How will Tourism and Hospitality Education have to change in 5, 10 and 15 years’ time for the global citizen student?

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**Abstract**

*Higher Education within the UK is experiencing many changes, one of which is the changing nature of graduate profiles (Higher Education Academy, 2014). Traditionally Tourism and Hospitality education was predominately composed of home students. In recent years this has changed to include more international students.*

*Our longitudinal research study of four years indicated that those international students’ encounter challenges when adapting to the UK University teaching systems, developing employability skills and integrating within the community.*

*To address these challenges the lecturing team created a conceptual framework named The Learning, Assessment, Pastoral (LAP) conceptual Framework, which provides for a theoretical model perpetuating the concepts of incremental learning, critical thinking; volunteering, competitive spirit and mentoring****.*** *The entrenched framework formulation enables students to build confidence and a sense of belonging as well as an appreciation of the teaching, learning and assessment styles.*

**Keywords:** *E.g. changing nature of student and graduate profiles, teaching and learning methodologies, internships, the role of validation and professional bodies, proximity to industry and industry partnerships.*

**Theme:** Education Futures.

**Introduction: The change in student profile.**

Certainly there is evidence that the demand for good value higher education will grow from international students. The UK university market, in particular, is viewed as a provider of quality education (Laurillard, 2008).

According to the HESA, there were 124,545 non-UK domiciled postgraduate students who studied in British universities in 2005/2006. In 2009/2010 this number has increased to 156,820 (just under 26% increase), (HESA, 2011). And in 2012/2013 this figure has increased to 195, 755 (36% increase). Figure one shows this trend is reflected in postgraduate students at the University of West London. In addition Universities have started to provide the same education at campuses in host countries, taking the home country academic team into new environments where they have to be ready to provide suitable learning teaching and assessment strategies. The School of Hospitality and Tourism at the University of West London, followed this trend with 147 students attending their level 5 and 6 modules across two campuses in India.

With this trend set to continue as part of the Universities strategy, we felt there was a need to review our teaching, learning and assessment strategies with the needs of the international students and lecturers in mind Coilingridge (1999).

**Figure. 1: Depicting the trend in rising international student numbers studying at UWL.**

**The challenge for Higher Education**

The challenge then is how can universities adapt their programmes in order to better develop the skills base of the changing nature of student cohorts in tourism and hospitality programmes? There is a perceived need to ensure that international students are receiving sufficient support to integrate into the University, thus aiding retention and future recruitment of international students. This leads us to question: How can universities adapt their programmes to help the international students get accustomed to the UK teaching delivery and assessment structures? In addition how can universities develop their curriculums to build in appropriate employability skills to enable them build a career in their respective industries?

One significant stakeholder influencing university programmes is the employer. They have identified key specific graduate attributes that need to be developed by universities, namely development of soft skills involving communication, change management, self and other leadership, presentation, flexibility and application(Baker, 2010; Hofstrand 1996; Kanuga and Visram, 2012; Pebble 2002; Robinson, 2006).

The Leitch report into review of skills (2006:p3) further identified that there is a direct correlation between skills and employment and indicated that it is the universities that need to make reforms to address this correlation better.

To address these challenges and the student expectations an inquiry based, qualitative research project was conducted by the lecturing team using a longitudinal study over a period of four years to ascertain the challenges the international students faced with regard to student learning and their expectations of what graduate skills they would like to acquire from studying on our programmes. The students were invited to attend a series of focus groups to provide a critical review of the issues they faced with learning in the UK environment and give indications of their personal projections for their future.

Our research case study was conducted on the Graduate Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism programme. The course is composed mainly of international students. It acts either as a stand-alone programme or as a conversion course to the MA in hospitality management. The students entering the programme come with a degree, not related to the hospitality industry. The degree needs to be recongnised by the UK system. The programme has a taught element and a placement element. The programme was due to undergo a revalidation event.

