological processes with which to carry the Project forward.

The first phase of the Project was an exploratory study. This phase incorporated a literature review followed by qualitative interviews with employers, graduates and representatives from Higher and Further Education, and Vocational Training Institutions. These qualitative, semi-structured interviews aimed to conceptualize 'key' generic business graduate skills and competencies for the purpose of the main part of the Project.

Following the exploratory study, the second phase of the Project began with the design of two quantitative surveys. The aim of these surveys was to encapsulate graduate and employer perspectives of the value of the discipline-specific knowledge and Employability Competencies to the work-environment. A pilot study was conducted in all four countries after which the questionnaires were refined, and then administered to recent graduates and graduate employers. The questionnaires aimed to: test the extent to which discipline-specific knowledge and skills and the Employability Competencies (acquired in educational study programmes) were used by graduates; measure the extent to which such knowledge, skills and competencies were considered relevant for graduate career advancement within their current or future workplace; determine how proficient the graduates were in utilising business knowledge and Employability Competencies; and identify the extent to which graduates require other skills and competencies in their employment (in addition to those developed during undergraduate business education).

The final stages of the Project involved analysing the questionnaires, interpreting, and disseminating the Project findings via national and international conferences, written reports and academic papers. A set of Meta-Indicators pertaining to graduate employability were then developed. These are defined (in detail) in the final part of this Manual.

Project Background

The MISLEM Project was originally rooted in the relationship between the quality of business and management undergraduate teaching to graduate employability. It aimed to identify and conceptualise a universal set of key Employability Competencies required by employers of business graduates in four European countries: Austria, Romania, Slovenia, and the UK.

The overarching objective of Project was to work with employers and graduates in order to develop a set of Educational Performance Indicators which would enhance graduate employability and which then could be recommended for inclusion within the undergraduate business and management curricula across the European Union.

Guiding Principles

The Project was steered by a set of *aspirational* guiding principles identified and articulated during the literature review and exploratory study.

These principles reflected the overarching objective of the Project and included:

1. *The need to increase input from employers in order to make the undergraduate curricula more relevant to the needs of the work environment.*

2. *The need to develop Employability Indicators for use in Higher, Further and Vocational Education and Training Institutions across Europe*

3. *The desire to develop and introduce innovative approaches to evaluating student employability skills that could be used as a tool to enhance curriculum development.*

4. *The desire to promote the exchange of good practice in the quality of undergraduate competencies in different types of European Educational Institutions.*

5. *The provision of a forum for discussion about quality assurance and graduate employability in higher, further and vocational education between Education, Government and Industry.*

6. *The building of opportunities for trans-national cooperation in a way that will create and disseminate common, European-wide, quality-assessment practices in education.*

7. *The development of an empirically grounded base from which further harmonization of higher, further and vocational education may be built across Europe.*

Partnership Members: Details.

Aston Business School, Aston University

Aston Business School is part of Aston University in the UK. It is amongst the leading business schools in Europe. Its business and management education opportunities, research and consultancy have been carefully fostered in partnership with industry, commerce and the public sector in Britain and overseas. Aston Business School has a highly successful undergraduate work-placement programme integral to all degree programmes; this programme provides all students with the opportunity to further develop employability skills and competencies acquired whilst in education. A dynamic university careers service supports students and graduates in the transition from study to employment and Aston continuously tops the graduate employment league tables.

For further information please see: http://www.abs.aston.ac.uk
Telephone: 0044 121 204 3000.

AQA

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance provides counselling and support for Austrian higher education institutions in developing and implementing quality assurance measures. It also organises and coordinates the evaluation of higher education teaching. In addition, AQA's primary activities include the drafting of quality standards and the certification of quality management.

For further information please see: http://www.aqa.ac.at
Telephone: 0043 1 319 44 50 0.

Bit Management

Bit management Beratung GmbH is part of the Bit group, Austria's largest private qualification provider. It has been active in the area of training and consulting since 1996. Located in three different cities, Bit management provides services and support for more than 500 companies and non-profit organisations each year.

For further details please see: www.bitonline.cc
Telephone: 0043 316 2855 500

Bfi Steiermark

Berufsförderungsinstitut Steiermark is amongst the leading training institutions in Austria. The main activities of *bfi Steiermark* lie in the planning and implementation of vocational and adult education training courses. Bfi Steiermark is a consulting partner in many education and training projects all over Europe. Since 1995 it has participated in, or been responsible for, 71 EU-projects; many of which deal with disadvantaged or disabled people to improve their employability.

For further information please see: http://www.bfi.stmk.at
Telephone: 0043 316 7270/1010

University of Craiova

The University of Craiova in Romania was founded in 1947. It has grown considerably since its foundation. The main mission of the University of Craiova is to promote and develop teaching and research activities in order to contribute to regional and national welfare. The number of the academic staff and students currently studying and working at the University of Craiova makes it amongst the five largest state universities in Romania. The University of Craiova promotes graduate employability through its Centre for Career Guidance. It also involves different stakeholders in curricula development. The University has a well defined international profile and is involved with several EU projects.

For further information please see: http://www.ucv.ro

Telephone: 0040 251 412 340

FH Joanneum GMBH

FH Joanneum is one of Austria's leading Universities of Applied Sciences. The varied study programmes offered at FH Joanneum are geared towards future scientific, social, and economic developments. The institution was founded in 1995. FH Joanneum promotes graduate employability by selecting study programmes that closely fit the needs of the labour market and by developing curricula linking theory and practice. The organisation is part of a unique European network of 40 universities (UNEECC) and it is currently involved in many international initiatives, including student exchange programmes and EU-funded research projects.

For further information please see: http://www.fh-joanneum.at

Telephone: 0043 316 5453-8800

Matthew Boulton College

Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education is located in the UK. It has a mission of making a valuable contribution to the community through the provision of high-quality, vocationally-focused education and training. The College is actively involved in local economic development in Birmingham and the Midlands. It is widely recognised for the depth and quality of its educational provision and excellence in vocational training.

For further information please see: www.mbc.ac.uk

Telephone: 0044 121 446 4545

PPS

PPS is the Resourcing and Retention arm of Badenoch & Clark. They specialise in assessment and testing techniques, recruitment, exit & retention interviews, and other consultancy services. With offices in the UK and throughout the world, PPS has a team of experienced HR professionals, working across Public and Private Sectors, who are dedicated to delivering results that exceed client's expectations.

For further information please see: http://www.ppsworks.com

Telephone: 0044 121 777 2332

Faculty of Management, Koper, University of Primorska

The Faculty of Management Koper (FM) in Slovenia is a member of the University of Primorska. Two undergraduate and five postgraduate programmes reflect an interdisciplinary approach to management that integrates economics and business, law, organisational science and behavioural science. All programmes have been accredited by the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) applies to all programmes. The Faculty strives for a greater internationalisation by: encouraging student, teacher and research exchange; organising annual international summer schools and scientific conferences; participating in international projects; and publishing two international research journals in English and Slovene.

For further information please see www.fm-kp.si

Telephone: 0038 656 1020 00

Project Phase 1: Pre-field Work

Literature Review:

The first phase of the Project began with a detailed literature review in each country. Each review was then collated into a single document.

The following paragraphs comprise a summary of the main facets of the literature review.

A Comparison of Higher Education in Each Country

Slovenia has the smallest sector with just over 67,200 students (EIU, 2005a) enrolled at three state owned and managed universities and seven private Higher Education Institutions (Doling, 2005). Austria has around 200,000 students (EIU, 2004: 2005b) enrolled in 50 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), comprising a mixture of public and private Universities and Fachhochschulen (Universities of Applied Science). Of the four countries, Romania has the most complex HE sector with over one and half million students enrolled in 112 public and private universities and colleges (Arsene, 2005). Higher education in Romania is delivered by six different types of HEI comprising Universities, Academies, Polytechnics, Institutes, Colleges and Postgraduate schools (Miroslav-Valeriu et al, 2002). The UK has the largest sector with around two million undergraduates (Lightfoot, 2006) enrolled in 197 HEI's (SCIT, 2006). Whilst the majority of higher education in the UK is delivered by state owned universities, the sector also incorporates 47 public university colleges, eight international colleges and universities, five postgraduate and professional institutions and one privately owned university (SCIT, 2006).

Demographic differences between the countries are exaggerated by social and economic disparities. Despite this, the content of business-related undergraduate programmes is remarkably similar in all business schools taking part in the study with similar 'core' modules such as accounting, strategic management, marketing and human relations, to name but a few, being taught in each institution. Other similarities between the four educational sectors are somewhat hard to find with the emphasis given to monitoring and evaluation of quality in teaching and research varying greatly between each country. Such diversity in quality evaluation and management reflects

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contextual differences in student learning and teaching in each country. Whilst Slovenia is in the early stages of establishing quality control mechanisms (BFUG, 2005), the UK, Romania and Austria all have formal, independent, Quality Assurance Agencies. Although the main purpose of such agencies is to assess and evaluate the quality of higher education within each country, and the function and ethos of each of the three Quality Assurance Agencies appears similar, the authority and scope of each Agency to facilitate and deliver improvements to Higher Education varies greatly.

