



Wilton Park
Youth Dialogues



Image: Robert Churchill

Report

Organising for change: how can higher education meet the changing needs of employment?

Monday 13 – Wednesday 15 November 2017 | WP1558

Held in South Africa

In association with:



**The Association
of Commonwealth
Universities**



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Background

Globally, higher education institutes are increasingly experiencing pressure to better meet the changing needs of employment. With over 71 million young people unemployed worldwide, and a further 600 – 800 million more young people expected to enter the job market over the next 15 years, the issue of graduate employability is evident. It appears as if new graduate skills are not necessarily aligned with employer demands. Despite rising unemployment, by 2020, there could be as many as 40 million too few workers with tertiary degrees, 57% of jobs are at risk of being replaced by automation and 40% of employers globally report difficulty filling positions. It is for this reason that higher education matters more than ever in order to develop curious, flexible, adaptable, innovative, entrepreneurial, value driven and ethical individuals and leaders that are able to cope with the rapidly changing world of employment.

Against this backdrop, universities continue to expand; gross tertiary enrolment is increasing across the world. Institutions however, are struggling to meet the growing demand for higher education and traditional means and current resources bases are no longer sufficient. Alternative methods of delivering quality education are dependent on innovation and technology and a lack of infrastructure and resources can create potential barriers to the supply of higher education.

Furthermore, the role higher education plays within a country's context is critical. What is evident is that successful higher education systems aid significantly in improving national competitiveness and are instrumental in the social and economic development of a country.

The conference which was held in association with the UK Department for International Development (DFID), The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the University of Pretoria and the National Research Foundation South Africa, formed part of the Wilton Park Youth Dialogues series held throughout 2017 and 2018. The purpose of the dialogue series is to create positive and action-orientated debate with a specific focus on young people and youth opportunities in relation to employment, education, security and peace. During the conference 46 participants from 20 countries representing Commonwealth university leaders, government and non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, business leaders and civil society convened to share and debate some of the global issues and

rising expectations facing higher education, in light of the ever changing needs of employment. The intended outcome of the dialogue was to generate key policy recommendations to be presented to the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers' meeting in Fuji in February 2018.

During the two days of discussions and breakout groups, six critical issues emerged: these are the need for graduate unemployment data to be disaggregated, the need to increase student mobility across different types of higher education institutions, the development of entrepreneurial skills, access to quality higher education, future-proofing higher education and the need for improved education-industry engagement.

“Employability is increasingly defined as soft skills - such as communication, interpersonal, team work, flexibility, time management and problem solving. How can Higher Education respond to this? And what are the magic skills that employers actually want from graduates? If we don't know this, the range of disappointment for our graduates will only increase.”

“We are not going to be able to solve the problem of employability and skills without thinking about partnerships and the exchange of ideas, virtually and on the ground.”

“Because of this very complicated world, universities matter more than ever.”

“In an age where our borders and boundaries are narrowing, Higher Education creates curious, flexible, ethical individuals, open to change. This

Key issues and recommendations

Aggregated data may be obstructing key insights

1. Current graduate unemployment data is typically presented in an aggregated format. Aggregated data appears to mask the critical detail when considering graduate unemployment rates. A need to disaggregate current graduate unemployment and student mobility data is required, on both a national and regional level in order to better understand the specific issues and recommended action needed for both undergraduate and post graduate students (this includes traditional 18 – 25 year olds, part-time students, mature students and life-long learners). The disaggregation of existing data will enable the collection of a set of standardised, transparent graduate outcomes data, across the Commonwealth, and will allow for focussed interventions to be developed whilst providing policy makers and funders with improved opportunities to address key strategic priorities.
2. In order for this to be actioned, a gap analysis is required, the outcome of which would not only be to understand what data is currently available, the sufficiency of the data and what data is possibly missing, but also to better understand how existing data has potentially had an impact on policy decisions. Segmentation of the data needs to be considered and relevant categories need to be identified and agreed. Not only is the graduate employment and unemployment data necessary but so too are the related demographics and specific educational dimensions. Disaggregated data should include but not be limited to: undergraduate, postgraduate, unemployment, employment, types of employment, age, gender, first to university, fields of study, type of institution, type of learning, type of degree, social population, social class, earnings and satisfaction rates.
3. A common methodology should be determined and possible funding mechanisms explored in order to develop a standardised, transparent, set of data across the Commonwealth, to allow for strategic, targeted interventions and the appropriate allocations of funds, whilst providing the means to track and monitor progress.

Lack of student mobility is hindering student progress

4. Student mobility within and across countries is of increasing importance as the demand for higher education grows. Countries require differentiated education systems in order to allow for accessibility and to meet changing national needs. Exploring the role universities play in the varied higher education system is essential when considering student mobility across different types of higher educational institutions. A better understanding of the distinction between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and universities is required. Similarities, convergences and differences occur when considering curriculum, internship programmes, employment opportunities, assessment methodology, experiential learning, government support, autonomy, modularisation and student choice. An improved understanding of these through the mapping of current competency frameworks across the Commonwealth,

is important as never before in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous times.”

