

# UNIVERSITIES, EMPLOYABILITY AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT: REPOSITIONING HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA, KENYA, NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA



International  
**Higher Education**

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# Acknowledgements

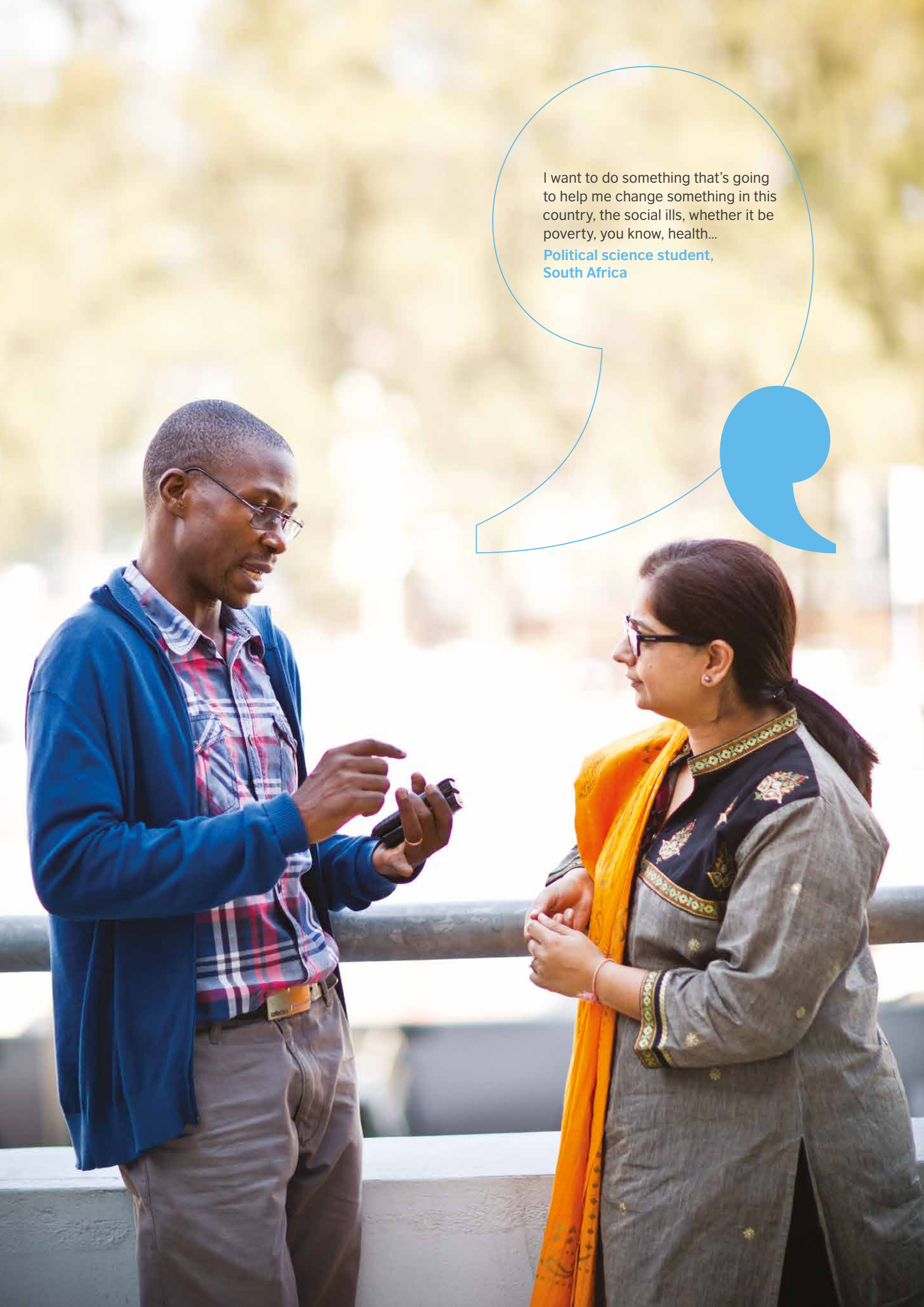
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This report was authored by Tristan McCowan, Melanie Walker, Sam Fongwa, Ibrahim Oanda, Daniel Sifuna, Segun Adedeji, Stephen Oyebade, Eric Daniel Ananga, Vincent Adzahlie-Mensah and Emmanuel Tamanja.

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A photograph of a man and a woman standing outdoors, engaged in a conversation. The man, on the left, is wearing a blue jacket over a plaid shirt and glasses, and is holding a small object in his hands. The woman, on the right, is wearing a grey tunic with a yellow shawl and glasses. A large, light blue speech bubble is positioned above them, containing text. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a railing.

I want to do something that's going to help me change something in this country, the social ills, whether it be poverty, you know, health...

**Political science student,  
South Africa**

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

Tristan McCowan

## The promise and challenge of higher education in Africa

'[T]he dream...is just to empower people and just make our countries, our communities, a better living environment for all ... if we are exposed to this and we get to a level where she can write books about history and that changes the education curriculum, that already means that there are people who are inspired and are empowered to do something for themselves. If this dream is to change the system of governance – not necessarily change but to improve the system of government – that means entirely the whole country will be improved... I want to do something that's going to help me change something in this country, the social ills, whether it be poverty, you know, health ... just do something that's going to get the next person to their next level...'

This statement, from a young political science student in South Africa, highlights the transformative potential of higher education – in changing individuals' lives, but also changing societies for the better. She – and the other two students interviewed with her – had come from poor rural backgrounds and had beaten the odds in getting to university. Like thousands of others across the continent, they were committed to using that opportunity to improve the lives of others.

Higher education is now acknowledged as being pivotal for development at all levels. Its role in fostering high level research and technological capacity in the knowledge economy is well recognised, but it has another fundamental role – that of forming the professionals who will play major roles in the provision of health, education and a range of other services, as well as public administration. The positive impact of higher education, therefore, is not restricted to those who directly study in universities, but can potentially ripple out through the whole of society, as emphasised in the declaration of UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education in 1988:<sup>1</sup>

Developing entrepreneurial skills and initiative should become major concerns of higher education, in order to facilitate employability of graduates who will increasingly be called upon to be not only job seekers but also and above all to become job creators. Higher education institutions should give the opportunity to students to fully develop their own abilities with a sense of social responsibility, educating them to become full participants in democratic society and promoters of changes that will foster equity and justice.

The process leading up to the development of the new Sustainable Development Goals involved much more discussion of higher education than during the lead up to the previous

Millennium Development Goals, showing the increasing interest in this level of education after a period of relative neglect. Major regional events such as the African Higher Education Summit (Dakar, Senegal) in March 2015 have affirmed this renewed recognition. The idea that the development of higher education is only justified for wealthier countries, or a goal to be pursued after universal primary and secondary education have been achieved, has been broadly discredited. It is now acknowledged that even the poorest countries in the world require and deserve a vibrant higher education sector, producing professionals for the public sector, creating innovators to develop local solutions to problems, carrying out research relevant to development needs and providing direct support to communities.

Africa currently boasts some of the fastest-growing economies in the world,<sup>2</sup> and the region has benefited from increased inward investment, growing trade and tourism, and expansion of the service sector.<sup>3</sup> However, the extractive industries on which a number of countries rely still leave their economies vulnerable to fluctuations in international commodity markets, and the resources on which they depend will eventually be exhausted. It is essential that African countries diversify their economies and develop the high levels of knowledge production and skills needed to sustain high-tech and creative industries.

1. World Conference on Higher Education (1998) *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action*. UNESCO.
2. Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ivory Coast had the second, third and fourth fastest growing economies in 2014. (World Bank (2016) GDP growth (annual per cent). Available online at: [http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?order=wbapi\\_data\\_value\\_2014+wbapi\\_data\\_value+wbapi\\_data\\_value-last&sort=desc](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?order=wbapi_data_value_2014+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=desc) )
3. The Economist (2015) *The twilight of the resource curse?* January 10. Available online at: [www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21638141-africas-growth-being-powered-things-other-commodities-twilight](http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21638141-africas-growth-being-powered-things-other-commodities-twilight)



Furthermore, the region has the fastest growing youth population in the world, with its current 15–24 age group population of 226 million set to increase by 42 per cent by 2030.<sup>4</sup> This so-called ‘youth bulge’ can be a motor for prosperity for all in the region if it is appropriately harnessed, but the prospects for doing so depend to a large extent on universally available and high quality education at all levels. Failure to address the educational aspirations and needs of the youth is likely to lead not only to sluggish economic growth, but also to youth unrest, a lingering sense of injustice and lack of purpose, and, in the most extreme cases, to extremism and violence.

There is no doubting the impressive growth of higher education systems across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The total number of enrolments in the region increased from 2.3 million in 1999 to 6.6 million in 2013 – of the global regions, only Asia had a faster growth rate in this period.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, SSA still has a low gross enrolment ratio of 8.17 per cent (compared to the global rate of 32.88 per cent),<sup>6</sup> on account of the late development of university systems, and, until recently, restriction of access to a very small elite, in the face of a growing youth population. In recent years, rapid expansion has been enabled by liberalisation of private sector involvement, which has allowed

for the entrance of a number of new providers, particularly faith-based organisations, alongside the creation of new regional public universities and expansion of existing ones. In Kenya, for example, enrolments soared from 219,000 to 444,000 in just three years between 2012 and 2015.<sup>7</sup> This expansion has gone some way towards meeting the considerable unmet demand, and absorbing the increasing numbers of secondary school leavers.<sup>8</sup>

However, attention to quantity has not always been accompanied by an adequate emphasis on quality. Many institutions suffer from very large class sizes, with numbers in excess of 500 in an undergraduate class being common, on account of the lack of funds to recruit lecturers and, in some cases, a shortage of appropriately qualified candidates. In addition, there are complaints of inadequate physical infrastructure, lack of laboratories and equipment for scientific, engineering and agricultural studies, outdated curricula, ineffective pedagogical methods and inefficient administration.<sup>9</sup> In many cases, these challenges are the direct result of a rapid expansion of the system without corresponding increases in funding or concern for the students’ learning experience. These challenges are seen in both the public and private sectors, with regulation difficult in the latter in the context of rapid growth spurred on by ever-buoyant student demand,<sup>10</sup> and

governance issues hampering quality improvement efforts in the former.

The lessons have not, therefore, been learned from primary education, which, following the introduction of fee removal policies and the support of international agencies through the Education for All initiative, expanded rapidly from the 1990s onwards, but encountered significant problems of teacher shortages and strained infrastructure. Simply piling more bodies into universities without adequate attention to the conditions for learning reduces the impact of university study, and at worst can waste precious years of young people’s lives, dash the high hopes of their families and incur debt. Meaningful access to higher education means engaging in a high quality and relevant course that will open opportunities in the broader society.

These quality challenges have translated into dissatisfaction with graduate skills in the labour market. While the situation of graduates is uneven across the region, a recent study by the Inter-University Council for East Africa estimated that over half of all graduates in the sub-region are inadequately prepared for employment.<sup>11</sup> In many contexts, graduates struggle to find work. For example, in 2015 the Kenyan judiciary had to sift through as many as 80,000 applications for the 1,000 posts it had advertised, while 3,000 candidates

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4. United Nations Population Division (2015) *Youth population trends and sustainable development*. Available online at: [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts\\_2015-1.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2015-1.pdf)
  5. UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) (2016a) *Education: enrolment by level of education*. Available online at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=142&lang=en>
  6. UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) (2016b) *Education: gross enrolment ratio by level of education*. Available online at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=142&lang=en>
  7. Republic of Kenya (2015) *Economic Survey*. Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.
  8. McCowan, T (2014) *Can higher education solve Africa’s job crisis? Understanding graduate employability in Sub-Saharan Africa*. British Council. Available online at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/graduate\\_employability\\_in\\_ssa\\_final-web.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/graduate_employability_in_ssa_final-web.pdf)
  9. Gudo, CO, Olol, MA, Oanda, IO (2011) University expansion in Kenya and issues of quality education: challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2/20: 203–214; Wangenge-Ouma, G (2007) Higher education marketisation and its discontents: the case of quality in Kenya. *Higher Education* 56/4: 457–471.
  10. Havergal, C (2015) Africa’s ‘teaching shops’: the rise of private universities. *Times Higher Education*, 22 October. Available online at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/africas-teaching-shops-the-rise-of-private-universities>
  11. Inter-University Council for East Africa, IUCEA (2014) *Regional higher education qualifications gaps Vol II*.

applied for 28 posts in the Ports Authority. In many cases, degree holders are forced to apply for posts that require lower qualifications, and sometimes hide their higher qualifications for fear of being disqualified. The desperate search for graduate jobs ended in tragedy in Nigeria in 2014, as candidates for the Immigration Service thronging outside recruitment centres across the country stampeded, leading to the deaths of 16 people.

Furthermore, brain drain has been exacerbated by both the lack of availability of quality higher education and the lack of employment opportunities, leading to a substantial loss of talent and expertise. There are, in summary, five principal challenges facing higher education systems in the region:

1. *Expansion.* In spite of the impressive increases in enrolments in recent years there is still considerable unmet demand, and the region still lags well behind global average levels of enrolment.
2. *Equity.* Access to universities is for the most part restricted to the privileged few, with under-representation of many groups, including women (with the exception of South Africa), lower-income groups, those from rural areas and those with disabilities.
3. *Quality.* Rapid expansion has placed considerable strain on university infrastructure, and there are substantial concerns about students' learning outcomes.
4. *Links.* Universities do not always have strong relationships with broader society, including local communities, schools and employers.

5. *Research and data.* Most higher education systems lack adequate information in many areas, even relating to basic enrolments, and there are significant needs for research on universities and their impact.

These challenges need to be faced head-on if the extraordinary potential of higher education is to be realised. Indeed, there are already a range of initiatives at local, national and international levels that are tackling these challenges and transforming institutions. Individual lecturers, institutional management and national agencies – in some cases supported by international bodies – are introducing new approaches and measures, and implementing reforms intended to transform the quality of their systems and open up opportunities for new cohorts of students. A number of these inspiring innovations will be outlined in the report that follows.

The project from which this report emerges – *Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development* – directly addressed the fifth of the challenges listed above: the shortage of research on the content and outcomes of university education, especially with respect to its inclusiveness and ability to produce employable graduates. While this is a propitious moment for higher education – given the renewed support from supranational agencies and national governments – it is essential to have sound knowledge of the current system's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the nature and outcomes of recent attempts to improve quality, as a basis on which to develop policy. In addition, the analysis addresses the other four challenges through the lens of employability. This report presents the findings of

the research project, analysing the challenges of graduate employability and the role of universities in four countries – Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. The report summarises the outcomes of three years of in-depth research with selected institutions in these countries, leading to recommendations for ways forward for institutions and governments in the region. It should be read in conjunction with other publications that have emerged from the project, which provide more detailed accounts of particular countries and specific themes. The following section provides a fuller outline of the research project.

## Background to the project

The research project *Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development* was commissioned by the British Council in 2012 in the context of the organisation's broader higher education programme in SSA. It emerged from a seven-country scoping study conducted in 2011, which identified a range of challenges faced in the region that were seen to limit the positive impact of higher education on society, and particularly to constrain its ability to produce employable graduates. The research project that was subsequently proposed sought to identify the changes that need to be made in universities so as to make them more effective in enhancing the employability of their graduates. The project was underpinned by a commitment to the development of higher education systems across the participating countries, as part of a broader process of social transformation for the benefit of all. In particular, the project has been informed by the human development and capabilities approaches, which

emphasise the need for a broad vision of human well-being (involving cultural and political as well as economic elements), recognise the diversity of individuals and societies, and acknowledge the need to ensure that all human beings have the wherewithal to pursue the life goals they value.

The research project ran from March 2013 to February 2016, and involved five countries – Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and for comparative purposes, the UK. The research was led by the UCL Institute of Education, London, and was conducted in partnership with four universities, one in each of the focus countries: University of Education, Winneba, Ghana; Kenyatta University, Kenya; University of Ibadan, Nigeria; and University of the Free State, South Africa.

In addition to developing new knowledge about the role of universities, it also aimed to engage a range of stakeholders and promote effective practice. Consequently, dissemination and stakeholder engagement events have been built into the research schedule at every stage. Each country had a stakeholder group involving relevant policymakers, academics, university senior management and employers that met periodically to discuss, develop and disseminate the work. In each country, the research partners studied a number of institutions.

The partnership network of the five lead universities (in addition to the broader group of case study institutions) was also intended to have a role in promoting innovation and successful practice relating to employability and, more broadly, ways of improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The research addressed the following questions:

#### Main research questions

- Given the increasing global importance attached to employability, how are universities in the five countries contributing to the preparation of graduates for work and participation in society?
- Furthermore, how does a cross-country comparative perspective influence understandings and explanations of graduate employability, and with what implications for policy and practice?

#### Sub-questions

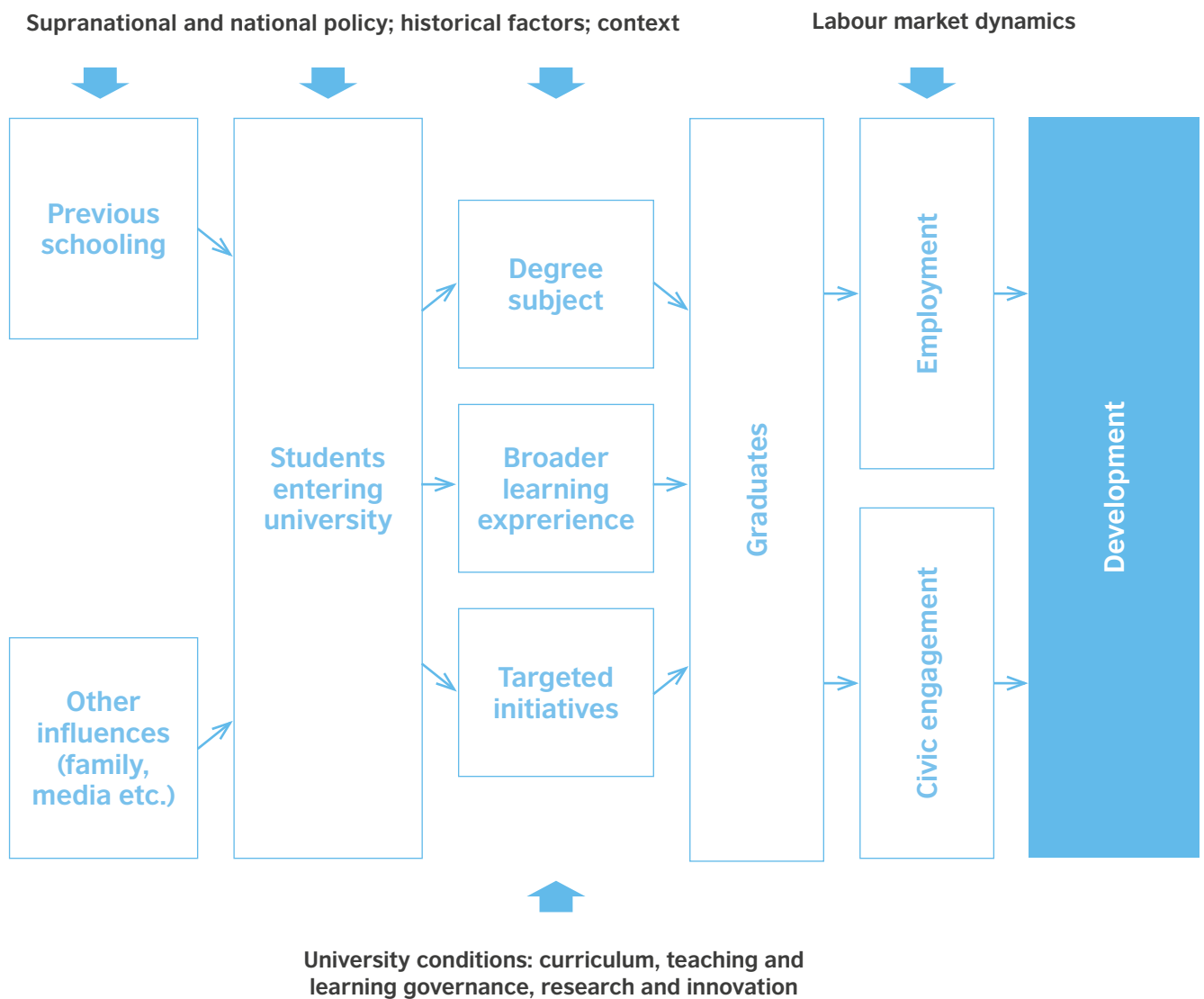
- How do students, employers and universities understand employability and the contribution of graduates to society?
- How is graduate readiness for the world of work and participation in society perceived? What are students' attributes (knowledge, skills, values) on leaving university?

- How have universities sought to enable the development of employable graduates through the curriculum and targeted initiatives, with what outcomes and why?
- How do universities in the five countries address widening participation, so that access, completion and preparation for the world of work are more inclusive?
- Which university conditions of governance, teaching and learning quality, and research and innovation support the education of employable graduates?
- Which contextual and policy conditions enable or restrict the education of employable graduates?

The research study, therefore, focuses primarily on the *teaching* function of universities, rather than *research* and *community engagement* – while acknowledging that the latter two also play an essential part of the university's role in enhancing a country's development. In addition, in order to maintain a viable scope, it focuses primarily on undergraduate education, rather than postgraduate level and the training of researchers, although there are issues of employability relevant to all levels.



The impact of different factors within the university on employability and on local and national development (involving positive economic and social transformation) – and their conditioning by factors outside – are portrayed in the following chart:



This framework allows us to place the impact of university education in perspective. Higher education influences students in three ways: through their formal studies, their experiences more broadly in the university (including extra-curricular activities such as music, drama and sports, participation in student societies, the students' union etc.) and targeted employability initiatives such as careers advice and entrepreneurship courses. However, the influence of university education on students is conditioned by their previous experiences, including their school education and everyday lives. Furthermore, the university experience is located within a web of national and institutional policy and contextual factors. Finally, while university experience is significant in terms of determining a graduate's employment and other forms of participation in society, it is not the only influence, with labour market dynamics also playing a significant role.

In order to address the research questions outlined above, data collection and dissemination in each of the four African countries was organised in the following three phases:

### Phase 1

Overview of national level trends involving:

- a.** A literature review of existing published research on employability and higher education.
- b.** An analysis of relevant statistical information at national level.
- c.** Assessment of relevant national policy on higher education and employability.
- d.** Interviews with policymakers and other key stakeholders.

### Phase 2

In-depth analysis of employability practice within a small number of case study institutions:

- Institutional statistical information.
- Governance documents and interviews.
- University staff interviews.
- Students:
  - cohort interviews
  - questionnaire
  - focus groups
  - follow-up interviews.
- Observations.
- Targeted initiatives.

### Phase 3

Build, develop and share models of effective practice:

- a.** Innovative practice cases.
- b.** Employer survey.
- c.** Employability scorecard.
- d.** University action plans.
- e.** Main dissemination of findings to stakeholders.
- f.** Academic publications.
- g.** Policy dialogues.

The second phase was by far the most substantial, and involved extensive qualitative and quantitative data collection in the case study universities. The 'cohort interviews' were carried out with a group of 12 final year students in each university: there was then a follow-up interview with the same students a year later, to explore how their perceptions had changed following their entry into job-seeking and the labour market. A questionnaire survey of a total of approximately 6,000 final year students across all of the institutions was also carried out to gauge their views on their institutions

and their assessment of their prospects for employment. The data collection and analysis are described in the country chapters that follow, and further details are available in the previous project reports.

As outlined above, the second phase of the research involved the selection of case study universities in each country, as listed below:

Ghana
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Ghana</li> <li>• Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology</li> <li>• University for Development Studies</li> <li>• Ashesi University</li> </ul>
Kenya
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Nairobi</li> <li>• Moi University</li> <li>• Daystar University</li> </ul>
Nigeria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imo State University</li> <li>• University of Ibadan</li> <li>• Bingham University</li> </ul>
South Africa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of the Witwatersrand</li> <li>• University of the Free State</li> <li>• Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University</li> <li>• University of Venda</li> </ul>

These universities were selected to cover the major institutional forms, including public and private, those located in the capital and elsewhere in the country, academic and vocational, and old and new. They are not intended to be representative of the entire higher education system. The purpose of the case studies was to generate in-depth perspectives on the processes of formation of graduate attributes through teaching and learning and

career support, and the ways in which specific activities were informed by institutional and national policies. For the most part institutions have not been anonymised since the contextual factors are important for understanding the data. However, the identity of the institution has not been stated in some cases in which the authors felt that it would present an unconstructive or misleading comparison. The in-depth analyses of the selected universities were complemented by national overviews in each of the countries.

Accounts of the findings from the second phase, particularly data collection with students, have been provided in previous publications.<sup>12</sup> This report therefore provides an overview of the findings across the three years of the project, with particular emphasis on the third phase. First, it reports on the findings from a survey of employers in each of the four countries. In each case, a selection of employers in the public and private sectors were surveyed, representing a range of different fields (including manufacturing, leisure and tourism, financial services, education, civil service, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and agriculture). Due to difficulties of access, it was not possible in all cases to obtain representation from all these areas (for example, in some contexts it was not possible to interview many public sector representatives). In some cases, employer organisations were also included in the sample. Face-to-face or telephone interviews, or in some cases written questionnaires, were conducted to gauge employers' views

on their recruitment needs, their preferences for different kinds of graduate, the skill levels of the graduates they had recruited, and their perceptions of the contribution of the university.

Second, three innovative cases were chosen in each country, to provide examples of experimentation and effective practice at local level. Some of these were located in one of the 14 case study institutions, while some were drawn from other universities. Vignettes of each of these cases are provided in this report, drawing on documentary sources and key informant interviews, to identify the key aims, activities and outcomes of the initiatives. These cases captured diverse forms of intervention related to employability: most common were business incubators and entrepreneurship courses, but examples of leadership development, careers advice, teaching and learning reform, other skills development programmes and industry links were also identified.

The last area of new data that this report presents are the follow-up interviews with the 12 students at each institution, who had been interviewed first when they were about to graduate. The follow-up interview one year after graduation aimed to identify any changes in their perceptions that had taken place during the process of making choices on careers, looking for jobs and, in some cases, taking up full-time employment. In the in-depth interviews, the graduates were asked to reflect on their experiences since leaving university, what they felt they

had gained from their studies and what advice they would give to new students arriving at the university.

As noted above, the UK was also a partner country in the research project. Given the significant economic, social and cultural differences from the African countries, it was not considered fruitful to conduct the same form of data collection in universities in the UK. Instead, the UK team conducted four pieces of research to inform the emerging findings from the African countries. The first of these related to institutional partnerships: it assessed the potential of UK–Africa university links for enhancing employability and identified some principles for effective partnership working from the experience of UK and African policymakers and universities with a variety of partnership links.<sup>13</sup> The second piece of research was a systematic review of research studies on employability interventions globally, in order to map the available evidence and identify impactful practices in different contexts.

A further two pieces of research were carried out to complement the main study. An early finding of the project was that concerns about graduate attributes were strongly linked to poor quality learning and teaching environments in universities. As a result, it was considered essential to carry out some dedicated research on teaching quality, focusing particularly on support mechanisms for lecturers to develop their practice, outlined in the Enhancing Teaching report.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Ananga, E (2015) *University Education, Employability and Skills Gap in Ghana: Perspectives of Students*. Research brief, British Council; Oanda, I, Sifuna, D and Ongwenyi, Z (2015) *Expansion of University Education and the Challenges of Quality and Graduate Employability in Kenya*. Research brief, British Council; Adediji, S and Oyeade, S (2015) *Graduate Employability in Nigeria: Thoughts, Travails and Tactics*. Research brief, British Council; Walker, M (2015) *Student Perceptions of Employability and Inclusive Development: South Africa*. Research brief, British Council. Available online at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2.5\\_student-perceptions-of-employability-inclusivity.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2.5_student-perceptions-of-employability-inclusivity.pdf); McCowan, T (2015a) *Students in the Driving Seat*. British Council. Available online at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2.5\\_students-in-the-driving-seat\\_report\\_overview.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2.5_students-in-the-driving-seat_report_overview.pdf)
  13. Smail, A (2015) *Bridging the Gap: Enabling Effective UK–Africa University Partnerships*. British Council. Available online at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2.5\\_bridging-the-gap.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2.5_bridging-the-gap.pdf); Schowengerdt, B (2016) *Building Effective UK-Africa University Partnerships: Perspectives from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa*. British Council.
  14. Brewis, E and McCowan, T (2016) *Enhancing teaching in African higher education*. British Council.

The focus of the project was on universities' contribution, rather than labour market dynamics. However, employability cannot be fully understood without evidence on the labour market destinations of graduates, and any such analysis has been severely restricted by the dearth of graduate tracer studies in the four countries under study. It was, therefore, considered important to assess the possibility of developing effective alumni tracer studies. To this end, a pilot graduate destinations survey was conducted in 2015 in Kenya, focusing on three universities. As outlined in a separate report, the experience of running the pilot study was used to draw out recommendations for a full national graduate destinations survey in Kenya, and potentially in the other project countries.

## Key concepts and definitions

A number of the central concepts in this research are ambiguous or contested and require some definition of their use, most importantly employability, inclusive development and the university.

### Employability

The basic concept of employability refers to the ability of an individual to gain and maintain employment. It involves a range of attributes, involving knowledge and skills, but also values and social networks. *Employability*, however, is not identical to *employment*. Whether a graduate will actually be employed is dependent partly on their employability, but also on a range of other factors, most importantly the availability of jobs.<sup>15</sup> The challenge of graduate unemployment is therefore a

multifaceted one, involving not just immediate questions but also underlying ones of a fundamentally economic and political nature. This project will focus specifically on the educational dimension: the development of employability attributes in preparation for work. Employability can relate to entrepreneurship and the creation of new economic opportunities, as well as acquiring salaried employment. It is recognised that, while universities play an important role, the employability of individuals depends on the quality of their primary and secondary level education and other learning in non-formal contexts.

The kinds of attributes seen to be important in employability vary between contexts and between stakeholders, for example, from a narrow conception of work-specific knowledge and skills to a broader conception of graduate identity.<sup>16</sup> In this project, employability was understood in a broad sense, as including job-specific skills, generic work skills, personal qualities (such as reliability and time management), knowledge and understanding of society, and moral values. The latter are important: according to the vision underpinning this project, universities should form graduates who are not only employable workers, but are also ethical members of society who can contribute to the broader good through the exercise of citizenship.

### Inclusive development

The ultimate goal of forming employable graduates is to contribute to the positive development of society. However, as seen in numerous cases

through the last century, national development has often delivered benefits to a small proportion of the population, while the majority struggle to lift themselves out of poverty. Higher education systems have often been too small and restrictive of access to allow entry to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Linking the project to the goal of inclusive development involves a commitment to developing forms of higher education that contribute to the formation of a fair and prosperous society.

Inclusive development of society involves three elements. First, it implies a fair distribution of the benefits of development (economic and otherwise) across the population, and allows equitable access to valued opportunities. Second, while upholding equality of all before the law and in terms of social welfare, it also recognises and values social diversity. Third, it engages individuals and communities in the task of deciding the shape that society will take, through the democratic participation of all segments of society.

Higher education can foster all three of these through enabling equitable access to degree programmes, offering a space for deliberation on and critical scrutiny of society, producing research for the public benefit, and forming highly skilled and ethical professionals through high quality teaching and appropriate curricula.

### The university

As stated above, the research project focused on the contribution of universities to employability, while

15. McCowan, T (2015b) Should universities promote employability? *Theory and Research in Education*. 13/3: 267–285; McGrath, S (2009) *What is Employability?* (Learning to support employability project paper 1). School of Education, University of Nottingham. Available online at: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/shared/shared\\_uccer/epa\\_docs/what\\_is\\_employability.pdf](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/shared/shared_uccer/epa_docs/what_is_employability.pdf)

16. Hinchliffe, G and Jolly, A (2011) Graduate identity and employability. *British Educational Research Journal* 37/4: 563–584. Holmes, L (2001) Reconsidering graduate employability: The 'graduate identity' approach. *Quality in Higher Education* 7/2: 111–119.

acknowledging the range of other influences on graduates' knowledge, skills and values. The 'university' is defined in varying ways in different contexts, but normally refers to an institution of higher learning involved in the three functions of teaching, research and community engagement. Universities are often distinguished from other post-secondary institutions, such as polytechnics, teacher education colleges and vocational training centres. This project focused primarily on institutions of 'university' status. Although it retained awareness of the full diversity of the tertiary education sector, it did not focus on youth and adult education and training outside higher education.

### Theoretical framing: the capabilities approach

In understanding employability, and the life chances for graduates more broadly, this study draws on the idea of 'capabilities' proposed initially by the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen<sup>17</sup> and developed by Martha Nussbaum.<sup>18</sup> In Sen's conception, well-being is not just a question of the quantity of resources at people's disposal, but of their freedom to realise the things they have reason to value. In order to have this freedom to pursue their vision of life (and exercise agency), people need both internal capacities and favourable external circumstances. Sen uses the example of a bicycle to explain this point. In order to ride a bicycle, we need not only the physical bicycle itself, but also to have learned how to ride it, and to live in a society in which it is possible to do so (i.e. there are no social norms forbidding bicycle riding, there are cycle lanes etc.).

A second element of the capabilities and human development paradigm is that it looks beyond purely economic gauges of well-being, to acknowledge the broad range of sources of value in individuals' lives. The development of a society, therefore, cannot be reduced to its GDP, but involves a range of non-economic dimensions, as captured in the Human Development Index. An underpinning principle of this approach is that the good life will be different for different people and societies, depending on their values and goals, and thus what is considered 'development' will also vary. The kinds of support or interventions that individuals need will also be different, given the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

Furthermore, there is a *counterfactual* element to capabilities. It matters not only what we do, but also what we have the capacity to do but decide not to. So for example, if people devote their lives to raising a family, or looking after an ailing relative, it matters whether they had a range of options open to them – including well-paid rewarding employment – or whether they were confined to those destinies. Capabilities, therefore, represents an important departure from human capital theory. In simple terms, it looks beyond the purely economic to acknowledge broader dimensions of human life, including the intrinsic value of education, health, democracy and so forth. It also opens our perspective to the idea that some people may not necessarily seek to maximise their incomes, but may make choices in their life courses that have a great deal of value to them but are 'irrational' from a strictly economic perspective.

The capability approach has some obvious applications to the idea of employability. While employment rates and salary levels are important, we must look beyond these to understand the capabilities that graduates have to pursue their visions for their lives. A graduate who is building a grassroots organisation in a township in Johannesburg, or developing a start-up technology company in Nairobi, may appear a 'failure' in terms of employment outcomes, at least in the short term, but could be making a significant contribution to society. Furthermore, we need to think in a multidimensional way about employability attributes. Employability requires technical skills, job specific and generic cognitive attributes, but also a range of other qualities including communication, empathy, intercultural awareness and so forth. As in the bicycle example above, the capabilities approach also alerts our attention to the internal and external dimensions of employment, involving not only the attributes of graduates, but also the resources available to them and the social norms and availability of jobs in a society. Such a perspective guards against a reductive 'skills gap' diagnosis of the problems of graduate unemployment.

There is also an egalitarian dimension to capabilities. In this perspective, everybody's capabilities matter equally, and we therefore have to pay particular attention to ensuring that those from disadvantaged backgrounds have the support they need to pursue their life goals on an equal footing with others in society. As has been seen in the four countries in this study – as well as in high-income countries such as the USA and UK – socio-economic privileges are

17. Sen, A (1992) *Inequality Re-examined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Sen, A (1999) *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf.

18. Nussbaum, M (2000) *Women and Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



compounded by access to elite institutions, as well as greater time and resources for enrichment activities outside the formal curriculum, leading to enhanced CVs, and greater ability to compete in the labour market. Significant interventions are needed to ensure that those from disadvantaged backgrounds can not only enter some form of salaried employment, but also pursue the forms of work they find rewarding.

These ideas from the capabilities and human development paradigm will underpin the discussions of employability and development in the chapters that follow.

### Existing literature on graduate employability in Africa

African newspapers are replete with stories of the hardships graduates face in finding employment, and employer dissatisfaction with the graduates seeking employment, especially their poor preparedness for the workplace: a frequent descriptor is that they are 'half-baked'.<sup>19</sup> These narratives are repeated so frequently that the problems of employability have become common knowledge in society. It was surprising then to discover that there is very little in the way of research or even reliable basic information on the topic. Countries rarely have national level statistics on the proportion of graduates who are unemployed, or on the types of job that those in employment have. Some individual universities run tracer studies

of their own students, but these are only occasionally disseminated in the public sphere. There is little research evidence relating to graduate destinations, the attributes of graduate recruits, or interventions in universities to improve employability and their effectiveness.

However, it is important to highlight that there are some significant differences between South Africa and the other three countries in this regard. The academic field of educational research is highly developed in South Africa, and there are a significant number of publications relating to higher education policy and practice. While there are still some gaps, there is a much richer array of research studies on employability in higher education than in other African countries. In addition, there are some in-depth studies of graduate destinations, most notably that of the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), which in 2012 surveyed alumni of the four universities in the Western Cape to determine graduate destinations as well as the linkages between those outcomes and characteristics of the graduates' university experience.<sup>20</sup> South Africa also has more extensive and reliable statistical information at both national and institutional levels.

In Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, the overall body of literature on higher education is of a fair size, but only a small part of this provides rigorous evidence relating to employability. As will be explored further in the following chapter, some studies have been carried out on

entrepreneurship courses,<sup>21</sup> employers' views,<sup>22</sup> work placements,<sup>23</sup> unemployment<sup>24</sup> and graduate skills.<sup>25</sup> However, there are significant gaps in the research, and an insufficient knowledge basis to form coherent policy.

In 2015–16, the research team for this project undertook a systematic review of research on employability interventions undertaken by universities. The review identified studies from around the world showing evidence of student outcomes resulting from targeted interventions in universities, including attributes such as critical thinking, problem solving, cross-cultural communication, negotiating skills, self-confidence and job application writing skills. Some 600 studies in English were identified in the period 2005–15, the vast majority of which had been carried out in the USA, UK and Australia. While generating some illuminating findings on interventions in those countries, the review revealed the critical lack of research of this type on the African continent. Only 12 studies from Africa were identified, of which seven were from South Africa, two from Ghana, one from Morocco, one from Uganda and one from Botswana.

While caution is needed in directly extrapolating from the studies to different cultural contexts, the global review identified some important findings that have implications for African countries. The findings revealed positive results from a range of different interventions, including service learning, work placements,

19. Nganga, G (2014) Survey finds most East African graduates 'half-baked'. *University World News*, 23 May. Available online at: [www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20140523130246934](http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20140523130246934)

20. Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) (2013) *Pathways from University to Work*. Cape Town, South Africa: CHEC.

21. For example, Ekpoh, UI and Edet, AO (2011) Entrepreneurship Education and Career Intentions of Tertiary Education Students in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, Nigeria, *Journal of International Education Studies*, 4/1.

22. For example, Inter-University Council for East Africa, IUCEA (2014) *Regional higher education qualifications gaps*. Vol II.

23. For example, Ayarkwa J, Adinyira E and Osei-Asibey, D (2012) Industrial training of construction students: Perceptions of training organizations in Ghana. *Education and Training* 54/2–3: 234–249.

24. Baah-Boateng, W (2013) Determinants of Unemployment in Ghana, *African Development Review* 21/4: 385–399.

25. For example, Pitan, OS and Adedeji, SO (2012) Skills Mismatch among University Graduates in the Nigerian Labour Market *Journal of US-China Education Review* 2: 90–98.

pedagogical innovations such as problem-based learning and careers support. These suggest promising areas for initiatives, as well as the urgent need for research in this area in the African context.

### Aim and structure of the report

This report is the last in a series of three summarising the findings from the research project as a whole. The first, *Can higher education solve Africa's job crisis?*, posed the overall problematique of the research in terms of the challenge of employability and inclusive development. It identified the gaps in evidence and put forward a theoretical framework and proposal for a research agenda. The second, *Students in the driving seat*, outlined the findings from the major phase of data collection in selected universities in the four countries, focusing particularly on the views of final year students. The report argued that student voice is a significant missing link in approaches to quality enhancement and addressing employability in Africa, and that empowering students can be a first step in a virtuous cycle of change.

This final report summarises findings from the whole of the project, leading on to a vision statement of ways forward. It presents a holistic perspective on the issue, juxtaposing the views of all the major stakeholders – government, employers, university management, lecturers and students – so as to understand the tensions, synergies and possibilities for change. In particular, the report highlights a range of innovations that already exist, including schemes for supporting disadvantaged students, incubation hubs, dynamic careers services, community placements and entrepreneurship education. While these innovative initiatives cannot be transplanted in an identical form to different contexts, they do provide inspiring examples and ideas that can be generative in devising approaches to enhancing practice elsewhere.

