

International Businesses: Consumers of Global Talent?



Nannette Ripmeester

Is the corporate world a true consumer of global talent? The impact of globalization on business is obvious and therefore the need for more cultural savvy staff is apparent. Does the Higher Education sector need to follow the business world's lead or are HE institutions in the driver's seat at all times when it comes to priming graduates who are able to work across continents? This article will look more in-depth on the skills gained by a study abroad experience and how to turn the experience into an advantageous skillset for the global workplace. However, the main focus is on corporate employers across the globe and how they see the link between Higher Education and the global world of work.

Content	Page
1. Consumers of Talent	22
2. From Education to the World of Work	23
3. Turning Experiences into Skills	23
4. The Value of International Competencies	26
5. Who is in the Driving Seat?	27
6. Employability is the new black	28
7. What do Employers value in International Graduates?	30
8. Connecting Higher Education and the World of Work	31
9. Understanding cultural DNA strengthens employability	32

The binding of this supplemental volume enables you to remove each article from the cover and file it according to your needs. Also, for your convenience, all articles have been organised by chapter and subchapter online at **www.handbook-internationalisation.com**. This article, A 2.2-6, has been assigned to:

Chapter A: Definitions and driving forces for internationalisation
Subchapter A 2.2: European developments

1. Consumers of Talent

Is the corporate world the consumer of the global talent that is facilitated by universities? Few would argue against the point that with ever expanding globalization, companies are in need for more culturally savvy staff. But what turns a student into a graduate capable of operating successfully across different cultures and continents, and what role in this process do corporate organizations play? Should higher education institutions listen more carefully to labor market needs, or should higher education be in the driver's seat at all times? This article will look at various aspects of the debate, but will focus mainly upon the view of corporate employers across the globe to answer the question, 'what is the current link between higher education institutions and the global world of work'?

To be able to gain a deeper understanding of how corporate employers across the globe view the link between higher education and the professional world, we interviewed 5 global employers from Accenture, AON Hewitt, Croon Elektrotechniek, IBM, and Philips. We have asked them 5 questions. The choice of questions was based on the 2012 QS Global Employer Survey, about which Davina Potts and John Molony reported in the article "Employer Perspectives on International Education and Recruitment: Findings From a New Global Study" in the EAIE Handbook.

The questions asked were:

1. Does your organization value international exposure of recent graduates?
 - a If yes, what is it that you value about this international exposure?
 - b If no, please explain.
2. Do you consider international education as a factor in the recruitment process for new employees i.e. is your organization more or less keen to recruit graduates who for instance spend time abroad during their study?
3. What skills do you expect from a prospective recruit who has had international experience as a student?
4. What level of language skills do you expect from new recruits for global roles?
5. What role, if any, should employers play in fostering certain skills during a student's higher education? Or is this the sole responsibility of universities?

2. From Education to the World of Work

Potts and Molony state, “in the transition from education to work, employers are an important part of the equation. Research suggests that education performs a signaling function to employers (Spence, 1973). In the absence of other evidence of the skills and abilities of prospective employees, education level, quality and academic performance can be proxies for intelligence, skills and knowledge.”

Employers are an important part of the equation in the transition from education to work

That refers to studies which indicate that graduates with study experience abroad are highly attractive to employers (Janson, Schomberg & Teichler, 2009). On the basis of this assumption, we contacted various corporate employers, differing in size, sector and scope, but all with an international outlook on their hiring principles. All considered an international study experience as a pro, but not necessarily a prerequisite. Kaleen Robinson, VP HR outsourcing at AON Hewitt, based in North America and responsible for 17.000 people globally, said, “A global perspective is not required to get hired, but the ones that stand out do often have a global perspective and in an organization that acts as a one-shore business, a global outlook can make or break it. Without the global perspective, you lack the understanding of how different people and different perspectives can contribute.” David Hulseneb, HR Director of Accenture in the Netherlands adds some insight to study abroad experiences by explaining, “spending time abroad definitely enhances people’s independence, it signals maturity, ambition and curiosity. But not every study abroad period is the same. In fact, time spent abroad is getting rather common. If a graduate wants to stand out, a year of high school abroad staying with the friends of their parents will not suffice. That does not signal maturity to us. However, recently I interviewed a girl who went to Singapore for a two year period as au pair and she was able to explain how she adapted to her new life and how she dealt with the cultural challenges she came across. Such an experience offers a lot more in terms of understanding cultural differences and growing as a person. So yes, we do look for international experience, but simply studying abroad is not enough – you have to be able to articulate very concisely what you have learned and how this can benefit your work for our organization.”

