



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS, MOVING TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

CareerChats between global employers, international students & Higher Education Professionals, to explore the alignment between career needs, employability expectations and related motivations.

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken” – is probably the best career advice to give to young people, and we should for sure thank Oscar Wilde for his wise words. But discovering and being yourself is not easy in this fast-paced, technology-driven world. Especially for graduates who are about to move into the world of work, this presents a challenge. How can we support young people to live their dreams? We have interviewed employers, students and HEI professionals to discuss matters around career preparation and employability. The **CareerChats** help us close the gap between education and the world of work to help students become the most talented version of themselves, because “the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

When you are challenged to follow your dreams, it always helps if someone can show you the way. But to what extent do Higher Education Institutions (HEI) need to support their students in bridging the gap between education and the world of work?

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

“ There are seven characteristics I look for in a candidate: common sense, taking responsibility, integrity, likability, competence, courage and personal strength. ”

Stuart Jehan, Strategic Fund Development Manager, Robeco, Luxembourg/the Netherlands

We have asked **global employers** what main skills they are looking for in a candidate. Each employer indicated the need to be on top of your subject. “If you hire a software engineer, you assume they have the necessary skills.” However, there is a big demand for more than just technical skills. “As an organization, we have four key skills which all staff are regularly appraised on. These are client centricity, innovation, sustainability and connecting. However, as an individual, there are seven characteristics which I personally look for in a candidate: common sense, taking responsibility, integrity, likability, competence, courage and personal strength.” says Stuart Jehan, Strategic Fund Development Manager at Robeco in Luxembourg. At Philips and IBM they are looking for enthusiastic change-enablers and flexible team workers, Vopak is looking for street-wise innovators. Whether you call it soft skills, transnational skills, transferable skills, or 21st century skills; these are the skills that will get candidates hired. The skills that you will need as a professional to succeed in today’s, but more importantly, tomorrow’s world. And how can our students show they possess those skills? According to Selene Siregar, recruiter at Michael Page in Jakarta, “students need to be able to identify their own strength and weakness. Ideally, students can think on their feet and relate the answers to their skills and experience which can be beneficial to a prospective employer.”

This ability to understand what skills an employer might be looking for, seems not very well developed in recent graduates. “Many do not recognise some of the key skills they may already possess – even if gained in a completely different scenario – or do not realize the high importance of soft skills. For instance, a part-time job serving coffee, although this may not seem relevant for an office job, can indicate your skills in sales and/or dealing with people,” mentions Stuart Jehan. His words are echoed by many other employers. In general, recent graduates do not realize what they have to offer a prospective employer. This reflection on yourself, your capabilities, your skills and how you can apply your academic knowledge to the ‘real world’ is critically evaluated by employers. However, if we ask the same question to **HigherEd Professionals**, the insight is slightly different, nearly half of them said “I think our graduates are well prepared in terms of understanding job market requirements given the nature of our programmes.” Although some do recognise the challenges, such as Adriana Perez Encinas from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, who says “I think the students are not so well-informed, at least till some months before graduation. And I do believe they experience uncertainty.” Brett Berquist from the University of Auckland states that “in the broadest terms, most undergraduates finish their studies with a mystical understanding of how the job market works.” Maybe the solution lies in the long summer breaks they have in Finland, as Salla Jutila from University of Lapland explains: “during those long summer breaks, Finnish school kids and students gain work experience and it helps them to understand job requirements better.”

Whatever way we move ahead in helping our **students** to prepare for the labour market, is depending on what decision a HEI makes, but the fact that something needs to happen is clear if we look at what students and employers say. “I expect the university to provide me with sufficient connections and knowledge to find a good job” says Olga Spinu, a Romanian student studying in Rotterdam. Or as Dutch Josje Diepeveen says “I do not expect a university to take me by the hand but I do expect help and support to make the transition to working life.”

We asked the HigherEd Professionals whether they believe it is the role of a Higher Education Institution to prepare students for their first steps on the labour market. Catherine Chapeau, Responsable Entreprise Insertion Emploi at Grenoble INP states that “the purpose of a higher education degree is to allow a student to exercise a professional activity in connection with their professional project. So, yes the role of a university is to prepare the student to enter the labour market but also to enable them to adapt and evolve on this **labour market**.” In line with this Diganta Talukdar, an Indian student studying in Groningen says he expects his university degree should support him into the future of work. “The need for jobs or employment may change and my degree should not be influenced by those changes.” Emma Hagg from the Swedish Karolinska Institutet mentions that Swedish regulations require a focus on employability. “We have a responsibility to make our students employable and that includes preparing them for the transition to the labour market, irrespective whether this is inside or outside academia. Both career paths are equally important.” Katie Orr, Director International of Nova Scotia Community College in Halifax thinks it is essential for higher education to bridge the gap. Certainly for Community Colleges as they are measured on it. Geoff Wilmhurst, Vice President Partnerships for Camosun College, agrees it is important, but also thinks there are different roles for different levels of HE. “At the College level this is vital to what we do and is in fact our raison d’etre. At a University level there is room, in my opinion, to provide an education that is related to general thinking and problem solving that is not necessarily related to a specific job outcome.”

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Catherine Chapeau Responsable Entreprise Insertion Emploi at Grenoble INP

That brings us back to what we understand under **employability**. Do we believe it is ‘just’ the job after graduation or providing people with the ability and the agility to be prepared for the ‘rest of their lives’? Do we give them a fish or do we teach them to fish? We believe it is preparing for the rest of their lives.

“I expect the university to provide me with sufficient connections and knowledge to find a good job.”

Olga Spinu, Romanian student studying in the Netherlands

Students & Alumni

Josje Diepeveen, Dutch
Stacy Hosana, Rwandese
Inessa Khemii, Russian
Irina Kurochkina, Russian
Maya Malyszko, Polish
Weronika Naklicka, Polish
Olga Spinu, Romanian
Diganta Talukdar, Indian
Tim Wuisman, Dutch

Employers

Stuart Jehan, Robeco, Luxembourg
Andrea Bresch, Philips, Amsterdam
Kashif Taj, IBM, Manchester
Jenny Taylor, IBM, London
Maarten Vaags, IBM, Rotterdam
Selene Siregar, Michael Page, Jakarta

HigherEd Professionals

Brett Berquist, University of Auckland
Catherine Chapeau, University of Grenoble Alpes
Emma Hägg, Karolinska Institutet
Yvonne Jordens-Streng, University of Groningen
Salla Jutila, University of Lapland
Sonja Knutson, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Katie Orr, Nova Scotia Community College
Adriana Perez Encinas, UA de Madrid
Martijn Roos, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Geoff Wilmhurst, Camosun College