

The following is an extract from the Employability and Enterprise Policy/Strategy:

The University has accepted the following definition of employability as articulated in 'Future Fit: preparing graduates for the World of Work' published by UUK/CBI (2009).

**“A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy”.**

The University has agreed the following attributes as important in the development of an employable graduate: self management; team-working; business and customer awareness; problem solving; communication and literacy; application of numeracy; application of information technology. Definitions of these are:

**Self management** – readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.

**Team-working** – respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, and awareness of interdependence with others.

**Business and customer awareness** – basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.

**Problem solving** – analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.

**Communication and literacy** – application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy – including listening and questioning.

**Application of numeracy** – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimation and applying formulae).

**Application of information technology** – basic IT skills, including familiarity with work processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.

Underpinning all these attributes, the key foundation, must be a **positive attitude**: a 'can-do' approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make these happen.

**SO**

**HOW WILL THESE SKILLS BE DEVELOPED THROUGHOUT YOUR CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING DEGREE?.....**

## OVERVIEW OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING COURSE

The City and Regional Planning course taught at Cardiff University combines most, if not all, of the employability attributes listed above. As a course, it is highly vocational in nature, whilst also drawing on strong influences from the disciplines of economics, social science, politics, architecture and Law. The course is accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), and students are actively encouraged to enrol as members, thus beginning to align their professional development alongside their academic career at Cardiff University. Currently, students are required to spend 12 months in practice, consolidating what they have learned during years 1 and 2, before returning to complete their final undergraduate year at Cardiff. Placements are frequently in local or UK national government organisations, or in private consultancies

### **So why are employability skills important?**

Many students assume that employers of graduates (whether within the domain of Planning, or in an unrelated field), will have a clear understanding of their technical skills and the academic knowledge underpinning their specialist subject. They may also take it for granted that the associated ways of working that they have acquired whilst studying (their employability skills) will be readily apparent to potential recruiters without further explanation or elaboration. This is frequently not the case, however, with the unfortunate result that a minority of very able graduates are not always initially considered for graduate-level posts, whether related to their degree or not.

**Communication and Literacy:** Report writing forms a continuing theme throughout the course, with particular attention being paid to appropriate use of language and style. Conciseness of expression, accuracy, and clarity are progressively developed, as these form an important part of working effectively within the machinery of a planning department or consultancy.

In addition, the preparation of major research documents is practised, particularly in the final year research project, which must conform to an established methodology. Oral communication skills are developed alongside this too, especially in the design and execution of surveys relating to feedback on various forms of plans, for example. They also use informal interviews and focus groups to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data, based on the application of Pure and applied social research methodologies.

The ability to present reports to an audience is critical to many of the projects which are tackled on an individual or team basis, encompassing Public speaking, and the appropriate use of presentational skills, such as *PowerPoint*. The complexity of these presentations increases throughout the course, as students develop confidence in the use of these techniques.

**Business and customer awareness:** The nature of the Planning process places the concept of a market in land and property, in juxtaposition with regulatory procedures for the wider benefit of Society. These sometimes contradictory themes are examined in progressively more complex material in economics and social policy, and by the extensive application of this knowledge using case studies throughout the course.

During their year out, students soon experience the reality of dealing with members of the Public as clients of their Local Authority, or as customers of a Planning consultancy. In each situation, tact, diplomacy, careful listening skills, and negotiation form an important part of their professional development. Furthermore, the participation of professionals from across the Planning spectrum is encouraged, in particular as part of the CMS Planning Forum held during the final year of the course in collaboration with the Careers Service.

**Self-Management:** There is an extensive lecture programme, which provides each student with an increasingly extensive understanding of City and Regional Planning. This is complemented by a wide variety of essays, project tasks and team exercises, all of which underpin the learning process. In order to cope with this, students become adept at managing their workload so that they maintain sufficient progress as the demands of the course increase. In order to facilitate this, students have regular tutorial sessions with their personal tutor, often drawing on the use of their own Personal Development Plan, as a basis for reflective comment and personal action. Students are responsible for organising their own placements, which develops a proactive approach to job-hunting, and the development of professional relationships.

**Application of IT:** From the very beginning of their studies, undergraduates are introduced to a range of information resources and computer applications which extensively support their work. These include bibliographic databases, *Digimap*, various GIS systems, *SPSS*, *Autocad* and *Sketchup*. The efficient and effective use of the Internet, *Word*, *Excel* and *PowerPoint* is continually practised, and regarded as very important during subsequent career development.

**Team Working:** Collaborative working takes place throughout the course. During the First year, students participate in the “Charette Weekend” group assignment, which exercises their embryonic planning knowledge and drawing skills, culminating in a group presentation to their peers. Projects become more complex as the course progresses, the second year exercise being a major team study of the possible development of an international Airport serving Cardiff, Newport and Bristol, along with a report and presentation to an audience. Marking schemes are structured to take account of individual contributions to the team as well as allocating marks for the team as a whole. Students are not always able to choose with whom they can work, so the practise of team working in various contexts and situations can be viewed as a helpful rehearsal for the transition from undergraduate study to the world of work.

**Problem Solving:** Students have to complete a number of design projects, using a variety of visual media to present their results. They make use of a range of data sources and complex planning guidelines in order to produce site layout solutions for all the potential stakeholders, both public and private. At the same time, they are encouraged to be creative and inventive, sometimes within conflicting constraints, as well as trying to take a strategic view of these issues when appropriate.

**Application of Numeracy:** Statistical analysis forms one of the backbones of effective planning practice, and is a significant element of the course. Also, determination of land values, rentals, tax revenues etc use a range of arithmetic skills which are exercised during the second part of the course. Whilst planning students might therefore be expected to perform well in basic mathematics tests often employed during graduate selection exercises, this is not universally the case, which can cause some bewilderment. Such tests are completed against strict time limits, so the need to understand how to perform well within time constraints, is crucial to success.

## **CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS (CMS)**

CMS sessions delivered in years 2 and 3 will show you how to make sense of the **employability skills** developed throughout your degree and will help you articulate these skills effectively on paper and at interview to an employer. This link between academia and employment is essential, especially for those wanting to enter employment straight after their study. The Careers service is available to help you further with this throughout all stages of your academic degree.

The Careers service has a full programme of fairs, employer presentations and employer-led skills sessions that give undergraduates opportunities to meet employers and start developing their **commercial awareness** skills. Furthermore, this insight will allow you to better prepare for the job search and application process.