3. Turning Experiences into Skills

It is exactly this ability of being able to articulate what the study abroad experience has taught them that students often lack, thus higher education institutions can make a true contribution to the employability of their graduates by strengthening this. Both Monash and Murdoch University in Australia are examples of institutions that have truly understood this. Upon completion of their study abroad period,

Being able to articulate what a study abroad experience has taught you is an ability many students lack.

they offer their students help and advice to identify newly acquired skills and turn these into employability statements to incorporate in their résumés. Alexandra Haaxman, a university career development professional, explains what they teach their study abroad students, “Rarely, if at all, does a job advertisement ask for a ‘former abroad student’, however employers are often looking for skills which a study abroad period provides.” When they are asked to describe their study abroad experience, students often use terms such as ‘fun’ and ‘nice’, and when pushed, they may say, ‘I’ve grown as a person’. However, when looking for work they should learn to turn the question around and think about what an employer would want to know about their study abroad experience. This would include skills, competencies and key experiences that would have a direct and positive effect on their capacity to undertake the position requirements. In turn, they would need to describe these experiences using terminology that employers would connect with. “If you mention, for example, you have been living alone, had to manage a tight budget, and learnt to cope within a new system, you should explicitly state the skills you have acquired during that process. Your experience spans coping with adversity, negotiation, initiative, resourcefulness, problem solving, etc. After we have identified these particular skills, we teach them how to communicate them. Hence we teach students to avoid saying ‘I’m adaptable’, but impress upon them to provide an example that demonstrates it. For instance, we tell them to articulate how they have contributed to an ethnically diverse project team and what their role in that team’s success was.”

Example of Good Practice from Murdoch University, Western Australia

ADDING STUDY ABROAD TO THE RESUME

EDUCATION Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies,
Murdoch University (Expected completion November 2013)
Concentrations in Journalism and Screen Production

INTERNATIONAL and CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE
Danish School of Media and Journalism, Denmark 2012

Photojournalism

- Conducted research into visual story telling using new media technologies
- Compiled a report for presentation to industry picture agency "SCANPIX"
- Presented a seminar on "Women in the Media" events conducted in Western Australia to Danish academics and students.

Additional skills acquired :
Digital magazine production
Designed a PowerPoint presentation in Danish
Industry liaison and business development
Cross-cultural communication skills

PRESENTING EXCHANGE INFORMATION AND COMPETENCIES IN THE COVER LETTER - FIND A WAY TO MAKE IT MATCH

Collectively, my course work, overseas study experience and employment within the hospitality sector have prepared me well for the position of (role) with (name of company).

While enrolled in the Danish School of Media and Journalism, I utilised social media technologies such as *Twitter*, *FaceBook* and *LinkedIn* for research purposes. This gave me the insight to use this technology strategically, together with a deeper understanding as to how such technologies work within a European culture as opposed to the Australian context. Accordingly, I can demonstrate how to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations. As your organisation embraces online technology and attracts international subscribers, my knowledge and competencies can be practically applied.

Provide an opening statement that introduces the experience

Mention the name of the program and where studied

Clearly articulate what was learned from the experience and how this will help in the position that is being applied for

International study experience is a differentiator that makes a graduate looking for work stand out from the crowd.

