

Sharing learning and learning to share: the implications of universities sharing academic responsibility with employers and other organisations when developing learning

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In response to challenging global economic circumstances many universities are increasing the volume and breadth of work that they seek to do with employers and other organisations from both the public and private sector. To build effective relationships with organisations, universities are recognising that they will need a different approach from the one they use for traditional lifelong learners who generally approach the institution as individuals and the curriculum design is done for them by the university

This paper suggests that to build valuable educational lifelong learning partnerships with employers and external organisations, universities must consider promoting a shift in the locus of power and responsibility especially in areas of curriculum development, quality assurance and assessment, allowing employers and external organisations to both influence and take part in some activities that previously had been seen as the exclusive premise of the academic.

Encouraging non-academics to look inside, influence and even challenge University processes that up to now had been viewed as solely controlled by universities to an extent mirrors the process of restorative justice, where all those affected by crime can influence the process of justice rather than accepting the judgement of a small team of professionals.

In the paper we specifically examine the areas of curriculum development, quality assurance and assessment, reviewing examples of ways in which power and responsibility might be shared with external organisations and employers to facilitate innovation in lifelong learning. However we also recognise that such an approach can represent a fundamental change for some institutions with wide ranging effects on embedded systems and procedures.

We note that in each of the areas we examine, a balance must be achieved between the university relinquishing or at least reviewing their control of particular activities and identifying where a release of control has the potential to adversely affect the quality or the status of a programme of study or qualification. Ironically, the economic and in some countries, political drive for universities to work more closely with employers is accompanied by anxiety that new approaches to learning may dilute the quality and reputation of higher education.

The paper concludes by attempting to position the notion of universities working more flexibly and openly with external organisations and employers within the context of the wider and emerging notion of restorative education, which seeks to encourage the users of a service to engage with its delivery at a deeper level.

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		UNIVERSITY CENTRED AND DRIVEN LEARNING	UNIVERSITY AND EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIP DRIVEN LEARNING	IMPLICATIONS OF MOVING TO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING
INPUTS	Assessment	set and judged by academics	set and judged by academics and staff from the enterprise (employer/external organisation)	release of authority; ability to negotiate assessments; need to build confidence in the tutors in the enterprise SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
	Subject/ content	presents the theoretical perspective	combines theoretical and applied perspectives	academic staff need to develop greater expertise in work based learning MINOR CHANGE
	Delivery methodology	based at the university (and/or online)	based at work, university and/or online	shared management of work located tutors SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
	Management, development and support of tutors	university full and part-time staff based at the university	shared between organisations, academic lead with the university, university staff may be based with the enterprise	support for tutors in the workplace (whether from university of enterprise) MINOR CHANGE
	Support for learners	on campus, focus on full time 18-21yr olds	flexible support, support in the workplace, adult learner focus	support for learners in enterprises needs to be developed; the learning culture of enterprises needs to be developed SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
	Timing and periodicity	based around the academic year, and structured timetables	year round learning to suit the enterprise and the learner	systems and processes need to be flexible enough to accommodate year round activity MINOR CHANGE
	Size and level of programmes	determined by existing awards and award structures and defined by university staff	determined by agreement between the enterprise and the university	may vary according to the learning to be developed; flexible award frameworks to be developed SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
OUTCOMES	Value	value is implicit, sometimes achieving the award (degree etc) is essential as a pre-requisite for professional practice eg Engineering, Medicine. Status of the award is understood internationally (degree)	the value is explicit for the enterprise, the individual learners, and is agreed between the partners; learning culture and systems develop within and between partners	outcomes of learning and the application of learning in the context of the enterprise has immediacy and relevance. Learning is of value to individual, organisation and university SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
	Further programme development	sits with the academic team responsible for the programme and the institution's quality review procedures which may have 1 yr, 3 yr, or 5 y cycles	likely to be reviewed and adapted in real time or close to real time and shared between partners	continual monitoring and review - closer liaison with enterprises MINOR CHANGE
	Cost	pressure for large cohorts in traditional lectures to make most efficient use of finances and to meet the cost of running the fixed university estate,	delivery costs may be shared with partners - where partner's staff are used to support delivery and the learning costs will reduce. But smaller groups may need to be accommodated, as will travel for tutors and increased support for tutors	negotiation of price and costs with enterprises (total cost the university will vary according to how the programme is designed and delivered). New financial models and negotiation skills of staff would be required SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
	Sustainability of relationship between universities and enterprises	depends on funding and continued recruitment of individuals - relationship with enterprises is maintained as supplier - purchaser type	may be improved as learning systems are developed and learning in the workplace/partner enterprise is recognised - development of partnerships	increased efficiencies and move toward the integration of learning relationships between universities and enterprises SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
ACCOUNTABILITY	For performance and quality of programmes	sits with university academic staff: programmes are adapted if recruitment declines	sits with staff of both university and employer enterprise	university may have to responsibility/be accountable for 'losses' as well as gains from outcomes of the learning SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
	Evaluation of learning	inputs are measured along with students' levels of achievement, outcomes of the learning are not evaluated	outcomes of the learning measured and evaluated from all stakeholders' perspectives (including learners')	critical to maintaining value and positive outcomes for the university for enterprises, for learners and for the economy and society more widely MODEST CHANGE
	For future development of learning	sits with university academic staff	sits with university and employer enterprise staff, individual learners, and other learning communities who may be involved	connectedness of learning and its development; closer relationship between knowledge development, universities, enterprises and community learning groups SIGNIFICANT CHANGE