



WINNING STUDENTS ARE EMPLOYABLE STUDENTS

Research Report

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Executive Summary

Skills and employability have a direct impact on life opportunities. Understanding how skills are learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted over time can facilitate improving the employability of individuals. Sports scholars are a unique population for investigation as they need to maintain a wide range of skills and acquire new ones in order to perform in two domains (education and sport). The ability to refine a previous skill, or learn new skills that may be required to be effective in a new domain or wider activity, is an important issue for society as a prosperous economy depends on the development of new skills.

The aim of this project was to assess the impact of the Winning Students sports scholarship programme on the development of key transferable skills and graduate attributes and employability. First, we reviewed the evidence-base of sport and education in the development of transferable skills desired by employers. Second, we reported employment data from graduate Winning Students and contrasted results with the wider sector of graduates. Third, through focus groups, we identified key transferable skills learned by Winning Students and explored how they were developed. Finally, through an experiment, we tested the impact of Winning Students (sporting excellence) to graduate employability.

The literature review suggested that sport can significantly contribute to employers' perceptions of candidate's employability. In other words, if student-athletes are able to demonstrate the skills they have learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted through sport and how these skills transfer to the workplace, they could be more likely to be perceived as highly employable. The literature also revealed how student-athletes could be an important population to help better understand an emerging 'new era' related to employability based on potential (i.e., the ability to adapt and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments). Potential is being seen an important predictor of success because the employment market is changing so rapidly and it is nearly impossible to predict the competencies needed to succeed in even a few years. Research shows how people with the highest potential have: a strong motivation to excel in the pursuit of challenging goals; the humility to put the group ahead of individual needs; the ability to be pushed out of their comfort zone with stretch development; a strong engagement with their work and the people around them; and, the determination to overcome setbacks and obstacles. The literature review indicates that student-athletes can develop all of these while combining education and sport, and thus could be seen as more 'trainable' by employers.

Employment data from graduate Winning Students portrayed very favourable outcomes for students who have progressed through the Winning Students programme. Further, the data compared favourably to national level data with clear

differences in levels of unemployment (lower for graduate Winning Students) and median salaries of full time first degree leavers in full time paid employment (higher for graduate Winning Students).

Through focus groups, key skills that Winning Students believed they learned and developed included networking, drawing upon available support, organisational skills, time-management skills, goal-setting skills, being disciplined, being driven (motivation), becoming a 'competitive person' in all aspects of life, communication, social/emotional competence, being more adept at group-work, and handling pressure. Student-athlete employability can be enhanced through strategies to encourage a focus on how skills can be transferred and adapted to the employment market.

In challenging economic times employers are looking for candidates to demonstrate achievements beyond academic performance. An experiment demonstrated that engagement in sport elevates the benefit of work experience to employers/recruiters overall evaluation of candidates. This suggests that employability is not just about providing evidence of what someone has done but also how demonstrating what someone has done shows they have potential (i.e., the ability to adapt and grow).

Recommendations

1. Bespoke career and employability advice for sports scholars could be considered as part of the requirements for network members. Career planning and employability advice could also be explicitly noted under service level requests in order to raise awareness.
2. Create a toolkit and resource pack based on research findings for professional staff in Universities and Colleges (i.e., student support services, careers staff, student advisors), and staff working with student unions, coaches and governing bodies, to help past, present and future Winning Students scholars enhance their employability.
3. Policy makers should consider sports scholars as a model to enhance graduate employability for all students. Research on how Winning Students are able to maintain a wide range of skills and acquire new ones in order to perform in two domains (education and sport) is highly relevant to a workforce increasingly requiring career adaptability.



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MAIN REPORT

This project had four key objectives. For each objective a brief introduction is provided, followed by an outline of the method undertaken to explore the objective. Results are then presented, followed by a brief summary. The following seven sections will be presented:

- Section 1: Background and Objectives
- Section 2: Objective 1: Review the evidence-base of sport and education in the development of transferable skills desired by employers
- Section 3: Objective 2: Report employment data from graduate Winning Students and contrast with the wider sector of graduates
- Section 4: Objective 3: Identify key transferable skills learned by Winning Students and understand how they are developed
- Section 5: Objective 4: Test the impact of Winning Students (sporting excellence) to graduate employability
- Section 6: References
- Section 7: Conclusions and Recommendations



SECTION 1

Background and Objectives

A prosperous economy depends on the development and adoption of new skills. Skills and employability also have a direct impact on life opportunities. Understanding how skills are learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted can facilitate improving the employability of individuals, relevant to the needs of students but also the up-skilling and re-skilling of existing workforces. Individuals need to learn and retain a broad range of diverse skills, and also acquire new skills throughout their life-course in order to function successfully in a changing society, or else innovation and new technologies are threatened and will not be realised (Ross, 2010). The aim of the project is to assess the impact of the Winning Students sports scholarship programme on the development of key transferable skills and graduate attributes and employability.

The following specific research objectives were identified:

Objective 1: Review the evidence-base of sport and education in the development of transferable skills desired by employers

Objective 2: Report employment data from graduate Winning Students and contrast with the wider sector of graduates

Objective 3: Identify key transferable skills learned by Winning Students and understand how they are developed

Objective 4: Test the impact of Winning Students (sporting excellence) to graduate employability



SECTION 2

Objective 1: Review the evidence-base of sport and education in the development of transferable skills desired by employers

The attributes, skills and knowledge desired by employers have been highlighted by the Scottish Government (2011; *Putting learners at the centre: Delivering our ambitions for post-16 education*) and include:

- Self-management
- Team working
- Business and customer awareness
- Problem solving
- Communication
- Application of numeracy
- Application of information technology

The Scottish Government have also outlined a vision towards working for growth and have provided an employability framework for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2012). Coupled with this the Scottish Government provide resources for Skills Development in Scotland (2014) and the Scottish Higher Education Employability Forum specifically consider employability skills. Drawing from these sources the following list of skills and capabilities appear important to employers.

- Communication skills
- Team-working skills
- Integrity
- Intellectual ability
- Confidence
- Character/personality
- Planning and organisational skills
- Literacy (good writing skills)
- Numeracy (good with numbers)
- Analysis and decision making skills

The purpose of the extensive review was to build upon this information from industry with research that has been undertaken with student-athletes to explore the relationships between Winning Students and the development of transferable skills desired by employers.

