YOUR SKILLS AND ABILITIES

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Throughout your time at university you will continue to develop a wide range of transferable skills and abilities. These are the skills acquired through your academic studies, your extra curricular activities and your vacation experiences. You will already have developed some skills informally through your everyday life. Employers, from the public, private and voluntary sectors, actively seek such skills when recruiting graduates. You can improve your prospects in the job market - whatever you decide to do - by assessing your skills, identifying gaps, and taking appropriate action.

Learned Skills

It is usually easy to identify the skills you have learned or been taught and the qualifications you have obtained, for example driving, word processing, playing a musical instrument.

Natural Abilities

It may be more difficult to identify natural abilities which often only become apparent when applied to particular situations. You may be good at organising, but organising what? Work? Your project?

The following list details the kind of skills and abilities you have the opportunity to develop while at university through your academic course, your extra curricular activities and your vacation experience. These skills are grouped under five headings -

DATA
(HANDLING AND PRESENTING INFORMATION)

PEOPLE
(INTERPERSONAL/COMMUNICATION)

THINGS (PRACTICAL)

IDEAS
(PROBLEM SOLVING/CREATIVITY)

CAREER AND LIFE PLANNING

DATA (HANDLING AND PRESENTING INFORMATION)

Decision Making: Identifying options, gathering information about their suitability, taking into account conflicting priorities and constraints, then using this information systematically in choosing the optimum course of action.

Collect / Process Information: Defining the type and quantity of information needed, finding appropriate sources, conducting surveys where necessary and compiling the data obtained in a form compatible with subsequent methods of analysis and dissemination.

Analyse / Interpret Data: Systematic analysis of written, numerical, graphical or other material to determine its meaning and/or evaluate results.

Report Writing: Producing a clearly presented, well expressed, logical and grammatical account of events, projects, visits, meetings etc and, where appropriate, well argued conclusions / recommendations for further action.

Creative Writing: Writing which demonstrates both imagination and originality.

Other Writing: Writing other than specifically defined under 'Report Writing' and 'Creative Writing' above eg taking notes, writing minutes, letters, memoranda, creating publicity material.

Presentation Skills: Development of confidence and competence to engage an audience by means of well prepared verbal, visual and/or written material. Ability to transfer ideas and propositions clearly, efficiently, effectively.

PEOPLE (INTERPERSONAL/COMMUNICATION)

Listening: Giving undivided attention to what is being said with a view to understanding and appreciating in depth the direct or indirect meaning of what is being conveyed.

Group / Team Working: The bringing together of a number of individuals, often with different areas of specialist knowledge and experience, to discuss, contribute to and address a topic or task and achieve results which are beyond the capacity of any one individual.

Negotiating / Influencing: To arrange an agreement with others or organisations by either direct or indirect contact, formally or informally. Selection of the most effective style of personal approach in order to successfully overcome objections and difficulties.

Leadership: Ability to inspire in others by example and encouragement the confidence, motivation and co-operative effort necessary to achieve any given objective.

Organising Tasks / Resources: Ability to arrange, co-ordinate, prepare, monitor and control activities or events ensuring the optimum planning and sequence of operations and best use of available resources.

Organising People: To engage others, co-ordinate their effort, guide and control their activities, encourage their contribution, build confidence, monitor progress and correct faults.

Verbal Communication: Marshalling of thoughts and communicating effectively using speech. Using appropriate vocabulary and language style compatible with social conventions and sensitivities. Avoiding misunderstanding. Ability to make effective use of the telephone and other communications equipment.

THINGS (PRACTICAL)

Acquaintance with Information Technology (IT): Experience in the use and practical operation of IT equipment ranging from word processors to sophisticated computer facilities. Familiarity with the kinds of problems which are effectively solved through use of information technology.

Facility with Numbers: Ability to comprehend and manipulate statistical and mathematical data and resolve problems expressed in numerical or graphical form.

Foreign Languages: Spoken and/or written abilities in other languages. Range of competencies from basic to advanced levels including conversational proficiency and knowledge of technical and business vocabularies.

Manual Skills: Work undertaken by hand involving aesthetic, artistic, co-ordinated, dexterous, physical and sustained use of hands or fingers. Craft and keyboard skills. Correct use of tools and equipment.

IDEAS (PROBLEM SOLVING/CREATIVITY)

Setting Priorities: Assessing the relative importance and urgency of tasks to be done and planning action accordingly.

Logical Thinking: The ability to analyse and process knowledge, ideas and information in order to arrive at a rational conclusion in a clearly argued way.

Creative Thinking / Innovation: Creation of new concepts, thoughts and ideas which have the potential for further theoretical or practical development.