“Higher Education can’t work in isolation. We need partnerships and collaboration to equip our young people for the future.”

“When classes reach levels of around 2,000 students how can you teach? You can’t talk about best practice or effective innovation if your class size is that large. The idea of Higher Education ceases to exist if you are just practicing crowd control.”

“Technology will shape the future world of learning. Is Mr Yip, the Holographic Advisor Bot, the future for undergraduates in a virtual classroom? Is this the future now we have aps for learning forensics and engineering course online?”

“Let’s not forget that Higher Education is a force for good in a colliding world of inequity.”

“It is a very powerful argument to make that the greater the percentage population who have gone

covering all elements of higher education, including Further Education Training (FET), TVET, Continuing Education and Training (CVET) and University, is of critical importance. Converging national qualifications and developing a standardised competency framework across the Commonwealth, could increase student mobility by allowing both vertical and horizontal, flexible pathways, within countries and across the Commonwealth and articulation between appropriate systems and even streams.

5. Both funding and quality are possible issues when considering the formulation of the standardised competency framework. Not only must funding be provided to enable a diverse and locally appropriate tertiary education system, but the funding system must align with the aims and objectives of policy makers. Quality assurance and monitoring must be built into the framework to ensure that an appropriate level of standard is maintained across institutions.

Lack of access to quality higher education

6. There is a significant and growing demand for higher education; however students across the Commonwealth are facing challenges around accessibility to quality higher education. Traditional institutions and teaching methodologies are no longer sufficient and it is necessary for institutions to scale up in order to meet this growing demand. Advances in technology have opened the door to allow for increased supply of education. Appropriately deployed technology has the capability to transform access to higher education. As institutions look to adopt a range of possible solutions including dual mode, blended learning and fully online courses, issues of quality assurance and challenges around cost, infrastructure and implementation, technology driving pedagogy, design of online content and learning approaches and enabling academics to make use of technology, need to be addressed.
7. Little is understood about what constitutes good practice and what key success factors determine quality in blended and online educational offerings. Research is required to better understand best practice when considering technology-enabled learning processes and to further identify clear markers of quality educational offerings. Furthermore, research into the real challenges faced by institutions with regards to operationalising and implementing blended and online courses is needed, as well as the collection of relevant data in order to determine whether such programmes are successful. Institutions who are successfully delivering quality higher education through both traditional means and non-traditional formats should be rewarded and recognised and be used as benchmarks of good practice across the Commonwealth.
8. Investment in IT infrastructure and resources is paramount in ensuring institutions have the capability to scale up in order to meet demand. Exploring the possibility of sharing both resources and infrastructure between institutions, whilst leveraging existing institutional partnerships to support in terms of course design, learning processes and training and development of academic faculty, will help remove some of the barriers some institutions are currently facing.

The development of entrepreneurial skills is a global concern

9. With 71 million young people unemployed worldwide, there is an ever-growing need for students to develop essential entrepreneurial skills and capabilities for both employment and self-employment. Entrepreneurship stimulates and sustains both regional and national growth and the necessary emphasis and priority needs to be given to the promotion of entrepreneurship within countries. All students should have the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills and consideration should be given to entrepreneurship acting as a cross-cutting theme within appropriate courses. There is a clear need for dedicated funding, earmarked specifically for the creation and development of entrepreneurial skills, to be made available to institutions and countries, across the Commonwealth. Such funding could support the development of internal and external ecosystems of entrepreneurship. The creation of entrepreneurial

through tertiary education, the greater the social cohesion and the greater prosperity in the country.”

“What Higher Education does, is it creates curious, flexible, open to change, open to innovation, value driven, ethical individuals and it is those kinds of skills that Higher Education incubates in people which will allow them to face the world of unemployment, the world where they would be creating their own jobs.”

“Focus needs to not only be on Employability as in ready for work - but increasingly on Entrepreneurship”

“Entrepreneurship is key”

“Entrepreneurs with university degrees are more likely to create jobs and more likely to produce multiplier effects in businesses that they initiate”

“We are experiencing the 4th Industrial Revolution. Higher

hubs near universities with a specific focus on strategic priorities of governments would further allow for the development of skills and contribute to the evolving ecosystem by providing internships for current students in the start-ups that are created through the hubs. Globally, there is a need to share good practice of developing entrepreneurial skills and understanding of the application of entrepreneurial skills within a specific context. An openly available database of global entrepreneurship case studies that showcase how entrepreneurial skills are developed and can be used by all institutions and students in the Commonwealth would be of great benefit.