There follows a chapter on each of the four focus countries: South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria. For each, the analysis includes a discussion of the higher education context and major policies in the sector, an outline of the findings from the research – the main data collection in the case study

universities, the employer survey and innovative cases – and an assessment of the implications of the findings for policy and practice. The country-specific chapters are followed by a comparative analysis, focusing on ‘enabling conditions’, the pieces in the puzzle that are necessary to ensure a vibrant learning environment, so that all students can develop the attributes necessary for pursuing their goals in life and making a meaningful contribution to their societies. It is argued that universities should keep a balanced perspective on learning across the ‘3Cs’ – classroom, campus and community – ensuring opportunities for student development within degree courses, through extra-curricular activities and work placements, and by volunteering outside the university. In the final chapter, recommendations are drawn out for the four countries and the region as a whole, to guide the evolution of higher education systems that will contribute to the inclusive development of societies.



Overall, while a university cannot do everything to get jobs for its students, it can do a great deal in terms of teaching and learning, developing an ethos and values, actively encouraging and promoting extra-curricular participation, and filling in social capital 'gaps' to enhance the employability of individual students.

# Chapter 2 – Universities and employability in South Africa: equity in opportunities and outcomes

Melanie Walker and Samuel Fongwa

## 1. Background

This study<sup>26</sup> addresses the challenges South Africa faces, given the characteristics of the higher education system, the labour market and the context in which both labour market and higher education operate. Findings from the research provide new perspectives on the role of higher education in employability and inclusive development, through the graduates universities educate. They also demonstrate that universities can be spaces either for the reproduction or reshaping of unequal social structures. It is important to consider the role that enhancing the employability of graduates might play in enabling greater social mobility and for whom, even under less than ideal labour market conditions. As discussed in this chapter, the link between obtaining a degree and both employment prospects and level of earnings has clear equity and social mobility implications for achieving more inclusive access to higher education, more inclusive success in completing degree programmes, and more inclusive employment outcomes.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. 1) The *first section* provides a broad overview of the socio-economic and political context. It analyses the complex relationship between higher education and the labour market, as South Africa tries to shift from its apartheid past to a non-racial democracy. 2) The *second section* considers how South African universities promote graduate employability, and assesses their commitment to inclusive human development, through the core functions of teaching and learning,

careers services and extra-curricular offerings. The findings are based on interviews and focus groups with students in their final year of study and individual interviews with academic and support staff across four universities. Selected innovative practices in teaching and learning for better graduate outcomes are also presented, while findings from follow-up interviews with 24 graduate students who are already in employment are summarised briefly. 3) The *third section* presents the perceptions of employers about the graduates they recruit. These include the readiness of graduates for the world of work, the values and attributes employers look for when they recruit, and their views on how graduate employability can be enhanced. 4) The *final section* outlines the key lessons learned and proposes recommendations.

The research involved case studies of four South African universities, which allowed us access to students and staff after ethical approval had been negotiated. The universities have different histories and national rankings: two are historically advantaged (HAI, formerly white) research and teaching universities – the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and the University of the Free State (UFS), one a historically disadvantaged (HDI, formerly black) institution, the University of Venda (Univen), and the fourth a comprehensive university (that combines more traditional research and teaching with vocationally oriented diploma qualifications), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). Univen also now describes itself as a comprehensive university. Of the four universities, Wits is the most highly ranked nationally and internationally and has the strongest research and graduate student profile. The research

reported on here included a desk-based review of literature, which was conducted during the first year of the project, and an empirical phase in the case study universities, which followed during the second and third years. Qualitative data was collected from final year students and staff across these universities. A sub-sample of these students was later tracked after graduation to capture their post-graduation experiences. Quantitative data was collected through an online survey of all final year students in the four case study universities. In addition, a total of 147 interviews were conducted with university leaders, lecturers and students across the humanities, sciences and business disciplines, as well as teaching and learning development staff and careers officers, together with a survey of 17.5 per cent of all final year students.

## 2. The economic, political and social context

### 2.1 A snapshot of the South African higher education (HE) system

Higher education in South Africa falls under the Ministry of Higher Education and Training (MHET) and the operational Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), led by a director-general. Two other relevant higher education organisations are The Council on Higher Education (CHE), which advises the MHET on policy and quality assurance through its Higher Education Qualification Committee (HEQC); and Universities South Africa (UniSA), which is composed of the Vice Chancellors from all 26 public universities. UniSA has a mandate to facilitate the development of policy on HE and to encourage co-operation between universities and government,

26. The report draws on the following documents produced over three years: literature review, statistical profile of the higher education system, four university case studies, consolidated university case study report, analysis of survey results, employer report, and graduate students report.



industry and other sectors of society. The South African HE system is dominated by the public universities, with a very thin and, to date, somewhat ineffective further education and training sector. The private university sector is highly regulated (unlike in other parts of Africa) and accounts for less than ten per cent of all enrolments. University mergers in 2005 sought to address apartheid race-based university divisions, while also increasing efficiency by reducing the number of institutions from 36 to 23. There are now 26 universities, following the creation in 2014–15 of Sol Plaatje University in the Northern Cape, and the University of Mpumalanga and Sefako Makgatho Health Science University in Pretoria. The public universities are divided into: 1) traditional research and teaching universities, which offer degrees such as BA and BSc, and professional undergraduate degrees such as BSc Eng, as well as a wide range of postgraduate qualifications (honours masters' and doctoral degrees); 2) universities of technology which offer mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas, and the BTech, which serves as a capstone qualification for diploma graduates, plus a limited number of masters' and doctoral programmes; and 3) comprehensive universities, which offer programmes typical of the traditional universities, as well as vocational programmes typical of a university of technology.

Despite declining state funding, public university composite headcount enrolments expanded between 2000 and 2013, from 578,134 to just under

one million (See Table 1 below). While there has only been a slight increase in the headcount numbers of white students, the numbers of black students have almost doubled, showing the result of efforts to address inherited inequalities by widening access. However, while the overall participation rate in the eligible age group was 19.5 per cent in 2013, only 16 per cent of eligible/all black students matriculating from secondary school were enrolled compared to 57.7 per cent for white students.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 1:** Public university headcount enrolment increase by race<sup>28</sup>

Country	2000	2013
<b>African/black</b>	340,670	689,503
<b>Coloured</b>	30,472	61,034
<b>Indian</b>	39,495	53,787
<b>White</b>	162,868	171,927
<b>Others</b>	4,629	7,447
<b>Total enrolments</b>	578,134	983,698

Source: Higher Education Data Analyser (HEDA) (2015).

According to the DHET,<sup>29</sup> in 2011 South Africa's national (public) budget for universities, including funding for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS, see below), as a percentage of GDP was 0.75 per cent, which was slightly lower than for Africa as a whole (0.78 per cent). In 2015–16, South Africa's national budget for universities, including NSFAS, is 0.72 per cent of the GDP, lower than it was in 2011. The DHET notes that, when compared to

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (1.21 per cent), and the rest of the world (0.84 per cent), South Africa lags behind. Higher education expenditure as a percentage of education expenditure in Africa was 20 per cent; for OECD countries it was 23.4 per cent, and for the world 19.8 per cent in 2006 (closest year). However, in 2011, South Africa's estimated higher education expenditure as a percentage of total education expenditure was only about 12 per cent.

Funding for HE comes from three main sources: government subsidies and grants, student fees and third stream income. DHET funding is estimated to account for 40 per cent of the university incomes. Other funding sources include tuition fees, accommodation fees, research income, and donor funding. The DHET budget for universities has increased from R9,879 billion in 2004–05 to R30,338 billion in 2015–16. These amounts include funding for NSFAS, which reached R4,095 billion in 2015–16. However, from 2004–05 to 2014–15 there was a decline in real terms in the DHET block grant of -1.35 per cent.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, most universities remain dependent on incomes from the DHET grant and tuition fees.

NSFAS was introduced in 1999 to increase access to HE for previously disadvantaged groups. Over the last ten years, about R12 billion has been distributed to some 700,000 students; overall NSFAS supports 25 per cent of the student intake. However, despite the significant increase in NSFAS payments to students, the allocated

27. DHET (2015) *Are we making progress with systemic structural transformation of resourcing, access, success, staffing and researching in higher education: What do the data say?* Paper prepared for the second national Higher Education Transformation Summit, and Institute of Race Relations (IRR) (2015) Fast Facts, February 2015, Issue 282.

28. Statistics are still collected by race in South Africa to monitor transformation changes. The term 'black' refers to African students.

29. DHET, *op. cit.*

30. DHET, *op. cit.*



funds have not been able to meet the increasing demand for financial support. This has been reflected in the recent *#Feesmustfall* campaign and now *#AccessmustRise* campaigns. Moreover, NSFAS recovered only 10.9 per cent of loans from 1999 to 2014 (although some of the funds are allocated as or converted to bursaries with no repayment required).<sup>31</sup>

As in other countries, the HE system is linked to the social and political landscape. Pre-1994, HE was used as a tool to enforce apartheid ideology by creating separate HE systems for the white and black<sup>32</sup> populations. Post-1994, transformation, equity and inclusive participation are the watchwords of the HE policy landscape, although their meanings are by no means uncontested. Of particular importance is the 1997 *White Paper 3 on Transformation*,<sup>33</sup> which continues to underpin subsequent policy, including the 2001 National Plan of Higher Education,<sup>34</sup> the university mergers process of 2005, and the 2013 White Paper.<sup>35</sup> The 1997 White Paper mapped out a broad transformation agenda underpinned by the core principles of equity (of access and the distribution of success along lines of race, gender, class and geography), and redress of past inequalities. Higher education was seen as an important vehicle for achieving equity in the redistribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens. It was to provide access to learning and enable the fulfilment of human potential, as well as

laying the foundations of a critical civil society by fostering a culture of debate, tolerance and critical engagement. It was also expected to address the human resource needs of the country, providing the labour market with the high-level skills needed for participation in the global economy.

The Higher Education Act of 1997 assigned responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa to the CHE, to be discharged through HEQC, with a mandate which includes quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation. In 2004, the CHE began the first quality assurance cycle, which lasted until 2011. A key activity in this period was to conduct institutional audits of HEIs. At the end of 2013, it was agreed that the focus of the second quality assurance cycle would be on improving student success, both at individual institutions and across the higher education sector. This focus was operationalised through the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP). The use of the term 'quality enhancement' signals an intention to follow up the recommendations of HEQC evaluation to help institutions to increase levels of quality.<sup>36</sup> One way to understand quality is by looking at staff–student ratios, which are higher at the HDIs compared to the HALs, varying from 15 to one at Wits to 40 to one at Univen.<sup>37</sup> Another way of assessing attempts to improve student success rates is to look at attrition rates: 40 per cent of students drop out in their first year, only 15 per cent finish in the

minimum time, and only 35 per cent graduate with a three year degree after six years of study.<sup>38</sup> This of course sharply reduces the numbers of graduates seeking employment at degree level, while also increasing unemployed numbers with lower levels of education, accounting for the high number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) – these youth constitute about 46 per cent of all the unemployed.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.2 Employability and employment dynamics

It emerged from our research that, the employability and employment of graduates hinges on: 1) *contextual* factors; 2) *demand* for graduates; and 3) graduate *supply* factors. Within the context, demand and supply interact and affect employability positively or negatively. The important point to note here is that employability and employment are different concepts, the former relating more to what happens in universities, and the latter more to what happens in the labour market. Graduates may be very employable and still struggle to find employment if labour market conditions are unpropitious; on the other hand under these conditions more employable graduates are more likely either to be able to establish their own businesses or take up the job opportunities that are available and hence to be more socially mobile. Who is more employable and why are thus significant questions for inclusive social mobility.

31. DHET, *op. cit.*

32. Black in this context refers to African, Coloured and Indian population groups, as was common in the struggle for democracy pre-1994, although the apartheid state still used white, African, Coloured and Indian classifications and established universities accordingly.

33. DOE (1997) White Paper. Pretoria: DHET.

34. National Development Plan (2011) *Vision 2030*. Pretoria: National Planning Commission.

35. DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training) (2013) *White Paper on Post-School Education and Training*. Pretoria: DHET.

36. See [www.che.ac.za](http://www.che.ac.za)

37. Republic of South Africa (2010) *Education Statistics in South Africa 2009*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

38. CHE (2013) *A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

39. OECD (2015) *Employment: Tackling high youth unemployment. South Africa Policy Brief*. Available online at: [www.oecd.org/southafrica/south-africa-tackling-youth-unemployment.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/southafrica/south-africa-tackling-youth-unemployment.pdf)

### 2.2.1 Contextual factors

South Africa's economic outlook is not promising, with stubbornly high unemployment of around 36 per cent, and a schooling system which is still failing to deliver good compulsory education for all, with the Minister of Basic Education recently describing the state and state-aided schooling sector as consisting of two systems, a 'high performance system with pockets of excellence [primarily formerly white schools, often called Model C schools] and a Cinderella system ...characterised by pockets of disaster [primarily black urban and rural schools]'.<sup>40</sup> Inequality remains a tremendous problem, with South Africa's finance minister admitting that 'we are leaving the poor behind'.<sup>41</sup> In an international survey, South Africa was placed 138th of 149 countries for its ability to turn the country's wealth into well-being for people.<sup>42</sup> In our survey of students, 58.1 per cent were concerned about the impact of the economic climate on their employment prospects.

#### The changing labour market:

Other scholars<sup>43</sup> have reflected on the shifts in the demand for labour in South Africa, observing that overall, the structure of employment has shifted from manual work in manufacturing to jobs in the service sector, which require higher levels of knowledge and skills. The demand has shifted from low-skill occupations and labour intensive industries towards high-skill occupations and capital-intensive

industries, generating a demand for new skills suitable for the current knowledge economy.<sup>44</sup>

**Politics and policy issues:** Employment in South Africa has been shaped both by the continuing apartheid legacy of white economic and educational privilege and post-apartheid policies aimed at improving equality and equity in the workforce. To take three examples: 1) The Employment Equity Act (1998) applies to all employers (including universities) – it prohibits unfair discrimination in employment policy and also requires designated employers (those with over 50 employees) to put in place affirmative action measures for designated groups (women, black people and people with disabilities) by putting in place employment equity plans and submitting regular reports to the Department of Labour. 2) Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) which established a policy framework for codes of good practice and transformation charters to encourage meaningful black participation in the economy, and a racially diversified employee profile in favour of previously disadvantaged social groups. Compliance is assessed according to a scorecard of the labour force, as well as top management positions. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that the economy is still largely in the hands of a white minority<sup>45</sup> and this informs some of the trends in graduate employment. 3)

Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) was launched in 2006 to address skilled labour shortages amplified by the legacy of apartheid spatial patterns and to lift barriers to competition in certain sectors of the economy. Some progress has been made, particularly a tripling in black graduates from 200,000 in 1995 to 600,000 in 2011. Overall, therefore, the labour market policy climate supports measures to ensure more equitable employment opportunities and outcomes.

### 2.2.2 Demand factors

The number of degree holders in the labour market grew from 463,000 in 1995 to 1.1 million in 2011.<sup>46</sup> In 2001, the graduate unemployment rate reached 18 per cent;<sup>47</sup> however, recent studies have shown a significant drop in graduate unemployment figures. Thus Van der Berg and van Broekhuizen<sup>48</sup> argue from their analysis of labour force data that only about five per cent of university graduates were unemployed between 1995 and 2011, while unemployment rates are highest among those with only post-secondary diplomas and certificates (16 per cent). For those without any qualifications, unemployment is higher still. There is, therefore, no obvious graduate unemployment challenge at present, but this may change as more graduates complete their studies and fewer opportunities become available in the over-large state sector.

40. Masondo, S (2016) Angie reads the riot act, *City Press* 24 January 2016, page 1.

41. Zwane, T (2015) Africa rising leaves the poor behind, *Mail and Guardian Business*, 29 May to 4 June, page 4.

42. *The Economist* 30 May 2015, 35.

43. Letseka, M, Cossar, M, Breier, M, and Visser, M (2010) *Student retention and graduate destination: Higher education and labour market access and success*. Cape Town, Human Science Research Council Press.

44. Kraak, A (2010) The collapse of the graduate labour market in South Africa: evidence from recent studies, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 15/1: 81–102.

45. Babarinde, OA (2009) Bridging the economic divide in the Republic of South Africa: A corporate social responsibility perspective. *Thunderbird International Business Review* 51: 355–368.

46. CDE (2013) *Graduate Unemployment in South Africa, a much exaggerated problem*, Johannesburg::Centre for Enterprise Development.

47. Labour Force Survey (2000–07).

48. Van der Berg, S, and van Broekhuizen, H (2012) *Graduate Unemployment in South Africa: A Much Exaggerated Problem*. Stellenbosch University Economic Working Paper, 22/12.

**Employer expectations:** Griesel and Parker<sup>49</sup> identified four principal skills components of employers' expectations in the South African context: basic skills and understanding, knowledge and intellectual ability, workplace skills and knowledge application, and personal or interactive skills. They note that there is less of a gap between universities and employers than some assume and suggest that it is possible to build dialogical bridges between universities and employers. In contrast, in a study of 2,841 graduates from NMMU between 2005 and 2008, employers from most sectors expressed concern that graduates seemed to know a lot of theory but frequently not how to apply it practically.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in a study by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and Higher Education South Africa it was found that, 'there was a huge gap between what employers expected and what they got after hiring a graduate straight from tertiary studies'.<sup>51</sup> Thus there is a possible mismatch between what graduates bring and what employers want, but in the absence of more research and better university data collection the extent of the gap is not clear.

**Provincial/spatial variations:** The spatial distribution of socio-economic opportunities in South Africa affects graduate employability; the mobility of graduates and where they study then becomes significant. In economically less well-off largely rural regions like the Free State and some parts of Eastern Cape and Limpopo, graduate

opportunities may be fewer than in major metropolitan areas like Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town. It has, however, been observed that, in some fields, such as school teaching, good employment opportunities for young graduates can be found in rural areas, as most qualified teachers and other professionals want to work in urban areas.<sup>52</sup>

**Field of study and race:** Looking at mobility between labour market sectors by fields of study and racial groups, Moleke<sup>53</sup> observes that, while white graduates have increasingly obtained employment in the private rather than the public sector, black graduates have increasingly obtained posts in the public sector, as post-1994 employment opportunities have opened up in government. Within both racial groups, in the decade after the end of apartheid, there was a shift towards self-employment, although this was greater for white graduates (3.6 per cent to 12 per cent), than for black graduates (0.35 per cent to 2.4 per cent), possibly because there are now fewer opportunities in government. There was a decrease in the number of Indians in both the public and private sectors, matched by increase (1.8 per cent to 12.1 per cent) in the proportion in self-employment. The majority of Coloureds still obtained employment in the public sector (56.6 per cent to 57 per cent), but there was a small shift towards self-employment (1.2 per cent to 3.7 per cent), and a small decrease in private sector participation (42.2 per cent to 39.1 per cent).

### 2.2.3 Supply factors

**Field of study:** Table 2 below provides a general summary of unemployment patterns experienced by South African graduates by field of study. The high employment rate in science, engineering and technology (SET) related fields (most strikingly in medicine) can be attributed to restrictions on the numbers entering the degree programmes, despite continuing scarcity of skills in these fields.

**Table 2:** Unemployment by field of study

Field of study	Percentage of graduates experiencing unemployment
Natural science	5.1
Engineering	1.0
Agriculture	1.0
Medical science	1.5
Humanities and arts	53.3
Education	17.9
Law	9.7
Economics and management studies	10.3
Total	100

Source: Moleke (2006).

49. Griesel, H and Parker, B (2009) Graduate attributes: A baseline study of South African graduates from the perspective of employers. Report for South African Qualification Authority and Higher Education South Africa.

50. Nel, H and Barnard, A (undated) *Graduate employability: A case study of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University*. NMMU Strategic and Institutional Planning.

51. City Press (2012) Young, jobless and desperate – degrees with no guarantees. Online publication available online at: [www.citypress.co.za/news/young-jobless-and-desperate-degrees-with-no-guarantees-20120616/](http://www.citypress.co.za/news/young-jobless-and-desperate-degrees-with-no-guarantees-20120616/)

52. Van der Berg, S and van Broekhuizen, H (2012) *op. cit.*

53. Moleke, P (2006) *Finding work: Employment Experiences of South African Graduates*. Cape Town: HSRC.

In contrast, over half of humanities and arts graduates and nearly a fifth of education graduates experience difficulties finding employment. A study in the Western Cape Province confirmed that graduates from the humanities experience more time before securing employment than those in any other field,<sup>54</sup> and especially compared to graduates from science-related fields like engineering. In a more recent study than Moleke's,<sup>55</sup> Van der Berg and van Broekhuizen<sup>56</sup> claim that, while the field of study is important for employability, graduates with degrees have similar chances of employment regardless of their field of study. They concede that humanities graduates are less likely to find work immediately, but find that they are more likely to do so within six months than commerce graduates. Overall, those with some level of tertiary education have close to double the chance of finding employment than those with matric only.<sup>57</sup>

**Institution type and levels:** Evidence from the South African Graduate Development Association (SAGDA) reveals that 9.7 per cent of unemployed graduates completed their studies in a traditional university and 16.2 per cent in a university of technology. Given the demand for technical skills it is somewhat difficult to explain why graduates from universities of technology have a higher unemployment rate beyond the possibility that employers prefer more traditional university qualifications. However, the

evidence also shows that graduates from historically disadvantaged/black institutions (HBIs) take a much longer time to be absorbed into the labour market than those from historically advantaged/white institutions (HWIs), who are absorbed within the first few months following graduation.<sup>58</sup> A study by Bhorat et al.<sup>59</sup> also revealed institutional variations in the unemployment rate of graduates – ranging from 67 per cent for Fort Hare (HDI) graduates, 30 per cent for University of the Western Cape (HDI/Coloured) graduates, 23 per cent for the University of Witwatersrand (HAI) graduates to 13 per cent for Stellenbosch (HAI) graduates. A more recent study by Rogan and Reynolds<sup>60</sup> comparing graduation prospects for students from Rhodes University and Fort Hare found a seven per cent unemployment rate among Rhodes graduates but a 20 per cent rate among Fort Hare graduates.

## 2.5 Policies that shape higher education and employment

### 2.5.1 Funding

The state uses its funding to steer and/or intervene in governance issues at system and institutional levels. Thus, while universities still have a high degree of autonomy and academic freedom, HEIs are required to report to the DHET on an annual basis with respect to a number of indicators, including student outputs and enrolments and research outputs

(publications), which in turn affects their funding. The role of the state was reiterated by the current Minister of Higher Education and Training,<sup>61</sup> who in 2013 maintained that 'unless the state is prepared to intervene decisively in all spheres of public life – the economy, education system, research system ... and so on – to ensure that transformation takes place, then it will not [occur]'. The 2013 White Paper on post-school education and training pays attention to employment, while still retaining social justice concerns, specified as a requirement that students should 'have an understanding of their society, and be able to participate fully in its political, social and cultural life.'<sup>62</sup> This seems to locate the policy framework somewhat beyond human capital needs and the assumption that more and better education will solve problems of (youth) unemployment. However, the *White Paper* notes the practical reality of a stuttering economy and suggests that: 'few can argue with the need to improve the performance of the economy, to expand employment and to equip people to achieve sustainable livelihoods.' It explains that the social and economic challenges facing South Africa have shifted national priorities in the face of structural challenges associated with unemployment, poverty and inequality, so that economic development has been prioritised, together with the role of education and training as a contributor to such development. Thus the policy

54. CHEC (2013) *Pathways from University to Work*. Wynberg: Cape Higher Education Consortium.

55. Moleke, P (2006) *Finding work: Employment Experiences of South African Graduates*. Cape Town: HSRC.

56. Van der Berg and van Broekhuizen (2012) *op. cit.*

57. Branson et al., (2009) *HE demand for tertiary education in South Africa*. SALDRU Report.

58. See CHEC (2013); Letseka et al. (2010); Oluwajodu et al. (2015).

59. Bhorat, H, Visser, M and Mayet, N (2010) 'Student graduation, labour market destinations and employment earnings', in Letseka, M, Cosser, M, Brier, M, and Visser, M. *Student Retention and Graduate Destination: Higher Education and Labour Market Access*. Pretoria Human Sciences Research Council.

60. Rogan, M and Reynolds, J (2015) *Schooling inequality, higher education and the labour market: Evidence from a graduate tracer study in the Eastern Cape, South Africa*. Pretoria: Labour Market Intelligence project.

61. Nzimande, B (2013) Why state intervention is needed in our universities. CEPD, Solomon Mahlangu Lecture of June 10.

62. Republic of South Africa (2013) *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training*. Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training.

acknowledges the need for economic growth, but takes social justice to mean 'education as a way out of poverty' in order to enable people to access economic opportunities, noting that 'Education will not guarantee economic growth, but without it economic growth is not possible and society will not fulfil its potential with regard to social and cultural development.'<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the wider development (development not just growth) message is not evident in the White Paper as whole. If we look at word counts as a rough indicator of emphasis we find: quality 207, diversity 96, equity 14, social justice seven, empowerment zero, agency in the form of 'social agency' one, poor students three, poor five, access 89, transformation 11, throughput rates ten. But we also have: skills 215, economy/development/developmental state 233 (together more mentions than anything else), employment 25, efficiency and efficient nine, so that economic development, led by the state, is emphasised. Even setting aside the assumption of a causal relationship between education and skills through education and the achievement of development objectives, there does seem to be a clear policy focus on preparation for employment and this may become more prominent in universities' future responses.

### 2.5.2 National Development Plan (NDP)

The NDP emphasises the role of universities in economic development: stating that 'Higher education is the major driver of the information/knowledge system, linking it with economic development'.<sup>64</sup> It further suggests that 'Good science and technology education is crucial for

South Africa's future innovation' (*ibid.*). According to the NDP, universities have three key roles in the knowledge economy (presented in this order of priority): 1) educate and train people with high-level skills for employment in the public and private sectors; 2) be the dominant producers of new knowledge and the application of existing knowledge; 3) provide opportunities for social mobility and simultaneously strengthen equity, social justice and democracy. While the NDP does not provide an implementation framework for achieving its stated objectives by 2030, it does, as a high level planning document, provide broad indicators (for example a 30 per cent HE participation rate) and pointers to the expectations of every sector of the society and economy.

### 2.5.3 Labour Market Intelligence Partnership (LMIP) Project

Launched in 2012, this multimillion rand project aims to set up systems for the collection of reliable data indicating skills needs and supply and demand in the labour market in a manner that will enable South Africa, including government and business, to plan better for the human resource development needs of the country.<sup>65</sup> The Minister has argued that the tools that have been used to prioritise skills development have been based on a limited understanding of shifts in the economy and labour market. Through this project, the Minister expects that a Labour Market Intelligence System (LMIS) capable of facilitating a closer alignment of South Africa's education and training system with the economic priorities outlined in the New Growth Path and National Development Plan 2030 will be established.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.6 Challenges

### 2.6.1 Equity versus development

The first challenge is the continued tension in policy between redress and future development. The 2011 National Development Plan emphasised the role of universities in enhancing knowledge production for national development, relegating transformation and redress to third place on its list of priorities. HE has been criticised by various government departments, other public sector stakeholders, business, and chambers of commerce for not producing the relevant skills needed for national development (often, however, without clear evidence). With the increased emphasis on science, engineering and technology-related fields by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and in the National Development Plan, there is a tension between a narrowed instrumental role for higher education and the equity discourse still central to higher education policy.

### 2.6.2 Population group/race inequalities

Race still plays a significant role in employment outcomes. Black and coloured graduates have fewer prospects for employment compared to their white and Indian counterparts. In a recent study, population group emerged as the strongest socio-demographic predictor of employment, with slightly more white and Indian graduates being employed (96 per cent) than coloureds (91 per cent) and many more than Africans (77 per cent) in 2012.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, it found that virtually all white graduates seeking employment were absorbed into the workforce within a year of beginning

63. *Ibid.*

64. Republic of South Africa (2011) *National Development Plan: Vision 2030*. Pretoria: National Planning Commission.

65. See [www.hsrc.ac.za/en/media-briefs/education-and-skills-development/Minister-launches-Labour-Market-Intelligence-project#sthash.5oVMRGij.dpuf](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/media-briefs/education-and-skills-development/Minister-launches-Labour-Market-Intelligence-project#sthash.5oVMRGij.dpuf)

66. Labour Market Research (2012).

67. CHEC (2013) *op. cit.*



searching; with 92 per cent finding employment within six months.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, only 56 per cent of African graduates had found employment within six months. Another recent study observes that unemployment rates for black and white graduates respectively are 8.6 per cent versus 3.0 per cent, showing that black graduates are three times more likely to remain unemployed than their white counterparts.<sup>69</sup> However, looking at unemployment rate figures from 2000, which showed white unemployment at one per cent and black at 16 per cent, the 2012 labour force figures indicate that there has been a closing of the unemployment gap by race. The racial differentiation of employment outcomes for graduates from single institutions is also striking. For example, black graduates from Wits University experienced an unemployment rate of 29 per cent compared to white graduates with an unemployment rate of seven per cent – more than four times lower.<sup>70</sup>

### 2.6.3 Access to and quality of teaching and learning

A major concern is the effect of the poor schooling system on the quality and university readiness of the undergraduate intake. In a cohort study from 2005 to 2010, student attrition rates were observed to reach 46 per cent for contact students and up to 68 per cent for distance students.<sup>71</sup> This challenge affects most sectors of the higher education system and ultimately affects the quality and number of graduates entering the job market.

### 2.6.4 An (un)differentiated HE system

A further challenge is the absence of a differentiated system. Using the CHET differentiation grouping,<sup>72</sup> HEIs have sought to define themselves based on their purpose, so that each university has a clear mission that sets out its unique contribution to knowledge production and national development. However, in practice there are variations on a homogenous system rather than differentiation, with continued inherited stratification both between HDIs and HAls and also internally where HAls have merged with former HDIs.

## 3 University provision to enhance graduate employability

Empirical data collected for the research project from university staff and students aimed at gaining an understanding of how graduate employability is understood and the main factors affecting graduate outcomes during and after degree programmes. Findings can be divided into three themes: 1) understandings of and factors affecting graduate employability; 2) perceptions of the most important graduate attributes and how universities are enhancing the development of these attributes; and 3) students' perceptions of their readiness for the world of work and society. Overall, we found that, while the quality of degrees remains important, other aspects, such as social capital, reputation of a university,

field of study, and involvement in extra-curricular activities (ECA) also influence graduate outcomes in South Africa, and are in turn shaped by structural arrangements such as race, social class, and the economy.

### 3.1 Understanding employability

Staff and students understand graduate employability primarily in human capital terms – graduates' ability to gain a decently paid job. In our data, more than 80 per cent of the staff and students interviewed see employability as developing the right set of skills and attributes needed for securing a job and being adaptable to the labour market. A student in the economics department at Wits explained:

'I think it's when you get an individual who has certain qualifications that the employer wants, yes, what the employer wants in their employees. And if the person doesn't have that then they're not very employable. And it's basically being able to adapt to the working environment and applying theory into your actual work.'

There was a general alignment between the responses and a human capital conceptualisation of employability as having the knowledge and skills 'needed by employers'. Respondents placed less emphasis on a broader view of employability. Of relevance is the perception, especially by historically disadvantaged groups in South Africa, that education and higher education will open the door to economic opportunities.

68. Letseka, M., Cossar, M., Breier, M., and Visser, M. (2010) *Student retention and graduate destination: Higher education and labour market access and success*. Cape Town, Human Science Research Council Press.

69. Van der Berg and van Broekhuizen (2012) *op. cit.*

70. Bhorat et al. (2010) *op. cit.*

71. John, V. (2013) Dropout rates point to lack of support. Mail and Guardian Online, 17 May. Available online at: <http://za.news.yahoo.com/dropout-rate-points-lack-support-084600715.html>

72. The grouping classifies HEIs into three broad groups using particular input and output variables. The 'red group', which consist of white HAls, produces the bulk of research outputs and academics for the next generation, while the 'blue group' (all Universities of Technology and two comprehensive universities) provides access and skills for better job prospects, while the 'green group' (the remaining nine universities) has yet to clearly define its roles (CHET, 2010).

Our analysis, however, generates a more complex interpretation of employability than that of our respondents, with three overlapping factors (see Table 3 below) shaping economic opportunities: personal background, institutional provision (what the university provides or offers), and external factors (labour market

characteristics and trends and public policies). This challenges the view that individual attributes, skills and competencies alone determine success or failure in graduate employment outcomes, or research that blames either graduates or universities for an apparent skills 'gap'.

**Table 3:** Graduate employability in multiple dimensions

University factors	Personal factors	External (social/economic/political) factors
Field of study	Socio-economic background (type of school), race, gender, income (NSFAS loan)	Structure of the economy and labour market; 'scarce skills' discourse/field of study; equity employment policies
Quality of degree – knowledge and skills, theory-practice alignment, ethos of hard work fostered; educational experiences that foster confidence	Confidence, 'attitude' and personal 'motivation' (to work hard; to take advantage of university opportunities e.g. ECA; to find part-time jobs with or without social capital networks, etc.).	
Reputation of university	Genuine opportunity to choose university and/or degree programme	Employer perceptions of university reputation and quality of graduates
Links to industry and employers (and concern with graduate employment post-university); work experience opportunities available	Social capital and networks	Location of university, internships and work experience
University values, leadership opportunities, diversity fostered, inclusive citizenship encouraged	Personal values oriented to the public good; diversity valued	Extent to which inclusive development is valued and practised
Extra-curricular activities (ECA) and effective careers office	Proactive involvement in ECA, accessing careers service	Participation in university 'careers fairs'

### 3.2 Knowledge and critical thinking as the most important graduate attributes

Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data obtained from staff and students provides evidence of their perception that knowledge and critical thinking (the core skills demanded by employers, according to Griesel and Parker,<sup>73</sup> and see Chapter 4) are the two most important graduate

attributes needed to gain employment and be successful in the workplace. Knowledge is understood as both knowledge of one's subject and being able to apply this knowledge in the work place. Broader knowledge of society and values is not included, we found, as an attribute that will improve employment prospects, outside of specific disciplines such as sociology. Knowledge of the subject,

and specific subjects in particular, such as accounting or engineering, is considered more important than skills such as communication, collaboration, and even social citizenship. Though the need for softer skills has been proposed in the literature,<sup>74</sup> the combined evidence from the staff and student data reveals an emphasis on hard (knowledge, technical) skills from a university perspective.

73. Griesel and Parker (2009) *op. cit.*

74. See Fallows and Stevens (2000) Pittenger et al. (2004).

### 3.3 Factors affecting graduate employability

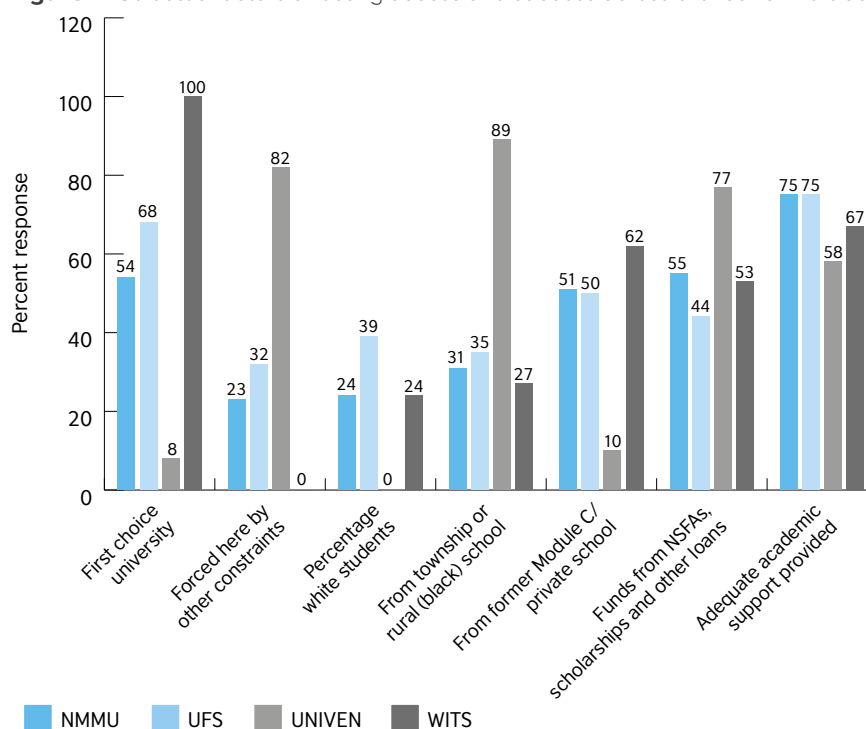
The significant factors affecting graduate employability emerged as: 1) student background; 2) linked to this, students' social capital and work aspirations; 3) university attended; and 4) field of study. Gender did not feature as a strong influence on graduate employability in our data.

The data indicates that a **student's background** is considered to significantly determine their employability. Firstly, it is said to largely determine if students will be able to go to their university of choice and study a programme of their choice, or if they will be forced to go to another university and even study a programme they would not otherwise have chosen, simply in order to go to university and gain a degree to improve their job prospects.<sup>75</sup> Most students from poor working class homes, especially at the only historically disadvantaged university in the study (Univen), reported that they could not have afforded to attend the more reputable universities, even if they were qualified. Thus a lecturer from Univen reflected:

'Most of the students, when they came to the University of Venda, it wasn't even their first choice, some of them landed up in certain degrees not because those were the degrees that they wanted, but [because] that is what was available... So you end up being forced to go [in]to agriculture, and yet agriculture was never your first choice. Under those circumstances, the whole motivational aspect is just a zero.'

Social class background (which is in turn linked to social capital and study opportunities) thus emerged as a key background factor affecting graduate employment prospects.

**Figure 2:** Selected factors affecting access and success across the four universities



There is evidence of a correlation between studying in the historically disadvantaged university and other variables (recognition of a university by employers, type of secondary or high school attended), which together makes students feel less employable and which students think may negatively affect their employment outcomes.

From Figure 2 above, it can be observed that students studying in Univen have experienced inequality in access. Due to a combination of their previous schooling and limited resources, few reported that they had been able to attend their preferred university (mostly the well-recognised universities). Instead, they noted that they have to depend on government support through NSFAS (an indicator of low income) or other bursary providers, which name the degree programme

a recipient has to study. In contrast, most (but certainly not all) students in the HAs are relatively well prepared, coming from good schools and having been able to choose their university (one perceived as favourably recognised by employers, see section 4) and field of study, thereby, in their view, enhancing their employability. However, graduates from Univen show a stronger sense of social responsibility and willingness 'to give back' to their disadvantaged communities and families, an issue we revisit later.

This further links to the future opportunities which graduates expect to be able to mobilise based on their own **social capital** (contacts through university peers, friends and family). In our data, most students from middle class backgrounds consider that they are well positioned to make use of internship opportunities which arise

75. See CDE (2013) *Graduate Unemployment in South Africa, a much exaggerated problem*, Johannesburg: Centre for Enterprise Development.

because of their social capital. These provide students with practical experience, improving their work readiness, and contributing to them later being employed in the same business, or being better placed to get a job elsewhere. On the implications of social capital, a Wits BA Law/Philosophy student explained: 'If you are from a poorer background and probably black or previously disadvantaged, then the likelihood of you having strong contacts is unlikely. If you are from a wealthier white or advantaged background then it's ten times easier. Just from the people I graduated from high school with, you can just tell that certain people are set from the get go. Irrespective of what they are studying they can always land on their feet. So you may be lucky and have a contact or two in a very influential position, it's not impossible, it does happen, but the likelihood isn't strong [if you are from a disadvantaged background].' Another student, this time from NMMU, explained that in his practical year, his parents knew the owner of the company for which he worked, and his brother had been at school with the man's son. This construction management student continued: 'I went and spoke to him, and he obviously remembered me from a kid, and he took me on board. If I was a random person, I don't think he would have just said, yes, come work for me.'

Also linked to background are **work aspirations**. The data shows that the majority of students from the former coloured schools (66 per cent), township schools (47 per cent) and rural schools (48 per cent) want to work in the public sector. The majority

of those who attended other types of schools prefer to seek work in the private sector. This is not surprising, in that between 2008 and 2012 the private sector shed jobs while the number of jobs in the public sector grew.<sup>76</sup> However, there are signs that public sector employment is no longer growing and this may generate an external driver for greater attention to be paid to employability in universities.<sup>77</sup> The research project data (from 2014) shows that there is still a correlation between the type of school attended (less or more advantaged) and students' aspirations, because the public sector is seen as providing more secure employment. There is some interest in self-employment, with 11.4 per cent of black students and 29 per cent of whites planning to be self-employed, but more students from University of the Witwatersrand (19 per cent) and NMMU (25 per cent) and fewer from University of Venda (six per cent) would opt for this choice, suggesting a possible correlation between advantage and being in a position to take greater employment risks (although as noted above, this may change). However, more data is needed on aspirations, how they are formed and how university experiences might influence aspirations for future career choices. To this end, it would be helpful if all universities put graduate tracking mechanisms in place and conduct regular employer satisfaction surveys.

Linked to social capital and its role in reinforcing or diminishing opportunities, staff and students across all four universities considered the important role played by the **reputation of the university** and its international

standing in determining employment opportunities for graduates, as well as the effect of its location (urban or rural). There is a general consensus that graduates from what are perceived to be the most reputable universities (in our study, Wits) have better opportunities, while those from the less reputable universities will struggle (in our study, Univen). As a microbiology student from Univen commented: 'I don't think there's an advantage of being a graduate of Univen. Unlike most universities, the name itself, despite your grades, will speak on your behalf to people who are going to employ you. If I did my degree at Wits, obviously you are going to have a better advantage than a person who has done a degree here. It has a negative effect because it seems we are well known for being under-qualified for most of what we do.'

