

Developing globally employable graduates: one approach

Abstract

This paper addresses the employability theme and will suggest that an international education certainly makes a significant contribution to the global economy and society but that an economic rationale should not be the only driver in the urge to internationalise. The paper will suggest that what is meant by 'international education' is not clear cut but contested, highlighting why internationalisation is important and suggesting what might be involved. The paper will offer an approach to internationalisation based on developing global perspectives, suggesting that this approach addresses internationalisation more effectively in the context of global employability. The approach has the potential to align with the changing needs of employers, who are increasingly seeking graduates with a broader world view and who have the ability to see the global in the local. The benefits of such an approach to UK and International students will be highlighted, along with the importance of seeking to develop the curriculum and offering extra-curricular activities to enhance skills development. If UK students are to continue to be successful in the global economy (and not lose out to graduates from other countries) it is critically important that new approaches are implemented, to engage them with developing an international experience and a global outlook. The paper draws upon the experience at Bournemouth University where the Centre for Global Perspectives contributes to a global employability agenda. The paper concludes by highlighting the challenges of such an approach.

Introduction

'In an increasingly globalised world there is wide spread acceptance of the importance of "internationalising" higher education and giving students the skills to enable them to operate effectively across boundaries.' (Bill Rammell 2007)

The importance of internationalisation for higher education is undoubted: it is a strategic concern of most universities (Altbach 2007; Middlehurst & Woodfield 2007) with the economic contribution made by overseas students, acting as an important catalyst for change. The fact that a 'marketisation discourse' has continued to dominate and has impacted upon the focus of what many embrace within their approaches to internationalisation, is hardly surprising particularly as competition has intensified (Caruana and Hanstock 2008). However, if the economic rationale focuses the mind but serves to divert attention from the broader concerns of internationalisation, particularly internationalisation at home then, as this paper suggests, the opportunity to enrich the student experience will be missed and UK students will be short-changed, in terms of being prepared for global employability

Many HEIs claim to be international but in their efforts to internationalise how many can really say that they offer all students an international education? Unfortunately it continues to be the case that internationalisation means different things to different stakeholders (Middlehurst & Woodward 2007) and that many HEIs adopt a limited perspective. There continues to be a real danger that internationalisation and globalisation are read cynically as euphemisms for international student recruitment (Fazackerley, 2007). There is also the idea held by some, that simply having overseas

students on campus makes a university “international”. Both are of course misguided, as is the notion that being global requires a physical base abroad. Recognising these tensions and putting in place processes that enable universities to respond fully to a changing global environment is therefore a key task for higher education and a particular leadership challenge. It seems vitally important that with so many institutions striving to be ‘world-class’ that we ensure that while promoting the status and brand of UK HE overseas, equal attention is applied to ensuring that the student experience at home will prepare students for life in a world that is rapidly changing.

This paper will first briefly highlight the changing context and the challenges of employability. It will then go on to describe one institutions response to shifting employability demands, outlining activity underway at Bournemouth University (BU) to ensure that all students develop global perspectives as part of a strategic approach to internationalisation.

What has changed?

Since the Robbins Report (1963) highlighted the need for graduates to make an effective contribution to the labour market and the Dearing Report (1997) sharpened the focus on education for employability (including the value of work experience and the development of key skills), higher education has increasingly sought to ensure that its provision aligns with the needs of employers. A context where UK government emphasises the link between HE and economic outcomes (for the UK as a whole and in terms of graduates’ earning power) has contributed to a strong emphasis on employability and spawned a range of research which addresses definitions (Watts 2006), and suggests what HE should be developing either within, or alongside the curriculum to ensure that graduates are employable (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Harvey, Moon and Geall, 1997).

Implementation of the employability agenda has been supported by the Quality Assurance Agency, including for example, through the National Qualifications Framework, and in the form of Codes of Practice addressing career development and Personal Development Planning. As a consequence a variety of innovative approaches have been deployed across the sector to address employability learning (Ward 2006), some more structured and strategic than others but most working towards ensuring that graduates gain employment, not least because of the implications for league tables.

One might assume given the very considerable attention put into employability that we are now doing enough and doing it very well – unfortunately that does not seem to be the case (Gilleard 2006). Employers continue to declare that graduates lack appropriate skills.

