

The global graduate: Developing the global careers service

Siobhan Neary, Nalayini Thambar and Sharon Bell

Graduate employability is an international issue. Students seek a higher education experience with added value in terms of employability and an international perspective. The University of Nottingham, an established global university with campuses in Malaysia and China, attracts students from across the world. These students have diverse and culturally-specific career development needs, requiring skilled practitioners with knowledge of the global graduate opportunity structure. Using a case study approach this article explores ways in which the Careers and Employability Services are being developed to meet a global market through support for staff and internationalised employer engagement.

Introduction

The OECD (2013) suggests that the pursuit of higher level studies by students in countries other than their own supports them to expand their knowledge of cultures and languages and better equips them in managing an increasingly globalised labour market. It estimates that the number of students enrolling outside their country increased to 4.3 million in 2011; the largest numbers of foreign students are from China, India and Korea. This increase represents not just the globalisation of economies but also the expansion of higher education around the world. Part of this expansion is due to the number of universities developing branch campuses overseas which allow students to access an international education without leaving their home country (Waldavsky, 2010).

The University of Nottingham in the UK (UNUK) has a long-standing commitment to internationalisation, in 2012/13 of the 34,000 students on the UK campus 27% were international. The development

of the overseas campuses started in 2000 when the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (UNMC) was opened. It has over 4,800 students, 29% of whom are non-Malaysian. The University of Nottingham Ningbo Campus (UNNC) was opened in China in 2004, it has 6,300 students, 9% are non-Chinese (International Office, University of Nottingham, 2013). Between them the campuses offer a wide range of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level ranging from Plant Biotechnology, Pharmacy and Computer Science, to Business and Management, Education and European Studies, with applied subjects in the majority.

Taking a case study approach this paper explores some of the challenges that have been experienced in developing consistent but culturally specific careers services across three international campuses within one institution. The case study comprised of interviews with key stakeholders on the three campuses including senior managers, careers staff, students and employers. It also utilised strategic documents such as University of Nottingham Strategic Plan (2010) which emphasised career development for all students. The process that facilitated the various dialogues and strategies has been conceptualised as a model we term the 'Nottingham Journey'.

Careers service provision

We believe that becoming an international university and attracting large numbers of students to all three campuses requires globally-minded services which underpin and complement the academic element of the experience. Careers services therefore need to meet the disparate employability needs of students from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. A particular issue for all the services is international students wanting to establish their career in the country they have studied in.

Careers services in universities in Malaysia and China are less well established than those in the UK. However the expansion of tertiary education and graduate employability has contributed to an increased focus in this area. In particular in China, graduate employability continues to be a problem with the increase in graduate jobs unable to keep pace with the number of graduates (Sun and Yuen, 2012). While in Malaysia, unemployment for graduates within six months of completing their studies is identified as an issue (Sirat, Heng, Shuib, Rahman, Kamil and Singh, 2012). This is attributed to poor language skills, particularly in English and lack of knowledge and competency in applying for jobs (Darmi and Albion, 2013).

The University of Nottingham context

The University of Nottingham provides careers services on all three campuses. Each provide a range of services including careers advice and guidance, labour market information, career planning and employer focused activities. Both UNNC and UNMC have their own careers services which, in line with the size of the campuses, operate on a much smaller scale, delivering a similar range of services to those in the UK. In the overseas campuses each careers team is line managed

locally. However, the lack of an established national culture around the delivery of careers education and guidance impacts on initial training and professional development for practitioners.

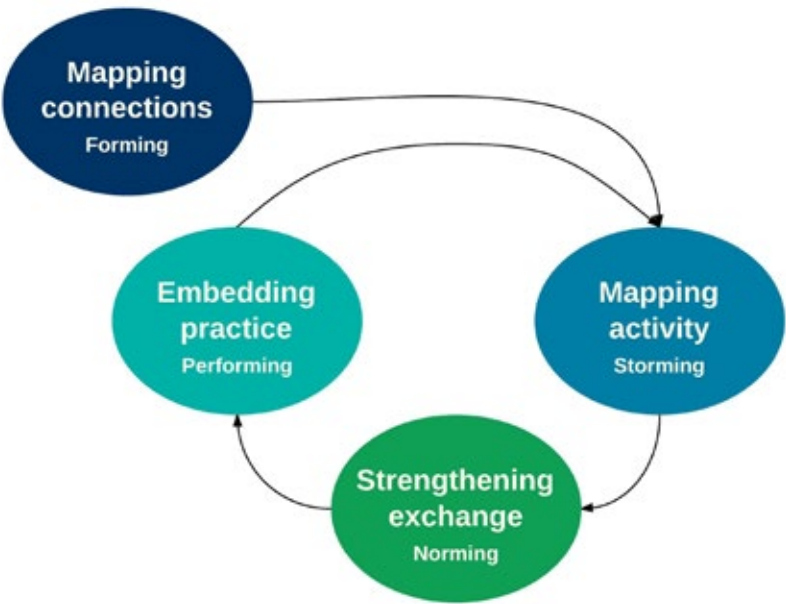
The longevity of the UK service enables it to provide support by bringing sector specific expertise to the development of strategic direction and service delivery. Strong relationships have been established with the overseas team to support the development of services. When Nottingham students, encouraged to be internationally mobile, decide to study part of their course at a different campus, they expect to see a level of consistency in the approach and style which is adopted. Therefore support in establishing a consistent level of service which is culturally and contextually appropriate can be a challenge. It is never appropriate to 'lift' an intervention in the UK and assume it will be appropriate overseas. Sultana (2009) explores the issues around lending and borrowing policies across countries. The issues are equally pertinent to multinational organisations where there may be an expectation that knowledge and practice which works in one context can be easily transplanted. It is vital to acknowledge what Sultana calls the 'cultural and social anchorage' of practice and how this needs to be context specific (Sultana, 2009:12).

