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Education Sub Saharan Africa

WHAT NEXT?

ENHANCING AFRICAN STUDENTS' TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE CAREER SERVICES

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About the Report

This report was prepared by Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) in partnership with the Education Collaborative at Ashesi University in Ghana and Kepler University in Rwanda. Financial support was provided by Dubai Cares (grant number PESSA010 to ESSA).

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About ESSA

Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) is a charity founded in 2016. Our vision is high-quality education that enables young people in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve their ambitions and strengthens society. ESSA's mission starts with universities and colleges. Driven by the needs of young people, we join up with leaders (e.g., educators, funders, and policymakers) and provide them with the data and evidence they need to make good decisions and change the system.

ESSA offers:

A. A strong, African team and board based in Africa and Europe, blending experience in research, mapping, knowledge management, advocacy, and communication.

B. A unique position in African tertiary education, via a proven track record in researching important educational issues in sub-Saharan Africa and delivering practical and innovative solutions.

C. Well-established research and dissemination partners and networks for tertiary education (e.g. All-Africa Students Union, Decent Jobs for Youth, Association of African Universities, Inter-University Council for East Africa, Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, Zizi Afrique Foundation, UNESCO, UNHCR and Quilt.AI, among others).

D. Strong values that guide everything we do. We are evidence-driven, solutions-focused, we strengthen trust, and we are always learning.

About Education Collaborative

The Education Collaborative is an initiative of Ashesi University. Started in 2017, the initiative is a collaboration of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Africa to raise higher education outcomes. The Education Collaborative's mission is to use collaboration and mentorship to build a network of HEIs that are uncompromising in achieving excellence in quality student outcomes in Africa. The Education Collaborative's vision is to improve educational systems and outcomes on the African continent through an institutional and collective effort to achieve systemic transformation.

The Education Collaborative target areas for transformation include:

A. Supporting the development of exemplar institutions to achieve successful models and relevant accountability systems.

B. Creating an ecosystem for HEIs to mentor each other and lead regulatory and policy reform from the inside out.

C. Working to achieve extraordinary education outcomes through a focus on ethics and leadership development, training students with relevant career readiness, enabling an active entrepreneurship ecosystem, defining metrics for African higher education ranking, and faculty development and research.

About Kepler

Kepler empowers young people with 21st-century training and new pathways to employment. They do this through degrees, upskilling and refugee preparation programmes.

Abbreviations

AERD	African Education Research Database
AJOL	African Journals Online
APG	Assessment of Personal Goals
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSD	Career Services Department
ESSA	Education Sub Saharan Africa
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HR	Human Resource
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACE	National Association of Colleges and Employers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRB	Population Reference Bureau
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank
WRICM	Work-Readiness Integrated Competencies Model

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Executive Summary

This report provides educators in universities and colleges and employers with evidence-based guidance on how they can work better together for the benefit of students. Partnerships between universities, colleges, and employers develop students' skills for employment and can improve students' ability to gain decent employment. For more details about this study, please refer to page 1 onwards.

Increasing graduate unemployment and underemployment in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and its negative impacts on young people and their communities are a growing concern across the continent. While the problem is complex and requires a multi-stakeholder approach to address it, universities and colleges have attracted the most scrutiny. A major contributing factor to graduate unemployment is the **'skills gap'** between what young people learn and what is in demand in the labour market. Students need effective career services to identify and develop relevant skills that will ease their transition to employment and help them make the right career choice. However, provision of career services in universities and colleges in sub-Saharan Africa is limited.

This study was undertaken by Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) in partnership with the Education Collaborative at Ashesi University in Ghana, and Kepler University in Rwanda. It aims to understand how universities and colleges in Africa can enhance their career services outcomes to help students' transition to employment. The study draws on multiple methods including systematic review, interview, focus group discussion and roundtable discussion.

What Next? Enhancing African Students' Transition to Employment Through Effective Career Services

3 Steps to an effective career services

Understand what skills local employers want

The first step in closing the 'skills gap' is for leadership of universities and colleges (e.g. heads of department, faculty, colleges, etc) to have a better understanding of the skills requirements of employers, or what employers expect from graduates. This can be achieved by talking to employers and studying market trends and forecast. Creating platforms for employers to share skills required for various careers provide a great source of information. This will help them to design appropriate programmes to enable students to develop these skills and increase their chances of getting employed. Considering that the skills needs of employers may differ across geographical contexts, evidence from employers in Africa, especially in a university's local economy is important.

Using the Work-Readiness Integrated Competence Model (WRICM), employability skills that employers in sub-Saharan Africa value are organised into four main themes. These are intellectual resources (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, and ability to learn), meta-skills (e.g., interpersonal, teamwork, and communication), personal resources (e.g., leadership, creativity, and time management), and job-specific skills (e.g., subject knowledge and technical skills). See Section 3, pages 5-9 for more details.

Take a career services approach that involves the whole community

Once universities and colleges know the skill requirements of employers, the next step is to devise ways to help students develop these skills. Career services are an essential strategy for achieving this goal. There has been a transformation of career services over the last century, with **connected communities** being the most recent. The focus on connected communities takes a broader perspective to connect a community of stakeholders within and outside universities and colleges, to work together to enhance students' employability. It comprises four main themes: career guidance and preparation, curriculum and pedagogy, industry engagement, and alumni engagement.

Career guidance and preparation involves initiatives aimed at increasing students' self-awareness, providing information about job opportunities and equipping students with transition skills. Self-awareness initiatives include strength and weakness assessment, personality assessment, career fit assessment, job shadowing, and career reflective writing. Opportunity awareness initiatives include career fairs, job postings, and employment trend updates. Transition skills initiatives include a cover letter and CV writing, interview practice or techniques, internships, networking skills, work etiquette, skills audit training, social media skills, negotiation, and time management.

Curriculum and pedagogy involve how career services professionals work with academics to embed employability skill development opportunities in the curriculum. Examples of modules to enhance employability include entrepreneurship, communication practice, critical thinking, job readiness, and small business development. Pedagogy for employability includes problem-based learning, presentations, collaborative learning, discussion, research-based learning, and field trip.

Industry engagement concentrates on collaboration between universities, colleges, and industry to provide avenues for students to develop employability skills. Areas for collaboration include employer participation in career fairs, internships, guest lecture series, mock interviews, co-creation of curricula, academics and students visits to industry, recruitment events, participation on university committees and boards, direct investment such as the construction of student hostels and accommodation, sponsorship of fellowships and research, as well as part-time teaching.

Alumni engagement encapsulates initiatives that universities and colleges provide to enhance the employability of their alumni, and how they work with these alumni to support current students. Examples of such initiatives include feedback on the course and career services programmes, venture incubators and accelerators to help develop and support start-up businesses, virtual appointments to discuss problems and seek support, sharing of job and graduate opportunities via newsletters, social media and alumni portals, mentor matching, an annual get-together to facilitate collaboration, and guest speaker series.

Step 3:   ## Measure progress

Career services professionals are expected to demonstrate the value and success of their initiatives for continuous support. To do this effectively, they need meaningful measures. A key component of effective career services measurement is a theory of change and its associated monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework.

To ensure that programmes are on track to achieving the expected impact, indicators are developed, and data is collected to track progress. Within universities and colleges, there are several tools and data sources often used to assess the quality of career services programmes. These include the alumni survey tool, the career services impact survey tool, the internship assessment survey tool, the career readiness competencies checklist, and centre quality benchmarks.

More information about careers services measurement can be found on pages 19–21.

Making careers services effective: what the evidence says

1. Leadership of universities and colleges should work closely with industry to implement ongoing assessments of the labour market, and to better understand current and future skill needs. This should focus on both job-specific and generic or 'soft' skills.

2. While careers services are important, they do not work in isolation and university and college leadership must promote and incentivise collaboration between academics and careers services.

3. Universities and colleges should engage students with career services right from their entry into the institutions. Most of the time, students do not actively consider their career goals or seek support until late in their programme, which could put them at a disadvantage.

4. There should be opportunities through teaching and learning for students to develop employability skills. Active learning strategies such as discussions, group work, presentations, research, problem-based learning, and field trips should be prioritised. In addition, assessment should require students to apply knowledge rather than simply recall facts. Application of knowledge helps students develop critical thinking skills.

5. There is a need for reliable and trustworthy measurement indicators developed through broader stakeholder engagement. Career-services programmes should be evaluated regularly, using multiple data sources. The feedback should be used to improve programme delivery for better outcomes.

6. The quality of programmes and activities designed by universities and colleges to prepare students for work is a key indicator when employers are considering partnerships and recruitment. This means that universities and colleges should be intentional about investing in programmes that provide opportunities for students to enhance their career readiness.

How employers can increase their return from engagement with universities and colleges: what the evidence says

1. Employers should proactively approach universities to discuss potential collaboration opportunities rather than waiting to be approached.

2. Employers need to share current and projected skills requirements with universities to help incorporate such skills into the curriculum as early as possible. One option is to work with university leadership to create a digital platform to share data from different sectors of industry. This will also help students and parents align career choices to areas with promising job prospects.

3. To increase access to internships, employers could consider offering more, but shorter, internship placements.

4. Employers should work with universities as they consider their own programmes to address skills shortages. This avoids duplication, makes it easier for young people to navigate the transition to work and improves knowledge transfer between institutions.

Keywords

→ Career Services
→ Connected Community
→ Curriculum
→ Employability Skills
→ Experiential Learning
→ Graduate Unemployment
→ Industry Engagement
→ Internships
→ Pedagogy
→ Skills Gap
→ Sub-Saharan Africa
→ Theory of Change
→ Transition Skills

1. Introduction

a. Background

Figures from the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) show that by 2030, young Africans are expected to make up 42% of the world's youth and account for 75% of those under 35 years in Africa. While a youth bulge is normally considered in terms of the challenges it poses, the increase in a country's youth population can be a blessing. To derive the benefits of an increased youth population, Africa needs to ramp up investment in the skills and knowledge of its youth for them to participate actively in the socio-economic development of the continent (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Goal Keepers Report, 2018).