There were many challenges arising during the delivery of these programmes. It was found that the international student learning was impacted not only by the different delivery and teaching methods; the different forms of assessment strategies; concepts of independent learning; but also by pastoral issues.

From the findings of this research the lecturing team created a conceptual framework named *The Learning, Assessment, Pastoral (LAP) conceptual Framework* ; informed by industry experts, student cohorts, institute of hospitality bodies to not only address the challenges faced by international students but also develop a model for future education that meets the government guideline and employer suggestions and international student expectations. The framework allows for global graduate attributes to be developed to help them integrate within the learning and assessment environment and adjust to their new environments and cultural differences.

**Methodology**

***Research Paradigms***

Careful consideration was given as to what methodological approach to adopt, to what research paradigms would be most suitable. It was decided that this research study should follow a constructionist ontology representation, based on interpretivist epistemology. The reason for choosing this approach was because subjectivity was seen as fundamental to this study, the students opinions and perceptions of the teaching and learning environment were important. We recognise that individuals will create realities of the teaching and learning world according to their own cultural and historical upbringings (Hammersley 2005;Eisner, 1992). This diversity in the student backgrounds was seen as a strength, in the long term. Such a variety of perceptions will better enable the lecturing team to redesign the programme. This diversity was perceived as significant as we are designing programmes for international students who come from different methods of teaching and assessment structures and different cultural backgrounds. To build on this plurality, it was seen as important to obtain an understanding of the way the international students were taught and assessed in their own countries and learn about the differences in cultural before we embarked on designing our curriculums, so we can better address their needs and concerns.

***Methods adopted***

Consideration was given as to what will be the best method for this approach. Focus group was chosen as they allowed multiple perspectives to be obtained and provide a good forum for discussions to be developed. They also provide an opportunity to explore and gain insight into individual views (Cohen *at al*. 2007 ). The focus groups were composed of 20 students per group. Two sets of focus groups were conducted every year, over a period of four years on the Graduate Diploma students.

The Graduate Diploma programme is composed of students mainly from the Asian sub-continent regions, primarily India, Malaysia and Nepal however there are a number of students from the USA, Europe, Brazil. With regards to the sample size, it was decided to invite all the class to the focus group, classes were composed of around 40 students. It was anticipated that not all students would attend. Each focus group had around 15-20 student attending. The sample contained students of both genders, the ratio was about 50:50. The sample contained different nationalities and cultures as shown in figure 2.

**Figure. 2: Origin of research sample.**

***The Research Question:***

*What are your experiences at studying at post graduate level in the UK?*

**The Findings**

Whilst the students found studying in the UK a rich full and valuable experience, the study revealed that the international students coming into the country faced many hurdles, all of which impacted their learning. We have identified these challenges into three categories : **Learning process, Assessment process, Pastoral** as identified in table 1.

**Table 1: Challenges experienced by international students studying in the university**

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| --- | --- |
| cultural differences | Pastoral |
| unfamiliar modes of transport | Pastoral |
| different cuisines | Pastoral |
| different modes of communication | Pastoral |
| Language (understanding the accent) | Pastoral |
| Belonging | Pastoral |
| Difficulty understanding the assessment criteria | Assessment process |
| different ICT platforms | Learning process |
| teaching strategies | Learning process |
| Independent learning | Learning process |

***The learning and assessment process***

Notable issues arise in the focus group regarding the learning and assessment processes. The students reported that they were more use to the teacher-centered education approach, where learning represented personal wisdom form the teacher rather that student-centered education (initiative) approach (Hofstede 1994, 1991). The students also reported that in their home countries they were more familiar with structured learning situations and where precise objectives were given and assignments were extremely detailed (Hofstede 1994). The approach in the Graduate Diploma programme was to encourage an independent learning approach, which fostered to some degree unstructured learning and broad assignments.

