

Introduction

The contribution of this special issue

The articles included in this special issue cover a range of topics centred on academic and practitioner discussion of graduate work readiness (GWR) from both an international and stakeholder perspective. Individually and collectively the articles provide insight, opportunities for reflection and areas for further discussion as solutions are sought to address the graduate skills gap and a young adults' preparedness for the labour market.

The paper by Winterton J.C.A. and Turner J.J. on "Preparing graduates for work readiness: an overview and agenda" aims to understand GWR from the perspective of stakeholders. Using a critical review of the multidisciplinary themes to emerge from the literature and in an international context, the research provides insight into the graduate relationship with the labour market. The implications of the research are that stakeholder perspectives have to be reconciled, with the identified parties (universities, governments, businesses and students) moving forward together on an agreed agenda to ensure an appropriate and effective transition for graduates into employment.

The paper by Jabarullah N.H. and Hussain H.I. on "The effectiveness of problem-based learning in technical and vocational education in Malaysia" investigates the impact on the learning experience of engineering students when a university embeds problem-based learning (PBL) into the curriculum. The research revealed that students on the higher technical and vocational education and training programme responded well to PBL, with improved performance in written and lab-based assessments. The findings suggest that those students enrolled on practical, hands-on programmes and who engage with applied learning benefit the most from PBL.

The paper by Prikshat V., Kumar S. and Nankervis A. on "Work-readiness integrated competence model: Conceptualisation and scale development" constructed a 53-item work-readiness integrated competence model based on the stakeholder perspectives of HR professionals and managers across seven Asia-Pacific countries. The resultant model, containing four dimensions and ten sub-dimensions associated to GWR, is intended to inform debate around GWR and provide an appropriate scale to measure it.

The paper by Teng W., Ma C., Pahlevansharif S. and Turner J.J., on "Graduate readiness for the employment market of the 4th industrial revolution: the development of soft employability skills" examines Chinese and Malaysian student perspectives on the soft employability skills they develop during their time at university and their preparedness for the future employment market. The research indicates that the curriculum of the Malaysian university was the most effective at engendering soft employability skills, better preparing students for the workplace. This is despite the fact that the institutions in China and Malaysia both embedded business engagement into their respective curriculum. Such findings provided insight into the relationship between Chinese educational culture and graduate readiness for the disruptive labour market.

The paper by Wrye B. Chafin C. and Higginbotham C. on "Creating a win-win: designing and implementing mutually beneficial collaborations between community organisations and academic programs" explores how a university/community partnership has successfully embedded three complementary pedagogical methodologies into an educational curriculum to promote student-centred learning within an experiential framework. The research indicates that the pedagogies of internships, service learning and project-based learning taken collectively provide mutual benefits for stakeholders, with



students in particularly emerging from the experience better prepared for graduate employment. Recommendations are proposed to enable other education providers navigate their own implementation of similar methodological approaches.

The paper by Baird A.M. and Parayitam S. on “Employers’ ratings of importance of skills and competencies college graduates need to get hired: evidence from the New England region of USA” investigates the skills and competencies employers look for when hiring graduates. In a response to identify the graduate skills gap, the research revealed from a scale of 21 skills, those considered the most important to employers which has clear implications for education providers. Identifying the employers need for critical thinking, problem solving and listening indicates how the tertiary learning environment has to reflect on the best way forward to create suitably job ready graduates.

The paper by Alvarez Sainz M., Ferrero A.M. and Ugidos A. on “Time management: skills to learn and put into practice” provides insight into students’ relationship with time management and the consequences for graduate employment preparedness. The research revealed that perhaps as a result of universities modular-based curriculum, students are more comfortable with short-term planning but lack the appropriate habits and attitudes for the longer-term. To address the issues raised by the research, recommendations are proposed to encourage students to make better use of their time and better prepare them for the world of work.

Jason J. Turner

Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and

Jonathan Winterton

Department of Management, Taylor’s University, Subang Jaya, Malaysia