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RSOG INSIGHT

MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

With the COVID-19 impacting countries at various stages, everyone is trying to understand what is required to protect themselves and their communities.

We spoke to some of our friends around the world on how it has affected them and their views of the situation.

ABOUT OUR GUEST

Professor Trevor McMillan became Vice-Chancellor of Keele University in August 2015. Before moving to Keele as Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost in January 2014, Professor McMillan was Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research at Lancaster University, where he led several major academic developments and was the lead for many partnerships with other universities and external organisations in the UK and abroad.

Professor McMillan was educated at Birtley Lord Lawson Comprehensive School before studying Biological Sciences at Lancaster, graduating in 1981. He was awarded a PhD in Biophysics at the Institute of Cancer Research, University of London, in 1984. He has been awarded Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Radiologists & Honorary Membership of the Royal College of Physicians. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology.

Currently, he has a national role as Knowledge Exchange Champion for Research England. As part of this Professor McMillan has recently published a report on technology transfer from universities, the recommendations of which have been supported by the government, in part through inclusion in the Industrial Strategy. He is also leading the development of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat with UUK/GuildHE and Research England.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in the article are of their own and do not reflect the opinion of Razak School of Government.

VIEWS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

In this edition, we spoke to Professor Trevor J. McMillan, the Vice-Chancellor of Keele University, UK. He spoke at Razak School of Government on 5 September 2016 on a topic entitled "Effective Technology Transfer - Experience from the UK".

RSOG: How has the pandemic affected your daily life?

Professor Trevor McMillan: Clearly the first major change is that I am working from home. I am fortunate that I live on the university campus so I still feel part of, and connected to, the University. The campus is inevitably very quiet but we do have a number of students still in residence because they are unable to travel home. Keele has the single biggest university campus in the UK in terms of area, with academic, commercial and residential buildings as well as extensive natural habitats in lakes and woodlands, and all of this still needs to be looked after so there is still significant operational work that needs to take place.

I am fortunate to have a good working environment and I am very sensitive to the fact that not all of our staff and students have an ideal situation for working at home. This is something that we have worked very hard on, in order to try to support our staff and students with remote working. This has included ensuring that they are supported with new approaches to IT and that they have the flexibility to adapt to their home environment which may, for example, include caring responsibilities for children or vulnerable relatives.

In terms of work, like many people, I am now spending many hours on video conference calls using various platforms. The first meeting of every day has been with my immediate advisory team who have been coordinating our response to the current crisis. I think it's fair to say that while we found the meetings by video conference strange at first we have now settled into a good approach and routine.

There is, however, a level of intensity in the work that we are all having to cope with and make sure we adapt to. There can be less downtime, or less social interaction time between meetings and we shouldn't underestimate how important these can be to developing work relationships, solving immediate problems and indeed for our own wellbeing. Creating specific space for less formal interactions has therefore been important.



RSOG: In your opinion what kind of collaboration(s) that is required to cushion the impact of the pandemic on the society?

Professor Trevor McMillan: Collaboration has been essential during the pandemic crisis in all sorts of ways and for us at Keele University this has been partly about collaborating with other universities but importantly also fulfilling our civic duty in helping with various aspects of business and public service. Inevitably an important part of this was the health system in the UK where for example we ensured that our final year doctors and nurses could be ready earlier than normal to work within our national health service. For the nurses this was voluntary and I'm very proud of the fact that over 90% of our final year nurses volunteered to go into the very difficult health environment while still having some of their academic work to do.

Through our newly formed Keele Business School, we have also been working with local businesses to do what we can to help with advice or general information. As is the case around the world many businesses are having a very difficult time and they risk becoming insolvent. The UK government has various schemes to support them but it is still a very difficult situation.

More broadly the university sector in the UK has collaborated with the government in providing expertise, equipment and research power to help the country survive and then emerge from the current crisis. This will be just as important in the recovery phase where again universities will play an important role in establishing how the economy and society will thrive in what will be the new normal.

It is also important to say that universities will need to learn from other types of organisation. We will certainly be doing things differently beyond the end of the pandemic. I suspect there will be an increased focus on research that has a more immediate impact on society although I should stress that it is essential that universities maintain their strong portfolio of enquiry driven research. There is no doubt that our teaching will have a much more significant online component but again I am a real believer that the benefit of a university experience comes from the broader interactions and opportunities that our students have available to them. I think we can support this in a more remote way but I hope and believe Keele students will get the opportunity to come to campus during the next academic year.

Part of the "new normal" is highly likely to be that we don't travel around the world as much as we used to, yet the pandemic has confirmed that some of the biggest challenges we face are truly global so we must all work very hard to maintain and develop collaborations across national boundaries. We will be better at using technology to help this and one of our challenges will be around how we develop working relationships remotely.

RSOG: Any messages you would like to share with our alumni and everyone involved whether directly and indirectly in curbing the COVID-19?

Professor Trevor McMillan: I suspect we are all finding it quite difficult to adapt to our new working practices and indeed to the way we are having to run our own lives at the moment. It is also likely that most of us have friends or relatives who have suffered great tragedy in the face of the virus. It is therefore critical that we look after ourselves, we each play our part in supporting national initiatives to limit the impact of the virus and we recognise, and are empathetic with, the challenges that other people are facing. It is only through a concerted and collaborative effort that the damage will be limited and we all have a part to play in doing that and helping recovery afterwards. Stay in contact with your various work and social networks, don't let yourself become isolated and most of all stay healthy. As leaders in our various organisations we have a critical role in supporting our staff and partners through these difficult times, and while the specific situation might be unprecedented the criticality of good two-way communication remains the same.