.....

Conceptualising the Nottingham Journey Model

The Nottingham Journey from three distinct services to one global careers service can be conceptualised with reference to Tuckman's stages of team development (Tuckman, 1965) Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing, and is illustrated here:

Figure 1:
The Nottingham Journey
adapted from Tuckman
(1965)



On reflection, the journey and relationship development has been defined within four incremental stages, building an interrelated process to underpin service developments. The model has four interrelated stages, making connections, mapping activity, strengthening exchange and embedding practice. These are explored in more depth below.

Making connections

This was the 'forming' element of the journey which involved visits overseas by the UK senior team in order to understand the local landscape and visits from the UNNC and UNMC Service Managers to UNUK. It was important to develop mutual understanding through which benefits of closer working could be identified, in order to reflect the University approach of collaboration through shared agendas rather than management directives. This period of relationship building over four years was supported by monthly Skype conversations between the Careers Manager on each campus and a member of the UK leadership team. Additionally discussions with line managers provided an important link with local and emerging policies. This has ensured that discussions around opportunities for services development are in line with local development activities. Once the team had 'formed' and a good and productive working relationship was developed, the next stage was to explore service delivery in context. At this stage consideration was given to identifying the similarities and differences particularly in terms of the local, political and cultural requirements.

Mapping activities

The 'Storming' phase aimed to better understand and support the development of the local career services in UNMC and UNNC through a series of mapping activities. These visits from the UK Campus to UNMC and UNNC allowed time with the local team to share current practice in the UK and develop service strategies considering all elements of information, advice and guidance alongside employer engagement. These contributed to a better understanding of both the services and the context in which the services were delivered. The model of delivery therefore was

devised through negotiation and partnership working rather than imposing the model of practice used in the UK.

The visits were supported by discussions with the delivery teams and with campus stakeholders including students, academics, alumni, support services and employers. This dialogue helped to identify what was working well and how the knowledge and expertise from the UK could be shared to enhance existing practice rather than be deployed as best practice.

These visits resulted in the formulation of two distinct work packages which were developed in partnership with the local teams. The first addressed training needs identified by the teams *in situ*, resulting in the establishment of a continuing professional development (CPD) programme which included refresher training in careers guidance and mentoring support. Delivering careers guidance training within differing cultural contexts requires the concept of careers guidance to be examined and potentially reframed (Neary, 2013). Models of delivery which have been developed within a liberal, non-directive and individual focused culture (Watts, 1996) may have less resonance. As such the importance of understanding and recognising the cultural context is essential. Presenting what might work in the UK is helpful but deconstructing what might be the issues for the local context helps both to build an understanding of what may be transferable and what adaptation might be needed to support a localised approach. For example for many students career decision making is not an individual choice, but one where parents or other family members may have a dominant voice. Recognising who influences and informs the decision may take a higher order position within the careers dialogue.

The second work package focused on strategic developments which had been identified jointly with the local teams through a series of facilitated workshops. Making connections and mapping activities were an important backdrop for the strategic development work. Given the small teams on the overseas campuses, the focus was understandably operational, with a relatively short planning horizon. There was a willingness to engage in new initiatives, but the approach was predominantly reactive. With

limited resource, the need for careful prioritisation was paramount. The UK Senior Team guided the overseas teams through the strategic planning process in a series of collaborative workshops. These sessions provided space to examine and explore 'blue sky' thinking for service development while pragmatically acknowledging local policy requirements. Each of the key stakeholder groups of students, alumni and faculty were considered with priorities for the next 24 months identified. As well as making it easier to track progress and re-prioritise as necessary, this facilitated an understanding as to where support from the UK team might be beneficial.