4. The Value of International Competencies

Based on earlier research we know that organizations, which value international competencies in employees, are international in their operations (The Gallup Organization, 2010). The companies we interviewed for this article are all internationally active, and their need for international savvy people may be obvious. Nevertheless, when we asked “*Do you consider international education as a factor in the recruitment process for new employees?*” all respondents considered it an asset, but certainly not a prerequisite. Rosemary Clunie, IBM recruitment manager for the UK, stated clearly that it is not a requirement, certainly not at undergraduate level, but “it is a differentiator that makes you stand out from the crowd. You are perceived as a more rounded person.” Kaleen Robinson from AON Hewitt agrees, “if you are comparing apples with apples, you go for the one with the global experience.” Anna Jezowska, HRM advisor for Croon in Poland, supports this view: “It is an asset. Such candidates are mainly very open minded and ready to travel – which is very useful for an organization with branches in different countries. It will always be an advantage.” Nicole Bueters, Head of Talent Acquisition with Philips is less outspoken, but does agree with the general principle. “We are definitely keen to meet such candidates during our campus recruitment, we consider it an asset, not because of the international experience as such, but because such candidates fit our overall profile better. We are keen to recruit recent graduates who are able to work in an ever-changing environment, who strive for innovation and can handle change, because that will be the environment they will be working in. Our world is on the move and we need those people who can handle that constant change. If you have spent a year abroad studying, you have proof of your capability of stepping outside of your comfort zone. That is what we want.” This coincides with the third annual Global Employability Survey by Emerging/Trendence where 33.1% focussed on the candidate’s skills and experience. According to Laurent Dupasquier, associate director of Emerging, the commissioning French education consulting firm, “recruiters are more and more acting and thinking globally.” Apart from the more global recruiting perspective, many recruiters are looking for similar skills in their new recruits. These are work experience, ability to work in teams, flexibility, motivation, the willingness to learn, (international) experience and creativity (Ripmeester et al, 2013). The article, ‘Recruiters without Borders: Companies Scout Globally’ from October 27, 2013 in the New York Times, comments on the Emerging/Trendence study and offers some insights into recruitment attitudes. Recruiters are not expecting the university to be international in its outlook or exposure. According to the article, universities should teach practical know-how, the ability to combine theoretical with practical knowledge and transferable skills. Internationalism is something recruiters seem to look for in individual job seekers.

International Student Perspective on skills gained by a study abroad experience

"I feel I have learnt many skills from four semesters on exchange which employers will value and I believe my class mates who have not studied abroad have not been able to develop. First off, flexibility; by having moved to and lived in four countries during my undergraduate degree, I have demonstrated that I have the ability to live and prosper in different cultural environments. Furthermore, I feel that my organizational skills have improved and benefited from coordinating my exchanges. I think I have also shown that I can do things more than just one way, because, as you know, trying to get anything done in Hong Kong is very different to how you get it done in France. Next, I believe that studying abroad improves ones communication skills, and demonstrates an ability to communicate with people from all over the world and from different cultural backgrounds. Simply being in the university environment allows one to do this, especially when it comes to doing group projects for university. As an extension of communication, I feel that language skills are developed extensively during the study abroad process. My French has improved considerably due to my semester in France, which was my main reason for wanting to go there. In comparison with my colleagues at British university X and other native English speakers I have met on exchange, I feel that I am a minority of English speakers in placing an emphasis on learning a second language. From studying abroad I have met many students whose English is excellent, despite it being their second language. I see people like this as a benchmark for my French. I am highly motivated to become fluent in French, not only for its benefits but as a springboard to learn languages such as Spanish and Portuguese. I am currently studying with final year French majors here at Australian University Z. Finally I feel it demonstrates that the student is globally minded and is aware of the modern world and the effects that globalization is having on it.

(Interview with British study abroad student Simon Roche, currently studying in Australia, conducted on 10 October 2013.)