The importance of investing in young people is acknowledged in policy discussions and documents. For example, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 8 emphasises the need for inclusive economic growth to enhance progress and provide decent jobs for all. In addition, the African Union's Agenda 2063 places emphasis on the commitment of member nations to equip young people with skills to lead Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Despite the commitments expressed in various policy documents, evidence shows that young people, especially those from low-and-middle-income countries, are marginalised economically (Okolie et al., 2020). According to the African Development Bank (2015), 10 to 12 million youth in Africa enter the labour force each year. Out of this, a small fraction (3.1 million) secure jobs, leaving most of the youth unemployed.

Among other factors contributing to youth unemployment are low economic growth, a field of study, a negative attitude towards technical and vocational education and training (TVET), low labour market data and limited career services (Amani, 2017). A major concern of employers is that university graduates lack the relevant skills to be effective in the workplace. This challenge is referred to as the 'skills gap' (Dodoo & Kuupole, 2017). According to PWC's 22nd Annual Global Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Survey (2019), 65% of African CEOs said the skills gap was preventing them from innovating effectively. Similarly, 59% conceded that their quality standards and customer experiences were being undermined. In addition, 54% (global 44%) confirmed that they were missing their growth targets because of inadequate skills.

A key proposal to address the skills gap is the provision of effective career services (i.e., services provided by universities and colleges in collaboration with stakeholders to help students develop the skills and knowledge required by employers and to enhance their transition to work). However, research shows a lack of or limited provision of career services in universities and colleges in sub-Saharan Africa (Okolie et al., 2019). Similarly, in 2020, Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) undertook research in Ghana to better understand the barriers to students' transition into employment and to address the skills gap. The research focused on the role that tertiary education institutions can play in improving the employability of their students. A prominent theme that was repeatedly highlighted throughout the research was the lack of (or limited) career support and orientation for students throughout the education-to-work lifecycle.

According to the African Development Bank (2015), out of the 10 to 12 million youth in Africa that enter the labour force each year, only a small fraction;

3.1m

secure jobs, leaving most of the youth unemployed.

b. Objectives

This study *aims* to produce an in–depth understanding of how universities and colleges in sub–Saharan Africa (SSA) can strengthen their career services outcomes and enhance students' employability. It adopts a broad perspective, focusing on students, faculty members, career services personnel, alumni, CEOs, and human resource (HR) managers. The objectives set to achieve this aim are to:

a
Identify existing evidence on delivering effective career services for university and college students in sub–Saharan Africa.

b
Explore how universities and colleges in sub–Saharan Africa can form and sustain partnerships with industry to enhance their career service outcomes.

c
Determine ways in which universities and colleges in sub–Saharan Africa can be supported in developing and implementing effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks for their career services.

d
Produce guidelines for universities and colleges in sub–Saharan Africa to improve their career services outcomes.

c. Structure of the report

Following this introduction, the next section discusses the methodology of the study, addressing a systematic review, interviews and focus group discussions, and roundtable discussions, as well as the limitations of the study. Next, we present the findings, which are discussed in two parts. The first part discusses evidence from existing literature. This focuses on employability skills and career services approaches (including career preparation and support, curriculum and pedagogy, employer engagement, and alumni engagement) and measurement frameworks for career services programmes. In the second part, we present insights from the industry and case studies of four higher education institutions (HEIs). The last section concludes and presents recommendations for universities and colleges, as well as the industry in sub–Saharan Africa.

1. Methodology

In this section, we discuss the methods and processes used to collect data to address the research objectives, as well as the limitations. These methods include a systematic review, interviews and focus group discussions, and industry roundtable discussions, which are presented below.

a. Systematic review

The main aim of the review was to identify existing evidence, especially from Africa, about how HEIs can enhance their career services outcomes to facilitate students' transition to employment. It considered academic and grey literature published from 2010 to 2021. This period was chosen because the issue of unemployment and the call for closer collaboration between universities and colleges and industry gained prominence in the last decade (Okolie et al., 2021). The initial search was conducted in academic databases, including Web of Science and Scopus, focusing on countries in sub-Saharan Africa. We also searched the African Education Research Database (AERD), African Journals Online (AJOL), and Google Scholar (for relevant publications from outside Africa).

In these searches, we used keywords such as 'graduate skills and employment', 'higher or tertiary education and graduate employability', 'employability skills through career services', 'graduate identity', 'skills employers value', 'career services models', etc. We manually checked the titles and sometimes the abstracts to identify publications that addressed the research objectives.

Even though using this approach was expected to generate a large volume of publications, we thought it was appropriate to ensure we captured as many relevant publications as possible. The process produced 956 publications, which were reduced to 54 after thorough screening. In addition to the four main sources of data, we identified 19 working papers and reports through Google Scholar and direct website searches of relevant organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Bank (WB) for relevant publications.

We started the analyses by reading each paper to identify specific aspects of the texts that addressed our research objectives and summarised the relevant information under themes that were developed from the research objectives. The final stage of the process was writing up the results through careful analyses and syntheses of the information.

b. Interviews and focus groups

In addition to the systematic review, we employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with HEIs and industry stakeholders. The purpose was to supplement the systematic review by gathering in-depth information to understand how HEIs can work together with the industry to enhance career services outcomes. Using interviews and focus group discussions has many benefits. For example, Newby (2010) states that interviews and focus group discussions allow researchers to ask follow-up questions, which enables better understanding and richness.

We conducted ten one-on-one interviews and two focus group discussions with industry stakeholders consisting of CEOs, Human Resource professionals and line managers from Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Rwanda. For HEIs, we engaged students, alumni, faculty, and career services personnel from Ashesi University (Ghana), Kepler University (Rwanda), and Warwick University (United Kingdom), of which there were four one-on-one interviews each with academic and career services personnel, one focus group discussion and three one-on-one interviews with students and alumni.

We used a purposive sampling technique to select tertiary education institutions that have effective career services and therefore could offer best practices for other institutions. We also considered resources for the study and therefore approached institutions that we already had relationships with to facilitate data collection. These considerations led to the selection of the following institutions: Ashesi University **(97% of the Class of 2019 received job and graduate school placement offers within six months of completing their National Service),** Kepler University **(90% of their graduates find full-time employment or further studies within six months of graduation),** Strathmore University **(ranked number 1 in the year 2020 as Kenya's university with the best reputation in the job market, and known for their annual career fair),** and Warwick University **(ranked in the top 30 in the world for employer reputation).**

In addition to the four HEIs, we engaged six organisations from Ghana, two from Rwanda and one from Burkina Faso, across six industries – Technology, Manufacturing and Production, Banking, Audit or Finance, Entertainment, and Consulting.
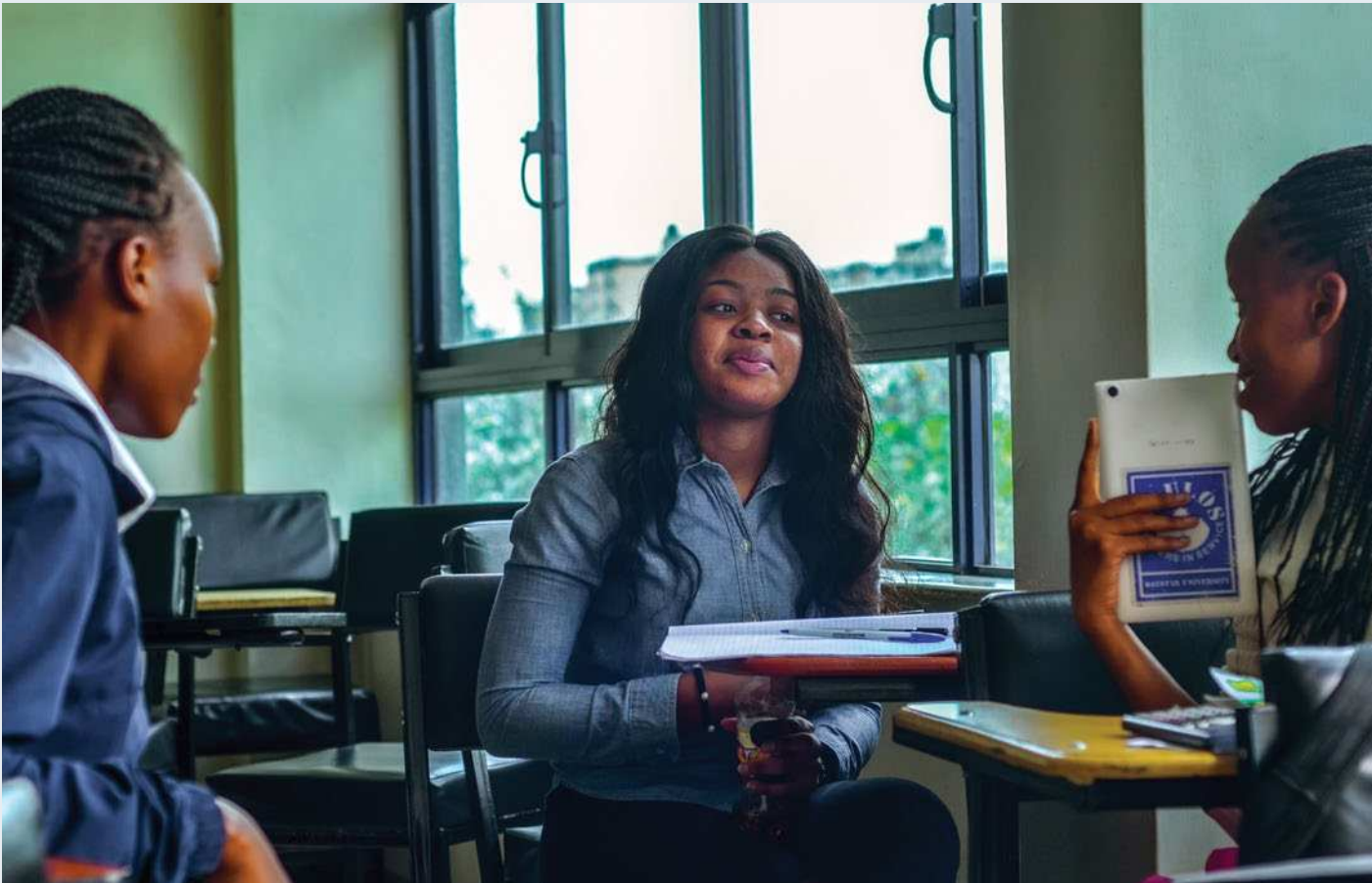
We followed strict ethical procedures. For example, before commencing data collection, we obtained ethical approval from the universities involved as well as the consent of participants. We ensured that participants were of an acceptable age, were not put under any unnecessary stress, and were not made susceptible to the COVID-19 pandemic by contributing to the research and data collection processes. Furthermore, data privacy and security, particularly when conducting research involving human subjects, were ensured. This was achieved by using an appropriate level of anonymity, confidentiality, or de-identification of individuals to reduce the risk for research participants, the researchers, and the organisations involved. All interviews and focus group discussions were held virtually, and pseudonyms were used for participants during reporting and dissemination.

