

TRANSFORMATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY- ENTERPRISE COOPERATION

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***Abstract.** This paper deals with the engagement of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) with the outside world, and how academic institutions build their relations with public, private and professional organisations. The research explores university-enterprise relations and the issues of employability of students in the 21st century, how universities respond to new demands and requirements in this field. The current research is based on the analysis of strategic planning in UK universities and considers several case studies as examples of developing mutually beneficial ‘transformational’ university-enterprise partnerships. The research analysis of the collected data aims to explore the importance of university-enterprise partnerships for students, academics, universities, and employers and how universities ensure effective developments in the field. The results of the research show that strategic planning is key in developing effective university-enterprise relations, and the strategic targets can only be achieved when there is evidence of active engagement of university staff and students in the process cooperation with enterprises.*

***Keywords:** CareerEdge model; employability; strategic planning; transferable skills; transformational university-enterprise partnership.*

Introduction

The importance of relations between Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) and their socio-economic environment has become a topical issue in the last 20 years. Employability of university graduates and ensuring stronger relevance of universities’ activities within their economic environment has moved high on the agenda of governments and higher education governing organisations. This paper analyses university-enterprise relations and considers several samples of partnerships in order to propose a few possible routes of development.

Before we proceed to the analysis of university-enterprise relations and how they are currently developed in the UK, it is useful to define major terms we are using in this paper when describing university-enterprise relations, strategic planning and implementation. It is worth noting what we understand under the term ‘enterprise’ from the very start of this paper. In this paper, the term ‘enterprise’ is used not only in relation to a business, commercial company or firm

but also to any public or private organisation. At the same time, the employability is considered as one of the most important elements and the driving force of university-enterprise relations, which has a direct impact on their development and expansion.

What is employability? It is not a new concept within the higher education, and as well as enterprise and entrepreneurship these terms “may be found in curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular activities”.¹ Employability incorporates a set of achievements of students, their skills, knowledge and understanding of subject specific and more general processes and events “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” (Yorke, 2004). This definition clearly underlines that it is not the same as gaining a graduate job, but it is rather about the capacity of graduates to function successfully in the outside professional world and being able to move between occupations and at the same time being employable throughout their life. Pool and Sewell (2007) developed Yorke’s approach further and came up with the *CareerEdge model* which identified the following five key elements for students’ employability:

Career Development Learning combines the knowledge, skills and experience to help students manage and develop their careers. It is vital for our current and future students and the HE as a whole. It ushers in a new era when the teaching and learning have to change dramatically in order to absorb all innovations. It is not enough to provide the information and memorise it any more when the information is readily available on the Internet, when students can easily find the required data themselves. They should be taught and practise how to find the right information in the ocean of various publications and how to assess the data received and what methods to apply. They need to develop creative thinking which will enable them to use the data and information in accordance with their specific needs. It is therefore, the education is moving to ‘experiential learning’, ‘project work’, and ‘research’. Students need better understanding that the process of learning does not stop when they graduate, it is a continuous process through their life experience. This is particularly important today when all professional fields undergo rapid development, and the knowledge obtained during a course often becomes obsolete when students graduate.

Experience: work and life experiences enable students to develop a broader range of skills and knowledge which may be attractive for prospective employers. Therefore, the curriculum should incorporate the opportunity for practical experience in a workplace.

¹Enterprise and entrepreneurship guidance: Guidance for UK higher education providers (2018), p.7. Available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education-2018.pdf>

Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills: students should receive degrees which allow students better understanding of key principles, methods and approaches in their subject area which will allow them to develop their knowledge and skills in their future employments.

Generic skills are often referred to as ‘core skills’, ‘key skills’ or ‘transferable skills’ (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 11). They may include imagination/creativity, adaptability/flexibility, willingness to learn, independent working/autonomy and working in a team, ability to manage others, ability to work under pressure, good oral communication and communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences, numeracy, attention to detail, time management, assumption of responsibility, decision making, planning, coordinating and organising ability, ability to use new technologies and software (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 12-13).