The need to future-proof higher education today

10. Students are increasingly able to access learning in many different ways. With the continuous and rapid improvements in technology and general increased connectedness, it is just as important that traditional institutions remain relevant and meet the changing needs of both industry and their students. Higher education institutions need to consider not only what the future of education is and how to prepare for it, but also how to equip and advance students so they themselves are able to cope with the uncertainty of what will be required of them.
11. Identifying priority areas and establishing possible guidelines around these areas is an immediate step towards preparing for the future. Studying current trends and predictions, both in education and industry, whilst regularly engaging with industry is of critical importance.
12. Providing opportunities for flexible pathways between higher education institutions including the mobility of credits across Commonwealth countries will ensure the validation of different types of education and learning. This should further assist the supply and demand issue facing higher education and ensure the long term success of traditional institutions.
13. As the world becomes increasingly volatile and unpredictable, the importance of teaching students to learn is significant. It should be a strategic focus to develop autonomous learners who are able to adapt to the rapidly changing world and to an uncertain future. Most importantly, research and innovation in pedagogy is required to not only enable students, but also educational institutions, to adapt to a dynamic environment.

Improved engagement between university and industry is required

14. There is an increasing disconnect between the skills employers need and the skills graduates have. In order to minimise this growing gap, regular, structured engagement with industry is required. Appropriate models need to be explored in order to facilitate such engagements and allow for open dialogue where possible changes to curriculum and timing of changes can be discussed. Examples of best practice of these kinds of engagement would be of value to institutions to learn from. Consideration should be given to the development of industry and higher education engagement best practice case studies.

Recommendations to the Association of Commonwealth Universities

15. Commission the formation of a policy group to conduct a comprehensive gap analysis on the available graduate unemployment and student mobility data to determine what data is currently available, the sufficiency of the current data and what data is currently missing. Use the findings from the analysis, identify the relevant graduate employment, demographic and educational data categories required and formulate a recommendation to Commonwealth Ministers on what should be included in the collection of graduate data and the possible methodology that could be adopted across the Commonwealth.

Education must respond to this. As one million young people a month join the job market in Africa, there is now a need for a new Education Revolution.”

“We should be reflective and nuanced in our understanding of the rhetoric about educational technology”

“How can we create creative people who they themselves are the designers of the future?”

“In this world where borders are narrowing and minds are being ‘shrunk’, networks matter more than ever”

“There needs to be structured dialogue between academia and the private sector to get over the growing skills mismatch. What industry wants changes quickly. So this is about not just co-creating but co-delivering the skills that are necessary to fill jobs.”

16. Further explore the role of universities by working with other institutions and leveraging the work already completed by the ACU and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Commission a benchmarking and mapping exercise, across the Commonwealth, to determine what competency framework already exists and what recommendations can be made to Commonwealth Ministers in order to support the development of flexible pathways between all elements of higher education including TVETs and Universities, across the Commonwealth, and the agreement of a system of mobility of credits.
17. Commission a review of the Commonwealth Youth Entrepreneurs Network and identify ways to leverage the current networks of entrepreneurial funding to allow institutions to create improved entrepreneurial skills.
18. Develop the ACU Entrepreneurship Community of Practice supported by a developed database of entrepreneurship case studies available to institutions, across the Commonwealth, to use as supporting material in courses and to support the development of internal entrepreneurial ecosystems.
19. Commission research on best practice in dual mode, blended and online learning programmes. Having identified best practice in e-learning solutions, conduct a benchmarking exercise against best practice in traditional formats and identify whether or not similar markers can be used. Develop a set of quality standards for e-learning programmes together with a bank of best practice examples of institutions to implement and draw on.
20. Evaluate the feasibility of a shared resource model that can be used by partnering institutions and with other institutions across the Commonwealth.
21. Institute a Commonwealth Quality Award for higher education, recognising and rewarding good practice and quality in institutions across the Commonwealth.
22. Commission research into good examples of innovation in pedagogy that can be rewarded and recognised and can be shared across the Commonwealth.

Policy recommendations to the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers’ meeting in Fuji, February 2018.

23. Commission a policy group to drive the disaggregation of the current graduate unemployment data. Commission the collection of standardised graduate outcome data that is transparent and open, specific to country context, provides measures of determined segmentation (including undergraduate, postgraduate, unemployment, employment, types of employment, age, gender, first to university, fields of study, type of institution, type of learning, type of degree, social population, social class, earnings and satisfaction rates), mapped to demographic data, across the Commonwealth.
24. Articulate and harmonise national qualifications and develop a standardised competency framework for all appropriate elements of higher education, across the Commonwealth. This should specifically apply between TVET and University, to allow for student mobility through flexible pathways between systems and streams, within and across countries.
25. Create a new entrepreneurship fund which is available to countries and institutions and is dedicated to the specific development and creation of entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial activities.
26. Commission a study on what a sustainable higher education IT infrastructure system might entail, considering investment, infrastructure requirements, resource requirements and geographical spread.
27. Agree on governments providing shared investment in the necessary infrastructure needed to increase the supply of alternative education solutions so that institutions are able to meet the growing demand for higher education.

28. Mandate the inclusion of a Learning to Learn module as a requirement of all university courses.
29. Develop mechanisms to promote strong policy cohesion across all governments.

Commitments from participating universities

30. Continue to promote engagement with existing student mobility schemes.
31. Share best practice indicators especially with regards to entrepreneurship and e-learning innovations.
32. Promote regular, structured engagement with industry.
33. Forge strong international, national and local partnerships in order to promote further collaboration, sharing of resources and sharing of good practice.

Hayley Pearson

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