5. Who is in the Driving Seat?

We asked the companies we interviewed about what role employers should play in fostering certain skills during a student's higher education? All employers believed strongly in the connection between higher education and the working world. A higher education institution should not be acting on behalf of the working world, but should be aware of the needs within the labor market, recognizing that most students are not going into academic research fields but will be using their academic knowledge in the global work place. The employers interviewed believed it was their corporate social responsibility to offer internships and summer programs to enhance learning on the job. Croon's Anna Jezowska mentioned that by offering these work placement opportunities students learn to understand how team work and communication are involved in the daily business routine. "By participating in such initiatives students often more easily choose their career path and get inspired by professionals."

Employability as a shared responsibility between the various actors involved.

Notwithstanding the shared responsibility employers feel, universities should provide students with a basic skill set, coupled with theoretical knowledge in their field. Accenture's David Hulsenk made it very clear by stating, "if we hire an economics student we expect the student to be able to read a profit and loss account." So universities should provide the actual knowledge and expertise needed to practice a certain profession. In doing this, they need to keep the labor market's needs at the back of their minds, but higher education institutions should remain in the driver's seat when it comes to training future international talent. This seems particularly important taking into account the struggles employers have when articulating their future labor market needs. This was discussed during the WES International Mobility Forum in Amsterdam on June 7th 2013. What exactly employers value in an employee is rather elusive. "An entrepreneurial-type of graduate with an open mind 'who makes it happen'." To ensure that universities generate graduates that possess the required professional knowledge, academic understanding of a professional field remains crucial. But what about an international perspective, is it up to the individual, as the Emerging/Trendence study seems to suggest, or is there a task here for the higher education institutions?

6. Employability is the new black

According to students the link between higher education and the professional world could intensify.

Based on data from i-graduate's International Student Barometer (ISB), in recent years (between 2009-2012) we have seen an increase of 10% in the importance of employability. The GATE report "Willkommen in Deutschland – Wie internationale Studierende den Hochschulstandort Deutschland wahrnehmen" (Ripmeester, Pollock, 2013) highlights the fact that opportunities for careers, employability and job prospects matter more than ever in study choice and study appreciation of international students. Current international students want to understand what their academic learning will bring them in the global workplace. They want to understand their employability and the value of their degree in the global labor market, and they look to their higher education institution to provide them with insight. For many higher education institutions this is a relatively new area; they have been knowledge and education providers, sometimes for centuries, and now they are *suddenly* confronted with a generation of students that consider employability a standard condition of a successful higher education degree. Not surprisingly some people have referred to 'employability as the new black'. According to international student Simon Roche "The link between higher education and the world of work could be a lot stronger." Of all his international study experiences, he particularly valued the study experience in which the majority of lecturers were career professionals who had turned to teaching. On the one hand, the courses covered a wider variety, and on the other

hand, the lecturers with a business background were much more hands on, gave more detailed and specific real life examples, and consequently provided a stronger link between studying and the working world.

The words of Simon Roche are echoed by many of his fellow international students in a global survey of approximately 7,000 prospective international students annually. The StudentPulse 2013 survey shows that the top 3 of most important drivers for studying abroad are:

- Improving Career Prospects (96%)
- Broadening Experience (95%)
- Improving Language Skills (87%)