‘Almost half of businesses said that they did not expect to receive “sufficient applications from graduates with the correct skills” in 2006. In 2005, 598 positions were left unfilled as a third of employers said that they could not find candidates of sufficient quality.’ (Times, 7 February 2006)

Research also suggests that focusing too much on academic content and insufficiently on employability will not serve students well: *“If they concentrate purely on academic studies and have no work experience, they are not going to impress the*

employer." (Gilleard, 2006 and 2007 Association of Graduate Recruiters).

The nature of the challenges posed by globalisation further exacerbates the problem: the requirements for employability are shifting in a context where business is increasingly international (and multi-cultural) and where the interdependencies between the global and the local cannot be ignored. This contributes to a situation where *"the skills that most employers look for are most evident in graduates who have studied internationally,"* with the criticism, that universities need to do more *"to enhance the multicultural experience of education and through this, the employability of graduates"* (Archer 2005). Archer highlights the importance of students *'developing a broader world-view'* and being *'able to see the global in the local'*.

This is reinforced by Brown et al reporting in the recent Centre for Industry and Higher Education publication (Brown, Archer and Barnes, 2008 p5):

"Global businesses are increasingly recruiting globally. Graduates who have international experience are highly employable because they have demonstrated that they have drive, resilience and inter-cultural sensitivities as well as language skills."

The CIHE report is illustrated by employers' perspectives:

"The value of [a student's] international experience goes purely beyond the acquisition of language – it lies in the ability to see business and personal issues from other than your own cultural perspective." (Charles Macleod, Head of UK Resourcing, Price Waterhouse Coopers, in Brown et al, p11))

In this context it seems imperative that what constitutes internationalisation (for UK HE) requires a shift in focus, from a strong emphasis on economic concerns and international students (although these things must remain important) to include greater attention to internationalisation at home and the future needs of UK students. If we do not explore what is necessary to internationalise the experience of UK students, the gap identified by recruiters will grow wider; eventually UK graduates will lose out to graduates from other countries who are not only multi-lingual but have greater cross-cultural experience.

The next section of this paper illustrates one institution's approach to aligning internationalisation with employability and seeking to redress the balance.

Employability and global perspectives have been an integral part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy at BU for a number of years[1]. Change at BU has been driven bottom-up and aligned with top-down approaches. More recently the agendas for internationalisation and global perspectives have become strategically aligned, and explicitly linked to global employability in strategy documents, including the BU Strategic Plan and the Educational Enhancement Strategy.

The Strategic Plan for Bournemouth University confirms *"by 2012, we will have built on our achievements in 'global perspectives'"* and states:

We are committed to fostering a global outlook. We will encourage internationally significant research, the recruitment of students and staff with experience of a wide range of countries and cultures, the development of opportunities for international engagement by students and staff, the delivery of a curriculum which prepares for global employability, the establishment of strategically significant international partnerships and active engagement with appropriate networks and initiatives within Europe and beyond.

The mission is to embrace and integrate three essential aspects that together will enhance our higher education provision: (1) embedding global perspectives in the curricula (2), developing global awareness among our staff and students that feeds into research, enterprise and education, and (3) offering students an international curriculum and opportunities for cross-cultural learning in an international environment, befitting for a context of 'global employability'. In addition, finding ways to embed corporate responsibility and behaviour (the notion of the University as a global citizen) into the workplace remains an important longer-term goal. None of these key themes can, nor should work in splendid isolation, and their whole is definitely greater than the sum of their parts. In order to achieve success in uniting each theme coherently, we are devising ways to help implement the University's commitment to developing an internationalised curriculum and establishing the essential framework and supporting structure within which the global agenda will be developed. The objective is to enhance learning and to enable learners to be apprised of global issues and processes, together with sustainable development and internationalisation, both at home and abroad. A holistic approach, to what some might see as disparate agendas, has the potential to secure synergies through more focused efforts.

These things are of course easy to write - after all, what university worth its salt would not want to push such a well-meaning agenda forward? But as ever, the Devil is in the detail. In a world where "going global" is fast in danger of becoming a hollow mantra, success or failure depends crucially on a well managed agenda, driven from the top by senior management (Bone 2008) and linked fundamentally to the strategic vision of the organisation.

