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EMPLOYABILITY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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GREENING EMPLOYABILITY: JOBS AS IF THE 21ST CENTURY MATTERED

EDITORIAL

It is hard to deny that employability is a hot topic in higher education. And yet, discussions around employability within the academy are never without controversy. To what extent must higher education prepare students for employment?

Does a period of outbound mobility boost a student's career prospects after graduation? If so, is it important what type of outbound mobility the student has chosen?

With the everyday employment of many thrown into disarray by COVID-19 and mounting concerns about the coming global recession, there could not be a better time for *Forum* magazine to look in more depth at employability for the next century and its multiple connections with international higher education.

In this edition, authors from Europe and further afield have looked at employability from a range of angles and share their insights on some of the key questions facing international educators in relation to employability skills and graduate attributes, to the role of mobility in preparing students for the workplace, and to the graduate employment outcomes of international students. I am delighted that Rajika Bhandari (now President and CEO of the IC3 Institute, whose mission is to enable access to career and college counselling for high school students around the world) accepted the EAIE's invitation to be interviewed for this edition. Reflecting specifically on graduate skills, Rajika highlights the "ability to pivot" as a significant skill for future careers. I believe this will resonate with many readers, given that so many of us have pivoted to working from home over the last weeks and months.

Beyond the interview, this edition features a series of articles which explore graduate attributes and intercultural skills, including reflections from Liliana Gonzalez on key steps to skill development for operating in different cultural settings, and a 'serious game' to boost intercultural skills for the future job market outlined by Sabine Sainte-Rose, Fabienne Munch and Anne Bartel-Radic. Bilingual Bachelor's degrees at the University of Helsinki provide a clear example of how cross-cultural communication and language skills can be embedded at the curriculum level, as outlined by Åsa Mickwitz, Dragana Cvetanović, Heini Lehtonen and Auli Toom. Jessica Schüller then highlights how a binational Turkish-German university has adopted a holistic institutional strategy for developing graduate employability.

Another cluster of articles looks at the particular set of employability concerns faced by international students and their institutions, not least the predominant focus on post-study work rights for international graduates. Brett Berquist provides an overview of this topic, and Gabi Binnie then shines a spotlight on the UK and its framework of support for international student employability. Louise Nicol and Vicky Lewis, on the other hand, question whether institutions are ready to actively prioritise graduate outcomes and employability for international students, while Maria Gallo and Sandra Rincon advocate for greater engagement with alumni networks in support of both institutions and students.

Rounding out this edition are a number of articles looking in greater depth at employability through particular lenses. Taking Italy as her example, Elena Borsetto questions how universities can support student employability in countries with high unemployment rates. Meanwhile, Natalia Österman takes a disciplinary approach, looking at the ins and outs of employment for nursing graduates. Davina Potts then seeks to reframe our understandings of learning abroad and its tie-in with gains in employability skills.

Closing out this edition, Scott Blair encourages us to think differently about the connections between employment and international higher education, pointing to the urgent need for the greening of employability. With growing reflections on how COVID-19 might be re-shaping approaches to work around the world, this final article encourages international educators to adjust their thinking to better prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow, rather than the workforce of today.

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WHAT HAPPENS AFTER GRADUATION?

Whether graduates seek work in the host country or the sending country, it's in the best interest of both national governments and individual institutions to facilitate international students' transition into the workforce and accurately track employment trends.

Photo: Shutterstock

Employability and graduate outcomes are now front and centre for governments and students alike. The address delivered at the Universities Australia conference in February by Dan Tehan, Minister for Education, recognised that "putting students at the heart of the system must also mean considering their needs […] after they graduate."[1]

Meanwhile, the UK government's 2019 international education strategy outlined a desire to "share good practice in how universities effectively support international students into employment and further study, both here in the UK and when they return to their home nation"; and to "enhance the evidence base on international graduate outcomes".[2]

A focus on – and investment in – employability helps national higher education sectors to appeal to prospective international students, many of whom are seeking confirmation that their overseas study choice will deliver not only a rewarding study experience but also lifelong value.

WHY FOCUS ON EMPLOYABILITY?

There is a growing body of evidence from agent networks, pathway providers, rankings providers, research agencies and youth panels to suggest that career impact is the most important factor for international students when selecting their future institution.[3]

It is sometimes a student's firm ambition to pursue post-study employment in their host country. In other cases, they are keen to return home once they graduate. Either way, they expect their overseas education to give them an ongoing advantage in the graduate jobs market. Many look to their university to provide proactive support.

Higher education institutions are starting to realise that helping their international graduates to achieve their career aspirations can have a positive impact on all concerned. Professionally fulfilled graduates are more likely to be loyal and supportive alumni, and employers value well-prepared employees and tend to rate highly the universities that they come from. Furthermore, insights into the employment outcomes of international graduates, backed up by narratives of success, can be a great asset for marketing and international student recruitment efforts.

However, providing the employability support that is needed – and ensuring that false hopes are not raised – is easier said than done.

POST-STUDY WORK

What can institutions do to support international graduates who want to stay on and work in the host country? This is a hot topic in the UK. The announcement that a new post-study work route would shortly be introduced resulted in a surge of interest in the UK as a study destination, particularly in South Asia. Students from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are all focused on opportunities to work in their country of study following their degree. And UK universities are delighted at the prospect of diversifying source countries, given concerns about an over-reliance on China.

> Insights into employment outcomes of international graduates can be a great asset for international student recruitment efforts

However, there are also concerns about being able to meet the high expectations of international students when it comes to post-study work.

Some lessons can be learned from Australia's experience with its temporary graduate visa, which was introduced in 2008 and updated in 2013. A recent study shows that "many graduates did not work full-time, and they did not necessarily work in their field of study. A considerable number […] were employed in retail, hospitality or as cleaners."[4] The study also records a lack of understanding of the graduate visa among employers.

Universities in other countries should take note. Helping students to find graduate-level opportunities in their host country requires significant time and effort. A strategic approach should involve engaging with international students early in their studies to provide them with the tools they need to make them more attractive to potential employers. Institutions should also gather data on (and raise awareness of visa options among) those employers in the local region who are more likely to hire international graduates.

Despite huge levels of interest in post-study work, it is usually only a small minority of international graduates who actually take the opportunity

EMPLOYMENT BACK HOME

Despite huge levels of interest in post-study work in the host country, it is usually only a small minority of international graduates who actually take the opportunity. The majority return home following their studies. Chinese graduates in particular are increasingly inclined to return to China soon after graduation.[5]

This is a challenge for university careers services, which tend to have modest budgets and have not historically had a remit to support international students with their job search back home.

However, UK universities are already taking steps in the right direction. The GW4 group of institutions[6] has been providing opportunities for Chinese graduates to meet employers through graduate recruitment fairs held in China over the past three years. Other groups of institutions have organised UK-based recruitment fairs for students wishing to work in China. These are useful for domestic students with international ambitions, as well as for Chinese students due to return home. Collaborating via a consortium is a good way to make such events viable.

But what are the actual employment outcomes of international graduates? The picture is a very positive one. According to Asia Careers Group data collected on more than 50,000 internationally-educated Asian graduates since 2016, by far the majority go on to have successful careers, with higher than average earnings and an excellent career trajectory.[7]

OUTCOMES AND INSTITUTIONAL 'PERSONALITY'

Analysis of the data shows that the outcomes of a university's graduates reflect the personality and mission of the institution. The nature of the institution affects whether graduates are more likely to found their own companies, to work in small or medium-sized enterprises, to find success in the creative industries, to work in education *etc*.

Smart universities interrogate the data and use the findings to develop a strong narrative of employment outcomes, backed up by case studies. Highlighting the destinations of international graduates helps to differentiate an institution, reinforcing messages about its distinctive characteristics.

In the current period of global instability – characterised by the coronavirus, Brexit, rising student debt and youth unemployment – it is more important than ever for universities to prove the connection between the educational experience they provide and their international graduates' subsequent career success.

If universities are perceived as 'ivory towers', disconnected from the world of work, they risk alienating both governments and young people. To combat this, they need to be able to provide evidence of the destinations of their international graduates and the lifetime value of a degree.

An active decision to make graduate outcomes and employability an institutional priority positions a university effectively for the future, while also showing that it recognises and respects its students' motivations for studying overseas.

— LOUISE NICOL & VICKY LEWIS

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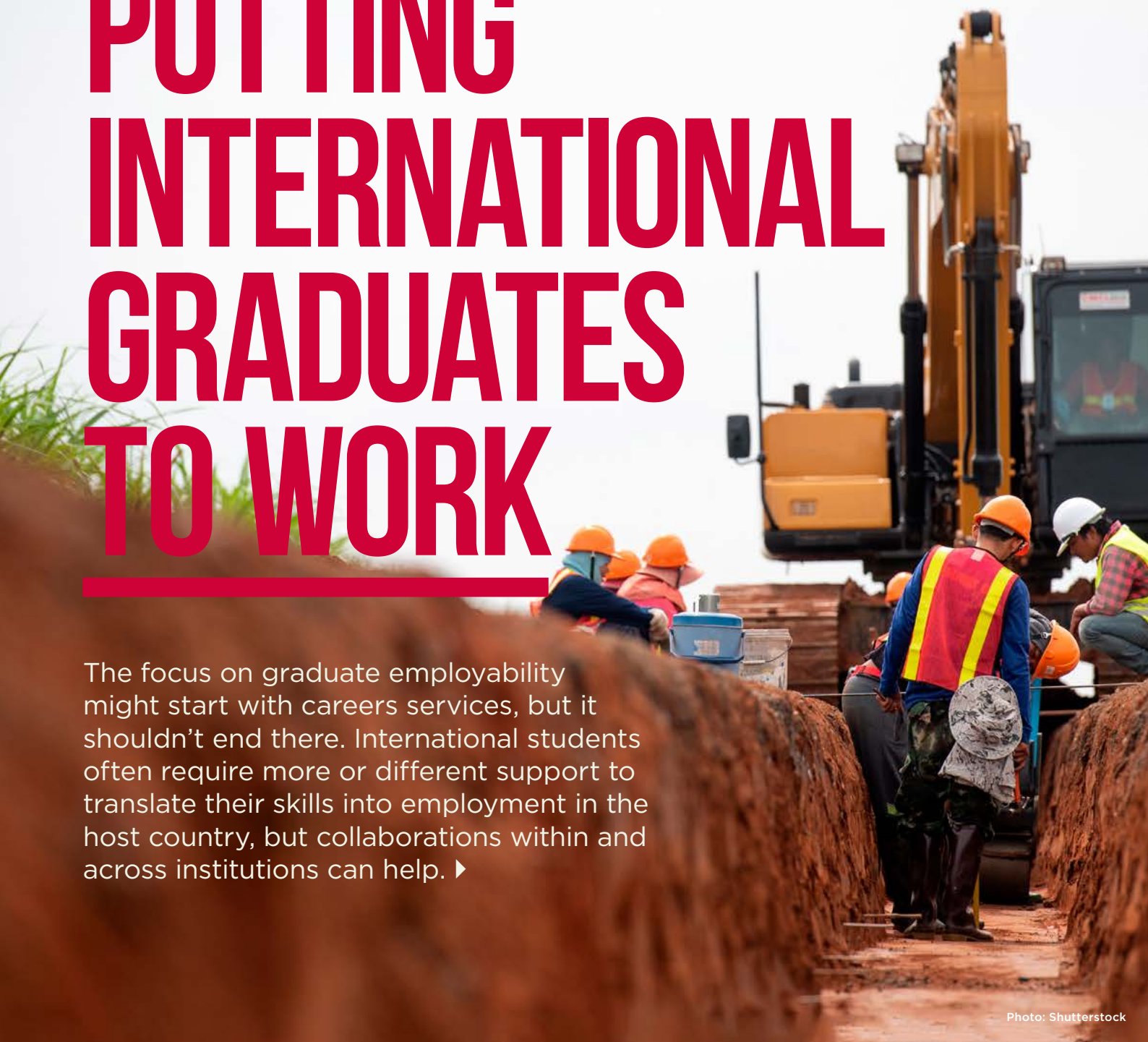
6. University of Bath, University of Bristol, Cardiff University and University of Exeter

