



## Induction Speech

**Emeritus Professor Philip A Thomas**  
LL.B (Wales) LL.M (Wales) LL.M (Michigan)

**Senior Academic Adviser**  
London East Bank College



### GLOBALISATION AND EDUCATION

#### HISTORICAL LESSONS

I am a lawyer and lawyers are good at telling stories. So I will tell you the story of my family and use it to illustrate the themes of my talk on globalisation and education. My great grandfather, Thomas Thomas of Trecastell, was a day labourer on a farm in mid Wales. He left school aged 10 although he was able to read and write. He travelled with his wife to south Wales to mine coal. My grandfather, David Thomas, was born in the mining village and went into the coal mine to work at age 12. He sat alone with an oil lamp opening and closing ventilation doors underground. He educated himself, as did so many coal miners, and he became an accomplished local musician. My father, Aneurin Thomas, won an educational scholarship which allowed him to stay in school until he was 18 and thereafter he trained and worked as a junior school teacher.

I am the first person in my family to go to university. I finished my formal education at 25. I am a university professor. I have been a visiting professor in Australia, Hong Kong, India, Norway, Spain, Czech Republic and the Netherlands. My son went to university and studied physics. He is a laser engineer in Silicon Valley, California. My daughter is a graduate and at this moment is in East Africa recruiting overseas students for Cardiff University.

What does this story tell you? Obviously, it says something personal but also it relates more generally to time, space and education. Time and education have a historical relationship. The further back in time we go the fewer people who were provided with formal education. Indeed, it was felt by many aristocrats that education was unnecessary even dangerous as it would encourage workers to think and aspire beyond their ordained station in life. Education would challenge the natural order of life. It should be that a carpenter would teach his son to be a carpenter and a coal miner would take his son down the mine with him. Daughters were prepared for marriage, motherhood and housekeeping. There was predictability and continuity through time. The social order would remain untouched and thereby constant. All that has changed in the age of globalisation.

My great grandfather never visited London. I do not think he went to England nor if he went there would he be able to speak English fluently as Welsh was his primary language. My grandfather was bilingual and he did cross the border to England although he never visited London. My father is bilingual only learning English at the age of six. He has visited London and other parts of the UK and Europe. I have lived and worked in the USA, East Africa and now I spend four months of the year travelling the world. My son lives in the USA and my daughter also travels globally. So, personal space also has many dimensions which are affected by education, time, knowledge and opportunities. Our work takes us into various places and spaces. More generally the extended European Union means that labour can move freely between member states. Today there are half a million Poles living and working in the UK. A similar number of Sikhs live here. Three per cent of the population are muslims. The world has become smaller for us as we move around in ways unthinkable a hundred years ago.

Likewise time and space have moved from Feudalism when life was local, short and brutal through the Mercantile era when Western merchants and explorers both travelled widely and 'discovered' the world in the fifteenth century through to the Industrial Revolution which commenced in the UK in the late eighteenth century and into the post-Industrial society of the late twentieth century which in turn spawned Globalisation of today.

## GLOBALISATION

Let us look briefly at the opportunities and challenges for education associated with globalisation. But first, what do we understand by the term globalisation which is on everyone's lips but not necessarily commonly understood.

The new economic order is global and reflects monumental structural changes which have occurred in the process of production and distribution. For example, it means that research and development can occur in the USA, manufacturing and testing can happen in China, information management can be based in India and marketing can be located in Europe. Likewise, in terms of services, gas can be brought from Saudi Arabia, refined and distributed in the UK, and call centres for customers can be based in Malaysia. As we will see, this destructured form of production or service presentation has a major impact on the forms of education that are needed to promote such developments.

The economic changes associated with globalisation have a significant impact on social, political and legal structures. A simple, and perhaps apparently insignificant example of legal change is that a law was introduced in the UK to exempt Sikhs from wearing crash helmets on motor bikes as the helmets do not fit over their turbans. A stronger illustration is the way in which the Rule of Law and Human Rights has become a way for the USA and Western Europe to seek to discipline China and developing countries in order to provide a legal system sympathetic to global economic activities.