In some instances the developments were quite operational, for example, a need was identified to review the messaging on some of the key marketing materials in order to manage the expectations of the students. In the subtlety of translating into English it is easy to inadvertently confuse the message for example suggesting attendance at a careers fair will lead to an internship. Colleagues have also trialled different formats of events, building on some of the experiences in the UK. It is intended that these smaller, more tailored events provide the forum for a more focused conversation between the student and the employer. This took the form of a 'Spotlight on Engineering' event, with a panel of employers in attendance, presenting their experiences and allowing for a Question and Answer style session. This was then followed by opportunities for networking. A development for the longer term will be for overseas colleagues to work more closely with colleagues in faculty around employability issues. This will allow local needs and priorities to shape the level of provision both through integration in the curriculum and stand-alone careers provision. As part of this, consideration is being given to reviewing the data on student engagement and targeting those harder to reach student groups including international students.

Strengthening exchange

We define strengthening exchange by the opportunity to develop activities which actively support interoperability across all campuses. This was the 'norming' phase of the process. Recent research produced by High Fliers (2014) identified

Nottingham, as the university most heavily targeted by graduate employers. A gap was identified in the ability to respond to and maximise the benefit of global connections. Colleagues were fully occupied in responding to incoming requests to their own campus, but did not have the capacity to respond on a timely basis and fully investigate the potential of incoming referrals. We felt that in order for a recruiter to seriously consider targeting the University of Nottingham (wherever they are based) a face to face conversation is required. Higher Education Institutions in the UK face an issue with brand awareness overseas. Anecdotally, there is evidence that unless those responsible for graduate recruitment overseas have either successfully recruited alumni, or have had an overseas education, they may view someone with an international education with scepticism.

This issue led to the establishment of the Global Labour Market Team, with one individual based in each of the UK, Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and China, (Shanghai). The team has been in place since April 2013. These colleagues have a defined remit and two of their key objectives are:

- To bring a global perspective to all of our employer relationships (where appropriate) ensuring that in-country connections can be proactively made and developed.
- To represent returning international students (wherever their 'home' campus is) and to work with employers to ensure that those studying overseas are in a position to access and apply for those vacancies in their home country (often recruitment timescales and methods make this challenging).

Whilst this team has not yet been in place a year, the benefits of this structure are becoming clear:

- A mechanism is now in place to advertise appropriate vacancies in all three countries and target relevant students by email. This can bring added value to those employers who value overseas education and want to ensure opportunities are advertised as broadly as possible.
- A deeper understanding has been gained of the recruitment methods and competencies

sought (which can vary between countries for the same employer). This intelligence then feeds directly into face to face work with students and to resources which are produced for students to access on-line. For example, our first Global Employability Conference in December 2013 was supported by labour market information supplied by the overseas member of the Global Labour Market team. In addition, a new 'Working in China' leaflet has been developed using the in-country intelligence.

- There are some employers who do not need to target universities in the UK because they already receive a high volume of applications. In the region of 8-10 of these organisations have specifically chosen to work more closely with Nottingham because of the tri-country presence and the international profile of the student body.

The Global Labour Market Team roles contribute significantly to supporting local careers teams to build employer relationships both nationally and internationally. Additionally their activities enhance students' perceptions of international career opportunities, particularly for those international students who have career goals which lie outside their home nation.

Embedding practice

The work undertaken to date has been fundamental in strengthening the exchange between the campuses. The priority now is to embed that practice so that we 'perform' as a team of three campus Careers Services taking into account the local context. A number of interventions have been undertaken or planned which support this priority:

- Weekly Skype meetings of the Global Labour Market Team in order to exchange information and share knowledge. Once a month, this meeting is chaired by a member of the UK Senior Team in order to focus on CPD Activities.
- Monthly Skype meetings continue with the Careers Manager on each campus. A particular focus of these meetings, based on a standing

agenda and further to the work package focussing on strategic developments, has been to review progress against agreed milestones on a regular basis.

- The aforementioned CPD programme, including refresher training on careers guidance and mentoring support, was important in developing the professional practice of the local teams. The challenges of distance mean that it is harder to reinforce the training and review its effectiveness. A plan is being developed to introduce a Skype mentoring programme, linking overseas colleagues with Careers Advisers in the UK, with the purpose of offering support and on going learning and development. The concept of mentoring *per se* is less established overseas and so a structured programme is to be developed, ensuring that the purpose and expectations would be clear to both parties in the relationship.
- Following establishment of the mentoring programme, progress will be reviewed to consider whether there are other key linkages which need to be developed between overseas practitioners and their UK counterparts. This does occur naturally in some areas already and it is important to encourage it where there is an obvious benefit. However there is acknowledgement that overseas colleagues will have responsibility for several areas which in the UK will be owned by separate individuals or teams. This can sometimes cause challenges relating to resource and capacity.
- Practice is increasingly being embedded across the three services through the Global Labour Market Team proactively supporting students returning overseas after graduation through; ensuring students are aware of employers with whom the university have an established relationship with, encouraging employers to use video conferencing and other technologies to support overseas recruitment.