Graduate Employability

The notion of graduate employability is a contentious issue that is both difficult to conceptualise and measure. In the UK, public interest in graduate employability reflects the massification of Higher Education over the past two decades. It is, however, given little attention in other societies, many of which prefer to consider the 'work-readiness' of graduates as a means of guaranteeing economic competitiveness in an increasingly global market-place (Little, 2003).

Whilst some definitions of employability focus on graduates' abilities to synthesise personal and academic skills (Pierce, 2002: Knight & Yorke, 2004), nearly two-thirds of all graduate vacancies are open to graduates from any discipline with the type of skills required dependent upon the role to be carried out within a particular organisation (Raybould & Sheard: 2005).

In the UK graduate employability is often associated with graduate employment and measured as an educational outcome under the auspices of 'first destination' statistics; these statistics show the percentage of graduates in employment six months after graduation (Harvey et al: 2002). Whilst statistical league tables have become part of everyday life in Higher Education, it is difficult to see how they relate to the work-based requirements of employers. One study which did, however, aim to conceptualise and assess graduate employability was undertaken by Smith et al (2000), who developed a method of measuring graduate employment outcomes based on cohorts of UK students since 1992.

The performance measures developed and utilised by Smith et al revealed that at an individual level, the probability of unemployment or inactivity six months after graduation is influenced strongly by the individual's class of degree, subject studied, prior qualifications and social class background (2000). It would seem, therefore, that in addition to the quality of degree and level of transferable skills possessed by graduates, other factors come into play when determining employability. Such transferable key skills and competencies, which are identified in the literature, may be summarised as follows:
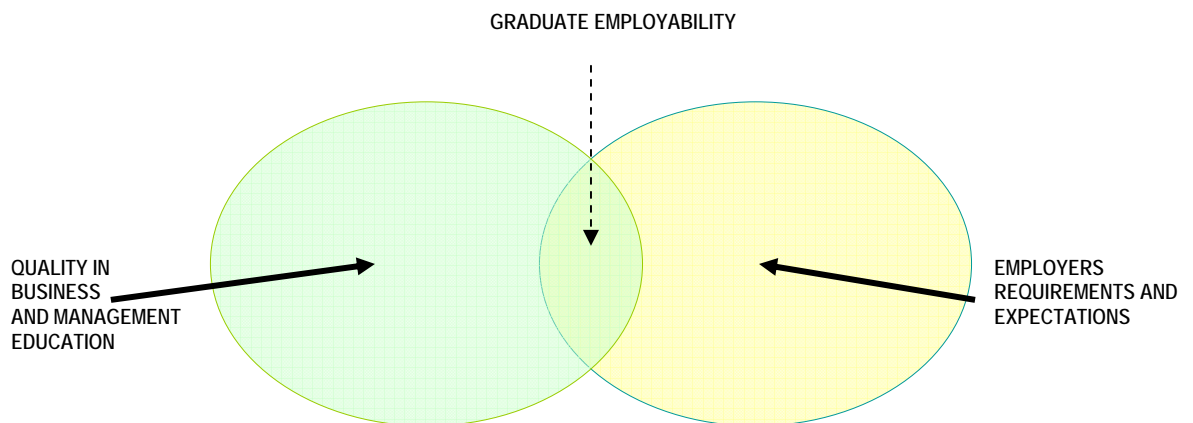
- o Professionalism:

- o Reliability:

- o Ability to cope with uncertainty:

- o Ability to work under pressure:

- o Ability to plan and think strategically:

- o Ability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking:

- o Good written and verbal communication skills:

- o Information and Communication Technology skills:

- o Creativity and self-confidence:

- o Good self-management and time-management skills:

- o Willingness to learn and accept responsibility.

> *Adapted from:* McLarty (1998), Tucker et al (2000), Nabi (2003), Elias & Purcell (2004), Raybould & Sheard (2005).

Conceptual Framework

During the course of the literature review, it became apparent that previous academic studies have not conceptualized an empirically grounded link between quality in undergraduate business education to graduate employment and employability. Thus, prior to embarking on the second phase of the Project, a 'conceptual framework' depicting how quality, education and employment may be conceptualised was developed. This framework is shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: The Relationship Between Quality in Undergraduate Business Education and Employment

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

QUALITY IN
BUSINESS
AND MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION

EMPLOYERS
REQUIREMENTS AND
EXPECTATIONS

Andrews & Higson (2006)

Research Aims:

Figure 1 conceptualises the 'possible' relationship between the quality of business undergraduate education and employers' expectations and requirements. It suggests that *graduate employability* provides a link between education and employment. A lack of previous empirically grounded study in this area meant that, at the beginning of the Project, it was not possible to draw any definitive conclusions linking the *quality* of business and management education to employment. Thus, the overarching aim of the Project was to investigate whether *graduates' and employers' perceptions of the **quality** of business undergraduate education is linked to their perceptions of graduate employment and employability*.

In addition to the above research aim the Project set out to:

1. Investigate graduates' perceptions of their experiences of making the transition from education to employment.

2. Identify and conceptualize key **Employability Competencies** required by employers of business graduates.

3. Identify the extent to which **business knowledge and skills** acquired by business graduates during a period of study at undergraduate level are **used** in employment.

4. Identify the extent to which key **Employability Competencies** are acquired by business graduates during study at undergraduate level are being **used** in employment.

Phase 2: Exploratory Study

The first stage of the exploratory study was to formulate two separate interview-guides (one for graduates and one for employers). Grounded in themes and issues identified during the literature review, the interview-guides consisted of open-ended, qualitative research questions. This approach was particularly useful because it provided empirically grounded research tools necessary for individual interviewers within each country to explore fully the relevant issues, whilst giving the participants the freedom and opportunity to discuss matters they felt important. Where necessary, the interview recordings were translated into English. Following this they were transcribed and analysed utilising grounded-theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The exploratory study interviews focused on three indicative questions – each one linking business and management studies to graduate employability. The three questions were:

1. Why do students choose to study business at undergraduate level?

2. What skills and competencies do business graduates lack?

3. Which particular skills and competencies are valuable in assisting graduates make a successful transition to employment?

During the course of the exploratory study analysis remarkable similarities in graduate and employer perspectives were identified across all four countries included in the Project.

A summary of these perspectives is given in Figures 2 and 3 overleaf (pages 18 and 19).

Figure 2: Business and Management Higher & Vocational Education: Indicative Links to Employability.

Indicative Questions	Business & Management Education & Graduate Employability
Why do students choose to study business and management at undergraduate level?	Graduates' motivations for choosing to study business or business related subjects at a higher level were remarkably similar to employers' reasons for employing business and management graduates: - A business qualification in itself can enhance employability. - The design, structure and content of business programmes provides an in-depth 'grounding' for employment, equipping graduates with core business related and other, softer interpersonal, skills. - Graduates are able to make immediate use of many of the skills and competencies acquired in education.
What skills and competencies do business and management graduates lack?	- Employers in Austria, Romania and Slovenia were particular concerned that many graduates lack business acumen and the ability to 'see the bigger picture'. - Graduates in all four countries identified verbal presentation skills as being an area in which they experienced most difficulties.

In addition to providing empirical data addressing the two questions depicted in the above table, the most significant outcome to emerge out of the exploratory study analysis was the identification and conceptualisation of eight generic key 'softer' competencies. These key competencies, which from this point are termed *Employability Competencies,* were defined and framed for the purposes of the Project using the emergent empirical study data. Figure 3, overleaf, depicts the conceptualisation of the Competencies used throughout the Project.

Figure 3: Key Employability Competencies:

	Competencies	Definition
1	**Communication Skills**	The ability to communicate clearly and concisely, using a range of verbal and written methods)
2	**Team-working and Relationship Building Abilities**	The ability to work in teams and to utilise appropriate interpersonal skills to build relationships with colleagues, team members and external stakeholders
3	**Self and Time Management**	The ability to organise oneself, one's time and one's schedule effectively in any given work-related situation.
4	**Ability to See the 'Bigger Picture'**	The ability to see how things are interconnected and to approach work-related issues in a strategic and innovative manner.
5	**Influencing and Persuading Abilities**	The ability to communicate at all levels using influencing techniques and negotiation skills to positively influence others.
6	**Problems Solving Abilities**	The ability to analyse problems and situations in a critical and logical manner and to apply workable and logical solutions to such problems.
7	**Leadership Abilities**	The ability to lead a team whilst taking responsibility for a task, giving direction, providing structure and assigning responsibility to others.
8	**Presentation Skills**	The ability to prepare and deliver effective presentations to different audiences in a wide-range of circumstances.