Emotional intelligence, i.e. “the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relations” (Goleman, 1998). This is important for developing effective working relations and in various other situations, e.g. recruitment, contacts with external partners, creating communities of practice and professional networks.

The concept of employability has received further development in many research papers in the field of education in the UK and overseas (Brown et al., 2013; Andrews & Higson, 2010; Song Ju et al., 2011; Teijeiro et al., 2013). The data collected by the above researchers shows that nowadays the degree alone is not enough anymore, that transferable personal competences become increasingly important for students and graduates to find jobs and ensure continuous development of those skills throughout their entire professional careers.

Employability and university-enterprise relations

Enterprises and the way universities, faculties, schools or departments build their relations with enterprises have a major impact on developing all five elements of CareerEdge model. University management realised that this is key for the success of their graduates and hence, the success of the HEI, attracting more students willing to enrol on their courses and possibly leading to higher institutional ranking. Another factor was the external influence, especially when the *EntreComp framework*² was published in 2016 which sets to become a major document for any initiative aiming to foster entrepreneurial development in the EU. The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published *Enterprise and*

²See EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework. (2016). Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/entrecomp-entrepreneurship-competence-framework>

entrepreneurship guidance in 2012 and developed this document further and published in 2018³.

This rethinking of the current situation in the Higher Education and society pushed the universities in the direction of developing links with enterprises and creating employability strategies or incorporating objectives related to employability or university-enterprise relations in their university strategic plans. It is therefore, our research aims to analyse these strategies and planning in UK Higher Education in the 21st century.

Our analysis of strategic plans published by UK universities shows that around 64 % of universities in the UK have developed distinct employability or university-enterprise strategies. At the same time, around 32 % of universities incorporated employability and the development of university-enterprise relations in their overall strategies and strategies related to research or innovation, e.g. Research and Innovation Strategy of the University of Plymouth, Research and Enterprise Strategy of the University of Bristol.

Those universities which developed distinct employability strategies incorporated numerous targets and objectives, e.g. The E3 Strategy: The Employability, Employment and Enterprise at Manchester Metropolitan University. Some other universities presented their aspirations in the field of employability and enterprise in the form of an action plan, e.g. Employability Sub-Strategy Action Plan at the University of Essex. There was a small group of universities which developed separate employability and enterprise strategies. On the whole, universities showed a variety of approaches and realigned their strategic planning accordingly.

Most of these developments in the HE coincides with major changes in the system of funding and increasing tuition fees. Our data show that the move to re-evaluation of the importance of employability skills in the HE and the development of employability and enterprise strategies began in 2008 and continues until now. Please see Table 1 for more details.

Table 1 Development of Employability and Enterprise strategies at UK universities

Strategies	2008/10	2011/14	2015/17
Employability	16	39	31
Enterprise	14	27	15

As you may see in Table 1, the peak in the development and publication of employability and enterprise specific strategies falls on the period of 2011/14

³Enterprise and entrepreneurship guidance: Guidance for UK higher education providers (2018). Available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education-2018.pdf>

when 66 universities adopted new strategies with an aim of expanding relations with enterprises and developing entrepreneurship, and employability skills. In a way, this was as a direct response to the publication of the QAA *Enterprise and entrepreneurship guidance*. Although, in many cases these were only statements and intentions, the work has begun in a number of directions, i.e. supporting innovation and links with public and private organisations, creating centres or units to lead on new developments in the field, setting up accelerators and specialist business incubators, where students and graduates learn how to start a business and receive support from experienced colleagues.