A UFS lecturer commented that a student who graduates from the University of Cape Town (UCT) or from the University of Pretoria 'would probably be looked at more favourably than from here, and certainly than from Limpopo', while a Wits engineering student said that because Wits is internationally known, 'It gives us the confidence that if we ever want to work in South Africa or elsewhere, that the reputation is there'. Moreover, we found much evidence from interviews with staff in particular that links to employers are stronger and easier to pursue for urban universities than those in rural areas, and such links in turn multiply work experience opportunities for students and graduates.

76. Duncan, F (2013) *Employment trends: a hard look at the numbers*. Available online at: [www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/employment-trends-a-hard-look-at-the-numbers/](http://www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/employment-trends-a-hard-look-at-the-numbers/)

77. Statistics South Africa (2014).

The **field of study** also emerged as a key factor in student and staff understanding of graduate employability. Both staff and students perceive better employment prospects for graduates in SET-related fields. The perception that humanities degrees (which include social science in South Africa) make one less employable was strong, however intrinsically valuable the knowledge gained may be. Thus a UFS sociology lecturer expressed her concerns: 'I'm getting more and more worried that it might be that most graduates will not be employed, especially in the humanities and social sciences', while a Wits Sociology/Law student remarked: 'I call this degree my useless but powerful degree. I love sociology, I've learned a lot of skills, I've learned how to use my brain, in politics how to argue my case, but I just feel that in terms of BA, to be quite honest, you get paid R5,000 to R6,000 when you leave here; personally I wonder how I would feed my kids with that salary. I find my degree useless [for employment] but powerful in the knowledge that it has [imparted].'

### 3.4 Enhancing graduate employability

Across the four universities, in addition to regular degree programmes, there is evidence of various initiatives to enhance graduate experiences and increase their employability. Some academics and departments, conscious of the needs of their students, try to 'add value' to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is well put by a lecturer at Univen: 'We lecturers are aware that we are teaching students who otherwise would have been kicked out of the system and not given a chance. The majority of us don't lecture, we teach, and when you do that the students seem to grow, and they grasp the skills easily. Once they grasp them, they can compete with the

best. What I have noticed is that most of the students that we train here, they go on to do their master's, Honours and PhDs in big universities like Cape Town, for instance. If the University of Venda can lift a student from that [original] level to the level of competing with those who were considered to be the cream, for me, that's a big positive.'

All the case study universities offer a range of ECAs, as well as support from a careers service, to enhance graduate employability; both emerge as important. As one UFS student affairs officer remarked: 'Everything in student life is about employability. So student life consists of sporting experiences, the arts and culture, leadership opportunities and development, volunteer training, community service projects. I would say the most significant things to do would be to participate in associations: societies, clubs.'

ECA includes participation in student representative councils, volunteering, sports, student subject associations, arts and culture, religious societies, and so on. While the opportunities to do so were more extensive at the urban campuses, they do exist at all four universities. Where students get involved in ECA activities, they believe that they gain immensely. For example, 71 per cent of the students in our survey believe that volunteering will increase their employability. In the in-depth interviews also, they commented on the value of ECA, for example:

'In my first year I joined an organisation on campus ... the association required me to go and speak to big business... I think that was where I got the practical experiences of being able to articulate myself in a professional manner.'

**(UFS student)**

Another told us:

'I lead a Christian organisation so I know how to communicate with people, how to treat people as a leader.'

**(Univen student)**

And a third, who led a student society, shared his experiences:

'Because I was president of the Society it allowed me the opportunity to make so many contacts with the working world. I was chatting to people that are head of departments in some of the big five companies. I was on speaking terms with the head of a big company here in Port Elizabeth. It does give you a lot of contacts and it also allows you the opportunity to organise events ... so there was quite a lot of event planning and coordination and working with different people, which is to me, all about learning.'

**(NMMU student)**

Nonetheless, not all of the students participate, or realise the importance of participating, in ECA for their career and personal development; nor indeed, according to our data, do the universities understand the importance of getting students from disadvantaged backgrounds involved in career-building ECA even where student mobility and money are constraints. Students from less advantaged universities may need more support to make more of whatever personal capital they have through taking up valuable and enriching ECA opportunities, yet we found that they seem least aware of how to do this and of why it is important for their futures, and also have the least means to enable them to participate.



Careers services at the four universities include: career guidance officers with the task of linking students to potential employers, providing opportunities for internships or work placements, as well as training final year students in job seeking skills such as CV writing, interviewing and work etiquette. Typically, the NMMU office explained how: 'We have been putting the vast majority of our first year students through this programme....like CV development, presentation skills, time management, financial management. [These] now get captured onto the co-curricular activity record, so in addition to the students' academic record, they now also have an NMMU co-curricular activity record.'

However, overall, we found a low level of participation in the available activities aimed at supporting and enhancing the employment of graduates after graduation. In most of the universities, most of the students in their third year (in one university up to 90 per cent) did not know about the careers office or did not know where the office is physically located. Where students had heard of and knew about the work of the support services, some of the programmes clashed with their academic timetables, while in some universities (Wits notably) careers support came via departments and their lecturers' own industry contacts (another form of social capital) rather than from central services. Overall, the survey responses showed that less than half of the students think that the student placement office or careers service at their university is supportive and informative. This percentage, coupled with the 36 per cent who neither agree nor disagree, suggests that the placement office is not a primary source of support for students.

As a Univen student observed, perhaps somewhat unfairly: 'There is no careers guidance. This is a group that should be actually nurtured, but that doesn't happen around here... So, right

now we are all depending on our individual strengths, because if we get to the workplace tomorrow we won't know what to do.'

### 3.5 Being able to apply theory/ subject knowledge to practice in the workplace

While there is evidence that students from the better regarded universities, as well as those in the SET disciplines, are more optimistic about their employment prospects, there is general agreement across students and staff that they experience a significant lack of practical exposure and application of theory during their degree programmes, even though students feel that the theory part of their curriculum is good. Academic staff, especially in the traditional universities, agree that the practical component is thin, because academics inevitably focus more on theory. Nevertheless, while universities are not narrowly conceived training institutions, most academics believe that more can be done to provide students with practical learning opportunities as part of the curriculum:

'I think a lot of our courses don't actually connect back into the practical application of what we do. So they will be very theoretical, very conceptual. And then we just expect the students to naturally understand and apply by themselves ... So we need to probably be doing more to create that bridge which I then think will enhance the employability of our students.'

**(Geography and Environmental Studies academic, Wits)**

There is evidence that some academics, particularly at NMMU, make a conscious effort to integrate practical dimension as part of the three- or four-year degree programme:

'Our practical component is very important for us, that the student gets practical experience. In our third year, we've got two years within the classroom, the third year the student has to work for eight months, [a] minimum [of] eight months on a farm, and so that just adds onto a student's employability.'

**(School of Environmental Science, Agriculture department, NMMU)**

However, resourcing practical experience is a challenge in some universities, where academic staff struggle with limited infrastructure even for university-based practicals:

'Well, they're trying to address it, because the main problem, we don't have infrastructure, we don't have buildings, and the university is a bit slow in response, but they are coming up now with equipment for practicals, but we don't have anywhere to house them, and then the students are disadvantaged in terms of acquiring practical skills – those practical skills they need when they go out.'

**(Environmental Studies, Univen)**

With regard to students, while overall they valued knowledge as the most important graduate attribute (as noted earlier), a significant concern is the limited opportunities to integrate and apply theory at practical level. As students explained, access to work experience enhances learning and opens more opportunities:

'internships give you the experience of what it's actually like to work in that field ... a chance to see what different employers are like, what different companies have as a culture.'

**(WITS BA Law/English student)**

'Here we get theoretical information and you need experience ... they are not offering practical learning, only theory.'

(Univen BCom student)

If work experience is not enabled by the university in which they are studying, this particularly affects students from poorer backgrounds who lack the social capital to find vacation work in order to apply their knowledge in a work situation and be better placed for employment. The theory–practice misalignment thus has unexpected equity effects for students who also lack networks with potential employers, both public and private; such students struggle to obtain work experience if this is not part of the formal curriculum.

### 3.6. Postgraduation student interviews

The research project tracked a sample of 24 students from the four case study universities roughly one year after graduation to understand their post-university experiences in the labour market. From these interviews, a number of findings emerged regarding graduate employability in South Africa. 1) Most bachelor (three-year) degree graduates in South Africa see the need to obtain an honours degree before going into the job market. While this is a prerequisite for some professional fields, in which graduates gain accreditation through the board exams they write at the end of the honours programme, other graduates (as well as employers) consider the honours degree an important transition space from theory to application of knowledge. Regarding the employment experience of graduates, a trend (also noted in the literature)<sup>78</sup> observed from this sample of 24 is that white

graduates struggle less to obtain employment than black graduates. Underlying factors may include the fact that white graduates have stronger social networks and support structures which can facilitate employment in the areas of their choice, and also they attend better universities. Some 71 per cent of white graduates were employed at the time of the follow-up interview, while only 41 per cent of black graduates had secured employment.

Furthermore, the findings show that graduates from the better known universities, such as Wits, had all gained employment, with two having chosen postgraduate study. Of the six students followed up from Univen, only two had gained employment, while three were unemployed at the time of the interviews and one had obtained a scholarship and decided to further her studies. Five of the seven students followed up from UFS were employed. Only one student from NMMU was unemployed, three were employed, and two were pursuing postgraduate studies before entering the job market. These employment outcomes are not dissimilar to those revealed by the earlier research when analysed by field of study. Half of all the graduates who had gained employment were in SET-related fields, while none of those in this small sample with a BA degree who had gained employment had secured a job related directly to their field of study.

Geographical location also emerged as important. Most of those employed found jobs in the major economic regions such as Gauteng, while other graduates continue to aspire to migrate from less urbanised areas to the big cities. Another finding from the follow-up interviews is the role of personal agency in gaining employment. Most of the employed graduates had made

significant efforts during and after their degree programmes to gain additional skills or competencies, which in their view had enhanced their employment outcomes. These activities had included internships, vacation work, being active in a student organisation, volunteering on or off campus and being active in job seeking initiatives.

This group of 24 graduates were asked to reflect on their university experience and how it had contributed (or not) to their current employment situation and their perception of the contribution they were making to society. With 15 of the 24 graduates (60 per cent) in some form of employment, knowledge of their field of study and critical thinking were the two attributes they felt had contributed to their success in obtaining employment. However, this shifts slightly when looked at by field of study and each university. Graduates from Wits emphasised attributes such as hard work: they observed that their departments had demanded rigorous academic work which, although difficult at the time, had prepared them for working life. Engineering graduates who had held bursaries also noted the practical vacation work, which they were encouraged to undertake as part of their degree, had provided them with valuable experience and social contacts, which had assisted them in securing their current employment:

'I think what also helped is [as part of the bursary agreement], doing vacation work in my third and fourth year. So because of that as well, it really gave me some exposure to what kind of work I'd be doing, and the whole work environment in general.'

(Wits engineering graduate)

78. See Borat et al. (2010) *op. cit.*

Wits graduates believe that besides hard work, the Wits 'name' also boosted their ability to secure employment. However, graduates from other universities also showed confidence, which they thought had been developed internally and was not necessarily linked to the status of their university. This was very evident amongst the graduates from Univen, who think that, even in the face of potential limitations such as the reputation of their university or their background, their self-confidence was a key factor in them getting and thriving in their current employment:

'if you are a graduate you have to think like a graduate, like a person who has knowledge, think of changing other people's lives, or impacting other people's lives, or making a change in the economy.'

**(BComm graduate working for Deloitte)**

Another attribute which emerged across all the universities as important is being able to work with people. Especially in universities with a diverse student profile, graduates feel that engaging with students from different backgrounds during their degree experience had enhanced their ability to adapt in the workplace. A UFS graduate who was working with the Student Representative Council while studying part time reflected as follows:

'I come from a community where ... we have our own set of problems but then race is not one of them. We are uniform... So for me the most important thing was [personal] growth. I don't think if I hadn't studied in South Africa I would have gained this [ability to work with diverse people] and know how people behave [differently].'

This reflection also applies to most of the graduates from the other universities where they reported that they had learned to engage with diversity at different levels and to break down their own prejudices around race, people and gender. A final attribute for which graduates praised their university experience was the ability to work with others or work in a team. Most recognised the importance of teamwork, skills in which they had developed through group work, assignments and other practical experiences. The same engineering graduate from Wits reflected on his good co-ordination skills, attributing them to: 'We did a lot of projects at university, a lot of project or people management, in terms of working in groups, having the people skills to work in teams, even in some cases where you don't get to choose the people that you work with. So I think I've been quite appreciative of that.'

Most of the graduates with jobs in this group of 24 reported that they were currently satisfied with their employment outcomes in relation to their university experience. This may be due in some cases to the modest expectations they had upon registration and also in the light of the high unemployment rates currently affecting the economy. However, especially those still struggling to gain employment, reiterated that there had not been sufficient practical exposure during their degree courses and felt that their BA degrees were too broad and not focused enough for them to obtain employment. Other graduates feel that their writing and communications skills are still insufficiently developed, while some Univen graduates continue to feel that the reputation of their university is hindering them in achieving their

aspirations. About 60 per cent of those in postgraduate studies, especially graduates from Univen and UFS, had resorted to studying due to the challenges they had experienced in securing a job.

### 3.7 Innovative employability initiatives

South African universities have introduced a variety of initiatives designed to enhance student employability and social contributions. As part of this research, those being tried by the case study universities and by other institutions were documented, and three are described below. Two specifically address business-type skills; the other focuses strongly on quality, with the aim of turning this into academic success and economic opportunities. The first, from NMMU, explores how employability and citizenship values are enhanced through a social entrepreneurship project within the Department of Management Practice. A fundamental aspect of the initiative is blending theory and a hands-on approach to learning that seeks to develop employability skills such as time management and business development, but also engages students with issues of inequality, social justice and giving back to society and the community. A similar initiative has been taken at the Vaal University of Technology. However, a key aspect of this programme is its diverse access routes, which aim to provide access to higher education for those who would otherwise not be able to access higher education. Furthermore, the initiative attempts to develop entrepreneurship skills, which have been observed to be lacking among South African youth. Through its teaching and learning curriculum, the Entrepreneurship

Development Programme (EDP) in the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) supports the university to implement its corporate strategy, which emphasises innovation and entrepreneurship in combination with a wider access policy. Similarly, the Faculty of Commerce at UCT, through its Educational Development Unit (EDU), has made enormous efforts to provide access to students from disadvantaged communities, with the aim of enhancing their skills development and achieving equality. The EDU is committed to

attracting and supporting students who have experienced disadvantage in their education and social life and who need a holistic approach to teaching and learning.

These selected cases suggest that there is a conscious effort from universities to introduce more innovative approaches to supporting wide access to higher education and enhance students' employability. With respect to these initiatives, success needs to be defined broadly to include

widening of access, improving students' university experiences and enabling them to acquire skills that will make them fit for work on graduation, while also enabling them to engage with the complexities of the South African economy and society. The evidence shows that, while some departments are more inclusive and responsive to broader societal needs, this is not the case for all.

### 1. Graduate employability and citizenship through social entrepreneurship, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)

The Department of Management Practice at NMMU is committed to inclusive access and enabling a wide range of students to obtain university qualifications, as well as engaging students in practical skills development and encouraging them to be socially responsible.

#### Identified gap/need

The programme was developed to fill a skills development gap. The lecturer in charge of the programme explained: 'I've listened to my advisory board, consisting of people from industry, and their input is that students graduating from the university have the theoretical knowledge, but are actually quite useless once they get into business. They don't have the softer skills, such

as time management, work ethics, assertiveness, self-confidence and presentation skills.'

#### Programme aim

The programme aims to prepare students not only academically, but also for work, so that graduates have not only academic qualifications, but also leadership and assertiveness skills, a professional work attitude and sound work ethics.

#### Method or approach

The programme co-ordinator described how: 'From the first year, I have moved totally away from theoretical projects and more towards the application of the theory taught in the classroom. Programme is in three phases. First is the integration of a theoretical focus with an applied dimension. Second is the hands-on experience students have, which is not just an observational visit to a business site, but the practical

involvement of the students as 'owners' of the activities. The third aspect is the fact that students participate in the product life span from design or supplier right through marketing and then selling to create a profit, which is saved in a bank account and used for the purpose of supporting disadvantaged students and communities.'

#### Programme outcome:

The programme has received favourable responses from employers, students and fellow academic staff: 'The feedback that we receive from these companies is that the students are more mature ... that they have a more mature sense of work ethic. When they come into the programmes of Checkers or Lewis, on ... internship programmes, they [are said to] conduct themselves very differently, and our students are always the first port of call for their [employers'] learnership (internship) programmes.'

## 2. Entrepreneurship and community engagement, Vaal University of Technology (VUT)

The Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) at the VUT is one of the core programmes within the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE). The Centre aims to support the university to implement its corporate strategy, which emphasises innovation and the fostering of entrepreneurship practices through its teaching and learning curriculum, as well as through research. As a university of technology within a knowledge society, VUT has committed itself to providing wider access and more diverse learning opportunities, by interweaving learning, working, and living through both content and delivery.

### Identified gap/need

‘There is a significant lack of an entrepreneurship culture among university graduates and youths within the community. There is a general tendency for black youths and graduates to look up to government or private employers for employment and livelihood.’  
(Programme Co-ordinator)

### Programme aim

The overall aim of the unit is to ‘create second chance opportunities for self-reliance and self-determination for the most marginalised in our communities, while cushioning those who have lost the support of families. We understand that entrepreneurship can be taught, and then.... we open it to everybody.’  
(Programme Co-ordinators)

### Method or approach

The programme has adopted a four-pronged approach to developing the relevant abilities, skills and values. These are:

- Developing an entrepreneurial culture through emphasising a mindset change from dependence to creativity.
- Skills development.
- Enhancing job creation.
- Networking opportunities between established entrepreneurs and businesses and young graduates and youths who have the potential to excel.

The objective of the course is to implement an enterprise development programme for the youth, especially those from deprived backgrounds, who are provided with the necessary skills to start, manage and market their own businesses (SASOL Partner).

### Programme outcome

The programme has, since its inception in 2012, benefited some 220 entrepreneurs, selected from a pool of 4,000 applicants. The goods and services the EDP provides include running kiosks, landscaping, branding, marketing and manufacturing. It claims to have been successful in providing entrepreneurship skills and opportunities to a growing number of South African students, youths and adults who would have otherwise struggled to obtain decent and sustainable livelihoods.



### 3. Access, participation and success, University of Cape Town (UCT)

At UCT, the academic development programme in the Faculty of Commerce claims to have had significant success in enabling participation and employment success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Led by the Educational Development Unit (EDU), it aims 'to be part of the development of well-rounded students who will acquire the appropriate skills to excel academically and contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of South Africa'.

#### Identified gap/need

'If you were black, you were put into the programme... Students were not allowed to decide if they wanted to join the programme, nor was there input from students as to how the programme was delivered. [Previously, e]mphasis was on academic development, ignoring other aspects of student development. Invariably the students just crashed out in the second year ... the throughput and the graduation rates were poor. There were some serious problems with the [that] model.'  
(Director, EDU)

#### Programme aim

To attract and retain students who have experienced 'gaps and disparities' in both their education and their life experiences is the primary purpose of the EDU. It also provides students with a variety of types of support in order to increase the range of education and life skills they develop.

#### Method or approach

The programme adopts a holistic approach, viewing students in their totality rather than focusing on academic skills. It seeks to enhance the learning experience, improve academic success, cultivate a broad set of graduate and social attributes and qualities, and provide students with a range of value-added components, such as leadership opportunities, a yearly awards evening which has become a space for students' voice and creativity, internships with various business firms, alumni mentoring, and community projects. According to the EDU director, a number of support activities are integrated into the curriculum to ensure that, *'It's not just about a career-driven initiative but developing a range of graduate competencies while studying: There's a scaffolding variation in terms of the kind of support throughout the rest of*

*the degree ... not just academic support but focusing on developing a range of graduate attributes. A particular focus has been given to development of human values of social conscience, citizenship and giving back [to their communities, with] a very strong focus on leadership and mentorships in different kind of ways.'*

#### Programme outcome

The EDU approach has generated results that out-perform most mainstream first year courses, with the graduation throughput rate increasing rapidly from 40 per cent in 2001 to approximately 78 per cent at the end of 2014. There has also been a large increase in the numbers and pass rates of EDU students writing professional examinations, such as those of the Chartered Accountant Board Exams. To date, approximately 280 EDU students have qualified as chartered accountants, with the pass rates for these very demanding professional examinations ranging from 78 per cent to 96 per cent. In addition, corporate bursary programmes make it a condition that bursary recipients must be part of the EDU, recognising its value to the students they sponsor and will later employ.

### 3.8 Inclusive development

We now turn to the other key aspect of the research – the link between employability and inclusive development. In this project we have understood inclusive development to include the formation of citizenship values and an awareness and desire to contribute to society and its human development beyond the narrow self-interest of individual students. The other way in which we have tried to understand inclusive development is in relation to how inclusive the universities themselves are with regard to access and student experiences. With regard to this latter point, our data suggests considerable variation, as illustrated in our attention to social capital, work aspirations and so forth in the preceding sections. Here we turn to the matter of diversity as a dimension of university inclusion and then consider citizenship and social contributions.

#### 3.8.1 Diversity capital:

While it is clear that some universities are better placed than others to enhance the social capital and economic opportunities available to their students, some universities seem to be doing especially well in developing 'diversity capital', that is an asset which can be accumulated at university, drawn on, increased, and so on somewhat like social capital. Diversity capability which emerges as highly rated by employers (see Chapter 4). Students value exposure to collaborative learning through teaching methods where black and white students are brought together. They also learn leadership skills by working with diverse students. This seems to be a deliberate focus at UFS and NMMU, as set out in their university mission statements and revealed in reports of daily interactions:

'In the classroom, especially when we have to do things like group work, there you don't have [the divide

between white and black students] ... And then it exposes you to a person's life. You [tend to realise], this person is not that bad. Maybe I thought white people are like this, but this guy is different. So we've learned to appreciate other people.'

(UFS politics student)

Another student remarked that:

'You meet different people that you would never have met before. And also with that comes adaptability. Like sometimes you're going to realise that, oh well, this person doesn't really think the same way I do, so you must learn to try and figure out how you and that person can be in the same space, but not overpowering each other.'

(Construction economics student, NMMU)

Students need to be encouraged to make more of such experiences when seeking employment; some are less adept at identifying their range of employment-attractive experiences and communicating them to employers than others.

However, the picture is not straightforward. For example, one academic at Wits explained that, in his view:

'Wits still is way behind the mass education institutions ... at surface value, I think, it looks fairly diverse but these [black students] are from very wealthy black parents sending their kids here, and that can make it look healthier than it is in terms of transformation... I've regularly heard the phrase here, oh, the weaker students will just fail out, as if it's not a concern. Whereas at [my previous university] we were very concerned with getting those struggling students through.'

The teaching methods adopted may facilitate or hinder interaction between students from different backgrounds and their ability to complete their programmes successfully. For example, a political science student from the UFS felt that the separation of students according to language reinforces feelings of separation and difference: *'I think my big [issue], looking at this institution specifically, is the separation of the medium of instruction, the language, I think for me it is a barrier because it forces us to separate ourselves.'* Moreover, with its black and almost entirely ethnically TsiVenda student body, opportunities for mixing with students from other backgrounds are far more limited at Univen, notwithstanding its cohort of Zimbabwean students.

#### 3.8.2 Citizenship:

Although universities' ability and willingness to foster interaction between social groups varies, they do mostly seem to place considerable emphasis on encouraging students to see their university experience as equipping them to contribute as graduates to society. Of the students interviewed, 49 per cent at NMMU, 63 per cent at UFS, 74 per cent at Univen and 53 per cent at Wits said that they expected to contribute to inclusive development in various ways. Nevertheless, the interviews also revealed that many students thought that their universities could do more in this respect. For example, some Wits students stated:

'I think the University looks at people who are going to have more impact on the economic side but on the social front, I think that is where we lack. You don't see the community projects they advocate. You don't see where they are saying that they take x number of students to Soweto. In our course we are supposed to do a community-based project, and we

did do it but we didn't go to the local communities... We are lacking in making graduates socially aware of what is happening, especially in the local community.'

**(Construction studies student, Wits)**

The survey data revealed that a total of 74 per cent of students strongly agreed or agreed that their university encourages them to seek to contribute to society after graduation, while 62 per cent strongly agreed or agreed that graduates from their university want to contribute to social development that benefits everyone in society. Finally, 87 per cent strongly agreed or agreed that they would be able to contribute to such development through their careers. Overall then, students do seem to have a sense of fairness and social justice and to be willing to make contributions to improving society.

Nonetheless, employers, for the most part, do not appear to value a desire to contribute to development at the national or local levels and do not specify this as something that they take account of in the recruitment process (see section 4). Also there is some tension between contributing to society and personal gain. Thus one of the heads of departments from Wits reflected on the attitude of students who are keener on the economic and financial gains of obtaining a degree:

'In BComm in general, a lot of these kids are here because they come from wealthy families and they want more. And quite often ethics, for example, which is an obvious area to address these kinds of things, is almost taught as a stapled-on bit of content. It's not the core content

because, clearly, you don't have time to have a module on its own, even though in honours we do. When you mention ethics, students tend to glaze over and go, oh, well, this is just some touchy-feely garbage that's been added on to the end. It's treated almost like that. I think that [ethics] is a very difficult question.'

There is a related tension with regard to the individualist discourse we found to predominate at Wits. Asked to what extent students are made aware of the broader responsibility they have to society and to their community, an academic in Social Science at Wits responded to the question of what the university is doing to enhance graduate employability as follows:

'Be motivated. It's a capitalist world. Get on your toes, right? Life owes you nothing, except your hard work to support your family and yourself, and our students know this. They know they've got to get out there and find the work and then find the answers and do that, be motivated.'

While this provides a description of the challenges within the working world, it does not foster more inclusive and collective values in students. However, such a view does reflect the individualistic basis of the human capital approach which has come to dominate higher education policy not only in South Africa but globally.

#### **4. Employer perspectives**

Finally, analysis of our data from 17 major employers from banking, construction, investment, retail, manufacturing, mining, legal services, auditing and government, as well as an interview with the executive director of the South African Graduate Employers

Association (SAGEA), generated four key findings relating to the employment of graduates from South African universities. Firstly, the employers we interviewed expressed a preference to recruit from a small number of universities. UCT was easily the most preferred (69 per cent), followed by the University of Johannesburg (UJ) (62 per cent), Wits and the University of Pretoria (both 50 per cent). The main universities from which these employers recruit are not only the historically advantaged institutions but also, importantly, are located in the most economically vibrant provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape. While 69 per cent of employers preferred to recruit from UCT, only two out of the 17 employers, including a public sector employer, made reference to employing graduates from HDIs. Even at the regional or provincial levels, employers expressed a preference for recruiting from the top-ranked universities. These are better resourced due to their historical advantages and thus continue to deliver better student performance, but may take in fewer disadvantaged students. Employers based in provinces other than Gauteng and Western Cape Province did, however, indicate a preference to recruit graduates from universities closer to them. These preferences largely exclude rural universities from employer consideration.

What do employers look for? Although the sample of 17 is small, our data shows that employers are not dissatisfied with the graduates whom they recruit (albeit from a small number of universities): 94 per cent said they were satisfied, including with graduates' subject knowledge and their motivation and willingness to learn. They emphasised the ability of graduates to understand and integrate

into the work or business culture. They are, however, concerned with the lack of application of theory to practice and have concerns about gaps in critical thinking, creativity and entrepreneurial development. They also identified graduates who are '*not motivated*' or '*ambitious*', in their view because such students enroll on the degree programme they can afford, or had been advised to choose a degree programme because it would enable them to '*easily get a job and earn money*'. They also noted a problem of some graduates failing to take responsibility for their own development, instead trying to shift this responsibility on to others.

According to Cathy Sims, CEO of the South African Graduate Employers Association (SAGEA, formerly SAGRA), employers look for 'quality', understood by large private sector employers as the class of degree (2:1 minimum), together with the university at which degree was completed. The employers we interviewed think the quality of graduates comes down to resourcing of the universities, while others relate this to the quality of secondary schools and family support, arguing that graduates from disadvantaged universities have '*realistic expectations*' of the workplace but have also had less prior support to develop their work readiness. Some employers, however, recognise the challenge HDIs face in training students, most of whom come from a low-quality schooling system, and acknowledge how difficult it is for universities to bring these students to a par with their peers from better schools.

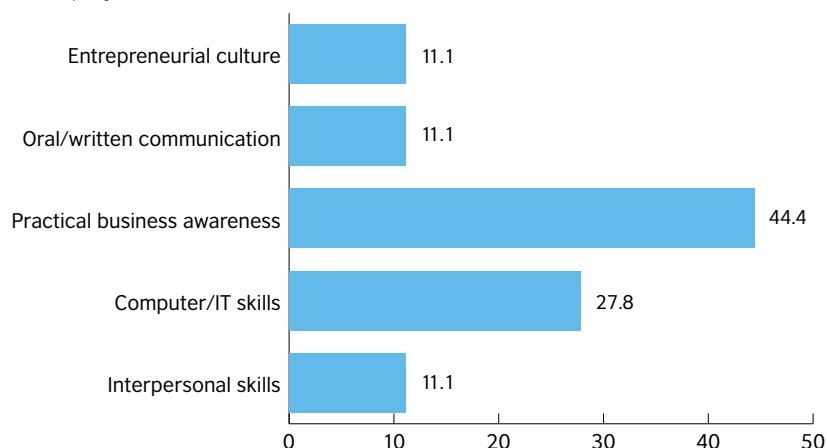
According to Cathy Sims, and based on SAGEA's large annual survey of private sector employers, they are looking for future leaders, who have the ability to make things happen/get things done and take people with them. They seek people who can problem solve [think through alternatives, come up with solutions], analyse ['sift the data'], think critically, plan, organise, mobilise, communicate, influence and lead. However, she suggested, large private employers may not see it as their responsibility to open up opportunities (until there is a severe and prolonged shortage, for example as happened with accountants). Based on their rankings of values, the employers we interviewed had a different prioritisation of what is most important, namely, '*working effectively in a racially and cultural diverse team*'. This was perceived by 42 per cent of the 17 employers as the most important attribute they hope to see in the graduates they recruit. Employers emphasised the importance of working in diverse racial and cultural milieus, through teamwork and respect for diversity. These employers emphasised that they value graduates with integrity and ethics, who are hardworking, motivated, ambitious and comfortable with diversity. Another key attribute which was mentioned by a number of employers is the '*all-rounder graduate*', used to describe graduates who are not only excellent in their academic work, but who are also able to engage with aspects of life beyond academia. Some employers said that they would rather take a student with an average academic performance who has been

active in other aspects of student life and society, such as student leadership, involvement in student societies, or community engagement.

The data shows, therefore, that a fairly typical group of employers emphasise the need for core skills such as communication, critical thinking and numeracy, but also consider a potential recruit's appreciation of diversity and ability to undertake teamwork as very important i.e. a well-rounded graduate who not only has a good degree but also much more.

Employers also identified a number of skills and attributes which they feel are less well developed in the graduates they recruit, including a lack of business awareness and entrepreneurial culture, which may be of particular concern. Figure 1 shows the proportion of the 17 employers who identify specific capabilities which graduates lack (rather than the percentage of graduates seen to lack these attributes).

**Figure 1:** Missing graduate skills in graduates according to percentage of employers interviewed



Employers think that more can be done by collaborating with universities to improve the skills of graduates, beyond their current activities which include – at some but not all universities – attendance at career fairs, the provision of bursaries and offering their own in-house training. They recommend a closer partnership between universities and employers, through which students can be exposed to work placements as part of their curriculum and which they believe will enhance the development of soft skills.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The dominant discourse of HE in South Africa is still one of quality rather than employability. This emphasis on quality aims to build on the achievements in terms of improving access which have been seen over the last decade. Student numbers have increased significantly. However, the quality and quantity of academics, as well as infrastructure and other resources, especially in historically black

universities, have not increased commensurately, and throughput is weak, hence the current emphasis on quality. Quality, in turn, is directly linked to graduate employability, because better quality, more well-rounded graduates are more employable.

### 5.1 Key findings

A number of findings can be distilled:

1. Graduate employability in South Africa is a function of complex factors, some of which are based on historic legacies which continue to favour graduates from some universities compared to others. Historically advantaged universities benefit from their better resourcing and from employer preferences, while students from affluent families can afford better secondary schools, enabling them to study where they want and to choose their field of study. Thus university type, geography, field of study, and student background – most especially social class and race – all shape opportunities.

2. Students are very concerned about their limited exposure to applied practice/experiential learning because they are aware that it affects their employability.
3. Exposure to working with diverse others in classes at university appears to be regarded especially positively by both students and employers.
4. Most general degree holders (BA, BSc, BComm) perceive an honours degree as necessary for employment.
5. Student aspirations are significant in shaping employment opportunities and their agency in working towards the job or career they want, but we do not know enough about how these are shaped by their university experiences.
6. Students want to contribute to society after graduating in some way, but also need to be employed. Citizenship is valued.
7. Careers services are undervalued and underutilised and ECA involvement is uneven.
8. Tracking even a small number of students postgraduation has been illuminating, in terms of documenting the university attended, race and subsequent employment experience, who chooses further study and why, and positive as well as negative shifts in career aspirations.
9. While there are some gaps between the skills and attributes employers want and those that graduates bring, the gap may not be as large as is often claimed. The development of a well-rounded graduate is an important concept which needs to be developed further.



## 5.2 Recommendations for policy and practice

With increased pressures on universities, as observed in student protests in 2015 demanding wider access, lower fees and better university experiences, higher education in South Africa is faced with many challenges as well as an opportunity to rethink policies. Based on our findings these recommendations can be made.

- Overall, while a university cannot do everything to get jobs for its students, it can do a great deal in terms of teaching and learning, developing an ethos and values, actively encouraging and promoting extra-curricular participation, and filling in social capital 'gaps' to enhance the employability of individual students. But because higher education sits at a nexus with employment, the labour market and public policies, what each university can do is also constrained. The key is to understand and act on those elements which universities can change; it would help, moreover, if universities were responsive to the needs, aspirations and goals of their students for their future lives.
- While graduate unemployment is not currently an issue, it may become so in the future as quality improves and more students graduate; universities need to develop employability initiatives of diverse kinds now, including addressing the challenges of more work-integrated learning and valuing diversity.
- Careers services provide valuable support. They need to be better known and better resourced and should especially target students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Careers advice needs to include building on diversity capital and explaining and encouraging the employability benefits of ECA (also see the first bullet point).
- There is a need for more engagement and collaboration between universities and employers beyond career fairs and talks. There is a need for employers to provide more opportunities for practical and work experience activities and internships, especially for students in universities in rural areas, and for employers to widen their university recruitment pool.
- There is a need for an expanded range of graduate outcomes to include social citizenship and diversity experiences as an integral part of curriculum and pedagogy, as well as skills and entrepreneurship.
- There are systemic issues at stake in the historical resourcing, stratification and reputational effects for diverse universities and individual student opportunities and outcomes. Public policy needs to support change in the direction of more equality. Poor students attend less well-known universities, are less well prepared for higher education, and struggle more to get jobs. Employers recruit from a narrow range of universities, even though they claim to value diversity in the workplace. Universities can also rally robustly in defence of the value of arts and social science degrees, do more to improve the quality of these degrees, and make the case to employers for what these have to offer.
- There is a need for more data and more research; such research needs to be both quantitative and qualitative, so that student voices are heard. In particular, we do not know enough about where graduates go after university and why. We need more tracer studies such as the ones conducted by CHEC for Western Cape universities, and the LMIP for Rhodes and Fort Hare. We do not know much about how universities foster aspirations or diminish them. We do not know enough about what employers want and how this might need to shift rather than being taken as the final word on what universities should be doing. Nor do we know enough about the outcomes of initiatives to develop entrepreneurial cultures (both social and profit-driven) and foster the capability for self-employment to assess the value of current approaches and the scope for replicating them more widely.

A young man with short dark hair is wearing large black headphones and a grey and black horizontally striped t-shirt. He is smiling and looking down at a device he is working on, which appears to be a small electronic circuit board or a similar technical component. The background is a warm, out-of-focus indoor setting with wooden walls and some greenery.

University attachments are defined in terms of white and blue collar elite occupations. No students are undertaking internships in the *jua kali* sector (informal enterprises). Yet they provide more practical and locally relevant improvised solutions to some of the development problems.

**Policymaker, higher education regulatory body, Kenya**

# Chapter 3 – Divergent narratives on graduate employability in Kenya: dysfunctional institutions or dysfunctional labour markets?

Ibrahim Oanda and Daniel Sifuna

## Introduction

Like most African countries, Kenya faces a growing problem of what has been referred to as the ‘youth bulge’, with 80 per cent of its population under 35 years old.<sup>79</sup> The youth, aged 15–34 years, which form 35 per cent of the population, have the highest unemployment rate of 67 per cent.<sup>80</sup> Not all of this age group are in the labour force, but the unemployment rate amongst those that are is extremely high. There are no official statistics to indicate what proportion of unemployed young people are university graduates, but recent expansion of the university sector has fed into perceptions that many of the increased number of graduates joining the labour market are failing to obtain jobs.

The key players give different reasons for this predicament. Policymakers are reluctant to admit the extent of graduate unemployment, while employers apportion more blame to the universities, and the universities tend to blame employers for ‘closing out’ students from apprenticeship and internship opportunities which might enable them to gain work-related skills. None of these claims are based on specific data. The objective of this chapter is to contribute to an understanding of the trends and causes of graduate unemployment in Kenya, based on the perspectives of the universities, students, policymakers and employers, collected as part of the ‘Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development’ study. This chapter is

organised into five parts. The first part provides background discussion to the economic, political and social context of graduate employability in Kenya. The second part is a discussion of the higher education system focusing on enrolments and the turnout of students to the labour market. Third is a broad discussion of the structure of the labour market in Kenya and government interventions to address the issue of graduate employability. Part four presents perspectives from employers, university students and policymakers, including university management and finally a conclusion pulling together the discussion.

## Background

### The economic, political and social context

Like most African countries, Kenya faces increasing problems of poverty and youth unemployment. The country has designed various political and economic policies that seek to address this challenge through the generation of inclusive economic growth to reduce poverty by strengthening the private sector,<sup>81</sup> and to generate employment opportunities, especially for the youth. These development ambitions are the core of Kenya’s development blueprint, ‘Vision 2030’, which seeks to transform Kenya into a newly industrialising, middle-income country that provides a high quality life for all its citizens by the year 2030.<sup>82</sup> The blueprint assigns education and training an important role in spearheading this transformation, through technological innovation, a shift from knowledge-reproduction to

knowledge-production, and ensuring the availability of a critical mass of well-qualified human resource.<sup>83</sup> These aspirations can only be realised through high quality education and training. As part of this strategy, Kenya has, since 2008, pursued various reforms in the education sector, notably expansion of education facilities at all levels, reforms in the university sector that have entailed rapid expansion of the number of institutions and enrolments, establishment of new technical training institutions, and closer collaboration between employers and training institutions. According to the second medium-term plan, 2013–17,<sup>84</sup> the heart of Kenya’s economic transformation is visualised to be a university education system that is focused, efficient and able to create knowledge, and deliver accessible, equitable, relevant and good quality training to sustain a knowledge economy that is internationally competitive. Despite this commitment, public resources allocated to the higher education sector have declined while the number of institutions and students enrolled has risen. For example, while student enrolment in the universities went up by 28 per cent from the 2014–15 to the 2015–16 academic years, requiring an estimated increase of ten per cent in funding from the government, funding actually fell by six per cent to US\$588 million compared to the US\$627.2 million allotted in 2014–15.<sup>85</sup> It is such reductions in funding against increased enrolments that have led to an increasingly common perception that the institutions offer only low quality training.

79. UNDP (2013) Kenya’s Youth Employment Challenge. Available online at: [www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Kenya\\_YEC\\_web\(jan13\).pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Kenya_YEC_web(jan13).pdf)

80. Republic of Kenya (2014) *Economic Survey*. Nairobi: Government printer.

81. African Development Bank (2014) *Kenya Country Strategy Paper 2014-2018*.

82. Republic of Kenya (2007) *Kenya Vision 2030 – A Globally Competitive and Prosperous Kenya*. Nairobi: Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030.

83. Republic of Kenya (2007) *op. cit.*

84. Republic of Kenya (2013a) *Second term medium plan 2013-2017; Transforming Kenya: Pathway To Devolution, Socio-Economic Development, Equity and National Unity*. Nairobi. Ministry of Devolution and National Planning.