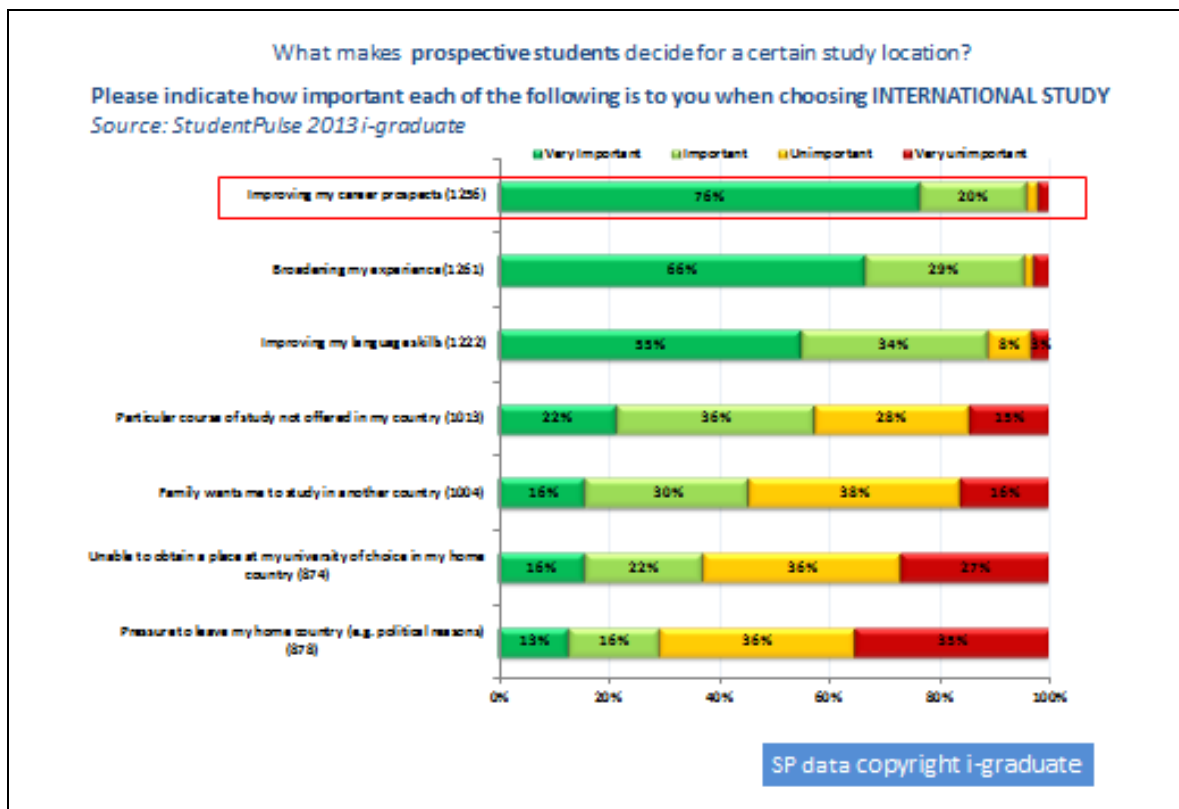


Figure 1

7. What do Employers value in International Graduates?

Ambition, willingness to learn, flexibility to adapt – what skill set does international study experiences offer and how does it benefit the career of alumni?

The question surrounding what skills employers exactly expect from graduates is not an easy one. Most importantly, employers want graduates that possess the required level of professional skills for the job they are trained for. However, in many interviews, a changed view on skills was mentioned. Accenture's Hulsensbek said it, "has moved to a new way of looking at required profiles. We will train people on the job, but to be able to do so we need people who have ambition, the willingness to learn, the flexibility to adapt and the eagerness to grow. That requires great adaptability of both the person and the organization." This resonates with Philips, who states that they score people's learning ability and are keen to recruit graduates who dare to take initiative and have a natural drive for results.

It is exactly those kinds of skills that a study abroad experience instills in graduates, hence validating more than 20 years of EU policy supporting the international mobility of students. An important remark from Caroline Scheepmaker, Director of the Career Centre of the Technical University of Delft, highlights this, "though most companies are inclined to say international exposure is beneficial, few companies are able to truly understand the added value such an experience brings. Hence careers advisors at higher education institutions need to help their students to sell their gained experience while simultaneously (smaller and medium sized) employers need to be supported in understanding what cultural diversity can bring their organization."

According to Mike Ryan of Study Perth, international study exposure instills both improved language skills (including listening, writing and comprehension) and an improved cultural understanding. "The understanding of how things are done, what is an appropriate way to undertake business in that country or how to go about setting up a business network, there is an added plus for the student with international exposure and employers are keen on that knowledge and start to appreciate it a little more."

