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Re: Developing future-ready global workforce: A case study from a leading UK university



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ABSTRACT:

Amid macro-level developments including globalisation and recent technological advancements and demographic shifts, the need to prepare future-ready and globally-aware graduates has gained fresh momentum within the Higher Education (HE) sector. This need is further emphasised by high graduate unemployment levels suggesting that more needs to be done to ensure graduates have the right kind of skills and attributes to succeed in a globally-competitive employment market. HE institutions have responded by firmly embedding internationalisation in their core institutional mission and vision. However, there remains scope for integrating internationalisation with employability initiatives. Against this backdrop, the paper provides insights into the development and first year of implementation of the Global Talent Programme (GTP) at Bournemouth University from the perspective of students. A case study approach is adopted to explore the impact of the GTP on the student experience and learning outcomes. Findings suggest that the GTP enables students to develop a range of skills, competencies and attributes of relevance to the future global workforce and workplace, whilst also providing opportunities to apply these skills. The paper discusses potential implications for other institutions wishing to develop their graduates as a future-ready global workforce.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present Bournemouth University's Global Talent Programme as a potentially innovative response to the challenges UK higher education is facing in developing employable graduates who can work successfully beyond geographic boundaries (Higher Education Academy, 2016; Times Higher Education, 2016a). Preparing university leavers to be successful in the graduate market has long been a key priority for higher education institutions (HEIs) (Sheppard, Minocha, & Hristov, 2015; Tomlinson, 2017; Wilton, 2011) and especially for Management Education (ME) and business schools (Azevedo, Apfelthaler, & Hurst, 2012). However, amid macro-level trends including globalisation, recent technological innovations (McKinsey, 2017) and demographic developments (Deloitte, 2017), the need to prepare *future-ready* and *globally-aware* graduates has gained fresh momentum within HEIs (Hristov & Minocha, 2017) against the backdrop of a highly competitive labour market.

An increased focus on globalisation requires students to effectively navigate across cultures and borders and highlights the importance of developing a global mindset (Sorrell, 2016). Equally, technological innovations, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics are reshaping the nature of work (McKinsey, 2017). The latter, together with demographic trends whereby over 30% of the global workforce by 2050 will come from China and India alone (Deloitte, 2017), call for the development of a new breed of global graduate talent to join the highly-competitive labour market.

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This renewed focus is particularly evident in the trend around developing global attributes, and associated concepts of developing a global mindset (see Sorrell, 2016), global heartset (see Ross & Hallowell, 2016) and global skillset (see Brimm, 2015). This shift to developing global skills and attributes has been evident in the context of both HE generally and ME in particular (Bennett & Kane, 2011; Randolph, 2011).

Whilst considerable work has been done to ensure that graduates entering the workforce are equipped with the right skills and attributes, research shows that 58% of graduates in the UK are in non-graduate or lower skilled jobs (Chartered Institute for Personnel Development, 2015) and 5.2% of university leavers are unemployed (HESA, 2017). Beyond the UK, graduate unemployment is a challenge for both developing and other developed economies. Graduate unemployment in developing economies such as India stands at 47% (British Council, 2016) and 31.4% in Malaysia (Edu Advisor, 2016). Despite developed economies demonstrating lower graduate unemployment levels in comparison, nevertheless 6.8% of graduates in France and 4.7% of graduates in Canada are still unemployed (OECD, 2015).