Method

The primary search tool was StirGate, a library resource that enables advanced keyword searches to be undertaken on over 100 databases simultaneously. StirGate includes the following academic databases:

- British Education Index
- Cochrane Library
- Conference Paper Index
- EconLit
- ERIC
- GeoBase
- Greenfile
- Health Source
- IBSS
- ISI Web of Knowledge
- Leisure Tourism Database
- MEDLINE
- PsycINFO
- SPORTDiscus
- Swetswise
- Wiley Journals

Search Terms

To derive the relevant literature our search included three categories of search terms (Table 1):

Table 1. Categories of search terms.

Sport related	Education related	Topic related
Sport	University	Transferable skills
Physical activity	College	Employability
Exercise	Tertiary education	Identity
	Student	Social support networks
		Supporting academic attainment

Results

What is employability?

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2014) gives the most accessible definition of employability in terms of skills, “the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job”. Moving beyond a set of skills alone, another widely accepted definition of employability is “a set of achievements—skills, understandings and personal attributes—that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Higher Education Academy, 2012, *Pedagogy for employability*). Sport can provide an excellent environment through which a set of achievements can be accumulated, and where skills can be learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted.

There has been a growing interest in the employability of graduates from higher and further education institutions in recent years. This growing interest has led to numerous studies being investigated on the various skills and attributes desired by employers of higher education graduates. The findings have shown various interpretations of what employers want from graduates, with studies showing the development of various skills and attributes as extremely important, such as problem solving, self-management, team working, business and customer awareness, and communication and literacy skills (Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011). However, some evidence suggests that higher and further education institutions are not producing graduates that meet the skills and attributes desired by employers. Evidence has shown that a ‘degree’ alone is often not sufficient to obtain employment; graduates need to demonstrate other ways that they have learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted certain skills and attributes. These skills and attributes can be gained through various methods such as work experience with studies showing that employers sometimes value relevant work experience over class of degree (Stuart, Lido, Morgan, Solomon & May, 2011).

Employers realise that it may be very difficult for students to obtain work experience in an area that is relevant to the vacancies they are applying, and for this reason employers recognise extracurricular activities and interests as a way to demonstrate relevant skills and experience (Kaufman & Gabler, 2004). There is a broad spectrum of what students might engage in to demonstrate evidence of activities and interests, including voluntary work with organisations and participation in recreational/professional sport. Studies have shown that engagement in competitive sport benefits students entering graduate employment, with evidence of positive relationships to future earnings (Brown & Scase, 1994; Eide & Rowan, 2001), and recognition that sport requires a high degree of discipline, responsibility, perseverance, and is an activity that builds character (Pfeifer & Cornelissen, 2009).

Sport can also build social/emotional attributes - a set of social skills that increase an individual's ability to understand other people's moods, behaviour, and motives in order to improve the quality of relationships (e.g., Rose-Krasnor, 1997) - which has been significantly related to career progression and earnings. For example, Cherniss and Goleman (2001) reported that for a wide variety of jobs social/emotional attributes were twice as prevalent among distinguishing attributes as were technical skills and purely cognitive abilities combined. In general the higher a position in an organisation, the more social/emotional attributes mattered; for individuals in leadership positions, 85 percent of their attributes were in the social/emotional domain.

However, there is also evidence that student-athletes could be at risk of not having time to self-explore career plans or gain work experience (Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013). This relates to Marcia's (1966) state of identity foreclosure – the status in which individuals tend to conform to expectations of others (e.g., allowing a parent to influence career direction) as a likely result of not exploring a range of options. Research evidence for this effect has been demonstrated in sport (e.g., Murphey, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). As such, successful management of sporting commitments alongside study, exploring career opportunities and gaining work experience is essential.

The literature review strongly suggests that employability is dependent on more than qualifications/education. Graduates must also be able to draw upon specific skills and attributes they will need that are relevant to their specific workplace. Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) undertook a study viewing employability as a set of experiences. From their study four types of experience emerged, relating to graduate *values*, *intellect*, *performance* and *engagement*. Values relate to a student having the ability to demonstrate diversity and cultural awareness within the workplace. Intellect relates to a graduate's ability to think critically, analyse and communicate information, together with an ability to reflect on their work and express their ideas and opinions to the organisation they work for. Performance is related to the ability of the graduates to use their skills and attributes to deliver results. Engagement relates to employers' desires for graduates to demonstrate evidence that they have engaged in extracurricular activities and made the most of out of their student experience. In short, employers want graduates who have the ability to face challenges and deal with pressure situations, and understand the importance to learn outside the normal methods of education.

Very recently, a "new era" related to employability is emerging that is challenging the prevalent competency-based approach (Fernandez-Araoz, 2014). Competencies are becoming insufficient in relation to employability as what makes someone successful in a particular role today might not tomorrow if the competitive environment shifts, the organisation's strategy changes and/or the person must

collaborate with or manage a different group of colleagues. This makes the employment market one of the toughest in history, not just for job seekers but also for employers. Because jobs are changing so rapidly and it is nearly impossible to predict the competencies needed to succeed in even a few years, the question is not solely whether a person has the right skills or not; it's also whether they have the potential to learn new ones. Fernandez-Araoz defines potential in relation to employability as "the ability to adapt and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments". His research shows how people with the highest potential have: a strong motivation to excel in the pursuit of challenging goals; the humility to put the group ahead of individual needs; the ability to be pushed out of comfort zone with stretch development; a strong engagement with their work and the people around them; and the determination to overcome setbacks and obstacles.

How does being a student-athlete enhance employability?

With the vast majority of job applications initially involving the submission of a curriculum vitae, student-athletes must be able to demonstrate that they can/have adapted their skills and attributes to the relevant job criteria they are applying for. A study by Bright and Hutton (2000) investigated the impact of competency statements within resumes for short listing candidates for job positions. Competency statements refer to the description giving by an applicant to describe their knowledge, skills and attributes that are relevant to a job competency or statement outlined in the job requirements. An example of a competency statement, relevant to student-athletes, is the development and maintenance of interpersonal and communications skills through being an integral part of a sport team. The study by Bright & Hutton (2000) produced results which showed that competency statements significantly improved an applicants perceived suitability for a position and being short listed for the next stage of the application process. Also, the inclusion of competency statements within the curriculum vitae improved readers' perceptions that an applicant is able to use their communication skills to demonstrate their suitability for a position.