When it comes to language skills, employers expect fluent English in all their new recruits for global roles. However, next to being able to speak English fluently, the need for more languages is growing. Certain markets, such as France, China, Brazil, require the local language, but the ability to speak more than 2 to 3 languages is considered increasingly important. "We used to just listen to our clients, but now we want our staff, even the junior ones, to be able to move beyond the 'order-taking' and consult directly with the client and solve client-related issues immediately. This requires stronger language skills" according to Kaleen Robinson of AON Hewitt.

8. Connecting Higher Education and the World of Work

For corporate employers, the connection between education and the working world is an obvious one. It is about making the connection. In all the interviews that were held for this article, employers felt it was the main responsibility of higher education to provide the professional knowledge and personal growth, which is associated with a higher education degree. However, employers felt the need for connection and a shared responsibility in bridging the gap from education to the world of work.

Bridging the gap between education and the working world whilst remaining in the driver seat is definitely an option for the higher education sector.

Philips provides nearly 700 internships a year in the Netherlands alone to help students understand how to apply their academic knowledge to a corporate setting. They take part in round table discussions and encourage their staff to provide guest lectures. “For us it is about the connection between higher education and the professional world. Companies should not ‘dictate’ higher education, but we do see a clear need for a shared social responsibility.” AON Hewitt agrees with the notion of joint responsibility, whereby higher education should provide students with the tools and insight to expand their skill set continuously to encourage lifelong learning. For AON Hewitt, employers should build a relationship with the higher education sector. “We feel we have to provide workshops for students and give guest lectures to expand the engagement between our organization and our organizational needs and the higher education sector.”

IBM is a strong supporter of the joint effort, “IBM UK works closely with the UK careers services at higher education institutions. We encourage this relationship by IBM staff teaching at universities hoping to create a win-win situation for all parties involved.”

Croon believes companies should play a role in higher education, “Companies should definitely take part in the education of young, future employees. We believe employers should offer more opportunities, such as summer programs, apprenticeships, company visits, to show students how team work and communication look in the daily routines of companies. By participating in such initiatives students often can more easily choose their career path and get inspired by professionals.”

Accenture believes in the connection between higher education and the professional world too, but feels there is room for improvement. “Whereas the higher education institution should remain in charge of education, we feel that the higher education sector should be more aware of what the labor market wants.”

9. Understanding cultural DNA strengthens employability

A study abroad experience provides graduates with employable skills, but needs the transition from experience into competencies.

Employers seem keen to contribute to the dialogue within the higher education sector and are convinced that a study abroad experience is of value. However, for employers the study abroad experience is not just about the global view it stimulates in graduates, it also acts as a signaling board for those skills they consider essential for the graduates who they want to hire. A study abroad experience signals flexibility, independence, maturity, problem solving and self-management. However, due to exposure to another culture, students will also have learned adaptability, culturally effective communication, teamwork in a diverse team, in addition to thinking outside the box. Spending a period abroad makes people recognize their own cultural DNA and how to ensure that they are able to sustain themselves in an other culture. It may seem that some of these processes may happen nearly automatically when students embark on a study abroad period, however to be able to articulate them and translate those experiences into the skills employers are looking for, most students will depend on their higher education institution, both for training in those skills as well as the ability to relate to those skills to potential employers.

Hence higher education institutions could pay more attention to what a study abroad experience can achieve and how to articulate this into the employability skills employers are keen on. Irrespective of the chosen career path, in tomorrow's job market graduates need a global perspective and need to be able to understand cultural consequences in a diverse team. If the higher education sector teams up with the organizations that most likely will hire their graduates, a more profound understanding of those employability skills would be possible. It is the dialogue between higher education and the working world that enhances this understanding, and it requires a constant dialogue to ensure that the changes in employable skills are recognized.

In conclusion, one can say that higher education is and should remain in the driver's seat when it comes to the design and delivery of higher education, but never without understanding the needs of the labor market. To ensure that those needs are articulated, there should be a constant connection and dialogue between higher education providers and the 'world of work'. This can be organized on a formal level, but most likely the more beneficial situation is through inviting employers to provide guest lectures and to take part in conferences and round table discussions as well as reinforcing the need for training periods for students in order to expose them to the use of academic knowledge in a work-related context.