7. Asia Careers Group. Retrieved from www.asiacareersgroup.com

PUTTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES TO WORK



The focus on graduate employability might start with careers services, but it shouldn't end there. International students often require more or different support to translate their skills into employment in the host country, but collaborations within and across institutions can help. ▸

Photo: Shutterstock

Students from outside the UK and the European Union are vital to the financial success and cultural vibrancy of higher education in Britain. The economic output generated through spending by international students and their visitors in the UK is estimated at £25.8 billion a year,[1] whilst the opportunity to study alongside international peers gives home students a global network, increases their awareness of cultural sensitivities and better prepares them for working in a global environment.

The UK is second only to the United States as the most popular study destination for international students, with more than 450,000 studying here in 2017–2018. Growth has been relatively flat since 2016, however, whilst other nations have experienced double-digit increases. In recognition of this – and perhaps to prove that Britain still has a global outlook as it redefines its relationship with Europe – the UK government launched an international education strategy in 2019 that featured an ambitious aim to increase the number of international students in the country to 600,000 by 2030.[2]

Employability is a critical consideration for international students who are deciding where to study, with recent research finding that targeting "good career prospects after graduation" is second only to choosing a degree subject they enjoy.[3] In order to maintain the UK's reputation as one of the best places for people from around the world to live, study and work, it is vital that universities offer the support and opportunities that international students need to find success in what may become an increasingly uncertain global climate and economy.

Only 28% of careers services offices feel able to meet the level of international student demand for careers and employability support

THE STATE OF PLAY

To understand how UK universities prepare their international graduates for global success, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services collaborated with Universities UK International and various sector bodies to produce a report called 'Supporting international graduate employability: making good on the promise'. This outlines good practices and recommends areas for continuous improvement to ensure students receive the support they need to achieve their aspirations after graduation.[4]

According to the Equality Challenge Unit (now Advance HE), "Providing equitable careers support does not mean providing the same for every student […] International students unfamiliar with the UK job market often require additional or specific information and support that UK students would know already or have access to through other sources and networks."[5]

'Supporting international graduate employability' uncovered a wealth of tailored initiatives that university careers services had created to develop the employability of their international students. At the University of Edinburgh, the careers service and business school use WeChat to engage Chinese students with careers support and connect them to recruiters and businesses in China. Kingston University created a Professional Placement route for all its Master's programmes in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing, with an accompanying 12-month preparation module that has resulted in 177 international students securing a year-long placement in the past two academic years. Newcastle University's China Career Gateway programme is a series of bespoke workshops to help Chinese students develop strategies and skills to plan their careers and make effective job applications in both China and the UK.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

Supporting international graduate employability is not without its challenges. Careers services work hard to provide tailored, effective support to a diverse student body to level the playing field after graduation, yet only 28% of the careers services offices involved in this research feel able to meet the level of demand from international students for careers and employability support.

In response to these pressures, careers services around the UK have recognised the benefits of working with other parts of their institution and other universities. Newcastle has developed a cross-departmental working group led by the careers service to support and steer international student employability activity. The University of Warwick and the University of Manchester have collaborated to deliver

a China careers fair roadshow, whilst Warwick is also working with the University of Birmingham and the University of Nottingham on a Work in China fair. Regional collaborations such as the GW4 Alliance and the Midlands International Group are successfully pooling resources to deliver employability events and webinars for international students at scale.

Despite these great examples, only 41% of universities collaborate with other higher education institutions to support international graduate employability. To improve outcomes across the UK, 'Supporting international graduate employability' recommends that universities, sector bodies and employers should collectively invest in research, pool resources to create shared labour market information for countries around the world, invest in training for higher education and career professionals, and consider ways to support UK businesses in accessing the pool of international graduate talent.

THE NEXT STEPS

Helping international students realise their potential is not the role of careers services alone. Positive outcomes for international students will only be achieved when those services work closely with alumni and professionals from international student recruitment, international employer engagement and international student support teams. Together, they can work to understand their international students' post-graduation aspirations and put strategies in place to help meet them.

The collaborators who produced 'Supporting international graduate employability' recently held a seminar to discuss four of the report's main recommendations:

1. Institutions should develop a strategic approach to supporting the employability of international students and graduates.
2. Institutions should establish a cross-department working group with responsibility for international student employability.
3. Institutions should consider ways of embedding experiences that support the development of employability skills of international students.
4. Institutions should provide more opportunities for home and international students to interact to ensure continuous improvement of international students' English language skills.

For each recommendation, attendees from across UK higher education shared their successful initiatives and aimed to find ways to turn the suggestions into reality.

Moving forwards, a working group made up of universities, sector bodies and international student representatives will be formed to help implement the recommendations and influence government policy affecting international graduate employability.

Whilst we cannot accurately predict the impact of COVID-19 on student and graduate recruitment, initial research suggests that the UK graduate employment market may be significantly disrupted.[6] The working group will play a vital role in helping UK higher education to respond to this challenge and understand how to support international students during intense changes to the world of work.

— GABI BINNIE

Only 41% of UK universities collaborate with other higher education institutions to support international graduate employability

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A VIEW FROM VENICE
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN ITALY

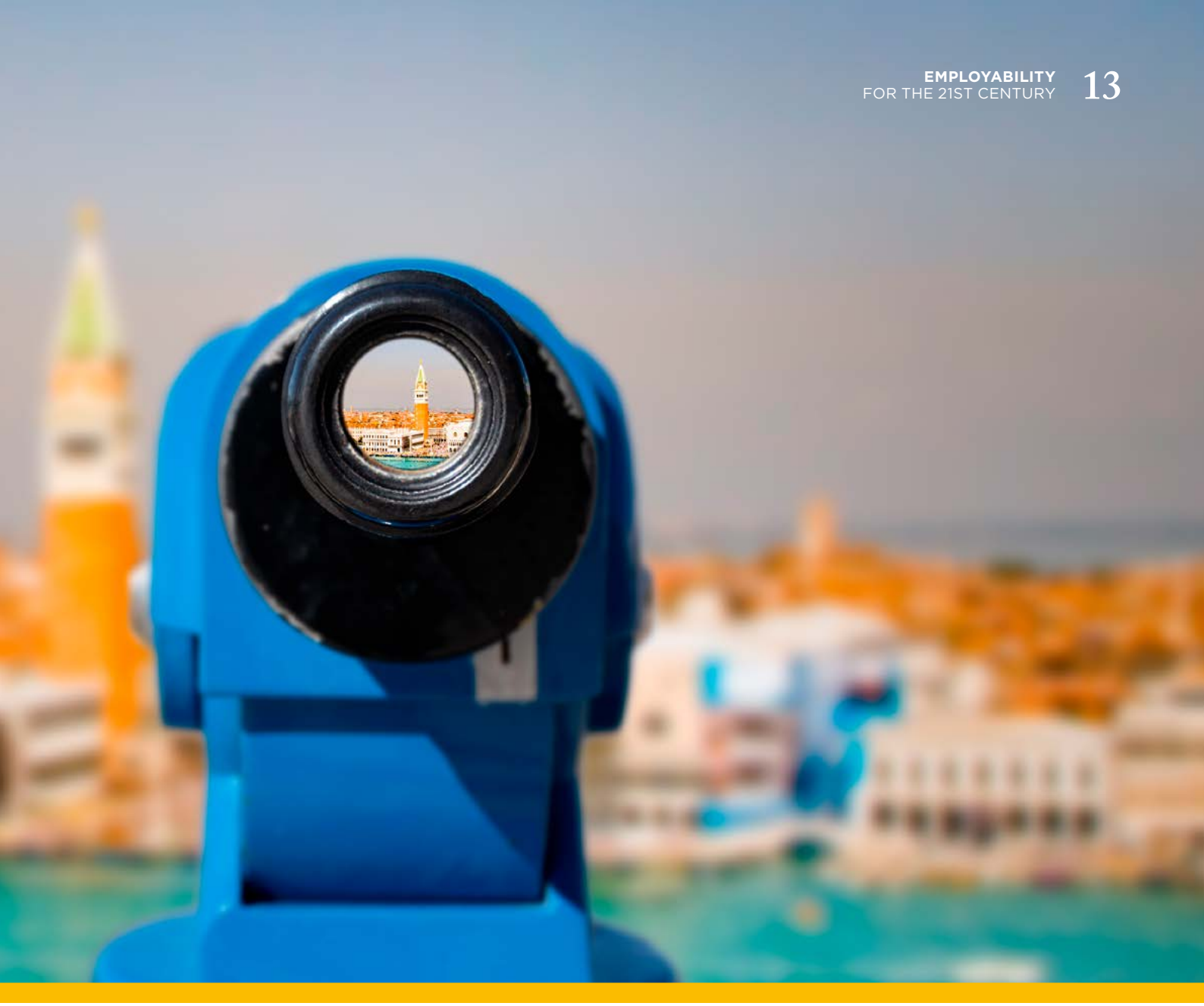
Internationalisation can also enhance the employment opportunities of domestic students. Ca' Foscari University of Venice is trying to bring down the European Union's highest youth unemployment rate by instilling international perspectives in the majority of its students who will never study abroad.

