

Editorial: Volume 8 No 2

Neil Marriott

This edition contains an eclectic mix of topics among the six papers and two research notes and there is an unintended theme relating to employability and working with employers in delivering business education that is vocationally relevant and ultimately successful. It is particularly pleasing to report that some of the papers are the outcomes of projects funded by BMAF's teaching research and development grants.

Gillian Maxwell, Bernadette Scott, Dorothy Macfarlane and Elizabeth Williamson's article explores the position and views of employers as a critical stakeholder group in postgraduates' employability skills. They conclude that employers can increase their stake in employability skills development in two ways: by working in partnership with universities on the core and component skills they seek from postgraduates; and, by assuming their share of responsibility for the development of these skills. In balancing employer expectations in such a way, it is levelled that the general standard of postgraduates' employability skills may be enhanced.

Guy Parrott's article presents the outcomes of a study that considers the detail and nature of the first year business curriculum. A series of formative reviews led to the adoption of a new approach to curriculum, infrastructure and teaching. The new approach represents a paradigm shift embracing a student-centred model where the teaching and learning facilities have been augmented to support students encouraging them to become both curious and autonomous learners. New teaching suites at the University of Bedfordshire act as a platform to support a curriculum redesign providing a new model where students work with real data, cases and problems sourced in collaboration with practitioners in services and leisure sectors. The developments provide the first year student with a challenging set of curriculum-specific issues to address and early indications of success are reported.

Marcelline Fusilier and Subhash Durlabhji explore the availability and characteristics of e-business master's degree programmes. Findings from their international study suggest that the number of e-business master's programmes has increased on all continents since 2001, with the exception of North America. The North American programmes appeared to require more non-technical business courses relative to programmes based on other continents. The composition of the curricula is compared to literature on e-business success factors and the implications for educational programme design are discussed.

Sally Sambrook and Jennifer Rowley's article reports on an exploratory study into students' attitudes towards, and use of, "webnotes": lecture notes on a virtual learning environment (VLE). It also explores students' view on the relationship between the availability of webnotes and lecture attendance. Their findings confirmed the importance of lectures and webnotes to student learning, and offer a range of insights into perceived benefits of webnotes to learning, student use of webnotes, and the relationship between webnote availability and lecture attendance. They recommend the development of students' skills in note-taking and the use of student representatives to champion the added value of attending lectures. They also recommend the development of staff skills to enhance the design and use of webnotes.

Helen Fee, Kate Greenan and Anthony Wall's paper assesses whether the students or the higher education teaching staff are prepared for the challenges that lie ahead in their degree programme. Their analysis shows that while not all first year undergraduate students will struggle with the intensity of some of their assessments, there is no doubt that university lecturers have to be prepared to provide greater support to the majority.

Roger Bennett and Suzanne Kane's study compared the educational management practices and approaches to first year retention of a group of universities that exhibited the UK's highest rates of first year retention among business students with a group of universities with the UK's lowest rates of first year business student retention. Differences between the two sets of institutions were reported in their organisational arrangements; the application of performance management techniques and performance related pay; the degree of centralisation of student support services; internal communications; and, whether a university's culture encouraged faculty members to believe, as a matter of course, that they should provide students with a high quality educational experience.

Alan Graham, Martin Hampton and Caroline Willett's study considers the evidence that many accounting students struggle to write accurately and appropriately, which has negative implications on their wider employability. Using an intervention approach, initiatives were taken to address this problem for first year accounting undergraduates at the University of Portsmouth. The results indicate that some improvements are possible and students' self-awareness of the issue was raised, but that in order to sustain any improvements an increased focus on the teaching of writing skills is required. The initiative is targeted specifically at the enhancement of employability and, although based around extracts from the accounting literature, could

readily be transferred to other subject areas.

Russell Craig and Joel Amernic have conducted a close reading of a crisis response communication by Nortel Network's CEO. A pedagogical focus on the role of language and communication has the potential to inform management education generally, and to enhance student appreciation of particular areas of concern such as leadership, public relations, corporate governance, strategic communication and transformational leadership. Here is a pedagogical resource for management educators who want an example to highlight the potential for close reading analysis. It is intended to be a demonstrative "pedagogical primer" for management educators who can ask their students to conduct close reading analysis of texts of their own choosing to develop insights to management thinking and practice in a wide variety of contexts.

A final reminder to our readers that the BMAF annual conference will be held in Newcastle from 20th to 21st April 2010 and further details are available on the BMAF website.