Perspectives

Developing global competencies in graduates

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This perspective identifies the necessary attributes to enable graduates to be equipped and ready to work in a globally competent manner. It is argued that knowledge and understanding are not sufficient to facilitate this, and that consideration of the fostering of appropriate values and attitudes and skills are also required. Therefore curricula need to encompass these personal development aspects within the delivery of study programmes.

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Many universities are now considering the graduate attributes of their students and as a result global competencies are becoming more prominent within degree programmes. This perspective has been written following our investigation of how to internationalise programmes of study. It provides a brief overview of considerations about what is meant by internationalisation and global competencies and then offers recommendations regarding how global competencies might effectively be facilitated within programmes.

While the terms globalisation and internationalisation are frequently used interchangeably (Hicks, 2003), they are distinct and fundamentally different concepts. Globalisation is considered to be the "widening, deepening and speeding up of world wide interconnectedness" (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999, p. 2) that has been driven by technological advances and the development of knowledge economies. Internationalisation on the other hand, is often considered to be an institutional response to the forces of globalisation (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Caruana & Hanstock, 2008; Van der Wende, 2007). While, globalisation reflects the development of homogeneity amongst nations, internationalisation reflects the individuality of nations and enables nations and institutions to respond to global forces (Knight, 2001). Internationalisation within HE comprises the processes by which HEIs compete for students globally as well as the processes that prepare students for a globalised world (Hanson, 2010) however, it is the latter process that is the focus here.

As knowledge has become a more critical resource, HE is considered an important medium for cross-border flows of knowledge as well as people, and HEIs are expected to foster global consciousness (Gacel-Avila, 2005), develop global perspectives (Lunn, 2008) in their graduates, and produce 'global ready graduates' (Hunter, White, & Godby, 2006). This preparation includes developing graduates with the capacity to work in a society where cross-cultural capability is essential to employment (Heitmann, 2005; Shiel, 2006). Recognition of the global skills race (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2008) and employer demands for graduates with a broader world-view all serve to reinforce internationalisation as a 'critical priority' (Shiel, 2008). Internationalising degree programmes is one way to achieve this goal and as a result, there has been growth in their provision. Table 1 outlines ways in which programmes might include international dimensions.

Schechter (1993) identified three goals of an internationalised programme to be:

- pragmatic (acquiring skills and knowledge for employability in a global context);
- liberal (developing an appreciation of cultural differences and intercultural sensibility);
- civic (developing multidimensional global citizenship).

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Table 1
A framework of internationalisation at programme level (Becket & Brookes, 2008).

Dimensions of internationalisation	Key indicators
Internationalisation of the curriculum (generally reflective of more formal elements)	• Programme aims and outcomes • Teaching which focuses on global business environments • International case studies and learning materials • An international perspective in all main functional areas • Opportunity to study a foreign language
Internationalisation of the student experience (reflective of both formal and informal elements)	• A concern for intercultural exchange in the classroom • Opportunity for intercultural exchange in a social or other informal setting • The provision of internships or project work across borders • The involvement of international visiting professors • The recruitment of non-nationals to the faculty • The international experience of faculty • The foreign language skills of faculty
International recruitment	• Recruitment of students from other countries • Support provided for international students
International partnerships and strategic alliances	• Courses jointly designed and taught with partner schools abroad • The involvement of faculty in international networks
International exchanges (staff and student)	• Existence of exchange programmes • Internships and study abroad as an integral part of programmes • Courses taught in English in non-English speaking countries • The opportunity for faculty to serve as visiting professors abroad
International research	• Participation in international conferences • Research and publication of an international nature
Alumni relations	• The international placement of graduates • The language ability of graduates

Thus the student experience should reflect these goals through the knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes, and skills developed amongst graduates (Mestenhauser, 1998). As students enrol on subject specific degree programmes, developing an understanding of the subjects within different cultural contexts is fundamental in an internationalised curriculum. However, in her study of global perspectives in higher education, Lunn (2008) identifies that students should also develop their knowledge and understanding of the broader, global contemporary issues reflected in political, economic, social and environmental forces at home and abroad. Furthermore, Hunter et al. (2006) report from their study on global competency that students need to understand the priority of sustainable development, as does Shiel (2007) from her examination of the requirements of global citizens. Lunn (2008) also reports that developing global perspectives is about developing students' knowledge about different people, places and cultures to make them aware of different ways of thinking about the world and contemporary issues. Hunter et al. (2006) further identify that students need to develop an understanding of cultural norms and expectations of others, and Rollins (2008) suggests that knowledge of foreign languages can aid in this development and is central to an international education.

However, knowledge and understanding is insufficient on its own to the development of a globally competent graduate to achieve the liberal goals of an internationalised education as identified by Schecter (1993). Previous research highlights the need to use the knowledge and understanding gained to cultivate values and attitudes (Lunn, 2008; Mestenhauser, 1998). For example, Shiel (2007) reports that knowledge and understanding must be used to challenge and discard prejudice. Gacel-Avila (2005) argues that global consciousness necessitates a respect for humanity's differences and cultural wealth, and global citizens need to respect and value cultural diversity (Oxfam, 2008). They also should accept political (Gacel-Avila, 2005) and ethical responsibility (Stevens & Campbell, 2006) as well as feel empowered to bring about change "to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place" (Shiel, 2007, p. 154). As such, graduates who have developed global perspectives will also promote justice and equality.

Both knowledge and understanding and values and attitudes are important to the development of graduate skills. For example, graduates who have developed an understanding of global contemporary issues and who promote justice and equality, should be better prepared to "seek out information about the world so they can make well-informed, ethical and responsible decisions" (Stevens & Campbell, 2006, p. 542). These decisions are characterised by mindfulness, partnerships, pragmatic hope and social entrepreneurship (Bellamy and Weinburg, 2008). To do that however, they also require the skills to