In addition, access to identifiable data was limited to members of the research team and data was stored in secure online or cloud folders that could only be accessed by pre-authorised individuals. Furthermore, all data collection and storage devices (e.g., desktop computers and laptops) were protected with strong passwords and correctly configured for safe use in the collection and storage of research data.

In analysing data, we employed a general inductive approach. This approach is defined as "a systematic procedure for analysing qualitative data in which the analysis is guided by specific research objectives" (Thomas, 2006). The process involves the preparation of raw data files (transcripts), the reading of texts, the creation of themes, and continuing revision and refining of themes.

c. Roundtable discussion for Chief Executive Officers

ESSA and partners held an industry roundtable discussion in Ghana on April 20, 2022, on the theme: *Partnerships for Improving Career Service Outcomes of African Higher Education Institutions.* It brought together a panel from industry, academia, and employment agencies to discuss how they can work together to facilitate students' transition to employment.

d. Limitations of the study

Like any research, this one has limitations. For instance, the systematic review included publications from 2010, which means any relevant publications before 2010 would be excluded. In addition, we used only English publications; hence, evidence from

non-English speaking sub-Saharan African countries was under-represented. Also, considering the resources for the study, we selected institutions that we already had relationships with to facilitate data collection. We also included more institutions from Anglophone countries due to language and resource barriers.

Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding interviews and focus group discussions. One is that participants may withhold some information to protect their organisation. Specific to this study, we could not collect the same detail of data from all the participating institutions, which means some are under-represented, making comparisons across challenging institutions. In addition, we could not engage all three seniority levels (CEO, HR, and Line Manager) we mapped out for this research in all the participating institutions. Furthermore, the study used a small sample, so caution should be taken when applying the findings to a wider region of sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Findings

In the previous section, we discussed the methods and limitations of the study. Here, we will focus on the findings, which will be presented in two parts. The first part will address knowledge and evidence from the literature (the systematic review). In the second part, we will discuss insights from the industry (the focus group discussions and interviews) and case studies of four HEIs.

a. Knowledge and evidence from the literature

i. Employability skills

Employability is defined as the likelihood of graduates exhibiting attributes that employers find necessary for executing their duties in organisations (Okolie et al., 2019). Taking a broader view of employability, Brewer (2015) states:

> Skills, knowledge and competencies that improve a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle (p. 2).

There is no universally accepted list of employability skills. Nonetheless, many researchers have proposed skills that demonstrate employability (Pitan & Adedeji, 2016) for graduates and have identified a list of basic employability skills (Mutwarasibo et al., 2014). These skills include communication, literacy and numeracy, teamwork, problem-solving, general information technology, customer care, enterprising, learning to learn and subject-specific knowledge (Dodoo & Kuupole, 2017; ILO, 2013). In a systematic review, Osmani et al. (2015) identified trends in employability skills in 12 non-African countries, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Employability skills

	Motivation and leadership		Teamwork
	Pre-graduate work experience		Technical skills
	Communication and interpersonal skills		Flexibility and adaptability
	Critical thinking, creative thinking and problem-solving		Time management and self-management

What skills do employers in sub-Saharan Africa value?

Even though some skills are relevant across geographies (e.g., Osmani et al., 2015), research shows that certain skills are preferable to others based on context (Mutwarasibo et al., 2014). Therefore, understanding the skills employers in sub-Saharan Africa are looking for will help universities and colleges align curriculum, pedagogic approaches, and career service approaches with employers' needs. For example, in a stakeholder convening by the Education Collaborative in June 2021, participants agreed that:

> The African job market seeks students with both transferable soft skills (skills that cut across careers) and hard skills (career-specific).

Employers emphasise the need for HEIs to equip students with transferable skills in project management, leadership, ethics, empathy, communication, technological competencies, and interpersonal relationships. A unique skill some institutions overlook is cultural literacy, which allows students to effectively work in different and cross-cultural working environments and minimise cultural shocks that derail their growth.

This observation was reiterated during the roundtable discussion in Ghana. For example, an employment consultant indicated:

> Employers talk about work experience. Yes, we are looking at fresh graduates, however, if we are looking at having voluntary internships with industry-based people, it will at least put you at a certain level when you are entering the market. You do not come with a zero degree.

What Next? Enhancing African Students' Transition to Employment Through Effective Career Services

Many studies on skills that employers value have been conducted in different countries across Africa, including Ghana (e.g., Damoah et al., 2021; Segbenya et al., 2021), Namibia (e.g., Shivoro et al., 2018), Nigeria (e.g., Okolie et al., 2019; Okunuga & Ajeyalemi, 2018), Kenya (e.g., Ruparelia et al., 2021), Rwanda (e.g., Mutwarasibo et al., 2014), and South Africa (e.g., Ngulube, 2020; Preez et al., 2019). These studies reveal various skills which can be categorised into areas of competencies. For example, Prikshat et al. (2019) proposed the Work-Readiness Integrated Competence Model (WRICM). This model has four areas of competencies, including intellectual resources, meta-skills resources, personality resources, and job-specific resources. There are limitations in categorising skills into themes, such that most skills cut across themes. However, the WRICM is a useful framework to organise employability skills in sub-Saharan Africa, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Skills that sub-Saharan African employers' value

Intellectual resources	Meta-skills resources	Personality resources	Job-specific resources
Critical thinking	Listening	Leadership	Subject knowledge
Problem-solving	Teamwork	Willingness to learn	Technical knowledge
Analytical thinking	Flexibility	Entrepreneurial	Academic
Ability to learn	Communication	Creativity	Technical skills
System thinking	Information Technology	Time management	
Decision making	Interpersonal	Project management	
	Numeracy and Literacy	Enterprising	
	Cultural awareness	Adaptability	
	Collaborative	Risk-taking	
	Work ethics		
	Research		
	Presentation		
	Positive attitude		
	Self-motivation		

Source: Authors' interpretation of the evidence available

Intellectual resources

Intellectual resources are cognitive skills that involve the complex use of information in decision-making and problem-solving. In the current uncertain work environment, intellectual resources are key to helping employees handle new challenges (Prikshat et al., 2019). Like employers in sub-Saharan Africa, studies from other geographies have demonstrated that intellectual resources are desirable skills for employers (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011).

This was emphasised in one of the recent interviews we conducted:

> Graduates must be bold and have the initiative to solve little problems, especially at their level, and not run to their superiors after encountering little problems in their line of work (Chief Executive Officer).

A similar position was espoused at the roundtable discussion:

> We are looking for potential. Potential in terms of technical ability exists, but as it has become more relevant these days, there is also potential in the areas of soft skills. In the area of soft skills, we are looking for what we call personal mastery. And it is bringing yourself to the office every day. It comes down to passion and a desire to work (Chief Executive Officer).

Meta-skills resources

This is a type of skill that enables an individual to learn and improve new skills faster. Meta-skills are the foundations of academic performance during the study and for the efficient and effective performance of professional tasks in the workplace. Meta-skills also foster graduate students to become lifelong learners, be adaptable to changes in the workplace, and enhance their capabilities (Yadollahi & Yazdani, 2020).

The importance of these skills was also highlighted during the interview:

> Another skill required of graduates is paying attention to details. Most fresh graduates do not pay attention to detail. They make basic grammatical errors and present analytical data with fundamental errors. They must ensure that whatever document they prepare is thoroughly revised to alleviate errors before they present it to their superiors (Chief Executive Officer).

Personality resources

Personality resources, represented by personal traits, are desirable to employers (Wellman, 2010). Employers design recruitment processes to ensure the selection of applicants with the best-fit personality resources for the role. This is considered as captured during the roundtable discussion:

> We are looking for purpose and service and that is very interesting because many young people unfortunately just do not have the attitude toward service. We must serve our consumers; we must serve our shops. We must go to the shops and teach somebody how to merchandise. So, we are looking for people with service, a culture of service and purpose (Chief Executive Officer).