***Pastoral category***

For the purposes of this study we have extended the category of pastoral issues to include the following issues as identified by the student focus group : cultural issues; different cuisines; the unfamiliarity with different modes of transport; different modes of communication. All these pastoral issues impact the ability to settle within the environment and subsequently impacted their ability to adjust to the learning environment.

As identified the students felt that culture was a noteworthy characteristic that impacts their ability to settle within a new environment. The students reported they experienced significant differences in culture from their home countries. The word culture can take many interpretations and therefore it would be appropriate at this stage to identify the word ‘culture’. For this study it is used in the sense of “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (Hofstede 1994). “The ‘category of people’ can be a nation, region, or ethnic group (national or cultural), wemon verses men (gender culture), old versus young (age group and generation culture)” (Hofstede 1994). The most significant differences in culture reported were : differences in humour, methods of addressing the lecturer, authority of the lecturer, questioning the concepts taught, lack of the bartering process in shops and student-centered education.

Another pastoral issue was the different modes of communication which included the smart phones, the virtual learning environment platforms and email systems, rather than the traditional letter format, which many were use to. One of the most challenging issues for the students was the integration into the local community. Many students reported a desire to integrate, however were feeling isolated when they had difficulties in doing so. The feeling of ‘belonging’ appeared an important (Wenger 1998).

The students reported that the cultural differences they experienced meant that there was an added learning curve to their experience in the UK in addition to the different teaching and learning approaches adopted at the university

The students reported that this cultural shock settled within six months of entering into the country, however the assessment and learning process took much longer to adjust to.

***The conceptual model***

The lecturing team designed a conceptual framework termed **Learning, Assessment, Pastoral (LAP)** framework to address the issues that were raised in the focus group meetings. The foundations of this framework were based on the focus group findings conducted over a period of four years; brainstorming sessions with the lecturing team; and discussions held during mentoring conferences. This framework provides a series of strategies which enables international students to integrate within the learning and assessment environment and adjust to their new environment.

The design of the conceptual model was created in partnership between the lecturing team and the students, with the aim of addressing the students’ needs and also to develop the international students’ confidence skills. The partnership allowed for both parties to voice their concerns and articulate their ambitions which enabled strategies to be developed and for students to lead on the implementation of these strategies.

This strategy involved a range of extra curriculum activities which are discussed within this paper and required a true alliance between staff and students. All initiatives were evaluated periodically through student led focus groups which involved both staff and students. During these sessions students assessed what worked well and allowed the students to integrate in their new community with confidence.

