



THE COUNCIL FOR INDUSTRY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

A MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIUS SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) has not made a formal submission covering the whole range of our work but would like to submit the attached reports as helpful evidence to inform the work of the Select Committee. This Memorandum summarises the evidence in those reports.

What employers want and what graduates offer

Employers are pleased with the overall quality of graduates developed by UK higher education (HE). The *National Employer Skills Survey 2007* confirmed this – 84% of employers recruiting graduates thought them very well or well prepared for work, compared with 67% of employers recruiting 16 year-old school leavers. Other less robust surveys or anecdotes need to be viewed against this evidence. That is not to say that the employability of graduates could not be further enhanced and related to employer needs.

Our report “*Graduate Employability: What do employers think and want?*” noted that employers seek graduates who have a range of competencies as well as subject knowledge (where this is relevant). These include:

- communication skills
- team working skills
- integrity and
- intellectual ability.

While they generally rate highly the intellectual abilities of the graduates they recruit, they find too many of them lacking adequate communication and team-working skills. This confirms the views in CBI employment trends surveys.

It should be one of the purposes of higher education to develop employable graduates and the student experience should aim to achieve this objective. More learning might be undertaken in teams, more presentation and communication built into the process of learning and more learning to mirror the approach of problem solving in teams which is the essence of the way the world of work functions.

We suggest that all universities and their career services should better signal to students early in their time at university or college the capabilities that employers seek in graduates, how the learning experience aims to meet those needs and how the student can supplement that through on-campus and off-campus experiences. Work placements or part-time paid work can increase the employability of graduates and are welcome by employers.

Developing globally aware UK graduates

We have stressed in a range of reports on the theme of Global Horizons that universities should be developing globally aware graduates and global citizens. This is a prime function of a university in the modern interconnected world. It is a way more enterprising graduates and postgraduates from all nationalities can be developed as it is through multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary teams and interchange that different ways of thinking can be appreciated and new ideas and insights generated. Employers increasingly seek graduates who have this global awareness, who are sensitive to different cultures and who can work in cross-cultural teams. Our report “*Global Horizons and the Role of Employers*” brings together the employer evidence on this matter.

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But UK domiciled students are in real danger of missing out on the top jobs in global businesses because they lack this global experience. They do not travel as part of their HE experience as much as their peers from most other European countries and universities have made less progress in developing teaching partnerships and student exchange arrangements as they have in developing international research partnerships. The EU Erasmus programme remains unbalanced with many more EU students coming to the UK than UK students going overseas.

Global employers welcome the quality of the learning that underpins the UK HE system; but they note the mismatch between what they increasingly seek from graduates in terms of their global awareness and experiences and what UK graduates offer and think is required.

We suggest that universities develop more strategic partnerships with universities in other countries so that more students and staff can be exchanged and the curricula enriched through a greater global input.

International graduates

The UK has the potential to be the preferred world-wide location for internationally mobile students and also for global businesses who increasingly seek graduates from a range of locations who can be deployed globally. But to realise this potential, more needs to be done to raise the quality of the international student experience, to better integrate all students on campus and to increase the employability of international graduates.

The key messages for the Select Committee from our report with i-graduate “*Does the UK lead the world in international education*” are:

- international students view the UK as offering a high quality if high cost experience;
- they consider that the quality of teaching, learner support and student union support to be higher than offered in other countries;
- but they consider that their integration on campus and the development of their employability is less good compared with other countries.

To some extent these results reflect the expectations international students have of the countries where they aim to study. The Careers Services suggest that some international students have too high an expectation of what they will receive from studying in the UK; this may reflect optimistic marketing by universities on their websites or what they have been told by overseas marketing agents.

Our report “*Global Horizons for UK Universities*” suggested the issues that universities face as they develop their international strategies, how these are being addressed and might be addressed with existing practice shared. In particular it made suggestions on how universities might better integrate students on campus including on learning programmes. It noted that positive action may be needed if international students are not to end up in cliques.

The CIHE is currently undertaking work for DIUS on how more UK businesses (and especially small companies) can be persuaded to take an international student on a placement and recruit more international graduates and postgraduates. This work will lead to a marketing effort later this year with the aim of helping businesses think through the skills strategies that might be appropriate as they start to look beyond the current recession.

We hope the evidence in the enclosed reports which we have summarised in this short note is helpful to the Select Committee. We would of course be pleased to supplement this Memorandum with oral evidence.

Enclosed CIHE reports:

- Does the UK lead the world in international education, 2007
- Global Horizons for UK Universities, 2007
- Graduate Employability: What do employers think and want?, 2008
- Global Horizons and the Role of Employers, 2008