CAREER AND LIFE PLANNING

Academic Self Assessment: Monitoring personal progress and motivation in respect of previously set academic objectives.

Personal Self Assessment: Monitoring personal progress and motivation in respect of building confidence, self reliance, communication and social skills.

Vocational Self Assessment: Monitoring personal progress and motivation in respect of previously set career planning objectives.

Career Planning: Using knowledge of self (including personal transferable skills), occupations, employment and training opportunities to make realistic vocational choices and set up an appropriately timed job hunting strategy.

Preparation for Application and Interviews: Generating a positive perspective on those aspects of one's personal background and experience most likely to impress potential employers and presenting this information effectively to them in writing and/or in person.

Employment / Training Perspective: Building up a detailed overall knowledge of potential employment and training opportunities and an awareness of commercial, professional, social and political factors as appropriate.

SKILLS DEVELOPED IN THE STUDY OF ECONOMICS

During your time at university you have the opportunity to develop a number of skills which employers value, in addition to acquiring concrete subject knowledge of economics. Many of the skills listed below are developed, to some extent, in any Social Science, Arts or Science course.

- **Subject mastery:** knowledge and understanding of current theory and best practice in key areas of economics are valuable not only for professional economists, but also in a wide variety of other careers eg accountancy, banking and finance and business management.

- **Intelligence and cognitive skills:** critical analysis and assessment; synthesising with related topics in an imaginative way; weighing arguments; distinguishing between different positions and considering them critically; reasoning adaptably and systematically; exercising informed independent thought and critical judgement.

- **Presentation and communication skills:** expressing complex ideas clearly, accurately and intelligibly in writing and in oral presentation. Writing skills are developed through note-taking in lectures, the preparation of course work, the dissertation and written examinations, with the latter in particular testing your ability to write under pressure. These skills are important for many careers, involving for example, note-taking in meetings and report writing for a superior or client. Oral skills are developed through participation in tutorials and seminars and are vital skills for participation in meetings of all kinds.

- **Computer literacy:** using computers for word-processing, spreadsheets and database manipulation, both for analytical purposes and to present your work professionally. Hands-on experience gained at university will help you in understanding and using the systems you will come across during the course of your career.

- **Independent action:** the ability to work independently without specific direction and to take the initiative in searching out and using information.

- **Practical skills:** collecting, assembling and analysing data. Problem solving together with related deductive reasoning skills enables economists to conceptualise problems and express them in a manageable form, thus assisting in problem solving.

- **Numeracy and quantitative skills:** a basic - and for those who take appropriate options such as Quantitative Economics and Econometrics more advanced - understanding of mathematical and statistical methods and their use for analysing complex problems.

- **Managing tasks and time:** planning and organising tasks; setting priorities for assignments and tasks; striking a balance between work and leisure; working under pressure to meet deadlines. You will be expected to perform all the above in a work environment and so the ability to manage your tasks and time is essential.

- **Coping with stress:** coursework deadlines, exams, tutorial and seminar presentations are stressful, as are many situations that you are likely to encounter in your career. Learning to manage stress and perform effectively in stressful situations is an important asset for most careers.

- **Interpersonal skills:** relating effectively to fellow students and busy lecturing and administrative staff - for example, teamwork on a project, problem or presentation, or efficiently and courteously obtaining information or advice needed during a lecturer's office hours or from the department office - involves similar skills to those required in most work environments.

- **Exposure to diverse disciplines:** your degree not only covers economics but also outside subjects taken in the first two years, and if taking a joint degree, a second subject at honours level. Even within economics, there are differing approaches to problem solving that are often the basis of heated debates between different strands of the profession. This diversity provides insights into the way in which different approaches are used to investigate problems and derive results.

SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH NON-ACADEMIC COURSES

There are many opportunities to participate in courses outwith the formal academic curriculum. These may be based on issues and topics which afford opportunities to extend your knowledge, experience and personal development. For those who have worked prior to coming to university you may have attended or participated in all sorts of professional, industrial, commercial or educational courses or workshops. During your time at university you will have the opportunity to participate in courses which are specifically aimed at the student population.

"Insight" Courses

The Careers Service runs short on-campus courses for students. These courses, in association with the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), offer participants a concentrated experience of tackling a variety of business activities and organisational problem solving. Working in competitive teams, students are encouraged by outside tutors, who are seconded to the course to inject both their experience and enthusiasm. You will be able to apply to attend these courses in your third year.

Major industrial organisations and professional firms offer places on courses aimed at undergraduates to give participants a flavour of experiencing specific types of work. These are often designed for students in their later years at university but some may accept students in earlier years. There is always stiff competition for places and skills training.