A study by Stuart et al. (2011) investigated the importance of extra-curricular activities to the student experience and to employability after graduating. The study showed that the most important aspect of an applicant's application is their degree classification. However, with a significant number of students graduating with a good honours classification or higher, applicants must use their extra-curricular activities to further demonstrate their suitability for a position. With various employers requiring certain skill sets, there was a difference in how employers valued extra-curricular activities and the type of extra-curricular activities they viewed as important. There was a general agreement from employers on the importance of university-linked team sports, with some employers valuing this over voluntary work or student union activities. Employers highly valued activities that

were perceived as long-term, that portrayed determination, and were evidence of some form of achievement and leadership or responsibility. These activities could be highly related to student-athletes who have competed in their sport for many years, been committed and disciplined to follow a strict training, competition and studying schedule, won competitions in their sport and possibly been a captain or senior member of their team. In addition, evidence was found that suggested that sport and exercise activities that were viewed as 'outgoing' indicated that an applicant was passionate and interested in new experiences. Employers from this study emphasised the importance of applicants to "sell themselves" within their application and within the interview, by not just simply listing, but explaining what skills and attributes they have managed to develop and maintain through extracurricular activities (such as sport). Another study by Cole, Rubin, Field & Giles, (2007) supported these findings, suggesting that 'superior' extracurricular activities may be more highly valued than academic qualifications because a candidate may be perceived by employers to have a specialised skill set.

Recently, British Universities and College Sport (2013) assessed the impact of engagement of sport (including participation, competition, volunteering, leading activities, and coaching) on graduate employability. The study found that graduates who participated in sport at university earn an average £5,824 (18 per cent) more per year than their non-sporting counterparts. More than ¼ (27%) of graduates who did not play sport at university were found to have been unemployed at some point in their career, compared with 21% of those who did participate in sport.

General benefits of sport/exercise beyond evidence for 'transferable skills'

Studies have shown that people who are physically active may have an advantage within the workplace over their non-active colleagues. Studies by Cawley (2004) & Morris (2006, 2007) suggest there is a negative association between obesity and wages/employment, with increases in obesity associated with lower wages. Engagement in an active lifestyle in sport or physical activity may facilitate a 'healthy' appearance. Student-athletes can display and promote these types of qualities when presenting themselves to future employers. A further study by Ewing (1998) produced results that suggest individuals who were active during high-school are more likely to be employed in roles which require attributes such as competitiveness, leadership and teamwork, such as supervisory or performance based roles. Again this shows the value of what student-athletes can offer to employers and, perhaps, provide some direction for the 'types' of employment that student-athletes would be suited to. A study by Kavetsos (2011) produced results that showed active individuals are far more likely to be employed than non-active individuals, especially for males. Again, this highlights the advantage student-athletes may have over their non-active colleagues when applying for employment. Studies have also shown that student-athletes can excel in comparison to non-

student-athletes at everyday tasks. For example, a study by Chaddock, Neider, Voss, Gaspar and Kramer (2011) demonstrated that athletes have the ability to multi task and process incoming information quicker than non-athletes. In sum, there are a number of benefits beyond transferable skills that student-athletes can draw upon.

Summary

Activities and interests can significantly contribute to employers' perceptions of candidate's employability. In other words, if student-athletes are able to demonstrate the skills they have learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted through sport and how these skills transfer to the workplace, they are likely to be perceived as highly employable.

The report herein will build upon this review by first, reporting employment data from graduate Winning Students and contrasting results with the wider sector of graduates (Objective 2). Second, through focus group interviews with current and graduate Winning Students, identify key transferable skills learned by Winning Students and understand how they are developed (Objective 3). These two objectives will provide further empirical evidence for the literature reviewed, with specific reference to Winning Students as a population. Finally, through an experimental design, we test the impact of Winning Students (sporting excellence) to graduate employability (Objective 4). This final objective will test the benefit to students that programmes, such as Winning Students, provide in regards to attributes developed and perceived employability in the workplace.



SECTION 3

Objective 2: Report employment data from graduate Winning Students and contrast with the wider sector of graduates

Objective 2 builds on the review of literature by reporting the employment status of graduate Winning Students and contrasting the results with the wider sector of graduates.

Participants

Participants were 29 (14 male) former Winning Students from across 11 sports and 11 colleges/universities.

Method

We asked graduate Winning Students to complete a number of questions that mapped onto the 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' (DLHE) survey. The DLHE survey asks leavers from higher education what they are doing six months after graduation. About three quarters of leavers complete the survey. Data were collected from Winning Students graduating from 2009 through to 2013.

Results from graduate Winning Students

Over 50% of those surveyed were employed full-time in paid work; over 10% were employed part-time in paid work; over 13% were self-employed/freelance; 7% were unemployed/not employed but looking for employment, further study or training; and, just over 17% were doing something else. To note, over 20% of those surveyed were engaged in full-time study and a further 3% in part-time study; it is, therefore, likely that a number of those who were 'unemployed/not employed' or 'doing something else' were engaged in further study.

Of those who were in paid employment (not including self-employed), over 39% were on a permanent or open-ended contract and over 26% were on a fixed term contract lasting 12 months or longer.

Notably, over 45% of those in employment noted that the qualification they received through university (supported by Winning Students) was a formal requirement/expected for their employment, and a further 32% noted that their qualification gave them an advantage.

Of those in employment, over 72% were engaged in employment related to the academic course that they undertook at university (supported by Winning Students),

and 55% noted that their employment fitted into their career plan or was exactly the type of work they wanted.

Of those who were undertaking further study, 50% were engaged in a higher degree (either research or taught).

Comparisons to national data from DLHE

Table 2. Comparisons to national data from DLHE.

Variable	WS 2008/09 to 2012/13	DLHE
In paid work – full-time/part-time, employed/self-employed	75.8% ^a	75.4% ^b
Unemployed	3.4% ^a	6.5% ^b
Median salary of full time-first degree leavers in full-time paid employment	£24,000 ^c	£19,000 – £20,000 ^d

Notes. ^a based on data from 29 Winning Student graduates; ^b based on AY1112 data set; ^c based on data from 10 Winning Student graduates; ^d based on data sets from AY0607 to AY1112.

Summary

Data from graduate Winning Students portrays a very favourable 'outcome' for students who have progressed through the Winning Students programme. Further, the data compare favourably to national level data with clear differences in levels of unemployment (lower for graduate Winning Students) and median salaries of full time first degree leavers in full time paid employment (higher for graduate Winning Students). The salary data are similar to the findings in the British Universities and College Sport (2013) study.

The report will now progress to Objective 3 which aimed to 'unpick' some explanations (e.g., key transferable skills learned through Winning Students programme) that might explain the positive employment data.



SECTION 4

Objective 3: Identity key transferable skills learned by Winning Students and understand how they are developed

Objective 3 builds on the review of literature and the data on employment of graduate Winning Students by identifying key transferable skills learned by current/graduate Winning Students and understanding how they are developed.

Participants

Participants were 22 (10 female) current/graduate Winning Students from across 11 sports and 12 colleges/universities.