The recently-published European Skills Index for 2020 measures skills development, activation and matching in 31 European countries. One nation that appears to be struggling is Italy, which "performs really poorly in skills activation in 2020, reaching the bottom of the ranking".[1] Although the merchandising label 'Made in Italy' is worth billions, which should guarantee a flourishing national market, Italy has the highest unemployment rate in the European Union among people aged 15 to 24, with 28.9% neither in education nor in employment or training.[2]

In addition to economic and historical factors, barriers to the employability of Italian graduates are also driven by: ineffective communication and information on jobs and candidates exchanged between universities and industry; few collaborations between academia and businesses; and a lack of suitable tools connecting demand and supply.[3]

BRIDGING THE GAP

In the Italian context, employability is a primary goal in life for young people who wish to become independent and contribute to the well-being of their country, see their talents and competences acknowledged and play an active role in shaping the future of their society. But to be successful in finding



a job, it is necessary to develop employability skills. What can universities do to help their students acquire these?

Research shows that employers tend to value graduates' international experiences, because these are seen as giving them the possibility to refine their skills.[4] Offering internships and placements abroad is a common service for careers offices within universities, although only a small number of students have the means and motivations to gain international experience, especially among those coming from less advantaged backgrounds.[5] If experiences abroad can enhance students' employability, how can similar benefits be gained by those – the majority – who do not experience this mobility?

Measures that universities can take to bridge the gap between graduates and companies can be divided into three kinds: communication, collaboration and tools. First of all, universities should directly consult employers about their expectations and their need for qualified professionals. Second, universities should increase the number of situations in which students and firms meet. This should happen not only when guest speakers from companies are invited during lessons, or when students have to engage in an internship as part of their degree, but also through real collaborations between students and firms. In this way, tighter bonds would be created at local and international levels, which could be a valuable resource for future alumni. Finally, universities should provide students with the means to develop their employability skills.

PROACTIVE RELATIONS

Some of these solutions have been successfully implemented at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, which came joint fifth within Italy for its graduate employment rate in the 2020 QS Graduate Employability Rankings, together with other universities with much larger student populations. In 2012, the Ca' Foscari Competency Centre was created "on the basis of a tradition of research on transversal skills undertaken by Ca' Foscari in the 1990s, which was at the time the first Italian institution to investigate this field".[6]

The competency centre's activities are intended to enhance people's performance and employability by developing their behavioural competences through a series of training seminars and consulting activities, thus helping the participants to develop valuable soft skills for any workplace, such as creativity, flexibility, persuasion, critical thinking and teamwork.

Other initiatives have been launched at the university's Department of Management to connect students with the world of work and to offer them opportunities to confront international and local realities. In 2016, an advisory board called Consilium, composed of professionals who work in fields such as business, culture, tourism, charity and construction, was set up to share perspectives on the activities of the department. Consilium advises on issues such as the methods and educational content that could be most useful in helping students to access the world of work, the competences required for students to succeed, and the creation of internship opportunities.

Meetings between Consilium and the departmental board take place two or three times a year and are an opportunity for constructive discussions and proactive relations, thus contributing to the development of collaborations within the university's third mission: to enhance the use of knowledge for the social, cultural and economic growth of society. After some of these meetings, Consilium members are invited to meet academic staff and PhD candidates.

COMPANIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Another initiative that the university has set up to foster employability starts directly in class, with students and professionals participating together in 'Experior training', which involves students working in teams to develop projects in response to a short proposal from invited members of industry. They might be asked to create an innovative marketing campaign for an existing product, find ways to access an international customer base or even launch a product that could capture the attention of a global market. This creates opportunities for companies to be involved in dynamic experimentation and to evaluate students for subsequent possible recruitment. The Experior training ends every year with a final meeting where students propose their projects in a poster presentation.

This innovative teaching method uses knowledge acquired in the classroom through participation in real business cases. Moreover, it aligns training with the profound changes taking place in industry and society. For now, it is localised, but it could be possible to use this method in exchanges between institutions in different countries, and also to add an intercultural element to the challenge, to create more international networks between universities and companies.

These examples of good practice at an Italian university may act as prompts for future measures that could be implemented more widely, in Italy and in other countries with low employability rates, to ensure stronger bonds between academia and the world of work and to prepare students for their future careers. However, these measures alone will not be sufficient in the long term unless a change of mindset is ignited at the national level to ensure that socio-economic decisions favour the rise of employability rates, helping the country's population and its new and future generations to thrive.

— ELENA BORSETTO

This innovative teaching method aligns professional training with the profound changes taking place in industry and society

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NURSING EDUCATION WITHOUT BORDERS

Qualifications for nurses in the European Economic Area were harmonised decades ago, ensuring the pan-European mobility of nurses. Today, an evolving social and technological environment compels us to update our standards in order to face the growing challenges in public health and employability as we head deeper into the 21st century. ▸

Photo: Shutterstock

Could there be a more topical profession to write about at the moment than nursing? Even before the COVID-19 pandemic brought medical professionals into the public focus, the World Health Organization had designated 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, in honour of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale. When we look at employability, opting for a degree in nursing is probably one of the safest choices to make. Even in this ever-changing and modernising labour market, the future looks bright for nursing graduates as they are not likely to be replaced or made obsolete by technology.

Nurses are in high demand. In many countries, nursing is the profession with the highest number of vacancies, and a shortage of nurses will be the biggest problem for national healthcare systems in the next decade.[1] The day I started working on this article, the Swedish Public Employment Service was advertising 3212 vacancies for nurses on its website, compared, for instance, with 80 vacancies for legal professionals.[2] Another 19,406 vacancies are awaiting trained nurses at the European job mobility portal EURES alone.[3]

HARMONIOUS MOBILITY

European employability for nurses is safeguarded by the regime of automatic recognition for nursing qualifications, based on the harmonisation of minimum training requirements. Degrees and qualifications in nursing that fulfil these requirements are not subject to the usual scrutiny and enjoy shorter deadlines for their recognition. Moreover, nursing is one of the five professions benefiting from a special recognition solution called the European Professional Card, which cuts through red tape and speeds up the recognition procedure even further.

Nurses take full advantage of their employability and, together with doctors, consistently top the lists of the most mobile professionals in Europe. Lately, the number of nurses recognised for the purpose of permanent establishment in the European Union, the European Economic Area and Switzerland has been fluctuating between 10,000 and 20,000 a year. France has been the top provider of outgoing nurses recently, followed by Romania and Germany. Romania has accounted for almost half of all outgoing mobility among nurses over the years. Switzerland, Germany and Norway stand out as the primary destinations for mobile nursing professionals.[4]

> A shortage of nurses will be the biggest problem for national healthcare systems in the next decade

STREAMLINING STANDARDS

Foreign nurses may be needed, but are they always welcome? Every now and then, sceptical articles or newscasts claim that there are serious shortcomings in foreign nursing education compared with domestic processes, which creates an aura of mistrust around foreign qualifications in this vital profession. Another dividing line separates academic and vocational qualifications. Moreover, even though most EU member states are currently offering academic training for nurses, the differences in academic approaches in nursing education create different focuses beyond the minimum training requirements. For instance, one system might focus more on patient safety while another emphasises more traditional patient care.

Meanwhile, the minimum training requirements are getting old. The requirements for seven professions, including nurses responsible for general care, were harmonised at the European level more than 30 years ago and were included in the Professional Qualifications Directive of 2005. The revision of the directive in 2013 involved some modernisation of the training requirements and delegated powers to the European Commission to introduce further updates to the minimum skills and knowledge of professionals and the outline of training programmes.

In 2018, the European Commission requested a study that would map and assess developments in the profession in order to evaluate whether an update, taking into account scientific and technical progress, was necessary. That study is close to being finalised. In the meantime, the workshop arranged as part of the study last autumn revealed both cohesion

and divergence in the views of European stakeholders, including training institutions. The use of simulation in clinical training became a spin-off of the discussion on scientific and technical progress. It was considered far too costly for some but vital for others that were already struggling to provide meaningful clinical training for nurses amid the everyday constraints on the ward. Simulation versus the direct contact with patients prescribed in the directive has the potential to create a further rift between national approaches.[5]

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OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

To date, harmonised minimum training requirements, creating the foundation for automatic recognition of professional qualifications in Europe, are one of the main achievements in the field of professional recognition. They serve as a guarantee for the pan-European employability of nurses. Even during less challenging times for public health, nurses are in great demand and their forecasted shortage in the future is well-known and dreaded.

To date, harmonised minimum training requirements are one of the main achievements in the field of professional recognition

Employability at home and abroad is one of the 'selling arguments' for choosing to study nursing, and the way our countries and higher education institutions incorporate the minimum training requirements into their training programmes is of great importance. Updates to the required knowledge, skills and training subjects can provide an opportunity to look at what solutions work and don't work, to learn from each other and to reach a new level of understanding and trust between the education systems across Europe in order to ensure the future employability of nurses.

—NATASHA ÖSTERMAN

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PROMOTING EMPLOYABILITY WITH SMART POLICY

The future will see workers increasingly moving from career to career and even country to country. Sound immigration policy – particularly as pertains to post-study work visas – can promote healthy 'brain circulation' and provide a boon to employability amid ever-shifting political winds.

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In a recent survey, eight out of 10 international students or alumni said that the top reason for taking a degree in another country was to improve their career prospects.[1] International students are often supported by the bulk of their families' savings, and international education markets are increasingly driven by students' and families' analysis of the potential return on investment.

I serve on the research committee of the International Education Association of Australia, which has commissioned research and policy analysis on how international graduate employability is supported. Last year, I was asked to brief the United Nations body for Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees. Over two days in Geneva, I saw officials from 17 governments who absolutely understood the importance of employability options but who had to balance this against factors including their national labour market, social cohesion and political winds.[2]

How can we focus on making them 'job-ready' when today's graduates will be changing careers more frequently than we did and working in jobs that don't even exist yet?