Taster Courses

The Careers Service offers a programme of Taster Courses run by employers which aim to provide students in all disciplines with a more detailed appreciation of specific sectors of employment or the opportunity to develop a skill. Courses offered in recent years have included Teaching, Investment Banking, Marketing, Information Technology, Management Consultancy, Conference Organising, Assertiveness, Telephone Skills and Presentation Skills.

Work Shadowing

This can provide an opportunity to gain valuable experience inside organisations, observe work activities and gain insight into the skills required in particular job areas some of which may be to participate in in-house courses, seminars or introductory programmes.

Training Courses

Many voluntary bodies, including community organisations, youth groups, sporting councils and similar, offer introductory or proficiency training to those who wish to help and thereby gain useful experience and enjoyment as well as helping others.

Those who have had working careers prior to university may well have undergone a series of training courses in their previous employment, or involvement in community activities. No matter what this training may have been, it is bound to have some relevance and transferable application elsewhere.

Specific Skills Courses

A range of organisations - commercial, public and voluntary, offer all sorts of training courses, which will equip you with some specific skill, in order to enhance your chances of entering particular types of employment (eg Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Word Processing, Foreign Language Training), and courses run by Student Societies. (eg The Advice Place, Nightline).

SKILLS DEVELOPED DURING VACATIONS

You may already be very clear about what you want to do after graduating, or you may still be unsure and looking at a number of options. Appropriate vacation experience (paid or unpaid) can help you to confirm your decision or to test out your ideas.

If you gain some experience relevant to the type of work you want to do, it can help to convince employers, in your final year, of the strength of your motivation and suitability.

It is not always possible to get relevant work, but whatever your vacation experience might be, it can provide you with opportunities to develop further and to add to your list of skills. So you need to analyse your vacation experience in three ways:

- as an opportunity to gain relevant experience for future jobs
- as an opportunity to test out your interest in a range of jobs
- as an opportunity to acquire and develop appropriate skills

Even the most obvious of student vacation jobs - eg sales assistant - will enable you to:

- check out the retail environment - the skills and qualities required
- observe management style
- gain some insight into the ethos of the organisation
- develop skills in dealing with the public, handling cash, team work, working under pressure.

Early planning is the key to successful use of vacations. Timescales will differ depending on the vacation and type of activity but the message has to remain 'apply **EARLIER** rather than later'.

Vacation courses and vacation work are publicised by the Careers Service in *Vacation Opportunities* bulletins at regular intervals throughout the academic year. Occasional talks covering topics such as Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Working Abroad and Voluntary Work are run by the Careers Service - ask for the dates at reception. The *Student Employment Service* fixes students up with paid work in vacations in Edinburgh and further afield - go in to see them at 3A Buccleuch Place. Vacation work can provide an in-depth view of what it is like to work for a particular employer or in a particular career area. Closing dates for employer-organised work experience vary from November through to May.

Speculative applications to local firms, national companies and organisations can also be successful. Adopt this method especially if you need practical experience to supplement the theoretical nature of your course. Approach companies early in January, using employer directories (*PROSPECTS, GET*) and information from professional bodies available in the Careers Service, to target firms which may offer relevant placements. Apply early as well for regular seasonal jobs such as those connected with tourism or major events (eg the Edinburgh Festival).

If you still have nothing fixed up by May / June, do not despair! Check local newspapers, advertisements in shop windows, employment agencies, the local Jobcentre, as well as *Student Employment Service* for **casual work**. Forward planning is often not appropriate in this case as this type of employment can require an immediate start.

Voluntary work can provide invaluable work experience for those considering one of the 'caring' professions. Indeed work experience may well be a necessary pre-requisite for postgraduate training where evidence of an active interest is often sought at application stage. Competition for jobs can be fierce, so use all sources of contacts to the full. Check with the Careers Service for lists of contacts. Speak to everyone you meet. Individual approaches to friends or relatives may turn up trumps. In short - **network** like mad!

Travel

Living, working or studying abroad provides the opportunity to develop a range of skills.

Employers are particularly interested in independent travel - where students have funded the trip themselves, organised their own travel arrangements or group ventures and coped with the inevitable setbacks. Language skills may be improved, and adjusting to different cultural activities and customs often requires tact and diplomacy.

A number of directories available in the Careers Service will provide you with information on all the above ways to use your vacations. Some examples are listed below:

- *Work Your Way Around The World* published by Vacation Work
- *The International Directory of Voluntary Work* published by Vacation Work
- *Working Holidays* published by Central Bureau
- *Summer Jobs in Britain* published by Vacation Work
- *Summer Jobs Abroad* published by Vacation Work

SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

What you **choose** to do with your time away from work or study is likely to give good clues about what is important to you. A typical application form question runs:

> 'Give details of current activities and interests indicating level of responsibility, commitment and achievement'.