I do not wish to be seen to be glorifying Globalisation. It is a product of capitalism which can produce benefits and simultaneously maintain or even exacerbate poverty. The benefits are not found exclusively in the West. For example, the tallest building in the world is in Dubai, the largest publicly traded company is in China, the world's biggest plane is built in Russia, the leading refinery is in India, and the largest factories are in China. The world's largest amusement wheel is in Singapore and the centre of the largest film industry is in Bombay, known as 'Bollywood', and the largest casino is in Macao, China not in Las Vegas, USA. The biggest shopping mall is in Beijing. Yet, only a few months ago I visited a village in Bangladesh, some twenty miles from Dhaka. I was the first white person seen there for twenty five years. The cotton spinning machines were unfenced, dangerous and deafening. The workers earned one pound a day and their water well had been polluted by underground arsenic. Villagers showed me cancerous growths contracted from the well water. Yet we wear expensive, fashionable clothes made from their spun cotton.

Globalisation has produced a mass of contradictions, expectations, problems and benefits. Life is less simple and the expectations for education have changed and become more complex.

## EDUCATION

When I went to university in the 1960's only 5 per cent of the UK school population had such an opportunity. Today, the government is committed to sending 50 per cent of school leavers into higher education. This month almost half a million students will enter universities as 'freshers' in the UK. There are over 350,000 overseas students studying in institutions of higher education in the UK: almost one in seven students. They contribute over £10 billion to the UK economy. Education has become big business. Nevertheless, education is not a constant. It is also subject to changing circumstances and demands and these in turn are dramatically affected by globalisation.

So, let us examine the ways in which globalisation has changed education in the UK and elsewhere. It is not simply a question of some subjects are no longer fashionable. We know that the teaching of Latin has almost disappeared although I studied it for five years and therefore do not regret its passing! Sociology and philosophy, so popular in the 1960's, are now marginal subjects. Media studies is fashionable today as is business, accountancy, law, human resources, management, economics, IT and computer programming. Hospitality management is increasingly important as the

leisured classes demand professional services as they holiday around the world. These disciplines reflect growing employment opportunities as the global economy changes and grows. The market is creating a demand for a different type of employee and in its turn so student demand, driven by prospective jobs, is marching to the pipe and drum of globalisation. A liberal education simply for the sake of obtaining a degree is neither desirable nor acceptable. A degree is now perceived as a passport to employment, good employment, somewhere in the world. Education has focused on producing a workforce with employability skills.

The very content and structure of these innovative educational programmes are changing. Flexible, information based technologies result in the reduction of certain types of labour. Blue collar is replaced by white collar workers. There are no longer 'Jobs for Life' as operated in Japan. You join a company and retire in it. Today, there are fixed contracts, short term contracts and consultancies. People change jobs either by choice or through necessity. Employees move across national borders or are involved in electronic immigration as they interact through telecommunications with other staff or their employers in distant countries.

Our new education framework should produce graduates with 'hard' technical skills and 'soft' interpersonal skills. Of course, all must be able to read, write, compute and be willing to keep learning throughout their working career, and hopefully beyond. But the need to absorb masses of information has become less important as the net is full of information. Indeed, more information than we can handle. Instead, we should be seeking to produce graduates who can problem solve, evaluate and apply information to new or difficulty scenarios. They should have skills rather than simply information at their finger tips. Knowledge is very different from information. They should be flexible, adaptable, able to make decisions, think creatively and have the capacity to reflect and learn from their errors and from the advice of their colleagues. Globalisation appreciates multi-linguists with cultural sensitivity who understand the politics, history, legal and economic systems of other countries. This global mindset is dramatically different from the educational system that taught History in the UK as the history of the kings and queens of England. Disciplines are becoming interrelated as holistic approaches are required to address new business eco-systems. Now, you need a broader mindset which deals with contradictions and ambiguity as they arise in a very different world of employment.

Even the methods of educational delivery have changed. The educational method commonly known as 'chalk and talk' involving the delivery of information to a group of silent, note taking students is obsolete. Interactivity in the problem solving class has replaced silence as the video, visual and audio electronic communication across continents links classes with teachers in an effective distance learning process.

## CONCLUSION

Your futures are unknown but you can be sure that unless you recognise and address the issues that I have spoken about then you will be left behind. There are skills and readiness that you must show on entering the new world of work. Remember, you are taking something out of the system in order to complete your degree. Do not forget to put something back into it. Globalisation is not exclusively about profit and personal gain. It also has the potential to lead to greater understanding between peoples and nations. Be part of that process. The 'knowledge economy' is both demanding and rewarding. Be prepared and be successful.

Thank you