

Youth Blog Post Form
Under UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022
(WHEC 2022)

Form

Title	Universities, workplaces and the government: partnerships for youth entrepreneurship and employability			
Thematic	<input type="checkbox"/> Theme 1: HED & Covid-19 <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 2: HED & Inclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 3: HED & Sustainability <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 4: HED and Digital futures <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 5: Youth and governance in HED <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 6: HED & Indigenous Youth <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 7: HED & Migration <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 8: HED & the Professional World <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 9: HED & Well-being <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please, specify and don't hesitate to write out of the box and/or in a transversal perspective): Theme 4 (according to Annex 1): Quality and Relevance of Programmes; Theme 6: Higher Education Governance; Theme 10: Preparing for the Future of Higher Learning.			
Category	<input type="checkbox"/> Journalism	<input type="checkbox"/> Research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Storytelling	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The second part of the article adopts an informative tone, sharing recommendations.
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Number of words	1000			
Original language	English			
Organization	Individual / ZLH Français (sole proprietorship)			

1000 words max. **Calibri, 11, 1.5 interline**

Original language (English)

Title: Universities, workplaces and the government: partnerships for youth entrepreneurship and employability

Keywords: skills mismatch; labour market; creative industry; entrepreneurship

Article:

I am a postcolonial, Jamaican millennial whose father wanted her to study medicine at university. It would have been the natural choice - I had the grades for it and both my parents were clinicians. Though I was accepted, I knew I would not survive the five-year medical programme when I despised Biology so much. I feared that administration of university programmes locally would not afford me the flexibility between courses that I needed to determine which field I wanted to pursue. At the last minute, I applied and got accepted to study International Development (IDS) at McGill University in Canada. As an interdisciplinary programme, IDS allowed me to take courses across the social sciences and a for-credit internship, which gave me practical experience in the field.

I returned to Jamaica bright-eyed and ready to contribute to local development, but found myself looking for a job for the second half of the year. I was hired as a research officer in the government's Entertainment division, and though I received grounded exposure to policymaking and established my professional network in the creative industry, I had nevertheless transitioned from unemployment to underemployment, with no structure to use the skills I had acquired in my first degree and few opportunities to progress into a position commensurate with my skill and pay-level. Most jobs required applicants to have prior work experience, yet few channels existed in the university environment to facilitate such exposure during full-time study.

Eventually, I turned to entrepreneurship and began teaching French and Spanish. I discovered that for a fraction of the time, I earned considerably more than I had in my full time job and thought: why was business education not incorporated from the beginning of our school careers? My growing interest in education led me to pursue a Masters in Social Policy in London, where I studied social security and labour market policies while researching higher education (HE) management and secondary education reform. Though I had grown as an education practitioner and scholar, I found myself in the same position that I had been in at the end of undergraduate study: unemployed and then underemployed, unable to secure a job that was not a part-time, fixed-term contract.

Innovative and flexible courses

Given that 63 percent of the Caribbean's population is under age 30 [1], its high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment [2] have significant implications for the region's sustainability. Notwithstanding, that Nassau, Kingston and Port-of-Spain were designated UNESCO Creative Cities of Craft and Music respectively [3] demonstrates the potential of the creative economy for the region's socio-economic growth and global competitive advantage. Caribbean HE should therefore foster the skills necessary for creative entrepreneurship in the global marketplace. Though cultural studies institutes have been established, university management and teaching staff must coordinate closely to ensure that regardless of the main discipline pursued, students have the flexibility to enrol in creative courses at various stages of academic tenure. Integrating creative programmes with those in law, policy, management and business faculties would not only make creative industry knowledge more accessible to students from other faculties, but also enable creative students to acquire competencies essential to the holistic capacity-building of the sector.

Matching skill supply with demand: partnerships

As I looked for jobs after my Masters, I realised a trend in my search: many employers sought people with skills in project management, marketing and sales, suggesting a higher demand for practical competencies over pure knowledge obtained in traditional academic programmes. Universities, workplaces and the government each have an important role to play in preparing students for this dynamic, business-oriented labour market.

Universities

Research and development units should be essential to the functioning of each university, monitoring the needs of the labour market and adapting its academic programmes to meet these needs. For example, each organisation needs a marketing team to relate its services to the public. Though not all university students will be marketing majors, close observation of the labour market could inform universities' decisions to integrate marketing and other core business courses in a variety of disciplinary programmes, so that students may learn how to apply the technical knowledge of their discipline of choice, be it environmental studies, to the needs of a future job as a communications officer in an environmental company.

Workplaces

Human resource divisions of organisations can ensure students' access to practical experience to complement their studies. Frequently, the budget for interns is available, but no structure exists for their assignment. By consulting its internal departments to determine their needs, as well as academic departments to understand their objectives, human resources divisions can develop a system of internship placements across the functional departments of their organisations, facilitating internships that are mutually beneficial for both student-interns and host organisations.

The Labour Ministry

As the organisation coordinating all relevant actors in the labour and skill portfolios, the Labour division of the government should convene an interagency committee, fostering dialogue between universities and workplaces to determine how each can better serve the other. By providing a forum for close collaboration across relevant stakeholders, the Labour division could bridge gaps in the development of emerging industries. For instance, local agricultural and manufacturing firms could sponsor research into their new products at universities, providing applied science students not only with the financing necessary to pursue graduate studies, but also the opportunity to work closely with key sectoral stakeholders and increase their employability. Moreover, the government's documentation of all organisations, Labour Ministries and other relevant government departments could collaborate to establish a membership database, with which organisations register to advertise their upcoming vacancies. Though job opportunities may be scarce in Caribbean and other developing country contexts, making vacancies available on a central digital platform would make the process of matching employers and jobseekers run more smoothly.

HE institutions are at the heart of harnessing our human resources. By partnering with the government and organisations across productive sectors, universities can empower youth to respond to the world's most critical challenges and contribute to its sustainable development.

References

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3. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (n.d.). *UNESCO Creative Cities Network*. UNESCO. Retrieved February 12, 2022 from <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/creative-cities-map>