Job-specific resources

These skills are basic competencies required for specific careers, which differ across disciplines. For example, (Owusu-Agyeman & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019) found that in Ghana, jobs in the telecommunication industry require core engineering skills. For instance, students need to understand fibre technology, including digital signal processing, antennas and wave propagation, and digital systems. The same can be said about the business and marketing fields:

> Graduates in the business and marketing fields should possess some core business development skills. The core skill that drives a business is business development. Graduates must be aware of these skills right from the university before entering the job market (Chief Executive Officer).

Even though most of the skills presented in Table 2 are valued across jobs or careers, research shows that some skills are preferable to others (Damoah et al., 2021). In a recent study in Ghana by Jobberman (2021), some skills were found to have more appeal to certain sectors of industry than others. For example, the top three required skills for various industries in Ghana include Agriculture (ability to receive feedback, communication, teachability), Energy (critical thinking, research, digital), Construction (project management, teachability, usage of technical equipment) and Manufacturing (mechanical ability, bilingual, marketing). This means higher education departments need to work with relevant sectors to understand their specific skill requirements in addition to the general skills that cut across sectors.

ii. Career services approach

The provision of career services is considered key for students' transition to employment (Pitan, 2016). Career services approaches have gone through a transformation over the last century, including a focus on the provision of vocational guidance (1900–1920), teaching guidance (1920–1940), job placement (1940–1970), career counselling (1970–1990), professional networking (1990–2010), and **connected communities** (2010–2030) (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). The current focus on career services does not mean earlier approaches have been neglected. Rather, career services are now taking a broader approach, connecting a community of stakeholders within and outside HEIs to work together to enhance students' employability.

The connected career services approach assumes that helping students develop the needed skills or networks for employment requires a comprehensive approach. This means key stakeholders, especially industry and HEIs, should work together for greater potential impact. Working in isolation will limit understanding of the problem, which will lead to disjoint or less effective solutions. Through relationship building and creating strong career communities within and beyond campuses, career services can provide customised approaches and stronger outcomes for institutions (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014).

The four areas of focus within connected communities include:

- **Career guidance and preparation** (which aim at increasing students' self-awareness, providing information about job opportunities and equipping students with transition skills).
- **Curriculum and pedagogy** (which involve how career services professionals work with academics to embed employability skill development opportunities in the curriculum).
- **Industry engagement** (which focuses on collaboration between HEIs and industry to provide avenues for students to develop employability skills).
- **Alumni engagement** (which encapsulates initiatives that HEIs provide to enhance the employability of their alumni and how the HEIs work with these alumni to support current students).

Figure 1. Connected community career services approach

Career services
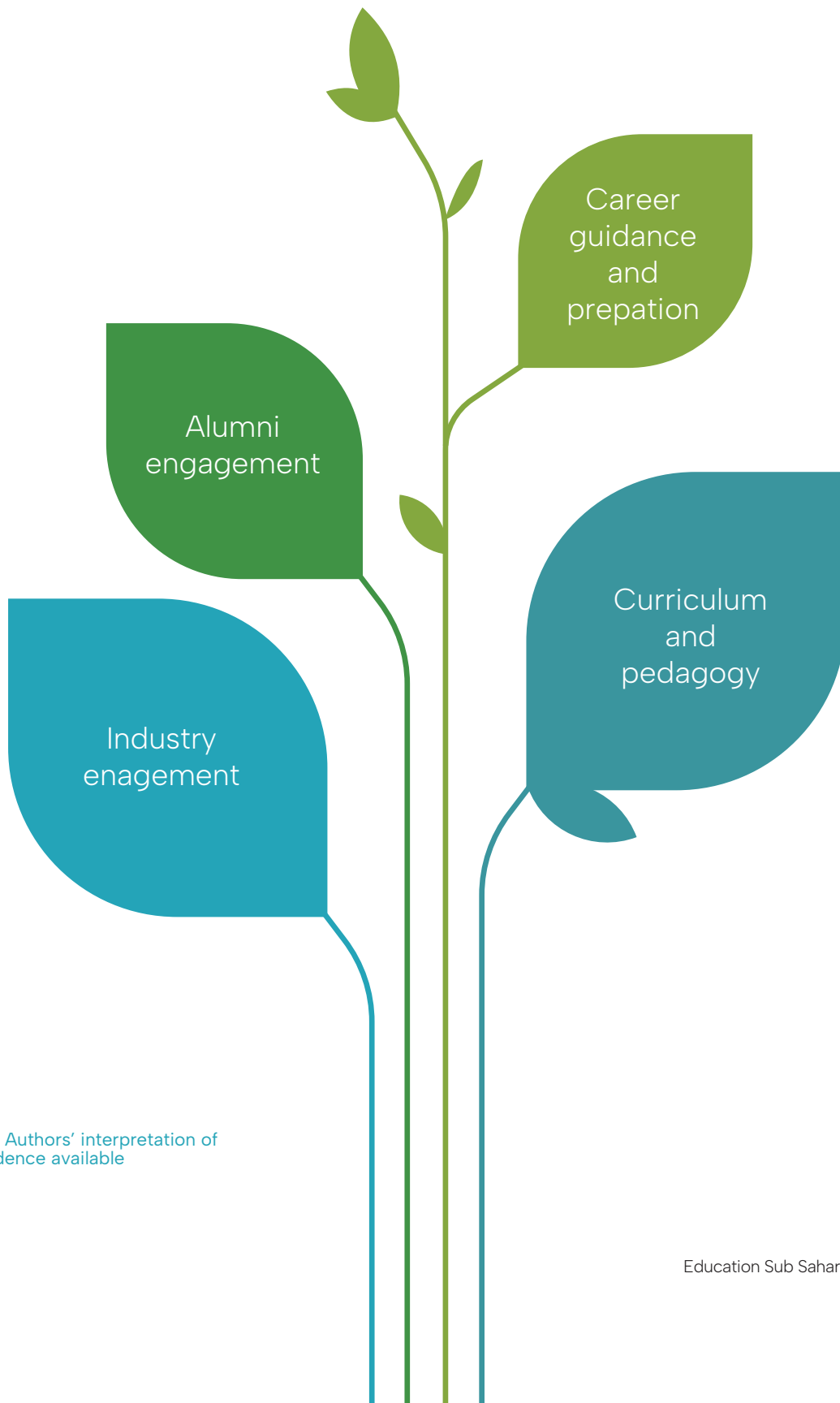
Career guidance and prepation

Alumni engagement

Curriculum and pedagogy

Industry enagement

Career guidance and preparation

A career is defined differently by scholars. For instance, Olaosebikan and Olusakin (2014) define a career as a person's profession or vocation requiring the acquisition of competencies through education and training. Career guidance and preparation can be classified into three areas of support, including self-awareness (the ability to identify and articulate personal interests, skills, abilities, values and motivations as they affect career plans), opportunity awareness (knowing what work opportunities exist and what their requirements are), and transition skills (understanding how to seek and secure opportunities in terms of having job-search and self-presentation skills) (Pitan & Atiku, 2017).

Research shows career guidance and preparation are key factors in helping students develop these skills to enhance their employability (Chireshe, 2012). For instance, Pitan and Atiku (2017) found that "self-awareness and opportunity awareness have the greatest influence on students' employability, followed by decision-making skills, and then transition learning skills" (p. 7). Table 3 presents examples of activities provided by HEIs within each area.

Table 3. Career guidance and preparation programmes.

Category	Description	Source
Self-awareness	Strengths and weaknesses assessment, personality assessment, career fit assessment, career reflective writing, career planning, etc.	*Okolie et al. (2020), Pitan (2016)*
Opportunity awareness	Career fairs, job postings, employment trends updates, panels, etc.	*Ogbuanya and Chukwuedo (2017), (Getachew & Daniel, 2016), Andrews and Russell (2012)*
Transition skills	CV and job application letter writing, interview practice and techniques, work placement or internship, networking skills, work etiquette, etc.	*Okolie et al. (2020), Chireshe (2012), Ogbuanya and Chukwuedo (2017), Pitan (2016), Andrews and Russell (2012)*

Source: Authors' interpretation of the evidence available

Choosing and developing career-relevant skills is a very important and challenging task for students, making guidance and preparation services critical. For instance, people have different personalities, abilities, needs, and interests. Therefore, career guidance helps match students' traits and needs with the right occupations (Amani, 2017). Students need to know that having an interest in or passion for a particular career is important, but that without the required skills, little can be achieved. Therefore, any mismatch in this regard may lead to unemployment, a lack of commitment, and dissatisfaction with the job (Okolie et al., 2020). On the contrary, students increase their chances of securing employment and being satisfied with their roles when there is a close match between their needs and abilities and their desired career (Amani, 2017).

Despite the general agreement among researchers on the importance of career guidance and preparation for employability, there is evidence that many HEIs in Africa do not provide adequate career guidance and preparation for students (Pitan & Adedeji, 2016). In South Africa, career advisors mentioned working from their independent offices due to a lack of career guidance centres in many institutions (Chireshe, 2012). Students also report a lack of awareness of career preparation programmes, and the poor timing of initiatives that clash with their lectures and make it difficult for them to attend (Andrews & Russell, 2012).

Studies have also shown that students do not actively consider their career goals or seek help until late in their programme, which may be too late (Pitan & Adedeji, 2016). For this reason, HEIs need to engage students right from entry and provide support to suit different stages of their university experience.

Many tools are available to help students improve their self-awareness and motivation. One is the **Assessment of Personal Goals (APG)** measurement instrument (Henderson, 2009). This tool is based on Motivational Systems Theory, which discusses models for understanding ways in which personal goals can help students adjust to and deal with new and challenging situations (Henderson, 2009).