In addition to identifying similarities in graduate and employer perspectives regarding employability skills and abilities, the exploratory study analysis also prompted the identification of five core discipline-focused business knowledge and skills taught (at undergraduate level) in all six of the business schools included within the study: Accounting; Economics: Human Resources: Marketing: and Production/Operations Management. Other discipline-focused business knowledge taught by the partner institutions at various levels included: law; sociology of business; psychology; ICT; languages; and strategy (this list is not exhaustive).

Phase III: The Study: Quantitative Survey; Development & Administration

The third phase of the Project aimed to encapsulate graduate and employer perspectives of the value of the skills and competencies identified in the pre-field and exploratory phases of the study to graduate employment and employability. Based upon discipline-focused knowledge and skills and incorporating the Employability Competencies, two separate questionnaires were formulated; one for employers and one for graduates. A pilot study was conducted in all four countries, after which the questionnaires were refined and administered to recent graduates and graduate employers. The questionnaires aimed to:

1. Explore business graduate perceptions of the quality of their educational experiences.

2. Explore employer satisfaction of business and management undergraduate study programmes.

3. Measure employer perspectives of graduates' core discipline-specific business knowledge and skills.

4. Identify graduate perspectives of the degree to which *Employability Competencies* are taught at undergraduate level.

5. Test the extent to which core discipline-focused knowledge and skills acquired in business and management study programmes were used by graduates in the course of their employment.

6. Test the extent to which the *Employability Competencies* acquired in business and management study programmes were used by graduates in the course of their employment.

7. Measure the extent to which discipline-focused skills and abilities were considered by graduates and employers to be of value for graduate career advancement within their current or future workplace.

8. Measure the extent to which *Employability Competencies* were considered by graduates and employers to be valuable for graduate career advancement within their current or future workplace.

9. Determine graduate and employer opinions of how proficient graduates were in utilising core discipline-focused knowledge and skills.

10. Determine graduate and employer opinions of how proficient graduates were in utilising Employability Competencies.

A total of 8000 questionnaires were administered; 4000 to employers and 4000 to graduates.

Issues of Validity & Reliability

Issues of validity and reliability were dealt with in each country by strict adherence to the research protocol. Each partner utilised the same methodological tools whilst developing methodological strategies appropriate to each country's culture and political environment.

Ethical Issues

Early on in the Project it became apparent that ethical difficulties might be experienced should the study attempt to capture the views of graduates and their supervisors or employers. During the exploratory phase, the graduates made it clear that they felt uncomfortable at being involved in a study in which their supervisor or employers were also involved. It was, therefore, decided to separate the two different groups and to conduct two simultaneous, but totally separate, surveys. Questionnaires were sent to graduates from each institution involved in the Project. Employers were identified using national data-bases and questionnaires sent to Human Resource Departments and Recruitment Officers. Thus, whilst the questionnaires were sent to graduates and employers of graduates, it was not possible to positively-link the two sets of questionnaires.

Phase IV: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings.

Having administered the two questionnaires, the next stage of the Project consisted of a statistical analysis. This report gives a **snapshot** of the study findings, a more detailed report may be found on the Project website **(http://mislem.styriatec.com/).**
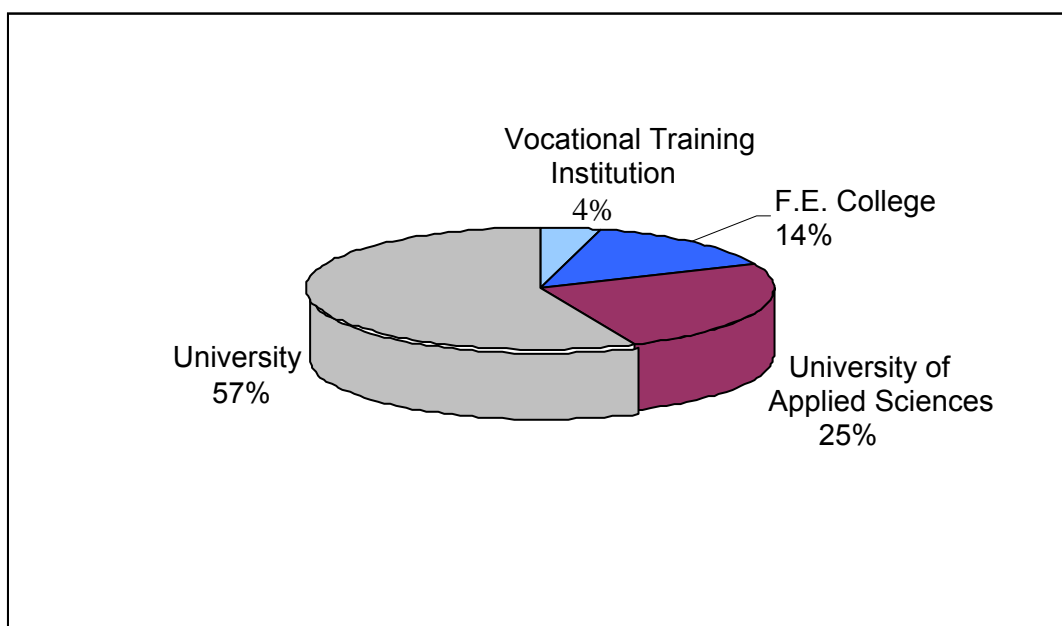
The survey response rate was mixed; 304 questionnaires were received from employers (a response rate of 7.6%), and 596 questionnaire received from graduates (a response rate of 14.9%).

Study Participants' Demographic Details

Most of the graduate respondents were female, whilst most of the employer respondents were male. The majority of graduates were aged between 21 and 30 years of age (66% of the graduate sample).

The graduate respondents attended one of four different types of educational institution: University; University of Applied Sciences (Fachoschulen/Polytechnic); Further Educational College; and Vocational Training Institution. Figure 4 shows the percentages of graduate respondents from each type of institution.
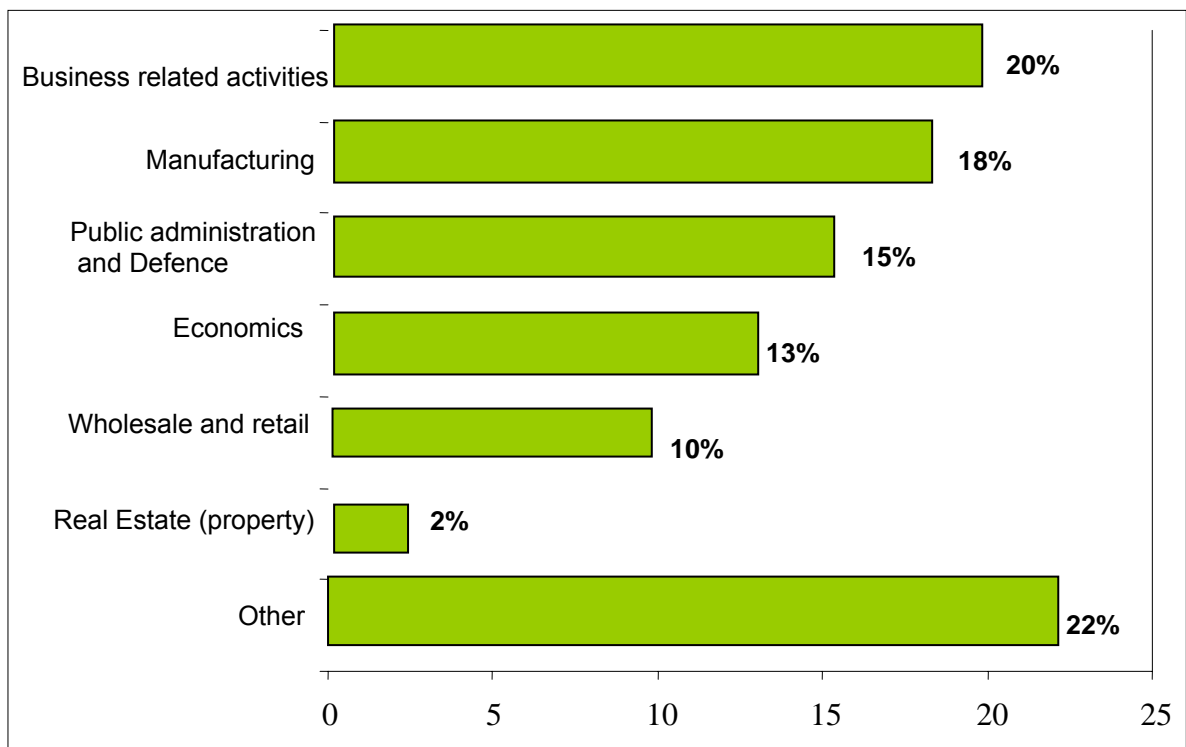
Figure 4: Type of Educational Institution Attended (%)