Method

We undertook five focus groups with current Winning Students, comprising a cross-section of college student-athletes and university student-athletes across the four years of undergraduate study. Focus groups comprised between 3-6 participants and were 45-90 minutes in duration. Data were content analysed. We also generated two online communications with graduate Winning Students.

Results

The results will be presented through the questions that we asked participants.

What influenced you to become part of the Winning Students programme?

The majority of participants heard about the programme through their governing bodies or coaches; most participants were unaware of the programme before being informed by coaches or their governing body. The reasons for engagement in the programme for the majority of participants were (1) financial benefit, (2) financial provision to effectively manage sporting and studying commitments, and (3) provision to dedicate time to sporting and studying demands without competing demands in the form of a part-time job, for example.

What do you hope to gain through being part of the Winning Students programme?

The majority of participants noted that the financial support enabled them to appropriately dedicate time to sporting and studying commitments. Specific examples included, opportunity to attend more competitions, financial support for traveling expenses to competitions/training, university living costs, provision of and access to specialist staff and coaches, and better equipment. The need to 'not' having to undertake a part-time job was incredibly important to participants, allowing more time to be dedicated to sporting and studying commitments. Finally,

participants also noted the advantage of having a formal connection/network with other athletes through the programme, explaining that they benefitted from this social support network through, for example, others providing motivation and support.

How do you feel you have changed over time?

Participants responded that over time they felt more secure about their training, and many acknowledged that they attended competitions they would not have been able to attend without financial support from the Winning Students programme.

Participants also responded that they were more dedicated/motivated to train as a consequence of financial support. Many participants in the first or second year of programme commented that they feel they haven't changed that much from engaging in the programme. In other words, it appears that the benefits of the programme are more evident/acknowledged towards the end of the programme.

What do you enjoy most about being a student-athlete?

Many participants referred to the financial support that enabled them to compete at the highest level and allowed them time to focus on their sport – have support from an organisation was greatly appreciated. Again, the need 'not' to undertake a part-time job alongside sporting and studying commitments was considered a considerable benefit towards progressing both sport and study. Indeed, many felt they would not be able to apply themselves effectively to their sport and studies if they also needed to have a job. Further, participants felt that the connections and the networks they were engaged with through the Winning Students programme and their sport governing bodies could assist them with future employment. The support and flexibility from the university was noted. That is, participants felt that they were supported through common understanding of the need for student-athletes to operate differently. Examples included, missing classes or lectures due to sport commitments and catching up / learning differently. Many participants mentioned having a sort of 'community' or 'family' with their fellow athletes.

Describe how being student-athlete influences your day to day life?

The participants feel they need to be very well organised to fit in everything throughout their day. Examples included, taking the appropriate kit to university for training alongside appropriate study materials, and appropriately organising their food consumption for the day. Many participants reported planning their study time around their training and competition times, and that they didn't have the flexibility that other students have to study when they want. Time management seems to be a significant transferable skill developed. Examples also included completing coursework and meeting deadlines on time and preparing in advance. Participants

also spoke of the discipline to get up early for training and go to bed early, unlike their non-athletic flat mates.

How does what you do on a day-to-day basis enhance your academic learning? And, how does your academic learning affect what you do on a day-to-day basis?

Participants referred to time management. Time management appears to be a significant transferable skill that participants used to enhance academic learning and day-to-day lives, though, for example creating timetables to factor in training, classes and studying. Another aspect that was discussed was discipline to attend training and complete university work on time. Most participants reported being very driven to succeed in both their academic lives and sport, and they perceived that sport seems to 'create' a very competitive person in all aspects of life. From discussions with participants, flexibility with deadlines and exams appears to vary dependent on the course studied. It appeared that students undertaking subjects such as sport science seem to receive more support and flexibility than courses such as medicine or engineering.

Describe any specific skills you feel you have learned through being on an athlete education programme (Winning Students).

Participants referred to developing and applying goal setting skills to both their academic and competitive sporting lives. Communication skills developed through speaking to lecturers and academic staff were also noted. Some participants noted that their confidence to speak in front of people (public speaking) was facilitated by engagement in sport. Time management skills was frequently referred to. Some participants felt that university life in general helps them develop skills such as communication, social, writing and organising skills.

Are there any skills you have learned through being a student-athlete that you wouldn't have otherwise learned in your time at University (i.e., if you were just a student and not a student-athlete)?

Participants referred to being highly disciplined and focused on all aspects of their lives. Further, participants made the connection between being competitive within their sport and applying that same competitive attitude towards their academic life. Participants noted that they had to learn early on in their university career to be well organised with their time and noted that a number of non-athletic students have not acquired this skill. Participants also commented that they needed high levels of motivation to compete in sport and when they engaged in group work with 'other' students they noticed a lack of motivation from non-student athletes to complete the project in good time and aim for a high grade.

How does the network of support around you as a student-athlete help you learn your skills?

Participants noted the support from coaches to help them with competitions, traveling and academic life. They also commented that the network of support from other athletes helped them maintain a strong focus on their academic and sporting lives. An example included the support to 'not' go out drinking and smoking like other students, despite the temptation and difficulty in separating themselves from that lifestyle. Some participants reported an overly strong pressure from their coaches to attend training and competitions and a lack of support from coaches towards their academic life. Simultaneously, and as noted above, the course studied appears to influence the amount of support/understanding for sport commitments that are provided by academic staff with some participants reporting that some academic staff simply don't understand how much commitment Winning Students have to give to their sport.

Describe how being on an athlete education programme helps you maintain skills? In other words, describe skills that you have drawn upon, that you had prior to being on the Winning Students programme.

Below is a quote that illustrates that many of the skills developed by student-athletes may go 'unnoticed' and many may have never consciously thought about how their student-athletic life has helped them develop a wide range of skills:

"When I think about it, we probably take a lot of our skills for granted really, not really recognise it has improved....I don't think I have thought oh this is going to make my time management skills better, I'm pretty sure it has but I maybe haven't recognised it."

Have you been able to adapt and apply skills learned through being on an athlete education programme within other areas of your life?

Participants reported being more confident during interviews and when applying for jobs. A number also felt better able to draw upon personal and social skills, developed through their team sport, when engaging with different people. Participants noted using their goal-oriented and competitive nature within other areas of their life such as the working environment. Many participants did note, however, that they did not feel that they have much of a life outside their academic study and sport to apply and adapt these skills.

How does what you have learned as a student-athlete help you overcome difficulties?

A couple of quotes are provided below to illustrate how being a student-athlete has prepared them to deal with various challenges within their lives now and overcome them.