Opportunity awareness provided by HEIs, and alumni are also vital for students' transition to employment. Students can only take advantage of job opportunities if they know about them. This means HEIs should seek and share job opportunities with students. It also requires HEIs to help students develop skills to effectively search for jobs. This can be done by organising career fairs for industry personnel to meet with students and share available openings and the

skills required to be successful in those roles, as well as introducing employment agencies and other sources of job opportunities to students (Chukwuedo et al., 2021). Considering the competitiveness of the job market and the need to prepare high-quality applications to increase chances for interview invitations, getting late information about job opportunities will reduce students' chances for application success.

Another important avenue for opportunity awareness is employment trend updates. The industry should provide information about growing sectors and areas where job opportunities are forecast to increase in the future. This information can help students plan their careers to match growing sectors where possible and decide when to acquire skills that will help them switch between careers to benefit from future opportunities (Andrews & Russell, 2012).

Transition skills are the most important among the three components of career guidance and preparation. Without the skills to take advantage of job opportunities, little can be achieved. For example, if a student is aware of a job vacancy and meets all requirements for the role but presents a poorly written CV and cover letter that do not demonstrate clearly how they meet the requirements, the application is likely to fail (Okolie et al., 2020). HEIs can facilitate students' development of transition skills through avenues such as one-on-one support, workshops, and internships.

However, it is important to point out that opportunity awareness does not necessarily translate into employment. The transition from HEIs to work is not linear and irrespective of how well students do in their programmes, they may still struggle to secure employment. Students may need other forms of support through friends or family contacts, which can be a disadvantage to students from low socio-economic backgrounds. It is also the case that the labour market may favour graduates from certain programmes and this information should be provided to students. Furthermore, students' expectations for some jobs (e.g., the working conditions) may differ from reality, which could then adversely affect their interest in and passion for those jobs once in employment.

When students are provided with this broader perspective of the labour market, for example, through internships and/or engagement with alumni working in the sectors of interest, they will be better prepared for any uncertainties and shocks after graduation.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Preparing students for work and life requires an institutional strategy that addresses employability through the curriculum. HEIs are expected to regularly evaluate their curricula to reflect changing labour-market skill requirements and implement pedagogical approaches to help students develop these skills. Promoting employability and developing subject-specific competencies are complementary because most teaching practices that enhance learning in specific subjects also promote employability. In this section, we will discuss some of the available modules and courses and some pedagogic approaches for employability.

Modules or courses for employability

Standalone modules or courses for employability are gradually being included in programmes at universities and colleges. For instance, note that entrepreneurship is a compulsory course in all universities in Nigeria, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels across disciplines. Similarly, a university in South Africa offers two compulsory courses (i.e., Small Business Development, and Communication Practice) for final-year electrical students. Similarly, (O'Leary, 2015) reports that as an alternative to a final year dissertation, there is a consultancy module available that allows students to work on projects in groups for clients.

Pedagogic approaches for employability

This refers to the extent to which teaching and learning facilitate or hinder students' employability development. According to Niyibizi et al. (2018), one of the most challenging tasks facing teachers is how to help students make meaningful connections between what is taught in class and their everyday experiences. Some scholars have suggested pedagogic approaches that can help address this problem and better prepare students for work and life.

At the University of Botswana, Moalosi et al. (2012) showed that problem-based learning (where students work in small groups on projects) developed students' employability skills. For instance, students rated themselves as 'excellent' or 'very good' on the following attributes: self-directed and lifelong learning skills (81%), organisational and teamwork skills (81%), creative thinking skills (76%), communication skills (76%), entrepreneurship skills (76%), and critical thinking skills (71%). Similarly, Ethiopia and South Africa, (Suzuki & Sakamaki, 2020) reported that TVET and technical university students who took part in group research activities (or what they termed 'Kaizen'), reported an increased level of communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.

	excellent	very good
self-directed and lifelong learning	81%	19%
organisational and teamwork skills	81%	19%
creative thinking skills	76%	24%
communication skills	76%	24%
critical thinking skills	71%	29%
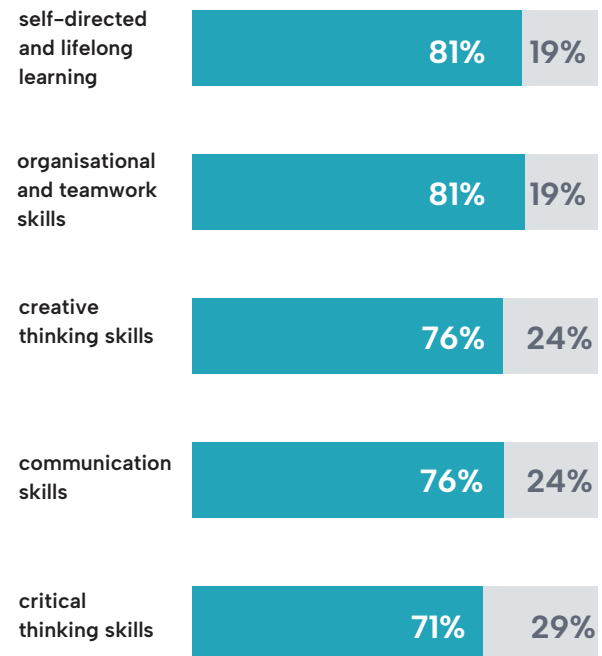
Furthermore, Ojo and Ntshoe (2017) reported positive outcomes for Graphic Design students who participated in collaborative learning in South Africa. Students mentioned benefits such as greater responsibility for themselves and the group (96%), increased active participation in the teaching and learning process (72%), fostered team spirit (84%), and useful and insightful knowledge gained during this exercise (100%). However, they noted that students felt it was difficult to get members to participate equally in tasks (64%).

greater responsibility for themselves and the group	**96%**
increased active participation in the teaching and learning process	**72%**
fostered team spirit	**84%**
useful and insightful knowledge gained during this exercise	**100%**
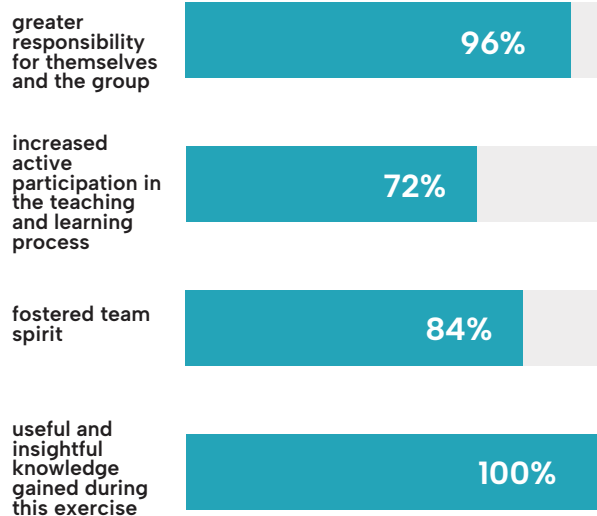
Another pedagogic approach discussed in the literature is experiential learning, such as internships and work placements (Niyibizi et al., 2018). For example, Law students who participated in an internship programme in South Africa mentioned several benefits including confidence in speaking, critical thinking, improved research skills, and a broader understanding of people and society (Cantatore et al., 2021).

Some scholars have also argued that assessments can contribute to better learning outcomes. Students can adapt their learning approaches to meet specific assessment requirements. For example, when students anticipate that assessments will require reproduction rather than the application of facts, they are more likely to adopt a surface learning (memorisation of material/rote learning) approach. Niyibizi et al. (2018), using Bloom's revised taxonomy (remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating) observed in a public university in Africa that teachers inadvertently set

examination questions that required students to use lower levels of cognitive ability:

Out of the 123 examination questions set for Year 1 in two academic years, 114 (92.6%) expected students to operate with lower levels of cognitive abilities, while 9 (7.4%) were for higher levels.

lower 92.6%
higher 7.4%
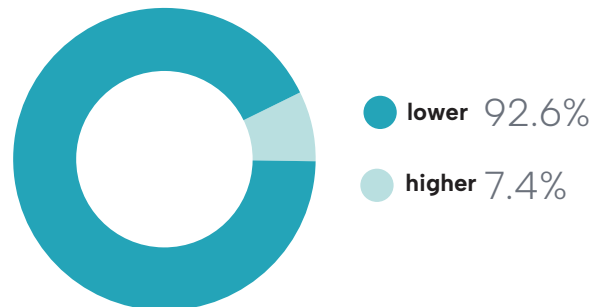
For Year 2, out of 71 questions for the two academic years, 68 (95.8%) were asking students to operate with lower levels of cognitive abilities, while only 3 questions (4.2%) were for higher levels of thinking.
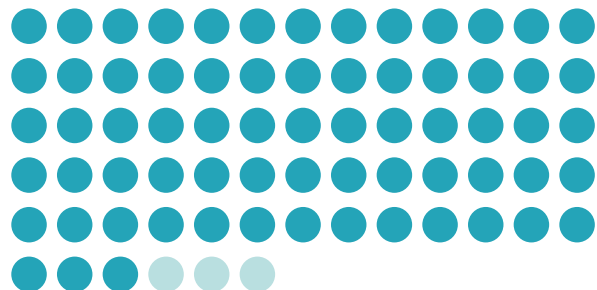
For Year 3, out of 167 questions, 153 (91.6%) were set for lower-order thinking skills, while 14 (8.4%) were for higher-order thinking skills (p. 6).

lower 91.6%
higher 8.4%
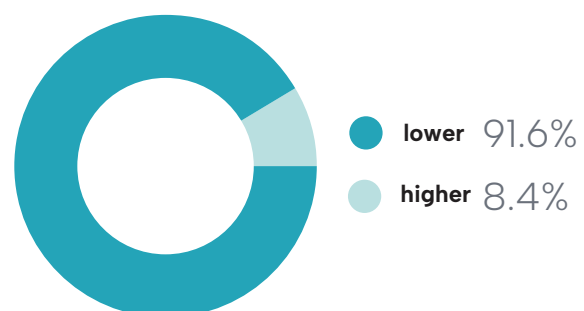
Alumni engagement

Alumni are important assets of any university or college. Education institutions can draw on the expertise, generosity, and networks of their alumni to facilitate students' transition to employment. Alumni can make both material and nonmaterial contributions (Iskhakova et al., 2017). Material support includes financial donations, scholarships for students, and the provision of teaching and learning materials. Non–material support may take many forms. For example, alumni can enhance teaching and learning by providing feedback (e.g., through alumni surveys) on students' expectations and needs. They can also supply *"career information for future students, serve as mentors to young alumni, act as a school's advocate in a lobbying process, provide other volunteer support for funds solicitation and organisational events, and recommend their university to other potential students."* (Iskhakova, et al., 2017, p. 7).