Beyond the careers services there are areas of activity where practice continues to strengthen across all three campuses. One example is the Nottingham Advantage Award, the University's co-curricular skills award, which is managed by the Careers and Employability Service. UNNC Careers

Service colleagues and the Award Manager at UNMC participate in Steering Group and moderation meetings which consider Award modules at all three campuses. Using the internal virtual learning environment (VLE), modules are being introduced which are simultaneously taken by students from all three campuses who take part in subject-themed on-line discussions. Work is also beginning between the three campuses to share best practice while undertaking a review of placement take-up and support.

Taking a broader view, Global Labour Market Team colleagues in Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur also liaise with the University's Business Engagement colleagues on the overseas campuses, mirroring the partnership that is established between the Careers and Employability Service and Business Engagement in the UK. This illustrates another dimension of the international campus challenge; the joining up of related activities within as well as across borders.

The process is iterative, partnership working will continue as will engagement with stakeholder views. Both will contribute to embedding of practice that ensures systems work within their context and are not just a transplantation from the UK. As such the development of context specific models of career guidance can lead to a richness in professional practice which will contribute to the development of the UK based guidance service, most particularly in extending the knowledge and understanding of UK practitioners of the nuances of working with both international students and employers.

Students and graduates are the primary stakeholders of any careers service and their needs must be understood and met. We believe that a focus on building relationships, strategic capability, common professional interest and the enhancing of professional practice with staff across borders will deliver the global careers service.

Conclusions

The University of Nottingham is committed to developing 'Global Graduates'. The Careers and Employability Services are facilitating this through an international focus with recruiters across the world. Collaboration and partnership working are fundamental to the three Careers and Employability Services and this has supported a balance between 'direction' from the UK to Malaysia and China and a collegial approach to building the service. This case study illustrates the importance of appropriate partnership building, the value of shared imperatives and the extent of the organisational commitment required to develop a cross-border careers service. This includes a sizeable investment in staff mobility, at least in the early stages, so that different cultural environments can be experienced and more deeply understood. This provides a valuable context for work to harmonise cross-border careers information, advice and guidance activities where it is culturally appropriate.

Finally, in considering the model of the Nottingham Journey presented here, the cyclical nature of the model supports continuing quality improvement.

References

Darmi, R. and Albion, P. (2013) *Malaysian Graduates: What and Why*. 3rd Malaysian Postgraduate Conference (MPC2013) 4-5 July 2013, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

Higher Fliers Research. (2014) *The Graduate Market in 2014*. London: High Fliers Research Limited.

International Office, University of Nottingham. (2013) (International Student Statistics). Unpublished.

Neary, S. (2013) Can Aspiration Kill Local Community? Challenges for Young People and Career Practitioners in Sri Lanka. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*. 3: 23-28.

OECD. (2013) How many students study abroad and where do they go? in *OECD Education at a Glance 2013: Highlights*, Paris: OECD.

Sirat, M., Heng, C.L., Shuib, M., Rahman, S.A., Kamil, SRA. and Singh, JKN. (2012) Employability of Graduates in Malaysia, in *UNESCO Graduate Employability in Asia*. Bangkok: UNESCO.

Sultana, R. (2009) *Career Guidance Policies: Global Dynamics, Local Resonances*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

Sun, V. and Yuen, M. (2012) Career Guidance and Counselling for University Students in China. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 34: 202-210.

Tuckman, B. (1965) Developing Sequence in Small Groups. *Psychological Bulletin*. 63 (6) 384-399.

University of Nottingham. (2010) *Strategic Plan 2010-2015*. University of Nottingham.

Waldavsky, B. (2010) *How Global Universities are Reshaping the World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Watts, A.G. (1996) Socio-political Ideologies in Guidance, in Watts, A.G., Law, B., Killeen, J., Kidd and Hawthorn, R. *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance*. London: Routledge.

For correspondence

Siobhan Neary, Principal Research Fellow
International Centre for Guidance Studies
University of Derby, UK
s.neary@derby.ac.uk

Nalayini Thambar, Director
Careers and Employability Service
University of Nottingham, UK
Nalayini.Thambar@nottingham.ac.uk

Sharon Bell, Associate Director
Careers and Employability Service
University of Nottingham, UK
Sharon.Bell@nottingham.ac.uk

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the coaching and proof reading support of Professor Dawn Forman in the writing of this article.