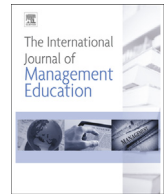




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Embedding enterprise education: A service based transferable skills framework



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ABSTRACT

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education, according to government reports, should be embedded within Higher Education (HE) however, although many HEI's are experienced in programme led initiatives, they have less knowledge of cross-school and campus wide provision. This paper argues that an alternative approach, based upon embedding transferable skills into the curriculum, produces more consistent and sustainable results than policy led enterprise programme initiatives, especially when informed by a systematic and integrated transferable skills framework.

This paper analyses the provision and nature of the transferable skills associated with four, highly successful, enterprise programmes. Using content analysis and a thematic coding system, existing programme documents are analysed to generate a service based framework of transferable skills that can be embedded across institutions.

The findings suggest that resource sensitive initiatives are problematic with regard to maintaining sustainable learning programmes and that an embedded transferable skills approach offers greater consistency. We conclude with a framework of transferable skills informed by empirical research, designed to embed such skills across the curriculum, thus shaping the 21st century graduate.

The service based framework is an institutional tool for programmes and curriculum design beyond the business school and offers an alternative approach to embedding enterprise education.

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1. Introduction

Concerns relating to graduate employability, combined with rising tuition fees and ongoing funding debates, will ensure the continued, at times controversial, topicality of enterprise and entrepreneurship within Higher Education (HE) (Billett, 2009; European Commission 2012; QAA, 2012). Stakeholders are rightly concerned that provision is fit for purpose, provides value for money and delivers results. This paper endeavours, with the 21st century graduate in mind, how best to determine and service transferable skills provision. It does so by adopting a systematic and integrated methodology to produce a holistic transferable skills framework. Within Institutions offering multi contextual learning environments, across

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disciplines such as health, engineering and business, standardisation of transferable skills provision is both complex and seemingly unsustainable, the service framework offers a contribution to the evolution of transferable skills provision.

2. Background

There have been developments in the skills and learning discourse, for example, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) has expressed the desire to enhance and expand the delivery of transferable skills (SHEEC, 2011). Various projects have been launched to stimulate collaboration on educational innovation. The SHEEC initiative is all embracing in that it aims to encourage flexible learning and enhance transferable skills delivery, while contextualising acquired knowledge and understanding. However, this discourse is not parochial, for example the *World Economic Forum* (2009) and *CIHE/NCGE/NESTA* (2008) both articulate the need for change, calling for stakeholders to consider how best to embed transferable skills, they point to industry connectivity and curriculum transformation as being essential prerequisites to success. Such policy initiatives can be faddish and transient as they are often dependent upon political agendas and interpretations (NCGE and ISBE, 2010). This in turn colours the view taken of them by the institutions and academics.

2.1. Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship

Policy initiatives and debates relating to transferable skills tend to ignore or gloss over very real academic and institutional concerns. These concerns, relating to academic definitions, institutional resource silos, employability services and sustainable income streams, converge to discourage proactive institutional responses. Indeed, there is much debate as to not only what are transferable skills? But also where are they to be located? Clearly certain subjects engage directly with practice and others indirectly, the classics scholar will have acquired transferable skills as will the civil engineer. Enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability offerings are, by their very nature, vocationally orientated and designed to produce direct benefits to the students and potential employer. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) special issue report on Education and Training (Martinez, Levie, Kelley, Saemundsson, & Schott, 2010), notes, as do Blenker, Dreisler, and Kjeldsen (2008), the significance of enterprise education in stimulating socio-economic growth, implying that it is closely linked to employability and transferable skills. This paper and the research upon which it is based adopted for clarity and coherence the term enterprise education. An extended debate surrounds the definitions of enterprise and entrepreneurship education, with issues of cultural, custom and practice affecting the usage of each term and preferences towards the correctness of terminology in particularly contexts. However custom and practice associates entrepreneurship education with venture creation and development, with enterprise education being seen to be a rather broad expression, inclusive rather than exclusive, being defined as:

'Enterprise education is the application of creative ideas and innovations to practical situations –with enterprise education aiming to produce individuals with the mindset and skills to respond to opportunities, needs and shortfalls, with key skills including taking the initiative, decision making, problem solving, networking, identifying opportunities and personal effectiveness. Enterprise provision can be applied to all areas of education, extending beyond knowledge acquisition to a wide range of emotional, social, and practical skills; and

Entrepreneurship education is the application of enterprise skills specifically to the creation and growth of organisations, with entrepreneurship education focusing on developing skills and applying an enterprising mindset in the specific contexts of setting up a new venture, developing and growing an existing business, or designing an entrepreneurial organisation.' (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013:15).

Enterprise education includes such transferable skills as emotional and personal development, which are considered as the building blocks for behavioural development within entrepreneurial contexts (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). Furthermore GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor special edition, 2010) suggests that enterprise education should be all embracing, providing graduates with the transferable skills that enhance employability opportunities. Martinez et al. (2010), the authors of GEM, emphasise the need to embed enterprise education within the HE curriculum and highlight the enormity of this task. The report stresses the need for enterprise education to be delivered by multi-disciplinary academics capable of cutting across discipline divides and silo mentalities: challenging traditional pedagogies and behaviours. The report notes that this view is generally well established and accepted amongst experts, however, questions are raised with regard to quality, design and nature of such education. The programmes that form the basis of this research paper comply with the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) ethos that enterprise education should be open to all and cut across discipline boundaries.

2.2. Institutional response

Increasingly HE institutions are being asked to respond to the socio-economic demands of their 'paymasters' and 'stakeholders', in short they must be more responsive to the professional, vocational and employability needs of their graduates (Billett, 2009; IfM and IBM, 2008). The research upon which this paper is based addresses the question, how should HE respond, institutionally, to this skill orientated employability agenda, whilst ensuring sustainable service offering? It does so, based upon a detailed enterprise programme audit, a transferable skills framework, in so doing, it recognises and

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