The above chart shows that three-quarters of the graduate respondents graduated from Higher Education with the remainder graduating from Further Education or Vocational Training.
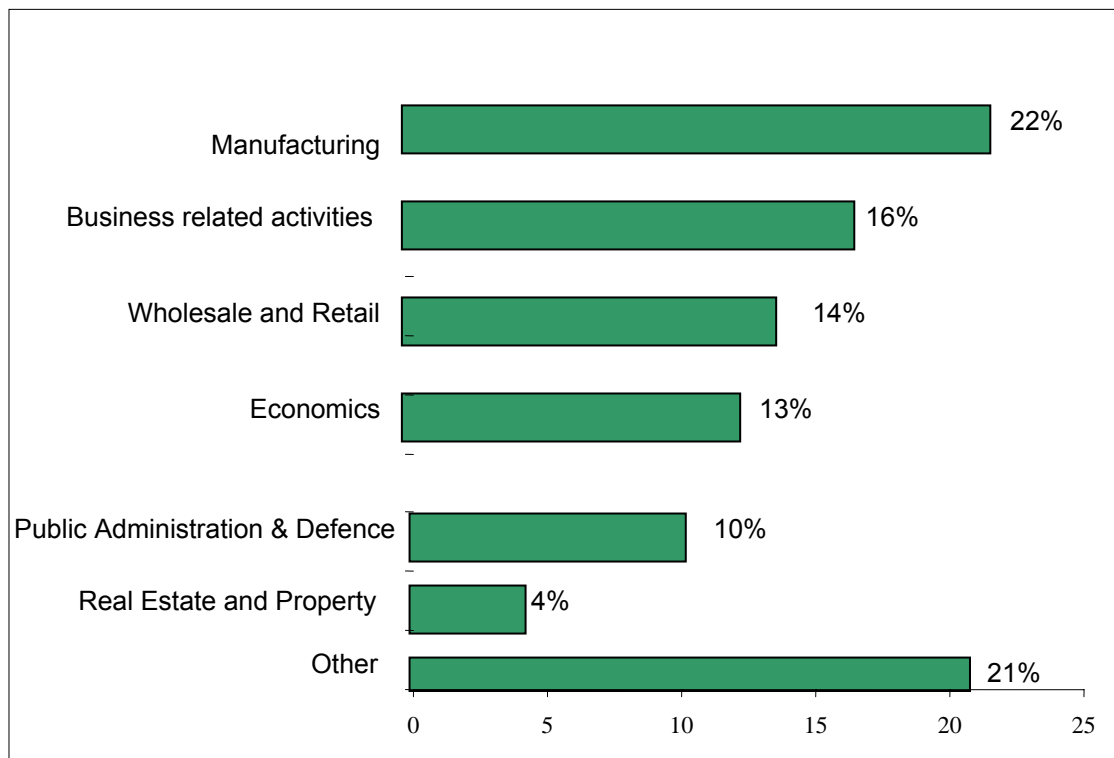
The graduates were employed across a wide-range of the economy. For the purposes of the analysis, six different areas were identified: Business: Manufacturing: Public Administration and Defence: Economics: Wholesale and Retail: Economics: Real Estate and Property. Figure 5 shows the areas of the economy in which the graduates were employed.

Figure 5: Area of Economy in Which Graduates Employed (%)

A similar analysis was conducted of the areas of the economy in which the employers originated. The results of this analysis are given overleaf in Figure 6.

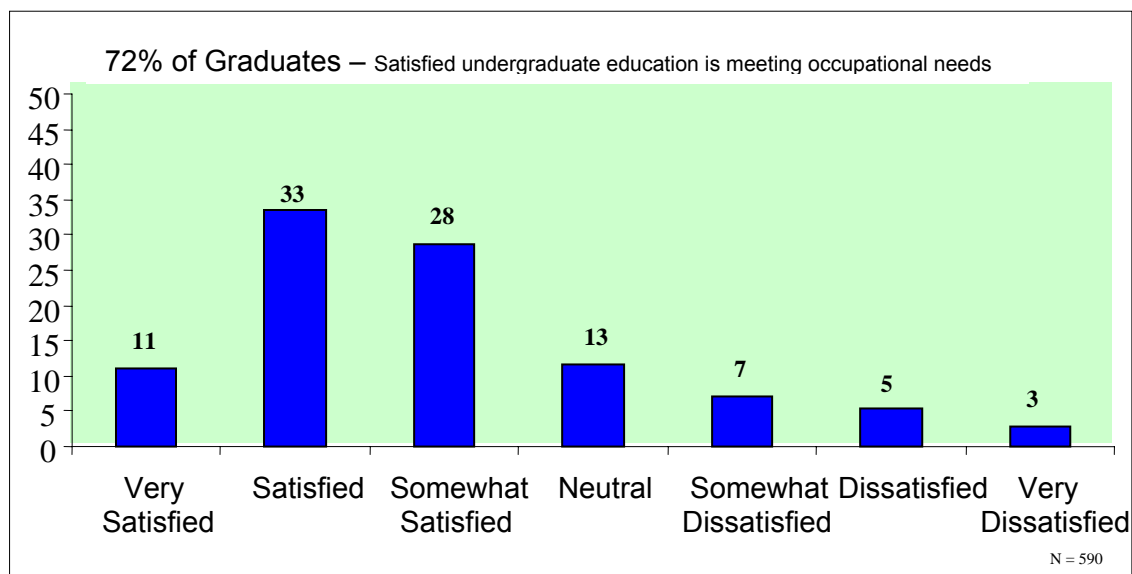**Figure 6: Area of Economy in which the Employers were Engaged. (%)**

Business and Management Undergraduate Education: Quality, Relevance and Value.

Whilst both graduates and employers indicated that they believed business and management education to be of a high quality, the complexities of graduate employability identified during the exploratory stages of the Project, meant that **it was not possible (from the study findings) to provide a positive correlation between perceptions of quality in business and management undergraduate education and graduate employability** (see page 15). This is not, however, necessarily a weakness. By conceptualising employability in terms of eight key generic competencies, this Project has shown how business education can contribute to both graduate employability and to the quality of the labour market. Furthermore, quality in education is dealt with later in this Manual in the formulation of a set of 'Meta-Indicators', all of which incorporate reflexive and reflective learning.
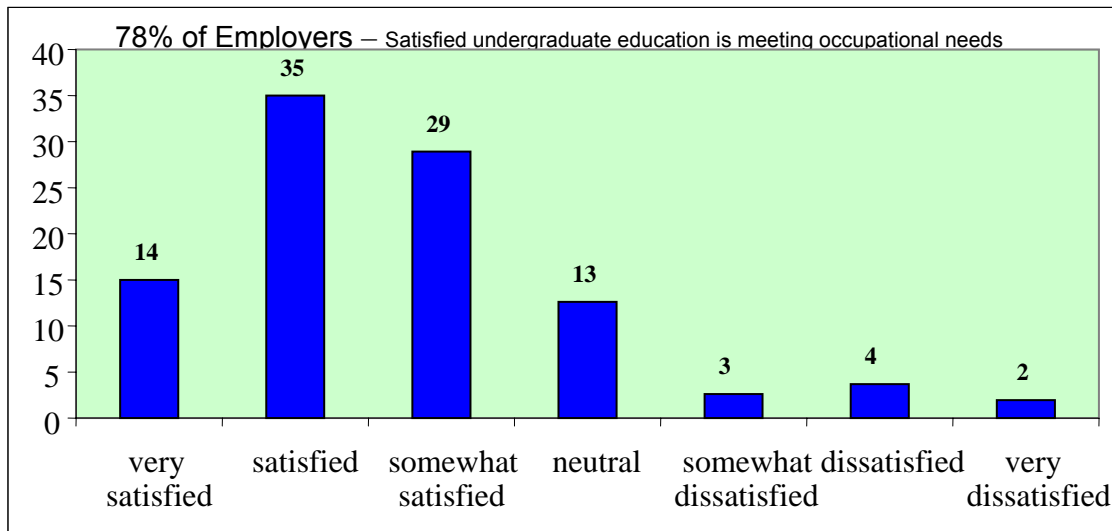
In order to determine the relevance of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in business and management undergraduate education one of the questions focused upon how satisfied the graduate respondents were that the education received was suitable for their occupational needs. Figure 7 reveals that 72% of the graduates indicated that they were satisfied (in different degrees) that their business education had been taught at a suitable level for their occupational needs.

Figure 7: Graduate Satisfaction with Business and Management Education in Relation to Meeting Occupational Needs.

Having ascertained that the majority of graduates were satisfied that their business and management studies programme had been taught at a suitable level for their occupation needs, it was necessary to determine employer perspectives. Figure 8, overleaf, shows that like the majority of graduates, 78% of employers were also satisfied (at different levels) that the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in education were suitable to meet the occupational needs of their business-graduate employees.