At the start of 2008 the situation at BU was one where despite substantial good work[2] to develop a curriculum for global citizenship based on the model represented in Figure 1, more work was identified as necessary to "*foster a global outlook*" in all students and staff, as championed in the Corporate Plan. Evidence suggests (and something which appears to be reflected nationally), is that students still lack an 'international experience' at home (Shiel and Mann, 2005) and are not taking full advantage of study and work abroad opportunities. Currently, our campus is still not as diverse as we would like in terms of students and staff, (although this is rapidly changing) and we continue to wrestle in some quarters with conflicting definitions of "international" and "global" in our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. We suspect that we are not alone in this, and recognise a current tension between what is required with respect to our strategic development and mission and what is happening on the ground. Indeed, reconciling the

rhetoric with reality is an important leadership challenge, where high-level managerial pronouncements on 'going global' can easily become lost in the day-to-day bustle of university life.

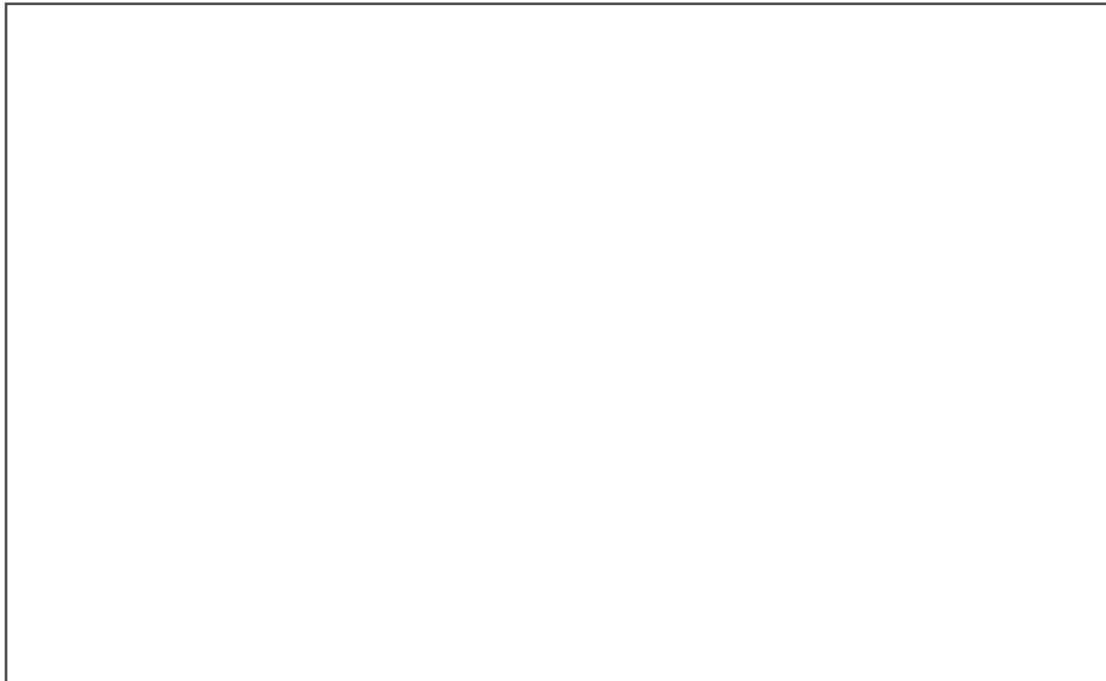


Figure 1

During 2008, activity has sought to step up a gear, raising the profile of internationalisation and demonstrating the link between global perspectives and global employability. The Centre for Global Perspective[3] (CGP) has been established to work across the university to address internationalisation at home, international mobility and to contribute to the development of new partnerships. The International Office has been disbanded with international recruitment relocated to Marketing and Communications. International student support has been integrated into the wider university support structures; internationalisation development and student mobility form an integral part of the new Centre.

A new International Strategy provides the framework for further change, outlining the strategic direction that BU will take in order to become internationalised. It aligns three themes: Global Perspectives, International Partnerships and International Recruitment. A key aim is to enable staff and students to build a tolerant and inclusive learning community based on acceptance, respect, understanding and appreciation of different cultures, with a curriculum that incorporates global perspectives, international scholarship and cross-cultural capabilities.

Global employability and international student recruitment are important aspects of the strategic approach, as is enhancing the international reputation of the University overseas however, internationalisation at home is now higher on the agenda, with the vision and values emphasising the need to prepare students as global citizens for future society.