"Having done the sport that I do, having to fight someone five or six times in a competition, there is nothing much more difficult than that....When someone moans when they have one less hour of sleep they think they're tired...trust me you don't know what tired is! So it gives you a bit more hardiness to get on with things."

"It puts into perspective what's important and not...there are things that you work towards your entire life, you may face a stressful situation within your life but they are maybe not a big trauma, so I feel you're able to cope with things a lot better."

How do you think being a student-athlete will help you in the future?

Many participants noted 'employment'. They commented that it will enable employers to see that they are committed, have a good work ethic, competitive, can handle pressure and stressful situations, have time management skills, organisational skills, dedicated and have competed at a high level in their sport. Many of the participants felt they offered something unique compared to the average student that employers would find interesting on their curriculum vitae's. A quote illustrating some of this is provided below:

"I think sometimes people underestimate how difficult it can be to get through your course as a student-athlete. It allows you to say I have had to balance all these aspects of my life, even though we may not think we are more organised or developed certain skills, we are probably more equipped than some people, probably better equipped than general people you have come out of University. We do offer something that we can put down on our CV or a piece of paper to show I have managed to juggle 35 hours a week of training and university and managed to come away with decent grades whilst performing at a high level in sport. I think being a high level athlete on its own shows a determination and a focus...I think that has a benefit so we have applied ourselves to something which I think is a skill employers are looking for."

However, for some participants, although they believe that they may have developed some key transferable skills, they felt they might be disadvantaged compared to other students because they didn't have time to complete any work experience that

was specifically tailored towards their careers. A quote illustrating this perspective is provided below:

"I'm nearly finished my time at university but I have no work experience in the field I have studied but I have something to show what I have done at university. It still is quite daunting for me though because I feel that's what employers in my field want, experience within the field. I would say that people who have work experience within the sector definitely have an advantage over me."

Have you taken steps to investigate your future employment opportunities, if so in what ways?

Many participants appear to have spoken to their coaches about gaining work experience or help with developing connections to jobs and internships. However, for others, this proves more difficult as they felt their coaches could not help them with their career aspirations for certain jobs (medicine or engineering).

Summary

A significant number of 'positives' for the benefit and provision of the Winning Students programme were generated through the data collection. Key skills that Winning Students believed they learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted included, networking, drawing upon available support, organisational skills, time-management skills, goal-setting skills, being disciplined, being driven (motivation), becoming a 'competitive person' in all aspects of life, communication and social skills with peers and mentors (hierarchy), being more adept at group-work, and handling pressure.

Despite the awareness of skills being developed and maintained through engagement in Winning Students, many scholars have not considered how to use their experiences to 'sell themselves' in the job market. In the future, there may be an opportunity to enhance Winning Students employability through strategies to encourage a focus on how skills can be transferred and adapted to the employment market.

Objective 4: Test the impact of Winning Students (sporting excellence) to graduate employability

Objective 4 builds on the review of literature, the data on employment of graduate Winning Students, and the identification of key transferable skills learned by current/graduate Winning Students by employing an experimental design to test the value of high-level sport engagement to perceived acquired attributes (transferable skills) and perception of employability in a graduate level job.

Participants

Participants were 119 (57 male) employers/recruiters. The mean experience of recruiting/screening applicants, on a scale of 1 (rarely or never) to 5 (currently full-time recruiter or have been at one time), was 3.20 ($SD = 1.19$). Further descriptive information is provided below in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive data for participants.

Highest level of education*	Frequency	Employment sector*	Frequency
Some college/university	8	Public	52
University undergraduate	35	Private	55
University postgraduate	64		

*12 participants chose not to respond to these questions

Method

The experiment required participants to complete a short survey in response to evaluating a curriculum vitae (CV) for a typical entry-level graduate position in their company/business. In a between-subjects design, participants were provided with one of the curricula vitae in the experiment: One was the recommended sample skills-based CV that is freely available on prospectus.ac.uk (2014) and is cited as a good example of a skills-based CV; the other was a sport-modified version using sport as a medium through which transferable skills were communicated.

Participants were provided with the following scenario:

"Assume in your organisation, there are open, entry-level positions suitable for recent graduates from universities. Such positions are open in each department or functional area in your organisation that is, accounting, human resources, marketing, information systems, etc."

"You are asked to complete a series of short questions in regard to the following CV. Consider that you have just received this CV from a new university graduate who is applying for one of your open positions."

In the survey, participants completed items relating assessing *biodata*, skill-based *attributes* and *employability*. Biodata refers to presence/evidence in a CV of candidates' education (qualifications), work experience and activities/interests. Prior to assessing 'presence' of biodata, we also assessed how 'influential' each biodata item was to participants' decisions when shortlisting candidates. Together then, in regard to the biodata items, participants were asked, "Please indicate to what extent each of the following items influences your decisions when screening applicants for professional, graduate-level positions. After reading the CV, in regard to the biodata items, participants were then asked, "Please rate the amount that each item is present of the CV."

After completing the biodata items, participants were asked to consider their confidence in the candidate's skill-based attributes. Finally, participants were asked about the employability of the candidate.

Biodata

Biodata were collected on 11 items across three factors. Data were collected on a 1 (no influence/none) to 5 (considerable amount of influence/considerable amount) Likert scale. The items and factors are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Biodata factors and items.

Education	Work Experience	Activities/interests
Final award in undergraduate degree	Evidence of work experience	Elected office within university
Grades across levels of education	Supervised others	Sports captain
Computer experience	Summer job/internship	Recreational sports
		Community activities
		University or professional clubs/societies

Attributes

Assessments of the following skill-based attributes were collected: Confidence in the candidate's (1) communication skills, (2) numeracy skills, (3) leadership skills, (4) teamwork skills, (5) administration skills, (6) innovation skills, and (7) IT literacy skills. All data were collected on a 1 (not confident at all) to 5 (highly confident) Likert scale.

Employability

Participants were asked to complete the following four items in reference to the employability of the proposed applicant:

What is your interest in interviewing the candidate?

What is the overall suitability of the candidate for the job?

How likely is it that you would be interested in interviewing the applicant?

Taking everything into consideration regarding the applicant's CV, what is your overall evaluation of the candidate?

All data were collected on 1 (not at all interested in interviewing the candidate/not qualified/not at all likely/completely negative) to 5 (highly interested to interview/highly qualified/extremely likely/highly positive) Likert scales.

Results

Interactive effects

Of particular interest in this experiment was exploring if biodata (education, work experience, activities/interests) interacted in the prediction of outcomes (attributes, employability). For example, perhaps higher levels of work experience or activities/interests can help to alleviate lower levels of education (qualifications). Alternatively, perhaps evidence of activities/interests can enhance perceptions of education. We explored interactive effects of the biodata factors on the outcomes. The results of the final moderated hierarchical regression analyses are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. Final models of interactions of core factors in CVs upon outcomes.