Figure 8: Employer Satisfaction with Business and Management Education in Relation to Meeting Occupational Needs

The Value of Discipline-Specific Skills and Abilities

Graduates and employers were asked to indicate whether they believed discipline-specific skills and knowledge are valuable in assisting graduates make a smooth transition from education to employment. The results are given below in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Percentages of Graduates and Employers Who Felt Discipline Specific Skills Are Valuable in Assisting a Smooth Transition from Education to Employment

Discipline Specific Area	Graduates (%)	Employers (%)
Economics	72	63
Marketing	66	59
Accounting	63	64
Human Relations	58	63
Operations Management	54	54

When considering the experiences of **recent** graduates, the Project findings suggest that graduates feel that Economics skills form the most valuable part of the business graduate portfolio. Employers, however, value Accounting skills the highest. Both employers and graduates place the least value on skills and abilities indicative of Operations Management.

The Value of Generic *'*Employability Competencies'.

Graduates and employers were asked to indicate whether they believed Employability Competencies are valuable in assisting graduates make a smooth transition from education to employment. The results are given below in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Percentages of Graduates and Employers Who Felt Generic Employability Competencies Are <u>Valuable</u> in Assisting a Smooth Transition from Education to Employment.

Competency	Graduates (%)	Employers (%)
Communication skills	94	96
Team-working and Relationship Building Skills	92	85
Self and Time Management Skills	92	82
Ability to see the Bigger Picture	88	74
Influencing and Persuading Abilities	86	78
Problem-Solving Abilities.	86	75
Leadership Abilities	75	60
Presentation Skills	74	88

The above table suggests that the majority of graduates and employers believe that all of the Employability Competencies are important facets of the graduate portfolio. Of most important in assisting graduates make a smooth transition from education to employment are written and verbal communication skills.

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Discipline-Specific Knowledge – v – Employability Competencies:

Whilst both graduates and employers agreed that discipline-specific skills and competencies are valuable in assisting a smooth transition from education to employment, less than half of graduates and employers agreed that the business knowledge acquired during their study programme is being **used** in their current employment. Given that undergraduate programmes aim to equip business graduates with sufficient high quality, discipline-specific, business knowledge to last throughout their careers, this is not entirely surprising. In contrast, the majority of graduates and employers agreed that the Employability Competencies are being **used** by graduates in their employment. This suggests that Employability Competencies such as communication and problem-solving abilities are more useful for **recent** graduates than discipline-specific business knowledge. Furthermore, over 80% of graduates and employers agreed that Employability Competencies are relevant for graduate career advancement (as compared with less than 50% of graduates and employers who agreed that discipline-specific knowledge and skills are important career advancement).

Phase V : The Development of 'Meta-Indicators': Teaching, Encouraging and Evaluating Employability Competencies.

The final stage of the Project comprised the development of a set of 'Meta-Indicators'. These Indicators, which build on the Employability Competencies, reflect key stages of undergraduate development and represent generic skills and abilities required by employers of graduates. In this respect the Competencies are an essential part of the graduate portfolio, integral to a successful transition from education to work. The Indicators have been conceptualised in such a way so as to make the Competencies applicable across a wide spectrum of undergraduate programmes (rather than focusing only on business and management graduates). Each Indicator corresponds to a different Employability Competency, the key features of which are conceptualised in three progressive stages; primary, secondary and advanced. It is expected that as students proceed through their undergraduate careers, their discipline-specific knowledge will develop along with their Employability Competencies. In this respect the Competencies will comprise an important feature of individual student Personal Development Profiles.

Throughout their undergraduate studies students should be encouraged to use the Competencies to guide and shape their own development; setting and evaluating their own *employability* targets and goals. The criterion depicted within each of the Meta-Indicators rely upon a certain amount of reflection and reflexivity in order to guarantee high quality learning experiences and individual development. The *additional* criterion relate to work-based learning (formal work-placements and internships) and extra-curricula activities (volunteering, mentoring, sports and other activities reflecting high levels of social capital). Whilst it is acknowledged that not all students participate in work-based learning or extra-curricula activities, this Project has shown how such activities greatly enhance employability. Thus, it is suggested that all students should be encouraged, wherever possible, to undertake a formal work-placement or internship; or, at the very least to get involved in *specific* extra-curricula activities (those which enhance employability such as mentoring, volunteering, peer representation and sports leadership or administration).

Whilst each Indicator is distinctive, they should be considered concurrently with each other. By working through each stage of the Employability Competencies students will promote and enhance their own employability.

It should be noted that the development of discipline-specific knowledge and skills is integral to the development of the Meta-Indicators and Employability Competencies. It is anticipated that by the time students reach the 'advanced' stage of the Employability Competencies, they will be able to integrate discipline-specific knowledge critically and analytically with each Competency. This will be manifest by 'high' levels of employability in which graduates are able to apply core discipline-specific knowledge and skills in any given work-related situation.

Competency 1: Communication Skills

The ability to communicate clearly and concisely using a range of verbal and written methods.

The importance of good, all round, communication skills and abilities was emphasised throughout the Project by both employers and graduates. One of the main areas of weakness identified early-on in the Project reflected graduate behaviour within the work environment. Some employers felt graduates were lacking the basic 'etiquette' normally expected whilst at work. For example, many employers noted that some graduates are unaware of the need to make one's presence known when first starting work in the morning (greeting one's colleagues). Other generic communication difficulties reflected casualness in electronic communications (e-mail and telephone conversations). Communication skills may be developed and enhanced across the curricula, but particularly: in coursework and assignments (essay and report writing practices); in the process of communicating with faculty staff (notably e-mail communications); and during experiences of work-based learning.

Three different levels of communication skills and abilities may be conceptualised:

Communication Skills and Abilities:

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Communication Skills and Abilities.	- *Adherence to university guidelines in coursework and assignment writing style and format.* - *Evidence of awareness of different styles of written and verbal communication – indicating which styles are appropriate within different settings.* - *Adoption of a descriptive and detailed writing style that is both clear and concise.* - *Awareness of own difficulties. Able to seek help and advice where necessary.* - *Reflection upon one's own essay and report writing skills identifying areas of strength and weakness.* **Additional Criterion** - *Involvement in extra-curricula activities requiring communication skills and abilities (mentoring, volunteering, peer representation).*
Secondary Competencies: Communication Skills and Abilities.	- *Adherence to university guidelines in coursework and assignment writing style and format with particular attention paid to correct referencing skills.* - *Utilisation of different styles of written communication skills during study (formal report writing, essay writing, informal note-taking, e-mail composition)* - *Adoption of a critical writing style that is both rigorous and informative whilst being appropriate for the discipline in which the writing is grounded.* - *Adoption of a reflexive approach to learning, reflecting upon communication skills utilised during coursework and identifying how improvements may be made.* **Additional Criterion** - *Development of own communication skills through involvement in extra-curricula activities.* - *Assisting others develop communication skills through involvement in extra-curricula activities.*
Advanced Competencies: Communication Skills and Abilities.	- *Adherence to university guidelines in coursework and assignment writing style and format with emphasis on clarity, conciseness, context and content.* - *Adoption of a critical and analytical writing style showing depth of thought and wide understanding of subject matter.* - *Adoption of a reflexive and reflective approach to own communication skills incorporating a critical analysis of previous coursework and articulation of how skills may be developed in future.* - *Utilisation of discipline specific knowledge to enhance and advance writing skills.* - *Adoption of high levels of appropriate discipline-specific style of writing.* - *Awareness of different levels of communication skills.* - *Adoption of a sensitive approach to others' learning and communication skills and abilities offering advice and guidance were appropriate.* **Additional Criterion** - *Development of advanced communication skills during a period of work-based learning with particular emphasis on work-related skills and abilities (report writing, verbal communication, electronic communications).* - *Development of communication skills during extra-curricula activities by using written and verbal abilities to enhance others' experiences (during volunteering, sports administration or mentoring activities).*

Competency 2: Teamwork and relationship building.

The ability to work in teams and to utilise appropriate interpersonal skills to build relationships with colleagues, team member and external stakeholders.

The Project findings highlight the value of teamwork and relationship building, both of which form an important part of the overall graduate portfolio. Both graduates and employers identified 'working in teams' as one of the key features of graduate employment. The nature of such teams varies greatly, from small office-based groups of colleagues who meet on a daily basis, to large international teams working together electronically and virtually. Many graduates are expected to work cross-culturally and in a number of teams concurrently. Teaching and learning strategies which may be utilised to advance student team-working and relationship skills include: group and project work; tutorials; classroom 'team' discussions and debates; group focused case-studies; and work-based learning.

Three different levels of competency are proposed in order to develop and enhance student abilities in this area:

Team-working and Relationship Building Abilities.

