

# The AWARE Framework – A Progressive Approach to Employability

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## Introduction

The University's third strategic aim is "to enhance Ulster's role as a sector leader for student employability as an integral part of the wider student experience." The Computing Subject Area underwent a highly successful Revalidation in 2012/13. As part of our revalidation activity we were keen to develop an enhanced employability strand, underpinned by a greater awareness and understanding of professional issues within the curriculum.

Based on reflections from the EDORT process, input from the Viewpoints project and through work conducted by a working group of the course committee, a progressive approach to employability was devised and introduced in September 2013 - the **AWARE Framework**.

A session during a School away day in 2011 was led by members of the Viewpoints team. One outcome was an initial draft of the AWARE framework:

- Awareness** (Year 1)
- Work preparation** (Year 2)
- Acquire experience** (Year 3)
- Reflect /refine/refocus** (Year 4)
- Employed**

**AWARE** helped formalise our existing employability coverage. It is implemented through an 'anchor' module in each of Years 1 - 4, with employability skills taught, developed and assessed elsewhere as appropriate, including CPD modules.

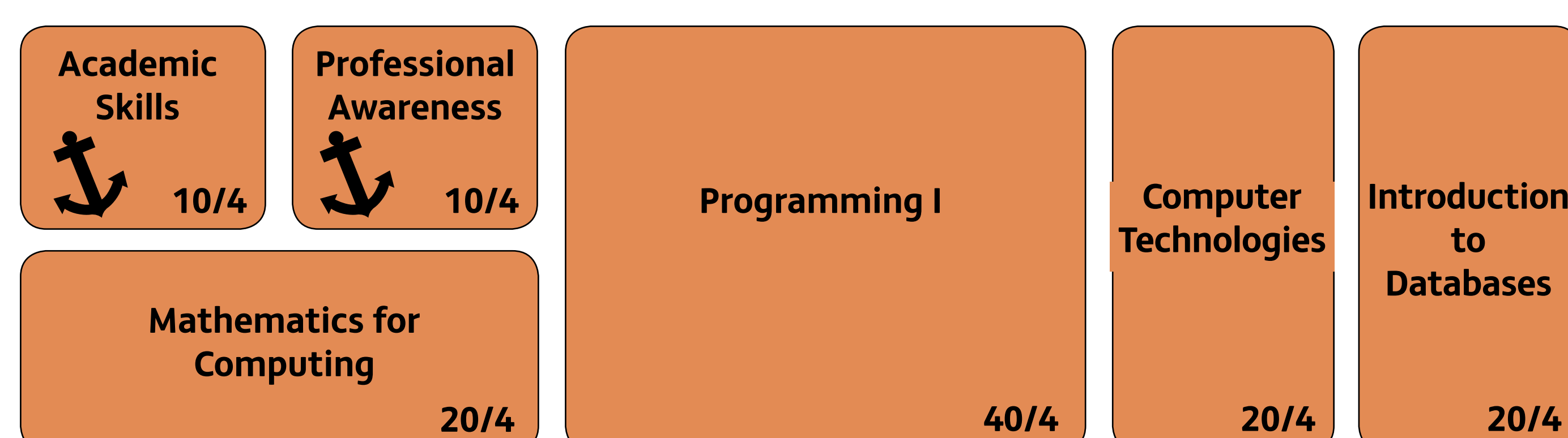


Existing coverage of employability has had some very positive outcomes. For example, a placement employer recently commented about a student, "his attitude to his work is meticulous, and his career attitude is always 'how can I do better' or 'give me some advice!'" Through AWARE we aspire for all of our students to receive this response.

## The Framework Explained

### Awareness (Year 1)

Year 1 is about raising awareness of the role and importance of employability skills.



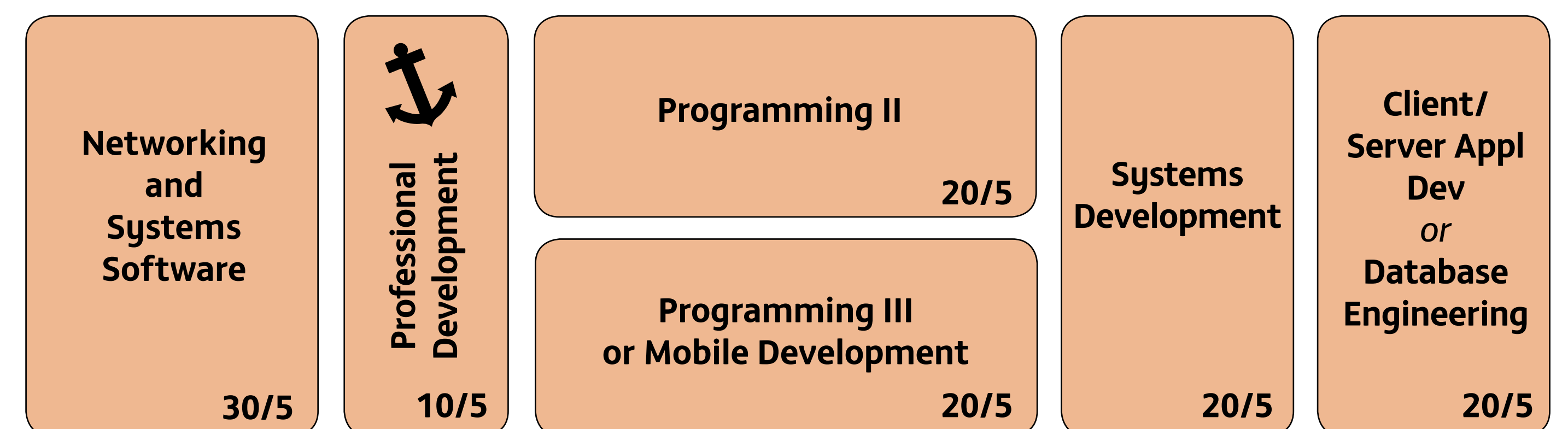
**Professional Awareness** is the anchor module for initial development. With Academic Skills for Computing and other level 4 modules, Year 1 addresses, inter alia:

- Employer expectations.
- Role of Year 1 and Year 2 marks in securing early placement interviews.
- Returning students meeting with new intake.
- Careers talks and guest lectures.
- Initial introduction to CVs, and skills acquired to date, via PACE.
- Presentation skills.

**Awareness** is also developed by the use of CPD modules for example: PPD105 "Building your Skills".

### Work Preparation (Year 2)

In Year 2 the focus is on **work preparation** and engaging with the placement preparation process.



**Professional Development** as the anchor module, Year 2 considers:

- Ongoing development of Year 1 professional development activities.
- Technical competence for professional practice.
- Ongoing CV development.
- Employability skills development and practice.

One student noted, "I was invited for my first Placement interview in Semester 1. My CV got me through the door, step two was making a presentation to ~15 people; it was nerve-racking, but the experience developed in Year 1 really helped"

**Work Preparation** is further enhanced by the use of CPD modules for example: PPD184 "Work Experience Skills Builder".

Foundation Degree students are encouraged to reflect on how their worked-based learning module has prepared them for seeking graduate employment.

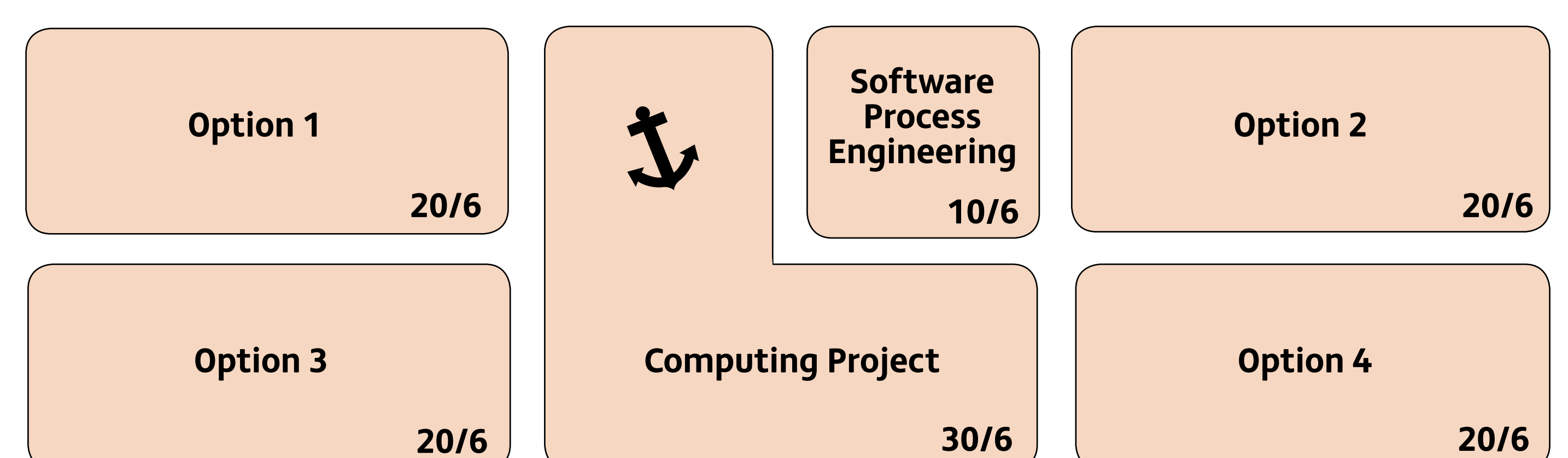
### Acquire Experience (Year 3)

Year 3 professional practice is a mandatory requirement of the course and is fundamental to the development of employability skills for the student. This is the primary opportunity for all students to **acquire experience and knowledge**.

Professional practice often influences Year 4 module choice, project choice and future career pathway.

### Reflect/refine/refocus (Year 4)

Having **reflected** on their placement experience, Year 4 is the opportunity for students to **refine their skills** and **refocus on their career direction**.



The final year Project module is an important aspect of this. Students may choose a project derived from, or building upon, their placement experience. The Project provides a context to:

- Assess what employability skills have been learned throughout the programme so far.
- Allow the student to reflect on why they are doing a project and its employability benefits. For example: showcasing their strengths, time management and presentation skills.

Further **reflection, refinement and refocusing** is encouraged by the use of CPD modules for example: PPD102 "Graduation – What Next?".

### Employed

As part of the Year 4 reflective activity each student prepares a **Project Showcase** – an assessed reflective report which allows the student to explore their project work from an employability perspective. One student noted, "the Project Showcase made me think about my project as something I could use at interviews." Another said, "the project showcase was something I could talk confidently about at my interview, I've just secured my dream job, it really helped"

### Conclusion

The University Revalidation Panel, in their formal feedback, regarded AWARE and our enhanced employability strand as exemplary. Its true value however, is in facilitating a growing body of students to become more self-AWARE of the skills they have developed and learn to review their progress against targets they have set.