Internationalisation of higher education was reflected in many strategic plans adopted by UK universities. In this area, we observe a shift from 'transactional' to 'transformational' and 'transcendental' partnerships (Sutton, 2010; Sutton et al., 2012). New 'transformational' mode of partnership explores how institutions can change and adopt new practices in line with the demands of the new generation of students, national and international employers and professional organisations and develop or enhance programmes for the benefit of students, combine resources in certain fields or even establish national or multinational units which serve a very specific purpose of providing high quality education and enhancing employability of students (Krouglov, 2014).

Our research data shows that such centralised approach still prevails across many universities where management aims to channel the process in the right direction in order to overcome internal and external challenges. The plans aim to address those challenges and engage academic staff and students in this process. This is not always easy due to various reasons. Our case studies show how staff and students may engage with employers and enterprises and develop necessary skills outlined by Pool and Sewell (2007) in their CareerEdge model.

Case studies: developing relations with employers and other organisations

The following case studies represent the experience of academic staff and students at London Metropolitan University where they applied CareerEdge model in developing transformational university-enterprise partnerships.

1. The first case study: MOU with the United Nations

Having successfully gone through the selection process organised by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), United Nations, the Translation and Interpreting Department, London Metropolitan University signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations for the training of high level language professionals⁴. This

⁴The MOU between the DGACM, United Nations and London Metropolitan University was signed in 2013. See more information by following the link <https://languagecareers.un.org/dgacm/Langs.nsf/page.xsp?key=Outreach>

initiative opened new opportunities for students and graduates in 22 MOU universities worldwide, e.g. internships and placements, practical visits to various UN organisations, virtual classes and workshops with experienced UN professionals and their regular visits to universities. UN language staff give presentations and master classes; or participate in seminars and workshops at the HEIs. They also meet with students and academics to present the work of UN language staff, give more details about the skills needed by international organisations, or provide guidance to teaching staff for classroom activities that would help prepare good candidates for the Language Competitive Examinations (LCEs). They provide advice and suggestions about the curriculum and materials used. Universities also engage UN language staff in course revalidation and quality assurance reviews.

This partnership receives very positive feedback from students and staff and allows HEIs to work closer with the employer and introduce necessary changes. It also raises the profile of the university and allows to attract better prepared and highly motivated students. While the employer receives candidates, who are better trained to pass the LCEs and work successfully in international organisations, universities are able to enhance their programmes and bring them closer to specific requirements of employers.

It looks like an ideal partnership, however, like in all partnerships, there are some challenges which require patient and consistent work on both sides. One of the main issues which regularly comes up in the feedback and various reports is the insufficient number of contact/practice hours during the course. The employer constantly asks universities to increase the number of contact hours, while HEIs are usually reluctant to increase the number of hours due to academic regulations and the cost of additional training which could lead to the increase of tuition fees and make the course unaffordable for many candidates. Those HEIs which increase the tuition fees will inevitably see their student numbers drop and this may eventually lead to the closure of the degree. This is perhaps the major challenge in this type partnership.

Another challenge which HEIs face is the need to employ professionals for the provision of practical classes. This sometimes presents certain difficulties since those professionals may not have availability or necessary teaching skills and experience. The latter one is usually resolved through Training for Trainers courses or other teaching courses organised by HEIs. However, in some very specific niche fields it may be difficult even to find an expert where the university is located. In this respect, cooperation between universities and other partner organisations/employers is crucial in resolving those issues.

2. The second case study: developing partnerships with professional organisations

Many degree courses in the UK have established partnership relations with professional organisations. This is not something new. Close links between Health professional associations and universities have existed for many years now. This collaboration significantly enhances teaching and learning at HEIs and allows students to obtain more practical skills and understand better how institutions work in the field of health. At the end of the last century, there was a drive to expand cooperation with professional bodies in other areas, e.g. creative arts, business, education and many others, especially where the course offers training of specific professional skills.