85. Nganga, G (2015) State cuts university funding by 6% as enrolment soars. *University World News*. Issue No 366.

In terms of political and economic reforms, the country adopted a new constitution in 2010, which set in motion legal and institutional reforms targeted at providing a better environment for economic growth and improved management of public resources. Some of these frameworks include: the Public Finance Management Act (2012); the County Governments Act (2012); the National Government Coordination Act (2013), and the Transition to Devolved Governments Act (2012); a new education framework (Education Act 2013); a new higher education legal framework (Universities Act 2013) and a series of other reforms aimed at enhancing the level of practical skills training among the youth. However, despite these reforms, unemployment, especially among the youth, has persisted and it is estimated that about 92 per cent of the unemployed youth lack the vocational or professional skills demanded by the job market.<sup>86</sup> The high unemployment levels have led to increased dependency ratios, when at the same time, the country is experiencing slow economic growth, increasing poverty incidence and a rising national security challenge that negatively impact on achievement of the overall objectives of Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Studies have for example documented that Kenya has an annual population growth rate of three per cent, a high dependency ratio of 0.8 and a fast growing youth population with young people (between the age of 18 and 34 years old) making up more than a third of the entire population.

While the young working force has the greatest potential with regard to capabilities and productivity, their large size also poses challenges if they are not engaged in productive activities.<sup>87</sup>

The government, in its First Medium Term Plan, 2008–12 projected annual average employment growth of six per cent and creation of a total of 3.7 million new jobs.<sup>88</sup> This target was not met: only an annual average of 511,000 jobs against a target of 740,000 jobs were created during the plan period.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, about 80 per cent of the new jobs created were in the informal sector, where most jobs are characterised by underemployment and low productivity.<sup>90</sup> This initial failure of the Vision 2030 blueprint strategy signalled the serious challenges the government faced as it set out to fix the mismatch between education/training and labour market needs, particularly the challenge of turning the ‘youth bulge’ into an economic asset by addressing growing informality in the labour market. As the government promises in its second medium-term plan, efforts need to be made to create quality jobs in the formal sector, improve skills training and achieve a major and permanent shift toward formal employment, with the aim of increasing the proportion of modern sector employment from 12 per cent in 2012 to 40 per cent by 2017.<sup>91</sup> Such government ambitions are, however, threatened by the fragility of Kenya’s economy. The country’s real economic growth rate has been oscillating around one per cent per year for the past five years, while its neighbours in East

Africa have enjoyed annual GDP growth rates ranging from three per cent to seven per cent. In addition, already high levels of inequality have increased, while issues of education access and quality are placing its current position as a regional leader in human capital development in jeopardy.<sup>92</sup>

### The higher education system in Kenya

The higher education system consists of public and private universities, a number of middle level technical and vocational institutions that are often linked to universities, and research centres such as the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). Together, these institutions constitute the higher education and training pipeline in the country. The research centres continue to support capacity for research and doctoral education in Kenya, provide some of the workforce required to drive university education, and generate new knowledge and solutions to problems in critical areas of national and international development. This research project concentrated primarily on the university sector of the higher education system, which provides most of the undergraduate education, and where recent expansion has created a concern regarding the extent to which the institutions are producing employable graduates.

86. Republic of Kenya (2013a) *op. cit.*

87. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) January (2013b) ‘Kenya’s Youth Employment Challenge’. Discussion Paper. Available online at: [www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Kenya\\_YEC\\_web\(jan13\).pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Kenya_YEC_web(jan13).pdf)

88. Republic of Kenya (2008a) *First medium term plan, 2008-2012: Kenya vision 2030: a globally competitive and prosperous Kenya.*

89. *Ibid.*

90. Republic of Kenya (2013a) *op. cit.*

91. *Ibid.*

92. USAID/Kenya (2014) *Workforce Connections; Kenya Youth Assessment.* USAID/FHI 360.



Recent education policy interventions have accelerated the pace of university expansion in Kenya (see Table 1). Central to this has been the desire by the country to respond to increasing demand for university education to consolidate gains in participation rates at the primary and secondary school levels. In 2012, Kenya had eight public universities and a number of constituent colleges, but the number increased dramatically the following year to 22, as a result of 14 new universities being created from former university colleges. There are still an additional nine constituent colleges of public universities and 17 chartered private universities. Much of this

expansion has been through converting middle level colleges that were critical in providing training in middle level skills to full university status. Once converted to universities, the tendency has been for the institutions to drop their pre-existing science and technology focus and to increase enrolment in humanities, education, and business degree programmes rather than science and engineering.<sup>93</sup> The capacity of science, engineering, and medical sciences has not grown in the past ten years despite a more than doubling of enrolment in the public universities, while private universities face constraints in offering science and technology degree

programmes because they are capital intensive and expensive to establish.<sup>94</sup> In addition, the expansion has led to duplication of academic programmes and delivery channels: universities are expanding in the same way, offering similar programmes and using the same traditional delivery channels, with the result that the capacity of the institutions to be transformational is not built into the expansion process.<sup>95</sup>

**Table 1:** Growth and number of public and private universities in Kenya

Category of universities	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Public universities</b>	7	7	8	22	22
<b>Public university constituent colleges</b>	15	23	23	9	9
<b>Public university campuses established</b>	30	30	33	33	33
<b>Chartered private universities</b>	13	14	15	17	17
<b>Universities with letter of interim authority</b>	9	11	12	11	13
<b>Newly registered universities (private)</b>	3	2	2	2	1
<b>Private university constituent colleges</b>	-	4	4	5	5

Source: Republic of Kenya (2015).

93. Republic of Kenya (2008b) *The National Strategy for University Education, 2007–2015*. Nairobi. Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

94. *Ibid.*

95. Oanda, IO and Jowi, J (2012) University Expansion and Challenge to Social Development in Kenya; Dilemmas and Pitfalls. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 10/1: 49–71.



The pressure to expand university education in Kenya has emanated mainly from the large number of qualified students who seek access to this level of education each year. Regardless of the evidence that middle level technical skills boost graduates' chances of employment, the demand for a degree of any type continues to be high. Enrolment increased from 82,095 students in 2003 to 443,783 in 2015, an increase of 400 per cent.<sup>96</sup> Enrolment by the Joint Admission

Board for public universities increased by 23.4 per cent from 17,100 in 2008–09 to 21,000 in 2009–10 and 34,000 in the 2010–11 academic years.<sup>97</sup> However, most of the growth has not been of government-sponsored students, but of fee-paying 'module two' students in public universities, which has been profitable for the universities, but raises quality control issues. These trends in enrolment are summarised in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Growth in enrolment in public and private accredited universities in Kenya

	2005–06		2007–08		2009–10		2011–12		2013–14		2014–15	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Public universities	53,737	27,940	60,504	36,603	89,611	52,945	94,358	63,558	173,987	115,746	217,164	146,170
Private universities	5,068	5,571	10,271	10,861	20,717	14,462	33,114	27,598	39,980	31,666	42,454	37,994
Total undergraduate enrollment*												
	92,316		118,239		177,735		218,628		361,379		443,783	
Percentage enrolled in private universities												
	11.5%		17.8%		19.7%		27.7%		19.8%		18.1%	

\*Total includes those in private unaccredited universities.

\*\*Source: Republic of Kenya (2015).

96. Republic of Kenya. (2015a) *op. cit.*

97. Republic of Kenya (2010) *Economic Survey*. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

With regard to private universities, Table 2 shows that, except in the 2011–12 academic year, when the percentage of students enrolled in private universities stood at 27.7 per cent, it has remained below 20 per cent over the years despite the expansion of this sector. In order to expand access, the Kenya National Strategy for University Education to 2015 suggested that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in universities needed to increase from three per cent in 2008 to 15 per cent by 2015.<sup>98</sup> This implied an increase in the number of students enrolled to about 450,000 by 2015, and by a further ten per cent to 600,000 by 2022.<sup>99</sup> To achieve these targets, the government prioritised the establishment of open universities and the expansion of distance education in existing universities, by making use of ICT.<sup>100</sup> The policy also advocated the expansion of facilities in the newly created university colleges, and for government to provide incentives and create an enabling environment for an increase in the number of private universities. Most of these aims remain strategies on paper.

Despite the fast expansion of enrolment, three issues still afflict the system. The first is that the gross enrolment ratio is still comparatively low at four per cent (although the latest UNESCO figures are from 2009), and is well short of the global figure of 32.8 per cent.<sup>101</sup> The majority of Kenyans do not access university education and less than half of qualifying students obtain places in the public universities. For example, in 2013–14 admissions by

the new Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) placed only 56,937 (46 per cent) of students for the regular (module one) admission in public universities. Some of the students who are not placed in public universities through the regular admission system seek admission in the private universities and the module two programmes in public universities. The pressure for expansion persists. From 2010, when Kenya adopted a new constitution creating counties as lower tiers of governance, each county has been clamouring to establish a public university. The Universities Bill 2014, being debated by the Senate at the time of this research, aims to establish a public university in each of the counties, as a centre of research for the region. These institutions, once established, would be expected to focus on research that addresses the needs of the national and county governments. If this bill is approved, it will mean that Kenya will set up at least 20 new public universities.

Because many recently enrolled students have to fund themselves, a second key issue is the financial burden that university education implies. The government has tried to alleviate this by making these students eligible for the government loan scheme. However, not all the private students receive loans and even for those who do, the amounts extended are too small to ensure a quality higher education learning environment.

The third issue is that the expanded access to university institutions and professional degree programmes has been marked by gender and regional disparities, in a manner that undermines the development of social capital among Kenya's marginal populations.<sup>102</sup> For example, although the number of female students in the universities has risen steadily in the recent past, especially through the private programmes of public universities, women still remain a minority, constituting about 40 per cent of all undergraduate students in public universities.<sup>103</sup> This under-representation is greater in professional degree programmes. For example, in the University of Nairobi's 49th graduation ceremony, 36 per cent, 22 per cent, 30 per cent and 48 per cent of students graduating in the Colleges of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Architecture and Engineering, Biological and Physical Sciences and Health Sciences respectively were women.<sup>104</sup> This under-representation has implications for the proportion of qualified women entering the labour market.

The expansion of the higher education sector has also had implications for the employability of university graduates. An analysis of the programmes on offer in the universities, including the newly established ones, shows a trend towards increased numbers of social science and humanities courses, leading to some wasteful duplication of low quality degree courses. In private universities, the number of approved degree programmes

98. Republic of Kenya (2008b) *op.cit.*

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*

101. UIS (2016) *Gross enrolment ratio by level of education*. Available online at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=142&lang=en>; Nicholai, S and Prizzon, A (2014). *Beyond Basics; the growth of post-primary education in Kenya*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

102. Oanda, IO and Jowi, J (2012) *op. cit.*

103. Republic of Kenya (2013b) *National Manpower Survey Basic Report*. Nairobi; Ministry of Labour.

104. University of Nairobi (2013) *Graduation Statistics Booklet, 49th and 50th Graduation Ceremonies*.

declined by eight per cent between 2013 and 2014, from 362 to 333.<sup>105</sup> This partly reflects increasing specialisation amongst the private universities, as some have decided to concentrate on core programmes in areas in which they have strengths. For example, Daystar University has focused on its communications programme; USIU has moved to establish a school of pharmacy; Mt Kenya University is slowly focusing on medical courses and Strathmore University on information technology and telecommunications courses, all of which promise better employment prospects than many traditional degrees. This trend does not appear to be emerging in public universities, where all the universities offer the same range of degree programmes, and, even within the same university, in all its campuses.

### The nature of the labour market and government policies on graduate employability

Government reports and statistics indicate that the demand for labour has grown less rapidly than the number of people in search of gainful employment. In addition, the economy has not created adequate opportunities for those who want to engage in self-employment. Various government policy documents, for example the country's long-term development blueprint: *Vision 2030, the first Medium Term Plan (2008–2012)*, and the *Labour, Youth and Human Resource Development Sector Plan (2008–2012)*<sup>106</sup> tried to deal with this problem. According to these documents, the country's employment problem was manifest in slow growth

of formal sector employment vis-à-vis a burgeoning informal sector that offers a large and increasing number of unsustainable jobs; a 12.7 per cent open unemployment rate; increasing numbers of working poor; rapidly changing forms of employment with limited job security; and high youth unemployment. However, at the outset of the second term plan period, in 2013, unemployment, estimated at 12.7 per cent, with youth unemployment at 25 per cent, remained a critical development challenge. Overall, studies show that Kenya's employment crisis, especially that affecting post-secondary graduates is such that there are a large number of unemployed graduates side by side with unfilled positions in the public and private sector, both formal and informal, due to a mismatch between the skills needed and those available.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, the *Kenya Workforce (2011/2012) Survey* shows that there is increased capacity, intake and outturn from most education and training institutions, increasing the number of fresh graduates entering the labour market, but at the same time, capacity underutilisation in some institutions.<sup>108</sup> This survey recommends that, to address the problem of capacity underutilisation, Kenya needs to improve the quality of training offered in existing programmes in universities and middle level colleges, instead of prioritising expansion and addition of new institutions and programmes as at present.

Two other problems are encountered when examining the composition of the labour markets in Kenya. There have been many policy initiatives and statistical data focusing on the youth generally, without disaggregating them

by level of education, the stock of skills they hold and the range of skill required. This particularly applies to universities, whose recent expansion and introduction of new degree courses does not seem to have been informed by any labour market surveys. A recent government survey<sup>109</sup> indicates that of the youth with primary education, four per cent are in formal employment, 54 per cent in informal employment and 14 per cent are unemployed. Of those with secondary education, 12 per cent are in formal employment, 40 per cent in informal employment, and 15 per cent unemployed. Of those with tertiary education, 31 per cent are in formal employment, nine per cent in informal employment, while eight per cent are unemployed. These figures give the impression that graduate employment and underemployment is less of an issue than that of young people with only primary or secondary education, despite the general perception that Kenya is experiencing high levels of graduate unemployment. However, it is difficult to define unemployment, as data on graduate destinations does not exist and government policy focuses on the youth more generally, so this figure for graduate unemployment may not be reliable. Given these definitional difficulties, and in the absence of reliable data, it has also not been possible to establish whether the perceived high levels of graduate unemployment in practice refer to the failure of many graduates to obtain the kind of formal jobs to which they aspire, or that it implies that they lack the skills needed to engage in any income generating activity.

105. Republic of Kenya (2015) *op. cit.*

106. Republic of Kenya (2007) *op. cit.*; Republic of Kenya (2008a) *op. cit.* Republic of Kenya (2008c). *Sector Plan for Labour, Youth and Human Resource Development, 2008-2012*. Ministry of Labour, Nairobi.

107. Republic of Kenya (2013b) *op. cit.*

108. *Ibid.*

109. Republic of Kenya (2014a) *Kenya Country Report for the 2014 Ministerial Conference on Youth Employment; How to improve, through skills development and job creation, access of Africa's youth to the world of work*. Abidjan, Côte D'Ivoire.

Another study by Workforce Connections,<sup>110</sup> a USAID-supported programme, shows that Kenya's workforce is overwhelmingly in informal employment, with only 1.3 million people working in the modern formal sector, against over 12 million in the informal economy, defined as including smallholder farming (6.5 million), self-employment (2.7 million), and informal wage work (3.1 million) (Workforce Connections, 2014: ix). According to this study, youth with less than secondary education constitute about two-thirds of the youth workforce (all youth 15–35), with the stock of youth with less than primary education growing at four per cent a year, those with less than secondary education shrinking slightly, while the educated workforce stock, comprising 3.5 million secondary school graduates and 1.2 million tertiary graduates, is expanding relatively quickly. This points to a scenario in which the number of post-secondary education graduates is increasing rapidly, but many are joining a fast-expanding informal sector in which these levels of education are not required.

This is one manifestation of the 'skill mismatch' issue referred to above. While it is difficult to attribute skills problems primarily to supply or demand factors, a consensus seems to be emerging that the education system at every level has weaknesses that account for the problem of skill gaps. With regard to university education, the survey identifies challenges relating to graduates' lack of both soft and technical skills (including ICT), and even if they have the latter, they may be out of date or irrelevant. Another study by the Inter-University Council of East

Africa (IUCEA) asserts that as many as 49 per cent of new graduates from Kenyan universities are not adequately prepared for the labour market.<sup>111</sup> Explanations for this vary. Universities and higher education policymakers think the universities are doing a good job, and blame graduates' difficulty in obtaining employment on either the failure of job opportunities to expand in line with labour force growth, or failure on the part of employers to provide students with opportunities for apprenticeships or to engage with universities more regularly on curriculum review.<sup>112</sup> The continued standoff between universities and professional bodies over the refusal of the latter to accredit professional programmes in a number of institutions has added a new dimension to the problem of graduate employment. In the opinion of these professional bodies, the universities are offering programmes that lack the requisite infrastructure and suitably qualified staff to ensure that students learn the desired level of skills. Other challenges that hinder a seamless transition by university graduates into work include lack of timely labour market information; limited linkages between employers and training institutions; poor management of industrial attachments and low registration levels of graduates with the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) which is in charge of regulating and co-ordinating training and attachments in Kenya.<sup>113</sup>

Besides the above challenges, the extent to which national government policies have articulated the issue of graduate employability as a problem affecting the university sector is also limited. Most national policies focus on

the youth in general, although the youth employment policies have not been robust, and inadequate physical infrastructure, poor macroeconomic management, weak governance, and corruption have hindered their implementation.<sup>114</sup> Recent reforms have focused on strengthening labour protection and establishing youth-targeted employment programmes and funds, but youth employment outcomes have been limited due to factors related to programme design as well as implementation. Meanwhile, the problem of university education is articulated as the need to expand access and improve quality, with the intention of producing graduates who are 'job creators' rather than 'job seekers', a stance that has informed much public debate about university education.

In addition, a new technical, industrial, vocational education and training (TIVET) policy has been adopted, which offers promise for improving education relevance and quality. However, its implementation has not been complete. Over the last five years, plans have been drawn up for the expansion and modernisation of TIVET institutions and universities, including a new policy and legal framework that will create a TIVET Authority to oversee curriculum reforms and strengthen the role of industry in TIVET institutions. In the university sector, the government is, in the long term, investing in science, technology and innovation (STI) and intends to refocus the universities to undertake targeted research, development and innovation (RDI) in strategic sectors.<sup>115</sup> The STI policy and STI 2013 Act is intended to leverage STI to transform the economy through

110. USAID/Kenya (2014) *op. cit.*

111. Inter-University Council for East Africa, IUCEA (2014) *Regional higher education qualifications gaps. Vol II.*

112. McCowan (2014) *op. cit.*

113. Republic of Kenya (2013b) *op. cit.*

114. USAID/Kenya (2014) *op. cit.*

115. Republic of Kenya (2013a) *op. cit.*

implementation of selected national priority areas, creation of an effective and efficient Kenya National Innovation System and commercialisation of research outputs through the Innovation Agency (KENIA), and mobilisation of at least the equivalent of two per cent of GDP annually from the government, private sector and other sources to fund the entire value chain.<sup>116</sup> The government hopes that these reforms will address the problem of graduate unemployment in the medium to long term by expanding the economy and therefore formal job opportunities, while improving the quality of graduate skills.

At an institutional level, the government has, over the two decades prior to this study, and in parallel with its stated intention to provide resources for expansion, encouraged universities to devise ways of increasing students' engagement with the world of work. The problem, as discussed above, is that the government has failed to provide sufficient resources for the desired expansion, which has forced universities to engage in commercial behaviour, especially the admission of fee-paying students, and has undermined quality.

The Kenya University Education Strategy to 2015<sup>117</sup> proposed that, beyond the internships and industrial attachments that are a requirement in professional degree programmes, universities should initiate linkages with multiple stakeholders. Such linkages were intended to lead to progressive innovative institutions with mandates informed and enriched by the experiences, expertise and resources of these partners. The strategy also proposed an increase in faculty internships and short-term consulting

opportunities in industry to improve the relevance and quality of teaching.

Besides the government policies, the African Development Bank (AfDB) is implementing programmes aimed at improving the quality of graduates from universities, especially in technical and engineering areas, in order to improve physical infrastructure, unleash inclusive growth and develop skills for the emerging labour market of a transforming economy. The bank's Country Strategy Paper (CSP) 2014–18 for Kenya<sup>118</sup> supports the country's ambitions and addresses its main developmental challenges by promoting job creation as the overarching objective. Through the Higher Education, Science and Technology project (HEST), the bank is engaged in supporting selected universities with resources for providing relevant equipment and training staff at master's and PhD levels. The project, which targets six university constituent colleges and two universities, focuses on STI, in line with the Kenya Engineering Registration Board (KERB) recommendations. The project will also contribute to increasing the number of qualified personnel, including women, in engineering and applied sciences through training at the master's and PhD levels. In addition, it will provide support for master's and doctoral programmes for selected environmental studies at a learning centre being constructed as part of the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences at the University of Nairobi. This teaching and learning centre is intended to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills on the sustainable use of natural resources from the faculty to grassroots communities. Finally, the AfDB support will provide

support for 500 master's and 200 doctoral students in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines at the Nairobi and Masinde Muliro Universities and six other constituent colleges which have since been elevated to universities.

### Perspectives from employers, university students and university education policymakers

#### Employers

The perspectives of employers on the work readiness of graduates from the Kenyan universities was sought through a survey of 58 organisations, in Nairobi and other regions of the country, that employed ten (plus) graduates at any given time. The survey was undertaken through a face-to-face interview with identified respondents in the organisation who were best placed to evaluate the performance of the graduates and/or participate in the interview processes when recruiting new graduates into the organisation. The first set of questions for the survey required the respondents to indicate if they had hired graduates from Kenyan universities in the 24 months preceding the survey, and to give an indication of the number of graduates they had hired and the disciplines the graduates had studied at university.

The core civil service in Kenya continues to be a key employer of graduates in Kenya. However, the privatisation of public enterprises that used to employ most graduates and the reduced size of the central civil service has led to a decline in numbers of graduates able to obtain employment in these organisations.

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116. *Ibid.*

117. Republic of Kenya (2008b) *op. cit.*

118. AfDB (2014) *op. cit.*



Table 3 below provides a summary of responses from the organisations surveyed regarding their recent graduate recruitment, subdivided according to the discipline of the graduates recruited. Of the total number of organisations surveyed, the table shows the number of these organisations who have recruited graduates from social science and humanities, business and natural

science. Across the whole sample, but particularly core civil service organisations and NGOs, there were considerably more graduates hired with a social science and business education background. This may be indicative of the smaller number of graduates in natural sciences coming out of the universities as much as the small demand for these graduates in the organisations surveyed.

**Table 3:** Recruitment by institutions that have had employed graduates in the 24 months prior to the survey

Type of organisation	Total	Social science and humanities recruits	Business recruits	Natural science recruits
Education	3	3	3	1
Financial services	7	2	2	1
Health and social work	8	2	2	0
Core public service	17	9	9	1
Manufacturing and processing	5	1	0	1
Legal services	3	2	2	1
Transport, information and communication	2	1	1	0
Real estate and informal business sector	1	1	1	0
NGOs – national and international	4	4	4	0
Agriculture and related services	1	1	1	0
Hotels and restaurants	3	0	0	1
Others	4	4	4	1
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: Compiled from field data.

Respondents were asked to list in order of preference, three institutions from where they recruited graduates. Responses, as summarised in Table 4 below do not seem to confirm the common perception that private universities are overtaking public ones as the preferred source of graduates. Respondents indicated that most employers (a quarter) prefer to recruit from the University of Nairobi, followed by Kenyatta University (19 per cent) and Moi University (10.3 per cent). However, some prefer to recruit graduates from a private university: 8.6 per cent of the organisations surveyed said that they would be most likely to recruit from Strathmore University and the Kenya College of Accountancy University. The responses here reflect the results of other surveys that show the University of Nairobi as having both the best institutional reputation and being preferred by employers seeking graduate recruits. The responses may also indicate a preference by employers for public university graduates compared to those from other institutions. For example, a respondent from one of the firms noted that:

‘...Viewed without bias, public university graduates are highly employable ... the claim that universities are not producing employable graduates has had the effect of putting universities and colleges under pressure to prove that they provide market-ready graduates ... which can lead to some distortions... Judging from the quality of students that make applications to undertake internships or occupy open positions at my place of work, I am certain that the claim of superior education from private universities is without foundation...’

(Chief executive; Public Policy Think Tank)

**Table 4:** Preferred institutions for graduate recruitment

University	Frequency	Percentage
University of Nairobi	15	25.6
Kenyatta University	11	19.0
Moi University	6	10.3
Strathmore	5	8.6
KCA	5	8.6
Maseno	3	5.3
Catholic	2	3.5
JKUAT	2	3.5
Egerton	2	3.4
MMUST	1	1.7
Other recognised universities	6	10.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Compiled from field data.

Beyond perceptions of the difference between public and private universities in terms of the quality of their graduates, respondents indicated that employers consider not one but a combination of institutional characteristics when recruiting graduates. The majority of employers did not specify which institutional characteristics they considered and the majority were non-committal. However, over half the employers in the education sector ranked most highly the quality of employability provided by an institution (52 per cent); followed by institutional reputation, relevant disciplinary knowledge, quality of discipline knowledge and successful past experience of recruiting from the institution, all ranked at the same level. On the other hand, the financial institutions ranked institutional reputation, relevant disciplinary knowledge and perception that an institution produces high quality graduates as the foremost institutional characteristics they considered;

followed by quality of employable skills the graduates possessed, successful past experience of recruiting from the institution and strong organisational links with the institution. In the health and social work sector, institutional reputation and quality of employable skills were emphasised. The core public services from where a majority of the organisations for the survey were drawn indicated that they considered foremost institutional reputation, the perception that an institution produced graduates of high quality, student participation in work attachments, quality of discipline knowledge and strong organisational links with the institutions as the most considered institutional qualities. The NGOs considered foremost quality of disciplinary knowledge; the transport and communication sector, institutional reputation and the hospitality industry ranked strong institutional links as the foremost characteristics. Generally it appears from that apart from the NGOs,

which ranked relevant disciplinary knowledge as their foremost consideration, all the employers in other sectors paid most attention to characteristics such as institutional reputation, perception of an institution producing quality graduates, and past experiences and links with the institution. It seems that the quality of disciplinary knowledge is not as important to most employers as these factors, which might indicate that, if institutions wish to improve the employment prospects of their graduates, they should devote attention to forging links with prospective employers as well as engaging in image building with respect to their reputation.

These perceptions are consistent with other surveys that have been conducted in Kenya. For example, one survey of employers and employment agencies revealed that Kenyan employers prefer to recruit graduates from institutions where they have successfully recruited in the past, with the University of Nairobi graduates being the most preferred in many fields due to the university's ranking in Africa, its reputation as the oldest university in Kenya and the fact that a large number of senior managers in blue chip companies are alumni of the institution.<sup>119</sup> Another survey by an employment agency, *Corporate Staffing Services* (2015),<sup>120</sup> shows that the majority of employers in Kenya (64 per cent), pay considerable attention to leadership experience, and another 61 per cent to volunteering experience when recruiting fresh graduates, because graduates with this experience are found to be outspoken, team players, flexible and able to take initiative.

Those with volunteering experience, they reported, already have a basic understanding of employer expectations and office etiquette. In contrast, only 53 per cent of employers considered educational attainment, 49 per cent considered the student's involvement in extra-curricular activities and only six per cent considered employing a fresh graduate on the basis of a foreign language competence.

Besides the institutional characteristics that they take into account when recruiting graduates, respondents in our survey were asked to rank the most important individual criteria, from a list provided, which the organisations took into account when recruiting graduates. Institution attended and volunteering was ranked as the very important, followed by performance at recruitment interview. Discipline of choice, relevant work experience, research area of interest and reference/recommendation letters were ranked as relatively important criteria. At the other extreme, qualification results, internship as part of course, relevant work experience post-qualification, and performance at recruitment interview were considered least important in that order. These results show that employers perceived the quality of education and training received by graduates not just in terms of the mastery of content exhibited, but also in terms of other attributes not directly related to the subject content. Many of these can be developed by engaging in a variety of activities and contexts outside the classroom. In this regard, the constant complaint from employers regarding the quality of graduates in Kenya would be a pointer that they are more dissatisfied with

failure by the graduates to manifest a wide range of skills besides demonstrating a masterly knowledge of subject content.

When asked to state if the graduates they had hired in the 24 months preceding the survey had the skills they desired, 56.8 per cent indicated they were satisfied that the graduates had the right attitude, 55.1 per cent were satisfied that they had the right workplace skills; 53.4 per cent were satisfied they had the critical thinking skills; while 50 per cent were satisfied they had the right knowledge. Looked at from another perspective, more than half of the respondents were satisfied with the level of employability skills that the graduates had, implying the perceptions of employers were not entirely negative. It is noteworthy that 19 per cent of the employers were dissatisfied with the level of confidence and voice and ethical awareness skills of the graduates respectively; 12 per cent were dissatisfied with language command and communication, while 10.3 per cent were dissatisfied with the level of critical thinking skills, collaboration and attitude of the graduates respectively.

The low level of satisfaction among employers with the graduates' level of ethical awareness points to another aspect of graduate employability in Kenya which may have become more of an issue as university education expands. In another survey by the Aga Khan University in Nairobi,<sup>121</sup> on the attitudes of youth in Kenya on a number of issues, the respondents seem to condone corruption and unethical behaviour with regard to the acquisition of wealth. The survey shows

119. *The East African*. (2009) Why employers are interested in where you got your degree. Available online at: [www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/526142/-/view/printVersion/-/d680b2z/-/index.html](http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/526142/-/view/printVersion/-/d680b2z/-/index.html)

120. Corporate Staffing Services (2015) *Hiring: Trends, Challenges and Future Outlook*. Quarter One Talent Report. Nairobi. Corporate Staffing Services.

121. Awiti A, Scott B, and Bhanjee, S (2015) *East Africa Youth Survey*. East Africa Institute, Aga Khan University, Nairobi, Kenya.

that the belief that hard work results in success declines with level of education, with 50 per cent of respondents with postgraduate education indicating that they were unconvinced that hard work brings success, as well as indicating a high expectation that corruption is increasing, and a high personal tolerance for it, with nearly half (47 per cent) of the youth in the sample indicating that they admire those who make their money by whatever means and 50 per cent agreeing with the statement: 'It doesn't matter how you make your money, as long as you don't go to jail', while 73 per cent admitted that they were 'afraid to stand up for what is right'. The issue here is that graduate employability in Kenya may point to a broad and complex problem with an ethical dimension and for which university level education cannot be solely responsible.

#### **Employer satisfaction with graduates' attributes by disciplines of study**

Respondents were asked whether they had been satisfied with the attributes of graduates of different disciplinary backgrounds that they had recently hired. The disciplines were grouped into three categories: social sciences, business disciplines and natural science disciplines. Responses to these items were generally low. But analysis from the few respondents shows that of the employers who had hired graduates in the social sciences and humanities, most were satisfied that students had the right skills and associated qualities such as the calibre of the graduates but were not satisfied with the speed with which course content was being reviewed to meet changing market needs. Overall, an average of over

55 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of social science graduates.

The trend was the same with business studies. Responses of those who were very satisfied or just satisfied were above 50 per cent for all the attributes except the speed of course review. In the natural sciences, 48.3 per cent of the respondents indicated their organisations were very satisfied with the calibre of graduates while 15.5 per cent were quite satisfied. This then means that graduate unemployment is not entirely a question of poor quality training in the institutions, from the perspective of employers.

#### **Employer perceptions of the capacity of institutions to produce graduates with the desired skills in 5–10 years' time**

The survey sought from respondents their perceptions regarding the capacity of universities to produce graduates with the desired skills in the medium term – five to ten years from the date of the survey. The perceptions here are based on respondents' perceptions of the capacity of institutions to produce graduates with transferable skills, relevant disciplinary knowledge and appropriate attitudes. Even with the small samples that were covered in this survey, 50 per cent of the respondents from the communication and information services; 40 per cent from manufacturing and processing and 35 per cent from the core public service were very confident that institutions would be able to produce desired workplace transferable skills in the next five to ten years. On the other hand, 66 per cent of the respondents from the education sector, 50 per cent from transport, information and

communication and 33.4 per cent from legal services were of the view that institutions might not be able to produce graduates with such skills. These happen to be sectors where there is ongoing public concerns about the deterioration of services in Kenya. Poor quality outcomes from basic education and post-secondary test scores have often been blamed on low standards of teacher training and management of the sector. The legal profession has also been hit by lack of acceptable lawyer skills, a situation that has been blamed on the many universities now offering legal studies without the requisite workforce and facilities. The attempt by the regulatory authorities to ensure that institutions strictly follow provided quality guidelines in their operations has been resisted by the universities. A high percentage of respondents did not proffer an opinion on this issue. It could be that the respondents who were assigned to respond to the interview in some organisations did not have a holistic grasp of the organisations' workforce planning and projections. It could also be that the forecast of skill demands for the future did not concern most institutions largely because the Kenyan labour market still operates on a supply-driven kind of environment where universities just produce graduates then they fit themselves into any openings in the market. The situation therefore is that whereas some organisations consistently blame institutions for producing graduates who do not have the skills required in the market, neither are the large organisations that employ most graduates helping by undertaking surveys that provide indications of their skill requirements in the medium to long term.

Regarding the capacity of the institutions to produce graduates with relevant disciplinary knowledge, most respondents were either very confident or confident. The results show that organisations from the agricultural sector ranked this at 100 per cent. Most of the other sectors were either very confident or confident, largely indicating an above average level of confidence in the institutions to continue producing graduates with a high quality grasp of disciplinary content.

Lastly, the survey asked the respondents if they thought the institutions will have the capacity to produce graduates with positive attitudes. On average, over 50 per cent of the respondents from education, core public service and agriculture were confident that this would be the case. On the other hand, 100 per cent of respondents from the transport, information and communication sector; 66.7 per cent of the legal services and hospitality sectors; 57.1 per cent of the financial services sector; 37.5 per cent of the health and social work sector and 33.4 per cent from the education sector were not very confident that the institutions would continue to produce graduates with the right attitude. A positive attitude and flexibility to work have been shown in the literature as key attributes that employers look for in graduates. As corroborated by the later survey by the Aga Khan University,<sup>122</sup>

positive attitudes and ethical considerations seem to be largely lacking among graduates coming out of Kenyan universities. The perception by employers that institutions will not be able to produce people with such attitudes means that institutions need to do more to change the world view of their graduates as regards the world of work.

### **University-employer engagements to enhance graduate employability**

Researchers and policymakers, drawing on international good practices, have urged universities and employers to constantly engage with each other to bring the world of work into the university classroom, and to take the university classroom into the world of work and the communities where graduates will work and live. In Kenya, the Commission for University Education regulations require that, for universities to introduce new courses and in the course of reviewing existing ones, labour market conditions should be taken into account through needs assessment, a market survey or a situation analysis and that stakeholders should provide inputs to the process.<sup>123</sup> No indication is given on who should initiate such linkages, but there is a tacit understanding that, given the role that universities play in the development of societies, they should initiate the engagements and be more welcoming to employers. As can be seen from the

discussion above, there was a general perception among employers that courses at universities are not being reviewed fast enough to match changes in skill requirements. In the survey, most employers asserted that they did have contact with universities, although only in one case was this 'very frequent'. It would seem that employers who seek specific skills and professional qualifications had a more practical incentive to engage in curriculum review with the universities compared to other institutions.

### **University students' perceptions on the contribution of their institutions to graduate employability**

As part of the study, the perceptions of students on the contribution of their institutions to ensuring their employability following graduation were gauged through a survey questionnaire administered to 1,037 final year students from two large public and one private university. The survey was complemented with focus group discussions and life histories of a sample of students. An analysis of student responses regarding their future career interests shows that, regardless of the type of secondary school attended, most students aspired to self-employment rather than formal sector wage employment.

122. *Ibid.*

123. Commission for University Education (2014) *Universities Standards and Guidelines*. Nairobi. CUE.



**Table 5:** University student career interests

Type of secondary school attended	Academic	Further study	Public sector	Private sector	Self-employment	Charity/NGO
<b>Government</b>	5.7%	6.3%	7.2%	7.8%	66.3%	6.7%
<b>Private</b>	3.5%	10.3%	9.8%	13%	56.7%	6.7%
<b>Religious</b>	0	0	0	18.2%	68.2%	13.6%

Source: Compiled from field data.

Regardless of the type of secondary school and university attended, on average 65 per cent of the students indicated that their ambition was to be self-employed. As attested from students' responses during focus group discussions (FGDs) and personal life history interviews, these perceptions are informed by the reality of a shrinking formal job market. Most students also thought self-employment was a better alternative compared to formal employment where entry required more than formal qualifications. For example, when asked what they thought most influenced their chances of employability, a majority of the students in the sample indicated institutional status and reputation, gender, availability of jobs for certain specialisations, family networks and low economic growth in the country in that

order. This means that according to the students, non-academic factors, regardless of qualifications will affect their entry into the labour market. The realism of student aspirations means that universities should prepare students for self-employment rather than focusing solely on training for formal sector employment. However, when asked what other skills they had learned at university, fewer than 40 per cent of the respondents in all three types of institution mentioned skills such as leadership, business awareness, organisational planning and time management, teamwork, communication and presentation skills; appreciation of cultural diversity; honesty and integrity. In short, skills that would prepare students for self-employment were largely lacking, yet this is their ambition.

When asked if the institutions in which they were studying had made them aware of different labour market options over half (55 per cent) strongly agreed that their institutions had done so. However, it appears that less than half of all students have access to career guidance and indeed, during the interview sessions, students were of the opinion that the career services provided by their institutions are weak. Student responses also indicated a lack of opportunities in their institutions to develop various generic skills; a response that ties in with that of employers when commenting on the quality of graduates.

**Table 6:** Students' responses on the opportunities available in the institutions to prepare them for employability

Students' involvement in other activities at the university	Urban-based private university	Rural public university	Urban public university
<b>Worked on student newspaper</b>	3.8%	4.9%	1.7%
<b>Member of student representative council</b>	8.3%	11.2%	7.5%
<b>Other student body or university club</b>	18.4%	24.5%	22.3%
<b>Class or degree representative</b>	7.2%	9.8%	7.1%
<b>University sports</b>	10.3%	12.9%	20.1%
<b>Residence committee</b>	4.5%	6.0%	5.9%

Source: Compiled from field data.

As seen in Table 6, across all the institutions, a majority of students reported that they are involved in activities outside their degree programmes, which can be a way of enhancing their employability through widening their experience and developing soft skills. Clubs and associations were important in all the universities, with participation in sports being more common in urban public universities, perhaps reflecting the availability of opportunities and facilities. Students also sought to supplement their degree studies with other courses. For those with resources, their first choice is to register for a professional course alongside their degree studies. Increasingly, they reported, those placed in courses that had not been of their choice were taking this alternative. Interviews with a number of academic staff across the institutions, especially those from public universities, confirmed these responses from students. They attributed it to the declining quality of the undergraduate education and programmes provided, which in their view is affecting the employability of graduates. For example, one academic from a public university noted:

'Some of our students take some course[s] when at university and after graduation to prepare

themselves for the workplace. These extra courses are mainly strategic, to add advantage for [the] competition in job search and are useful in providing practical work experiences to students. Faculties have gone commercial, leaving lecturers with little time for research and renewal of what they teach. A majority of the lecturers, therefore, both in terms of content and pedagogical approaches do not benefit their students much in terms of [their] employability.'

Staff from the private urban university studied repeatedly indicated during interviews that their programmes focus on the job market and therefore claimed that their graduates are more readily employable, though no data on graduate transitions was available to confirm these claims:

'...there's a category of private universities that are chartered, and this [university] is part of that, just like public universities. As a matter of fact, a university like this, that was chartered in 1994 ...we would expect that every lecturer who comes to our classes has a better, I mean, has a good grasp of how to bring on board discussions that will sit at the very foundations of the programmes and the courses and which, when posed, will force the students to begin to

evaluate the presuppositions of the courses that are being taught.'

Emphasising the issue of employability, a respondent from the private university reflected on:

'Why do students still come to this university when they pay more when they can pay less and university (X) has many places now? When this university was starting as a private university, there was probably not any other – we only used to have University (Y) up here, and there was nothing. So why are we still having students coming to us when we are ... probably the second [most] expensive university in this area. I think the whole thing is you still have people who believe that they want to spend their money in this kind of programme. And I think one thing that is important information here is that ... the market also appears to prefer it. We have programmes here where our students just go, they just, you know, get into jobs, I mean into the job market, just that easy. I think the society, the Kenyan society – and not just Kenya, we also have a very, very high international student population, and we have about 34 nationalities at the university.'

Unlike such sentiments expressed by staff from a private university, public university staff were more critical, especially regarding the rapid expansion of public universities and the effect it is having on the quality of learning processes, including the limited contact time they have with students given their increasing numbers. This, in their view, is having an adverse effect on the employability of their graduates.

### University management and policymakers' perspectives

University management staff, especially from the public universities, however, consistently rejected the perception that universities are turning out poor quality graduates. From their perspective, the blame for the inability of graduates to find work lies with the economy, which is not expanding sufficiently fast to absorb the growing number of graduates. They indicated that the universities had made efforts

to enhance the employability of their graduates. Transformations in universities that indicate these attempts include new institutional mission statements and visions that focus on producing graduates equipped with relevant knowledge and skills related to the job market, rebranding institutions and degree programmes, expanding student enrolment and modes of study, offering market-driven programmes, internationalising campuses and curricula, enhancing information and communications technology, diversifying sources of revenue, increasing focus on the customer/client, adopting international standards of excellence, such as the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) quality management systems, and prioritising curricula geared to developing skills in graduates that will help them compete favourably in the knowledge-based global economy.

