Supporting the Needs of Higher Educational Learners, through the ‘Postgraduate Pathways’

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a case study in Adaptive Personalised Learning for Postgraduates within Higher Education: What is already known about this topic: Current State of Higher Education within supporting postgraduate careers and transferable skills Raised standards and improvements within universities expectations required by the QAA Research students and their academic and employability needs. What this paper adds: A postgraduate Recommender Systems for educational pathway to aid with on-line support towards selecting suitable transferable skills depending on departments. Engagement of postgraduate research students and their perception on transferable skills through additional training in Higher Education. Implications for practice: Development of an online postgraduate recommender system, that can guide students on individual modules, courses or programmes to take to benefit them while carrying out their PhD research. Capture a current snap shot of the current trends that the University is facing.

Keywords: Adaptive, E-learning, E-learning in the Cloud, Higher Education, Personalised, Raised Standards, Training

INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

It is now widely recognised by employers, professional bodies and research funding agencies that specialist expertise alone is not sufficient preparation either for research or a subsequent career. Researchers like Saiti and Prokopiadou (2008), Campbell et al., (2008), Alpay and Walsh (2008) indicates that postgraduate (PG) students require a balance between the skills needed within the labour market, adaptability, and transferable skills. Alpay and Walsh (2008) mentions that attitudes toward skills set of the students have shifted towards a positive outlook from not just postgraduates but also from employers and academia.

Vitae (2011) indicates that “the knowledge, intellectual abilities, techniques and professional standards to do research, as well as the personal qualities, knowledge and skills to work with others and ensure the wider impact of research”, this is key to enable academia to grow, by providing additional training for postgraduates.

In this research, we present an approach tailored towards the requirements of Higher Educational Institutes by mapping educational pathways through the use of an Online-Recommender

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Systems (Drachsler et al., 2008; Wang and Wu 2011; Bridge and Dunleavy 2014) to provide pre-guidance transferable training skills for postgraduate’s students within a variety of different disciplines. Hefce (2013) indicates that “it is important to consider the difference in information needed between students who are returning to education” or “those who move from an undergraduate course straight into a Postgraduate courses” (Hefce 2013, p.7) and it is critical that students can also find information relating to questions and guidance all in one place.

**HEIs should ensure that transferable skills’ training is embedded as standard in the funding and design of all postgraduate research programmes (UK Government 2012, p.6).**

Gilbert et al., (2004) suggests that to enable postgraduate students to build upon skills necessary for industry, supervisors are key to identifying any skills gaps that might exist, and in encouraging them to address these. It is also important to reinstate that a PhD is not a single purpose qualification, and that transferable skills are ideally sort after within industry. According to HEFCE, the

PGR area was generally in good health and the sector had made efforts to expand and strengthen its research provision, creating an appropriate and well-resourced environment (HEFCE 2013, p.34).

and with the help of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) enables universities to set expected outcomes and create high “quality research opportunities and support” (HEFCE 2013, p.34). The Higher Education Commission (2013) and HEFCE (2013) and there has been a steady improvement to the Higher Education sector, for example, with regard to support mechanisms, raised standards and improvements within universities expectations required by the QAA.

The main contribution of this paper focuses on the approach taken by the University of Hull to implement an on-line support mechanism that builds upon the recommendations from the Higher Education Commission and HEFCE that more work is needed to guide and assist postgraduates through their educational journey, this is why the ‘Postgraduate Pathway Model’ was introduced. The Postgraduate Pathway Model will use Content-based Filtering mechanism, to shift through a result set belonging to students to offer the individual the opportunity to choose a variety of different learning pathways, to decide what transferable skill set to be studied. Once the student has selected a branch of required modules for training, the options are simplify modified and stored back into the management system. The Postgraduate Pathway Model is directly link to the Research and Transferable Skills Training programme called the Postgraduate Training Scheme, PGTS (Est. 1995). The Compulsory Research training programme captures a variety of factors that students consider when making choices about PGTS module selection and how these have a desirable impact relating directly to employability, transferable skills etc… With the aid of on-line questionnaires and focus groups, the researcher hopes to capture a currently snap shot of the individuals who are facing the challenges within the Higher Education.

The aim of this study is to explore some of the challenges to developing support mechanisms for research students and challenge the current perceptional thought about Higher Educational Training. The research questions which this paper addresses are:

- What changes would you like to see to support transferable skills within academia?
- Are you aware of the importance of transferable skills associated with your PhD Journey?

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