How do we balance these tensions within higher education? Some institutions have staked their claim to producing 'job-ready' graduates who can 'hit the ground running' – and we all know of studies where employers feel that higher education is not producing what they need. Other institutions eschew the 'job-ready' gambit for a longer-term vision. How can we focus on making them 'job-ready' when today's graduates will be changing careers more frequently than we did and working in jobs that don't even exist yet?

BRAIN CIRCULATION

The old concept of 'brain drain', something to be avoided for the developing world, has been replaced by 'brain circulation'. In New Zealand, we have high labour mobility rates for our graduates, domestic and international.[3] Canada has a thriving co-op programme and Australia's more recent focus on work-integrated learning is advancing. Students still make individual choices and form their own profile, but institutions are increasingly taking part in this responsibility.

Analysis of Australian census data has identified trends in the uptake of the 'subclass 485' post-study work visa – and it points to sustained underemployment of international graduates, compared with a robust hiring market for domestic graduates.[4] Another mixed-methods study found that some international graduates saw post-study work as 'extra time' to fine-tune their skill set, further improve their English and plan their next steps.[5] Not all graduates are looking for the same thing.

Multiple surveys in different markets show that there is high interest in post-study work options but relatively low uptake after graduation. Students certainly want the option of post-study work, and uncertainty in this space is seen as a negative for a study destination. Do post-study work rights establish an expectation or obligation of well-paid, degree-relevant work? Attitudes on this vary considerably across our field.

DECLINE AND GROWTH

The European Union, the world's largest receiving market of international students, has called for its member states to offer a minimum nine-month post-study work period, and this is having a major impact. The most recent data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed a 25% average long-term stay rate of international graduates across the OECD. Several governments privilege science, technology, engineering and

mathematics graduates, whom some call 'designer immigrants'.[6]

Canada's policy revisions and strong 'open-door' statements from government, in stark contrast to travel bans and nationalism in its nearest neighbour, have made it the big winner in this space with phenomenal enrolment growth. The United States is in its third consecutive year of decline in new international enrolments. Its overall numbers, however, are buoyed by the significant increase of optional practical training enrolments, which make up nearly a quarter of the one million enrolments announced, whereas most other countries do not include post-study work in their enrolment reporting. This rise is due to the restriction of H-1B visas, where the annual quota is usually exhausted in the first three months of the year, greatly increasing the flow of graduates into optional practical training.[7]

Australia benefited the most from the UK's suspension of its post-study work policy in 2012, which coincided with Australia's expansion of post-study work. Conversely, the UK's recent reinstatement of post-study work options has had immediate market impact.

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

The research on this topic is growing rapidly. One of our challenges is the significant variation in research design, duration of post-graduation milestones and replicable measures of long-term retention, making it difficult to compare like with like. More work is needed to examine the impact of immigration policy shifts, cross-referenced with national graduate surveys and census data.

EAIE members know how difficult it can be for international students to engage with the local scene and make local friends in their host country. Similar barriers exist for employment. International students may lack the social skills, slang and humour of the host country – all of which help us to relate to each other in our work lives.

The lack of work experience and professional networks in the host market hinders international graduates' prospects. In some cases, prioritisation of academic performance precludes the broader social and professional networking that can make a difference for employment. In addition, local employers often have misperceptions about international students and the policies that allow them to work.[8]

Does our focus on recruitment and enrolment performance indicators detract from the student experience and graduate outcomes?

The literature calls for coordination with governments, institutions, students, employers and communities. There are some great models of collaboration but, overall, we're not supporting our students' employability needs or connecting with employers enough. Whose job is that at your institution? Does our focus on recruitment and enrolment performance indicators detract from the student experience and graduate outcomes?

As the competition for global talent intensifies in the 21st century, the educational systems that are able to work together with their communities, governments and employers will rise to the top. Partnerships must be put in place to boost mutual understanding of, and investment in, the strategies and resources that can help overcome the barriers to employability for international students. These dynamics can only intensify as our economies adjust to the long-term impact of the current health crisis, bringing employability outcomes into even stronger focus in international education.

— BRETT BERQUIST

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ALUMNI NETWORKS

CONNECTING TO GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES

Even for students with all the right skills and internships, connections are often key to getting a foot in the door. Alumni networks are a crucial bridge connecting international graduates not only to their first jobs, but bringing them into contact with the global challenges they will spend their careers working on. ▸

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The 'fourth industrial revolution' is evolving at an exponential rate. Its breakthroughs are disrupting almost every industry in every country; artificial intelligence, machine learning and biotechnology are transforming entire systems of production, management and governance. How can higher education prepare future generations for constant changes in the labour market and the mounting sociopolitical unrest and environmental challenges?

In his book ***21 lessons for the 21st century***, Yuval Noah Harari argues that education should impart the ability to manage change, to constantly learn new things and to maintain a mental balance in unfamiliar situations. He further emphasises that "you will need not merely to invent new ideas and products – you will above all need to reinvent yourself again and again."[1]

In discussing the skills needed to be job-ready for the 21st century, Dr Charles Kivunja asserts that students should be explicitly taught the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation.[2] To thrive in a changing labour market, employers increasingly seek employees who can easily adapt, apply and transfer their skills and knowledge to new contexts.[3]

Numerous reports and surveys of employers, students and graduates reveal that higher education needs to provide future generations not only with content knowledge but also with global competence. This refers to "the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development".[4]

SOCIETAL CONNECTIONS

In our interconnected world, higher education needs to work closely with the public and private sectors to adapt curricula to the needs of the labour market and of society as a whole. Throughout the history of higher education, alumni networks have been connecting universities to civil society and the labour market. Alumni serve as ambassadors, advisers, mentors, lecturers, volunteers and donors. Career centres that work with alumni are opening doors to companies to help graduates – primarily local graduates – find internships and jobs.

'Making good on the promise' was the subtitle of a report on international graduate employability published in January by Universities UK.[5] The 'promise' is not only a glossy recruitment brochure promoting better career prospects to international students. It is the one enshrined in the UK's international education strategy: "To identify and share good practice in how universities effectively support international students into employment [...] in the UK and when they return to their home nation."[6]

The 21st century requires all graduates to learn to work in diverse teams, communicate across cultures, adapt quickly, be flexible, be critical problem solvers, innovate, reflect and rethink themselves in other fields.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Global alumni networks can support higher education in addressing the challenges of our time. These networks create opportunities for entrepreneurship, switching jobs, lifelong learning and building sustainable solutions to local and global challenges. Many business schools and some universities are investing in alumni networks abroad to promote their brand, maintain alumni loyalty and grow their businesses. In general, financial and resource constraints limit further investment in alumni networks abroad. But those of us in international advancement know that in the long run, such investments reap more benefits than money could ever buy.

Career centres that work with alumni are opening doors to companies to help graduates – primarily local graduates – find internships and jobs

The Global Graduates programme at the University of Manchester offers undergraduate students an opportunity to spend a week with university alumni in an international location. Trips to the likes of Toronto, Dubai and Singapore enable students to gain insights from alumni hosts on local work culture and on how their own studies impacted their career paths.

The programme aims to "enhance the selected students' employability by expanding their professional networks, improving skills such as communication and teamwork, and fostering a more global mindset [...] and an appreciation of global working practices".[7] The programme also benefits from alumni donations, ensuring that all those eligible and selected can participate without any financial barriers. Upon their return, students are expected to complete a reflective report and presentation about the impact of the programme on their career development.

The Holland Alumni network, an association for international students and alumni residing in the Netherlands, helps to prepare students for the Dutch jobs market. It also supports alumni in developing skills such as creative leadership, negotiation, time management, dealing with the psychological stresses of living abroad, and reflecting on career choices and future opportunities. It has led to the creation of Here2Start, launched last summer in Amsterdam, which is building a network of international entrepreneurs to assist international alumni with financial advice, finding funding and understanding how to establish a business in the Netherlands.

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

In addition to being a resource to support students and alumni in their career development, global alumni networks can inspire innovative solutions to social and global challenges. AlumniPortal Deutschland's Global Goals initiative highlights alumni stories across all 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most of the stories are about graduates of German higher education who have returned to their home country (or a third country) to make an impact as social entrepreneurs, innovators and activists. Such initiatives and global partnerships "facilitate the exchange of financial, technical and personnel resources, opening up new markets and trade cooperation, enabling us to pursue the SDGs together around the world," says AlumniPortal Deutschland member Arnab Mandal.

In addition to aiding career development, global alumni networks can inspire innovative solutions to global challenges

As the fourth industrial revolution continues to bring changes to our societies, the safety net of global alumni networks can empower students and graduates to join the uncertain labour market with confidence. Higher education has the responsibility of empowering people not only to find jobs and generate new ones but also to drive sustainable solutions to global challenges. It cannot afford to be complacent in engaging in strategic partnerships with alumni. As international educators, we must join forces with our graduates in showcasing the value of global networks.

— SANDRA RINCON & MARIA GALLO

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IN CONVERSATION WITH RAJIKA BHANDARI

JACOB GIBBONS
EAIE

Photos courtesy of Nicole Lebenson Angulo

After many years at the Institute of International Education spent thinking and writing about what happens when people cross borders, Rajika Bhandari is currently President and CEO of the IC3 Institute. In discussing the evolving nature of employability, she highlighted the need for employees of the future to be able to pivot as circumstances and industries change, and the need for higher education institutions to reach beyond the silos they inhabit.

Earlier this year, you were appointed as President and CEO of the IC3 Institute, which has a mission to enable access to career and college counselling for high school students around the world. To what extent do you believe that employability drives the decisions which students make about an international education?

RB: Employability is absolutely critical in student decision-making. Students and families are looking at the full pipeline of the future for students; it's not just about the academic degree, but what is the viability of that education when it comes to jobs and employment? Many rankings also now assess higher education institutions not just on academic indicators, but also their ability to graduate students who are truly employable. The relevance of education for employment will become even more important once we are past the current pandemic, and with postsecondary education and the workforce having been disrupted so significantly. In fact, in recent years we've even seen many of the ranking systems now begin to rank institutions not just on academic rigour and research, but also on how good a job they're doing of actually being able to graduate students who are truly employable.

What international students are allowed to do right after their study programme in terms of work is a huge factor in their international education decisions. Repeated surveys of prospective and current international students has shown that post-study opportunities are extremely important for them.

Likewise, when we look at different countries and their ability to attract global talent, fluctuations in international student enrolment over the past few years are clearly tied to what students can do post-graduation. We've seen that in the case of the UK, where restrictions on the post-study work option had an impact on their international student numbers; those numbers have now rebounded significantly since they liberalised that programme once again.