Universities have also introduced innovations in an attempt to provide

students who are budding entrepreneurs with the opportunity to launch their careers and develop innovations that might be picked up by industry. The assumption on which these interventions are based is that students need to develop creative ideas that can be turned into profitable business ventures instead of looking for formal employment. To achieve this, a supportive environment for entrepreneurship within the institutions is said to be required. According to information proffered by university administrators during interviews across all the three universities in the study, provisions have included the creation of business accelerators, labs and co-working spaces to provide a variety of support services, all with the goal of assisting start-ups to be successful and grow. Students have found such hubs a good environment in which to launch their applications, software and ventures, and to access business mentorship and community engagement.

### Examples of innovations to enhance graduate employability

#### The Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre (BIIC) at Kenyatta University

This centre (Chandaria-BIIC) was launched in July 2011 to support new and innovative ideas developed by Kenyans. The centre accommodates both Kenyatta University students and other Kenyans in need of support. It aims to promote a culture of innovation among Kenyan youth through various programmes and a platform from which to provide

solutions to the challenges facing various industries. Supported by a Kenyan industrialist, whose name the centre has taken, BIIC focuses on supporting up to 120 start-ups per year (70 per cent Kenyatta University students and staff and 30 per cent others). It aims to blend applied research with innovation and the establishment of start-ups, as well as to predispose Kenyatta University students and Kenyans in general towards being job creators

rather than job seekers. Innovators are provided with support such as business development services, seed capital, space, telephone services, high speed internet, stationery, administrative support, professional guidance and mentorship for a period of 12 months (with a possible extension) and every business at the Chandaria-BIIC is required to meet various milestones to continue receiving support.

### **Strathmore University Incubation Hub and @iLabAfrica Research and Innovation Centre**

The Strathmore Innovation Hub is not a single intervention, but a broad-based umbrella programme that seeks to utilise the university's expertise in entrepreneurship education in the Strathmore Business School, Strathmore Enterprise Development Centre and the School of Management and Commerce to offer inter-disciplinary courses on entrepreneurship. The aim is to equip students with skills and a sense of professionalism that will complement their classroom knowledge. The Strathmore iLabAfrica research and innovation centre was set up in 2011 to spearhead research, innovation

and entrepreneurship in ICT, while the incubation hub was started in April 2013 to complement the iLab and boost the university's status as a centre for nurturing student entrepreneurs. The centre will accommodate up to 50 entrepreneurs. The hub has offices for business process outsourcing, business mentorship and consultation to support student innovators and entrepreneurs and boost self-employment. The hub will also expand Strathmore's existing iLabAfrica research centre, which was set up in 2011 to spearhead research, innovation and entrepreneurship in ICT. The hub is supported by the The Idea Foundation from Norway, which

has committed about KES13 million (\$160, 000) to support four viable projects in four rounds in 2015. The hub will admit 18 to 25 students for entrepreneurship training for between six months and a year. The facility is meant to encourage students to be less reliant on obtaining formal employment through providing seed capital and contacts. To finance the training and other operations of the hub, the university partners with technology companies such as Google and Safaricom, which have established training academies on campus and fund various research projects taking place under the umbrella of the incubation hub.

An emerging trend among universities in Kenya is to claim that they have taken action to promote the employability of their graduates. Most of the interventions, like those presented in the boxes above, revolve around business education and ICT-based technologies. The idea is that, with business and ICT skills, innovation is possible, and if the context is favourable, it is possible for graduates to engage in their own businesses, thereby helping to solve the unemployment crisis. There is also a sense in which the rush by companies to fund or establish business hubs in universities is part of a strategy to benefit from the skills that students and faculty have. In other words, it may be cheaper for a company to establish a research unit in a university (an apparently benevolent gesture), while cutting down on their in-house research budget. Nevertheless, such

units are likely to benefit students in the long term, as engagement in research and development is likely to provide them with opportunities to link into international networks and widen the field in which they can seek employment. The innovations, however, face two limitations. First, they are often limited to a few students in a few academic programmes, rather than being university-wide. The second limitation is that the innovations are being implemented in a context of a quality crisis in undergraduate education as a result of underfunding and reliance on inadequately qualified and inexperienced academic staff.

Higher education policymakers, in contrast to university managers, seemed to lay the blame on the universities and the government. According to policymaker perspectives, employability is a new concept that universities have not yet tuned

themselves into. Traditionally, they noted, the mandate of universities was not to train for the job market but to focus on teaching, research and community service. Their ability to tackle the problem of graduate employability is, in the view of policymakers, limited due to the lack of funds to improve the quality of programmes and engage a more qualified workforce. The other issue raised by policymakers is the lack of availability of 'blue collar' internships and a perception that employers are not providing enough opportunities to students before they graduate. In their view, the university expansion and curriculum orientation are still white-collar oriented, rather than being focused on the informal skill market and technical areas where most jobs are available. Universities, they note, rarely send students on attachments in small and informal firms. According to these

informants, the problem of graduate unemployment has been accentuated by the clamour to open more universities, at the expense of middle level vocational colleges. The latter, once transformed into universities, gradually shade off their vocational orientation in favour of arts and humanities degree programmes whose graduates find it difficult to find jobs. Universities, they suggested, also need to focus the training they offer on areas where skills are needed. For example, the tendency for institutions to take in more students for teacher education programmes, graduates from which are likely to be unemployed for over ten years, should be reconsidered in favour of restricting intakes to fit the demand in the market. Indeed, the fact that graduate teachers stay out of employment long after graduation while schools experience shortages of teachers is an indication that dysfunctions in sections of the labour market rather than low quality graduate training also contribute to the crisis in graduate employability.

Despite the challenges, institutional leaders have become innovative and are increasingly establishing linkages with employers, although on a small scale compared to enrolments. The Chandaria Foundation, for example, has partnered with a number of public and private universities to encourage the establishment of business incubation units in universities to enable students to be socialised in entrepreneurial skills before graduation. Other corporate entities, such as Equity Bank, are providing students and graduates with work attachments and training in business skills. In addition, some universities are establishing new academic programmes. Such initiatives are, however, hindered by the lack of data on labour market trends. In the authors' view, universities should invest more in generating data that will be

useful for their planning through conducting labour market surveys and developing close working relationships with employers, regulatory bodies and professional bodies that accredit programmes.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The perception that graduate employability is an increasingly serious problem in Kenya is strong, especially among employers. The latter lay the blame on the quality of training provided by the universities, which has, in their view, created a pool of unemployed graduates in a labour market that is experiencing skill shortages. Beyond such complaints, however, there do not appear to be any systematic interventions by employers to engage with institutions to improve the quality of skills training. Employers should, for example, provide technical assistance to universities in order to enhance career guidance and career services. In addition, interaction between university students and potential employers in their fields of study should be strengthened, through events, field visits, and practicums/ internships. Programmes should also seek to mainstream mentoring into student-faculty interaction and internships. Awareness should be broadened among employers of the importance of engaging with the institutions more frequently especially regarding issues of curriculum review and labour market projections to improve information availability, especially regarding potential career pathways.

Few employers participate regularly in institutional curriculum reviews nor are they providing adequate opportunities for students to undertake volunteering and internships before they graduate. On the other hand, institutions take a

long time to review their curriculum, if at all, to meet the expectations of employers. On its part, the government has constituted a taskforce to draft a policy on internships, but this has yet to be finalised and its focus seems to be more on the youth generally than on university students and graduates.

Universities, on their part, continue to claim that they are producing good quality graduates, but data rarely exists to confirm most of these claims. Investing in systematic data collection by both employers and the universities is one of the challenges that needs to be addressed immediately. Universities need to invest more in obtaining systematic data on labour market skill demands and on demand for graduates from various courses, and to be better informed of the skill requirements and curriculum adjustments needed to meet these labour market demands. Nevertheless, while the institutions need to improve on issues like frequent curriculum reviews, expanding the range of student experiences while at the institutions and gauging labour market trends, the economy would need to expand as fast to accommodate the number of graduates leaving the universities.

Despite these challenges, it is interesting that student perceptions on their employability are changing. Most students in the sample were prepared to consider self-employment as part of their career aspirations. Students increasingly perceive a university as *'not only important for getting a job but it can also empower you to be self-employed and create job opportunities.'* (Student, regional public university, Kenya). The problem is that neither the institutions nor employers are providing students who wish to become self-employed with adequate skills and the context is often not conducive to realising these aspirations.



# Chapter 4 – In pursuit of graduate employability and inclusive development in Nigeria: realities and expectations

Segun Adedeji and Stephen Oyeade

## 1. Background

This chapter presents a summary of research activities in Nigeria as part of the Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development project. The chapter is divided into six parts as follows: 1) Background information on the economic, political and social contexts in Nigeria; the higher education system; the labour market; and key challenges relating to higher education (HE) and employability. 2) National government policies on higher education and employability. 3) University provisions for tackling the challenges of graduate employability. 4) Employers' perspectives on the calibre of graduates, relevance of the skills acquired and speed with which course content is being adapted to meet changing business needs in different disciplines. 5) Innovative case studies. 6) Conclusion and recommendations for policy and practice.

### a. Economic/political/social context

Nigeria is, by far, the most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with a population of close to 170 million. It is a middle income, mixed economy and emerging market, with expanding financial, service, communications, and entertainment sectors. Though currently underperforming, the manufacturing sector is the largest on the continent, producing a large proportion of goods and services for the West African region. Nigeria's economy is the 26th largest in the world, as well as the leading<sup>124</sup> economy in the African continent and is on track to becoming one of the 20 largest economies in the world by 2020. However, like most African countries, Nigeria continues to struggle to achieve what seems to be an elusive ambition of economic and political emancipation, even after more than five decades of independence. The country has witnessed various political changes and has undergone

different economic reforms intended to make it a global economic player. These reforms notwithstanding, the standard of living of the average Nigerian and human development indicators still rank below average in comparison with other developing economies. Table 1 provides relative socio-economic indicators among Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. The indicators reveal the development status of the four countries that participated in this study. Nigeria ranks lowest among these countries with respect to several indices, despite its GDP per capita being well above that of Kenya and Ghana. For example, Nigeria has a Human Development Index (a composite of income, life expectancy, and adult literacy) ranking of 153 out of 187 countries that were ranked by the UNDP, with Ghana, Kenya and South Africa slightly better at 135, 145 and 121 respectively.

**Table 1:** Some socio-economic indicators – Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa

	Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
<b>Human Development Index (HDI) ranking (out of 187 countries as at 2013) and score</b>	135 (0.558)	145 (0.519)	153 (0.471)	121 (0.629)
<b>Life expectancy at birth (2013)</b>	61.1	61.7	52.5	56.9
<b>Adult literacy (aged 15+, 2015)</b>	76.6	78.0	59.6	94.3
<b>Combined gross enrolment (GER) in education (2007)</b>	56.5	-	53.0	-
<b>GDP per capita (US\$, PPP, 2011)</b>	3,532	2,158	5,353	11,788
<b>Poverty</b>				
Population living below \$1.25/day (%)	30.0	43.4	64.4	13.8
Population living below \$2 per day (%)	57.7	-	83.9	13.0
Population below national poverty line (%)	40.2	-	34.1	-
<b>Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index</b>	0.438	0.440	0.296	0.422

Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 2013. SSA averages: HDI – 0.514; Life expectancy – 51, 5; Adult literacy – 86.3; Combined GER in education – 53.5; GDP per capita - \$2,031.

124. Nigeria rebased its gross domestic product (GDP) data in 2013, which pushed it above South Africa as the continent's biggest economy. Nigerian rebased GDP totalled \$509.9 billion, compares with South Africa's GDP of \$370.3 billion at the end of 2013.

Besides, poverty levels are higher in Nigeria than in the other countries, despite its relative wealth compared to Ghana and Kenya. It is estimated that about 84 per cent of the population is living below the \$2 a day level and, more than one-third below the national poverty line. However, all four countries demonstrated a high level of inequality, as reflected in their respective Gini indices. In spite of an average economic growth rate of about seven per cent per annum over the last seven years, which is a good performance by global standards, unemployment still remains one of the major challenges facing Nigeria. Economic growth has not translated into jobs and real life opportunities for many of its young people, leaving Nigeria with a paradox often described as 'jobless growth'. Being highly educated does not appear to increase individuals' chances of getting a job. This has implications for the social sectors and indicates deficiencies in the provision of facilities in educational institutions. For example, the infrastructural facilities in many schools are in a deplorable state and cannot support quality teaching and learning. The issue of pervasive national corruption has also affected development of the educational system: funds meant for development purposes are often misused and diverted. Currently, Nigeria rates poorly on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI).

Furthermore, previous political instability has led to inconsistent educational policies, owing to a rapid turnover of education ministers with different interests, from supporting basic education to developing the National Open University (NOUN), at the expense of the existing federal and state tertiary institutions. The next section discusses the higher education system and the labour market in Nigeria.

## b. Higher education system

The HE system in Nigeria is comprised of universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and professional/specialised institutions.<sup>125</sup> It includes much of the country's research capacity and produces most of its skilled professionals. Regulatory agencies under the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) supervise the HE system in Nigeria. Such agencies include the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). These vital parastatals plan, organise, co-ordinate and control HE system activities. They also manage funds, supervise and monitor provision as well as development of the HE system. Each parastatal helps to ensure minimum standards and quality in the institutions for which it is responsible.

They also play intermediary and advisory roles between the Federal Government and institutional authorities. For instance, the NUC is responsible for accreditation of all programmes in the universities, including state universities, although it has no role with regard to the establishment of the latter, which is a matter for state governments.

In Nigeria, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) has increased tremendously over the past few years in response to rising demand for enrolment. For instance, between 2001 and 2005, the total number of universities in the country increased from 51 to 80,<sup>126</sup> and to 142 by 2015. In addition, the number of non-university HEIs increased to 350. Thus, Nigeria has the largest number of HEIs in Africa, though South Africa's tertiary enrolments are higher than those of Nigeria. Table 2 shows the number of, and enrolment<sup>127</sup> in, HEIs in Nigeria in 2015.

125. International Association of Universities (IAU) (2000) Nigeria-education system. Data for academic year: 2000–01.

126. Okojie, Julius A (2009) *Financing the University System in Nigeria*, National Universities Commission, Abuja, Nigeria. NUC.

127. This is the estimated enrolment figure of HEIs in Nigeria as at 2013.

**Table 2:** Nigeria's higher education system in 2015

Type of institution	Federal	State	Private	Total	Enrolment	Percentage
<b>Universities*</b>	40	44	58	142	1,131,312	58.4
<b>Polytechnics **</b>	21	38	25	84	360,535	18.6
<b>Monotechnics</b>	23	2	2	27		
<b>Colleges of Agriculture</b>	17	19	0	36		
<b>Colleges of Health Technology</b>	9	40	1	50	91,259	4.7
<b>Vocational Institutes</b>	0	0	69	69		
<b>Colleges of Education***</b>	21	46	17	84	354,387	18.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>1,937,493</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: \*National Universities Commission (2015) List of Nigerian universities and years founded. [www.nuc.edu.ng/pages/universities.asp](http://www.nuc.edu.ng/pages/universities.asp)

\*\*National Board for Technical Education (2015) Directory of accredited programmes in polytechnics, technical and vocational institutions in Nigeria. Abuja: NBTE.

In spite of the seemingly rapid growth in HE, the gap between demand and supply with respect to enrolment has not reduced. Rather, the demand for access has continued to rise in the face of limited supply, resulting in a large enrolment deficit (only one-fifth of applicants receive a place in public universities). There has been growth in the number of private universities since the 1990s, but this has not widened access to education for the poorest, due to the high fees charged in these privately owned institutions. Efforts to expand enrolment in public institutions and improve quality are severely constrained by growing shortages of qualified academic staff. Between 1997

and 1999, the numbers of academic staff declined by 12 per cent even as enrolment expanded by 13 per cent. There were about 28,000 academic staff in the system, fewer than the estimated staff requirement of about 36,000, with consequent negative effects on the quality of programme delivery.<sup>128</sup> The problem facing HEIs in terms of access and quality has made Nigeria a ready market for the recruitment of potential students by foreign universities. For instance, in the 2008–09 session alone, about 6,256 and 10,090 Nigerian students were registered in universities in the USA and UK respectively, with tuition and living expenses averaging £19,000 per

session for international students in the UK and \$21,000 in US universities. Thus, Nigerian students in these two countries, in aggregate, must have spent close to NGN70 billion on tuition and living expenses per session.<sup>129</sup> In this context, it is pertinent to note that the Federal Government budgeted NGN249 billion for the entire Nigerian education sector in 2009. The implication of this apparent under-investment in HE for Nigeria's fragile economy cannot be overemphasised. Table 3 shows the gap between enrolment in Nigerian HE institutions and their carrying capacities.<sup>130</sup> Most have enrolled many more students than their carrying capacities.

128. Bamiro, AO and Adedeji, SO (2010) Sustainable financing of higher education in Nigeria (SUFHEN). Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

129. *Ibid.*

130. Calculated on the basis of teaching and learning facilities available in the system.

**Table 3:** Enrolment and carrying capacity in Nigerian universities

Institution/system	Enrolment	Carrying capacity	Over enrolment
Universities	1,096,312	715,000	381,312
NOUN	35,000	100,000	-65,000
Polytechnics/Monotechnics	360,535	198,370	162,165
Colleges of Education	354,387	118,129	236,258
National Teachers Institute	91,259	100,000	-8,741

Source: Okojie (2010)<sup>131</sup>.

The economic relevance of expanding access to higher education relates to its role in solving societal problems. In almost every country in the world, access to higher education is recognised as an important societal goal and higher education institutions provide the training needed for most skilled occupations and professions. However, Nigeria's status in terms of human resource development is unsatisfactory. For instance, out of the 140 countries surveyed, the UNDP 2011–12 Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) ranked Nigeria 114th in higher education and 106th in technological readiness, with five years as the mean number of years of schooling.<sup>132</sup> Not only do poor scores in various socio-economic indicators reveal inadequate access to universities and other higher educational institutions, the growing number of university graduates who are unemployed has aggravated public disappointment in university education.

### c. Labour market characteristics

The labour market in Nigeria presently suffers from serious economic doldrums. The sharp reduction in oil revenue and the global economic slowdown are having severe effects on the operations and activities of

the labour market. The International Labour Organization (ILO), towards the tail end of 2015, predicted that more than three million people would become unemployed worldwide in the next two years, making existing jobs vulnerable and fuelling potential social unrest.<sup>133</sup> Developing markets like Nigeria, it suggested, will bear the brunt of increased joblessness, owing to the plummeting price of oil combined with weak local currencies. Thus, as a matter of urgency, oil producing countries like Nigeria need to aggressively diversify their economies and restructure their labour markets to nip in the bud the social disorder that may arise from youth unemployment. Employers need to actively participate in efforts to bridge the skills gap and close the difference between the knowledge, skills and values of university graduates and the requirements of the labour market. In other words, government, employers and others need to work with educational institutions to prepare students who are equipped with the skills needed.

The structure of the labour market influences the employment status of graduates and also serves as an

important determinant of household income and welfare. Analysis of the Nigerian labour market reveals that it is dominated by self-employed persons. As at 2006, four per cent of those working were employers, while the self-employed (farmers, traders and others) accounted for 54.9 per cent, and waged and salaried workers (private and public) made up 38.7 per cent.<sup>134</sup> Traders were the most prominent group of self-employed workers, accounting for 29.1 per cent of total employment. Other groups of the self-employed accounted for a sizeable percentage of approximately 19 per cent, while farmers accounted for as low as 6.5 per cent of total employment. If wage and salary earners are disaggregated by sector, the figures showed that the public and private sectors accounted for 20.1 per cent and 18.6 per cent of total employment respectively. Paid apprentices only accounted for 2.1 per cent of total employment. People in paid employment and those without adequate skills are most at risk in the event of labour market shocks. It is, therefore, important to identify some of the factors that affect earnings and entry into the labour market, and which may put people at risk of poverty and inequality across

131. Okojie, JA (2010) *The Nigeria University System: Challenges and prospects*. Paper presented at the Annual Seminar of the Pro-Chancellors of State Universities held at the Kaduna State University, Kaduna, 18–19 May.

132. Garba, PK (2012) The impossibility of sound economic outcomes without sound management and leadership. *An Inaugural Lecture*, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

133. Cited by *The Guardian*. Available online at: [www.theguardian.com/business/unemployment-and-employment-statistics](http://www.theguardian.com/business/unemployment-and-employment-statistics)

134. Ogwumike, FO et al. (2006) *Labour force participation, earnings and inequality in Nigeria*. Available online at: [www.sarprn.org/documents/d0002270/Labour-force\\_Nigeria\\_Oct2006.pdf](http://www.sarprn.org/documents/d0002270/Labour-force_Nigeria_Oct2006.pdf)

various sectors of employment. Such an analysis is essential to facilitate the formulation of policies targeted at reducing unemployment, poverty and inequality. Unfortunately, detailed studies of the relationship between the structure of the labour market and unemployment, as well as wage income and inequality, are rare in Nigeria despite the relevance of such links to many contemporary growth and development policy debates.

#### **d. Key challenges relating to HE and employability**

Higher education has been adjudged one of the decisive factors in life chances, equal opportunities and human capital development all over the world, and is a powerful instrument for developing and empowering citizens. HE contributes to both human and social development in terms of:

1. Higher earnings.
2. Greater labour productivity.
3. Better health and nutrition.
4. Faster economic growth.
5. Poverty reduction.
6. Political, economic and scientific development
7. External benefits.<sup>135</sup>

HE increases individuals' chances of employment and gives opportunities for job mobility. Nevertheless, the university sector in Nigeria faces nothing short of a crisis, in terms of inadequate access – only a fifth of qualified candidates currently gain admission to public universities, and only some of those remaining can

afford to go to the private universities; inadequate funding – expansion without a corresponding injection of resources; declining quality and an increased number of poorly-equipped graduates sent into the already congested job market; and rising unemployment, among other things. In 2009, the Executive Secretary of the NUC<sup>136</sup> identified some of the challenges facing the university system as follows:

1. Inadequate access: as indicated by the wide gap between the demand for and supply of higher education places.
2. A massive explosion in student enrolment in the face of inadequate/obsolete infrastructure and equipment.
3. Poor governance structure, accountability, and transparency
4. An unstable academic calendar resulting from the incessant strike actions embarked upon by various campus-based staff unions.
5. A shortage of academic staff in the critical areas of science and technology – poor salaries have created a class of under-motivated academics in the public universities.
6. Inadequate funding for teaching, research and community development.
7. Lack of functional and well-equipped laboratories and e-library facilities.
8. Highly deficient, outdated and irrelevant curricula.

None of these problems is as agonising and persistent as the challenge of

unemployment facing graduates from Nigerian higher education. Many graduates of higher institutions have been unable to find jobs more than ten years after leaving school;<sup>137</sup> those who manage to get jobs are not usually gainfully employed. Instead, they are forced to accept menial jobs that do not require their qualifications, particularly in sales, agriculture and manual labour. The lucky few who managed to find gainful jobs are often perceived as lacking job-related skills and so need to undergo months of training to make them able to satisfy their job requirements.<sup>138</sup> Empirical evidence indicates that employers want their graduate recruits to be competent and technical in their chosen fields.<sup>139</sup> They also want them to come from HEIs well-equipped with complementary life skills, such as problem-solving ability, reflective and critical thinking, interpersonal and team-spirit skills, effective communication skills, good character, integrity and a high level of personal ethics, self-esteem, self-discipline, organising skills and ability to translate ideas into actions. However, the problem typical of higher education in many countries is that these life skills are rarely taught as part of the curriculum and even many students with first class results may not have them. Yet they are no less important in leading to success in the world of work than the specific technical skills in a graduate's chosen field. The HE sector needs to identify measures that can enhance the ability of graduates to contribute to Nigeria's labour market requirements and drive the economy.

135. Babalola, JB (1993) Educational Costs and Financial Analysis (ESP) Centre for External Studies, University of Ibadan.

136. Okojie, JA (2009) *Financing the University System in Nigeria*. National Universities Commission, Abuja, Nigeria.

137. Olu Akanmu (2011) *Graduate Employment and Employability Challenges in Nigeria*. Abridged text of presentation given at the Association of Commonwealth Universities/British Council Regional Policy Dialogue on Graduate Employability in Africa in Accra, Ghana, 18 January.

138. Pitan and Adededeji (2012) *op. cit.*

139. Edinyang, SD Odey, CO Gimba, J (2015) Academic Factors and Graduate Employability in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human Resource Management* 3/5: 9–17.



## 2. National government policies related to higher education and employability

The Nigerian government has consistently acknowledged that access to higher education and production of quality graduates can be enhanced by raising expenditure, but argues that the current economic reality prevents them from increasing the allocation of public funds.

Foreign private investors, which might provide an alternative source of financial support to the education, social and other sectors, have also reduced their involvement in Nigeria because of rampant financial indiscipline, political instability, the poor state of the nation's infrastructure, insecurity and the unfavourable economic climate. A survey by international businesses working in SSA found that Nigeria is one of the most difficult countries in the world for private investment.<sup>140</sup> Nigeria is typically known for its oil, but the country's oil fortune is dwindling. While in the past, it contributed more than 50 per cent of Nigeria's GDP, it provides less than five per cent of employment.<sup>141</sup> Recent developments in the oil market call for a shift in industrial policy. The Nigerian government needs to adopt a new economic and industrial policy that will promote employment intensive industries with strong potential national competitiveness. Industries and services such as light manufacturing, construction, ICT, wholesale and retail, meat and poultry processing, oil palm and cocoa processing, along with their value chains, have the capacity to generate employment. These should be the focus of Nigeria's industrial

policy, to ensure that its economy creates jobs and life opportunities for Nigerian youths and higher education graduates.<sup>142</sup> The factors that have constrained the growth of these industries beyond infancy, such as poor physical infrastructure (particularly power and transport), access to finance, a bureaucratic investment environment and a dearth of technical skills as well as manpower should be removed.

In its current condition, the education system is far from being ready to address the massive unemployment problems facing the country, due to its inadequate teaching and learning facilities. Meaningful government intervention is required to address the inadequate infrastructure that reduces the effectiveness of the university system. Nigeria also needs to develop its formal technical and vocational education system, giving it prestige and making it attractive to young people, in order to produce graduates with the skills needed to operate labour intensive industries and their value chains. The education provided by tertiary institutions should be re-sharpened to equip students with skills, such as analytical, critical thinking, entrepreneurial skills, problem-solving and communication skills.

Some recent government policies have aimed to address these challenges. In 2014, the NUC, which regulates the activities of Nigeria's university system, approved the inclusion of entrepreneurship as a course in Nigerian universities' curricula, to train students how to set up profitable business ventures in their professional fields, or implement novel ideas after graduation. This

policy requires students in public universities to pass at least two units of entrepreneurial courses in the course of their degree programme. The policy is aimed at bridging the identified skills gap and addressing the problem of graduate unemployment. Entrepreneurship studies have thus been adopted as compulsory general studies for students in Nigerian public universities, though they have not fully taken off in some private universities.

The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) of the Subsidy Re-investment Programme, (SURE-P) is another key policy on HE and employment in Nigeria. The scheme, which aims to address youth unemployment challenges in Nigeria, is one of the programmes of the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. The SURE-P arose out of the partial withdrawal of the petroleum subsidy in 2012 and the decision of Goodluck Jonathan's administration to invest the Federal Government's share in infrastructural development, social safety-net projects and other schemes that would be beneficial to the masses of the Nigerian people. The GIS is a policy intervention intended to address the skills gap faced by many Nigerian youths who were not able to secure employment immediately after graduation. Over 180,000 unemployed graduates across the country benefited from the GIS of the SURE-P scheme in 2014.

Another policy is the Nigerian Government's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which outlined strategies designed to promote economic growth. NEEDS is complemented by equivalent

140. Centre for International Development, cited in Saint, W, Hartnet, T and Strassner, E (2003) *Higher Education Policy* 16/3: 259–281.

141. Olu Akanmu (2011) *op.cit.*

142. Olu Akanmu (2011) *op. cit.*

approaches at the state level – State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEED) and at local level – Local Government Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS).

The overall policy aim is to strengthen food security, increase employment opportunities and boost agriculture as an engine for broad-based economic growth in the country. NEEDS focused on the reduction of poverty and unemployment. Rising unemployment among young people, worsening rural poverty and the marginalisation of women informed the NEEDS policy, which also aimed at strengthening financial services by providing improved access to credit to assist young entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as a key to reducing poverty and unemployment.

Other policies designed to address the challenges of employability include the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). SIWES is one of the interventions of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and is intended to provide undergraduate students in the science disciplines with practical/industrial experience. It is a work-based study programme that seeks to enable students to acquire and utilise practical skills. However, it is reported that even participants in the scheme cannot secure employment after graduation, which casts doubt on the relevance of SIWES in addressing the challenges of graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

In general, the government needs to create a conducive environment for existing policies to work and to allocate more resources, as well as ensure its institutions develop curricula that address the life skill requirements of

their graduates and prepare them better for their post-education life journey. The next section discusses university provisions designed to tackle the challenges of unemployment among university graduates.

### **3. University provision for tackling the challenges of graduate employability**

Our research on employability in Nigeria draws on quantitative and qualitative data collected from three universities, assesses the overall situation and identifies recent initiatives that seek to address the challenges of employability facing graduates of tertiary institutions. The University of Ibadan (UI), a public federal government-owned university in the South West region, Imo State University (IMSU), a public state-owned university in the South East region, and Bingham University (BU), a private faith-based university in the North Central region were selected for the study on the basis of their ownership and geographical location.

Generally speaking, there is a lack of research on employability in Nigeria; what is available focuses on the perspectives of governments, employers and labour organisations. Interestingly, the views of the students – the recipients of this employability development – and the lecturers – the providers of the education, are not well known. Hence, this study aimed to address this gap by examining the perspectives of students and their lecturers on HE and employability in Nigeria. A total of 1,036 students aged between 19 and 26 years participated in a questionnaire survey (517 from UI, 249 from IMSU and 270 from BU).

Seven faculties were covered in the survey (arts, education, science, agriculture, social sciences, business management and law). The majority of the students (99 per cent) interviewed were full time, and 57.7 per cent were female. The data showed that 50 per cent of the students had attended public secondary schools, and the majority (86.4 per cent) were sponsored by their parents. Additionally, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with students and staff from the three universities. A total of 90 students from UI, 53 from IMSU and ten from BU participated in the interviews, drawn from five faculties (arts, education, social sciences, science and agriculture) at UI and IMSU and three faculties (humanities, sciences and arts) at BU. The students were divided into different FGDs based on their course of study; they were then encouraged to brainstorm on some predetermined questions. Interviews were also conducted with teaching staff and university policymakers, during field visits. Ten staff each from UI and IMSU and 11 from BU, comprising both academic and management staff, participated in the interviews. This quantitative and qualitative data was collected in the three case study institutions between 2014 and 2015, with the aim of examining cross-cutting issues, as well as briefly assessing the services provided by Nigerian universities with respect to graduate employability. Analysts' Data Services and Resources Limited (ADSR) was responsible for data entering, cleaning and analysis of quantitative data, while the qualitative data was transcribed and content analysed by the authors.

## a. Summary of key findings

This section presents the summary of key findings of the survey of final year students and qualitative interviews conducted with the students, lecturers and some management staff in the three case study institutions.

The first section presents the views of the students in relation to their career aspirations and scoring of skills developed at the university, followed by what the lecturers consider should be the contributions of the universities towards enhancing the employability of their graduates.

### Students' career aspirations

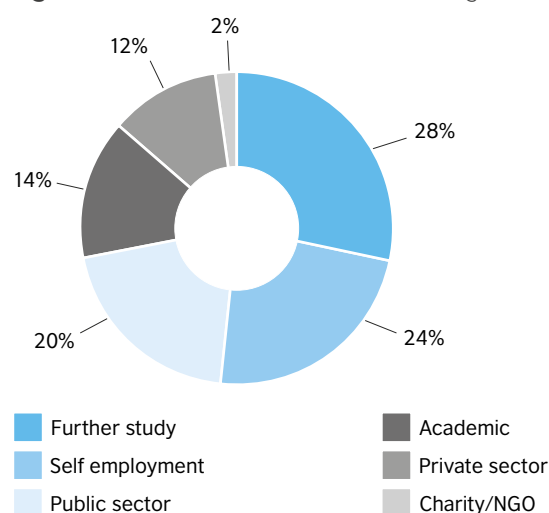
Studies on career aspirations show that university students all over the world face dilemmas in making career choice decisions.<sup>143</sup> In most cases, the choice of careers, subjects, and courses of

study, as well as subsequent career paths to follow, are significant challenges for prospective undergraduate students.<sup>144</sup> Very often, choosing the right subject combination, leading to the right professional qualification, can make the difference between enjoying and disliking one's career in the future. Individuals making career choices are influenced by such factors as the context in which they live, their personal aptitudes, and their educational attainment.<sup>145</sup> In Nigeria, a study on career aspirations<sup>146</sup> found that many youths felt that, in the absence of adequate vocational guidance and career counselling, they had made the wrong career choices due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or as a result of the prestige attached to certain jobs. Similarly, looking at the factors influencing career choices made

during college, and how these factors differ between male and female students in South Africa, it was found that male career aspirations appeared to be driven by financial rewards, while women were more concerned with the social goods of their career choices.<sup>147</sup> A similar study in the USA asserted that adolescent career aspirations are influenced by life context, personal attitudes and educational attainment.<sup>148</sup>

Figure 1 shows the distribution of students interviewed in this study according to their preferred career choices. A significant finding is that 24 per cent wanted to be self-employed, a greater proportion than those wanting to work in the public sector (20 per cent) or the private sector (12 per cent). Furthermore, 18 per cent would prefer to stay in academia, and 28 per cent intended to further their education.

**Figure 1:** Distribution of students according to their preferred career choices



143. Bandura A, Barbaranelli C, Caprara GV, Pastorelli C (2001) Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development* 72: 187–206.

144. Issa AO and Nwalo, KIN (2008) Factors Affecting the Career Choice of Undergraduates in Nigerian Library and Information Science Schools. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 18/1: 23–32.

145. Watson, M, McMahon, M, Foxcroft, C, Els, C (2010) Occupational aspirations of low socio-economic Black South African children. *Journal of Career Development* 37/4: 717–734.

146. Salami, SO (1999) Relationship between work values and vocational interests among high school students in Ibadan. *Nigerian African Journal of Educational Research* 5/2: 65–74.

147. Sax, LJ (1994) Retaining tomorrow's scientists: Exploring factors that keep male and female college students interested in science careers. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering ERIC* 1/1: 45–61.

148. Perry, NM (2006) Factors influencing career choices of adolescents and young adults in rural Pennsylvania. *Journal of Extension*: 44/3: 1–6.

### **Students' ranking of their degree studies with respect to employability**

To determine students' responses on the contribution of their degree studies to their future employability, levels of agreement with four statements were elicited, using a five-point scale: 'I know which skills and experiences are valued by employers of graduates in my field' had the highest mean score (3.79), followed by 'I feel that my degree has developed my self-confidence and self-assurance' (3.69), while 'I feel confident that with my degree I will be able to find appropriate work when I leave university' was next (3.68). However, 'I expect to work in the public sector' was the least rated (3.05). The respondents expressed quite strong views on their choice of careers, which is usually influenced by knowledge of potential career experiences that are valued by employers and personal attributes like self-confidence and self-assurance. Perhaps surprisingly, the responses show that most were confident that their degree will enable them to find appropriate work when they leave university.

### **Students' views on attributes developed at the university**

Students also scored the skills they had developed while at university. The students claimed that attributes such as the 'Need for honesty and integrity', 'Ability to work without supervision' and 'Ability to reflect on your development and identify strengths and weaknesses' were the top three they had been able to develop, while business awareness was the least developed. Students believed that the three topmost abilities that graduates need to have are 'confidence and voice' (4.1), 'ethical awareness and social citizenship' (4.1) and 'language and communication' (4.0), while critical thinking and autonomy are a little less important (3.6).

### **Barriers to obtaining employment**

However, students acknowledged that possession of suitable skills is not always sufficient for gaining employment, especially when ethnicity, discrimination and partisanship are the deciding factors in recruitment. The students interviewed alluded to the fact that what counts ultimately is not always what one knows but who. Quoting one of them:

'...employers, most of the times, do not actually give adequate consideration to the skills possessed by applicants during job screening. Some employers consider beauty and would go ahead to employ a lady because she is looking very attractive without knowing her ability to deliver on the job. Another reason could be because you are a friend or daughter or a friend's daughter to the employers, or other personal considerations, which may influence somebody's chances to be employed apart from what you know, learn, or skills acquired from the college. Meanwhile, you [employers] are rejecting people with actual qualified ability, and who could deliver on the job, for unqualified ones. In that process, even when you employ the person, that person will be of little productive value both to the employer and to the society at large. And these things do not augur well for our economy and the society in general.'

Some of the academic staff interviewed agreed with this view, arguing that often, more attention is given to ethnic group and state of origin than the knowledge and skills a candidate has. One stated:

'[I]f you don't belong to this ethnic group or you are not from this state of origin, you may not be given employment. This sentiment has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. So, if that bias is removed, I think, it will help many of our graduates to be employed anywhere in [the] country.'

### **Contribution of extra-curricular activities to employability**

A university graduate who equips himself/herself with skills additional to the knowledge acquired in the classroom is expected to be more attractive to an employer due to the practical experience already gained. A student affirmed this when she said:

'...extra-curricular activities have increased my understanding and idea of the necessary things I could do, or of the necessary places where I could be employed, or the necessary qualifications I should have for me to be employable. I learnt that an entrepreneur is creative and proffers solutions to ... problems in the society.'

**(Female student in Economics)**

One of the respondents in a faith-based university said the university is known for a holistic type of education, which aims to develop students in their totality. In this university, a flexible curriculum gives more room for work-study programmes and other extra-curricular activities, which expose the students to what is expected in the world of work. A student respondent expressed his view as follows:

'Following the structure of my school, a faith-based university, first of all, they try to capture spirituality; that is, one basic thing that a student needs in life. Secondly, when it comes to leadership and acquisition of certain qualities, they do permit us to participate in some extra-curricular activities, to a certain extent, to be mature and to develop good character in us. Some of us don't really know what we have in us. It helps us bring out those qualities in us. That is what the school has been doing.'

**(Male student in Economics)**

**Figure 2:** Contribution of extra-curricular activities to employability

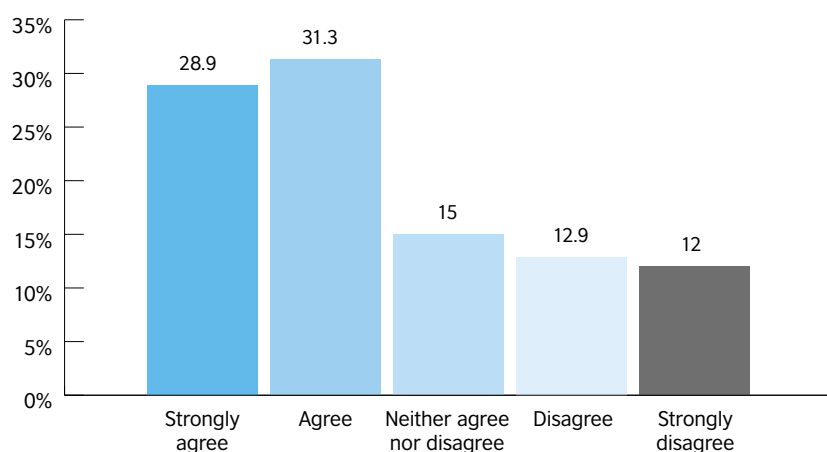


Figure 2 shows the perceived contributions of extra-curricular activities to employability. About 60 per cent of the students agreed that extra-curriculum activities undertaken while attending university are likely to help equip them for their working lives.

### Contributions of the university

This section discusses the views of students and staff on the contribution of their university towards enhancing the employability of their graduates. As noted above, the NUC has directed public universities to include courses in entrepreneurship in the curriculum in order to prepare students for the world of work and participation in society. A senior member of staff in the Department of Accounting in one of the selected universities affirmed that:

‘We are running, in our department, and in fact, not just our department, but in the whole university, to ensure that our students undertake entrepreneurial courses. Not only do they go through the theory but also engage in practical entrepreneurship. They undertake practicals; they develop skills and undergo some practical sessions to acquire skills for self-employment.

These are the things that we are trying to promote in our graduates so that they won't graduate and be seeking for white-collar jobs.’

Another lecturer added:

‘I think this university is doing quite a lot, but we can do more, even at the departmental level. I can tell you, one of the recent things we have introduced is to increase the interest of students in more practical things like going into writing. You can be writing and you can go into media practice. We encourage them to become public speakers, to write articles. We know that some of my colleagues here have been responsible for organising public debates to make sure that we are producing people that can stand out and when they go out, they will be adjudged as being properly educated and as such they can get jobs easily.’

