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### **Help us to improve VC Net...**

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#### **Strategies for employability and skills development: an evolving imperative**

A number of recent developments serve to highlight the growing international focus on graduate employability and skills development. In recent months a meeting hosted by the ACU and the British Council in Ghana, the launch of the 3<sup>rd</sup> national skills and development strategy in South Africa, and a report by the World Economic Forum all emphasise the need for greater coordination, and even integration, between the tertiary sector and the workplace. [\[Read more\]](#)

#### **Internationalising the early career**

A need to pay proper attention to academics' early careers is climbing up HE agendas. As institutions across the world grapple with early career issues, there is a clear opportunity for an international approach. Balancing needs and ambitions – north and south – will certainly require care. If universities can forge shared and mutually advantageous agendas they have much to gain by taking an international perspective to early career support. [\[Read more\]](#)

#### **HE, regionalism, and the 'university city'**

Several recent initiatives have addressed the regional engagement of higher education, and specifically the role of the 'university city'. Although developed independently these projects share an interest in showing how universities define and meet local and international needs, and where, at times, they overlap. [\[Read more\]](#)

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### **Strategies for employability and skills development: an evolving imperative**

A number of recent plans and strategies on graduate employability and skills development emphasise the role of the university as a pathway to employment and national growth. The expectation of a return on the financial and intellectual investment in higher education has acquired greater urgency under the joint pressures of expanding student numbers and, in many countries, the rising costs of tuition. In January a conference convened by the ACU and the British Council on graduate employment was held in Ghana. Focusing on Africa, the conference found that specific support for graduates to enter the job market is limited. The conference produced a declaration calling for the tertiary sector to become more integrated with the employment market, incorporating a ten-point plan to embed employability within the curriculum, services, relationships, monitoring and philosophy, of tertiary institutions. Examples of good practice included the British Council's Africa Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (AKTPs) which encourage industry to work directly with universities. There were also examples of individual universities initiating more formal links with

employers and beginning to track the career directions of their students. However, much of the activity reported tended to be quite small in scale and sporadic.

National drives on graduate employability tend to revolve around developing skills to meet the needs of industry and, more broadly, for economic growth. In South Africa in January the Minister for Higher Education and Training launched the 3<sup>rd</sup> incarnation of the National Skills and Development strategy. A central pillar of the strategy is to promote partnerships between employers, the public tertiary sector and private training providers. Included among its goals is the creation of an institutional mechanism for assessing the supply and demand for skills and improving career and vocational guidance. These recommendations draw on the plan for higher education and training in South Africa, produced by the Development Bank for Southern Africa for the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Elsewhere, in a speech given by the chairman of the Sri Lankan UGC in February emphasis was placed both on the need for the expansion of higher education to cater for the growing demands for university places, but also on developing courses to align human resources to the potential demands of the labour force. This sits alongside national ambitions within Sri Lanka to become an international hub for higher education in South and East Asia and strengthening as well as servicing a developing knowledge economy.

Globally, and in the West in particular, there is a focus not only on graduate employment but, paradoxically, given the growing numbers of graduates, on 'talent scarcity'. A recent report by the World Economic Forum argues that there is an urgent need to respond to the skills demands of 2020 to avert a global crisis in talent. This crisis is forecast to be particularly acute in high income countries with high demand for well-educated professionals. Among the 'at risk' countries are: the US, Canada, Spain, Germany, Russia and Japan. Included in its seven-point response to the global talent risk is increasing employability through an education system that encourages practical as well as theoretical skills, lifelong learning and 'upskilling'.

With problems of graduate unemployment existing alongside problems of skills shortages, there is clearly a need for evidence-based career guidance as well as planned skills development. Universities inevitably have a role to play in this process, but balancing their role as suppliers of the workforce with the core functions of knowledge creation and dissemination will not just be a question of internal strategy but of external pressures from national drivers above and market drivers below.

Sources:

- 'From job seeker to job creator' *ACU Bulletin* (April 2011) ([http://www.acu.ac.uk/member\\_services/bulletin](http://www.acu.ac.uk/member_services/bulletin))
- 3rd National Skills Development Strategy (NDS3) (13 January 2011) (<http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=15635&tid=26727>) (Press Release) (<http://edulibpretoria.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/nsds3-document.pdf>)
- 10-Point Plan for Higher Education and Training – Skills for inclusive growth: Towards a long-term strategy for higher education and training (July 2010) (Development Bank of Southern Africa) (<http://www.dbsa.org/%28S%28nrV0zgbivhkn34iwd5cnbd45%29%29/Research/Pages/HigherEducationandTraining.aspx>)
- Sri Lanka –UGC Chairman's Speech (2/2/11) (<http://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/news-and-events/829-chairmans-speech-new-horizons-and-strategies-in-education-in-sri-lanka.html>)
- Global Talent Risk – Seven Responses (January 2011) (World Economic Forum) ([http://www3.weforum.org/docs/PS\\_WEF\\_GlobalTalentRisk\\_Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/PS_WEF_GlobalTalentRisk_Report_2011.pdf))

## Internationalising the early career

A need to pay proper attention to academics' early careers is climbing up HE agendas, often linked to strategies for internationalisation and academic mobility. Recent work by the UK's Vitae, discussion of the post-PhD options open to Canadian students, and concern about Australia and New Zealand's ageing academic workforces, all point towards the need for a particular emphasis on supporting researchers as they begin their academic careers. And as discussions on the subject also acknowledge, that this critical stage matters not only for personal and professional development, but because collectively it underwrites the future strength of universities and the research community as a whole.

If the doctorate serves as the essential apprenticeship, it is often at the postdoctoral level that a researcher learns the wider skills of the professional academic: how to negotiate the peer review process, how to formulate research questions and navigate grant applications, how to manage a project from inception to completion, and how to supervise their own doctoral students. It is also a critical time for the forming of new academic relationships – an opportunity to participate as a full member of the research community and to enter new networks. Signalling its recognition of these needs the Hong Kong Research Grants Council

recently announced plans for an Early Career Scheme to 'help nurture junior academics to conduct high quality research', while the Indian UGC has announced new postdoctoral fellowships, noting that the future quality of the country's HE system will depend on a concerted effort to 'attract and retain talented young persons'.

There is now greater continuity between the doctoral and postdoctoral phases of a career. The PhD is no longer the watershed of the 'proper' academic career, and many are now undertaken alongside lecturing positions. Moreover, students present conference papers, publish through their doctoral years, and in some cases undertake consultancy work. Yet while the doctorate is formalised by the process leading to a qualification, for many the years that follow may be relatively unstructured.

There are international dimensions too. With policy and funding emphasising mobility, institutions seeking the most talented staff from across the world, and with many countries hoping to encourage the return of sizeable academic diasporas, international collaboration becomes essential in the early years. Where universities are struggling to develop faculty within their current means, collaboration can be particularly valuable. Split-site PhDs or postdoctoral exchanges, for example, can offer a crucial bridge between the constraints of home resources and the requirements of international-standard work. The benefits can also run both ways. Connections between peer groups and with senior scholars globally can be extremely valuable intellectually: honing thinking, securing access to new networks, research sites and data, and learning from new conceptual and methodological approaches.

As a recent workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand emphasised, the undersupply of doctoral-qualified staff, and the career progression of those that obtain a PhD, are amongst the most pressing concerns of the Sub-Saharan African research sector. Research presented at the workshop, and to be published in a forthcoming paper, suggests that UK universities recognise that global interests necessitate much stronger links with returned students and visiting academics. It also confirms that there is a will to deepen these relationships – through mentoring, support for repeat visits, and by engaging in joint doctoral supervision. The market for talent is, of course, international, and concerns abound in Africa that the best researchers will simply end up re-settling in the north. Nevertheless, many universities are keen to develop partnerships which are cemented at institutional level, and which take a much longer term view. They recognise that nurturing links to former students can help to seed future networks or enable collaborative projects to be constructed; bring an international dimension to campuses; and realise ambitions to develop research portfolios on 'global issues'.

As institutions across the world grapple with early career issues, there is a clear opportunity – and perhaps imperative – for an international approach. Balancing needs and ambitions– north and south – will certainly require care, and more open conversations may be needed. Northern institutions may, for example, need to do more to acknowledge the intellectual value that such arrangements bring to their own research (rather than framing it solely within philanthropic concerns), while southern institutions will need to reconcile concerns to develop their local faculty with the need to grant their researchers the freedom to participate internationally. But if universities can forge shared and mutually advantageous agendas they have much to gain by taking an international perspective to early career support.

#### Sources:

- Hong Kong: 'Response to concerns over the Transfer of the Research (R) Portion of the Block Grant', University Grants Commission (25 February 2011) (<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/speech/2011/sp20110225.htm>)
- India: 'Higher Education in India, Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan Period (2007-2012) for Universities and Colleges', University Grants Commission (January 2011) <http://www.ugc.ac.in/pub/stategies/HEIstategies.pdf>
- Canada: 'One + one = success', *University Affairs* (7 February 2011) <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/one-plus-one-success.aspx>
- Australia: 'The Real Academic Revolution', LH Martin Institute (12 January 2011) <http://www.lhmartininstitute.edu.au/news-and-media/latest-news-and-media/84-new-study-the-real-academic-revolution>
- New Zealand: 'Responding to an ageing academic workforce: Summary of the Academic Workforce Project 2020 Report', Universities New Zealand - Te Pōkai Tara (31 January 2011) <http://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/node/648>
- UK: Vitae (recent publications) <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1393/Publications.html>

## HE, regionalism, and the 'university city'

An OECD Conference on Higher Education in Cities and Regions took place in February, while late last year several other independent European initiatives on regional innovation and the 'university city' were also developed. Elsewhere, policies to help rural and regional students are being implemented in Australia, China is constructing an ambitious 'university town', while branch campuses and networks continue to proliferate. A factor common to each is the familiar argument for (and measurement of) innovation and economic development, though comparative rankings, the need for distinctive institutional identities, access, and employment are also all playing their part. The renewed interest in the local engagement of HEIs confirms it as fundamental to, rather than simply supplementing, established research and teaching functions. It is also increasingly being recognised as integral to a university's global status and role.

The OECD meeting considered what HEIs could contribute in 'making their cities and regions stronger, cleaner and fairer', using the outcomes of the second round of their self-evaluative and comparative review process (2008-10). The OECD reviews have, since 2005, surveyed HE's role in 29 cities and regions. Their aim is to identify and help satisfy strategic goals in relation to local development and, by involving several HEIs in a single area, have been influential in motivating and informing co-ordinated change. As a result regional engagement can be seen to include links with various agencies or networks as well as business and industry. In turn, those areas which are judged successful centres of higher education are so often because of the skills and expertise they attract as much as generate.

An EU-funded project (MODERN) recently issued an analysis of 'University Engagement and Regional Innovation', the fourth in a series of conference-related reports on HE management issues. It traces in detail the development of HE's regional mission and innovation, the studies which have been published on it, and practical principles for effective regional engagement. It acknowledges the 'dynamics and rationales' which have long been held in common by universities and cities, and that 'having a strong university with an international reputation is also seen as an important element of what it means to be a 'global city''. Reinforcing this, a meeting co-hosted by the German Rectors' Conference on 'The University City: a model for the future of Germany' highlighted the values and needs of those actually working and living in universities. Urban planning, accommodation, provision for young families, even city marketing, were examined and in its concluding reference to an 'urban structure and civil society' it draws attention to the historic and continuing contribution which those at universities make: 'Students are the most socially committed population group in Germany. Cities benefit from them.'

Other initiatives have focused on the regional mission, particularly for institutions outside established urban centres, in the development of national HE policy. In Australia, for example, a Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund is, from January 2011, making grants available to disadvantaged rural and regional students, with a view to raising participation rates. The 2008 Bradley Review referred to the 'uneven pattern of regional provision', and originally proposed a new national university which would consolidate some existing campuses and concentrate expertise. Meanwhile in China, given the scale of demand, a completely new 'university town' is being developed. Shahe in the Beijing District will host 5 university campuses. A 9 square kilometre site is being used, with an estimated population figure of 200,000. Elsewhere the continuing growth in branch campuses (eg Qatar's Education City) and split site provision, nationally and internationally reveal the need for HEIs to serve carefully targeted markets.

The value of clarifying a university's regional role becomes more significant as competition increases for funding, students, and institutional profile. Engagement, by definition, is not circumscribing an institution's exclusive service to a very specific locale; a university could in practice best serve its regional mission by attracting interest in its work, and linking with comparable institutions, at an international level. However influential a university's location may be, particularly initially, independent factors such as how research cultures are fostered, communities of interest developed, or academic library and museum collections supported, are issues which any university faces, wherever they are based.

### Sources:

- OECD Conference – Higher Education in Cities and Regions, Seville, (10-11 February 2011)  
[http://www.oecd.org/newsLetter/0,3535,en\\_2649\\_35961291\\_47147623\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/newsLetter/0,3535,en_2649_35961291_47147623_1_1_1_1,00.html)  
[http://www.oecd.org/site/0,3407,en\\_21571361\\_45834904\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/site/0,3407,en_21571361_45834904_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)
- University Engagement and Regional Innovation (Higher Education Modernisation (MODERN) project) – Benneworth, P.; (2010)  
<http://www.highereducationmanagement.eu/images/stories/modern%20conference%20regional%20innovation-executive%20report.pdf>

- The University City: a Model for the Future of Germany (German Association of Cities, German Rectors' Conference, German National Association for Student Affairs), Jena, (7-8 December 2010) [http://www.hrk.de/95\\_2592.php](http://www.hrk.de/95_2592.php)
- Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund (Australia) <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Programs/Funding/RTHF/Pages/default.aspx>
- 'Breathtaking in scope and scale' (China) (COL Blog) (Daniel, J.) <http://www.col.org/blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=126>

## Other news

- **AWAU (Association of West African Universities) (10/1/11)** An Association of West African Universities (AWAU) has been established to promote inter-university co-operation in the region and represent member universities. (see NUC (National Universities Commission) Bulletin (17/1/11) [www.nuc.edu.ng/nucsite/File/Monday%20Bulletin/MB%20Draft%2017h%20January,%202011%20.pdf](http://www.nuc.edu.ng/nucsite/File/Monday%20Bulletin/MB%20Draft%2017h%20January,%202011%20.pdf))
- **Federalism in national education strategy** (COL Blog). A series of useful analyses and commentaries on the implications of federalism on education policy and practice have been posted on the COL Blog (Jan-Feb 2011). Australia, Canada, India, Malaysia, Nigeria and the UK are among the countries covered. ([www.col.org/blog](http://www.col.org/blog))
- **India:** 'Higher Education in India: Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan Period (2007-2012) for Universities and Colleges'. This UGC analysis represents a useful overview, with statistics, of recent developments in HE in India, not least its dramatic and continuing expansion. (1/11) (<http://www.ugc.ac.in/pub/index.html>). Among Bills assigned to the current session (21/2 -21/4) are those for the National Council for Higher Education & Research Bill, and Universities for Innovation. (<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=69894>). A comprehensive survey of HE in India is also being planned. The study is to be undertaken by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), perhaps becoming part of a regular analysis. ([www.education.nic.in/secondary.htm](http://www.education.nic.in/secondary.htm))
- **Pakistan:** 'Higher Education Medium Term Development Framework II (MTDF-HEII) 2011-15' [(Higher Education Commission (HEC) (Pakistan); (2011)] A strategy document for the development of higher education in Pakistan has been published recently; it includes an analysis and statistics on the current state of the sector. (<http://hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/Documents/MTDF%202011-15%20FINAL.pdf>)
- **Research impact/assessment.** The first 'Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA)' report has been issued, analysing research output by subject area and institution (1/11). ([www.arc.gov.au/era/outcomes\\_2010.htm](http://www.arc.gov.au/era/outcomes_2010.htm)) <http://minister.innovation.gov.au/Carr/MediaReleases/Pages/IMPRESSIVESCORECARDFORAUSSIERESEAR.CH.aspx> For the next Research Excellence Framework (2014) in the UK, the weighting of research impact (1/3/11), and the membership of expert panels, has been announced (21/2/11). ([www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2011/refpanel.htm](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2011/refpanel.htm)) ([www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2011/refimpact.htm](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2011/refimpact.htm))
- **Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS)** has made available education statistics from 1970 onwards, enabling more detailed trends analysis. The figures cover pre-primary to tertiary education (14/2/11). ([www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=8267\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=8267_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC))

## ACU

- **Risk, Reputation and Reform: Developing New Business in a Changing Environment**, the ACU Conference of Executive Heads, is being held in association with the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Open University of Hong Kong, 6-8/4/2011. (An opening address from the World Bank's Jamil Salmi argued for the critical role which universities play in providing the talent on which national economic development depends.) ([www.acu.ac.uk/hongkong2011](http://www.acu.ac.uk/hongkong2011)) ([www.acu.ac.uk/view\\_news?id=88](http://www.acu.ac.uk/view_news?id=88))

## Key publications

A selection of recent publications on higher education:

**Globalization and Cross-Border Education: Challenges for the Development of Higher Education in Commonwealth Countries** [Varghese, N.; IIEP; 2011] Brief paper on Commonwealth higher education, its expansion, and possible impacts on quality among other areas. [http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Info\\_Services\\_Publications/pdf/2011/Globalization\\_CB\\_Education.pdf](http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Info_Services_Publications/pdf/2011/Globalization_CB_Education.pdf)

**Herding Cats: Being Advice to Aspiring Academic and Research Leaders** [Garrett, G.; Davies, G.; Triarchy; 2010] Practical guidance on HE management and leadership. ([www.triarchypress.com/pages/Herding\\_Cats.htm](http://www.triarchypress.com/pages/Herding_Cats.htm))

**Life after Study: International Students' Settlement Experiences in New Zealand** [Wilkinson, A.; Merwood, P; Masgoret, A-M.; NZ. Dept of Labour]

Trends analysis of international students' experience, including their reasons for choosing to study in New Zealand, their subsequent careers, and residency. (<http://dol.govt.nz/publications/research/life-after-study/life-after-study.pdf>)

**Planning for Technical and Vocational Skills Development** (Fundamentals of education planning, 94) [King, K.; Palmer, R.; IIEP; 2010]

Raises key questions and summarises recent reform with a view to restoring technical and vocational to government and aid policy. Published in IIEP's useful educational planning series. ([www.iiep.unesco.org/information-services/publications/abstracts/2010/fundamentals-94.html](http://www.iiep.unesco.org/information-services/publications/abstracts/2010/fundamentals-94.html))

**Towards an Arab Higher Education Space: International Challenges and Societal Responsibilities** [Lamine, B. (ed.); Unesco. Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States; 2010]

Proceedings of the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARCHE), Cairo, 31/5-2/6/09, held in preparation for the Unesco World Conference (WCHE). Themes include student mobility, quality, research, and social responsibility. (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001892/189272m.pdf>)

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The authors Nick Mulhern, Jonathan Harle and Jay Kubler are always pleased to receive comments on the usefulness and content of this briefing. News from other Commonwealth countries, which might be of wider interest, is also most welcome. They can be contacted by e-mail on [vcnet@acu.ac.uk](mailto:vcnet@acu.ac.uk) or by fax on +44 (0)20 7387 2655. This and previous issues can also be accessed online at: [www.acu.ac.uk/member\\_services/research\\_and\\_policy\\_analysis/vc\\_net](http://www.acu.ac.uk/member_services/research_and_policy_analysis/vc_net)

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