'Because of growing ethnic, cultural, racial, language and religious diversity throughout the world, citizenship education needs to be changed in substantial ways to prepare students to function effectively in the 21st century. Citizens in this century need the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to function in their cultural communities and beyond their cultural borders. They should also be able and willing to participate in the construction of a national civic culture that is a moral and just community Which embodies democratic ideals and values. (James Banks, 2003 cited in BU International Strategy)[4]

The *Internationalisation at Home/Global Perspectives* strand of the strategy comprises areas such as the continued internationalisation of the curriculum; developing inclusive pedagogic approaches; enhancing the student experience (for both international and domestic students) and developing staff and student capability and cultural awareness.

CGP is working in partnership with Schools to take the strategy forward loosely organised around themes:

- **Education:** Developing a global outlook through education programmes and internationalising learning, teaching, assessment
- **Internationalising the student experience:** continuing to enhance the experience of international students while at the same time, enhancing the international experience of home students and developing approaches to secure reciprocity in learning between home, EU and overseas students
- **Extra-curricular:** Enhancing the extra-curricular experience, ensuring that a multi-cultural ethos pervades the University and developing opportunities for skills enhancement
- **Experience of other cultures:** Developing a 'global outlook' by increasing opportunities for international exchange and increasing staff and student mobility
- **Developing staff capability** for internationalisation

The aim is to ensure that all graduates will be able to evaluate the impact of globalisation and sustainable development in their personal and professional spheres, now and in the future, and as individuals might be described as someone who:

- is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen;
- respects and values diversity;
- has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially, culturally, technologically and environmentally;
- challenges social injustice;
- participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from the local to the global;
- is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place;
- takes responsibility for their actions.

Increasing student and staff mobility is a critical challenge and an essential component of the strategic approach. As David Lammy suggested at a recent Bologna Conference, "*It will encourage them (students) to become active and employable citizens and foster international understanding.*" (David Lammy Minister for Higher Education 2008). Developing new opportunities for staff and students to experience other cultures through mobility programmes and the continued internationalisation of the student placement scheme (in 2006 19% of BU students took placements overseas) will be vital.

CGP is already running a number of initiatives to enable students to learn from international students and to think beyond their own country context. BU's Overseas Travel Awards encourage students to consider visiting Africa, Asia, South America, Canada, Europe, Oceania or the US, on work placements, research or field trips, supporting them to develop knowledge of the range of issues that affect a global economy whilst enhancing future employability prospects.

Working with DEED (Development Education in Dorset), the three-year Skills for Life project is also supporting students to enhance their employability skills. Learning takes the form of volunteering and active citizenship: students facilitate workshops on global issues, actively promote sustainable development, the alleviation of poverty and social justice, and organise citizenship days for local schools on campus.

The Centre is also actively encouraging BU students to engage with volunteering and social entrepreneurship with links to other countries. United Youth Development Organisation (www.uydo.org) encapsulates the global in the local, developing skills for employability through fund raising and volunteering. In essence, youth in the global North raises micro-finance funds, for youth in the global South – employability skills are involved on both sides.

At all levels BU is aiming to encourage, promote and engage students and staff in international experiences by expanding the range of opportunities available.

The benefits of the approach

The rationale for the approach at BU is rooted in a belief that the benefits of an international experience are undoubted, will be critical to global employability and is fundamental for an education that is fit for purpose in the 21st Century. The BU student will develop a broader set of competencies as a consequence (Figure 2) and will understand the implications of globalisation at a personal level and also in the context of their chosen professions.

An indirect benefit that arises out of this approach (and one that impacts indirectly on the bottom-line) is that concerted efforts to ensure learning between UK and international students, the development of more inclusive pedagogy and ensuring an international ethos pervades, contributes to creating a more welcoming environment for international students. The knock on effect of this, is improved retention. International students also feel more valued, where UK students begin to see international students as a rich cultural resource, particularly where assessment strategies embrace the need to reflect diverse cultural perspectives.

The greatest benefits accrue to those students who engage with international mobility; student feedback provides clear evidence of their learning development.