What students are allowed to do right after their study programme in terms of work is a huge factor in their international education decisions

The same thing has played out in the US, where post-study work opportunities are under threat, and have likely had an impact on international student enrolments.

Many institutions outline a set of graduate attributes which they seek to foster in their student body, including global sensitivity and intercultural competency. For international educators, which of these transversal skills do you think are most crucial for 21st-century employability?

RB: I believe that there is no difference in the skill sets that ought to be fostered in future employees, regardless of whether they are domestic or international. At its core, to effectively prepare any student to be a productive and purposeful employee of the future and to be a global citizen means for them to be exposed to an international component in some shape or form, if not via traditional mobility then by means of Internationalisation at Home or an internationalised curriculum.

If I had to name just one key 21st-century skill, I would say it is the practice of ethics, and how to make ethically informed decisions in our day-to-day lives and pursuits. So important is this skill and mindset that the OECD considers it an essential component of its 'Future of Education and Learning 2030' conceptual learning framework, and it is of course enshrined in the SDGs as well. As our existence becomes increasingly automated through AI, the appropriate and ethical applications of technology – how to make nuanced decisions that are based more on human conscience and values – is going to become critical. Even beyond technology, as a society we will need to evaluate and assess the environmental, political and societal impact of our actions. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought this to the forefront, where despite large-scale suffering we are also seeing unintended positive impacts on the environment globally that are resulting from our planned stillness as a society.

Can you point to particular national or regional skills or employability programmes which stand out as examples of good practice? How does internationalisation factor into these programmes?

RB: Many countries are now aligning their internationalisation strategy with an overarching national skills and talent strategy to ensure that their country has the skills and talent that its industries need. However, the focus on international students in these strategies has often been limited to the recruitment aspect of it, *ie* at the point of entry into the talent pipeline. But once international students are in the country, there isn't enough attention paid to what happens to this group of students and their career pathways. What further complicates the picture is that a country's immigration policy can limit international students' opportunities after graduation: what they can actually pursue post-study is often severely restricted, and that's a real challenge as we think about how to shape the future of the international student population.

> If I had to name just one key 21st-century skill, I would say it is the practice of ethics

However, there are some countries that are explicitly focusing not just on recruitment but also on the academic success of students once they are in the country. Germany, Australia and New Zealand are all good examples of this kind of approach. But even so, their focus is much more on students' academic success rather than their professional outcomes once they have left the in-country stitution. In that regard, beyond small research studies and modest interventions, we know very little about the career pathways and the successes or failures of preparing international students for their professional futures.

Many institutions seek to leverage their business and industry connections to secure international placements or internships for students. How valuable are these initiatives for students? Do they help to set realistic employer expectations of graduates subsequently entering the labour market?

RB: Any sort of applied learning opportunity like an internship is crucial for students. In fact, that's also one of the core beliefs at the IC3 Institute, where we work with schools and teachers to prepare students early on to understand the application of academic subjects to the real world of careers.

While internships are beneficial to students, it is not always a win-win situation for employers, as interns come in with academic or content knowledge but are often lacking the basic skills that enable efficiency and productivity in the workplace, such as time management, business communication skills and the ability to evaluate and curate information. For the internship model to work effectively for both parties, higher

education institutions and industry partners need to collaborate more to ensure that students are not graduating with these fundamental skills gaps.

What changes to the world of work have you witnessed in your career, and how do you see these dynamics being impacted by recent trends like the COVID-19 pandemic? What are your predictions of the changes that students will face in the future, and in what ways can international educators support them to gain the skills they will need?

RB: One shift I have witnessed is that of being a generalist versus a specialist. At one time, the idea was that we need to prepare students to be generalists with a broad array of knowledge and skills. Then came the era of the specialist, which has been particularly important as countries have moved towards knowledge economies. Now, with COVID-19, we have come full circle, with an emphasis being placed on the ability to 'pivot' and building a carefully curated portfolio of knowledge and skills that allows individuals to move nimbly from one job to another, leveraging different combinations of skills as needed. It's about demonstrating one's value and relevance rather than relying solely on one's formal qualifications or credentials.

One of my observations which has been sharpened by the COVID-19 crisis is that international educators need to engage with the full ecosystem of a student's life. This includes schools, where the student journey begins, as well as higher education institutions and then eventually the workplace. We need a systems approach to addressing all the issues we're facing right now. With the disruptions to education and the world of work, in addition to effective college and career counselling, students are also going to need social and emotional support for navigating an uncertain terrain. How international educators can better serve students is to move beyond their own professional silo (other industries inhabit their own silos as well); it is not just about international education. It is about international development, it is about addressing broader global social challenges, and really thinking about how we are preparing these students – both international and domestic – to address the grand challenges of the future.

Now an emphasis is being placed on the ability to 'pivot' and build a curated portfolio of knowledge and skills

LISTACROSS

The ability to understand and work with people from different cultures ranks highly on lists of attributes that universities aim to instil in graduates, and indeed all signs indicate that it is key to competing in the global labour market. However, institutional strategies are often short on details of what such cross-cultural competence looks like in practice and how to develop it in students.

In our globally connected and ever-changing world, workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse. Employers are realising the benefit of creating an inclusive work environment and hiring employees who can communicate in different cultural settings and with diverse individuals. It is evident that having diverse teams can be a driver of innovation and success. In fact, the Institute for the Future's Future Work Skills 2020 report predicted that cross-cultural competence – the ability to operate in different cultural settings – would be one of the top 10 skills needed to succeed in the workplace in 2020.[1]

Cross-cultural competence is also valued in higher education. It is a crucial element of internationalisation and therefore features in many universities' strategic plans. For instance, the internationalisation strategy of my institution, the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, aims to improve global competences within campus communities and produce graduates with strong cross-cultural competences who will be competitive in the global marketplace.[2]

What it means to be cross-culturally competent is the subject of long-standing debate. Is it truly achievable? How do we measure our level of cross-cultural competence? Even when it comes to the terminology used, this is a highly complex topic. 'Cross-cultural competence' and 'intercultural competence' are often used interchangeably, while the term 'cultural humility' is used in the literature but differs in that it puts the emphasis on a lifelong process.[3] Furthermore, the term 'culture' is multi-faceted: a person's cultural identity can be made up of their ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, educational background, religion and more.

ENING CULTURES

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What follows is a series of steps that one can take as an individual to develop cross-cultural competence, or as an institution to help instill it in students and staff. Ultimately, the goal is for you to experience an internal (frame of reference) and an external (behaviour) shift.[4]

REFLECT ON YOUR CULTURAL IDENTITY

Your cultural background influences how you think, behave and communicate (verbally and non-verbally). Culture can shift and change as you have new experiences. Ask yourself the following: What does culture mean to you? What is important to you? Why is it important? What life experiences have influenced how you interpret the world around you? The more you understand yourself, your thoughts and your behaviours, the more you will be able to understand the people around you.

CHALLENGE YOUR PERCEPTIONS

As cross-cultural communication expert Prany Sananikone said in 2007: "Perception is reality. It is not what you say, but what is heard. It is not what you show, but what is seen. It is not what you mean, but what is understood."

When you encounter a situation that makes you uncomfortable, stop and self-reflect. This could be a rich learning experience. Feeling uncomfortable can be a clue as to what is important for you or what your expectations are. For instance, when someone says something that makes you uncomfortable, take time to reflect on what exactly brought out this feeling of discomfort in you. Is it the words that were used? The way the message was delivered? The body language? Or even the pitch or tone? What values were expressed by this individual? What questions does this experience raise?

Many work conflicts arise when individuals misunderstand the difference between direct and indirect communication. For instance, someone who communicates in a direct manner can be perceived as rude or insensitive by someone who communicates indirectly. On the other hand, someone who communicates indirectly can be perceived as vague or insincere by a direct communicator. Remember that neither communication style is better than the other: they both have their advantages and disadvantages, and ideally each person will adapt their style depending on the context and audience.

> Cross-cultural competence has been identified as one of the top 10 skills needed to succeed in the workplace in 2020

ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE

To accurately understand and adapt your behaviour to cultural differences and

commonality, you need to acquire knowledge of cultural norms. There are numerous online sources of useful information, including such as the Hofstede country comparisons website and various national and institutional resources. There are also assessments that can measure an individual's level of intercultural competence, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory, which provides suggestions on how to improve your level of competence.

> It is everyone's responsibility to become skilled at understanding and communicating with people of diverse cultures

Other ways to acquire knowledge include joining a cultural association, interacting with individuals from a different cultural background, reading international news, taking internationally-oriented courses, and participating in international conferences and events.

AVOID ASSUMPTIONS

Play around with various theories for your experiences with others. For instance, when you encounter an interaction that generates discomfort, ask yourself: Why did the other individual behave this way? Here is where knowledge of cultural differences and commonalities can be useful. However, remember that each individual will have a unique cultural identity, lived experience and personality type. It is important not to make assumptions or generalise.

ADAPT

Whose responsibility is it to adapt? It is everyone's responsibility to become skilled at understanding and communicating with people of diverse cultures. In a workplace, it is the responsibility of both the employer and the employee. Recognise that you can change your behaviour and your interpretation of experiences.

TAKE CONCRETE ACTIONS

At an institutional level, some examples from the University of Calgary of initiatives to support the development of cross-cultural competence include:

- Internationalising the curriculum and co-curriculum
- Providing numerous study abroad opportunities, including exchanges, group study programmes, research opportunities and internships
- Enhancing teaching and learning resources to optimise the educational experiences of international students
- Reviewing and enhancing support services for international students
- Providing funding through various internal and external grants and awards available to students, faculty and staff to support their chosen international experiences
- Increasing and encouraging opportunities for students and staff to develop language skills

In our globalised world it is increasingly crucial to be able to operate in different cultural settings and to communicate effectively with people from different cultures – our higher education institutions must both demonstrate this intercultural awareness and be able to instill it in their graduates. While it may begin in university, cultivating cross-cultural competence is a lifelong process in which students will continue learn from each experience and interaction long after graduation.

— LILIANA GONZALEZ

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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

ALL FUN AND GAMES

The ability to collaborate with teams across borders and cultural differences is one that most future employees will need, but not all students will be able to gain these skills through traditional mobility. To reach the 95% of its students who never study abroad, Grenoble Alpes University in France has built an innovative new 'serious game' to bring global skillsets to local students. ▸

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In the increasingly globalised world, preparing our students for today's interconnected and international workplace has become crucial. International student mobility continues to provide hands-on experience for acquiring intercultural competences, but is very difficult to scale within our large university, Grenoble Alpes, in France, where a mere 5% of our student body travels abroad every year. For that reason, we have created a serious game to help a broader number of students enhance their intercultural competences and add a competitive edge when comes the time for them to enter the global workforce.

