Provisional programme

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

Monday 13 – Wednesday 15 November 2017 | WP1558

To be held near Pretoria in South Africa

The current unique demographic shift towards a high youth population is particularly acute in developing countries, where 90 per cent of all young people live, and especially in sub-Saharan Africa. A young population offers much potential for the growth and development of a country, but only if their talents are harnessed.

Governments recognise the critical role universities can play in delivering social and economic change. Many have actively encouraged expansion of higher education in both the public and private sector; the number of ‘first generation’ graduates is increasing rapidly. Individual graduates expect to recoup their investment by securing graduate level jobs and widespread disappointment could be a source of instability and political turbulence. On a more macro level, governments expect to recoup their investment by seeing graduates who drive growth and development. To achieve this we need to ensure universities are developing the visionary leaders, competent front line service providers and entrepreneurial business people of the future.

Delivering this expectation presents a huge challenge. University expansion is taking place against a background of huge youth employment, with 75 per cent of young people in developing countries either in irregular work or unemployed. The UK’s experience is that economies will take time to adjust to the increasing supply of graduates. In addition, it is important that the quality of education offered does not suffer. Employers tend to value ‘soft skills’ such as analysis, confidence and personal qualities and there is a risk that these will be more difficult to impart to large classes of students.

So how can we ensure that our expectations of universities are realistic? How can higher education be expected to maximise the chance that students get jobs and, once employed, use their influence to drive development? How can limited resources best be used for this purpose? What are the attributes which employers are looking for and do these differ between private and public employers? How should universities balance...
employment needs with other responsibilities? What support do they need from government and the business community?

With a focus on employment to drive development and in the context of SDG 8, this dialogue will bring together Commonwealth university leaders, government and non-governmental organisations, students and youth organisations, entrepreneurs, business leaders and civil society representatives. This dialogue will feed into a special session of the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers to take place in February 2018.

In association with the Department for International Development, The Association of Commonwealth Universities, University of Pretoria, National Research Foundation

(Speakers invited and themes proposed * denotes confirmed)

### Monday 13 November

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<td>1200</td>
<td>Participants arrive and buffet lunch available</td>
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<tr>
<td>1400-1445</td>
<td>Welcome and introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>1445-1645</td>
<td>1. What role should employability play in higher education curriculum and pedagogy?</td>
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<td>1645-1730</td>
<td>Photograph followed by tea/coffee</td>
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<td>1730-1900</td>
<td>2. Interpreting the needs of employers</td>
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**1400-1445**

*Alison Hilliard  
Programme Director, Wilton Park

Joanna Newman  
Secretary General, The Association of Commonwealth Universities, London

Kirsty Newman  
Head, Higher Education, Skills and Youth, Department for International Development, London

Cheryl De La Rey  
Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria

**1445-1645**

1. **What role should employability play in higher education curriculum and pedagogy?**

This opening session will explore the opportunities and challenges facing the higher education sector in terms of meeting the changing needs of employment - looking both at course content and delivery. How far can universities meet labour market needs? What are the obstacles to doing so? How should universities balance employment needs with other responsibilities? Who are the key players and what are their responsibilities?

**1645-1730**

Photograph followed by tea/coffee

**1730-1900**

2. **Interpreting the needs of employers**

What do employers need from graduates? Are employers clear on the skills they require and how to assess these? How do the skills needed by public and private employers differ? How can we ensure clear lines of communication between universities and employers? What strategies work to allow universities to connect with public and private employers? This session will include examples of employer-led curricula, whilst presenting an opportunity to discuss best practice.
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Reception followed by dinner</td>
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<td>0800-0845</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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| 0915-1045 | 3. Learning to learn: what are the most effective innovations?  
What are the most effective innovations to improve the core skills needed for employment in the context of rising class sizes? A look at best practice in promoting the entrepreneurship, analytical skills, civic mindedness and critical thinking needed in today’s employment market in the context of rising class sizes and given the likely changing needs of the labour market. What skills need to be promoted in order to prepare for employment in the future? How do we effectively measure the development of core skills for employability? |
| 1045-1115 | Tea/coffee                                   |
| 1115-1245 | 4. The role of enablers in higher education  
Who are the actors that enable higher education reform? What is the role of ministries, higher education regulators and regional bodies? How can they help or hinder reform in higher education? What role can government play to ensure that graduates are given the best chance of finding a job? How will that reform come about? |
| 1300-1430 | Lunch                                       |
| 1430-1530 | 5. Breakout groups followed by discussion in plenary  
Topics and groups to be confirmed. |
| 1530-1630 | 6. Breakout groups followed by discussion in plenary  
The second round of breakout groups, allowing participants to attend sessions on two different topics.  
Topics and groups to be confirmed. |
| 1700-1830 | 6. Feedback from discussion group            |
| 1830    | Reception followed by dinner                 |
| 0800-0845 | Breakfast and checkout                      |
7. The role of technology
What is the role of technology in developing core skills necessary for employment today? How can technology be better integrated into the development of students and faculty members and how can entrepreneurship be fostered in the classroom? What approaches are working to ensure universities have adequate resources to enable students to use technology to explore and learn as well as support a culture of entrepreneurship? What role can distance and blended learning play?

8. Evaluation survey
Completion of online evaluation survey

9. Towards higher education reform: commitments, closing summaries and next steps

Participation in this dialogue is by invitation only.
This is a preview programme and as such may be subject to change.
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