

CPD for the IKT

Chris Birch, University of Greenwich, UK

Professor Chris Birch, MInstKT. Representative board member of the IKT.

We are now actively considering the future direction of the IKT and the value that this can bring to members.

We fully recognise that as a membership organisation, if we do not provide valued services, then our future will not be as rosy as it should be. On the positive side, never has the time been better for an Institute that supports knowledge transfer.

It is clear to all that employability, enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation are critical issues, politically, economically and socially. If we want to maintain our standards of living, both in relative and absolute terms, we have to be increasingly imaginative in the way that we create, disseminate and apply useful knowledge.

In many ways, this is, and always has been, at the heart of what a university does, but in the context of a knowledge-based economy, the potential value is greater than ever.

The IKT has always supported knowledge transfer professionals and that should continue. However, perhaps we should start to think a little more widely. This forms the context for some thoughts that I have on CPD.

As Sir Richard Lambert pointed out in 2003, numerically the most important source of knowledge exchange and transfer between businesses and universities is through the graduates. They go on to use their skills and knowledge in the wealth creation processes.

As tuition fees rise, employability and enhanced graduate salary levels will become even more important. They will be key metrics against which Universities are judged and compared.

Employers, when asked what they are looking for from graduates, cite knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, behaviours and mindsets, and indicate that they will pay above-average salaries if a graduate can rapidly adapt to the commercial environment and quickly add to the bottom line. Taking all of these, an agenda begins to emerge to which the IKT could play an important role.

Perhaps we should now look wider to all academics having an active role to play in developing the rounded, multi-talented, multi-faceted graduate. Many employability skills cannot be taught per se, but can be nurtured, supported and monitored. This needs to take place in a variety of settings, both within the formal curriculum, but

also building on the many other things that graduands do, including part time work, extra curricular and other social activities.

If this is to happen academics will need development and support in order that they can help deliver the agenda in the context of their specialist cognate area. Informally, this may happen, but given the growing relative importance, perhaps we need to take a more pro-active and systemic approach. At the same time, one needs to be mindful of the specific needs of individuals and institutions. I would be the last to advocate that there might be a 'one size fits all' model.

The implications underpinning this could be profound, in terms of resource and capacity. Academics are already very busy doing a plethora of things and having to juggle time as best they can. I recognise this, and indeed, it is this starting point which forms the foundation of my proposal.

I am passionate about work-based, work-related pedagogy. I, like many, make significant use of technology, and am interested in technology-enhanced education. I am far more interested in learning outcomes than teaching inputs. For older and well educated learners, I think that a combination of coaching and mentoring with timely feedback provides a very powerful 'learning mix'. I also recognise that for many, there are benefits in meeting others to discuss and debate and, of course, effective networking can lead to many unplanned, but positive, consequences.

Already, many have tried to develop Masters Degree programmes based around knowledge transfer. Auril, Praxis, EU consortia and others have developed very useful frameworks that underpin Masters level programmes. These are, and will remain, important for those who wish to be specialist in this area. However, taken as a whole programme, they will not attract the majority of academics, who will not have time or inclination to do a full award, often delivered in quite traditional format. What we need, I think, is a different approach.

My suggestion is that we develop a 20 or 40 M level framework, with defined objectives and outcomes – based on knowledge, skills, competency and behaviour. This approach could be adopted by any HE organisation with degree-awarding powers, or it could be managed through one university on behalf of the IKT / sector.

The IKT would co-brand it to give it professional credibility and status. The content would be determined by the individual. This will be relevant to their specific role, discipline, institution and personal interest. Ideally, this would build on work that is already taking place, such as bid writing, delivering short courses, knowledge transfer activity and of course, research.

This work-related approach not only makes CPD more relevant, it also is time efficient and effective. Processes would be put into place to ensure efficacy and that appropriate quality and standards are maintained. At this stage, the concept is as important as delivery. These modules can easily be accommodated within

existing MBA programmes, for example, and therefore adds flexibility on an individual basis. Furthermore, there is no reason anyone should not follow this, should they so wish.

It ought to be possible to assimilate the CATS points into existing Masters programmes. It may be that some learners would follow the module(s) without accreditation, which would also be fine. I want to give options and choices to many individuals that are right for them at a given a moment in time.

There is little that is revolutionary in this. What perhaps is different is scale and scalability, the individually determined curriculum, the different role of content in framing the module, and the important role of the IKT in quality-assuring and branding.

In many ways, this approach is very low risk, and one that we could quickly develop into tangible services, which going back to the beginning, could be the means of the IKT providing the membership value-added that will allow it to grow and thrive.



Professor Chris Birch MInstKT is Director of Enterprise at the University of Greenwich