Step		ΔR^{2a}	b^b (standard error)
<i>Attributes (n = 94)</i>			
1	Demographic variables ^c	.08	
2	Influence controls ^d	.05	
3	Main effects	.28**	
	Education (Ed)		.12* (.05)
	Work Experience (WE)		.28** (.05)
4	Interactive term	.07**	
	Ed * WE		-.16** (.05)
<i>Principal employability item: Overall evaluation of candidate (n = 91)</i>			
1	Demographic variables	.08	
2	Influence controls ^e	.01	
3	Main effects	.15**	
	Work Experience (WE)		.38** (.08)
	Activities/Interests (AI)		-.03 (.08)
4	Interactive term	.05*	
	WE * AI		.21* (.09)

Notes. All variables standardised except for interactive terms. Interactive terms formed from preceding (standardised) variables.

^a Stepwise change in R^2 ; ^b Unstandardised regression coefficient in respective step; ^c Gender, age, education level or respondent; ^d influence of education, work experience and activities/interests in recruiters/employers decisions; ^e influence of work experience and activities/interests in recruiters/employers decisions.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6 reports the results of the two final moderated hierarchical regression analyses. One analysis was run on the effects of biodata on attributes; a second analysis was run on the effects of biodata on a key employability item – *"Taking everything into consideration regarding the applicant's CV, what is your overall evaluation of the candidate?"*

For analyses, respondents' gender, age and education level were controlled for (step 1 in analyses) and respondents' rated 'influence' of each biodata item was controlled for (step 2 in analyses). Controlling for these factors removes biases from the inferential results; we can therefore be more confident in the tests of the effects of the *presence* of biodata items upon the chosen outcomes. In step 3 of analyses, main effects of biodata items were entered and in step 4 interactive terms for biodata were entered.

Looking at the effects of biodata on ratings of skill-based attributes, the results demonstrate that both education (qualifications) and work experience are significant predictors of skill-based attributes. In other words, higher levels of ratings on biodata items relating to education and items relating to work experience were related to higher scores for skill-based attributes.

Looking at the effects of biodata on the item "Taking everything into consideration regarding the applicant's CV, what is your overall evaluation of the candidate ", the results demonstrate that work experience is a significant predictor. In other words, higher levels of ratings on biodata items relating to work experience were related to higher scores for overall evaluation of the candidate.

All main effects reported above, however, were conditioned by interactive effects. The interactive effects are displayed in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Interactive effect of education and work experience upon attributes.

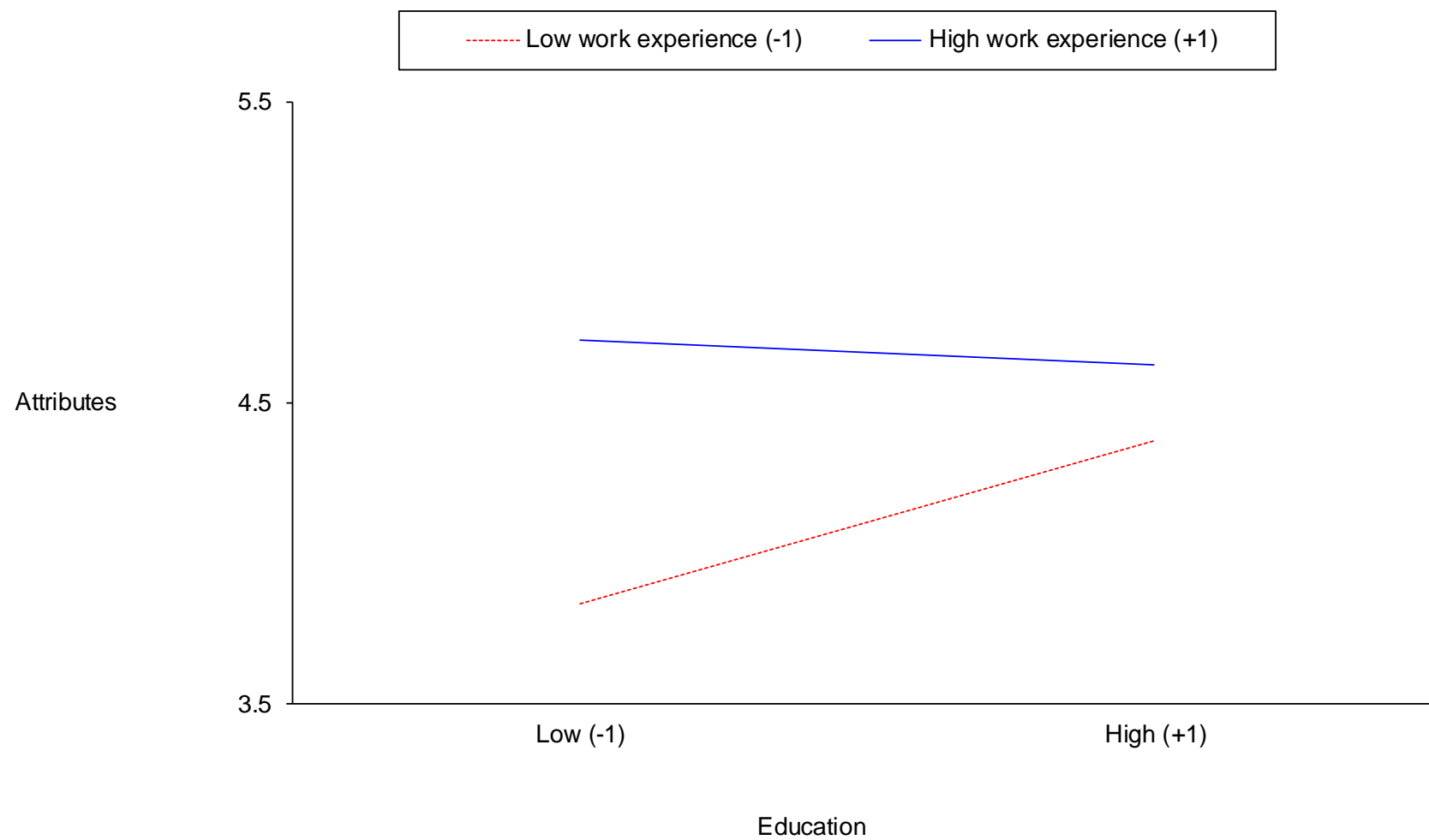


Figure 2. Interactive effect of work experience and activities/interests upon overall evaluation of candidate.