“I can see myself as being a more approachable and well-rounded individual after my time here.” (Student Exchange to Memorial University Canada)

“During my time in Coburg I made some great international friendships which will surely last much longer than the Erasmus Exchange. There are many things I have learned from each of them about their countries, I became more aware of different cultures and mentalities which made me more ‘international’, tolerant and open-minded.” (Business Studies student, Erasmus exchange to Coburg, Germany)

“I have fulfilled all my learning outcomes plus so much more. Stockholm is very multi cultural so I have developed a deeper appreciation for caring for women from many different cultures.” (Midwifery student, Erasmus exchange to Karolinska, Sweden)

“The China Summer School has definitely had an impact on my life both academically and professionally. I now feel more confident to work in Marketing at an international level after learning about oriental culture. During the time I spent in China I discovered the ability to see life from another perspective. These cultural differences have helped me to be more open minded now that I am back home.” (International Marketing student, China Summer School)

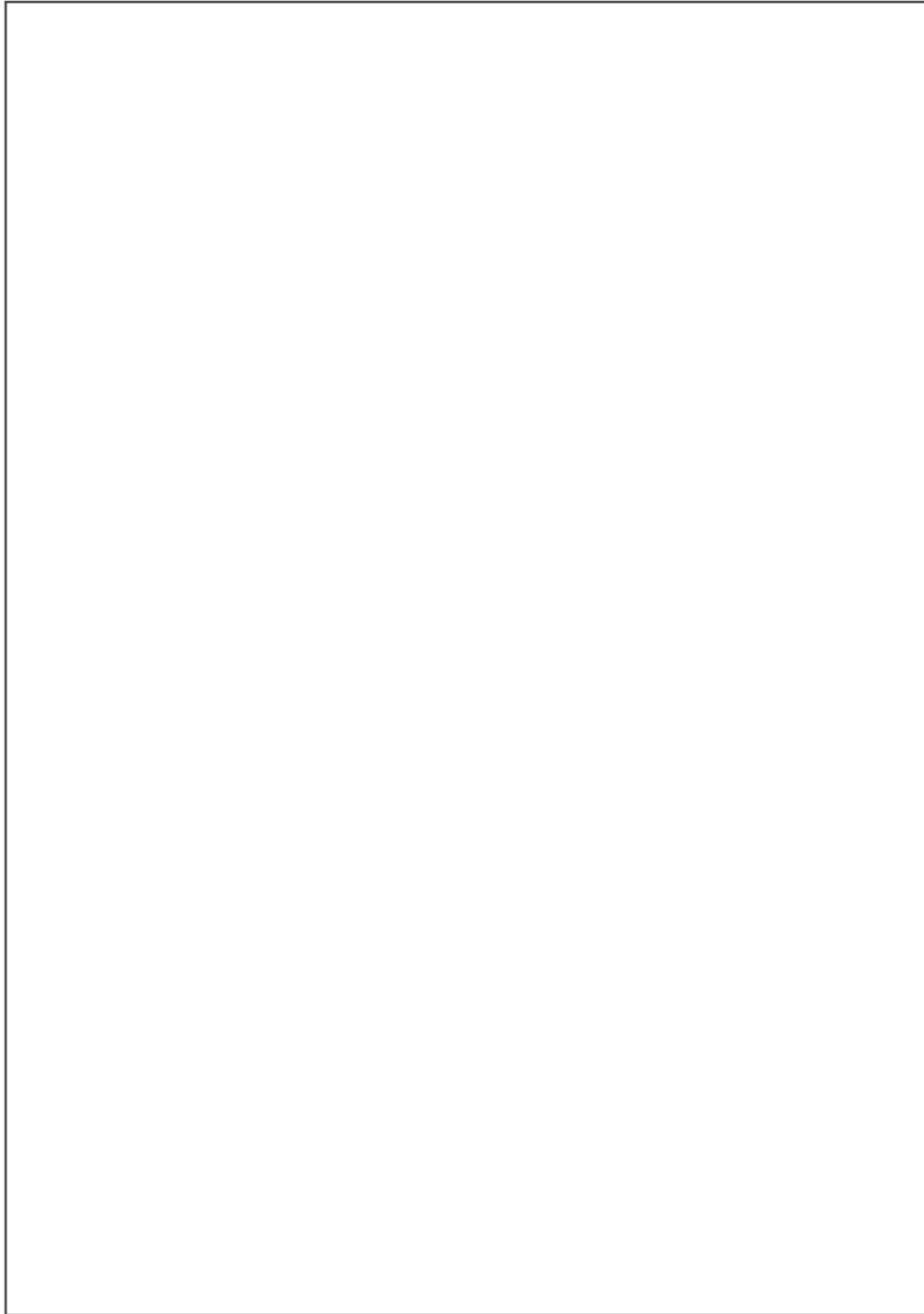


Figure 2: Gush, G (2006)

This is matched by comment from employers: *“Our BU student has been a great match to our organisation’s requirements due to her excellent communication and language skills”* (IBM, R & D Germany).