References

All electronic sources were correct on 5-12-2013

- [1] Davina Potts and John Molony, "Employer Perspectives on International Education and Recruitment: Findings From a New Global Study" in the EAIE Handbook, 15th supplement, II-2013, http://www.handbook-internationalisation.com/%20index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=169
- [2] New York Times, "Recruiters without Borders: Companies Scout Globally", 27 October 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/world/europe/recruiters-without-borders-companies-scout-globally.html?_r=0
- [3] Nannette Ripmeester, Archie Pollock, GATE publication Schriftenreihe: "Willkommen in Deutschland – Wie internationale Studierende den Hochschulstandort Deutschland wahrnehmen", ISBN: 978-3-7639-5317-2, December 2013.
- [4] Nannette Ripmeester, et al, series of 34 country career guides: "Looking for work in ...", 2013, <http://www.labourmobility.com/career-guides/>.
- [5] WES International Mobility Forum, 7 June 2013, www.wes.org/ras/events/IMF_2013_AmsterdamProgram.pdf
- [6] Employability is the new black, EAIE Blog posts: <http://www.eaie.org/blog/employability-are-you-doing-enough-for-your-students/>
- [7] Caroline Scheepmaker, Nannette Ripmeester, "Employability: Matching employer needs with student capabilities", 12 December 2012, EAIE, <http://www.eaie.org/blog/matching-employer-needs-with-student-capabilities/>
- [8] i-graduate runs the International Student Barometer among international students in 24 countries. The StudentPulse is an annual survey among prospective international students: <http://www.i-graduate.org/services/studentpulse/>

Interviews held for this article:

- [9] 26 September 2013: Alexandra Haaxman, Career Development and Employment Advisor at Murdoch University in Western Australia, Australia
- [10] 27 September 2013: Mike Ryan, Executive Director, StudyPerth, Perth, Australia
- [11] 2 October 2013: Anna Jezowska, HRM Advisor, Croon Elektrotechniek, Warsaw, Poland
- [12] 2 October 2013: Kaleen Robinson HR Leader & Patrick Burke, Vice President, Client Solutions, Aon Hewitt, Lincolnshire, Illinois, USA
- [13] 2 October 2013: David Hulsenbek, HR Director, Accenture, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- [14] 3 October 2013: Caroline Scheepmaker, Manager Career Centre, Technical University Delft, Delft, The Netherlands
- [15] 3 October 2013: Rosemary Clunie, Recruitment Manager, IBM UK Human Resources & Rob Smith, Program Manager, Office of the Chief Technology Officer, IBM Software Group, Hursley, United Kingdom

- [16] 3 October 2013: Nicole Bueters, Head of Talent Acquisition Benelux-UK & Global TA Account Manager Consumer Lifestyle, Philips Electronics, Eindhoven, The Netherlands
- [17] 10 October 2013: Simon Roche, British student, with international study experience in Toulouse (France), Perth (Western Australia), Hong Kong (China) and the UK

Biography:

Nannette Ripmeester holds a MA degree from the University of Amsterdam. She is founder and director of Expertise in Labour Mobility (ELM), based in Rotterdam. ELM is specialized in customized solutions for international labor mobility. Nannette holds extensive knowledge on what makes graduates internationally employable by working with large corporate clients and higher education institutions across the globe. With her respective knowledge on what makes people mobile, Nannette regularly advises governments and organizations on how to further increase the connection between recent graduates and their future job opportunities. Nannette combines her role for ELM with her work as Director Client Services Europe for i-graduate, which is a leading benchmarking organization responsible for the International Student Barometer (ISB). With 1.7 million student responses, the ISB is the largest student survey in the world. With over 20 years of advising employers, universities and governments on graduate mobility, Nannette is one of Europe's leading experts on mobility for study and work.

Contact: n.ripmeester@labourmobility.com