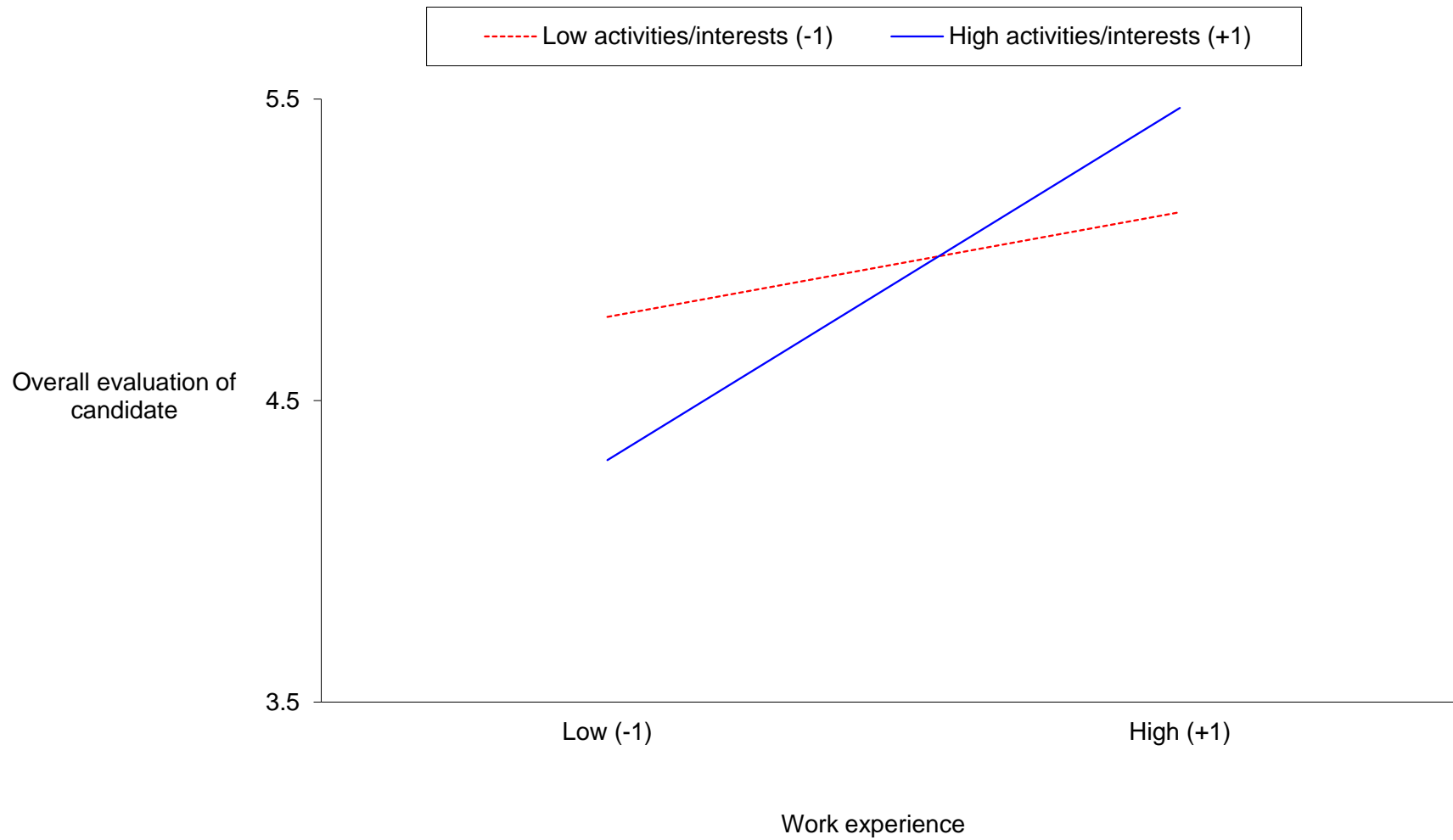


Figure 1 depicts the interactive effect of education (qualifications) and work experience upon skill-based attributes. The results demonstrate that work experience can protect candidates from lower ratings of education. In other words, engaging in work experience can compensate for lower qualifications in regard to employer/recruiter ratings of candidate's skill-based attributes.

Figure 2 depicts the interactive effect of work experience and activities/interests upon the overall evaluation of the candidates by respondents. The results demonstrate that whilst work experience is positively related to employers/recruiters overall evaluation of candidates, this relationship is stronger when employers/recruiters also rate that candidates have high levels of activities/interests (e.g., engagement in sport). In other words, engagement in sport elevates the benefit of work experience to employers/recruiters overall evaluation of candidates.

As noted, these interactive effects are of most interest and demonstrate that work experience can compensate for lower qualifications in regard to employer/recruiter ratings of candidate's skill-based attributes, and that engagement in sport elevates the benefit of work experience to employers/recruiters overall evaluation of candidates.

We now provide some descriptive results and analyses that may be of interest. Means, standard deviations and key comparisons between the two conditions are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Means, standard deviations and key comparisons between the two conditions.

Variable	Standard CV condition (<i>n</i> = 45)		Sport CV condition (<i>n</i> = 49)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Presence of core factors in CVs				
Education	3.74	.72	3.78	.68
Work experience	3.56	.72	3.70	.64
Activities/interests	1.92	.53	3.61	.72
Outcomes				
Attributes	3.44	.68	3.56	.46
Employability*	3.31	.90	3.52	.93

Note. *A total of 91 participants completed all of the employability items.

In regard to the biodata (education, work experience, activities/interests), based upon the design of the experiment, we were only expecting to observe a significant difference in ratings of activities/interests. In the CVs, we kept all information relating to education and work experience constant; we only changed information relating to sport – captured by biodata items referring to activities/interests. The results demonstrate that there were no significant differences in ratings of education and work experience (as we expected) and that there was very nearly a significant difference ($p = .06$) in ratings of the presence of activities/interests between the two conditions, with the sport condition receiving higher scores that indicated greater evidence of activities/interests. The effect was meaningful: The mean of the sport condition – 3.61 – was nearly twice as large as the mean of the standard condition – 1.92. Bootstrapped analyses – estimation of effect with 1000 resamples using the original sample as the ‘population’ – indicated that effect was robust at $p < .01$.

In regard to the results for the outcomes (attributes and employability), there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the conditions in ratings of confidence in candidates’ attributes. In other words, when comparing the overall average scores and in comparison to the standard condition, respondents who read the sport CV rated that they had higher levels of confidence in the candidate’s communication skills, numeracy skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, administration skills, innovations skills and IT literacy skills. This is interesting. Recall, the only differences between the CVs are in regard to how skills are demonstrated – through sport (sport CV condition) or not through sport (standard CV condition). In short, the results suggest that engagement in sport is interpreted as positive evidence of a number of skill-based attributes.