We created LINK: a single-player game that immerses the learner in an international business environment. The goal: managing a multicultural team tasked with designing and launching a new product for the global market. Each player is asked to coordinate the different responsibilities of the team members and makes decisions to move the project forward. The player communicates with the rest of the team via email, videoconference and instant messaging, choosing from a selection of answers when prompted for a decision and adapting his/her choices to each team member's culture. Dynamically designed, the story evolves according to the player's choices. This nonlinear storyline reflects a first assessment of the player's international competence, which is scored based on his/her interactions and choices.

While the game is based on the concept of inverted learning, whereby the student learns through experience and problem solving, the student can access additional videos and learn from experts explaining the outcomes of the scenes based on cultural dimensions.

> Intercultural competence cannot be reduced to a simple personality trait, or some abstract textbook knowledge

These cultural dimensions, as developed by Hofstede,[1] Hall and Hall[2] and Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars,[3] reflect how situations can be interpreted differently based on culture, and relate to criteria such as time, group, hierarchy, competition and rules.

DESIGNING THE GAME

One of the transversal skills that yields higher levels of employability is the ability to work in teams across various cultural, disciplinary and functional contexts, and within an increasingly diverse workforce. "Managing dispersed workforce expertise" is the name of the game of the next several decades, as most organisations will need to access the best and most talented experts, regardless of their geographic location. To do so, learning how to manage distant collaboration in shared projects will become a requisite skill and highly sought-after competency.

But intercultural competence cannot be reduced to a simple personality trait, or some abstract textbook knowledge. By gamifying the learning experience, not only does LINK boost intercultural knowledge and insights into cultural basic assumptions, but it also connects them to the player's behaviour. In doing so, the player is engaged in a learning process that is not passive but contributes to actively developing their intercultural skills.

So how did we build such an ambitious project?

To kick off the process, we initiated an ideation phase guided by design thinking, which included end users and expert gamers of all ages. Thanks to the Université Grenoble Alpes Excellence Initiative (IDEX) funds, we gathered about forty colleagues and partners from around the world to help develop the game and content for its intercultural scenarios. This process and the highly multicultural team it involved helped us gain recognition within our institution and thus stimulated voluntary cooperation from the university staff. This was a major plus, since it yielded co-creation between academics, technicians, students and university staff.

UNIVERSITIES: A PLACE FOR GAMES?

Within large higher education institutions, expecting 10,000+ students to opt for international mobility is unrealistic. As international educators, we strive towards increasing mobility numbers,

but we must recognise that a majority of students will remain in their home country throughout their studies for various reasons. However, those students who are unable to study abroad should not miss out on the opportunity to learn intercultural collaboration. For instance, Grenoble being the 'Silicon Valley' of the French Alps, many businesses and research facilities in the area are already fully international entities. Students who find work locally will need intercultural savviness to navigate multicultural team activities and interact with partners from all over the globe.

Students who are unable to study abroad should not miss out on the opportunity to learn intercultural collaboration

Large business representatives intervening in employability forums have recently shared that international mobility in itself is no longer a key hiring criterion; instead, the skills and maturity that develop with intercultural experiences are of higher importance. In light of this testimony, we are convinced that scaling up our game will help large numbers of students become global citizens.

Moving forward, we see our game being used in various contexts: courses in various languages, integrated in intercultural management and other professional soft skills courses, and even as a preparation for academic stays abroad and international internships. In the long run, we hope to deploy the game across a large variety of academic contexts, to impact as many learners as possible. Indeed, our decision to make LINK a single-player game was based on our desire to create a very adaptable tool, serving a variety of needs of diverse student bodies.

BUILDING ON THESE FOUNDATIONS

Other important transversal skills have been identified as central for employability in international companies, organisations and new positions: the ability to interact in English with speakers with various accents and English proficiency levels, managing conflict, and implementing social responsibility according to different contexts and cultures. Based on similar principles and guidelines as LINK, we are currently developing other games aimed at training these competencies. These games are conceived on the GenaGame platform that was developed for the LINK project. This platform collects the players' answers to the questions asked in the game and generates a database that will be used for research purposes. The research team will use the game answers as data to help answer research questions such as "under which conditions does international experience enhance intercultural competence?", or "which digital tools are most effective for communication in international virtual teams?" or "does the implementation of corporate codes of conduct differ across cultures?" The results will not only offer a better understanding of intercultural and transversal competencies for employability, but also help to continuously improve the game as a student learning tool.

Universities need to rethink their curricula and instil in students the intercultural competence that is becoming an increasingly crucial dimension of employability. With the right tools and a creative approach, there's no reason cultivating employability shouldn't be all fun and games.

— SABINE SAINTE-ROSE, FABIENNE MUNCH & ANNE BARTEL-RADIC

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PREPARING FOR THE MODERN MULTILINGUAL WORKPLACE

For the 21st-century workplace, one language simply isn't enough. That's the idea behind the University of Helsinki's bilingual Bachelor's degree programmes, which since 2010 have been giving graduates a linguistic edge over the global competition.

Multilingual skills and smooth intercultural communication continue to be among the most important assets not only for the labour market but for all participation in future societies and economies. At the University of Helsinki, we are working on a research project, PEDAMO, that aims to shed light on the professional assets that bilingual Bachelor's degrees can provide to the internationalised labour market, especially in Finland and Scandinavia.

What kind of linguistic skills are considered important by bilingual students who are entering working life in the 21st century? Our project focuses on developing teaching, instruction and guidance for linguistically asymmetrical student groups at our university. The results presented here are based on recent interview data with students.

BILINGUAL DEGREES

Finland is a multilingual country, with Finnish and Swedish its two main official languages. To promote multilingual values in academia and society and to guarantee a sufficient number of bilingual professionals, the University of Helsinki introduced bilingual programmes, known as TvEx, to eight different disciplines in 2010. The idea and execution of the TvEx degree programmes is a unique strategy and has generally received positive feedback from students.

On these degree programmes, in disciplines including biology, chemistry, physics and law, students take a third of the course in Finnish and a third in Swedish. The remaining third is up to them. The aim is not to create fully bilingual academic experts but to enable students to be highly functional professionals in both national languages.

Illustration: Shutterstock

Before graduation, students' written and oral skills are tested: they submit a portfolio and participate in an oral test conducted by a language teacher. These tasks are assessed on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale; in order to receive the bilingual diploma, the students need to reach the level of C1 in their weaker language.

The University of Helsinki also offers a broad palette of teaching in English, which is appreciated by both domestic and visiting students. English is seen as a mandatory language that students absorb 'naturally' during their studies – or as one first-year law student reports: "Although I am only in the beginning of my studies, I am not worried that I could graduate without skills in English. I would be very disappointed if I would not be able to work professionally in English after three and a half years of studies." Since Swedish and Finnish are spoken by relatively small populations in the world, good skills in English are not only an asset but a prerequisite for students' future careers.

> The aim is not to create fully bilingual academic experts but to enable students to be highly functional professionals in both national languages

SENSE OF BELONGING

Although English is a prioritised language of communication in Scandinavian business life and even in everyday life, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish have retained their importance at all levels of Scandinavian society. The common working language in many Scandinavian companies is English, but informal meetings such as coffee table discussions and dinner conversations are still held in the local languages.

It is also quite common for speakers of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish to speak their own native tongue to each other, relying on the mutual intelligibility between the languages. For Finnish speakers, this means that in order to truly integrate into Scandinavian work and social life, they need sufficient skills in Swedish for the purpose of smooth communication in informal contexts.

The TvEx bilingual degrees are based on the idea of gaining academic expertise in Finnish and Swedish, enabling students

as future professionals to work in their one field fluently in two languages. Being fluent in Swedish enables students to find work in the wider Scandinavian jobs market. And this is exactly what our data shows: the main reason students enrol in the bilingual degrees is their well-articulated ambition to be able to work fluently in both Finnish and Swedish. Bilingual degree students, according to our interviews, want to develop language skills in their weaker language so that they can work professionally in both. One student, for example, says that in job interviews she wants to be brave enough to say: "I speak good Swedish and I can work in Swedish, even if I am completely Finnish-speaking."

What we have learned from our preliminary data analysis is that listening, reading, writing and attending lectures in the weaker language are not enough to acquire bilingual skills suited to future labour markets. Students need to establish a sense of belonging and a social identity in both language groups in order to build bilingual expertise. Interestingly, this seems to be especially important for Finnish-speaking students who previously had little or no contact with Swedish-speaking students.

Illustration: Shutterstock

Students need to establish a sense of belonging and a social identity in both language groups in order to build bilingual expertise

PROFESSIONAL USE

Another important finding of our research so far is the way law students comprehend the importance of mastering explicit language practices such as judicial terminology and linguistic style. Law students often work in real, professional settings simultaneously with their studies, helping them to acquire knowledge about what kind of expertise might be expected from them in the future. This working experience gained in the professional environment is a clear motivation to ensure future bilingual expertise.

Finally, our PEDAMO project stresses another important feature of gaining linguistic skills: the persistent scrutiny of what kind of language competence is 'good enough'. The C1 level in the weaker language, which students are required to reach, is almost native, but students themselves might interpret professional use as being able to speak the weaker language at fully native level. When obtaining more self-confidence in their professional performance, the students eventually come to realise that their linguistic expertise is not judged normatively and that they do not necessarily have to reach any abstract 'native' level.

These observations on language competence and the possible paths towards it are only a first stepping stone for the PEDAMO project. We aim to contribute much more to the discussion about why and how multilingualism and linguistic expertise should be an essential part of preparations for professional life in the 21st century and beyond.