Our case study is the growing partnership between the department of Translation and Interpreting and the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) which is the leading UK-based membership body for language professionals offering a range of fully regulated professional qualifications for linguists around the world⁵. The CIOL has established partnerships with many HEIs⁶. London Metropolitan University and the CIOL have been working together for many years now, mostly in the fields of Translation and Interpreting. The agreement between two institutions allows London Met students who show good results during their translation course and in their final assessment, receive an award from the CIOL in the form of an exemption from Unit 1 of the Level 7 Diploma in Translation⁷. This is an excellent opportunity for students to have both academic and professional degrees at the end of their university course. The CIOL also benefits from increased membership and more students interested in other qualifications offered by the Institute.

The above account covers fields which identify the main points and directions of this partnership, however there are even more important connections between these organisations which allow to shape the profession as a whole. One of them is the collaboration between professionals of both institutions. For example, university academics may serve as examiners of CIOL professional qualifications, while at the same time university students receive feedback from the CIOL professional translators. This collaboration ensures better understanding of current professional requirements and continuous enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment in the HEIs. CIOL translators also offer workshops to students and are engaged in the development and validation of university degrees. Such cross-fertilisation realigns degrees with the requirements of the professional world. This is only one example of cooperation with professional organisations.

⁵See more information about the Chartered Institute of Linguists by following the link <http://www.ciol.org.uk/>

⁶See language partners of the CIOL by following the link <http://www.ciol.org.uk/language-partners>

⁷See an example of BA Translation by following the link <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/translation---ba-hons/>

Many other university courses received professional accreditation from various professional institutions.⁸

These two case studies of mutually beneficial ‘transformational’ partnership relations show how university-enterprise relations could be initiated and developed at the course or departmental level and enhance teaching and learning. The role of the HEIs is to encourage and support these developments through various structures, e.g. university-enterprise partnership or employability offices. It is also crucial to disseminate this experience at the university level so that academics in other degrees expand their horizons and develop new opportunities for students and academic staff.

Conclusions

How can we achieve the most effective University-Enterprise relations? The research and the analysis of case studies covered in this paper point into several directions.

One of the founding principle in developing employability and university-enterprise relations is the successful strategic planning incorporating key targets and objectives and identifying possible challenges. Strategic plans are often aimed at ‘transformational’ type of partnerships and may include curriculum development in line with the five key elements of the CareerEdge model, research and governance. Such partnership enables universities to learn from the experience of others, introduce changes and develop either specific strategies dealing with issues of employability and university-enterprise relations or incorporate those targets in their overall strategic plans.

The strategic targets can be successfully achieved only when there is evidence of active engagement of staff and students in the process. Our case studies showed, that often the most successful partnerships are initiated at departmental levels where academics are aware of specific professional requirements and needs in their field and work towards the recognition of their courses in the form of partnership relations and associations. They may also find it easier to establish these contacts and engage more effectively with enterprises and professional organisations working in their fields. Universities and staff need to engage students in this process since university-enterprise partnerships enhance their learning and improve their employability. This is still an area for further development.

University central bodies dealing with university-enterprise and employability should support and encourage these developments at all levels,

⁸See more examples from the Guildhall School of Business and Law <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/schools/business-and-law/>

especially at departmental/course level. The role of central bodies coordinating employability and university-enterprise relations will be to identify key directions in line with the adopted strategic plans and needs and requirements of each faculty and department and to facilitate the process.

Our findings also showed that students need a new set of skills in line with the proposed CareerEdge model. Apart from professional skills and knowledge, students need to improve their transferable skills, emotional intelligence, get some experience and be prepared for career development learning. The five elements identified by Pool and Sewell (2007) should be key in curriculum development and enhancement.

Apart from these issues, it is crucial for an employer to become an active player in university life and engage with academics and researchers, the cohorts of students and the courses so that they could achieve better understanding of teaching and learning provided by partner universities and introduce changes contributing to the enhancement of training and bringing it closer to real-life situations. Our research confirms that employers should become active participants in curriculum development and quality assurance procedures if they want to achieve their goals in training the best specialists in their professional fields.

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