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Pioneering Business Management Education through an Integrated Curriculum Programme Design

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Pioneering Business Management Education through an Integrated Curriculum Programme Design

Summary

Cardiff University seeks to provide a positive and enriching student experience supported through an effective and innovative education and student strategy. This ensures a strong emphasis on supporting students through the transition to independent learning. Cardiff Business School's strategic objective for a 'public value' school suggests that we have a distinctive ethical, evidence-informed and impact oriented approach to management education. Drawing from these objectives as well as extensive background research reports and feedback the core Business Management degree scheme is being reviewed and extensively revised to reflect a modern, innovative and integrated approach to business management education. This paper discusses the influence of literature examining an interdisciplinary approach to education, coupled with literature espousing a public value approach to education. It uses this literature to justify Cardiff Business School's approach to business management education through an integrated curriculum programme.

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Introduction

HESA data demonstrates that there has been a very slight drop in student numbers in the past year (HESA, 2015). Potentially this means that universities are striving for a smaller pool of students. Driven by an ever more competitive business environment, fuelled by league tables, National Student Survey scores and the Research Excellence Framework there are a myriad of mechanisms that leading business schools can use to benchmark their success. As a leading Russell Group university, Cardiff seeks to provide a positive and enriching student experience supported through an effective and innovative education and student strategy. This ensures a strong emphasis on supporting students through the transition to independent learning. Cardiff Business School's strategic objective for a 'public value' school suggests that we have a distinctive, ethical, evidence-informed and impact oriented approach to management education (Brewer, 2013). Drawing from these objectives, as well as extensive background research reports and feedback, the core Business Management degree is being reviewed and extensively revised to reflect a modern, innovative and integrated approach to business management education. This paper will debate the pioneering new integrated curriculum business management programme under development at Cardiff and reflect upon delivering a positive educational experience for the undergraduate student (Cardiff University, 2012).

The Business Management degree review team identified a number of core values that it wished to provide the foundation of the new degree, underpinned by the core values and strategy of the school. That is that the degree should be interdisciplinary and deliver 'public value' through integrated curriculum and modern, innovative delivery and assessment methods. This paper will use relevant literature to outline why these values are important to Cardiff Business School and conclude by making recommendations on the future delivery of higher education degree courses.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

The main objective of our pioneering new programme is to aim for a comprehensive integrative approach to business education (Weber and Englehart, 2011). If business education programmes are to meet the needs of the business community, we, as educators, must continuously examine the strengths and weaknesses of our programmes. While the current business curriculum typically educates students in the key business disciplines, many business schools deliver their curriculum by creating courses based on functional area, rather than the integration of knowledge from a holistic perspective Stember (1991).

Stember (1991) posits three arguments in support of an interdisciplinary approach. Firstly, she notes that there is an intellectual argument. That is that each field (or functional area) can be enhanced by integrating the theories, concepts and methods from other fields. She proposes that specialisation can create great depth of knowledge but that it also fragments the mind and subject matter, which may be better served holistically. If students are not taught through an integrated approach, they fail to make the links between subjects. Secondly,

Stember (1991) provides a practical argument, in that the world is not lived nor organised by academic discipline. Overlap exists in life and equally in social science disciplines, thus an interdisciplinary approach provides a greater knowledge base to solve problems when the student transfers to the workplace. Finally, Stember (1991) provides a pedagogical argument. She supports several reports calling for greater coherence and integration in undergraduate education. Certainly, analyses of current Business Management degrees demonstrate a number of areas where overlap takes place. An interdisciplinary and integrated curriculum programme design would ensure that the programme is more holistic in both composition and delivery. Furthermore, by taking a truly integrated approach the programme will consider not only academic requirements but those of employers.

Both research and practice recommend creating multi-disciplinary case studies and enterprise to be incorporated across all modules at key points within the curriculum. This approach allows students to experience business from an integrated perspective at various points throughout their academic programme. Many programmes that employ an integrative curriculum also provide students with the opportunity to hone their interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills. Graduates often are lacking in these skills when entering the workforce (Tomlinson, 2012), thus, providing teamwork and group activities into our programme will allow students to improve these skills prior beginning their careers (Hesketh, 2000).

Public Value

A second core value that the new degree wishes to instil is that of delivering a public value degree, from a public value school. Using Brewer (2013) as a springboard for this approach, Cardiff Business School eschews a number of key features of Brewer's treatise. Firstly, Brewer (2013) expresses concern regarding the marketization and audit culture of Universities, both in the UK and abroad. Secondly, he sees this as an opportunity for social science to become 'public social science' and to promote public good through civic engagement. Brewer (2013) recommends that public value social science teaches courses that deal with issues that will affect the future of humankind. Brewer disrecommends the specialisation that earlier programmes delivered which, he posits, step away from public value social science. In summary, Brewer defines public value as having several facets but the overarching theme of his definition is that public value social science provides a foundation for the student. Through that foundation the student is taught humanitarian values and learns to think critically about "big issues" and wicked problems. Upon graduation, the student takes these public values forward to society, for the good of that society. Thus, using Brewer's framework, Cardiff Business School seeks to provide students with an education that equips them with the skills to be successful in the economy and wider society (Bloom et al, 1956).

Delivery and assessment methods

As the CBI recognise (www.cbi.org.uk), in an increasingly competitive employment market, business employers are looking beyond simple academic achievement when considering applicants for a job or internship. Many now expect to see evidence of other skills and achievements that boost their attractiveness as a potential employee. Businesses want

graduates who not only add value but who have the skills to help to transform their organisation in the face of continuous and rapid economic and technological change. All business graduates now need to be equipped with employability skills (HEA, 2006) and a further challenge was to embed this ethos into our new degree. (Andrews and Russell, 2012).

Additionally, the ethos of the new programme suggests that more authentic assessment tasks and assessment *for* learning (rather than *of* learning) should become hallmarks of the programme's learning and teaching philosophy. Consequently, the assessment strategy of the new scheme has been considered holistically, across the scheme, not on a module by module basis. A programme led strategy ensures that the development of generic skills and attributes can be assessed coherently and incrementally across the entire scheme. This strategy, links to the outcomes and standards for each level of the programme and ultimately the Cardiff graduate attributes. This means that alongside considering specific module knowledge and skills, assessment tasks are more problem based and work focussed capstone events focus on integration.

Outcomes

This paper is currently in a developmental stage. However, it already demonstrates the commitment towards an integrated curriculum programme design. It does this in three ways. Firstly, it uses literature espousing an interdisciplinary approach within higher education which justifies collaborative and multifaceted delivery of degree programmes (Falchicov, 2005). Secondly, it provides a theory based rationale to demonstrate that public value social science is a key integrative part of the programme. Finally, it uses a range of practitioner and academic sources to demonstrate the necessity and efficacy of an integrated and holistic delivery and assessment strategy with a more student-focused strategy (Washburn and Petroschius, 2004).

If accepted, the authors intend to extend the paper by including a wider range of literature to support the argument contained herein. Further development of the paper will also use primary data from interviews with students and prospective employers to validate the need for an integrated curriculum in higher education.

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