Universities and colleges will maximise alumni benefits if they provide support to facilitate the students' transition into employment. Those students can then give back to their institutions in the future. Also, the institutions could engage alumni directly to provide programmes for students. Research shows that when students have positive learning experiences, they are more likely to support their alma mater (Rust & Uys, 2014). Universities and colleges need to support both alumni and students through sharing of job opportunities, training in job search skills, and networking events.

As an example, to enhance networking for alumni, the African Leadership Academy holds annual gatherings (Indabas) in North, East, West and Southern Africa, as well as in the USA. These gatherings help their alumni to re-connect with one another, share ideas and experiences, and renew their focus on the African continent. During these events, the alumni participate in leadership development activities and collaborate on ventures and projects that impact the continent.

Industry engagement

Scholars argue that an important way to enhance graduates' employability is through a closer working relationship between HEIs and industry (Ishengoma, 2016; Okolie et al., 2020). According to Okunuga and Ajeyalemi (2018), Nigerian graduates lack the relevant skills needed by employers and this is due to a low level of cooperation between these two stakeholders. Effective partnerships draw on the expertise of both HEIs and industry to improve programme delivery, to help students develop competencies required for industry and self-employment (Okolie et al., 2020). In this section, we will discuss types of university – industry partnerships, partnership formation process, benefits and drawbacks, as well as other related themes.

Types of university–industry partnership

University–industry partnerships take many forms. In the model of Ishengoma and Vaaland (2016), four areas of the partnership were highlighted, which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Types of university–industry partnerships

Type of partnership	Description
Education and training	University–industry partnerships take many forms. In the model of Ishengoma and Vaaland (2016), four areas of the partnership were highlighted, which are presented in Table 4.
Research	This encapsulates research carried out for or with a private company, an arrangement to jointly build research facilities, the interchange of research personnel, as well as the loan of equipment and facilities for university research use.
Services and consulting	This includes assisting a university in developing and modernising curricula and programmes aligned with industrial needs. Other examples include industry representation on university boards and committees, participation in students' business presentations and recruitment events, extension services such as testing, calibration, repair services, and simple design modifications. Furthermore, for such partnerships, the industry could make direct investments, such as the construction of student hostels.
Activity-based sponsoring	This includes the sponsorship of prizes, awards, and competitions that involve students and/or faculty, as well as financial support for institutional buildings and other infrastructure.

Partnership formation process

The literature shows different ways for partnership formation. One option which seems most appropriate for university – industry partnerships, involves conducting checks on prospective partners, including pre-existing partners to ensure vision alignment. Pre-existing relationships are important for the success of new partnerships since trust (which is incrementally built as partners repeatedly interact) may already exist between the organisations. Based on the initial checks, a single or multiple prospective partner(s) can be identified for the next step.

Making contact

After the selection of the prospective partner(s), the initiating partner will make contact through emails or phone calls. This initial contact provides an opportunity for the prospective partner(s) to engage internally to decide whether to progress with the partnership proposal.

→

Partnership negotiation

Once the potential partner(s) agree to move the negotiation forward, confidential information will be exchanged (upon the signing of a non-disclosure agreement), and meetings will be arranged to discuss the partnership. Issues to be addressed in these meetings will include purpose and objectives, organisational structure, specific milestones, measures or indicators of success, and resources.

→

Agreement signing

The final stage involves the preparation and signing of a partnership agreement and/or an intellectual property agreement.

Benefits and drawbacks of a partnership

Like any partnership, university–industry partnerships have benefits and drawbacks for both parties (Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016). Table 5 presents some of these benefits and drawbacks.

Table 5. Benefits and drawbacks of university–industry partnerships

Benefits

	University	Industry
Economics	The partnership provides additional income for institutions and researchers through patent or licensing rights and the creation of business opportunities. It also enables universities to contribute directly to local or national economic development.	It develops new processes and products that improve efficiency and spurs business expansion. The partnership also provides an avenue for industry to access public grants and promotes economic growth.
Institutional	It provides space for students and faculty to apply theory in practice using modern technology and equipment for better understanding and curriculum improvement. It increases students' employability and builds researchers' credibility among practitioners. Research projects can lead to journal publications for career progression and the enhancement of the reputation of institutions.	Industry skill requirements can be addressed through partnerships by influencing the curriculum and pedagogy of universities. It enhances capacity and innovation through knowledge and technology transfer.
Social	Service to the community enhances reputation.	Social investment improves branding.

Drawbacks

	University	Industry
Deviation from mission/objectives	Dissemination of knowledge may be delayed due to confidentiality agreements. Faculty members may become overburdened, which can affect teaching and learning. Universities may lose experienced faculty members to the industry as partnerships create job opportunities with better service conditions.	Bureaucratic processes may slow the commercialisation of technology, which can affect the realisation of objectives. It can also present a financial burden because of high administrative overhead.
Quality issues	The partnership can affect the types of research questions addressed and reduce the quantity and quality of basic research. There can also be biased reporting by researchers sponsored by companies in favour of positive experimental results relating to company products.	Some contract work can produce low-quality output.
Conflicts	There may be a conflict over whether to share research evidence based on the findings – some parties may not want it shared, while others may want it made public.	Intellectual property disputes and patenting disagreement.
Risks	Delays in the patent process may cause technology to become obsolete. It may compromise research ethics and the integrity of the academic investigation.	Partnerships have a high failure rate and technology sometimes fails to perform to specification.

Source: Adapted from Ankrah & AL-Tabbaa (2015)

Enablers of partnership

The importance of partnership between university and industry is established in the literature (Ankrah & AL-Tabbaa, 2015). Given this, it is crucial to ensure that partnerships succeed for both parties to realise the full benefits. In this section, we will discuss some of the factors that enhance university–industry partnerships. These factors relate to institution, relationship, framework, and proximity.

Institutional factors

Overall, the quality of a partnership strongly relies on the resources that potential partners can provide. Key resources include finance, time, staff, and equipment (Rybnicek & Königsgruber, 2019). For a successful partnership, issues to agree on range from making resources available, to the commitment of partners, and proper planning.

In addition, the organisational structure plays a key role. For instance, the complex and bureaucratic structure of some universities can inhibit success because they are opposed to the more flexible management framework of the industry. Scholars recommend the application of project management to ensure smooth coordination and communication between partners. As part of the initial discussions, formal roles and responsibilities should be identified and communicated.

Willingness to change is another important success factor. That means, readiness to adapt to different circumstances and ways of doing things and being receptive to new ideas. Partners' ability to learn and get a better understanding of one another is crucial. When universities and industries work together, sharing expertise and using feedback for improvements, they both benefit (Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016).

Relationship factors

One of the key ingredients for a positive relationship is communication, which should happen at both management and operation levels. This must include regular interactions, giving feedback and sharing information with partners proactively. Some of the channels of communication include email, telephone, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc. Choosing a communication channel should be considered carefully to ensure all parties have the resources and competencies for effective use.

Commitment is also considered important for building positive relationships. It refers to the extent to which a partner identifies with the goals of the partnership and their willingness to invest resources (Rybnicek & Königsgruber, 2019). It is particularly necessary to commit top management, to ensure that the needed resources are provided (Ankrah & AL-Tabbaa 2015).

Trust is seen by many scholars as crucial for successful partnerships. When there is mistrust, partners are less likely to share relevant information, which can hinder progress. Therefore, partners need to spend more time on building mutual trust. It is suggested that lessons from past experiences in working together and with similar organisations should guide present relationships. Another option is to work on smaller projects and learn partners' ways of working, before considering a bigger project.

Lastly, organisational culture refers to "the mutual understanding within an organisation about how members should perceive, think and feel about their roles for organisational success" (Rybnicek & Königsgruber, 2019, p. 232). Culture differs from one organisation to the other but plays a crucial role in partnerships. Therefore, partners must consider cultural gaps carefully and be ready to adjust and accommodate other ways of doing things.

For example, there may be different terminologies for the same thing. Therefore, partners need to establish a common language early in the project (Canhoto et al., 2016). Linked with culture are shared goals/objectives. One area that can bring tension between industry and universities is going public with findings. For instance, researchers from universities want to publish right away for career progression and institutional reputation while the industry may want to withhold findings from competitors. Therefore, such matters need careful consideration, to ensure that partnerships are mutually beneficial to all parties.

Framework factors

The prevailing environment for partnerships such as government policies, contractual as well as intellectual property rights is important for the success of partnerships. Governments have enormous influence to facilitate or hinder partnerships. For instance, tax incentives for industries that work with education institutions to address economic challenges could facilitate partnerships. Also, efficient public services to ensure easy access to relevant documentation and a fair adjudication process are important. Furthermore, the industry is more likely to invest in a partnership if there is the market potential for the research products (Ankrah & AL-Tabbaa 2015).