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Team-working and relationship building abilities.	- *Active participation in group-work and projects.* - *Use of team-working skills to build relationships with immediate peers during group and project work.* - *Reflection upon own use of team-working and relationship building skills in relation to participation in group and team activities – identifying own strengths and weaknesses.* **Additional Criterion** - *Active participation in extra-curricula activities requiring a level of teamwork and/ or relationship building (sports, volunteering, mentoring)* - *Use of team-working skills for the promotion of 'team' cohesion and success during extra curricula activities.*
Secondary Competencies: Team-working and relationship building abilities.	- *Active participation in group-work and projects taking account of the needs and abilities of other team members.* - *Use of relationship building skills for the promotion of group and class cohesion during classroom discussions and debates.* - *Use of team-working skills for the promotion of own and others learning during specific 'real-life' learning activities (ie. The Business Game).* - *Use of relationship skills for the promotion of group cohesion and working during 'real-life' learning activities (ie. Case-Studies).* - *Reflection upon own team-working and relationship building skills identifying how such skills may be developed and enhanced.*

Secondary Competencies: Team-working and relationship building abilities.	**Additional Criterion** - *Use of team-working and influencing skills for the promotion of extra-curricula activities and develop others skills and abilities.*
Advanced Competencies: Team-working and relationship building abilities.	- *Active participation in group-work and projects using team-working and relationship building skills for the promotion of group cohesion whilst taking account of other group members' perspectives and abilities.* - *Active use of team-working and relationship building skills to influence peers during group and project work.* - *During project and group work utilisation of discipline-specific skills and knowledge to promote team-working.* - *Utilisation of relationship building skills to develop others' and own discipline specific knowledge and abilities. .* - *Adoption of a reflective and reflexive approach to learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses in one's own team-working and relationship building skills, and showing evidence of improvements in approach.* **Additional Criterion** - *During a period of work-based learning, utilisation of team-working and relationship building skills for the promotion of team cohesion and advance employment goals.* - *During extra-curricula activities, utilisation of team-working and relationship building skills for the promotion of team cohesion and advance team goals.*

Competency 3: Self and Time Management.

The ability to organise oneself, one's time and one's schedule effectively in any given work-related situation.

Good self and time management was identified early in the Project as being one area employers believe to be of particular importance. One of the key issues identified during the study related to graduate difficulties in making the transition from what many perceived to be a relatively informal educational environment, to a more rigorous and formal work regime. Thus, a key component of the graduate portfolio, vital in assisting individuals 'fit' into the work environment, is reflected in high levels of self and time management skills. Such skills indicate a level of maturity and independence and can be promoted during undergraduate education by: adherence to university regulations and guidelines relating to coursework and assignment deadlines; good time-keeping in attending lectures and tutorials; and the use of independent study programmes and initiatives.

Time and management skills may be conceptualised at three different levels:

Time and Management Skills

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Time and Management Skills.	- *Adherence to university guidelines in coursework and assignment submission.* - *Good time keeping in attending lectures and tutorials.* - *Reflection upon one's own time and management skills, identifying strengths and weaknesses.* **Additional Criterion** - *Involvement in extra-curricula activities requiring a high degree of self time and management skills (mentoring, volunteering, peer representation).*
Secondary Competencies: Time and Management Skills.	- *Adherence to university guidelines in coursework and assignment submission.* - *Time management skills evident in management of study and maintenance of 'work-study-home' life balance.* - *Initial adoption of a reflective and reflexive approach to self and time management – identifying areas where improvements may be made.* **Additional Criterion** - *Ability to manage own time and self during extra-curricula activities and to use such skills to maximise time efficiently.*
Advanced Competencies: Time and Management Skills.	- *Maintenance of individual study regime evident through adherence to university guidelines in respect of coursework submission, exam timetables and work-study-home balance.* - *Utilisation of high levels of reflexivity and reflection to manage time and self efficiently and effectively.* - *Demonstration of flexibility and a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances.* **Additional Criterion** - *Provide evidence of ability to manage own time and self during a period of work-based learning.*

Competency 4: The Ability to See the Bigger Picture.

The ability to see how things are interconnected and to approach work-related issues in a strategic and innovative manner.

One of the key features of 'graduateness' identified during the Project related to individual graduate's ability to see the 'bigger picture'. Such abilities reflect student progression across the undergraduate curricula and tend to be developed gradually as students' integrate discipline-specific knowledge and skills with employability competencies and other life experiences. Various learning and teaching strategies may be utilised to promote student competency in this area including: an emphasis on 'contextual' learning strategies; case-study learning techniques; critical and analytical essay writing; 'real-life' focused assignments and projects; and work-based learning.

Three different levels of problem-solving abilities are conceptualised in order to promote problem solving at an undergraduate level:

Ability to See the Bigger Picture:

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Ability to See the Bigger Picture.	- *Demonstration of an awareness of wider background to discipline specific issues and problems.* - *Integration of wider context into written assignments and verbal presentations.* - *Reflection upon 'bigger picture' when considering own learning styles and techniques.* **Additional Criterion** - *Demonstration of an awareness of wider background issues when involved in extra curricula activities (mentoring, volunteering, peer representation).*
Secondary Competencies: Ability to See the Bigger Picture.	- *Openly discuss wider background issues during classroom discussions and debates. .* - *Provide written evidence of contextual understanding when considering discipline specific issues and problems.* - *Breakdown discipline-specific issues and problems into 'component' parts and explain how such issues or problems are linked.* - *Initial adoption of a reflexive approach to own learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses and proposing solutions has to how individual learning may be improved or developed.* **Additional Criterion** - *Demonstration of an awareness of wider background issues whilst undertaking extra-curricula activities.* - *Discussion of how such 'wider' issues may be linked.*
Advanced Competencies: Ability to See the Bigger Picture.	- *Adoption of an empirical and contextual writing style that is evidence based.* - *Provide written evidence of contextual knowledge and use such knowledge to support and enhance discipline specific learning and problem-solving.* - *During verbal presentations of discipline-specific issues, discuss 'bigger picture'; providing both content and context whilst answering questions from peers and teachers.* - *Demonstration of a reflexive and reflective approach to own and others learning. Show how, by adopting a reflexive approach, individual learning has been developed and enhanced.* - *Demonstration of a reflexive and reflective approach to others learning. Consider how peers' individual learning strategies might be developed and enhanced.* **Additional Criterion** - *During extra-curricula activities critically analyse unsolved problems by considering the 'bigger picture' and identifying how different facets of the problems may be linked. .* - *Evaluation of own learning strategies in light of extra-curricula based problem.* - *During a period of work-based learning, provide a demonstration of wider understanding of the 'bigger picture' by describing contextual, background issues and difficulties.* - *Provide a verbal description of how such issues may be interconnected and propose solutions where appropriate.*

Competency 5: Influencing and Persuading Abilities

The ability to communicate at all levels using influencing techniques and negotiating skills to influence positively others.

The Project findings highlight the importance of influencing and persuading abilities within the overall graduate portfolio. Both graduates and employers identified influencing and persuading abilities as being integral to graduate employment – particularly in work situations where graduates may be dealing with older or more experienced colleagues. Teaching and learning strategies which may be utilised to advance student competency in this area include: group work; tutorials; classroom discussions and debates; real-life learning techniques; and work-based learning.

Three different levels of competency are proposed in order to develop and enhance student abilities in this area.

Influencing & Persuading Abilities:

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Influencing and Persuading Abilities.	- *Participation in group-work and projects.* - *Use of communication skills to influence immediate peers during group and project work.* - *Reflection upon own use of communication skills in relation to studying – identifying own strengths and weaknesses.* **Additional Criterion** - *Participation in extra-curricula activities (sports, volunteering, mentoring)* - *Use of communication skills to influence peers during extra curricula activities.*
Secondary Competencies: Influencing and Persuading Abilities.	- *Active participation in group-work and projects adopting a central role where appropriate.* - *Demonstration of ability to use influencing and persuading skills to influence peers during classroom discussions and debates.* - *Demonstration of ability to use persuading skills to put across a point of view, or argue a point, in a logical and reasoned manner during classroom discussions and debates.* - *Demonstration of persuading skills to promote group cohesion and working during 'real-life' learning activities (ie. Business Game).* - *Reflection upon own success in persuading others and promoting group cohesion.* - *Ability to consider how one's own persuading and influencing skills could be enhanced.* **Additional Criterion** - *Demonstration of use of influencing and persuading skills during extra-curricula activities to promote group/ team cohesion and success*

Advanced Competencies: Influencing and Persuading Abilities.	- *Active participation in group-work and projects adopting a lead role where necessary to enhance and promote group cohesion.* - *Adoption of influencing and persuading skills to influence peers and teachers during classroom discussions and debates.* - *Adoption of discipline-specific skills and knowledge to support own perspectives and influence others' points of view during classroom debates and discussion* - *Adoption of a reflective and reflexive approach to learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses in one's own influencing and persuading skills; showing evidence of improvements in approach.* **Additional Criterion** - *Demonstration of ability to use communication skills to influence co-workers, subordinates and supervisors during a period of work-based learning.* - *Demonstration of ability to use communication skills to influence peers/ colleagues during extra-curricula activities.*

Competency 6: Problem Solving Abilities.