This global picture of graduate employment suggests more needs to be done to ensure graduates have the right *kind* and *level* of skills and attributes to succeed in a globally-competitive employment market. This is an opportunity for graduates to secure a graduate-level employment for those keen to pursue this labour market entry route amid other labour market routes including apprenticeships (see Coole, Ioras, Bandara, Arraiza, & López, 2017), traineeships (see Fitzpatrick, Coleman, Shanahan, Coleman, & Cordes, 2017) and the self-employment or the entrepreneurial route (see Ren, Zhu, & Warner, 2017). HE institutions and business schools in particular have responded by firmly embedding internationalisation (Hudzik, 2011) in their core institutional mission and vision. However, there remains scope for integrating internationalisation with employability initiatives (Times Higher Education, 2016a). Many HEIs have introduced innovative approaches and initiatives to provide experiential learning in a global context and to give students the opportunity to develop a range of global skills and attributes (see AGCAS, 2015a; Sheppard et al., 2015). However, more can be done, as Hawawini (2017, p.1) argues: “HE institutions should redouble their efforts to offer a truly global learning experience and global knowledge to those who seek it” - something that should be firmly embedded in HE institution's internationalisation mission statements' (Cheng, Kitigawa, & Osborne, 2017).

Set against this backdrop, the central purpose of this paper is to describe and evaluate Bournemouth University's Global Talent Programme (GTP), which has been designed to address calls for future-ready and globally aware graduates (Blessinger, 2015; Smith & Meaney, 2016; Sorrell, 2016). The review of the literature discusses key academic contributions focused on the development of global graduate attributes, such as mindsets, heartsets and skillsets amidst a globalised context; the importance of providing opportunities for students to apply these attributes in real-life contexts and practice; and the challenge of articulation and demonstration of these graduate skills and attributes. The paper concludes by providing potential implications for other HEIs who may wish to reshape their global skills development and graduate employability offers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Internationalisation and the importance of developing global attributes

Graduate employability is high on the agenda for the UK Government (Leitch, 2006; Minocha, Hristov, & Reynolds, 2017b), employers (Harvey & Knight, 2003), and for the UK HE sector. This emphasis on employability is of course reflected across global HE; employability rankings being one such indicator of this (i.e. Times Higher Education's Global University Employability Rankings, Times Higher Education, 2016b; and QS Graduate Employability Rankings, QS, 2017).

Universities and their business schools however face considerable challenges in this area. The latest World Economic Forum (WEF) report predicts that by 2020 over one third of the skills that are considered important in today's workforce will have changed considerably and around five million jobs will become extinct due to technological developments impacting the workforce and workplace (Mirza, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2016).

Arguably, macro-level developments such as the penetration of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (see McKinsey, 2017) which are reshaping the nature of work call for the development of a wider set of global employability skills and attributes in graduates, such as adaptability, emotional intelligence and cross-cultural communication (Brimm, 2015). There are also calls for greater innovation in the provision of institutional employability practice (Alegre, 2016; Rae, 2007).

Whilst many universities and their business schools have embedded employability and employability-related skills in courses and student support services (Levitas, 2005; Tymon, 2011, pp. 1–16; Wilton, 2011; Yorke, 2004), UK HE has been criticised for its slow pace in responding to the global challenges facing graduates (Barber, Donnelly, Rizvi, & Summers, 2013, p. 78; Minocha, Reynolds, & Hristov, 2017a). Employers too have criticised universities for not sufficiently integrating ‘global attributes’ into their provision. The 2016 CBI and Pearson Education and Skills Survey demonstrated that employers are unsatisfied with the availability of graduate attributes and skills considered to be of key importance to the future workforce, such as resilience, global awareness and problem solving (CBI and Pearson, 2016). Another survey of 400 employers echoed this, identifying that graduates are not adequately prepared for the workforce, lacking exposure to real world learning and essential skills such as creative thinking and teamwork (CareerBuilder UK, 2015).

Amidst the growing influence of internationalisation on the world of work, the importance of developing global attributes in students and graduates is an important element of HEIs response to the impact of internationalisation on the World of Work (WoW) (Blessinger, 2015; Smith & Meaney, 2016; Sorrell, 2016). Bennett (2008) argues in favour of the importance of developing three sets of attributes, namely mindsets, heartsets and skillsets.

A mindset, according to Bennett (2008, p.18), is informed by a set of cognitive competencies, which “include cultural-general

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