

The Ultimate Challenge

Higher Professional Education for Adapting to Change and for Participating in the Management of Change

Why this educational reform?

*"Continuing change will be the constant in the new century"*¹

These changes will range from those that are specific to a particular profession to those that affect a single country or region and those that have a global affect.

Profession-specific changes, for example in relation to the health professions, would include:

- (i) The emergence of new diseases and an increase in anti-microbial resistance, as well as an increase in the needs for health care for a growing number of elderly in virtually all populations.
- (ii) Continuing advances in science and technology with their impact on the quality and quantity of life.
The conflict between the possible and the affordable, leading to a further escalation of ethical challenges.
- (iii) Changes in the respective roles of the professions.
- (iv) Social and educational changes, as well as global information technology, tend to increase the expectations of the public and professionals and thus have a decided influence on their relationship with each other.

Supra-professional changes are primarily related to well recognized geodemographic, environmental, social and economic factors that have a major impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of populations. A few illustrative examples would be:

- (i) Foreign debt burden and a growing number of the world's population existing below subsistence level.
- (ii) Unregulated use of technology exacerbating the overuse of irreplaceable raw materials; growing competition for limited water supplies and resulting in threats of war over access to water.
- (iii) Reduction of biodiversity and continuing desertification are accompanied by pollution of air, water and soil, with resultant detrimental influences on the global environment.
- (iv) The continuing expansion of the world's population is likely to contribute significantly to these problems.
- (v) The fate of human values in the 20th Century has not been a happy one. The prospect for the 21st Century is likely to be equally unpromising, due, in part, to increase in extreme poverty, growing nationalistic, political and religious extremism. These changes tend to lead to armed conflict, mass migration and social destabilization.

¹ Weatherall, Sir D, (1995) Science and the Quiet Art: Medical Research and Patient Care. Oxford University Press

Whose responsibility? - The Professions

The professions could collectively contribute from their corporate experience and expertise towards the international exploration of the cause and effect relationship of the world's problems. Many of the necessary mitigating and resolving interventions are likely to be of a long-term nature and almost invariably quite unpopular. Governments will, therefore, need the consistent, non-political support of the professions. The professions would have to achieve interprofessional consensus and collaboration on many fundamentally important issues.

The magnitude and complexity of the issues facing the present century will call for interprofessional and intersectoral collaboration across the world. The professions will need to strengthen an outward looking and proactive approach.

Whose responsibility? - The Universities

Can the universities continue to focus on scholarship and research, in isolation from the stark realities that face our planet?

The proposition is that the universities of the 21st Century should accept the responsibility to ensure that their graduates will be able to *adapt to change* and to *participate corporately in the management of change* - not only within their own professions, but also on behalf of society at large.

The linking of social responsibility with participation in the management of change will expect *the universities and their graduates to accept supra-professional responsibilities for interprofessional and intersectoral collaboration.*

What will be the educational requirements?

As education is to be a means towards engendering change, a prerequisite will be the identification of the nature of the desired capability.

In the present challenge this will call for the definition of the competences that professionals will need, in order to be able to adapt to change and to be able to participate in managing change. These definitions will help to determine the content - what is to be learned, and the process - how the learning is to be accomplished.

Special attention will need to be paid to a number of imperatives:

- (i) *Cumulative learning* will require repeated opportunities for students to build on what they have experienced and learned already.
- (ii) *Integrated learning* will allow students to seek a deeper understanding in different disciplines, in order to be able to apply a combination of their new understanding.
 - (iii) *Reflective and collaborative learning* will enable students to reflect on, and share with other students, experiences that lead to new insights and deeper understanding.
- (iv) *Contextual learning* will relate closely to the context in which the learning is to be applied.

The sequence of these wider experiences, in a curriculum in parallel with their discipline-specific courses, should be seen as an integral part of a *maturation process* that enables lay men and women to develop into societally responsible professionals.

These considerations will help to determine not only a rational construct for the sequence of inter-linked educational experiences within a profession-specific curriculum, but also an educationally acceptable, effective and sustainable approach to the implementation of this enhanced university education.

How could such an enhanced curriculum be implemented?

This has been the subject of an initial exploration through a Delphi Consultation with some one hundred senior educators in four health professions from six European countries and several colleagues from Australia, Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand.

The first Round of the consultation invited responses to "Which competences will be needed to decide how to adapt to change and which role to adopt for participating in change?"

"Which competences will be needed in managing change?" and "Which educational interventions are most likely to assist in developing these competences?"

The second Round sought suggestions in answer to the questions "How might the suggested educational interventions be accommodated in an existing / amended profession-specific curriculum

or in a dedicated *parallel curriculum*?" and "What conditions would need to be met, in order to make planning, implementation and continuation of an enhanced or parallel curriculum possible?"

The responses were collated in a report that has been translated into French, German and Portuguese.

The Report, www.the-networktufh.org/publications_resources/furtherreading.asp#T makes it clear that **all the professions**, not only the health professions, **would need to adopt interprofessional and intersectoral collaboration and thus institute appropriate education for their future colleagues.**

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