The ability to analyse problems and situations in a critical and logical manner and to apply workable and logical solutions to such problems.

Problem-solving abilities represented one of the key features of 'graduateness' identified during the Project. Such abilities reflect student development and progress throughout the curricula and are usually acquired and developed gradually, as students' progress through their undergraduate careers. Numerous learning and teaching strategies may be utilised to promote problem-solving abilities including: case-study learning techniques; critical essay writing; problem-based assignments and projects; and work-based learning.

Three different levels of problem-solving abilities are conceptualised in order to promote problem solving at an undergraduate level:

Problem-Solving Abilities:

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Problem Solving Abilities	- *Participation in classroom centred problem-solving activities.* - *Adoption of problem-solving strategies whilst settling into university life (familiarising self with campus and cohort etc).* - *Reflection upon own problem-solving abilities – identifying different strategies and approaches.* **Additional Criterion** - *Involvement in extra-curricula activities requiring a basic level of problem-solving abilities.* - *Utilisation of problem-solving skills during extra-curricula activities.*

Secondary Competencies: Problem Solving Abilities	- *Active involvement in classroom centred problem-solving activities – proposing workable and logical solutions.* - *Adoption of problem-solving skills during classroom discussions and debates.* - *Demonstration of ability to breakdown problems into 'component' parts and offer solutions.* - *Adoption of problem-solving skills to put across a point of view, or argue a point, in a logical and reasoned manner during classroom discussions and debates.* - *Initial adoption of a reflexive approach to problem solving, considering how previous solutions might be improved or developed.* **Additional Criterion** - *Demonstration of ability to identify problems and propose solutions to peers and/ or co-workers, subordinates or supervisors during extra-curricula activities.*
Advanced Competencies: Problem-Solving Abilities.	- *During written assignments, classroom based activities or work-based learning, adoption of problem-solving abilities and in doing so provide demonstration of ability to: identify and classify problems; develop workable and logical solutions; put solutions into practice; evaluate and re-conceptualise solutions and problems. .* - *During written assignments, classroom based activities or work-based learning, utilisation of discipline-specific skills and knowledge to identify problems, formulate, develop and evaluate solutions.* - *Adoption of a reflexive and reflective approach to problem-solving. Consider how own individual problem-solving strategies might be developed and enhanced.* - *Adoption of a reflexive and reflective approach to problem-solving. Consider how peers' problem-solving strategies might be developed and enhanced.* **Additional Criterion** - *During extra-curricula activities critically demonstration of ability to analyse unsolved problems by providing and working through a number of workable and logical options and solutions.* - *Adoption of a reflexive and reflective approach to problem-solving in light of extra-curricula based problem.* - *During a period of work-based learning, utilisation of problem-solving skills and abilities to critically analyse unsolved work-related problems; providing workable, innovative and relevant solutions to such problems.* - *Reflection upon own problem-solving abilities in light of work-based problems – indicating what different strategies might be adopted to deal with future difficulties.*

Competency 7: Leadership Abilities:

The ability to lead a team whilst taking responsibility for a task, giving direction, providing structure and assigning responsibility to others.

Early on in the Project it became evident that employers conceptualise leadership abilities differently to managerial skills. Whilst recent graduates are not expected to be 'ready-made' managers, they are expected to possess leadership abilities. Such leadership abilities may be developed: during periods of work-based learning; whilst

participating in 'real-life' learning experiences such as a Business-Game; during group work and projects or in extra-curricula activities.

The following three levels of competency are proposed in order to develop and enhance student abilities in this area.

Leadership Abilities:

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Leadership Abilities.	- *Demonstration of early signs of leadership by taking a central role in group-discussion and group-work.* - *Demonstration of an awareness of different learning styles appropriate for self and others.* - *Initial reflection upon own leadership abilities – showing an awareness of own strengths and weaknesses.* **Additional Criterion** - *Adoption of an active role in extra-curricula activities (sports, volunteering, committee membership)..*
Secondary Competencies: Leadership Abilities.	- *Adoption of a leadership role during 'real-life' learning activities providing guidance and advice to peers.* - *Demonstration of ability to takes account of peers' diverse needs and abilities whilst working in groups.* - *Adoption of a reflexive approach to own and others learning needs.* **Additional Criterion** - *Adoption of a leadership role during extra-curricula activities* - *Adoption of university-focused responsibilities in addition to those usually associated with undergraduate education (peer representation and mentoring).*
Advanced Competencies: Leadership Abilities.	- *Adoption of a leadership role, using discipline-specific knowledge to support own perspectives and strategies during classroom 'real-life' learning activities, group or project work* - *In classroom situation, demonstration of ability to give direction and provide structure to peers whilst assigning responsibility to others.* - *Adoption of a leadership role within a given situation, taking overall responsibility for a particular task.* - *Demonstration of an awareness of others different learning styles and competencies.* - *Demonstration of ability to take account of others opinions whilst working in groups – allowing others to take the lead where appropriate.* - *Adoption of a reflexive and reflective approach to learning. Able to discuss how own and others learning may be developed and enhanced by identifying areas for improvement and articulating how any improvements may be made.* **Additional Criterion** - *During a period of work-based learning, utilisation of discipline-focused knowledge to provide logical and grounded advice and guidance to co-workers and subordinates.* - *Utilisation of a reflexive approach to learning by analysing own actions in dealing with critical incidents in a work-based learning situation. .* - *During extra-curricula activities, takes overall responsibility for a task whilst assigning responsibility to others and taking account of others' needs and abilities.*

Competency 8: Presentation Skills.

The ability to prepare and deliver effective presentations to different audiences in a wide-range of circumstances.

The high value placed on verbal presentation skills was evident throughout the Project, identified by both graduates and employers as an area of particular importance. Possibly the area of greatest weakness, many graduates admitted struggling with verbal presentations, making this an area of some concern for employers and graduates alike. Verbal Presentation skills may developed across the curricula, particularly during formal lectures and tutorials where undergraduates should be encouraged to develop and practice making oral presentations in front of peers and teachers.

Presentation skills may be conceptualised at three different levels:

Presentation Skills and Abilities:

Level of Competency	Assessment Criterion
Primary Competencies: Presentation Skills and Abilities.	- *Active participation in classroom discussions and debates.* - *Demonstration of ability to construct an argument and explain issues verbally to small group of peers.* - *Utilisation of basic preparatory skills when constructing a verbal presentation with a particular emphasis on planning and time management.* - *Adoption of a clear and concise verbal communication style that is easy to understand and at an appropriate level.* - *Reflection upon own presentation skills, showing an awareness of individual difficulties with verbal presentations. Seek help and advice where necessary.* - *Demonstration of awareness of different electronic and other 'tools' available to assist and support verbal presentations (powerpoint, acetate slides etc).* **Additional Criterion** - *Involvement in extra-curricula activities requiring verbal presentation skills (mentoring, volunteering, peer representation).*
Secondary Competencies: Presentation Skills and Abilities.	- *Participation in classroom discussions and debates taking a central role in making verbal arguments and leading debates.* - *Utilisation of preparation skills required when constructing a verbal presentation with a particular emphasis on planning, content and time management.* - *Utilisation of different electronic and other tools to support verbal presentations (powerpoint etc)* - *Utilisation of different styles of verbal presentation during classroom presentations (individual and group presentations, use of slideshow to support arguments, informal presentations and debates, formal discussions etc)* - *Adoption of a critical presentation style that is both rigorous and informative.*

Secondary Competencies: Presentation Skills and Abilities.	- *Initial adoption of a reflexive approach to learning, reflecting upon presentation skills utilised during lectures and tutorials, and identifying how improvements may be made.* **Additional Criterion** - *Utilisation of verbal presentation skills through involvement in extra-curricula activities.* - *Demonstration of ability to assist others develop verbal presentation skills through involvement in extra-curricula activities (mentoring, volunteering, administration of sports and other activities).*
Advanced Competencies: Presentation Skills and Abilities.	- *Participation in classroom presentations making individual presentations that are informative, concise and relevant.* - *Utilisation of high levels of preparation skills when preparing verbal presentations; with particular emphasis on planning, content, conciseness, appropriateness, context and time management.* - *Utilisation of advanced use of different electronic and other tools to enhance verbal presentations (powerpoint etc)* - *Utilisation of different strategies when undertaking verbal presentations (class participation, individual and group presentations, use of electronic resources to enhance main issues, informal presentations and debates, formal discussions etc).* - *Utilisation of discipline-specific knowledge to support and enhance verbal presentation skills.* - *Adoption of a critical presentation style that is both rigorous and informative.* - *Adoption of a reflective and reflexive approach to learning, reflecting upon presentation skills utilised during lectures and tutorials and making improvements to own presentation style where necessary.* **Additional Criterion** - *Demonstration of advanced presentation skills during a period of work-based learning with particular emphasis on work-related issues and problems.* - *Utilisation of high level of presentation skills during extra-curricula activities by using verbal presentation skills to enhance others' experiences (during volunteering, sports administration or mentoring activities).*

Employability Competencies: Key Issues

In developing the above set of Meta-Indicators and Employability Competencies certain key issues, common to all of the Competencies, have arisen:

1. Issues of reflection and reflexivity are of paramount importance in the development and enhancement of all of the Employability Competencies and are key to ensuring quality within teaching and learning. Students should, therefore, be encouraged incorporate reflection and reflexivity into their own learning and personal development at all times.