**Figure 3. : The Learning, Assessment and Pastoral Model (the LAP model)**

**Pastoral Model**

Competition

Mentor

Scheme

VTeam

Field trips / Critical thinking/Observational skills

Conceptual model

Past assignments

Incremental / Learning /assessment

model

**Assessment Model**

**Learning Model**

Extended

inductions

Independent study

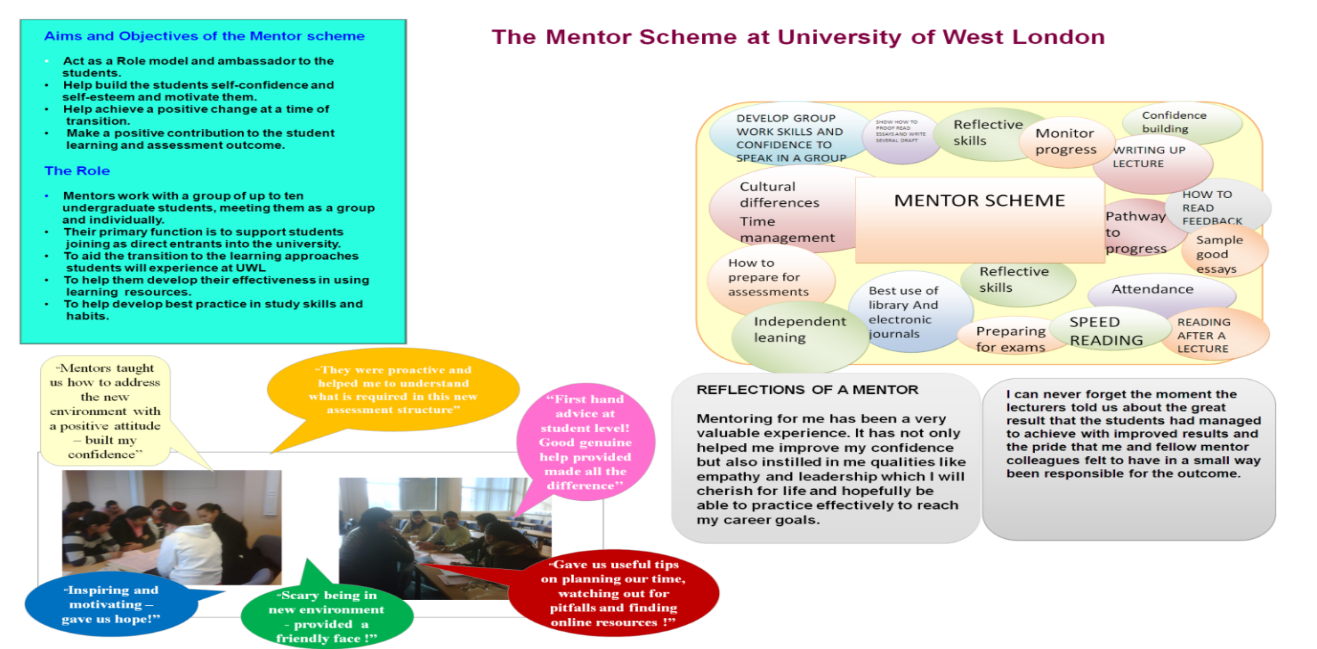
***The Pastoral model: The mentorship initiative***

The first initiative was to successfully secure funding for a student led mentorship programme. This mentoring scheme was designed to help new international students settle within the country and adapt to the teaching delivery approaches and assessment strategies as well as becoming accustomed to the concept of independent learning, (Mentoring scheme for international students : a practical guide : UKCIS). The mentors were selected via a recruitment process and then trained. Careful consideration was given as to what would be the criteria for selecting a suitable mentor. It was decided that the mentors ideally should be enrolled on the MA programme and that they have been through a similar learning process. The mentoring scheme started in the beginning of each semester and the mentors were involved from the onset and then conducted sessions in the extended induction programme for the Graduate Diploma. The mentors were then timetabled in two hour weekly slots for a period of 6 weeks. It has proven to be successful and has run in both semesters for 3 years. The following table identifies the benefits the mentees experienced from the scheme.

**Table 2: Benefits the mentor scheme brings to the mentees**

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| **Benefit for mentees :** |
| Extended inductions : Making students feel wanted / valued by the institution and local community |
| Extended inductions : orientation |
| Encourage friendship and belonging |
| Educate cultures and traditions |
| Encourage integration |
| Understanding about the hospitality industry from a student perspective |
| Understanding about the assessment structures |
| Educating about the teaching methods |
| Learning about independent study approaches |

**Figure 4 : The Mentor Scheme at the University of London**



***Competitions***

The second initiative involved entering a European competition. In this competition both the staff and students worked together as a team competing against 80 EU hospitality institutions. The competition required for the team to produce online “rumour around their brand” via social media platforms which encouraged all students and lecturers within the department to become an active online community. The students presented their research project in Holland, competing against other institutions. This project build the students competitive spirit, project planning and team working skills as well as presentation skills.

***Hotel conferences***

The third strategy involved making alliances with leading hotel conferences to develop opportunities for the students to volunteer in the designing, coordinating, management and deliver of the international conference. Such conferences gave the students an exposure to the discussion and debates undertaken at senior management and director level. These conferences provided the students with an exposure to emerging developments within these industries at European level.