There was no statistical difference between the conditions in regards to ratings of employability. It is important to note, however, that in comparison to the standard condition the mean ratings for employability are higher for the sport condition and that this trend was evident across all four of the employability questions. All mean scores for items were above 3.1 on a scale of 1 to 5 – it is important to note this in respect to the ‘standard’ CV actually representing an *exemplar/template* CV, recommended on the prospectus.ac.uk website. We would expect naturally ‘high’ scores for the standard condition because the CV is likely to be better than ‘average’. As such, demonstrating ‘advantages’ of the sport CV was going to be difficult. In this context, although differences were not significant, the consistently higher scores for the sport condition are considered somewhat meaningful.

Summary

The experiment significantly builds upon the literature review, the employment data, and the identification of key transferable skills learned by current/graduate Winning Students, by demonstrating *how* education, work experience and activities/interests

(sport) influence employers/recruiters ratings of skill-based attributes and employability of candidates. Primarily the results demonstrate that work experience can compensate for lower qualifications in regard to employer/recruiter ratings of candidate's skill-based attributes, and that engagement in sport elevates the benefit of work experience to employers/recruiters overall evaluation of candidates.

These results are important given the emerging "new era" of employability (Fernandez-Araoz, 2014) as highlighted in the literature review in section 2. The findings suggest employers/recruiters perceived Winning Students as having more potential, i.e., the ability to adapt and grow into increasing complex roles and environments. This would suggest that employability is not just about demonstrating what you have done; it is also about how demonstrating what you have done shows you have potential.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Skills and employability have a direct impact on life opportunities. Understanding how skills are learned, developed, applied, maintained and changed over time can facilitate improving the employability of individuals. Sports scholars are a unique population for investigation as they need to maintain a wide range of skills and acquire new ones in order to perform in two domains (education and sport). The ability to refine a previous skill, or learn new skills that may be required to be effective in a new domain or wider activity, is an important issue for society as a prosperous economy depends on the development of new skills.

The aim of this project was to assess the impact of the Winning Students sports scholarship programme on the development of key transferable skills and graduate attributes and employability. First, we reviewed the evidence-base of sport and education in the development of transferable skills desired by employers. Second, we reported employment data from graduate Winning Students and contrasted results with the wider sector of graduates. Third, through focus groups, we identified key transferable skills learned by Winning Students and explored how they were developed. Finally, through an experiment, we tested the impact of Winning Students (sporting excellence) to graduate employability.

The literature review suggested that sport can significantly contribute to employers' perceptions of candidate's employability. In other words, if student-athletes are able to demonstrate the skills they have learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted through sport and how these skills transfer to the workplace, they could be more likely to be perceived as highly employable. The literature also revealed how student-athletes could be an important population to help better understand an emerging 'new era' related to employability based on potential (i.e., the ability to adapt and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments). Potential is being seen an important predictor of success because the employment market is changing so rapidly and it is nearly impossible to predict the competencies needed to succeed in even a few years. Research shows how people with the highest potential have: a strong motivation to excel in the pursuit of challenging goals; the humility to put the group ahead of individual needs; the ability to be pushed out of their comfort zone with stretch development; a strong engagement with their work and the people around them; and, the determination to overcome setbacks and obstacles. The literature review indicates that student-athletes can develop all of these while

combining education and sport, and thus could be seen as more 'trainable' by employers.

Employment data from graduate Winning Students portrayed very favourable outcomes for students who have progressed through the Winning Students programme. Further, the data compared favourably to national level data with clear differences in levels of unemployment (lower for graduate Winning Students) and median salaries of full time first degree leavers in full time paid employment (higher for graduate Winning Students).

Through focus groups, key skills that Winning Students believed they learned, developed, applied, maintained and adapted included networking, drawing upon available support, organisational skills, time-management skills, goal-setting skills, being disciplined, being driven (motivation), becoming a 'competitive person' in all aspects of life, communication, social/emotional competence, being more adept at group-work, and handling pressure. Student-athlete employability can be enhanced through strategies to encourage a focus on how skills can be transferred and adapted to the employment market.

In challenging economic times employers are looking for candidates to demonstrate achievements beyond academic performance. An experiment demonstrated that engagement in sport elevates the benefit of work experience to employers/recruiters overall evaluation of candidates. This suggests that employability is not just about providing evidence of what someone has done but also how demonstrating what someone has done shows they have potential (i.e., the ability to adapt and grow).

Recommendations

1. Winning Students scholarships help to support elite athletes and can help them achieve their academic and sporting goals. A key objective of Winning Students is enhancing the capability of the further and higher education sectors to support and cater for the needs of talented student athletes as flexibly as possible. One of these needs is making a successful transition into the world of work. We recommend adding bespoke career and employability advice as part of requirements for network members. In addition, we recommend career planning and employability advice be explicitly noted under service level requests in order to raise awareness.

2. Create a toolkit and resource pack based on research findings for professional staff in Universities and Colleges (i.e., student support services, careers staff, student advisors), and staff working with student unions, coaches and governing bodies, to help past, present and future Winning Students scholars 'sell themselves' in the job market. Student-athlete employability could be further enhanced through strategies to encourage a focus on how skills can be transferred and adapted to the employment market. In challenging economic times employers are looking for

candidates to demonstrate achievements beyond academic performance. Skills learned in sport such as leadership, teamwork and communication can add value by providing evidence of organisational skills and decision making. Universities and Colleges can help sports scholars become more aware of skills being developed and maintained through engagement in the Winning Students programme, and also promote the benefits and added value to the prospective applicants, the existing network, the wider sector and industry employers.

3. Policy makers should consider sports scholars as a model to enhance graduate employability among all students. Through their significant engagement in wider-curricular activities, in this case sport, they develop key transferable skills that equip them for an ever-increasing competitive employment market. Research on how The way Winning Students are able to maintain a wide range of skills and acquire new ones in order to perform in two domains (education and sport) is highly relevant to a workforce increasingly requiring career adaptability. Future research questions include: What contribution does expert coaching, high expectations and exposure to high performance environments have on overall development and how do they impact on studying? How do sport scholars use technology in distance and blended learning? Does the timing and provision of feedback through coaches and teammates influences how they use feedback from lecturers, and how they prepare for assessments? Does coaching in sport have any benefits for academic studies and is there a role for (non-sport) coaching for other students to enhance their university experience and improve academic attainment and employability? A better understanding of Winning Students could help improve outcomes for all students.

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