2. Responsibility for promoting graduate employability within a classroom environment rests equally with undergraduate students, lecturers and tutors.

3. In order to promote employability, the eight Meta-Indicators need to be viewed as component parts of a wider employability strategy. The Competencies act together in a synergenic manner to promote and enhance graduate employability.

4. The Employability Competencies should not be viewed as independent of discipline-focused skills and knowledge, but should instead be seen as an integral part of undergraduate education and learning. As students progress through their undergraduate careers, their discipline focused business-knowledge and skills will improve along with their Employability Competencies.

5. The Meta-Indicators and Employability Competencies have been conceptualised and defined in such a way so as to be flexible enough to meet individual student needs whilst fulfilling differing discipline focused requirements and institutional demands and contexts.

The issues raised in this paper have implications for educational policy and practice. Such implications are discussed, in some depth, in the following section.

Issues of Policy & Practice

At the start of the MISLEM Project it was hoped that the research might be able to establish a positive correlation between employer and graduate perceptions of the quality of business undergraduate education and graduate employability. Perhaps not surprisingly, this did not prove possible. The study findings did, however, provide a depth of high quality statistical and qualitative data, the analysis of which has highlighted the value of employer insight into undergraduate education and graduate employability. The following paragraphs discuss five different policy areas relevant to graduate employability:

1. The development of the curricula to incorporate Employability Competencies.

2. The provision of a written record as evidence of students' Employability Competencies.

3. The involvement of employers and graduates in undergraduate teaching and curricula development.

4. The importance of work-based learning.

5. The harmonisation of Employability Competencies across Europe.

Each of these policy issues are now discussed in some depth.

The Development of the Curricula to Incorporate Employability Competencies

In considering the introduction of the Employability Competencies into undergraduate teaching and learning, it is necessary to reflect on how the concept of employability may be introduced into the undergraduate curriculum. One solution would be to introduce *business* employability as a module in itself. Such a module, which could be introduced in addition to the discipline-focused content of the curricula, would enhance greatly graduates' employment prospects. Whilst the introduction of en *employability* module would be of great value to graduates, it is acknowledged that the practicalities of 'fitting' it in around existing timetables might prove impossible.

Thus, the most sensible and practical approach would seem to be to introduce employability into each area of the curriculum. It is acknowledged that many institutions have already made much progress in this area, and are 'producing' highly employable graduates as a result. Bearing this in mind, the Employability Competencies have been developed in such a way that institutions may use them either as a 'starting point', or to develop current practices. It is suggested that students be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and development in this area. By making employability a central part of each module, lecturers could encourage students to use their discipline-focused knowledge and skills to enhance their own Employability Competencies and employment prospects. This approach would require minimal changes to the curricula

The Provision of a Written Record as Evidence of Students' Employability Competencies

It would appear that the Employability Competencies conceptualised in this Manual are acquired more by 'accident' than by design in many Higher, Further and Vocational Education Institutions. Moreover, across Europe, students graduate with little or no written record or 'evidence' of their employability skills and abilities. Thus, the need to provide undergraduates with written evidence of **all** their achievements is central to the promotion of graduate employability. The eight Employability Competencies identified in this Manual form an integral and important part of the graduate portfolio. In many respects the Competencies are more significant than discipline-focused skills and knowledge in assisting individual students make a successful transition to work. This Manual has proposed a set of 'Meta-Indicators' incorporating the Employability Competencies and suggesting how such Competencies might be evaluated at an individual level.

Several institutions already have in place active learning strategies that encourage students to take responsibility for their own personal development. The European-wide Diploma Supplement requires every institution to provide students with a written record of all their achievements. By providing students with a Personal Development Profile that details Employability Competencies in addition to other achievements, institutions will enhance graduate employability and employment prospects.

Involving Employers and Graduates in Undergraduate Teaching and Curricula Development

In addition to introducing employability into the curricula, one method of enhancing graduate employability is to increase employer involvement in undergraduate teaching and curricula development. This study has drawn attention to the value of considering both employer and graduate perspectives when determining which key skills and abilities graduates require in the workplace. As well as including the views of graduates and employers in curricula development, Business Schools need to invite suitably experienced individuals to act as guest lecturers on the undergraduate curricula. This will raise student awareness and knowledge of the relevance and applicability of classroom-based learning.

The importance of work-based learning

The majority of graduates and employers drew attention to the role played by work-experience in equipping graduates with many of the necessary skills and competencies required in the workplace. Work-based learning in the form of formal work-placements and internships was noted as being particularly valuable. Those graduates whose undergraduate programme had incorporated a period of work-based learning benefited greatly. Formal work-placements and internships enable students to put into practice discipline-focused knowledge and skills, whilst enhancing their employability skills.

The Harmonisation of Employability Competencies Across Europe

The Competencies defined in this Manual reflect the study findings in four EU countries. Similarities in graduate and employer experiences and perspectives in all four countries suggest there is a need for 'harmonisation' of Employability Competencies across the undergraduate curriculum throughout the European Union. Whilst such Competencies may be adapted to suit individual abilities and requirements, there needs to be a single, unified, approach to employability. Such an approach will promote graduate employability on a European scale whilst reducing inequities and inequalities in graduate employment.

Guiding Principles: Final Comments

The MISLEM Project was steered by a set of guiding principles (see pages 8 and 9). These principles reflected the overarching objectives of the Project. The following paragraphs briefly explain how the *aspirational* objectives set out in each of the principles have been achieved.

1. *The need to increase input from employers in order to make the undergraduate curricula more relevant to the needs of the work environment*

Employers were involved, as full team members, from the onset of the MISLEM Project. Each stage of the research process captured employers' views and perspectives. Furthermore, advice was taken from the graduate employment industry in the development and conceptualisation of the Employability Competencies.

2. *The need to develop Employability Indicators for use in Higher, Further and Vocational Education and Training Institutions across Europe*

The Meta-Indicators, incorporating the Employability Competencies, have been developed in such a way so as to be applicable to all European Higher, Further and Vocational Education and Training Institutions – irrespective of current practices in this area.

3. *The desire to develop and introduce innovative approaches to evaluating graduate employability that could be used as a tool to further enhance curriculum development*

The Meta-Indicators represent an innovative approach to evaluating student employability. The Employability Competencies comprise a flexible management 'tool' – the introduction of which will both enhance and enrich curriculum development.

4. ***The desire to promote the exchange of good practice in the quality of undergraduate competencies in different types of European Educational Institutions***

The MISLEM project partnership embodied different facets of the non-compulsory European Educational Sector. A synthesis and analysis of research conducted in each country reflected an exchange of good practice between partner institutions. Adoption of the Competencies will do much to improve quality across the undergraduate curricula within all types of European Educational Institutions.

5. ***The provision of a forum for discussion about quality assurance and graduate employability in higher, further and vocational education between Education, Government and Industry***

Throughout the MISLEM Project, representatives from Education, Government and Industry have met at six monthly intervals. The culmination of the Project is an international conference encapsulating the views of all stakeholders.

6. ***The building of opportunities for trans-national cooperation in a way that will create and disseminate common, European-wide, quality-assessment practices in education***

One of the key features of the MISLEM Project is trans-national cooperation. Throughout the Project, the academic partners have attended national and international conferences in order to disseminate emergent knowledge reflective of the study findings.

7. ***The development of an empirically grounded base from which further harmonization of Higher and Vocational Education may be built across Europe***

The Meta-Indicators conceptualised in this Manual represent an empirically grounded base upon which the harmonisation of Employability Competencies may be introduced across the European Union Educational Sector.

Concluding Remarks.

The Employability Competencies described in this Manual are equally applicable across the whole spectrum of European undergraduate education. Employability is not just an issue for Business Studies; it is an increasingly important part of the graduate portfolio – irrespective of area of study or focus of degree. The Meta-Indicators and Employability Competencies should not be viewed as being separate to discipline-focused skills and knowledge. It should instead be viewed as a complimentary part of student education; adding to discipline-specific knowledge in such a way that enhances student learning whilst encouraging individual development and growth.

In conclusion, this Manual has drawn attention to the study findings of a large European study, focusing upon quality in undergraduate business and management education and graduate employability. By developing a set of key Meta-Indicators incorporating different levels of Employability Competencies, and by suggesting how such Competencies might be evaluated within the curricula, the Manual adds much to current debates in this area.

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