***Field Trips***

The fourth initiative involved the incorporation of field trips within the curriculum. The purpose of this initiatives was to introduce the students to the industry in practice. Students were taken on a variety of field trips. The trips gave an exposure to the operations undertaken within the industry and how the industry addresses customer relationship management issues. The trips had an academic element associated with them. The students were given specific activities to undertake, often involving observational studies, or interviewing or designing questionnaires related to the activities, these activities had criteria related to the learning outcomes, specifically to developing their critical thinking skills.

***Integration within the community***

In addition a strategy was designed to help the students integrate within the wider community. The students were also encouraged to join the university VTeam which provides opportunities for students to volunteer within the local charity projects; providing an exposure to working with the local community. They learnt teamworking skills but also had opportunities to do hands on work, project design and learn about the UK culture. An exposure that cannot be gained within the academic context presented in the learning environment of Universities.

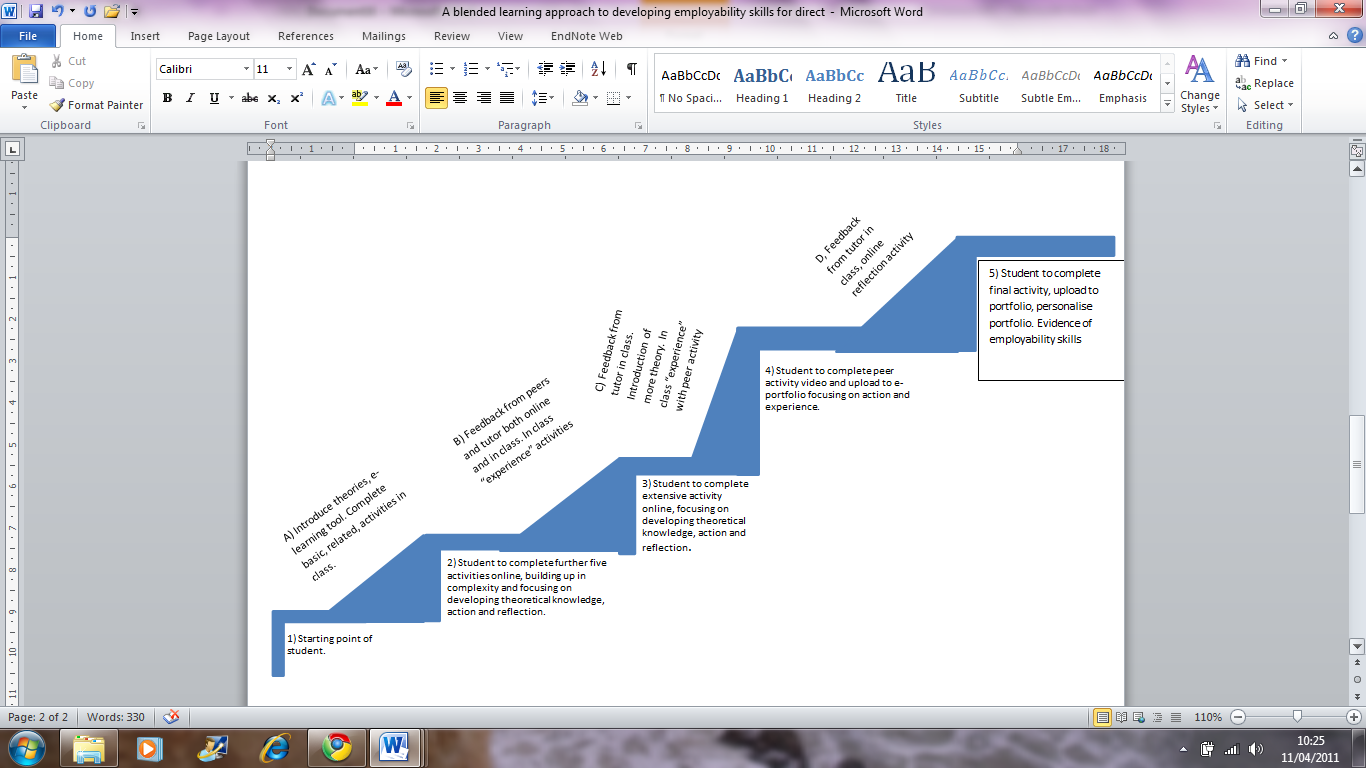
***Assessment and learning model : Incremental learning process.***