— ÅSA MICKWITZ, DRAGANA CVETANOVIĆ, HEINI LEHTONEN & AULI TOOM

BINATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

DOUBLE THE OPPORTUNITIES

Learning foreign languages and cultures is a critical component of employability – but are students best served by taking advantage of a breadth of cultural and linguistic opportunities in different countries or regions, or by focusing more narrowly? In the case of Turkish-German University in Istanbul, students are offered a focused opportunity to steep themselves in two cultures, two languages and two job markets. ▸

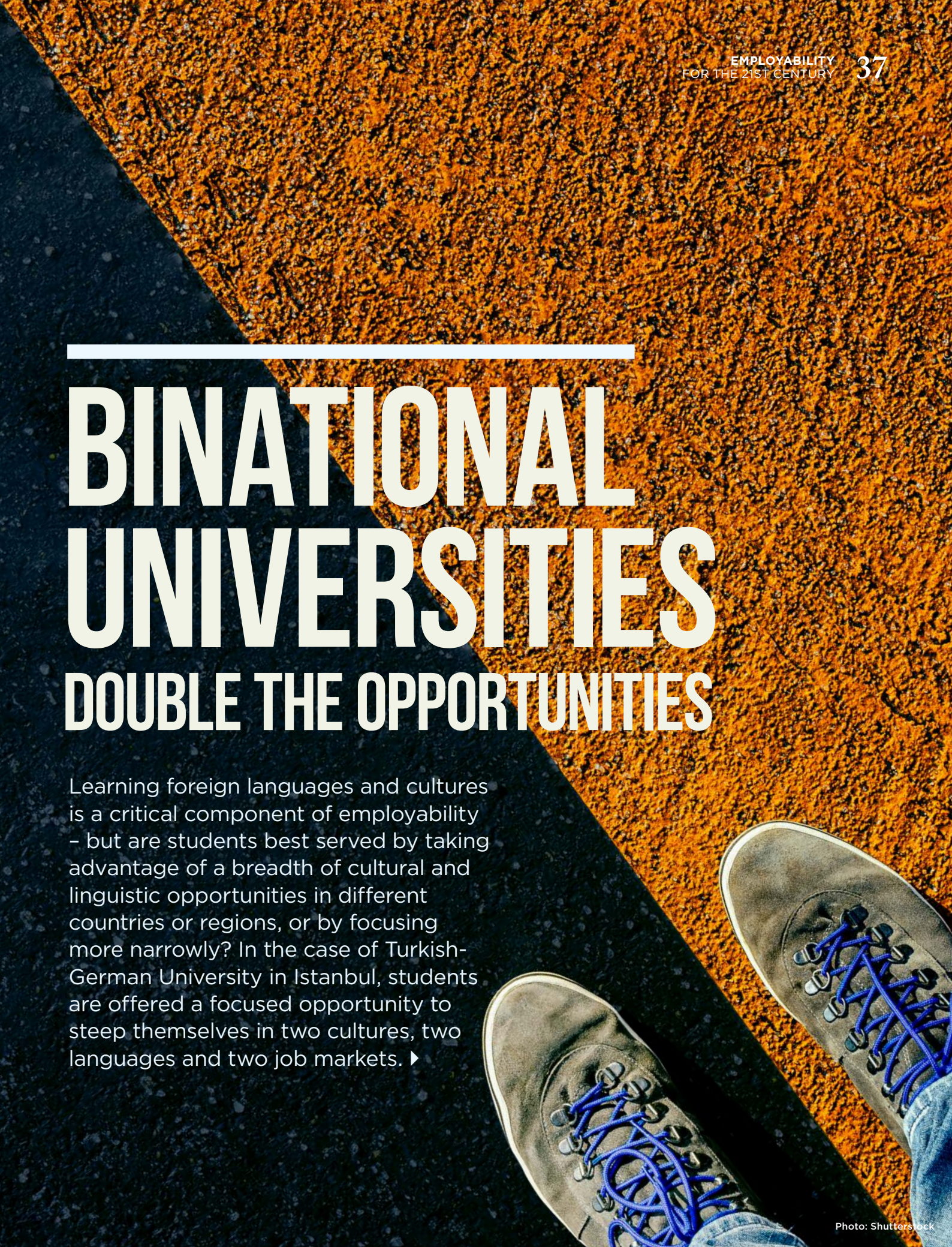

Photo: Shutterstock

To enhance graduate employability, universities often create services such as international internship programmes and career workshops centred on building a 'global CV', in addition to encouraging foreign language acquisition. These efforts, usually coordinated at the departmental level, tend to be fragmented. A more holistic approach would be to adopt an institutional strategy for developing graduate employability – and one great example of this is the binational Turkish-German University (TGU) in Istanbul.

Binational universities are generally established by a legal agreement between two countries, although a variety of governance and funding models exist. The model applied to establish the TGU includes a consortium of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and over 30 German universities providing academic support for study programmes at the state university, subject to Turkish higher education legislation. It intertwines the academic traditions of both systems, building on years of exchange and partnership between the two countries.

TRANSNATIONAL HUMAN CAPITAL

The TGU does what many of us in international education and career services aspire to: it offers students a seamless, strategically targeted arrangement of international study and work experience, foreign language acquisition, development of intercultural competences, and access to a personal and professional international network. Recent literature has referred to this combination as "transnational human capital", defined as "stocks of knowledge and skills that enable a person to operate in a different field beyond the individual nation".[1]

The triad of international experience, language training and development of a binational network is the foundation of a TGU education. Students mainly study in German, although there are courses and study programmes offered in Turkish and English. Turkish school leavers can enrol at the TGU without knowing any German and spend a preparatory year learning the language. Once they are matriculated students, they can continue taking German courses or improve their business-focused English skills.

Study and internship periods in Germany are highly encouraged by the TGU and financially supported by funding schemes from the German Academic Exchange Service, Erasmus+ and the Turkish Council of Higher Education. Depending on their study programme, students can carry out internships at a company in Germany, participate in a summer school or exchange semester at a German university or earn a double degree from a German university.

Study programmes have built-in opportunities to develop students' intercultural competencies, and an intense, continuous exchange of teaching personnel enables consistent interaction with German people, culture and society. This includes nearly 50 long-term German administrative and academic staff, in addition to short-term flying faculty from Germany who teach blocks of classes. Turkish academics are required to know or learn German, serving as academic and linguistic role models for students. Combined with language training and international experience, the TGU integrates the development of transnational human capital into all aspects of its programmes.

> The triad of international experience, language training and development of a binational network is the foundation of a TGU education

ENHANCED EMPLOYABILITY

Since opening in 2013, the TGU has had around 200 graduates. A quick glimpse at LinkedIn alumni data reveals that they often go on to a short stint of work abroad (predominantly in Germany) but that the majority find long-term work in Turkey at multinational companies. This can be seen as a positive example:

> Providing students with a publicly funded international education at home is an investment that feeds back into the Turkish economy and society

providing students with a publicly funded international education at home is an investment in citizens that in this case seems to feed back into the Turkish economy and society. Simultaneously, German companies in Turkey benefit from highly-qualified, skilled and bilingual employees. An alumni network brings students and graduates together with employers, facilitating the transition to work and the creation of a support system.

A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

The TGU and other binational universities following a similar model have one main component in common: consistency. The model focuses on one partnering country and one foreign language that students master. This is not to discredit traditional universities offering a multitude of study abroad programmes and language learning options. But is a student who takes A1 Spanish, studies abroad in Vietnam and interns in Chile strategically enhancing their employability or merely experimenting with the opportunities available to them? There is definitely merit in such an approach, especially for students' personal development. Employers, however, are interested in what results from the language classes and periods abroad, not the mere presence of them on a CV. Binational universities provide a coherent pathway that leads to language- and country-based specialisation, regardless of the field of study.

Not all universities can be binational. This is neither something to strive for nor something that is necessary to produce similar results. Universities offering multilingual programmes and services are not a new concept. However, the main university model used in Europe does not take advantage of the benefits of integrating a holistic employability strategy into the core and auxiliary functions of an institution. Non-binational universities can imitate this best-practice example of international employability preparation by implementing a comprehensive approach to developing students' transnational human capital. This is especially true for smaller, technical or applied universities that could benefit from streamlined, targeted international programmes and language training focused on one or two countries or a specific world region.

> Employers are interested in what results from the language classes and periods abroad, not the mere presence of them on a CV

The increasing number of binational universities worldwide shows that this model is gaining traction. In Turkey, increasing the establishment of binational universities is part of the government's higher education strategy. The Turkish-French Galatasaray University and the TGU are the only ones in operation for now, but several more are expected in the coming years. The Turkish-Japanese Science and Technology University, planned to open this autumn, will be the newest addition to a growing family of binational universities. The future is bright for this model of providing top-notch, specialised preparation of internationally agile graduates.

— JESSICA SCHÜLLER

1. Gerhards, J. & Hans, S. (2013). Transnational human capital, education, and social inequality. Analyses of international student exchange. *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie*, 42(2), 99–117.

SHORT STAYS REVISITED

Common wisdom holds that, when it comes to mobility, the longer the better. Indeed, much published research attests to the higher impact of long-term stays on employability. But are we asking the right questions when we weigh the value of short stays abroad for students' futures?

Most university graduates in the 21st century will work in an environment defined by global connections. Whether this manifests as a health professional serving a multicultural clientele, or a financial professional overseeing a portfolio of international investments, or a customer experience designer building digital interfaces for a global audience, the capacity to draw on well-developed employability skills is vital.

The first Erasmus impact studies established the connections between learning abroad and graduate career outcomes. Researchers and practitioners have continued to study this theme, with a shift towards the language of employability in alignment with the broader higher education sector. Studies in many countries have found positive connections between learning abroad and the subsequent careers of graduates. Learning abroad has been found to support recent graduates in a number of ways, including:

- Securing their first job
- Shortening the duration between graduation and employment
- Developing more internationally mobile graduates
- Enhancing the development of core employability skills such as communication skills, adaptability, creativity and problem solving

Personal and motivational difference between learning abroad participants and non-participants should be considered as part of these findings, because graduate employment may be connected to other factors such as family networks and engagement activities during higher education.

DURATION AND VALUE

When considering the value of learning abroad programmes, the tradition in the international education sector has been to assess significance against duration. For many practitioners, the gold standard remains the year-long immersion

programme pioneered by the Junior Year Abroad model in the United States. Published opinion has often discounted short-term programmes as little more than educational tourism with limited opportunities for deep cultural learning. One only has to look at the policy setting around ERASMUS+ and the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan Scholarships to confirm the value we ascribe to long-term mobility.

Even when the impact of short-term programmes is studied against long-term programmes, the results generally favour greater duration. So far, this holds true for the connection between learning abroad and employability skills. In one of the few large-scale studies to consider this question, the Institute for International Education found that former participants of short-term programmes reported higher levels of impact on the development of teamworking skills, compared to their peers who participated in long-term programmes.[1] In the same project, 42.5% of short-term programme respondents indicated that international study contributed to a job offer. Although this is a positive result, it compares to 67% of long-term programme participants.