In addition to the government's role, how contracts and intellectual property rights are negotiated is important. In the early stage of negotiations, there is a need for clarity and consensus on the details of the arrangements, to prevent later disputes (Attia, 2015). Clarity also builds trust and helps partners to monitor progress.

Geographical proximity

The proximity of industry and HEIs have been identified to facilitate the partnership. For example, proximity can reduce the cost of travelling for researchers and students. In addition, proximity facilitates face-to-face communication, which is preferable for most people because of its relevance, including building trust.

iii. Measurement frameworks

The importance of career services programmes for students' employability has led to an increasing commitment from HEIs and other stakeholders to invest in career services departments. To demonstrate the quality and value of their services to stakeholders (including students, faculty, alumni, and employers), career services practitioners are required to use meaningful measures (Dodd et al., 2021).

Measures for career services programmes

To lay a solid foundation for driving maximum impact for career services programmes, a Theory of Change and its associated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework should be developed, and success measures (performance indicators) formulated. The measurement framework is intended to operationalise the Theory of Change and provide a consistent approach to Monitoring and Evaluation so that sufficient data and information will be captured to review the progress and impact of programmes.

The overall impact that HEIs want from their career services is increased graduate employability (Pitan, 2016). There are three outcomes to support the achievement of this impact:

a Effective career services systems in HEIs.

b Students acquire the required skills to transition smoothly into employment.

c An experiential learning experience for students.

Each outcome has a set of expected objectives that must be achieved over time to address the issues identified.

Data sources and collection tools

Within HEIs, there are several tools and data sources often used to assess the quality of careers and employability service provision. These include the Alumni Survey Tool l, the Career Services Impact Survey Tool, the Internship Assessment Survey Tool, the Career Readiness Competencies Checklist, and the Career Centre Quality Benchmark as explained below.

Alumni Survey Tool

The Alumni Survey Tool is used to collect data from alumni. The survey is sent to alumni every year to better understand their career outcomes and the impact of their HEI experience on their professional lives. The questions focus on their current situation in terms of their employment status, usefulness, and relevance of career development training in their present careers – including job satisfaction. The feedback from alumni helps HEIs to improve their planning, how they assist current students, and how they support a career-ready education.

The Alumni Survey has been used by HEIs across different geographies (Odame et al., 2021). For example, Bolaane et al. (2010) studied graduates of vocational training programmes, including catering and construction. They found that even though graduates mentioned the usefulness of their training and acquired skills, most of them were in temporal jobs with low pay. They argued that the problem was due to limited career services and a mismatch between course content and industry needs. Similarly, Odame et al. (2021) surveyed visually impaired graduates of a public university in Ghana and found inadequate support for transition to employment.

Career Services Impact Survey Tool

This Impact Survey Tool is sent to current students to find out if and how career services have impacted them. It is focused on their experiences and level of satisfaction with HEI career services. For example, Ogbuanya and Chukwuedo (2017) surveyed undergraduate students in two public universities in Nigeria to understand the impact of their mentorship programmes. They reported positive impacts on students' career planning, job search skills, career commitment and self-efficacy. Additionally, Ntim (2014) found in his study of undergraduate students in private universities in Ghana that institutions provide opportunities for students' feedback on programmes, but the feedback does not reflect adequately in the redesigning of programmes.

Internship Assessment Survey Tool

Efforts to assess the employment and career-related outcomes for HEI graduates are not new. Many institutions undertake these efforts in various ways, to differing degrees, and at different points in time. As an example, in response to the concerns and circumstances, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) established some standards and protocols to guide HEIs in collecting and disseminating vital information regarding the immediate career outcomes of their graduates (NACE Professional Standards for College & University Career Services, Revised 2019). This Career Readiness Checklist is a set of eight competencies associated with career readiness that students should master by the time they graduate.

Also, according to the ILO (2013), in addition, to discipline-specific competencies, graduates need to possess general skills including learning to learn, communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Furthermore, Prikshat et al. (2019) proposed the WRICM as outlined in Table 2. These examples and more could help HEIs and students to assess their career readiness of the students.

Career Readiness Competencies Checklist

Efforts to assess the employment and career-related outcomes for HEI graduates are not new. Many institutions undertake these efforts in various ways, to differing degrees, and at different points in time. As an example, in response to the concerns and circumstances, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) established some standards and protocols to guide HEIs in collecting and disseminating vital information regarding the immediate career outcomes of their graduates (NACE Professional Standards for College & University Career Services, Revised 2019). This Career Readiness Checklist is a set of eight competencies associated with career readiness that students should master by the time they graduate.

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Career Centre Quality Benchmarks

The use of quality benchmarks in HEIs' career services is intended to facilitate excellence in the creation, maintenance, and effective delivery of programmes, resources, and services. These quality benchmarks reflect dimensions of career services that affect programme performance and quality. The benchmarks should address ten areas:

Mission and Strategy

Financial Resources

Alumni Relations

Programme Components

Facilities

Programme Evaluation, Assessment, and Research

Organisation, Management, and Leadership

Technology

Human Resources

Employer Relations

iv. Summary

Universities and colleges are required to help students develop employability skills. To do this effectively, these institutions need to better understand the skills requirements of employers in their target markets, and the relevant career services approach they should use to help their students develop these skills to enhance their transition into employment.

Over the last century, career service provision has gone through a profound transformation. The current approach (which seeks to incorporate earlier approaches) is the connected community, which involves four main areas: career support and preparation, curriculum and pedagogy, industry engagement, and alumni engagement. Within this connected community, HEIs take a broader perspective on career provision. This is to ensure that relevant stakeholders are brought into the conversation to provide effective support to students and alumni.HEIs need to track progress of the support provided to students. . There are several tools and data sources to assess the quality of career service initiatives, including the Alumni Survey Tool, Career Services Impact Survey Tool, Internship Assessment Survey Tool, Career Readiness Competencies Checklist, and Career Centre Quality Benchmark.

b. Knowledge and evidence from industry engagement

To broaden our understanding of the findings from the desktop research focusing on the industry's role in enhancing career services outcomes within HEIs, the authors sought insights from key industry stakeholders who have experience engaging with the HEIs and/or working with young graduates. Interactions with the selected CEOs and HR professionals from Ghana, Rwanda, and Burkina Faso were centred around three main areas/themes:

i ✓ Experience engaging young graduates

ii ✓ Industry partnerships with HEIs

iii ✓ Measurement frameworks

For each theme, we probed further to explore ways in which both HEIs and industry could support the employability outcomes of young people in Africa.

i. Experience engaging young graduates

Perceptions and expectations of current graduates

From our interactions with industry stakeholders, the relevant skills needed to enhance productivity at the workplace are not what graduates typically enter the workforce with. According to them, most of the graduates churning out of the universities are more theoretically oriented. As such, they struggle to apply what they have learned in school on the job. An HR Manager observed that:

> Graduates understand what they learned in the classroom but cannot apply it at work. I think that has been the general perspective. It makes the induction of these young people quite longer than expected.

For most employers, graduates have disconnected views of the job market, and this affects their approach or attitude to work. Employers encouraged HEIs to be intentional about creating platforms or opportunities to expose students to the industry early on in their tertiary education:

> They have a very academic view of the workplace, which is not the reality, but those that tend to thrive are those that demonstrate good people skills and have some internship experience (HR Director from Ghana).

Although the general experiences or perceptions of young graduates were not too encouraging, industry stakeholders admitted that they also had a role to play in supporting universities to prepare students for work. Some have put in place initiatives or programmes to support students and graduates develop the right skills for work through graduate training programmes, internships, capacity-building workshops, and mentorship, amongst others.

The insights shared by the professionals in the industry on their expectations of young graduates suggested that businesses required graduates to demonstrate some value-adding skillset which they ought to have developed in school. These employers believe that when these young graduates come to the workplace with some basic skills and industry knowledge, it is easier to further train and work with them.

Industry needs and requirements (skills and competencies employer need)

The skills and competencies employers expect young graduates to demonstrate before transitioning to the workplace are quite similar across different industries. Having the required technical skills for a particular job is important to employers. However, graduates who have soft skills are more desirable to most employers than those who have only technical skills. These employers believe that technical skills can be learned on the job, whereas soft skills are difficult to learn or be taught.

The employers we interviewed admitted that not a lot is required for an entry–level role. However, basic skills such **as effective formal communication** – both written and verbal (being able to express yourself and articulate your ideas), **phone and email etiquettes, critical thinking/analytic skills, paying attention to detail, proactiveness** (someone who does not just sit and wait to be told what to do), **problem–solving, business development,** and **digital skills** (e.g., the use of Microsoft Office suite) are qualities expected from young graduates.

Although employers expect graduates to be able to demonstrate these skills before they join the workforce, that is hardly the case. As such, when employers engage graduates who demonstrate these competencies, they are likely to do what it takes to hire them:

> As a CEO of a business, if I meet an outstanding person, no matter how full my organogram is, I will not want to let that person go. I would keep the person in mind, and I would try and reach out to them once there is a vacancy. (CEO from Rwanda)

One important quality that all employers mentioned as a non–negotiable skill when recruiting or engaging young graduates is having a **positive attitude:** the willingness to learn and go the extra mile, the ability to work well in a team, commitment, discipline, open–mindedness, and flexibility. Students or young graduates **demonstrating confidence, emotional intelligence, business acumen, and ethics** were also important to most industry stakeholders:

> We do not care about technical skills; it is our soft skills. When we are recruiting, we are looking for trainable people. I have recruited graduates who were top of their class. The best students! Some with a GPA of 3.98, yet they were fired. Some were fired because they did not have the character to back their competence. (HR Partner from Ghana.)