Moreover, one of the lecturers in Social Sciences said:

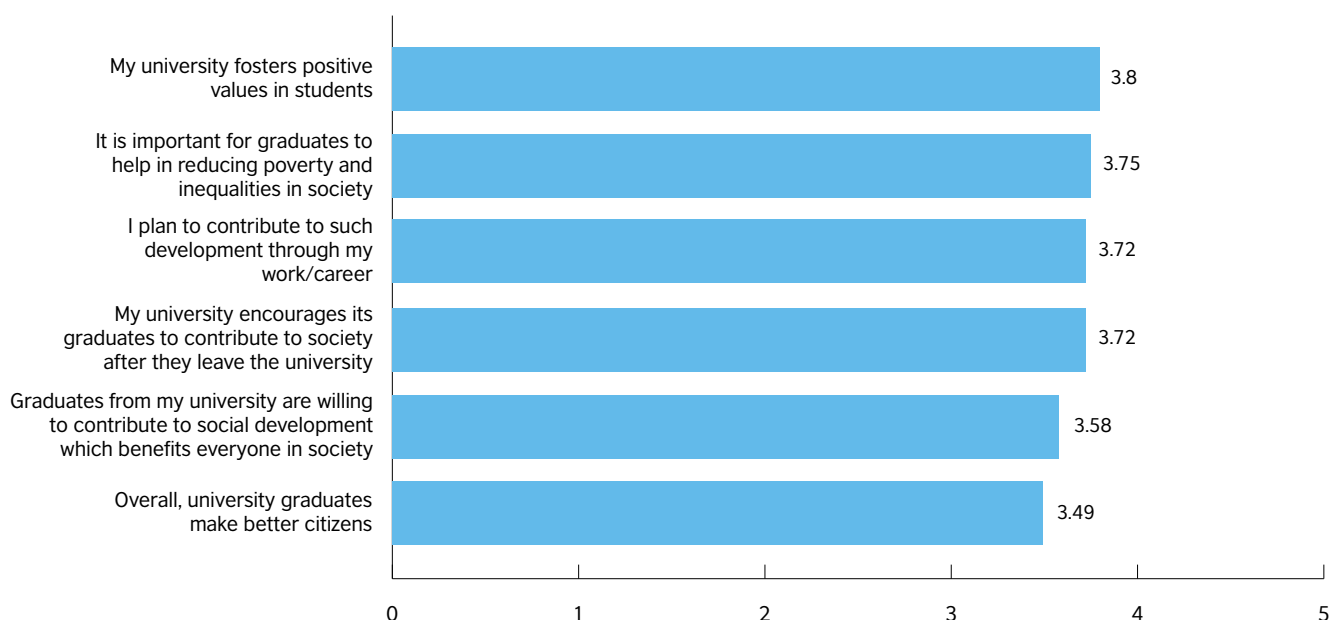
‘Our students are well prepared for the job market; one of the things that we do is that, as much as possible, we ensure that they are linked with accounting professional bodies. We ensure that we build a

strong affiliation with the accounting professional associations, like ICAN and ANAN, we have good relationships with them. We develop our students to understand this profession and then we encourage them to prepare for external examinations co-ordinated by these associations. Also, we are partnering with ACCA certified chartered accountants of the UK.’

The students were also asked for their perspectives on the contributions that universities make to development in Nigerian society, showing broadly positive views on a range of issues, including values, civic development and poverty reduction, as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Contributions of university to development in society (mean rank)



Developing students through capacity building programmes is another way in which universities can prepare students for the labour market. One of the lecturers stated that:

‘We provide capacity-building programmes for our students, and develop in them the confidence to advertise themselves and the department as much as possible when they graduate. We train our students to believe that employers will always be looking for them. So, when our students are leaving here, they will be leaving shoulder-high knowing that when they get outside there, people will be looking for them to employ because of the strong foundation the university has given to them to face the challenges of the labour market.’

Overall, students show surprisingly positive views towards their experiences at university and

prospects after graduation, given other stakeholders’ concerns about quality of provision.<sup>149</sup> They also have positive views about the potential of university education for transforming society. However, they are concerned about the barriers to obtaining employment in practice, even when having the required graduate attributes.

#### **b. Follow-up student interviews**

A subsample of the students who had participated in the survey were traced and followed up. Most were, at the time of the interview, still serving in the compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).<sup>150</sup> These graduates agreed that the programmes offered by their universities were helping them to contribute to society in many ways. The programmes they mentioned included organised workshops and capacity building activities by various student associations, industrial training/

attachment and practical experience. They said that they considered themselves ready for entry into the labour market and were seeking out job opportunities. They also claimed that in pursuit of their corporate social responsibility aims, organisations had often made visits to the universities in which they had studied to train students in the skills and competences required in the labour market. The majority believed that their degree courses had equipped them very well for the labour market. They also believed that the extra-curricular activities undertaken at the university had helped to equip them for life after graduation. Moreover, they said that the work they were doing at the time of the interview was related to what they were trained for in university. However, many noted that, even if they would prefer public sector employment, very few such jobs are available, and expressed their willingness to be self-employed.

149. The possible reasons for these attitudes have been explored in the *Students in the Driving Seat* report.

150. The NYSC is a one-year compulsory national service for graduates from public and approved private universities in Nigeria who are under 30 years of age.

Next, this chapter reports on the perspectives of employers on how well Nigerian graduates are prepared for the labour market.

#### 4. Employer perspectives

As part of the final phase of the project, a survey of employers was carried out to elicit their perceptions of the quality of training received by students while enrolled in university and the job-readiness of fresh graduates. Some 101 respondents were interviewed in Lagos (40), Ibadan (31) and Abuja (30). The organisations included education and training institutions, manufacturing and industry, and hotels and services in both the private and public sectors.

##### a. Summary of key findings

Our findings reveal that in the two years prior to the survey, more than 75 per cent of the employers had recruited

graduates, although about nine per cent had not, and 18 per cent did not respond to the question. Vacancies for graduate-calibre jobs are in short supply in Nigeria because of the economic slowdown and the embargo placed on new recruitment, so that potential employers have to cope with increased numbers of job applicants.

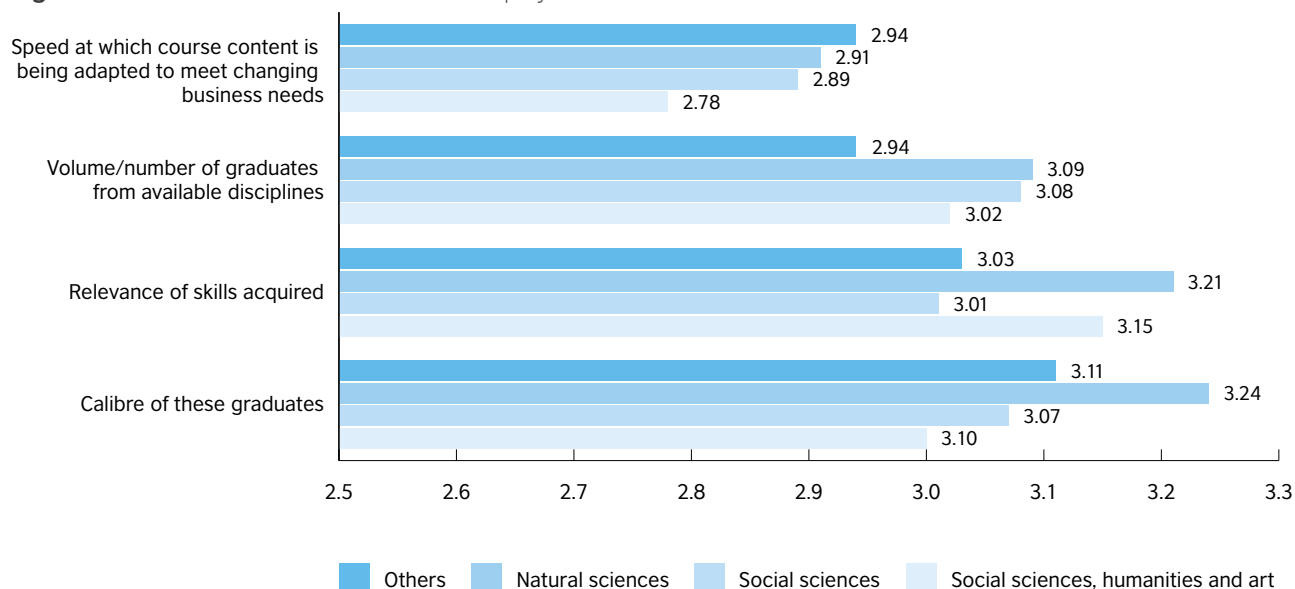
In Nigeria, every graduate vacancy attracted an average of 83 applicants in 2014, compared to 69 in 2010, with competition for each available position intensifying as more students leave higher education each year.

Of those graduates the employers interviewed had recruited, 43 per cent were from social sciences, humanities and arts disciplines, followed by graduates from business studies (26 per cent) and natural sciences (22 per cent). The satisfaction of respondents concerning the calibre

of the graduates they had interviewed/recruited, the relevance of the skills these graduates had acquired, the volume/number of graduates recruited and the speed at which course content is being adapted to meet changing business needs by discipline was ranked. The findings (see Figure 4) reveal that graduates from the natural science disciplines ranked highest in all except in the speed at which course content is being adapted to meet changing business needs. Graduates from these disciplines were perceived as being of high calibre and having the skills required by employers.

The criteria used by the respondents to set minimum entry standards for graduate recruitment were also ranked, as shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 4:** Mean ranks of the satisfaction of employers



**Figure 5:** Criteria used for minimum entry standards (percentage)

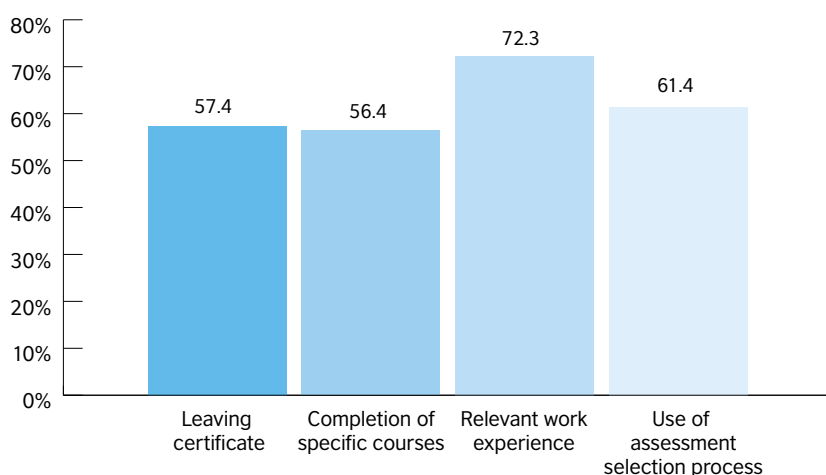
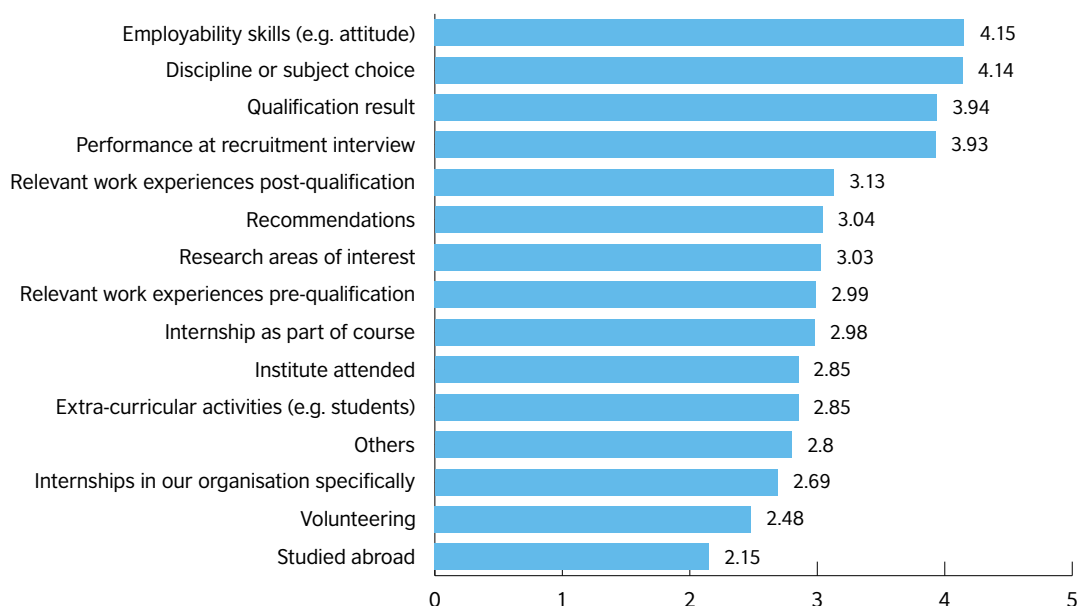


Figure 6 shows the scoring of the criteria used in filling graduate vacancies. On a five-point scale, employability skills (e.g. attitude, communication skills) ranked highest (4.15), followed by discipline or subject choice (4.14). The employers did not consider the location of the university at which an applicant had studied

(whether home or abroad) as such an important criterion in selection. Contrary to expectations in relation to the value of extra-curricular activities, they valued 'traditional' qualifications and knowledge (3.94) more than enrichment activities, such as work placements and volunteering (2.48).

**Figure 6:** Mean rank of criteria used by organisations when recruiting graduates

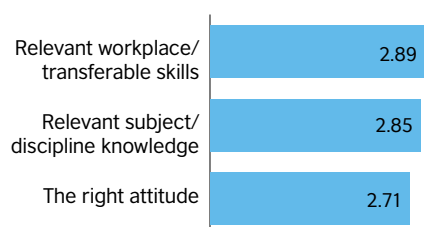


The respondents also identified some major challenges they face when filling graduate vacancies. Below are some of them:

1. Too many applications for few openings.
2. Unqualified applicants.
3. Getting someone who is fit and has the required skills or competence.
4. Inability of job seekers to compose themselves during the interview.
5. Coping with the pressure of 'godfathers' – pressure from highly placed personalities, that often affects a recruitment decision.
6. Inadequate work experience.
7. Inadequate ICT knowledge.
8. Lack of necessary practical skills and communication ability.
9. Gap between what is learnt in education and what is needed in the work place.
10. Applying acquired knowledge in the workplace to achieve organisational goals.

Figure 7 shows the mean rank of the degree to which the respondents were satisfied with the skills possessed by the graduates they had recruited in the 24 months prior to the survey, with indication that there was some lack of satisfaction.

**Figure 7:** Mean rank of satisfaction of skills possessed by the graduates recruited in the 24 months prior to the survey



Employers were asked how frequently different types of collaboration between university and industry occurred. The responses showed that recruitment of graduates and provision of workplace training and development were most common (jointly ranked highest), implying that university – industry engagement is most frequent, followed by work placement opportunities for students, while co-operation on curriculum design and study programmes was next. Collaboration on research and innovation was next while joint business ventures with academic researchers was the least common area of collaboration. However, the results showed that none of these forms of collaboration were frequent. The respondents were also asked to rank the importance of different types of university – industry collaboration. Co-operation on curriculum design and study programmes was considered to be the most important, while joint business ventures with academic researchers ranked least. It appears that collaboration between universities and employers is just starting to develop, and respondents admitted that there is room for improvement, especially by organising 'stakeholders' forums', when universities can

deliberate with employing organisations and jointly appraise each other's activities and the teaching of entrepreneurship.

On how to improve collaboration between industry and university, the following measures were proposed by the respondents:

1. Contribute to infrastructural development, setting of standards and course accreditation.
2. Involvement and participation in teaching and academic seminars organised by universities.
3. Strengthening the student work experience scheme (SIWES)<sup>151</sup> to enhance practical training and technological transfer.
4. Involvement in curriculum design, planning and modification.
5. Inclusion of organisation members on university management boards.
6. Provide a conducive environment that will support and encourage collaboration between employers and universities.
7. Award of scholarships and financial assistance to indigent students.
8. Organise regular stakeholders' and university-employer for a.
9. Participate in collaborative research.
10. Provide constant and regular feedback on the performance of graduates in the labour market.

151. The Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) is a work-based study programme with reference to skill acquisition and utilisation in tertiary education in Nigeria – see above.

We also tried to find out what, in the employers' view, the universities could do to contribute to the development of their organisations. Respondents suggested the following:

1. Produce on a regular basis graduates who meet the requirements of different economic sectors.
2. Partner with organisations to know what types of qualities are desired from university graduates.
3. Improve university –industry research collaboration.
4. Prepare graduates who are worthy ambassadors for their institutions when they eventually enter employment.
5. Create a conducive forum for interaction and sharing of ideas.
6. Implement curricula that are market-responsive and can meet present needs.
7. Develop innovative teaching methodologies to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
8. Establish entrepreneurial and skills acquisition programmes that can bridge the skills gap between university education and the needs of employers.
9. Disseminate research reports promptly, for the benefit of employers.
10. Produce all-round graduates who can use their hearts, heads and hands.

### **Summary of employers' views**

The perspectives of employers in the survey on the calibre of graduates were not very negative, but they did show lack of satisfaction in certain areas. They believe that even when a deficiency is discovered in a certain discipline, they would be able to initiate

an appropriate training programme to build the extra capacities needed by their recruits. Collaboration with universities was relatively low, however, and they affirmed that universities and employers could work more closely together in the areas of ICT training, and the exchange of new ideas and innovations. To prepare students with appropriate skills, they agreed that industries and universities should also collaborate on curriculum design, implementation and evaluation.

### **Students' and employers' views contrasted**

Whereas many of the students surveyed in this research bemoaned that there is no job for them after graduation, the employers surveyed were of the view that graduates are not always well prepared for work. The employers believed that academic standards have fallen considerably over recent decades and that a university degree is no longer a guarantee of communication skills or technical competence. As a result, university graduates are commonly viewed as 'half-baked'. University graduates, on the other hand, complained of the high level of unemployment as well as pervasive corruption in the Nigerian state, which they allege has deprived them of job opportunities. The situation is of great concern as shown during the course of a recruitment exercise for the Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS) in February 2014, which turned into an indescribable tragedy for many Nigerians, when about 6.5 million job seekers in all 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory, besieged recruitment centres across the country for 4,000 vacant positions in the NIS. A stampede during the exercise left at least 16 job seekers dead.

The views of graduates and employers in terms of the qualities, characteristics, skills and knowledge which constitute employability both in general and specific terms were juxtaposed. The students expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees, but the employers want graduates to demonstrate a broader range of skills, including language and communication skills, knowledge of the subject matter, critical thinking, a positive attitude, ability to collaborate, workplace skills, confidence and voice, ethical awareness and social citizenship. The employers require work-ready graduates who can take decisions, act according to instructions, find opportunities, take initiative and produce results. However, these skills are not taught in the universities; and even many students with first class results may not have these soft skills. Both students and employers value industrial attachments and relevant work experience in enhancing employability. While employers expect applicants to have relevant work experience that has contributed to the acquisition of collaborative, interpersonal, language and communication, and critical thinking skills, the students complained that limited job spaces, where they could do practical work, lack of flexibility in the length and timing of training as well as inadequate funds remain barriers to their aspirations.

The messages conveyed by these comparisons are clear:

- Large numbers of university graduates are unable to meet the employment requirements of the labour market.
- The curricula in operation in many universities are inadequate to deliver employable graduates.



- Perceptions of students and employers on what constitutes employability are at variance, leading to an apparent misalignment of skills, between what the students acquire and what employers require.
- The shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication, as well as in technical skills.
- The policy regulating university – industry relationships is not very visible.
- In many cases, employers compensate for insufficient academic preparation by organising training and retraining programmes for new recruits. This increases firms' operating costs, and reduces their profitability and competitiveness.

## 5. Innovations

In addition to the general findings reported above, the study sought to identify specific initiatives designed to enhance employability. Three innovative approaches are reported on in this section. The first is the Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State. The second is the Centre for Entrepreneurship, Kwara State University KWASU, Malete, Kwara State, while the third is the Entrepreneurship and Innovative Development Centre of privately-owned Pan Atlantic University, Lekki, Lagos. This section presents highlights of fuller reports on the activities of these centres.

### a. Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES), FUNAAB

Founded in 1989, FUNAAB builds capacity in various areas of agriculture, such as agricultural management and

rural development, animal science and livestock production, engineering, food science and ecology, environmental resources' management, management sciences, natural sciences, plant and crop production and veterinary medicine. FUNAAB also has a Directorate of University Farms, which manages the research and training facilities for students and staff. The Directorate has three departments specialising in (a): commercial and innovative development, (b): teaching and research development and (c): livestock unit.

### Entrepreneurship drives at FUNAAB

FUNAAB established the Agricultural Media Resource and Extension Centre (AMREC) in 1991, which operates through model extension villages for:

- a. Testing latent agricultural technologies.
- b. Being used as study villages on extension models.
- c. Training of students in practical extension activities.

AMREC has undertaken a number of training programmes for farmers and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector, which have also directly impacted positively on food production. AMREC also covers ICT knowledge in various skills, broadcasting and community-based farming schemes, which requires university students spending a year in what is called the Farm Practical Year (FPY) training programme. During this period, student-farmers live and work on farms in rural communities under the supervision of community-based farmers and with occasional visits from university-appointed Farm Managers. The purpose is to encourage these

young undergraduate farmers to take up agriculture as a business in a rural community.

### Academic aspects of entrepreneurship training at FUNAAB

The CES promotes skills acquisition in textile design and production, fashion design and clothing, arts and crafts, food processing, floriculture, masonry, building maintenance, furniture making, interior and exterior decoration, poultry production, fish farming, cosmetics, graphic design, photography, shoe making, hair dressing, arts and bead making and crèche management. Other activities include auto mechanical and electrical work, forex trading, events planning, catering and hotel management.

### Academic programme structure

The Centre runs two programmes, namely:

- a. The Alpha (Basic Programme).
- b. The Omega (Advanced Programme).

The Alpha Programme runs for nine weeks, during which students are taught various skills and interact with field experts in these trades. They get certified in the process.

The Omega Programme takes this training further, to the level of mandating every student participant to register a business name with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). They are connected with loan granting/mentoring institutions and personalities in business circles to acquire more experience and obtain soft loans to kick-start their businesses, using their certificates as collateral. Once repayment is completed, their certificates are released to them.

### Component divisions of the Centre

The CES operates in two distinct divisions:

- a. The School of Business and Entrepreneurship.
- b. The Strategic Businesses and Ventures Division.

The School of Business and Entrepreneurship operates academic programmes to which all undergraduate students of the university must subscribe as compulsory university-wide general studies (GNS). The programme is tagged the Enterprise Creation and Skill Acquisition Programme, comprising five courses, in stages, namely:

*Stage One:* Business Opportunities Identification (BOI): GNS 203 (Innovation and Product Development).

*Stage Two:* Business Values Reorientation (BVR): GNS 204 (Enterprise Creation and Development).

*Stage Three:* Practical Skills Acquisition (PSA): GNS 303 (Entrepreneurship Mentorship).

*Stage Four:* Resource Mobilisation and Business Plan Writing (RBP): GNS 304 (Enterprise Resource Planning).

*Stage Five:* Practical Business Operations: GNS 403 (Entrepreneurship Practice).

There is also a postgraduate entrepreneurship programme, which commenced in 2011. The target population for this programme is comprised of senior civil servants in the state who are close to retirement and are sponsored by the state government.

### Success stories

The Centre has created opportunities for its immediate locality to be engaged in entrepreneurial activities initiated by the centre. It has also produced food and many other dairy products for immediate consumption and also packaged some for export. The Centre has established linkages and attracted support from external institutions like the Ford Foundation, A. G. Leventis, MacArthur Foundation and the British Council.

#### b. Centre for Entrepreneurship, KWASU, Maletu

Kwara State University (KWASU)'s Centre for Entrepreneurship, established in 2010, provides training opportunities for all students of the university to be job creators, innovative graduates of different trades, and successful entrepreneurs. The Centre runs Certificate Courses in venture capitalism, innovation management, project management, supply chain management, business strategy, organisation design and planning, strategies of managing small businesses, etc.

Just like FUNAAB, KWASU's CES has a division devoted to practical business ventures covering water, bakery and confectionery, bookshop, beauty/hair salon, block making, finance and investment, stores and transport, as well as fashion design, etc. Some of these ventures are still emerging but, if more credit opportunities are made available by the authorities, there are strong indications that they will soon come of age.

### Expectations

All undergraduates studying in KWASU are exposed to practical demonstrations of business in their third year of studies. All are mandated to register a business name before graduation, like in FUNAAB. All students are also required to take GNS 401 (Social Entrepreneurship). Students are grouped and required to go into different local communities to implement their chosen entrepreneurship projects on agro information, women's empowerment, family planning, community health, prison outreach, etc.

The Centre is well known in its immediate neighbourhood and more broadly across the country for its entrepreneurial programmes. Seminars organised by the Centre attract national and international personalities, who come to present salient issues of entrepreneurship and business development.

#### c. Enterprise Development Centre (EDC), Pan Atlantic University, Lekki, Lagos

This centre was established in 2003 to:

- a. Help owners/managers of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to develop their competences.
- b. Establish and sustain long term entrepreneurial ventures.
- c. Build the capacity of entrepreneurs and their teams to deliver valuable products and services.
- d. Help entrepreneurs to be better prepared in accessing finance to enable their business to grow.

It operates in two ways:

- Interacting with the business world represented by SMEs in Nigeria.
- Dealing with academic issues – teaching and examining General Academic Courses, which are compulsory for all registered students, and sending the results to relevant university offices for further processing prior to graduation.

### **Programmes for SMEs**

SMEs receive support services from the centre to help them to implement their growth plans. The centre constantly builds its network of partners and collaborators who share its passion for the development and growth of SMEs and also partners with the business community to build the capacity of SMEs in Nigeria. Examples of such partnerships include Diamond Bank, Eco Bank, Heritage Bank, and ETISALAT. International institutions such as the World Bank, Goldman Sachs, Coca-Cola and Africa Foundation also provide support.

In addition, the centre interacts with and provides support for small and growing business groups which manage between NGN1 and five million per year and micro/macro business groups managing large funds (between NGN10 and 100 million per annum).

The Business Group delivers its programme in modules, which enable subscribing entrepreneurs to spread their skill development over five months. During this period, staff members of the EDC and its consulting partners provide assistance with

implementing action plans when needed. The media of interaction can be online, via radio, face-to-face in class or a combination of two or three, as the case may require. In these encounters, assessors and examiners reward active participation. EDC staff also pay on-the-spot visits to business centres to offer useful advice to subscribers. Among the certificate courses offered are:

- Entrepreneurial Management.
- Social Sector Management.
- Essential Management Skills.

### **Academic programme in entrepreneurship courses**

In October 2014, Pan Atlantic University recently introduced Enterprise Education as an academic undergraduate course for all students. Results of the examinations taken by students are processed as part of graduation requirements.

As can be seen from these cases above, there is concerted action being taken to address the challenges of employability in Nigeria at an institutional level. Now that employability and inclusiveness in skill development are being widely discussed, recent initiatives by universities suggest that they see the solution in increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship development, so that whatever degree students obtain, they learn how to apply their knowledge in practice and acquire skills that will enhance their employability after graduation. These initiatives are promising, although they are often relatively new and do not appear to have been evaluated.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

Universities in Nigeria used to occupy a prime place in the delivery of higher education but more recently a number of deficiencies have been found in the system, making it unable to deliver on its terms of reference. This research has confirmed that poor provisions for skill development have imposed major constraints on the production of employable graduates as a consequence of the deplorable state of teaching and learning facilities, inadequate funding, interruptions to power supply, curriculum design and review issues, reliance on poor-quality staff, and corruption leading to mismanagement of scarce resources and abandonment of time-bound projects, among others. University authorities and policymakers clearly need to develop curricula that can address the observed deficiencies, in particular to ensure individual freedom, self-reliance and national development.

### **Recommendations for policy and practice**

Based on the research carried out, and discussions with stakeholders, the following recommendations are made:

1. Periodic curriculum review should be carried out to ensure that curricula reflect labour market characteristics and trends.

2. Strong university-employer linkages should be encouraged to promote the development of employability skills in the universities. Employers should be encouraged to participate in the process of curriculum design and modification to ensure that the skill gaps identified are bridged.
3. Public spending on education should be increased and judicious utilisation of resources should be stressed to guide against diversion and misuse of public funds.
4. Conducive working conditions should be provided for staff to motivate them to higher productivity.
5. Meaningful government intervention should be offered to address the challenges of inadequate teaching and learning facilities and inadequate infrastructure, which impede the effectiveness of the higher education system.
6. Teachers' modes of delivery should be upgraded, through the provision of ICT facilities; staff training and capacity building should be encouraged to support the all-round development of learners.
7. Transparency and fairness should be emphasised during recruitment of students by universities and of staff by employers to eliminate nepotism, favouritism and sectionalism.
8. Greater synergy is needed between supply of graduates and the needs of the labour market.
9. The Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) should be strengthened to support skill acquisition and development in tertiary institutions.
10. Functional career services centres should be established in universities to provide counselling assistance for students, to help them make career decisions and access timely information on job prospects.





To prepare students with appropriate skills ... industries and universities should collaborate on curriculum design, implementation and evaluation.

Employer, Nigeria



# Chapter 5 – Higher education and employability in Ghana

Eric Daniel Ananga, Vincent Adzahlie-Mensah and Emmanuel Tamanja

## Introduction and background

This chapter presents findings from a three-year study on university education and graduate employability in Ghana. The chapter is organised in nine main sections. The first section describes the higher education system (HE), while the second comprises a brief discussion on the labour market. The third section highlights findings from the study on the challenges faced by HE with respect to employability, and discusses trends in the sector's approaches to employability. The fourth section reviews national government policies relevant to HE and employability, and findings on employers' perspectives on graduate employability are presented in the fifth. Provisions made by universities to facilitate graduate employability and student feedback on what they think is needed and what universities offer are reviewed in the sixth section. Findings from follow-up interviews with graduates are presented in the seventh section. The eighth section presents on three innovative approaches to enhancing graduate employability, and the final section concludes by briefly summarising the findings and identifying some policy implications of the study.

Ghana has been a stable democracy since 1992. It is one of Africa's biggest gold and cocoa producers, and is rich in other minerals such as diamonds, manganese ore, bauxite, and oil. Its huge international debt was cancelled in 2005 but more recently the plunge in oil prices and high government

expenditure led to an economic crisis, compelling the government to negotiate a US\$920 million extended credit facility from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April 2015. Despite this, there are frequent power outages, which have exacerbated already poor economic growth and forced some businesses to cease trading. The economy has been further slowed by a fall in gold prices, which has led to mine closures, and negative growth in the hospitality and catering sector. GDP annual growth rate in Ghana averaged 7.2 per cent from 2000 to 2015, reaching an all-time high of 25 per cent in the first quarter of 2012 and a record low of -3.80 per cent in the first quarter of 2014.<sup>152</sup>

A well-prepared citizenry and workforce is the bedrock of any country's vibrancy, economic viability, quality of life, and business competitiveness.<sup>153</sup> The education system is the foundation of sustainable human capital, and is the platform on which economic and social well-being is constructed. Education is an investment in human capital which is expected to contribute to economic growth by improving the productivity of the labour force, and reducing income inequality and poverty.<sup>154</sup> Education – including knowledge acquisition and skills development – is a crucial determinant of individual and national prosperity; it also improves quality of life and brings broad social benefits. The world is undergoing rapid economic transformation due to technological innovation, increasing globalisation, and changes in workplace practices. Many countries are transforming their education systems

to meet these challenges. In particular, the development of so-called 21st century skills – e.g. innovation, creativity, problem solving, communication, and collaboration – has become very important.

The state of education is a key determinant of a country's level of economic development and its potential for growth. In Ghana, governments since independence have recognised the indispensable role played by education in socio-economic development. Accordingly, efforts have been and continue to be made towards the expansion of education at all levels. It is believed that improvement of the country's economy is dependent on its human capital, and, in turn, the education system is the major generator of such capital. Since independence, this system has undergone a massive transformation, ranging from reduction in the number of years of pre-tertiary schooling to attempts at redesigning the curriculum to prepare young people for the needs of the labour market. For example, one of the main goals of the education system – as outlined in the education strategic plan (ESP 2010–20) – is making education relevant to industry. Currently, there are about nine million Ghanaians in the education system, of whom 7.7 million are in basic school, about one million in secondary education, and about 312,000 in tertiary education. Over 71,000 graduates from both private and public tertiary education institutions enter the labour market each year but it is estimated that there are currently over 200,000 unemployed graduates.<sup>155</sup>

152. Okudzeto, E, Mariki, WA, Lal, R, Senu, SS (2015) *Ghana 2015: African Economic Outlook*. AfDB OECD, UNDP 2015 Available online at: [www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/2015/CN\\_data/CN\\_Long\\_EN/Ghana\\_GB\\_2015.pdf](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/2015/CN_data/CN_Long_EN/Ghana_GB_2015.pdf)

153. In the 2014–15 Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) report, Ghana ranks 111th of a total of 144 countries (with a score of 3.71), although this is a slight improvement on its 2013–14 rank of 114th (Schwab, 2014). The country is regarded as being in a 'fact-driven' stage of development, dominated by unskilled labour and natural resources, with low productivity. The GCI report concludes that, 'Education levels continue to trail international standards at all levels, labour markets are characterised by inefficiencies, and the country is not sufficiently harnessing new technologies for productivity enhancements (ICT [information and computer technologies] adoption rates continue to be very low)' (Schwab, 2014).

154. Amin, AA, and Awung, W (2005) *Economic Analysis of Private Returns to Investment in Education in Cameroon*. Paper presented at the Regional Conference on Education in West Africa: Constraints and Opportunities, November 25–26, Dakar, Senegal.

155. Allotey, GA (2015) Worsening graduate unemployment a 'time bomb' – ISSER. Citifmonline, 9 July. Available online at: <http://citifmonline.com/2015/07/09/worsening-graduate-unemployment-a-time-bomb-isser/>

## The higher education system in Ghana

The university is the principal HE institution in Ghana. However, 'tertiary education' is employed as a generic term for programmes offered in various locations, including universities, polytechnics, and other specialised professional institutions, all of which have both public and private forms. Government policy on tertiary education is designed to promote access and foster the development of a critical pool of human resources, with the aim of accelerating national development. Until the early 1990s, tertiary education was mainly state sponsored, but since then, the sector has been liberalised to allow the entry of private providers. This has led to rapid growth in the number of institutions and students: there are currently 203 tertiary institutions – 96 public and 107 private.<sup>156</sup> The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and the National Accreditation Board (NAB) regulate the tertiary education sector.

According to the Education Strategic Plan (ESP: 2010–20),<sup>157</sup> the overall strategic goal for tertiary education is to '*increase equitable access to high quality tertiary education that provides relevant courses to young adults within Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities, and for research and intellectual stimulus.*'<sup>158</sup>

In terms of governance, the Ministry of Education is responsible for HE. However, the sector was re-organised by the University Rationalisation Committee (URC), which was established as part of the restructuring of education in 1987. In accordance with the recommendations of the URC, the NCTE regulates the HE sector; identifies norms for universities, which serve as policy benchmarks for monitoring the performance of institutions; establishes instruments for determining institutional resource requirements; and aids in institutional planning and ensuring operational efficiency.<sup>159</sup> Public HE institutions are financed principally by the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund), supplemented by internally-generated funds. Universities are managed and administered by vice-chancellors, who serve as chief executive officers.

The HE system has become highly diversified in its provision of an expanded tertiary education. Over the years, student numbers have also grown and employers demand an increasing variety of institutional programmes. There are seven public universities in the country, which are augmented by six public specialised or professional institutions that offer a variety of professional programmes in ICT, business, public administration, maritime studies, and languages. Until recently, public universities were operated by the Government of Ghana

as fully funded and wholly residential, both in terms of their operational budgets, and the costs of student tuition and maintenance. However, increasing demand for HE has led to a reorganisation of this institutional model and mode of delivery, with diversification of the HE system regarded as a necessary strategy for meeting the growing demand for higher education and achieving national development goals. Also, private provision of tertiary education has increased significantly over the last decade although without any financial support from government. Currently, private HE institutions constitute 61 per cent of the sector's providers, three having received charters to operate as fully-fledged universities.

Enrolment has risen steadily (Table 1): in the public HE sector, full-time student numbers grew from 168,182 in 2008–09 to 248,507 in 2014–15 – an increase of 76 per cent; and enrolment over the same period in the private HE system nearly quadrupled, increasing from 17,220 to 64,112 – an escalation of 272 per cent.<sup>160</sup> Private institutions currently enrol 20.5 per cent of students, compared to 10.7 per cent in 2008–09, however growth has tailed off since 2013 since the national accreditation board has prevented some institutions from admitting new students until they have met the requisite standards.

156. These figures are calculated from NCTE data.

157. Official education delivery policy document.

158. MoE (2012) *Education Strategic Plan 2010–2020. Policies, Strategies Delivery and Finance*. Government of Ghana, Accra. Ministry of Education Publication

159. NCTE (2012) *Sustainable Financing of Tertiary Education: Building Ghana's Future*.

160. These figures are calculated from NCTE data.

**Table 1:** Total higher education enrolment (2008–15)

	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
<b>Public</b>	168,182	179,998	185,268	202,063	221,803	238,574	248,507
<b>Private</b>	17,220	18,329	53,535	59,899	61,874	75,272	64,112
<b>Total</b>	<b>185,402</b>	<b>198,327</b>	<b>238,803</b>	<b>259,002</b>	<b>283,677</b>	<b>313,846</b>	<b>312,619</b>

Source: Calculated from NCTE data.

## The labour market

Unemployment is one of the most serious political and socio-economic issues facing policymakers in Ghana today. Overt unemployment may appear quite low according to official sources: different figures have been quoted by different sources over the years, but according to the Ghana Statistical Service, the unemployment rate averaged 8.82 per cent from 2001 to 2013, reaching an all-time high of 12.9 per cent in 2005.<sup>161</sup> However, a very large proportion of the labour force is locked into employment in the informal economy.<sup>162</sup> In the early 1980s, when a structural adjustment programme was first introduced, the formal sector employed about 20 per cent of the total workforce. Currently, however, it employs just some ten per cent of the total labour force, the remaining 90 per cent being engaged in the informal economy.<sup>163</sup> For most graduates of universities, polytechnics and other HE institutions, the public sector used to be the major employer, but this situation has changed dramatically. Over 250,000 young people, including over 40,000

university graduates, are estimated to enter the labour market every year, but only two per cent of those employed in the formal sector are graduates, with many forced to seek work in the informal economy.<sup>164</sup> This makes it difficult to track labour market trends since this category is mostly unregistered.<sup>165</sup> The economy is characterised by underemployment, poor working conditions, ambiguous work relationships, low wages, and high levels of income insecurity.<sup>166</sup> It is reported that a significant number of informal sector workers do not receive wages but merely a daily living allowance.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to job insecurity, the Ghanaian labour market is characterised by low wages. The national daily minimum wage has been below US\$2 a day for more than 20 years, about ten per cent of public sector employees receive a salary that keeps them below the national poverty line, and those employed in the informal economy are much more likely than those in the formal sector to be unable to earn an income above the national daily minimum wage. Income inequality

is also high: the last two Ghana Living Standards Surveys showed that income inequality, as measured by the Gini Coefficient, increased from 0.38 to 0.39. The World Bank estimates that growth in income inequality over the last decade has reduced the poverty reduction impact of growth in the economy by almost three percentage points, and poverty among the working class is still quite high, a general decline in the nationwide incidence of deprivation notwithstanding.

In respect of university education and the labour market specifically, it is alleged that though the country's population is becoming more educated, the current supply by the tertiary education institutions of skills required by the key growth and job creating sectors still remains inadequate.<sup>168</sup> It has been argued that there is a mismatch between the skills employers require and the types of courses offered by education institutions.<sup>169</sup> This contributes to the difficulty of obtaining employment – a problem that may be exacerbated because graduates tend to be quite selective about the job opportunities they are

161. Ghana Statistical Service (2013) *2010 Population and Housing Census: National Analytical Report*. Accra: GSS.

162. Informal-sector workers are largely self-employed individuals such as farmers, traders, caterers, artisans, and crafts people (ISSER 2013).

163. Ghana's informal sector consists of micro- and small-scale enterprises, including producers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers. Additionally, some intermediary service providers, such as suppliers of raw materials to manufacturers on a contractual basis, fall into this category.

164. Baah-Boateng, W (2008) 'Employment Generation and Poverty Alleviation', in Amoako Tuffour and Bartholomew Ahma (eds) *Poverty reduction strategies in action: Perspectives and Lessons from Ghana*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books; ISSER (2013), Ghana Social Development Outlook 2012. Accra: ISSER.

165. Twerefou, DK, Ebo-Turkson, F, and Kwadwo, AO (eds), (2007) *Labour Market Flexibility, Employment and Income Security in Ghana. Employment Policy Papers*. ILO: 1–86.

166. Osei-Boateng C, and Ampratwum, E (2011) *The Informal Sector in Ghana*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Ghana Office, Accra.