It was found from the focus group meetings that the international students were finding it difficult to adjust to the teaching, learning and assessment strategies. In addition they were experiencing difficulties in adjusting to the concept of independent learning. To address these challenges the lecturing team decided to use a phased assessment strategy built on incremental learning. The students were asked to complete a range of activities or small assignments which formed part of a larger assignment, like a portfolio, which increased student engagement and allowed for development of skills (Baker 2010), in particular employability skills. The aim was for students to build the necessary employability skills within seven weeks, through the use of blended learning involving an e-learning environment called pebblepad.

***The Blended learning phased assessment strategies for employability skills*** *(****BLPASES Framework).***

Within this framework the student builds up the required skills through completing a range of activities, relevant to the employability skills needed in the field, which involve building up theoretical knowledge, experience, action and reflection and on-going feedback from the tutor and peers both online and in person.

**Figure 4. : The Blended learning phased assessment strategies for employability skills**



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| *The overall framework :*  Within the BLPASES Framework, stages 1-5 display the industry/field- related activities the students complete online using the web-based platform. Within these stages students also complete activities in the field, alone or with peers and evidence needs to be uploaded on their portfolio. These activities are part of the phased assessment with the student only being able to complete stage five, if stage one takes place. The length of the horizontal platform indicates the time the student is expected to spend in comparison to the other stages. |
| *Stages A-D* represents the peer and tutor involvement within the blended learning environment. The degree of the triangle/climbing step indicates the level of learning and developed is taking place through experiencing, application and reflection. For example at stage 3 the student only completes one activity online however the level of feedback from peers and tutor is peeking here, allowing for the student to develop to a level where they can progress to a much higher stage where they are required to provide evidence of their learning. |
| In the *first stage* the student is introduced to the tool and the teaching and assessment strategy. The student becomes comfortable with the tool and the theory-action/experience/reflection template of the activities |
| The *second stage* requires the student to complete five activities which increase in difficulty as the student becomes more familiar with the tool and the theoretical site of the module. In class the student then receives feedback from the tutor and peers and is able to “experience” the online activities and learning in class. This enables the student to move to the next step. |
| The *third step* requires the student to complete a larger activity which involves applying the reflective skills learned, understanding the literature around the subject and applying this within this activity. Returning to class, the student receives more feedback from the tutor and is able to experience the activity with a peer. As can be seen in the framework, this is an essential, rather steep, part of the development of skills. The student cannot successfully progress to the next step if this has not been completed. |
| If the student has achieved the *fourth step*, they are now required to act upon what is learned and experience the skill together with a peer. A record, often a video, needs to be uploaded to the portfolio to enable feedback and reflection. |
| The final feedback from the tutor and the student’s online reflection activity help the student to access the *fifth step*; demonstrating the employability skills achieved. |

The framework was designed to enable learners to develop their employability skills through a range of activities forming a phased assessment. The framework considered that such skills will need to be applied within a seven week period and thus rapid developed is required without risking a cognitive overload. Finally as the skills required are predominately around self and other-leadership, the framework is designed to facilitate reflection, peer and community feedback, which are skills needed for cognitive learning.

**Conclusion.**

The LAP framework has been developed and adapted over a number of years for the Graduate Diploma programme. It has been successful in that students have reported they feel more comfortable within the new teaching environments and have confidence to integrate within the community. The quality of placements the students are securing have significantly improved over the years. The lecturing team has attributed this to the increased level in confidence.

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