Any activity which requires involvement with others has been organised by someone. Clubs and societies are always looking for individuals willing to fill posts which become vacant as undergraduates work their way through university. You could become involved as a committee member or as a secretary or treasurer. The same applies to similar organisations with which you might be involved outside university.

You could even decide to form a new society catering for interests not already offered. You may have to produce some form of business plan to convince others that this is a worthwhile idea.

These activities will give you the opportunity to organise meetings, make decisions, record information, work as part of a team, persuade others .....

YOUR SKILLS

When you are applying for jobs or training places in your final year, employers will ask you to produce evidence of your skills and abilities in relation to the type of work for which you are applying. It will be useful to record appropriate experiences as you go through university. Below are some examples - start to build up your own information by completing the charts on the following pages.

Example

Academic Study

Activity/Task	**Skills Developed**
Essay	Process information, analyse data, writing, time management
Tutorial	Presentation skills, interpret data, debating, persuading, team work

Non-Academic Course

Course	**Skills Developed**
Insight into Management	Time management, team work, making presentations

Vacation Experience

Job Title	**Tasks/Activities**	**Skills Developed**
Waitress in busy cafe	Setting up and serving at tables Handling cash Supporting other staff	Working under pressure Numeracy Managing time Team work Dealing with the public
Clerical assistant - Chartered Accountant's Office	Reception cover, telephone, filing, tea-making, some typing	Office routines Team work Attention to detail Insight into CA work

Extra Curricular Experience

Experience/Activity	**Skills Developed**
Staff/student rep	Negotiating, diplomacy, verbal communication, listening .....
Member of student flat	Team work, tact, negotiating (with landlord), numeracy .....
Start up intramural table tennis team	Initiative, team work, time management, numeracy (funds) .....

RECORD OF ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Activity	Skills Developed

RECORD OF NON-ACADEMIC COURSES

Course	Skills Developed

RECORD OF VACATION EXPERIENCE

Job Title/Travel	Tasks/Activities	Skills Developed

RECORD OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Experience/Activity	Skills Developed

YOUR SKILLS - WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE?

FOR EACH ITEM IN THE BOXES BELOW CONSIDER THE EXTENT OF YOUR EXPERIENCE AND NOTE AS FOLLOWS

CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE	A
SOME EXPERIENCE	B
LIMITED OR NO EXPERIENCE	C

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Use the telephone effectively

Express an opinion

Ask questions for clarification

Take part in a group discussion

Instruct a group of people

Argue a point in discussion

Talk confidently to people in authority

Ask a question at a lecture

Give a talk from notes

Make a presentation with visual aids

Make yourself understood in a foreign language

Communicate fluently in a foreign language

Take part in a debate

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Collating information from a variety of sources

Spell correctly

Express yourself clearly and concisely in writing

Take good lecture notes

Skim read for key points

Edit and select written material

Fill in forms correctly

Write formal letters

Write minutes of a meeting

Write reports

Write a dissertation

Write difficult/tactful letters

Write instructions

INTERPERSONAL

Put people at their ease

Feel comfortable chatting to total strangers

Show you understand other people's feelings

Interview people for information

Work well in a team

Mediate to solve a problem

Persuade others

Motivate others in a team

Chair a meeting

Confront others when necessary

Supervise the work of others

Listen to others' problems

Recognise and deal with negative attitudes and/or discrimination

REASONING	
Think logically	Break down a problem into its elements
Understand complex ideas	Grasp ideas and facts quickly
Organise and classify information	Critically evaluate evidence put to you
Solve logical puzzles and problems	Know when a case is being overstated
Complete crosswords	Summarise the key issues from a lecture
Keep to the point in a discussion	Research and gather information for a project

NUMERACY	
Use a calculator	Understand pie charts
Do calculations in your head	Interpret data in tables
Use fractions	Interpret graphs
Work out percentages	Plan a budget
Work out averages	Keep simple accounts
Work with decimals	

TECHNOLOGY/WORD PROCESSING	
Use a keyboard to write essays	Create tables
Use E-mail	Print a document
Copy information to disk	Tell the difference between hard and floppy disks
Search for a piece of text in a document	Use OHP
Insert footnotes	Use Internet

CAREER AND LIFE PLANNING		
Research for information about jobs		
Use self assessment and knowledge of occupations to make realistic choices		
Set personal objectives	-	academic
	-	social
	-	vocational
Monitor personal progress		
Monitor academic progress		
Present self in a positive way to employers through applications and interviews		

Use this space to note the areas you feel you are best at and those requiring further development.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION
INTERPERSONAL
REASONING
NUMERACY
TECHNOLOGY
CAREER + LIFE PLANNING