

# CAREERPROFESSOR



**Nannette Ripmeester** is director of Expertise in Labour Mobility (ELM). ELM specializes for over 20 years in customising solutions for international labour mobility. Together with her team, Nannette works under the motto of 'making mobility work'. She is considered an expert on global mobility trends and how to enhance the connection between recent graduates and their future job opportunities.

## Why did employability become an area of focus of your work?

As part of my Master's Degree in European Studies at the University of Amsterdam, I had to write a thesis. At that moment, there was a big problem on the labor market in the Netherlands and I thought how interesting it would be to look at the mismatch between what the universities provided and the labor market required. Since I was studying European Studies at that time, I focused on the European mismatch regarding this subject. It was the beginning of my research. Since then, I have always been interested in labor mobility, how to connect people to the labor market, and what roles do universities, societies and companies play in this space.

## How does globalization influence the progress of employability?

One of the effects of globalization on employability gives rise to the assumption and reflection that skills are the same everywhere when it is not. When you ask employers from other countries what set of skills do they look for in a candidate, you hear that they look for slightly different skills. I think globalization is here to stay. It also shows us how vulnerable our society is now that we are interlinked. Even though the world is getting more cosmopolitan, I think almost the opposite happens. Regionalization becomes more important because people want to belong to something. People want to belong to smaller entities.

## What's the difference between 'Hard Skills' and 'Soft Skills'?

Hard skills are the set of skills you learn at university. These are the skills required for your job. It is interesting, however, that if you talk to certain employers, they'll say that students need to learn "how to learn and how to deal with the information." For instance, computer hardware company IBM was present in Liverpool for the EAIE, a conference for higher education, and one of its recruiters pointed out to "stop teaching [the students] all the knowledge because by the time they graduate, it's outdated knowledge." What we need is people who are able to pick up new things quickly and have developed all the other skills that they need to fulfill their job responsibilities. Maybe we should stop calling it "soft skills" and start referring to them as "professional skills" since these skills are essential for people's professional futures. "Soft skills" is how people describe them; it is how we interact as human beings. However, if you say "soft", it sounds as if it doesn't matter, but it matters quite a lot. I think if you look at how recruiters select, they look at the CV and it has to contain indications of the subject matter knowledge plus the skills you need to be able to do the job. In job interviews, they will briefly test whether you have these hard skills, then they'll spend most of the time trying to sense: does this person have the skills that I believe will allow him or her to function within my team, within the environment of our organization? Will this person be able to deal with clients, work under pressure, and meet deadlines? I think universities can train them

also simply by having people work in teams or on certain group assignments. There are a lot of methods you can use to train people (almost) in a playful manner without them knowing that they're acquiring a skill.

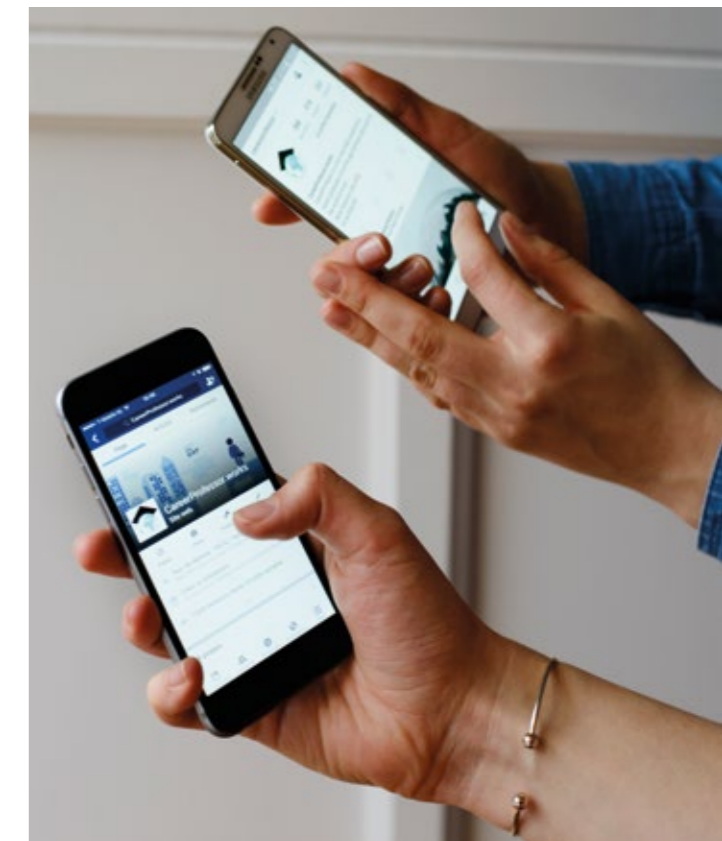
starting salary, CV or resume models, the main employers in that country, how feedback is given, and how teamwork works in that country. That's the whole idea about it: to think and understand how people do things differently in different countries and cultures.

## How can international experience affect the employability of the students?

I think it is essential because you learn something that you won't learn anywhere else; all the things that help a person to grow. It is certainly helpful when it comes to employability and creating a better employability portfolio. I think for international programs, we have to ensure that the students are aware of the skill-learning activities and have real programs where they experience valuable and employability-related situations. What the employers often mention is the ability of a student to tell his or her story. Even if you have (very) little exposure to international programs and experiences, but you are well-integrated in the international (student) community and do all kinds of services and assistance there, you might still be able to tick off all the boxes within the criteria. In such cases, you have to talk, to share your experience, in a manner that will make the employers say, "Wow! This is the person I'm looking for!"

## What does the CareerProfessor app offer to students?

CareerProfessor trains intercultural employability skills that make you successful in a global world. We want students to understand that there are three different areas: job hunting, social interaction, and doing business. We use gamification in CareerProfessor: in a rather playful manner, we encourage students to learn about cultural differences and think about differences. The idea of the game is not to choose the right answer, but to think and realize that people do things differently. The app also has a reward system: students can win an "unlock another country" reward and those country profiles will tell you the top employability skills,



Learn more: [www.careerprofessor.works](http://www.careerprofessor.works)