167. ISSER (2013) *op. cit.*

168. Country Operations Department (2012) *Republic of Ghana Country Strategy Paper 2012-2016*. Africa Development Bank.

169. Twerefou et al. (2007) *op. cit.*

prepared to pursue. However, given the competition for formal sector employment, graduates have increasingly been forced to be prepared to work for lower wages. A final notable feature of the labour market is that public sector workers tend to earn much lower salaries than those employed in the private sector, although working for the government is more likely to guarantee job security.<sup>170</sup>

### Key challenges with respect to higher education and employability

Given that education is generally regarded as an investment, most parents sacrifice their scarce resources to have their children educated in the hope that it will open the gates of attractive employment.<sup>171</sup> Securing a job and earning a good salary is indeed to some extent dependent on how high an individual climbs the education ladder; however, it has also been argued that university education fails to produce employable graduates, either for wage jobs or self-employment.<sup>172</sup> In this regard, Ghanaian universities have been described as overly theoretical in their approach to curriculum design and failing to train graduates to be innovative and entrepreneurial, with the result that they are still mostly job seekers rather than job creators.<sup>173</sup>

One of the key aims of the 2007 Ghanaian education reform was to link education to the world of work by developing programmes that focus

on job market readiness through alliances with private and public sector agencies.<sup>174</sup> The government has pledged to track, monitor and evaluate student flows to enhance the development and design of programmes tailored to job market needs. However, this has not been extended to HE.

In terms of the HE–employability nexus, it appears that stakeholders are uncertain as to the nature and extent of the problem. This is attributed to a lack of tracer studies and rigorous data on graduate unemployment. Indeed, other than GSS data on graduate unemployment and a few studies on graduate destinations,<sup>175</sup> little research has been undertaken. More recently, the government has put in place structures to collect data on the distribution of employment, unemployment and industrial accidents, as part of its Labour Market Information System (LMIS) project. Through analysis of labour market trends<sup>176</sup> it is believed that the information collected will in future help education providers align course provision and training with labour market needs.

With regard to the relevance of university programmes to labour market demand, there is some scepticism among policymakers and university faculty alike that there is any mismatch:

‘Tracer studies do not exist. We receive no formal feedback from industry to suggest that graduates are not performing. You hear many things, but they seem to [be due to]

rumours on the street that are not the products of empirical knowledge. People talk about graduates who cannot perform without providing the[ir] justification for saying so. Now, no one knows exactly what the mismatch is between programmes being offered and the requirements of the world of work.’

(Interview with policymaker)

The absence of data on graduate destinations and the nature and dimensions of any mismatch between programmes offered and the requirements of the world of work is a concern. The lack of a competency framework or a standard by which the employability of graduates can be assessed are also problems, making it difficult to assess the quality of graduates and match them with market requirements. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence reveals that there are some doubts as to whether university students graduate with the necessary competencies and skills to make them employable, have the competencies to operate as team players and innovators, or have an ability to work with little or no supervision.

There is also uneasiness with respect to the ability of academic institutions to implement curriculum innovations designed to address questions of employability: there is said to be a lack of organised thinking about how HE can respond to the needs of the market and no set of agreed general skills that HE graduates are expected to have

170. *Ibid.*

171. Addae Mensah, I (2013) Differentiation and Diversification of Tertiary Education, *Paper presented at the National Policy Dialogue on Tertiary Education*, Mensvic Hotel 8–9 May 2013, Accra Ghana.

172. Dai Kosi, A, Tsadidey S, Ashiagbor, I and Baku, DM (2008) *Graduate unemployment in Ghana: possible case of poor response of university programs to the demands of the job market*. ERNWACA Research Report.

173. *Ibid.*

174. Akyeampong, AK (2009) Revisiting Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE). *Comparative Education* 45/2: 175–195.

175. Lassy, AT, Lassy, PD and Boamah, M (2013) Career Destination of University of Ghana Medical School Graduates of Various Year Groups. *Ghana Medical Journal*; Abagale, FK (2012) Performance Evaluation of University Graduates: Case of UDS Graduates from 1998 to 2010. Priscebs Publishers, Anwomaso, Kumasi Ghana; Ghana Statistical Service, 2013. 2010 Population and housing Census; National Analytical Report. Accra Ghana; Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2014. Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6; Labour Force Report Accra Ghana.

176. Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment (MoYE) (nd) *Establishment of a Labour Market Information System; National Draft Report*. Accra, Ghana.

acquired. These concerns indicate the need for an organised discussion on how HE can contribute to skills development. Drawing on an analysis of tertiary education in Ghana, the key challenges faced by HE are listed below.

### Key challenges faced by the HE system

- Unbridled development of private institutions with no clear policy on their growth.
- Over-concentration of private institutions in two major cities (Accra and Kumasi).
- Rate of increase in enrolment unmatched by infrastructure development.
- Low enrolment in science and technology programmes.
- Rising cost of HE.
- Slow progress on gender parity.
- Inadequate advanced qualifications and industrial experience among HE staff.
- Inadequate technical capacity of supervisory bodies to perform effectively.
- No comprehensive national qualifications framework.
- No comprehensive policy framework on HE funding or budget allocation mechanism.
- Increasing graduate unemployment and underemployment.
- Role ambiguity among HE supervisory bodies.
- Limited authority of NCTE and NAB in enforcing compliance with national policy.
- Low quality of research output.
- No clear national research focus.

HE in Ghana faces tremendous challenges, as listed in no particular order above. Most important is the problem of increasing enrolment without commensurate expansion of physical and academic infrastructure, which puts undue pressure on both facilities and staff. For example, the public HE sector employs a total of 6,177 academic staff and the average student-to-teacher ratio (STR) in the 2014–15 academic year was 43 to 1, whereas the desirable average ratio specified by the NCTE is 19.3 to 1.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, although the proportion of HE students enrolled in STEM programmes compared to those taking humanities, arts and social sciences continues to vary, there is a persistent gap between the two, the average ratio being about 40 to 60 and 21 to 79 in favour of the latter in public and private institutions respectively.<sup>178</sup>

### National government policies on HE and employability

The HE system has experienced several policy reforms over the years and various innovations have been implemented. However, the main policy reforms have focused on structural reviews and the issue of employability has been neglected. For example, following the URC report and education restructuring in 1987, the length of study for a bachelor's degree was extended from three to four years. However, there has been some emphasis on subjects that would lead to the development of skills relevant to the scientific and technological development of the country.<sup>179</sup>

Some efforts to strengthen the linkages between tertiary education and industry have included:

- Establishment of curriculum review bodies for new programmes introduced after NCTE/NAB assessment.
- Adoption of a competency-based training model by polytechnics.
- Provision of lecturers' book and research allowances to facilitate research.<sup>180</sup>
- Tertiary institution provision of research and staff development funds from GETFund through the NCTE.
- The Student Industrial Attachment Programme (SIAP).

The Student Industrial Attachment Programme (SIAP), introduced in Ghana, is designed to offer students opportunities for the practical application of theories and principles learned at university or college; to better understand principles learned in the abstract; to interact and share experiences with industry workers; and to learn of the contribution of industry to national development. It has been suggested<sup>181</sup> that SIAP's 'objectives include helping students to acquire new manipulative skills and sharpening old ones, getting students acquainted with technologies new to them, students being able to acquire interpersonal skills, and developing positive attitude towards work.' SIAP in its current form is described as a 'unique pathfinder programme' which is designed to help students develop career pathways, through industrial attachment opportunities.<sup>182</sup> Student interns are assigned to industry or workplace environments for a period of one month.

177. These figures are calculated from NCTE data.

178. Addae Mensah (2013) *op. cit.*

179. NCTE (2012) *op. cit.*

180. The government does not provide block research grants to institutions.

181. Donkor F, Nsoh, SN, Mitchual SJ, (2009) Assessment of supervised industrial attachment of a technical and vocational teacher education program in Ghana. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education* 10/1: 1–17. Available online at: [www.apjce.org/files/APJCE\\_10\\_1\\_1\\_17.pdf](http://www.apjce.org/files/APJCE_10_1_1_17.pdf) access December 2015

182. Baah-Boateng (2013) *op. cit.*



In the present study, policymakers interviewed confirmed that there is no specific national policy on graduate employability, with statements including 'We do not have a coherent policy on higher education and employability' and 'We don't have benchmarks or a competency framework because of a policy role conflict between NCTE and NAB.'

These responses suggest that one of the reasons for the lack of a policy has to do with the locus of responsibility and apparent confusion between the roles of the different governing bodies. Another reason is in all likelihood because all public Ghanaian universities are chartered autonomous institutions. Nevertheless, as a way of linking university education to the world of work, a NAB directive on accreditation requirements has made it mandatory for institutions to show evidence of industry input in designing degree programmes, which may encourage institutions to link programmes to changing workplace requirements.

## Employer perspectives

Employer evaluation of graduates' skills provides feedback on the extent to which students learn the necessary knowledge, skills, attributes and competencies to equip them for the world of work. It is important to note that industry does not expect graduate recruits to arrive comprehensively trained to carry out specific jobs; rather, employers are more interested in the attitudes, competencies and basic skills of new graduate employees.

Including both the state and private sectors, there are over 437 registered – as well as many unregistered –

employers in Ghana.<sup>183</sup> Twenty-eight public and private companies participated in the present study, covering the financial, insurance, telecommunications, oil and gas, hospitality and catering, haulage, and media sectors, among others.

## Qualities employers value in students

An evaluation of graduates' skills by employers was conducted to ascertain their satisfaction with the skills of recent recruits. It emerged that employers place a high premium on graduates who are knowledgeable in their fields of study and possess some other skills and attributes considered to be necessary in the workplace. When employers were asked to rank the skills and attributes they required of employees, attitude to work was, on average, ranked the highest (94 per cent) and a second language (11.4 per cent) as the least important. For example, when probed further, one employer responded:

'The fact that an employee has a good attitude to work will show in the willingness to take responsibility and ... to cope with work pressure. From my experience in this company, this person will be more likely than not to have the capacity to be flexible and adaptable, will be open to change due to adaptability.'

**(Manufacturing company)**

The second most highly valued skill was ethics and integrity (82 per cent), while problem solving (71.4 per cent) and critical thinking (71.1 per cent) were rated third and fourth

respectively. Having the ability to work in a culturally diverse environment was critical to most multinational and private companies and this was therefore rated highly too. Work experience was also considered important, as internships and attachments were considered to be very helpful in introducing graduates to the workplace.

While employers want prospective employees to demonstrate skills relevant to the job market, they also value qualities relating to lifelong learning, the ability to develop specific skills (e.g. teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking), and evidence of experiential and authentic learning. Accordingly, in addition to the ranking of the above 17 skills, employers were also asked to select from a list of ten qualities those that they value in prospective graduate employees. The interviews revealed that the paramount qualities identified by employers were knowledge, possession of practical skills and adaptability. Most employers believe that, once a student has acquired sufficient knowledge and is ready to adapt to the workplace, the next crucial factor was to demonstrate an ability to work with others. Findings in terms of qualities valued by employers also show that community engagement, concern for the common good, environmental awareness, and ability to cope with diversity are rated highly.

Generally, most employers engaged in this study prefer employees with practical skills, job-related experience and work-related skills, being unwilling to train newly recruited employees in non-specialised practices. While

183. Ghana Employers' Association Report (2010) *Annual Report and Financial Statements 2010*. Accra, Ghana.

one set of employers (those in the hospitality sector) reported that they always retrain newly recruited employees because the nature of the work requires it irrespective of any previous experience, most others did not. In addition, graduates need to stay up-to-date with non-technical as well as technical skills and to be open to change and self-development to be employable.

### Employer satisfaction with graduate employees

It emerged from the interviews that employers had found it problematic to recruit graduates with the qualities they sought and the number of employees who readily met employers' requirements seemed to be dwindling. One informant highlighted the situation thus:

'The workplace situation becomes grave when the skills required of employees are more scientific and technical... It will surprise you to know that even at the polytechnics, where most of the technical experts are trained for the industries, the intakes are now seeing a greater percentage of the student population drifting into offering [graduating from] programmes in the humanities, especially in purchasing and supply, human resource management, accounting, and hospitality and tourism... You don't get the types of skills you are searching for... where will the electrical, mechanical, civil, oil and metal engineers come from to fill the ever growing human resources needed for the industries in Ghana?

**(Employers' Association)**

Indeed, not a single participating employer indicated overall satisfaction with graduate skills and attributes. Employers acknowledged that they had a responsibility to provide training to employees, but the study found a growing concern about the extent of graduate recruit training needs, for example:

'Irrespective of who you employ, there has to be some training, but I can attest to my experience in this institution that it is increasingly becoming more intense, the amount of training new employees require. This is not to say that everyone needs intensive training, but the majority of employees do.'

**(Oil and Gas employer)**

It was common to hear graduates argue that unemployment amongst their demographic was due to insufficient suitable jobs being available, but employers took a contrary view:

'The problem of unemployment in Ghana is not caused by lack of employment opportunities...it is the lack of employability...of the graduates.'

**(Employers' Association)**

'Many of the fresh graduates don't have adequate training in the use of ICT... [and] they lack other skills in teamwork and leadership and time-management in order to become employable after graduation.'

**(ICT company)**

The employers' position is that most graduates are not employable – they do not possess the skills required by employers. That view speaks back to competencies with which HE institutions equip graduates: it questions not only the content and nature of the training received, but also students' school-to-work transition planning and preparation.

### Institutional provision

This section seeks to highlight university provision in terms of developing graduates' employability skills. This section draws on findings from the second phase of the research project, which involved in-depth research within four participant universities: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the University of Ghana (UG), the University for Development Studies (UDS) and Ashesi University. The data is drawn from interviews with lecturers, interviews and focus groups with students, and a sample survey of 2,310 final year students. A pragmatic, flexible and ethical approach was employed in the sampling of final year students and subsequent data collection. In an attempt to involve as many individuals as possible, a number of departments were approached that offered programmes in the physical sciences, social sciences, arts, and business studies. Sometimes, informal visits were made to establish contact with people who could facilitate introductions to potential respondents; at other institutions, the research team was invited to attend lectures and meetings, which provided opportunities to make direct contact with students who might be interested in participating in the study.

The survey was conducted exclusively on the campus of each participating university, the survey instrument being given to respondents to complete in their own time and collected on a later date. It took about two weeks to distribute the questionnaire to all final-year students in any given department. In some instances, departmental teaching assistants were asked to facilitate meetings with students; in other cases, teaching staff assisted in arranging for us to meet with students after lectures. It took between three and six weeks to collect the completed questionnaires. Responses are analysed and presented in the sections on student satisfaction with their degree courses and their perception of the obstacles to employability respectively.

Of the 2,310 students sampled, 48 were interviewed, tracked after graduation, and 28 contacted and re-interviewed. Notably, some of their number had secured employment in public or private institutions, others were self-employed, and some were still unemployed. The follow-up interviews sought to understand how recent graduates are navigating the employability challenges of the labour market in Ghana. The interview excerpts from fresh graduates are presented in the section on student follow-up interviews.

Most of the sample of final year students were aged 21 to 25 years (79.5 per cent), with a minority being younger (aged 15–20, 1.2 per cent) or older (26–30 years, 11 per cent; 31–35 years, 1.8 per cent; 36–40 years, 0.6 per cent; 41 and above 0.4 per cent). The survey identified the types of senior high school (SHS) attended by participants before gaining access to

tertiary education. Examination of the SHS factor is relevant in understanding graduate employability scores. Eighty-six per cent had attended a government SHS, with just 14 per cent having been to a private or religious school. There is limited access to senior secondary education in Ghana, and individuals and religious bodies (mainly Christian and Muslim) with capital are therefore permitted by the Ghana Education Service (GES) to establish an SHS with approval from the government.

#### **University programmes and courses offered, students' choice of degree courses and their satisfaction with university education**

As indicated in the section on HE in Ghana, there is diversity among both public and private institutions in terms of the fields of study and courses offered. For example, KNUST concentrates mainly on science and technology, and has specialised programmes including engineering; the University of Ghana operates as an elite and research institution; while UDS has a development and rural focus, and runs a trimester programme that requires students to spend three to four months each year in a rural community.<sup>184</sup> Unlike KNUST, UG and UDS, Ashesi University (AU), which is a private institution, has an admission policy that places emphasis on factors such as leadership potential, involvement in extra-curricular activities, communication skills, and writing proficiency. AU operates a citizenship project whereby faculty and other members of staff spend at least two hours a fortnight in the community providing services such as numeracy and literacy tuition, and painting skills.

In terms of the prioritisation of subjects, it emerged that, in spite of a national HE policy that emphasises science and technology (ESP: 2010–20), this is not adhered to. For example, a private institution such as AU essentially offers programmes in the field of business studies rather than science-related subjects. Over 60 different university courses are offered nationwide. However, the study grouped them into four broad fields, namely, physical and natural sciences, social sciences, language and arts, and business and administration. The number of students taking courses in the social sciences and humanities in the four case universities outnumbered those studying natural and physical sciences.<sup>185</sup>

Many reasons were given by students for their choice of institution and course. The four most common responses were:

- Availability of the desired programme of study.
- Lack of options.
- Preferred programme.
- Convenient location of the HE institution.

It emerged that the main reason participants had decided to pursue university education was interest in a particular subject – they did not link their choice to a desire to contribute to Ghana's development. Thus 65 per cent of the respondents in the student survey did not think that their university fostered positive values or inculcated effective citizenship education, and 51 per cent did not believe that their degree could be used to benefit society as a whole. Some students interviewed seemed to be quite content with their institutions and

184. The trimester programme of UDS was designed officially to run for a full semester but due to lack of funds and other logistical constraints they have been running for only two months.

185. Addae Mensah (2013) *op. cit.*

courses. However, most were not enjoying their undergraduate experience, and would have preferred another institution – or, in some cases, another course at the same university – if they had had the opportunity. Other than those students taking overtly practical courses, many complained of a lack of practicality in their programmes of study and declared that HE had not lived up to their expectations. For example, one student commented:

‘The university has not fully met my expectations because the practical element is missing. I think we should do more practical work than this book [on] mining we are doing: they have to change the style of teaching and challenge the thinking of students.’

**(Final Year Bachelor of Arts in Geology Student)**

Overall, not many students were found to be wholly satisfied.

The interests and career choices of students varied, including banker, lecturer, engineer, accountant, nurse, doctor, lawyer<sup>186</sup> and policymaker; some also expressed a desire to become entrepreneurs or to do voluntary work. Surprisingly, only a few of those sampled had developed an interest in a particular career before enrolling in HE. For many, the decision as to which career to pursue resulted from the subject or course to which they had been admitted, which had been determined by the HE institution itself, based on the availability of space, subjects studied at secondary school, and grade point average.

### **Understandings of employability and importance attached by the academic institution to employability skills**

The ways in which employability is understood by faculty and students respectively is likely to shape attitudes towards student career choices.

However, few faculty members were able to express views on the concept of employability, and many students had not heard of the term before and were unable to discuss it; those who did talk about it tended to understand employability in terms of simply getting a job.

Students’ views on preparation for the world of work were diverse, but most mentioned teamwork, as well as knowledge and skills they thought were applicable to specific professions. In response to a question on the most important things to do to get a job, in order of priority, the majority of students emphasised practical skills (both technical subject specific and general transferable skills), experience related to their chosen careers, and innovativeness, which corroborates the opinions of employers in this regard.

Of the four case universities that participated in the study only Ashesi University offers various types of preparation for the world of work directly, including courses in communication skills, team building and critical thinking. Students at AU and some of those taking practical courses at KNUST were aware of possible employment opportunities. AU and UDS students also indicated that they had opportunities for industrial internships and attachments. However, few of those at KNUST or UG mentioned the availability of such opportunities.

In respect of the extent to which employability is embedded in the curriculum, the NAB and NCTE require that a new university course meet the needs of society before it is approved for inclusion in the courses offered by an institution; periodical review of the programme for every course is also mandatory in order to enhance and tailor the content to emerging employment opportunities. However, it emerged that these requirements<sup>187</sup> were not being adhered to in the universities under study.

Although, as noted above, some students were aware of opportunities for internships, it seems that careers services are limited. For instance some of the students said:

‘Yes, opportunities exist for internships and I have participated in it.... Our lecturers talk to us about employment and the job market relating to our course. I don’t know if there is a careers service but I know course seminars are organised.’

**(Final Year Bachelor of Science Student in Civil Engineering)**

‘No opportunity [has been] made available by the university...I am not aware of any labour market options or careers service by the university... Graduates from this programme, even though they get employment, it is not as a result of the university’s assistance.’

**(Final Year Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Physiology Student)**

186. Ghanaian students with any relevant first degree can pursue a second degree in law, but the study did not sample law faculties per se.

187. Carrying out a periodic review of the range of degree programmes on offer and reviewing the content of individual programmes or modules to respond to employment opportunities.

'No, the university only teaches us to chew [cram for examinations], pour, pass and forget.'

**(Final Year Bachelor of Arts in Geology Student)**

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'There exist opportunities out there for internships and work placement but the university doesn't help in any way to assist graduates to get employment.'

**(Final Year Bachelor of Science Student in Renewable Natural Resources Management)**

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Another issue is the consideration of industrial application in university education courses. With the exception of AU and to some extent UDS, such relationships were found to be limited to specific programmes and departments. Collaboration between industry and some university departments notwithstanding, it emerged that KNUST and UG did not have any direct policy on employability skills (both technical and transferable skills) development, assuming that students would naturally develop such skills as part of the university experience. Indeed, few faculty members thought that any skills had been omitted from their respective curricula.

Thus, although institutions did go some way to preparing students for the world of work, students still faced challenges in, for example, practical technical and transferable skills training with regard to their chosen career. In general the degree programmes offered in three of the universities under study (KNUST, UG and UDS) contained little practical content. Nevertheless, even in these institutions, students undertaking some

programmes – e.g. science and IT – mentioned that they were given opportunities for work experience in their respective fields.

'I have gained enough experience from this university because of the field practical [practical fieldwork]... There have been opportunities for career development ... there are opportunities for undertaking internships.'

**(Final Year Bachelor of Science Student in Renewable Natural Resources Management)**

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However, in response to the question as to whether their HE education experience had met their expectations, and, if not, what they wished had been done differently, responses referred to the practical content of courses. The majority of respondents were of the opinion that their university is not well regarded by employers.

Generally, students' views indicate that they think it is important for universities to maintain linkages with industry in order to help them develop the desired skills. They also believed that development of employment environment awareness through the provision of university careers advice services would be helpful.

'If I were the vice chancellor of my university, I would intensify careers guidance courses to help young people make proper career choices. I would advise that university education should be made more practical and careers guidance sessions should be organised for young students.'

**(A BSc Earth Science graduate who is self-employed in cloth making)**

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Our reading is that employers have their own views of what the HE sector should do, including the desirable curriculum content and training methods and what skills graduates should possess to be employable. That universities for the most part do not have links with employers or appear to understand their requirements suggests that more interaction is needed between employers and HE sector planners at both national and institutional levels.

### **Student satisfaction with preparation for the world of work, and obstacles to graduate employability**

It emerged that many participating students were highly dissatisfied with the contribution of their respective degrees to their employability. In their eyes, the three main factors affecting their employability are self-confidence, awareness of the labour market, and awareness of the skills and experiences valued by employers. These were followed by organisation and time management, leadership skills, and knowledge of the world of work. Interestingly, skills such as teamwork, reflective thinking, ability to work without supervision, honesty and integrity, and willingness to accept responsibility were rated as least important by the majority of student respondents. In response to a question on the availability of opportunities outside formal degree programmes to develop skills, the vast majority of respondents agreed that such activities were relevant and available.

With regard to activities students engaged in to enhance their employability, possible career and prospective employer investigation



(n=947), and opportunities to undertake voluntary work (n=944) topped the list. These were followed by skills development courses (n=921) and careers advice (n=817). Interestingly, support for CV writing was the employability activity students engaged in the least. Although the universities under study provided some opportunities for students to enhance their employability, notably many students reported that they had not taken advantage of the opportunities available.

Students' views on the factors that would influence their prospects for obtaining employment are revealing. An overwhelming 88 per cent thought that family connections were the most important factor, and 67 per cent believed that the possibility of getting a good job depends on family contacts, while 69 per cent considered networking to be important. In addition, 55 per cent thought that a postgraduate degree would make it easier to secure employment. 61 per cent stated that gender was not a factor likely to affect employability, although this means that an alarming two out of five students thought that it would influence their employment prospects. The views of graduates who were followed-up and interviewed again is represented in the next section.

### Follow-up graduate interviews

While participants in the main student survey had little to say about employability, they expressed their views more firmly when the study tracked them after graduation. Of those who were interviewed a second time, 11 were employed – with two in self-employment, four were teaching on a voluntary basis, two had remained in education, and 11 were unemployed.

The study found that almost all the graduates who participated in the study were of the opinion that there is a great need for industrial attachments, emphasising the importance of first-hand experience and contact with employers before graduation.

'I believe that in Ghana, getting a job is very difficult these days, so, in pursuing a university education, the course of study must be as practical as possible in order to create one's own job when it becomes difficult to get employment in the formal sector.'

**(BSc Renewable Natural Resources Graduate employed as a fish pond supervisor)**

'I am of the opinion that university education should be made more practical. The introduction of [a course in] critical thinking by the university is commendable, but it must be broadened to enable students to study it throughout their stay in the university.'

**(A Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Philosophy Graduate who is employed as a Social Intern)**

'I would advise anyone starting university not to limit themselves to just their field of study, but try and learn as much of other things as possible. They should also take advantage of the career opportunities and internship prospects that their school [university] may provide.'

**(A BSc Business Administration Graduate who is employed as a Digital Marketer)**

With graduate unemployment a growing problem for the government, parents and new graduates alike, some participants were interested in creating their own employment opportunities:

'[The] formal sector as a source of employment is not practicable anymore. University education has to reflect realities on the ground: it has to educate students in a way that will equip them to become employers instead of employees. Job avenues in the formal sector keep dwindling and this is causing a high rate of unemployment.'

**(A BSc Electrical Engineering Graduate who is unemployed)**

'If one wants to go through university education and be able to get employment at the completion of the course, then one has to embrace the total university experience by being part of academic as well as social life of the university. Also, one should consider doing a course that can lead to self-employment in case finding a job in the formal sector fails.'

**(A BSc Natural Resource Management Graduate who is employed as Customer Service Executive in a banking institution)**

In sharing their experiences, graduates suggested the following ways in which applicants and undergraduates could prepare for the world of work and make the most of the university services on offer:

- Seek information on the requirements of the labour market and the skills necessary to meet them before pursuing an HE course.
- Develop passion and interest in their field of study.

- Seek advice on the career paths of individuals in different fields of study.
- Early choice of a career is necessary in order to develop the passion to pursue it.
- Seek counselling from people who have pursued similar career paths.
- Take advantage of opportunities made available at the university to prepare for a career.
- Participate in all aspects of HE offered to develop employability skills.

### Interventions, initiatives, and career services

In Ghana, major challenges include high graduate unemployment, low rates of economic growth and transforming university education to meet the demands of employers (or self-employment). The key role of education is the development of critical skills relevant to the economy, including the ability to innovate. There is a need to rethink how tertiary education and training prepares the next generation of graduates for the world of work, and in particular how it can enhance graduates' employability and encourage them to be innovative and entrepreneurial. Some innovative strategies have evolved in the institutions under study and beyond to address the alleged mismatch between employer requirements and graduate employability and enhance the attributes of graduates.

Three of these programmes are highlighted here: firstly, Blazing Trails is an initiative of the British Council designed to equip unemployed graduates with employability skills and the capacity to exploit career opportunities; secondly, the Kumasi Business Incubator at KNUST targets 25 graduates with good business plans and coaches them in entrepreneurship; and thirdly, the Career Support Programme at AU is a comprehensive service for students of the university.

#### Blazing Trails: British Council

Blazing Trails is a leadership and professional development programme designed to equip recent and unemployed graduates with employability and other relevant skills, to enable them to identify alternative career opportunities and meet the requirements of the labour market. It also has a complementary module designed to support both budding and established entrepreneurs in building, growing and sustaining their own businesses. Blazing Trails aims to provide hands-on training focused on key skills development in employability and entrepreneurship.

In terms of enrolment, there is usually an open invitation for applications on the British Council website and social media pages. The programme is operational in seven regions in Ghana: Volta, Greater Accra, Northern, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Upper West, and Western. It delivers training sessions to intakes of 35 graduates and 50 entrepreneurs. The programme runs for three days for each group, after which participants are provided with continuing support. It was initiated in November 2012 and was expected to end by December 2015, with the expectation that it would train 5,000 young people aged 18 to 35 years over its lifespan.

#### Kumasi Business Incubator: KNUST

In collaboration with the National Board of Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), KNUST established the Business Incubator to assist 25 selected final year students with innovative business ideas to develop them into profitable enterprises. The goal of the Business Incubator is to contribute to the sustainable overall industrial and business development of the country by nurturing and sustaining innovative and competitive start-ups that grow out of student research and other initiatives. Through the provision of business premises, and training, coaching and mentoring for two years, participants are assisted to develop micro, small and medium-scale enterprises.

The programme is organised into three phases – Pre-incubation Stage – entailing perfection of ideas, development of business ideas into plans, and registration of businesses; Incubation Stage – involving providing

counselling and advisory services, training in managerial and entrepreneurship skills, support to participants to develop their products and services, and assisting participants to implement their business plans; and Post-incubation Stage – which includes the provision of technical support for research and development, and implementation of market entry strategies.

During the incubation period, participants enjoy a range of privileges including rented workspace, and shared services and secretarial facilities. Other privileges are the considerable wealth of consultancy, training, tuition and coaching available within the university. In addition, KNUST is visited by a host of high calibre visitors and reputable firms. These linkages offer participants opportunities to network and promote their businesses. So far 24 of the participants have established and are running their own IT-related enterprises.

### Career Support Programme: AU

The AU Career Support Programme is organised in three stages. Firstly, it offers an intensive course during which students learn to write CVs, volunteer in their communities, and participate in internship programmes. Internships are encouraged all year round, but most actively during the long vacation (June – August). With the aid of career workshops, student forums and interview preparation sessions, the Career Support Programme prepares students to make the most of the internship opportunities. Participants are helped to identify a career path and make their way along it; regardless of how certain an individual might be about

employment prospects after graduation, the programme helps him or her to chart a career path and develop employability skills.

Secondly, the annual AU career fair brings employers to the university to interact with students. Organised as a one-day event, the fair brings the entire AU community of students, alumni, faculty, and administrative staff together with representatives of industries from across Africa. The fair provides opportunities for interaction at various career development levels, helps participants understand the challenges and opportunities of the workplace, and creates a platform for the recruitment of AU students and alumni.

Finally, alumni are closely monitored and encouraged to maintain links with the university, working closely with graduates, and providing lifelong career coaching, essential skills, and business connections around Africa. Together with the Alumni Relations Office, the Career Support Programme keeps an eye open for past students, who are provided with opportunities for career growth and leadership. Collaboration with older alumni allows AU graduates to receive coaching from colleagues with substantial work experience, as well as knowledge of the AU experience and how it connects with the labour market.

The programmes illustrated above highlight three key employability issues: firstly, how a culture of entrepreneurialism that prepares graduates for a changing global economy can be developed; secondly, practical ways that university programmes and initiatives can mould students into innovative and entrepreneurial thinkers; and thirdly, how universities can work closely with employers to ensure that the courses and programmes offered are relevant to labour market needs.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### Identified challenges

The main focus of this study was the Ghanaian HE–graduate employability nexus. It examined what universities are doing with regard to ensuring that students are employable, and how recent graduates and employers view the preparation of university students

for the world of work. The main findings point to a number of major challenges:

- The lack of a clear national policy linking HE and the world of work remains a major concern; in addition, HE institution governing bodies are unable to state unambiguously what they believe to be necessary in terms of graduate skills.
- Although HE institutions believe they are doing all they can to prepare students for the labour market, graduates and employers alike were found to be dissatisfied with the employability training offered at the universities under study.
- There is a general disconnect between most of the content of HE degree programmes and the practicalities of the labour market, meaning that employers are dissatisfied with the preparedness of the graduates they are obliged to recruit for the world of work.

- The Ghanaian HE system is undergoing a tremendous transformation: in particular, demand for HE has increased significantly without a commensurate expansion of infrastructure and facilities. Among the other results, the quality of employability training has been adversely affected.

### Good practices

- Despite the challenges outlined above, and in the face of growing graduate unemployment and employability issues, some innovative practices to develop graduates' employability skills have evolved:
  - The Ashesi and UDS community service and trimester programme.
  - The Blazing Trails programme of the British Council, which trains young graduates with employability skills.

- The KNUST Incubator programme is another good practice that supports young graduates to become entrepreneurs, primarily through providing mentoring.
- The AU Career Support Programme is an innovative package that prepares all students of the university with employability skills and connects them with employers before they graduate.

### Recommendations for policy and practice

HE and training needs to be linked to the world of work within the national education and employment policy framework. To achieve this, active commitment of stakeholders in HE, industry and other institutions to a common aim of preparing young people for the world of work is needed. To ensure effective governance and implementation of programmes to address employability issues, the following policy recommendations emerge from this study:

#### National policy

There is a need for the governing bodies of educational institutions to consider developing policies in the following areas:

- Design curricula to link all forms of university education to real-world issues.
- Link HE institutions to employers in order to help identify and develop the desired skills in students.
- Strengthen university education institutional outreach programmes.
- Encourage the establishment of proactive links between tertiary, technical and vocational schools and industries.

#### Higher education institutions

To facilitate effective preparation for the world of work, institutions should:

- Improve the practical aspects of teaching and learning rather than focusing solely on theory.
- Inform undergraduates of available employment opportunities.
- Focus on the quality of outcomes rather than merely numbers in the classroom.
- Strengthen student careers advice services to develop knowledge of the employment environment.

- Explore ways of providing skills development outside as well as within degree programmes.
- Equip students not only to seek employment, but also to be job creators and start their own businesses.
- The gender disparity in all HE institutions should be addressed in order to increase female enrolment.

**Graduate unemployment in Ghana is not caused by lack of employment opportunities ... it is the lack of employability skills ... of the graduates**

Employers' Association

# Chapter 6 – Enabling conditions

Tristan McCowan

Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa are located within the same continent, but have distinct histories, political and economic conditions, and higher education systems. The previous chapters have shown the distinctive challenges facing universities in each of the countries, and the ways in which institutions and governments have addressed them. Yet to what extent can we perceive commonalities in relation to graduate employability across the different contexts? Is it possible to identify a cross-cutting set of conditions necessary for employability and inclusive development, or responses and solutions valid for all? This chapter distils some of the key points from the country-specific chapters and outlines a set of ideas for understanding the prerequisites of employability and conditions for its effective promotion.

Throughout this chapter – and indeed the project as a whole – we adhere to the principle that contextual differences are significant, and that a universalised notion of ‘best practice’, disembodied from the actual political, economic and cultural conditions in which it is located, is neither viable nor desirable. At the same time, contexts can learn from one another, and innovations, ideas and successes from one country – what we might call ‘generative practices’<sup>188</sup> – can inform and inspire work in other countries. In addition to analysing the challenges associated with employability and inclusive development, therefore, this report has also presented a range of examples of innovation and impact.

There are three primary purposes to this chapter: first, to provide a brief summary of the key findings from the four countries – particularly with respect to national and institutional policy – assessing the nature and extent of current provision in relation to employability. Second, the chapter addresses the question of what graduates need in order to be employable. It provides an analysis of the prerequisites for employability that draws on Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach, but relates it to personal, institutional and broader societal factors. Finally, there is an assessment of what universities can actually do in practice, focusing on potential spheres of intervention relating to formal taught programmes (*classroom*) extra-curricular activities (*campus*) and experiential learning outside the university (*community*).

As a whole, the chapter develops a framework for enabling conditions that countries and universities can put in place to give graduates the best possible chance of succeeding on leaving university. Importantly, these are not guarantees of employment or of a particular type of life outcome – human agency entails that for any particular set of conditions there are a range of possible outcomes in practice – but do provide the conditions needed for graduates to pursue their life courses without obstructive barriers. Throughout the chapter, attention will be paid not only to conditions that allow for the effective development of *employment*, but also for broader *civic and personal development*, under conditions of equity for all students.

## Current policy and practice across the four countries

### National level policy

The policy landscape across the four African countries is for the most part characterised by a high level of awareness of the challenges of employability, but few concrete policies to address them. In the context of the knowledge economy, all of the countries emphasise higher education and the development of high-level skills and cutting-edge research as part of their national strategies. In Kenya, for instance, Vision 2030 calls for a rapid expansion of access to higher education, on account of the need for development of science and technology in the country. The National Development Plan in South Africa (which also sets out objectives for 2030) also asserts the role of higher education as a motor for economic growth through science, technology and innovation.

In addition, countries have a range of policies relating to the labour market and youth skills, often involving technical and vocational education and training. For example, Kenya is introducing a tax rebate for companies that are active in helping graduates to develop relevant skills.<sup>189</sup> In some cases, it is hoped that universities can be used to generate more favourable labour market conditions by contributing to a profound transformation of the economy through research and development: this can be seen in Kenya’s current Science, Technology and Innovation policy and the Kenya Innovation Agency.

188. Scott, D, Terano, M, Slee, R, Husbands, C and Wilkins, R (2016) *Policy Transfer and Educational Change*. London: Sage.

189. Kira, N (2015) From a tax view, budget seems to be tinkering. *The East African*, 12 June. Available online at: [www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/From-a-tax-view-budget-seems-to-be-tinkering/-/2560/2749138/-/p21egj/-/index.html](http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/From-a-tax-view-budget-seems-to-be-tinkering/-/2560/2749138/-/p21egj/-/index.html)



However, this chapter will look only at those policies that directly relate to higher education and which focus on equipping students more effectively for the workplace and their future lives.

The challenge of expanding the higher education system so as to enable access for the increasing numbers of secondary school leavers has been the primary concern of governments such as that of Kenya, in which university enrolments shot up from 218,628 in 2012 to 443,783 in 2015.<sup>190</sup> However, expansion has entailed either increasing enrolments at existing institutions without sufficient increases in academic staff numbers or facilities, or the creation of new institutions without adequate infrastructure. Concerted policies to address quality of provision have been hard to establish and implement in this context of rapid expansion, with an inevitable impact on the employability attributes of graduates.

In all of these discussions of graduate employability, the considerable inequities of access to university education must be borne in mind. In spite of significant increases in enrolments of black South Africans since the end of apartheid, there are still significant inequities of access in the country, with particular difficulties for students from rural areas; these are compounded by subsequent difficulties in obtaining employment. In Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, differences in access by ethnicity are not widely documented, but there are significant gender inequalities, as well as unequal access by region of origin, while in all the countries socio-economic background plays a significant role.

Marketisation of higher education has had a significant impact on provision across the countries, though to a lesser extent in South Africa. Competition between institutions for students has led to a largely demand-based determination of the courses offered. This is potentially positive in terms of responsiveness to students' interests, although their ability to make informed choices depends on adequate information about course content and future prospects, and as yet this is not always available. In many cases, financial incentives to increase enrolments have led to a detrimental effect on conditions for learning – with insufficient numbers of academic staff and straining physical infrastructure – since there is buoyant demand for courses even in the absence of high quality provision. Competition to mount courses that attract fee-paying students exists within the private sector, but also increasingly in the public sector, particularly in Kenya, where public institutions run private parallel streams that now account for the majority of their students.

As in many aspects of society and education, South Africa has a range of distinctive features. With a relatively low level of graduate unemployment, and less public concern about the 'calibre' of graduates, employability has not been a primary focal point for policymakers. Instead, the focus at a national level has been on the low levels of completion, more broadly on the quality of teaching and learning, and – particularly in light of recent protests – on student funding. In addition, there is a racial lens to policymaking in South Africa that is largely absent in the other three

countries, and the overarching aim of higher education policy since 1994 has been historical redress for injustices of the apartheid period through the process of 'transformation'. Nevertheless, despite the lack of explicit promotion of employability at a national level, there are a range of policies in South Africa that indirectly address the issue – as well as provision at institutional level that will be discussed in the section that follows.

Policymaking in the four countries with relevance to employability and inclusive development can be seen in the following areas:

### Work placements

An area in which there are widespread policies across the four countries is work placements and internships. In Kenya, professional programmes have their own requirements for industrial attachments, but universities are also being encouraged by the Kenya University Education Strategy to develop broader opportunities across all courses. Ghana has a Student Industrial Attachment Programme that aims to supplement students' theoretical knowledge with practical experience in the workplace. In Nigeria, the Graduate Internship Scheme focuses on young people who are unlikely to secure employment immediately after finishing university.

