

Strategies for Graduate Employability: Post COVID-19

Introduction

COVID-19 has tested countries around the globe by damaging the global economy. The damage can be seen by the significant increase of unemployment reported around the world. According to the study by Global Student Survey: A survey of the loves, hopes and fears of COVID and beyond, a quarter of respondents globally has listed that the two most prominent issues facing the students' generation are access to quality jobs and "the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer". The survey outcomes make sense as the Institute Student of Employers (ISE) findings have shown that the economic changes will impact graduate recruitment. The key trend which ISE highlights are:

- **The graduate market mirrors problems in the broader economy.** The current crisis impacts workers of all skill levels; hence most likely to be particularly difficult for fresh graduates who enter the labour market for the first time.
- **Graduate recruitment volumes are down everywhere.** As a response to the pandemic crisis, many employers have decided to delay or reduce graduates' recruitment. Therefore resulting in the decline of overall numbers of jobs in the formal graduate labour market.
- **The graduate market will not recover straight away.** Out of 21 countries in the study, 15 countries expect the volume of graduates recruited to further decline up until next year. Only three countries predict that the market will stabilise, and only three more anticipate growth.
- **Uncertainty is the only thing that people are sure of.** There is a loss of certainty in a usual narrative about how graduate transitions work, making planning difficult.

Despite the current crisis, more than half of the students who participated in the Global Student Survey are looking to the future with hope and say that their primary motivation for studying is to expand their job prospects, increase their earning potentials, or fulfil the requirements for a specific career. Therefore, the universities bear the responsibility of moulding and preparing students for the modern professional landscape. The universities have to offer sufficiently relevant and up-to-date education and provide the skills needed in today's workplace to enable young people to play an active role in society as innovators, entrepreneurs (to generate economic and social growth) or intrapreneurs (to innovate within companies). The question is, how? How can they help their students venture into successful careers in a highly skilled, socially inclusive, and diverse knowledge-based society? Taylor et al. (2021) have suggested several strategies to be adopted by universities in helping the students' professional development:

i. The power of internships

Findings from a study carried out by LinkedIn, Statistics Netherlands, and Eurostat have shown that 82 per cent of Dutch graduates were employed within a year, where 77 per cent of graduates indicated that they had either done at least one internship or taken part in a further education experience (usually in the workplace) within four years of graduating. The internship experience offers students professional networking and insights into professional environments in their field of study. In today's world, post-COVID-19, many companies are forced to operate online, affecting internships. Although interns can no longer experience the on-site working

through working online, it can still be beneficial to the students. The students can obtain a wide range of new skills, such as the use of social media, online communication tools, strategies for self-management task, flexible timetabling, and desktop research.

ii. Leveraging students' contribution

Universities can make use of the nature of students' learning process itself. Students of the 21st century will appreciate and learn more through student-centred education. Student-centred education is one of the best methods as they work efficiently when they feel that they belong to a community that allows them to be themselves and learn from each other. Through this method of education, students are given the responsibility for their self-learning process, setting their own goals, and finding their pathway to become independent learners, develop the confidence to learn by discovery (rather than simply to memorise information), acquire lifelong learning skills to deal with current problems, and compete in the local and global job market. Universities can develop new forms of partnerships with students, enabling them to create innovative teaching practices, to facilitate a range of new skills and personal attributes.

iii. Reimagining teaching and learning

Graduates' essential skill nowadays is to live and operate in a technology-led world and understand how to leverage the potential of technology for new business development. Hence, institutions must change their models radically to offer new forms of comprehensive digital education by fostering meaningful learning in e-learning design. For instance, to produce simulations and develop online tools for different purposes (for collaborative online discussions in online spaces or to practice new skills) and to use technology to improve feedback process, to adapt to independent learning and develop personalised understanding, allowing students with much more flexibility in their learning paths. In a blended world, campus time would be more dedicated to active problem-based learning.

Summary

In summary, the pandemic has undoubtedly affected all people around the world by damaging the economy. The impact can be seen through current university students' main issue: access to quality jobs and "the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer". Post COVID-19 world economy is not in good condition as employers are forced to downsizing as a response to the current economy. Hence, affecting the graduate employment market. Universities have a significant role in helping and preparing graduates for their future career. Strategies taken by universities must be up-to-date and relevant to the current situation as labour market is dynamic.

References

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