

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0502

“I just need exposure”: Understanding the benefits of knowledge exchange for business undergraduates, academics, and industry partners

Katja Jonsas¹, Elizabeth Miller¹

¹*Pearson College London, London, United Kingdom*

Research Domain: Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract: In this paper, we question the assumption that knowledge exchange (KE) activities only concern those activities that disseminate of scientific or disciplinary knowledge. Our concern is that this framing does not take into consideration the sorts of knowledge that is exchange in other sorts of education-industry collaboration. Our initial analysis of business school students, alumni, and industry partner interviews suggests that educational collaboration is underpinned by KE that provides insights into professional context, and that builds skills in students. For industry partners, these activities give the opportunity to access to different perspectives and an early career workforce. For students, KE activities result in employability benefits, which are particularly important for those who study for a generalist degree.

Paper: In this paper, we reframe education-industry based collaboration as Knowledge Exchange (KE) and explore benefits for business management undergraduates, staff, and industry partners. While undergraduate teaching is a well-researched topic (Healey, 2005), students' engagement in Knowledge Exchange (KE) is less so. The reason for this may relate to how KE activities are often associated with dissemination of scientific knowledge. For example, while CPD features in the recently introduced Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), most of the metrics revolve around research activities, working with businesses or third sector and IP and collaboration (Johnson, 2020). This points out how internships and work placements that form the core of education-industry based collaboration are seldomly acknowledged as KE practices. Our limited understanding of different approaches to KE – and thus of the benefits of KE for students, academic staff, and industry – is problematic. Therefore, we argue that a more inclusive definition of education-industry collaboration as KE reflects the fact that students and industry partners gain access to perspectives and understandings that would otherwise not be achieved.

Understanding educational collaboration as KE is important in the context of rapidly changing employment markets. While the number of graduates has increased (ONS, 2021), there are indications of both overeducation and skills shortages. Thus, there have been calls for approaches to higher education that ensure graduates are prepared for a changing labour market. One approach to enhance students' employability is to focus on skills development (Succi & Canovi, 2019), while others have argued for engaging students with work and work-related practices while studying for a degree (Billett, 2011). Thus, starting from the definition of educational collaboration as 'interaction between academic institutions and non-academic organizations involving academic educational

activities' (Kunttu, 2017:15) motivated by student mobility and lifelong learning (Orazbayeva et al., 2020), this paper sets out to explore how business management undergraduates, their teachers, and the relevant industry partners may benefit from KE activities.

The empirical context for this paper is Pearson Business School (PBS) which offers programmes in Business Management, Accounting, and Law. Data was collected in the context of 2-year project funded by OfS and UKRI. In this paper we explore 25 interviews with industry partners, academic tutors, alumni, and current students, as well as three focus groups with current PBS undergraduates. Drawing on grounded theory, the interviews and focus group transcripts were open coded followed by focused coding to gain an understanding of how those involved benefited from engagement in KE activities.

Our analysis shows that as business management studies do not necessarily prepare students for specific careers, KE in educational collaboration can provide important opportunities for students to increase their employability and their chance to build professional connections, all of which are particularly important for students studying a generalist degree. In this context, KE activities in educational collaboration can be divided roughly into two categories: those that help students understand professional contexts and those that help students identify and develop skills and behaviors required in those contexts. In broad terms, we defined the first type of KE activities as Insight and overview activities while the latter type can be labelled as Personal development activities. These two types are not mutually exclusive. For industry partners, these activities provide access to talent, fresh perspectives, early career workforce, and opportunities for employer brand management. At the same time, students can have the opportunity to gain skills but also figure out how to position themselves in employment market after graduation while academic staff is able to connect their classroom context with professional practice. Thus, based on these initial findings, we propose that KE activities in the context of educational collaboration provide a valuable addition to undergraduate curricula as well as important employability benefits to students. Moreover, we argue for a shift in how KE is defined in educational collaboration. Rather than focusing on the dissemination of scientific or disciplinary knowledge, there is a need for acknowledging that knowledge exchanged in educational collaboration extends beyond disciplinary knowledge to professional skills and perspectives that are beneficial both to students, their teachers, and industry partners. By taking this shift, we can have a more nuanced understanding of KE activities in the context of educational collaboration, and how educational collaboration can benefit students, academic staff, and industry partners.

References: Billett, S. (2011). *Curriculum and pedagogical bases for effectively integrating practice-based experiences – final report*. Strawberry Hills, Australia: Australian Learning and Teaching Council

Healey, M. (2005) Linking research and teaching exploring disciplinary spaces and the role of inquiry-based learning. In Barnett, R. (ed) *Reshaping the university: New relationships between research, scholarship and teaching*, McGraw-Hill/Open University Press pp.67-78.6

Johnson, M. (2020) The Knowledge Exchange Framework: understanding parameters and the capacity for transformative Engagement, *Studies in Higher Education*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1735333>

Kunttu, L. (2017) Educational Involvement in Innovative University–Industry Collaboration, *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 7(12), 14-22.

ONS (2021) *Graduates' labour market outcomes during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: occupational switches and skill mismatch.*

Orazbayeva, B., Davey, T., Plewa, C. & Galán-Muros, V (2020) Engagement of academics in education-driven university-business cooperation: a motivation-based perspective, *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(8), 1723-1736.

Succi, C., & Canovi, M. (2020) Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: comparing students and employers' perceptions, *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(9), 1834-1847, DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2019.1585420](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1585420)

Tran, T. T. (2016) Enhancing graduate employability and the need for university-enterprise collaboration, *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 7(1), 58-71.