For Australian universities, recent growth in learning abroad participation has accelerated with the development of short-term learning abroad options. In 2017, 68% of undergraduate learning abroad participation was short-term in duration. This figure has increased from 56% in 2014[2] and is now higher than the proportion of short-term programme participants in the USA.[3] Short-term learning abroad has expanded access to international education to students from diverse family backgrounds and to disciplines of study where learning abroad for a semester has proved difficult in the past.

> For many practitioners, the gold standard remains the year-long immersion programme

REFRAMING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Given participation trends, it might be time to change our approach to the subject. What if we shift our thinking to better align with the behaviour of 21st-century graduates? What if undertaking several short-term experiences could lead to similar benefits in employability skills development as one long-term experience? Can students who are unable or unwilling to spend a semester or more abroad gain a similar benefit from undertaking multiple short-term programmes?

In 2019, the Australian learning abroad sector undertook the first large-scale study of career outcomes and

learning abroad. Of 3378 respondents who participated in a learning abroad programme over the last 30 years, 24% undertook a short-term experience, classified as less than seven weeks in duration. Additionally, more than a quarter of respondents indicated that they had undertaken more than one learning abroad programme during their degree. Such investment in learning abroad indicates that students at Australian universities have embraced the value of international study for their academic, personal and professional development.

Are we educating future employers about the diversity of learning abroad programmes available and their benefits to our graduates?

WHAT STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY

With support from the Learning Abroad Network of the International Education Association of Australia, almost 5000 survey responses were collected from 36 universities, making it a broadly representative national study. Of the total sample, 3378 respondents participated in a learning abroad programme and had graduated at the time of the study. The dataset has allowed for rich analysis from angles not studied in the past.

The survey asked respondents to rate the perceived impact of their learning abroad experience on a set of nine commonly tested employability skills. Using simple descriptive analysis, for six of the nine employability skills, respondents who undertook several short-term learning abroad programmes reported a higher impact from their international experience than respondents who undertook a single long-term programme.

There are likely to be other explanatory variables at work, such as discipline of study and employment sector. From this data we can confirm that participants in several short-term learning abroad programmes are positive about the perceived impact of their experiences on the development of their employability skills. In some cases, the reported perceived impact is higher than respondents who participated in a single long-term programme. This includes creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, entrepreneurship, problem solving and decision-making. Further analysis of this data set is underway and will be published throughout 2020.

From extensive free-text comments provided by respondents, it is clear that many former students have purposefully constructed their international higher education experience, selecting the programmes and destinations relevant to their future career and study aspirations. They have been strategic in their use of funding opportunities to support their goals and are strong advocates for learning abroad. Our alumni respondents are the future employers of our current students. They are supporters of international education and a valuable resource to our institutions. Ongoing relationships with these alumni should be nurtured through opportunities to inspire new cohorts of students to follow in their global footsteps, such as through speaker panels and alumni profiles in student publications. They can also become influencers in the community, promoting the benefits of international education from their personal experience.

For practitioners in mobility, we need to consider how our institutional policies and practices support students to construct their internationalised higher education programmes. Questions we should be asking include: do our advising practices help students to understand all of the options available to them and support them in making good choices aligned with their career directions? Are we advocating for the development and support of short-term programmes, and is funding available to encourage participation in more than one programme? Are we educating future employers about the diversity of learning abroad programmes available and the benefits of these programmes to the graduates of our institutions? These questions will help us better understand the complex dynamics of mobility and its impact on graduate employability.

— DAVINA POTTS

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2. Potts, D. (2019). *Career outcomes of learning abroad: short-term programmes.* International Education Association of Australia.

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GREENING EMPLOYABILITY

JOBS AS IF THE 21ST CENTURY MATTERED

As higher education institutions continue to evaluate and re-evaluate what constitutes an employable graduate, the idea of employability itself is also due for a 21st-century update. Faced by global challenges to public health and the environment, should today's employers be the ones telling students what skills they need – or should it be the other way around? ▸

Photo: Shutterstock

After years of research, the link between the acquisition of an international higher education and enhanced career prospects has been compellingly demonstrated.[1] The soft skills that students develop through mobility programmes – such as an enhanced ability to work in culturally diverse settings and across borders – are valued by employers. Students understandably expect universities to provide them with such skills so that they are employable and can maximise their career potential in a competitive and globalised labour market.[2] Institutions, in turn, are implementing internationalisation strategies based in part on positive student employability outcomes. Everyone in this cycle – employer, student and university – seeks to maximise its benefit by supplying inputs critical to the market demands of the 21st-century economy.

But what if this logic is all wrong? What if it's actually the students who should be telling employers what skill sets to look for to meet the challenges faced by businesses in the 21st century? What if today's anxious generation of graduating students knows more than employers and educators, both cognitively and intuitively, about the needs of the global economy? What if Gen Z graduates understand that the very notion of what constitutes meaningful economic activity and employee productivity – and therefore employability – has thoroughly and definitively changed? What if, in the end, it's not about getting the right education and landing that job within the established economy; it's about saving and protecting the economy from the out-of-date thinking of established employers and universities?

HEADING FOR COLLAPSE

This idea is as counterintuitive as it is revolutionary, but it's backed up by reams of research that employers and universities too often tend to ignore, be it through ignorance, indifference, willful blindness or lack of imagination. One body of research is generated by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; another by the World Wide Fund for Nature's Living Planet Report; and another by the Global Footprint Network's National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts.[3] What is clear in all this research is the negative environmental impact that our species is having on Earth's five natural systems: air (atmosphere), water (hydrosphere), land (lithosphere), ice (cryosphere) and life (biosphere).

> What if it's actually the students who should be telling employers what skill sets to look for to meet the challenges of the 21st century?

We are altering the chemical composition of air and the corresponding regularity of both weather and climate. We are depleting and poisoning terrestrial water resources while simultaneously altering the acidity, temperature, currents, sea level and purity of the oceans. Through intensive agriculture, genetic farming and deforestation, we are making soil both chemically artificial and prone to exhaustion and erosion. We are melting polar ice, glacial ice, seasonal snowpack and permafrost – and releasing long-frozen pathogens in the process. We are pushing unprecedented numbers of animal, plant and insect species towards extinction.

In short, the global economy that we have built, the jobs we create to keep it humming and the type of work we do to keep it productive constitute a total ecological and consumer footprint well beyond the biocapacity of Earth to supply such resources. We now use the equivalent of 1.7 planet Earths to fuel our global annual economic activity. We are out of balance with nature and living beyond our planetary means. The result will be a global systemic economic collapse if we don't change our ways.

ECO-FRIENDLY EDUCATION

This stark reality has important implications for employability and the role of higher education institutions in producing 'global-ready' graduates. If educators want students to be prepared for the world coming their way, they should be emphasising and articulating eco-literacy, sustainability, zero-waste behaviour and circular resource management. Each discipline should be working to reinvent itself and reorient its theories, methodologies and basic concepts towards enhancing students' understanding of ecological realities and closed-system dynamics. Business schools will have to evolve with

particular depth, breadth and speed in these areas. All educators will want to challenge curricular structures that socialise student identities as upwardly mobile entitled consumers and Earth exploiters rather than as Earth stewards and caretakers. To achieve this new vision, educators will need to engage students using critical eco-pedagogies that challenge the fundamentally anthropocentric ethos of traditional educational discourses.[4]

For their part and in the face of a global environmental crisis accompanied by the imminent collapse of biodiversity, students will want to clearly distinguish between out-of-sync employers engaged in carbon-intensive business-as–usual practice and truly green employers committed to reinventing the global economy in line with sustainable and eco-friendly activity. It is here that employers shouldn't be telling students and universities what skills they need to keep the extractive and unsustainable globalised economy humming along; students should be explaining to such employers how to attract skilled, eco-literate graduates. Socially responsible students will no doubt choose to deny their green skills to employers who are failing to transition their business towards zero-carbon operations. Employability works both ways.

TOMORROW'S ECONOMY

It was H.G. Wells who, during World War II, warned us that "history is a race between education and catastrophe". His injunction is even more urgent and relevant in our day. Climate change, collapsing biodiversity, global pandemics such as the coronavirus, and the disruption and human costs these ongoing crises will bring in their wake – these are the social, political and economic challenges that Gen Z students will encounter across the 21st century.

To empower and enable such students, international educators should work feverishly to provide the knowledge, skills, attitudes and foresight intelligence they'll need to find their place in tomorrow's economy, which will be very different from today's. It will need – and therefore value – a very different set of eco-literate job skills, few of which traditional carbon-fuelled employers value today. It is the students, not the employers (and perhaps not even the universities unless we change our ways), who will transform how society thinks about graduate employability.

EAIE founding member Hans de Wit says that "all institutions would do well to remind themselves that a university education should prepare people for life, not just a career".[5] We might do well to push this sentiment a bit further: a university education should prepare people for life on Earth as it will become, not just as it once was. This will require a whole new set of eco-literate life and job skills. Students know this. The greening of employability is already a thing – employers and international educators should start taking note.

— SCOTT BLAIR

Employers shouldn't be telling students and universities what skills they need to keep the extractive and unsustainable globalised economy humming along

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EAIE BLOG SPOT

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02 APR

An open letter to the European Commission: COVID-19 and beyond

The EAIE applauds the European Commission's initial response to the outbreak and issues 6 further calls to action for the Commission and the sector.

http://ow.ly/qyvl50zRlFV

09 APR

Lessons from Italy: a conversation with Amanda Murphy

Italy has been on the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director of the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation offers a human perspective on the crisis.

http://ow.ly/DZ8L50zRlMA

29 APR

EAIE Spring resource round-up: COVID-19

To help you navigate the corona crisis, we've gathered some of the most helpful and insightful resources for international education professionals.

http://ow.ly/mitw50zRlSq

06 MAY

How COVID-19 is sending Armenian education online

In the midst of the crisis, Armenia's digital aspirations are getting an unexpected push.

http://ow.ly/aOpy50zRlWw

20 MAY

How to communicate clearly in a crisis

When a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic strikes, ensuring everyone is on the same page is crucial.

http://ow.ly/CbAB50zRm6Q

26 MAY

Alternative approaches to crisis-time student recruitment

There remain more questions than answers about how the 2020–2021 academic year will play out, but one thing is certain: international student recruitment won't look the same as in years prior.

http://ow.ly/bq3M50zRmbg

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