The experience at BU confirms Brown’s comment (2008; 5) *‘As students and graduates expand their horizons they in turn become more enterprising, innovative, socially aware and better global citizens.’*

Change, however has been a slow process. The next section highlights some of the challenges and learning from the experience, proffered to support others.

The challenges

Disbanding the International Office and developing a cross-institutional 'Centre' to lead internationalisation at BU has involved a considerable amount of leadership effort; persuading academic staff that things have to change is a political process which is ongoing. This has possibly been the greatest challenge.

Developments at BU would have failed without champions at all levels and the agenda continues to require significant senior management support. If leaders do not champion internationalisation (Middlehurst 2008; Bone 2008), ensuring that appropriate frameworks are in place and providing the resources and political back up to secure implementation, wider institutional commitment will not be gained. Middlehurst (2008;16) reinforces this and provides a useful account of the *'pitfalls en route to successful leadership of internationalisation'* including among other things a *'failure to act as champions'*, a lack of *'coordination'*, and a failure to deploy *'resource'*. She suggests (p19) that the most difficult challenge is to achieve *'alignment between leadership, management, administration and governance.'*

The experience at BU provides evidence that working across the academic, professional services domains as Middlehurst suggest, and trying to ensure that internationalisation permeates teaching, research, business and community and infrastructure and services, is not an easy task. It involves investment and uncertainty as familiar structures are challenged.

Internationalising the curriculum and developing inclusive pedagogy takes time. Staff need to be persuaded – they also need help in developing resources and to be provided with examples of how learning teaching and assessment strategies might better serve internationalisation. Curriculum structures also need to support mobility; further opportunities for staff/student exchange need to be developed.

Developing new partnerships for exchange and curriculum development take time to work through, what is important (in the interim) is to seek ways to innovate in the extra-curricular sphere to reinforce skills development. The extra-curricular sphere offers huge potential to develop skills for global employability but the challenge is to demonstrate the benefits of engagement to students, particularly when their attention is often limited to what is assessed. However, evidence from BU students suggests that many of them are eager to engage with volunteering and fundraising – the challenge is to harness this as an opportunity to engage with both global learning and enhancing their CV.

Conclusion

This paper has provided evidence of one institutions approach to what is a challenging but necessary agenda. In developing the higher education experience to prepare students for the wider world of work, it is important that we are mindful that we are preparing students for the future - a future that is evolving and uncertain. This paper has

set out how internationalisation and the development of Global Perspectives at Bournemouth University, is seeking through a variety of initiatives, including curriculum change to prepare students more effectively. The provision of a curriculum and a learning environment that focuses on the global perspective enables the development of knowledge, skills and competences, that will not only be in demand in the future but will be personally rewarding for students and useful to society.

The paper has highlighted that universities need to adopt a broader perspective with regard to internationalisation.

'Only when an international outlook pervades everything that we do, can we say that we make an effective contribution to global education.' (Shiel 2008)

What will be critically important is that this agenda is supported by leadership from the top, is part of a strategic and coherent approach and supports an ethos that internationalisation embraces all aspects of university life. Preparing learners to work effectively across cultures in a context of global employability cannot be ignored – it is critical for our students and will be critical for the economy.

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Biography (200 words)

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Chris Shiel is Director of the Centre for Global Perspectives and was previously Head of Learning and Teaching in the Business School. She has led developments in global citizenship and sustainable development nationally and has contributed to publications

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[1] see Gush, J (2006) for a summary of BU's approach to employability.

[2] BU has been engaged with the 'global perspectives' agenda since 1999: Shiel (2007) provides a summary. Essentially global perspectives has been developed as an 'umbrella term' incorporating several aspects including, internationalisation and sustainable development. The approach is founded on the belief that 'internationalising' the experience of UK students has a key role to play in the wider context of 'globalisation' in HEIs.

[3] See Petford & Shiel (2007)

[4] Banks, J.A. (2003) Introduction; "Democratic Citizenship Education in Multicultural Societies". In J.A. Banks (Ed.) *Diversity & Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass