

FORUM

MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education



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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.

— DOUGLAS PROCTOR, EDITOR
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Louise has been working in international education since participating in the the Japanese Exchange Teaching Program (JET). She has travelled the Trans-Siberian Railway and crossed the USA from coast to coast.

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Higher education consultant, assessment and sustainability

Scott knew he wanted to work in international education after spending his final two years of university abroad. His hobbies include ragtime piano and collecting World War I portraiture postcards.



IN CONVERSATION WITH

**RAJIKA
BHANDARI**

JACOB GIBBONS
EAIE

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

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

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 institution. 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

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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

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.

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.

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 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

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

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.

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.



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