It is important also to mention the long-standing national service schemes in Ghana and Nigeria. Graduates of all universities must spend a year in an extended internship, usually in a public service function such as teaching in a remote rural area. The national service programme in Ghana is compulsory for

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190. Republic of Kenya (2015) *op. cit.*

every citizen who is 18 years old and above and has graduated from any tertiary institution. It awards a certificate – one which is required by every employer – and is mandatory even for those graduates wishing to pursue further studies. The aims of the programme are as follows:

1. Encourage the spirit of national service among ALL segments of Ghanaian society in the effort of nation-building through active participation.
2. Undertake projects designed to combat hunger, illiteracy, disease and unemployment in Ghana.
3. Help provide essential services and amenities, particularly in towns and villages of the rural areas of Ghana
4. Develop skilled manpower through practical training.
5. Promote national unity and strengthen the bonds of common citizenship among Ghanaians.<sup>191</sup>

In Nigeria, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) plays a similar role, and is obligatory for all university and polytechnic graduates (from public and approved private institutions) under 30 years of age, with the scheme particularly seeking to promote mutual understanding and respect between those of different regions, ethnicities and religions, and encourage mobility of labour. This requirement serves the dual function of ensuring that graduates – many of whom have benefited from public funds during their studies – give something back to society, particularly to the poorest segments, but also are provided with a formative experience, in some cases directly relating to their future

work, and in others, providing a broad professional and intercultural learning process.

### Disciplinary spread and curricular relevance

There are a range of concerns across the countries in relation to the disciplinary offering of universities. Two distinct trends have been observed: on the one hand, there has been ‘course splintering’, for example in Kenya, with universities offering increasingly specific courses – say on specialised areas of electrical engineering – as a means of maximising income through capturing new markets. These new courses are seen to be too narrow to be of much use to students in their working lives. On the other hand, there has been a process of programmatic isomorphism, with institutions previously focusing on technical, vocational or scientific areas moving towards more generic academic programmes. This is the case in the middle level public colleges in Kenya that were recently upgraded to university status. The increasing similarity of institutional foci is seen to be problematic, because it reduces the diversity of the offer, and particularly because it churns out very large numbers of students from generic applied social science areas, with fewer students specialising in technical and vocational areas.

Ghana has attempted to address this issue by requiring a 60:40 ratio of students in favour of science and technology, as opposed to social sciences, arts and humanities subjects. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education also recommends a 60:40

ratio in favour of science courses.<sup>192</sup> In fact, this ratio would bring the countries well above the average for those in the OECD, in which the proportion of students in science and technology subjects is much less than half, and nearly a quarter of students are in business and administration alone<sup>193</sup> (with 11.3 per cent of students in science, mathematics and computing, 10.1 per cent in engineering and 9.4 per cent in health in 2013).<sup>194</sup> Furthermore, it is not clear whether specialist jobs would be available for such high numbers of science and technology students, or whether the availability of graduates with this training would in fact have a positive impact on economic growth. In any event, progress towards this aim has been slow.<sup>195</sup>

There have been attempts in various contexts to reform the content of courses, responding to widespread concerns about out-of-date curricula and universities not keeping abreast of new developments in industry and the workplace. In Ghana for example, national bodies have developed new provisions for curriculum review in order to ensure that courses are more relevant to employers – for example, there is now a mandatory requirement for universities to show that there has been employer input in the design of new courses, particularly to strengthen the quality and relevance of science and technology education. Finally, the increasing marketisation of higher education in the four countries also has implications for disciplinary spread, since private institutions are less likely to run equipment-intensive science and medical courses due to their higher costs and need for more extensive infrastructure.

191. Ghana National Service Scheme (2016) *Who we are*. Available online at: <http://nss.gov.gh/home/who-we-are>

192. Federal Ministry of Education (1977, revised 2004) *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: Education Research and Development Council.

193. OECD (2014) *Education Indicators in Focus*. Available online at: [www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202014--No19.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202014--No19.pdf)

194. OECD (2016) *Graduates by field of education*. Available online at: <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=RGRADSTY>

195. Alabi, G, Alabi, J and Mohammed, I (2013) Congruence between national policy for science and humanities enrolment ratio and labour market demand in Ghana. *Educational Research and Reviews* 8/10: 708–719.

## Entrepreneurship courses

A notable area of policymaking in relation to employability has been the effort to instil entrepreneurial aspirations and skills. In particular, all students in Nigerian universities – regardless of their area of specialisation – are required to undertake an entrepreneurship course, following a federal government directive in 2006.<sup>196</sup> This is a rare example of concrete national level action to respond to the perceived problems of graduate employability. The policy was aimed at generating far higher numbers of successful self-employed graduates, and reducing the reliance on traditional white-collar work, which is no longer able to absorb the majority of graduates. The policy has had only limited success, however, due to difficulties in ensuring a high quality of provision – and indeed, general misgivings over whether entrepreneurship can be taught at all. There are also a range of institutional level initiatives in the area of entrepreneurship education in Ghana, South Africa and Kenya<sup>197</sup>, as will be outlined further below. Associated with the above are business incubation and innovation centres, which have been established in a number of universities and also provide mentoring in relation to entrepreneurship.

In addition to the above areas, there are a range of general measures being taken to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in universities, as outlined in greater detail in the Enhancing Teaching<sup>198</sup> report produced for this project. While teaching and learning units in universities are common in South Africa, these have not historically been

present in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, but there are new moves in a range of institutions to establish structures for supporting lecturers in improving their teaching. There have also been a range of reform initiatives in pedagogy, aiming to move away from transmission-based lectures to problem-based learning, more participatory, collaborative classrooms, and increasing use of technology and virtual learning environments to support classroom-based work. In addition, there have been a range of reforms to assessment, to move gradually away from dependence on examinations focusing on memorisation.

In addition to these national level policies, it is important also to be aware of the work of international agencies. As explored in Chapter 3, the African Development Bank is supporting work in Kenya to develop the quality of graduates in technical and engineering areas, and support programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, the British Council ran the Education Partnerships in Africa scheme, funded by the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which facilitated a range of small-scale initiatives aimed at promoting graduate employability through partnerships between UK and African universities.

As may be expected, implementation of these policies and initiatives is uneven. In some cases this may be due to lack of resources, in others to insufficient capacity and technical expertise at the local level, or to tensions between institutional and national aims. In Ghana, the lack of effective policy on employability is attributed to the ambiguity of the

roles of the two principal regulatory organisations relating to higher education (NCTE and NAB).

A significant barrier for policymaking in all of the countries (though to a lesser extent in South Africa) is the lack of relevant data. Institutional tracer studies are rare, and in some cases the few institutions that do run their own alumni studies have been unwilling to share the results. There are no national level graduate destinations surveys in the four countries that could be used to inform policy: the closest is the CHEC study<sup>199</sup> that covered all four institutions in the Western Cape, South Africa. In some cases, the situation is even graver, with even basic enrolment numbers and details unreliable. The Labour Market Intelligence Partnership in South Africa is a significant initiative in this regard, being aimed at establishing reliable data sets on the labour market and demand for skills.

## University-level provision

The ways in which universities support students to enhance their employability in practice vary considerably, in part due to the differing ways in which the above national policies are implemented, but also because of differences in the nature of the institutions and the particular initiatives in place. The universities included in our sample are highly diverse, ranging from long-standing large public institutions such as Nairobi University, with some 80,000 students, to recently created, small private universities such as Ashesi, which has only 550 students. Naturally, the mode of operating of institutions with these different characteristics cannot be the same and each will have its own particular set of

196. In some universities – particularly private ones – this requirement has not yet been fully implemented.

197. Robb, A, Valerio, A and Parton, B (eds) (2014) *Entrepreneurship Education and Training: Insights from Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique*. (A World Bank Study). Available online at: [www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/06/12/000470435\\_20140612105917/Rendered/PDF/886570PUB0978100Box385230B00PUBLIC0.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/06/12/000470435_20140612105917/Rendered/PDF/886570PUB0978100Box385230B00PUBLIC0.pdf); Kajage, E and Wheeler, D (2013) *Supporting Entrepreneurship Education in East Africa*. Available online at: [http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Misc\\_Education/Entrepreneurship-Education-East-Africa-2013%20.pdf](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Misc_Education/Entrepreneurship-Education-East-Africa-2013%20.pdf)

198. Brewis and McCowan (2016) *op. cit.*

199. CHEC (2013) *op. cit.*

characteristics. Nevertheless, there are some provisions that can be put in place at all forms of institution, and both well-established and fledgling, experimental institutions have much to learn from each other. This section will not attempt to capture every aspect of the university experience, and fuller accounts can be found in previous project publications: the focus here is on three forms of provision – careers services, work placements and skills development programmes – that are particularly important with respect to employability.

### Careers services

Careers services are, for obvious reasons, critical to enhancing graduates' employment prospects, since much of the work in understanding, identifying, selecting and preparing for employment needs to take place before a student has left university. However, careers services are not universal in the four countries. Institutions can broadly be grouped into one of three categories:

1. Has a fully functioning careers service.
2. Has a careers service, but with inadequate staffing or funding to function fully.
3. Has no careers service.

Of the 14 institutions participating in this study, only four fell into the first of these categories, with nine in the second and one in the third, and the situation may well be more critical in other institutions across the countries. In a number of the institutions, a single person is expected to cover all the responsibilities of the careers office. In some cases, institutions have a broader student office in which careers is one of a number of services provided, including general academic guidance and personal counselling. It is vital to ensure that every institution

has an effective careers office, a priority that needs urgent attention from governments and institutions across the region.

To a large degree, the extent of careers provision is associated with the level of resources and prestige that an institution has. The University of Cape Town, for example, the African institution highest placed on international rankings, has an exceptional level of provision, with a large team of dedicated staff and a diverse portfolio of activities and support services. More recently established institutions with meagre resources struggle to provide this kind of service to students. There are significant equity issues as a result, particularly given that less advantaged students are disproportionately likely to attend the less well-resourced institutions.

Interviews and documentary research carried out with institutions identified the following services as being offered by careers offices:

- Careers fairs.
- Workshops.
- Inviting alumni and entrepreneurs to speak to students.
- Mentoring and one-to-one advice (face-to-face or email).
- Establishing links with employers.
- CV-writing advice.
- Support for presenting oneself in interviews/mock interviews.
- Facilitating work experience and volunteering.
- 'Cleaning up' online profiles.
- Forwarding job adverts.

An example of a role provided by careers services is to demystify certain forms of employment, allowing students to see through myths about the requirements of certain jobs (e.g.

that working in a bank requires an accountancy degree) and understand more clearly the forms of work that they would prefer and/or are available.

However, there are a range of challenges involved in delivering careers services. One of the limitations is that universities do not have sufficient information on graduate destinations, as mechanisms to track students are not generally in place, and few universities have up-to-date alumni databases. Even in the case of those institutions that do have fully functioning offices, there is no guarantee that students will actually take up the opportunities that are available. The survey of final year students carried out for this research project showed that only a third of students had spoken to a careers advisor at any point during their studies,<sup>200</sup> and the figure across all universities in the countries is likely to be lower. The graduate destinations survey carried out for this project with alumni of three universities in Kenya – all of which have better than average careers services – showed that 35 per cent of students had never received any careers guidance from their institutions.

In some cases, students do not take up the opportunities because of time constraints – either direct clashes with taught courses, or simple lack of time because of study commitments. In others, students are unaware of the existence of the careers service or the activities provided. These constraints require further efforts from careers services to adjust the times of activities to fit in with student schedules, to provide more information, and to raise awareness of the opportunities available. However, even with these measures in place, not all students will necessarily take up the opportunities, through apathy or a lack of a sense of urgency about the need to prepare

200. McCowan (2015a) *op. cit.*

themselves for pursuing opportunities after graduation. There are equity elements at play here too, since students from more privileged backgrounds are more likely to take up careers service opportunities, thus reinforcing initial inequalities. KNUST in Ghana has taken the measure of making participation in careers activities obligatory for all final year students in order to address these disparities.

Despite the absence or uneven provision of careers support overall, there are examples of excellent practice amongst the institutions participating in this study. Ashesi, for example, has a structured three-year programme which moves through CV and cover letter writing and basic business etiquette skills, to interviewing and networking, and finally to social media presence and personal branding. This training programme is punctuated with internship opportunities and direct contact with employers. The University of the Free State also has an innovative programme, in which students volunteer for a period of six months in the careers office: in addition to gaining valuable work experience, the students thereby develop a strong familiarity with the training and opportunities available.

### **Work and volunteering placements**

As seen above, work experience is an area on which there is substantial national policy emphasis, and many students have access to placements while they are in university (some facilitated by the institution, and others self-organised). The survey carried out with final year students showed that significant proportions had already undertaken an internship (62 per cent in Ghana, 46 per cent in Kenya, 37 per cent in Nigeria and 29 per cent in South Africa). In addition,

the destinations survey of graduates from three universities in Kenya indicated that 85 per cent had already done a work placement while they were at university.

However, simply providing students with work experience opportunities is not enough on its own. There are concerns that employers do not provide appropriate tasks and conditions for interns, and, on the other hand, that students may not take their placements seriously. Careful management is needed to ensure that both students and employers get the most out of the experience. In KNUST, students have to write a report on their work experience, ensuring that they engage strongly with the internship and enhance their learning through subsequent reflection. Employers are also required to write a report on the students' progress.

Innovative schemes include the UDS placement scheme, through which all students spend an extended period at the end of the first and second years in a community work placement, through which, in addition to understanding the reality of rural villages and interacting with diverse ethnic groups, they also develop skills of local development planning. In the third year they then move on to an industrial attachment in their area of study. Some universities – such as the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, in Nigeria – actually have their own businesses, providing opportunities for work experience and entrepreneurship on the campus. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Kenya has set up the Nairobi Industrial and Technology Park, which allows for intense linkages between the university and industry and also provides opportunities for eight-week industrial attachments for students.

### **Skills development programmes**

Universities also provide targeted courses to develop particular kinds of skills. As seen above, some of these are laid on by careers services, to prepare graduates specifically for job applications and interviews. In addition, some provide broader courses to develop knowledge, skills and values for students' working lives. The most prominent of these are the entrepreneurship courses now rolled out universally in Nigeria, and provided in a number of universities in Ghana, South Africa and Kenya – usually as single modules, but occasionally as entire degree programmes. However, while these are a potentially significant development – acknowledging the limited number of white-collar jobs, and the need to generate new forms of livelihood, as well as encouraging students to develop their own enterprises – there are limitations on implementation. Ironically, it has been reported that some entrepreneurship courses are delivered in a largely non-participatory way, focusing on knowledge transmission, rather than developing the students' own ideas. A more effective model of an entrepreneurship programme is shown in the above case study on the Vaal University of Technology, in which knowledge, skills and values around entrepreneurship are developed in an integrated way, combined with practical experiences. Strathmore University in Kenya is also a leading institution in entrepreneurship teaching, providing, in addition to its taught courses in enterprise, opportunities for students to develop their own start-ups in the Incubation Hub and @iLabAfrica Research and Innovation Centre.

Another form of skills development programme is seen in the work of the Educational Development Unit at the University of Cape Town, outlined in



Chapter 2. This programme targets students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and aims to enhance not only their academic performance, but also to develop leadership skills, student voice and creativity.

### Prerequisites for employability

Employability – that is to say, the extent to which an individual is equipped to gain, maintain and succeed in employment – is complex and cannot be reduced to a single factor such as skills. Drawing on the capabilities approach outlined in Chapter 1, this section proposes that employability can best be understood as a confluence of three sets of factors: societal, institutional and personal.<sup>201</sup> First, factors at the macro level, including the economic health of the society, the availability of graduate level jobs, social norms and the policy environment, have a bearing on the requirements for and realisation of employability. Second, universities play a role in developing the employability attributes of students, building on their previous development at school. Finally, factors relating to the individual – skills, values and aspirations – affect their aspirations and employability.

Maintaining this wider perspective guards against the one-sided attribution of blame often observed: for example, that graduate unemployment is all down to the lack of commitment or application of students, or alternatively is due to universities being out of touch with new developments in technology and the labour market, or indeed that it is solely a question of the lack of job opportunities. In reality, all of these factors are intertwined and a holistic response to the challenge is needed.

### Societal

First, employability is deeply influenced by broader currents in society of a social, economic and political nature. These include the following key dynamics:

- *Labour market* – the overall demand for graduates, and the demand in specific areas, as well as unemployment rates.
- *Employment policy landscape* – the existence of policies to generate employment and facilitate graduate entry into jobs.
- *Higher education policy landscape* – the existence of policies to enhance university practice in relation to employability.
- *Employer preferences* – the relative value attached to different graduate attributes.
- *Employer training practices* – the extent to which employers undertake their own induction programme or see work-related training as the responsibility of universities.
- *Socio-economic inequality* – background inequalities in society that affect people's abilities to access university level study and employment.
- *Discrimination* – overt or institutionalised barriers to employment on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, social class or other factors.
- *Enterprise environment* – the extent to which entrepreneurship and social enterprise are encouraged and supported.

### Institutional

Second, individuals' employability is affected by the universities in which they have studied, not only through the learning gained, but also through the location and prestige of the institution. Dimensions of institutional influence include:

- *Quality of the learning environment* – teaching staff, learning resources and infrastructure appropriate for enhancing students' learning.
- *Geographical location* – proximity to industrial/business centres, particularly relevant in large countries and those with extensive rural areas.
- *Reputation* – the prestige that an institution holds in society, often based on historical factors.
- *Field of study* – specific subject studied (for example, the limited ability of arts and humanities students to find employment in some contexts).
- *Equitable access* – measures in place (e.g. bursaries, preparatory courses) to facilitate enrolment and completion by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- *Link to employers* – extent to which the institution engages employers and facilitates students' connections with them.
- *Careers services* – support for students to access information about careers, develop their skills and prepare for job applications.
- *Graduate tracking* – existence of alumni surveys, or other mechanisms to keep track of graduate destinations.
- *Values promoted* – ethos of the institution and the way it shapes students' attitudes, expectations and ethical stances.

201. This frame was originally developed by Melanie Walker and Sam Fongwa for the analysis of the South Africa case, as seen in Chapter 2.

## Personal

Finally, there are personal attributes needed in order for individuals to secure and prosper in employment:

- *Disciplinary learning* – acquisition of knowledge, skills and values relating to a specific professional or academic area.
- *Transferable learning* – development of broader knowledge, skills and values relevant to employability.
- *Socio-economic background* – factors of income, resources and social markers that can influence graduate recruitment positively or negatively.
- *Social capital and networks* – contacts and acquaintances that can directly or indirectly aid in gaining employment.
- *Aspirations* – aims and goals that students have for their careers and broader lives.
- *Empowerment and agency* – confidence, voice and capacity to pursue and realise one's goals and commitments.
- *Learner engagement* – extent to which individuals are open to continuing professional development and lifelong learning.

Broadly speaking, we can identify two dimensions of the prerequisites relating to the personal dimension: *learning and connections*. On the one hand, students need to develop their capacities in different areas, involving disciplinary knowledge, job-specific skills and also generic skills such as communication, analysis and problem solving. On the other, they need to have relevant connections to translate that learning into real opportunities. Some students, due to their privileged birth, are already inserted into a strong network that can facilitate the gaining of rewarding employment; for others, these networks need to be developed throughout their

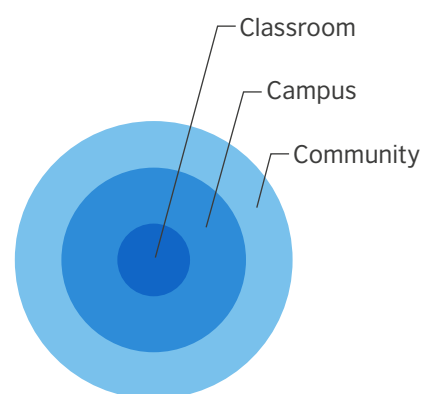
time at university, and so need to be actively facilitated by their institutions. Work experience opportunities are key for developing such connections.

## Spheres of intervention

What can universities actually do, or do better? Some of the elements identified above are outside the direct control of the higher education sector: questions of macro-economic policy, the availability of graduate jobs, socio-economic inequalities, and ingrained cultural preferences and prejudices. It is important to acknowledge that universities are not the only cause of the problems that graduates experience in finding and succeeding in rewarding jobs. At the same time, there are a range of measures that universities can take, and areas in which they can have a significant impact on graduates' life chances.

In this report, we argue that a holistic vision of the university experience is needed. Isolated attempts, as have been seen in the past, to enhance employability solely through increasing the number of industrial attachments, or having employers on academic boards, or setting up innovation incubators, are unlikely to have a significant impact. For ease of conceptualisation, we locate the areas in which universities must be active into three spheres: classroom, campus and community. 'Classroom' here refers not only to the literal room in which classes are taught, but to all of the formal learning that takes place in accredited courses. In addition to providing the disciplinary and technical knowledge that students need in their diverse areas of work, high quality degree courses also develop a range of transferable skills, including those of analysis and critical thinking. 'Campus' refers to the broader learning

experience of the university. As has been shown in research in diverse contexts,<sup>202</sup> extra-curricular activities have a significant positive impact on student development and are highly valued by prospective employers. Finally, 'community' refers to the learning experiences taking place outside the university gates, not only in the local community, but also in work placements and internships, in some cases in other regions and even internationally.



Universities must pay attention to all of these three spheres simultaneously, and ensure that they are providing students with a rich array of learning experiences in each.

### Classroom

Employability, to a significant extent, rests on the quality of learning available to students in their basic degree courses. The following are dimensions of learning and teaching quality that need to be addressed:

*Transforming pedagogy.* Many universities across the four countries are still dominated by transmission-based teaching approaches based on lecturing, with few opportunities for students to engage in discussion, to critique and apply the ideas conveyed. New strategies are needed to enable students to actively participate in

202. E.g. CHEC (2013) *op. cit.*

learning. For example, a number of universities – such as Moi and KNUST – have adopted problem-based learning in a range of degree courses.

*New forms of assessment.* In practice, it is extremely hard to transform pedagogy without transforming assessment. Teaching and learning practices will naturally gravitate towards what is needed for assessment and successful completion of a degree. In most universities, examinations are still dominant, giving credit for memorisation, but based on inert forms of knowledge. New forms of assessment are needed to support the development of analytical skills, creativity and teamworking. Examples of alternative forms of assessment are portfolios, presentations and group projects.

*Ensuring adequate learning resources.* Research carried out for this study and in other contexts has identified a severe lack of essential equipment in certain contexts, particularly for natural science and agriculture programmes. Work readiness can be severely compromised by inadequate facilities. More broadly, a rich learning environment for all students needs to be provided through well-stocked libraries, virtual learning platforms, internet connectivity and space for independent and group study.

*Curricular relevance.* Steps need to be taken to address the so-called ‘yellow notes’ phenomenon of ageing curricular content. Taught programmes need to keep abreast of new developments in research, the latest technologies and professional practices. Regular reviews of programme and curriculum content and close interaction with industry and professional organisations are essential in this process.

*Disciplinary spread.* While it is positive for institutions to have disciplinary specialisms, the full range of courses should be represented across the higher education system, from natural sciences to arts and humanities, and from academic to more applied professional subjects. All of these areas are important for the achievement of development goals and for employability. Furthermore, individual students should have the opportunity to be exposed to a broad-based curriculum that includes both technical and liberal arts elements. A prime example here is Ashesi University, in which all students, in addition to their main discipline, are exposed to a range of courses including humanities, technology and African studies.

*Choice of courses.* Findings from this study show that many students are disengaged from their courses because they were not their first choice. Policies should be adopted to ensure that students are not channelled towards particular degrees purely on account of their secondary school grades, the availability of funding or an uninformed perception that a particular subject provides a sure route to a good job and income.

*Theory/practice balance.* Universities are sites of higher learning and theory has an essential place on academic courses of all types. Nevertheless, a rebalancing is needed in response to students’ and employers’ concerns about a lack of practical applicability. Students should be supported in developing the ability to critically engage with theory and to apply it effectively in their working lives.

*Targeted skills development courses.* While many transferable skills can be gained through regular degree courses, in some cases ‘bolt-on’ or ‘capstone’ units may be needed in

key areas. Entrepreneurship has been a prominent example, with courses being made increasingly available, as discussed above in relation to Nigeria and elsewhere, but care must be taken to offer a range of skills development opportunities, especially until the value of entrepreneurship courses has been demonstrated. Attention must be paid to delivering such courses in a participatory manner, allowing students to experiment and gain hands-on experience.

## Campus

Changes in higher education participation and the increasing numbers of students working full-time and studying at evenings and weekends has challenged traditional conceptions of the campus university. Nevertheless, universities must work to maintain broader spaces for learning outside of formal teaching, given their significance for the personal, intellectual and professional development of students. In particular, attention is needed to the equity dimension, given the disparities in the time and resources available to more and less advantaged students. These learning opportunities can be particularly important for those students going on to develop social enterprises and other forms of entrepreneurship, but are also critical for conventional forms of employment.

*Careers service.* As discussed above, there are significant gaps in career support at universities across the four countries. In some cases this is a question of the absence or limitation of a dedicated careers adviser and support activities, while in others provision is available, but students do not take up the opportunities sufficiently. Ashesi University is an example of an institution that succeeds

in providing extensive support for making choices and developing skills for careers, and linking in with employers, for the whole of the student body. However, rolling out such provision in a large university is a significant challenge.

*Extra-curricular activities.* Students can benefit from a range of activities outside of their formal programmes, including artistic pursuits, sports, drama and debating. These activities serve recreational purposes but also are a source of learning and development of social relations. The University of Venda, for example, has a community radio programme, in which students act as producers and presenters, serving an important function in providing local language services as well as raising key issues in the public interest, such as health campaigns.

*Student voice and representation.* Students should also have the opportunity to engage in student unions or representative councils. This form of participation is critical in developing civic capacities and engagement<sup>203</sup> on the part of individuals, but, as discussed in the *Students in the Driving Seat* report, also serves an essential function in feeding in student views on the university and enhancing quality of provision.

*Employer engagement.* Beyond the involvement of employers in the development of curricula, other events and activities can be run on campus. Most common are careers fairs, in which employers can provide information to students on prospective employment opportunities, as well as develop direct contact with them.

*Innovation incubators.* Universities can also provide opportunities for development of start-up companies and creation of innovative products on their own campuses. Students can benefit from space and facilities, support of experienced entrepreneurs and in some cases financial support to develop their ideas. Pioneering work in this area is being undertaken at Kenyatta University's Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre and the business incubator at KNUST.

### Community

Finally, there is the learning that students gain in the course of their degree studies beyond the gates of the university. The systematic review conducted as part of this research study showed a substantial body of evidence internationally supporting the value of such activities in developing employability attributes. Ideally, these extramural learning opportunities are facilitated by the institutions and incorporated into study schedules. Such experiences can have a positive impact on the communities involved – whether a local neighbourhood or a workplace – and also have significant benefits for the students themselves. As has been explored widely in the literature on service learning,<sup>204</sup> these experiences are most effective for students when there are opportunities for subsequent reflection back in the university, with students required to discuss their experiences collectively and write reflective reports.

*Work placements.* Perhaps the most commonly discussed and longest practised intervention relating to employability is opportunities for real experience in the workplace. Much professional learning, in fact, can only occur in the workplace, so these

experiences are generally essential for students before looking for employment. However, this research study has identified a range of concerns about meaningful engagement of students in such placements and the extent to which valuable learning is gained. Universities need not only to facilitate links with employers, but also to ensure that students are supported throughout, and employers need to provide a conducive environment for students to engage and develop.

*Volunteering and service learning.* Students commonly engage in activities on a voluntary basis to support local communities, participate in environmental projects, work with children or the elderly, and involve themselves in diverse forms of work with NGOs, social movements, and religious and other civil society organisations. In addition to having a positive impact for the communities concerned, such activities represent an important source of learning for the students themselves. In particular, they can be helpful in developing generic, transferable skills, and can be particularly relevant for those looking to develop social enterprises in the future.

A holistic vision of learning across the 3 Cs – classroom, campus and community – is therefore needed to develop the kind of 'all-rounder' graduate that employers seek, and who will succeed in a rapidly changing labour market, carving out new opportunities and generating positive benefits for society. The final chapter will now draw out some broader implications and recommendations for higher education policy and practice in the four countries.

203. Luescher-Mamashela, TM, Kiiru, S, Mattes, R, Mwollo-ntallima, A, Ng'ethe, N and Romo, M (2011) *The university in Africa and democratic citizenship: hothouse or training ground?* Wynberg: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.

204. See Clayton, P, Bringle, R and Hatcher, J (2013) *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment*. Sterling, Virginia Kohler stylus: Stylus.

# Chapter 7 – Conclusion

Tristan McCowan

Higher education has for many years slipped from the agenda of international development agencies and has suffered from underfunding by national governments. In the context of inadequate coverage of primary and secondary education, it seemed something of a luxury to invest in universities, particularly when their benefits were captured by a small elite. However, there has been a sea change in attitudes to higher education in recent years. Its centrality to development, even in the most resource-constrained countries, has now been broadly recognised, as governments refocus their attention on universities in the context of the quest to develop a knowledge economy. In many contexts, there is also a worrying spectre of increasing numbers of unemployed and dissatisfied graduates, a concern that is spurring stakeholders into action. Yet, while lip service is paid to strengthening higher education systems, for the most part the trends are towards expansion of the system through marketisation, with little concrete attention to maintaining and enhancing the quality of learning. Achieving the broader aims of development – and solving the problem of graduate employability – depends not only on widening access, but also on a rich, relevant and invigorating learning environment for students.

The Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development research project aimed to understand the challenges in higher education in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, to assess initiatives already under way and to put forward proposals for transformation. In the course of three years, it has collected a large body of qualitative and quantitative data, working

intensively with 14 universities in diverse locations, of varying sizes and with distinct institutional ethos. The data has been collected and analysed by the research teams located in the four African countries and the UK, complemented by cross-cutting studies carried out on partnerships, teaching quality, graduate destinations and international evidence of the impact of employability interventions. Notably, what matters is not just the data gathered, but also the process of action set in motion through the course of the project, with institutions coming together and discussing the challenges, sharing examples of innovation, developing action plans and implementing changes, not only within and between the institutions involved, but more broadly with other HE institutions and stakeholders. To this end, in the final phase of the project, employability and inclusive development ‘scorecards’ and action plans are being developed in each of the participant universities, to ensure that the insights developed through the research will be incorporated in future initiatives and institutional development as a whole.

A comparative perspective on the findings from across the countries was provided in the previous chapter on *enabling conditions*. This conclusion recaps the key arguments from the whole report, draws out further implications and provides a set of five key proposals. Recommendations specific to each of the countries have already been provided in Chapters 2–5, so here only overarching proposals relating to all of the contexts will be put forward. It goes without saying that these need to be appropriately contextualised, and will manifest themselves in different ways in different locations.

While the need to address the challenges of graduate employability garners widespread consensus in society, it is important to remember that there are dangers associated with the agenda. The relationship between higher education and work is not straightforward and graduate unemployment is not only due to a ‘skills gap’. Simplistic notions of human capital development and returns in the labour market have now been broadly questioned.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, universities will be impoverished if they adopt a narrowly economic vision, focusing only on commercial outputs and maximising the salaries of their graduates. Above all, universities need to remain spaces for free and critical enquiry, developing graduates who can reflect on themselves and their societies and who have a commitment to social justice. Forms of ‘zero-sum employability’ – in which graduates gain advantages over others, but without increasing their net contribution – or even worse, ‘unethical employability’, involving maximising personal or corporate benefits to the detriment of others in society, should be avoided.<sup>206</sup>

Enhancing the life chances of graduates involves institutions developing strong connections with external bodies. First, strong links are needed with schools, in order to provide prospective students with the information they need to access university and to raise their aspirations for continuing on to higher education. In particular, secondary school leavers need information about the courses open to them, in order to address the problems outlined above with respect to students entering professional areas for which they have no strong affinity. Second, as widely acknowledged by governments, strong links are needed with employers. Universities must be

205. Marginson, S (2015) Rethinking education, work and ‘employability’: Foundational problems of human capital theory. Keynote presentation at the Society for Research in Higher Education annual conference, 9 December.

206. McCowan (2015b) *op. cit.*



porous to the involvement of diverse employers in curriculum design and campus life, but equally employers must be attentive to their own responsibilities in contributing to universities' work and providing support for the development of their graduate employees. Last, strong links are needed with alumni. Universities should track the destinations of their graduates, understand the links between those destinations and graduates' experiences in university, as well as involving alumni in the preparation of current students for their future lives.

Drawing on the findings across the three years of the project, five key recommendations emerge:

#### **1. Maintain a broad conception of employability**

Employability is not only about obtaining a job, it is about succeeding in the workplace, and importantly about contributing meaningfully to society through one's work. For inclusive development, society needs graduates who are ethical and will contribute to the public good through their professional activities and civic participation. The values promoted by universities are therefore important, in addition to the knowledge and skills they develop. Furthermore, employability relates not only to salaried employment, but also to entrepreneurship and social enterprise.

#### **2. Transform the higher education experience through an integrated approach**

A holistic vision of student learning in university is needed, acknowledging the multiple dimensions and spaces

of the institution. Relying solely on entrepreneurship courses or careers fairs will not be sufficient to transform individuals and societies. Attention is needed across the areas of 'classroom', 'campus' and 'community', enhancing the quality of formal degree courses to develop critical analytical skills, providing extra-curricular opportunities for broader development of interpersonal skills, and enabling students to access placements outside the university to develop life and workplace experience. Career services need to be significantly strengthened, and attention paid to the uptake of those opportunities by students. Work placements are widely available, but measures need to be taken to ensure students gain meaningful learning from them.

#### **3. Empower students**

One of the key constraints on improving quality in African universities is the lack of student voice. Ensuring effective channels for student views on teaching and learning, the curriculum and other aspects of university life can make a vital contribution to ensuring relevance and maintaining a high quality of provision. In addition, it can lead to greater engagement of students with their studies through an enhanced sense of ownership of the learning process. Participation in decision-making bodies is also an important learning experience for students, as part of the 'campus' sphere of learning. More broadly, a transformation of learning culture is needed to move away from a focus on examinations and knowledge regurgitation, to more critical and participatory forms of learning.

#### **4. Ensure an equitable distribution of opportunities**

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are faced with a combination of barriers: after beating the odds to get to university in the first place, they struggle while at university to engage in the kinds of enrichment activities that make them attractive to employers, and then often face discrimination in the workplace once they have left university. Institutions need not only to operate affirmative action policies to ensure access for talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also to provide targeted employability support.

#### **5. Develop comprehensive data and research**

Creating and implementing effective policy at the national and institutional levels is difficult without an appropriate evidence base. Little is known about the destinations of graduates, with the exception of a few pioneering studies, and some institutions lack accurate enrolment data. In addition to maintaining key information sets about employment outcomes and other destinations of graduates, qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to understand the trajectories of students and the impact of university initiatives.

Making these recommendations reality of course requires appropriate investment from national governments. Even in the context of constraints on public funding, it is important for states to prioritise the quality of higher education provision, given its key role in economic growth, sustainable development and social inclusion. Nevertheless, not all of these interventions require significant funds:

in many cases it is a question of change of mindset, appropriate regulation of quality, or a change of organisational structures and cultures.

Raising awareness of the problems of higher education and employability is not in fact the issue – as discussed above, there is widespread discussion not only within universities, but also in the public sphere, about the problems of ‘half-baked’ graduates. However, much of the noise about the problem is not constructive: what is needed is close and realistic attention to what universities can actually change, and the impact those changes will have on students and their future lives. This project has aimed to contribute to addressing this challenge by proposing models for understanding employability and inclusive development, document existing practice, highlight examples of generative practice and develop insights through comparison. Beyond these national and cross national perspectives, each institution will also need to engage in its own process of understanding and transforming its practice.

There are a number of aspects of the question of graduate employability in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa that the study has been unable to cover in full. The focus here has been on dynamics *within* universities – the kinds of learning experiences and other support that institutions provide to prepare students for their future lives. This research, therefore, needs to be linked with broader work on conditions in the labour market, as well as the preparation that students gain from their primary- and secondary-level studies, and training provided to

graduates within employment. As stated above, one of the key needs for all four countries is to develop a full national graduate destinations survey. The pilot graduate destinations survey in Kenya conducted as part of this project has provided a blueprint for how these surveys could be carried out, and highlighted a number of the methodological challenges that must be overcome. While there is much attention in the media to low levels of graduate skills, the information on which these reports rely is largely anecdotal, and more systematic research is needed to gauge adequately what the skill levels of graduates actually are in different areas. Another point is that the focus in this project has largely been on conventional face-to-face provision in universities: as distance education expands its reach, and an increasing number of people access learning via massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other online platforms, it will be important also to assess the employability implications of online learning and other uses of technology.

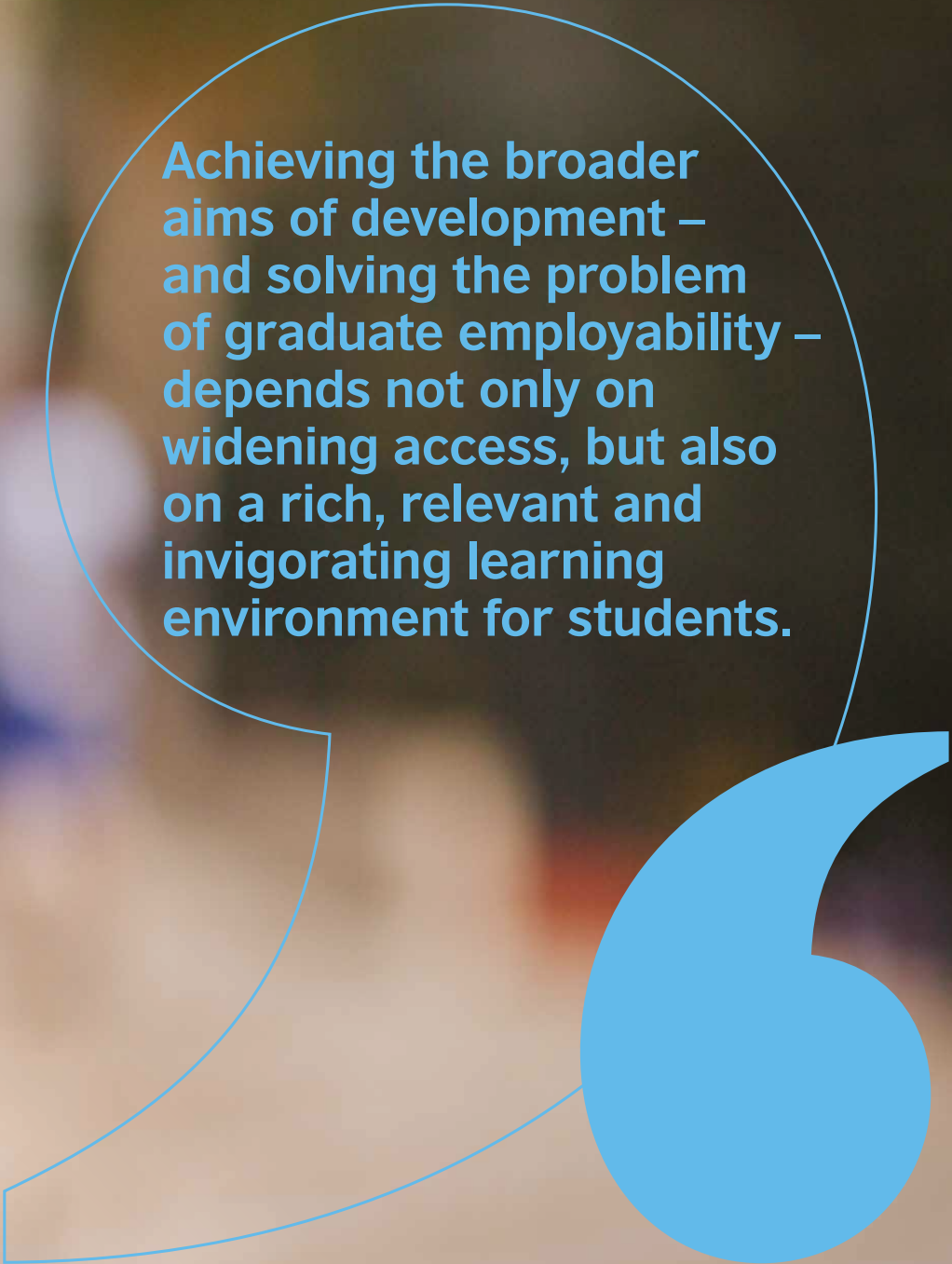
Universities cannot solve the graduate employability challenge alone. Ensuring rewarding employment for all involves not only providing the right kinds of skills, but also having in place a range of macro-economic and employment market conditions, not to mention social norms and personal freedoms, thereby requiring concerted action from governments and civil society. Many of the skills and broader attributes required by graduates should be developed earlier in their lives through schools and their family and community environments.

Nevertheless, the role of the university is critical and there is significant room for enhancing its impact. As explored in this report, inspiration for change can be sought from international experiences, but also from innovation at a local level, and there are a range of highly effective practices and initiatives already under way across the four African countries. In part, the current task of the university is to adapt itself effectively to the changing nature of economy and society: for example, the shift away from traditional white-collar employment to flexible work and entrepreneurship, the increasingly fluid nature of knowledge and advances in technology. Yet it is not only about adaptation; universities themselves play an active role in transforming society. Ensuring inclusive development across the African continent, and globally, depends on universities accepting this challenge and responsibility, through promoting free and open enquiry to develop human understanding, in turn helping to forge more prosperous, just societies.









**Achieving the broader  
aims of development –  
and solving the problem  
of graduate employability –  
depends not only on  
widening access, but also  
on a rich, relevant and  
invigorating learning  
environment for students.**