It was interesting to know that some employers expect young graduates to have some **management skills**; the ability to manage themselves and others, to manage their time, to work with little supervision, and to manage their relationships with others.
The skills and competencies employers highlighted align with their company values/culture and business strategies. As such, while looking for talent, they pay attention to those who can meet such requirements and can add value to their business. Employers expect graduates to demonstrate most of the above skills to further train them for their respective work.

Forecast on future graduate skills/competency requirements

We engaged employers to share their thoughts on skills that would be needed for the future of work – skills that may be an added advantage for young graduates to develop now. Most employers believe that graduates who can **adapt to change** would survive in tomorrow's world because things change all the time in the world of work, meaning new skills will be needed too:

> Most banks in the West are run as digital banks – which means there are no physical presence or branches anywhere. Everything is in the cloud or virtual. So as a graduate preparing for work, how do you prepare for an environment like this which is becoming our normal? (HR Business Partner from Ghana)

Although most of the skills highlighted above (in the industry needs and requirement section) would still be relevant in the future, employers advised graduates to hone their skills in **project management, digital technologies/capabilities,** and **data analysis** to boost their employability now and in the future.

ii. HEI and industry partnerships

Many educational institutions and industries in Africa have for a long time been operating in silos. However, the existence of such institutions and industry is dependent on each other, since the students taught in educational institutions need to be equipped with the skills required by industry to enable the graduates to gain sustainable and impactful employment. Therefore, change is needed urgently, to enable mutually beneficial collaboration between industry and educators to support the employability of young people preparing for work.

Industry perspectives regarding collaborating with HEI's

There were many suggestions from employers regarding how HEIs could contribute effectively to improving the employability outcomes of young graduates.

For some industry stakeholders, the curricula in many African universities do not address the needs of employers. Therefore, they recommend that the HEIs engage with them to better understand employers' needs and then **redesign their curricula to incorporate compulsory job readiness programmes/modules** that prepare students for the job market:

> I think there must be a mindset shift in the world of academia, to say that whatever you are training your graduates for, it should be relevant for the people who will employ them. (CEO from Ghana)

These employers believe that having such modules embedded early in the students' tertiary education would help them to develop skills that are relevant to work. The employers recommended that the institutions use real-life scenarios from the industry as case studies. HEIs could also set projects/competitions for the students, request students to prepare and deliver presentations, as well as collaborate with industry to design or improve the programmes, modules, and curricula to develop the competencies of the students.

Additionally, some employers attributed the unemployment of young people to the calibre of lecturers teaching students in the universities:

> Most of the lecturers you find in our universities today are very academic, without any industry experience. So, they churn out students who are also academic and do not understand current industry trends. (CEO from Ghana)

Suggested solutions provided by some of the employers include inviting industry representatives to periodically lecture on certain topics, giving students a practical overview and exposing them to real-world scenarios. The relevant industry experience that lecturers should ideally have (in addition to the academic experience) could also be captured in the person specifications and selection criteria during the recruitment of academic staff. Furthermore, HEIs could provide relevant staff training, continued professional development and work with employers to provide opportunities for academic staff to experience mini sabbaticals in industry.

View on career services in HEIs

There were many suggestions from employers regarding how HEIs could effectively contribute to improving the employability outcomes of young graduates through career guidance and services.

Students can be **supported with internships** through the universities' career services provision. Instead of students looking for these opportunities all by themselves, HEIs can partner with organisations to facilitate internship placements for students.

A few employers also suggested that HEIs should go the extra mile **to share expectations/learning outcomes with organisations hosting their students for internships**. This can be done by outlining the skills students should have gained at the end of their internship, which will help to track the students' progress and make the experience worthwhile for them. These employers believed that when universities set such expectations, there is clarity of students' needs. This helps employers assign relevant tasks for the students during their internships and ensures that the students develop some skills for work.

Another suggestion from some industry professionals was that exposing students to the industry early and not waiting until they are in their final year, prepares them better for work. Initiatives like **job shadowing, mentorship, mock interviews, informational sessions** with industry professionals, **organising career fairs and industry talks or seminars** allow students to engage with their future recruiters or employers to know the career options or pathways to explore even before they transition to work.

In an interview with a Manager from Ghana on the support HEIs could provide their students to enhance their employability, she recommended that universities have:

> A functional career and guidance office with dedicated and competent staff who have the industry experience to support students with their career development and facilitate employer engagements on behalf of the university.

Employers also commented on the quality of guidance and support that students receive when applying for jobs. They encouraged HEIs, especially the career departments, to **teach students how to write CVs, Cover Letters, and prepare for interviews**.

While exploring other creative ways that HEIs could support students with their employability skills to reduce graduate unemployment, there were thoughts around encouraging students to take initiatives such as **volunteer programmes, community activities, and on-campus jobs,** amongst others:

> Allow students to engage with the staff and faculty working in various departments: HR, Marketing, Finance, etc. to shadow or work with them while in school to get some work experience. (HR professional from Kenya)

Lastly, some employers suggested that universities that do not have the right resources to provide relevant training and support for their students could partner with external trainers or organisations that have the resources and experience to equip the students with the right employability skills for work.

Existing partnerships

HEIs and industry partnerships were not foreign to these employers. However, very few employers had any formal engagement (i.e., signed Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] or agreement) with universities that focused on partnerships. The common types of partnerships were informal – ad hoc and sometimes not via direct engagement with the university leadership/staff but rather via engagement through the students.

The few organisations that did not have any form of partnership with HEIs had either not been approached by HEIs or had not been successful in establishing a partnership with them due to certain factors which will be highlighted in the barriers to partnerships section below. It is also possible that the non–existence of partnerships is because those organisations had not approached HEIs.

For the organisations that had some existing relationship with HEIs, their partnerships constituted engagements around **hosting students for internships, and company visits, providing information for students' research work/dissertation, facilitating workshops/training on employability skills, guest speaking, and career advising.**

Employers admitted that both HEIs and industry could do better to improve the already existing partnerships and establish new ones to foster employability outcomes for young graduates.

Barriers to partnerships

Many factors that hinder employers from establishing partnerships with HEIs were highlighted. These included: **the absence of dedicated HEI staff or offices responsible for facilitating employer partnerships, HEIs often not following up or through with employers after the latter reaches out, and some HEIs making outrageous demands before agreeing to forge a relationship with organisations.**

For some of the employers, their experience of working with HEIs has been difficult because of the **complex hierarchical structures in most universities**, especially the public ones, and some **HEIs fail to keep their end of the bargain or partnership terms.**

There were also frustrations from the industry about often having to proactively approach the universities for collaboration, rather than it being seen as a mutually beneficial engagement.

Building partnerships

As daunting as HEIs may think fostering partnerships with industry may be, employers see this relationship building to be very simple. The industry stakeholders interviewed were keen to help and support students. However, they require HEIs to come to them with a very clear plan and approach, and then they would engage with them:

> If HEIs want something, they can just send us an email, or drop a letter, and from this, we try to see what we can do together. Just make sure we have the right information. (CEO from Burkina Faso)

Like the partnership formation process proposed by Ishengoma and Vaaland (2016), the industry stakeholders interviewed recommended the following steps on how HEIs could connect and build partnerships with employers:

- **First, define what you are looking to get out of the relationship and set goals.**
- **Define the terms of the relationship.**
- **Define metrics to measure the success of the relationship.**
- **Map out organisations to collaborate with, based on the goals set.**
- **Reach out to the HR department of the selected companies and engage (introduce your university/programme offerings, calibre of students and alumni and the partnership type(s).**
- **Connect with recruiting firms too – they have access to most employers.**

Some CEOs and HR professionals we engaged with also added that HEIs could leverage the initiatives and programmes they organise by inviting employers to support or partner (e.g., as guest lecturers, guests at graduation ceremonies, to participate in career fairs, mentorship, and job shadowing programmes, among others) to build some form of relationship with industry stakeholders.

Additionally, HEIs could leverage the network of their staff/faculty and students to establish partnerships with the industry. Following up on alumni to know their place of work would also broaden the scope of such networks and enable HEIs to have more engagement.

Building and nurturing partnerships with industry requires having a structure or plan in place, it does not just happen. Engaging industry experts in programmes and initiatives by the universities helps to establish these partnerships.

Value or benefit of partnerships to boost employability for young people

From our interactions with some industry stakeholders, they are certain that if partnerships with HEIs were to be well nurtured and managed, there would be many benefits that both parties could enjoy. For example, employers' benefit from the **exposure and visibility** created for their brands, which sometimes makes them employers of choice for students. **Business opportunities** for firms are also generated from these partnerships, especially through training. **Regular updates** from HEIs to keep employers abreast of what is happening in the educational institution could also feed the knowledge base of employers.

Furthermore, the impact these partnerships have on **students' employability** outcomes could be invaluable. Many employers shared their thoughts, and one theme that ran through most of the feedback was **direct access to top talent** for their organisation. Employers value university partnerships where there is a pipeline for candidates with the right skills and knowledge to add value to their organisation. As such, HEIs should show or advertise the skills and competencies their students have, for easy collaboration:

> You can go to an employer and say, can you give us a few challenges that you are facing in your organisation? Run a contest at school to solve these real-life challenges. Collaborate with employers to work with the participating students. That is a way to show the calibre of students you have. (CEO from Rwanda)

Others have also **boosted their company brands and visibility** through university partnerships. Some confirmed that their affiliation with certain universities has attracted the right talent to their organisations and made them an employer of choice for students and young graduates. This makes it very easy for employers to reach out to these universities to request the calibre of students they need for internships, projects, national service, or full-time opportunities.

For some employers, the **impact of their engagements on students in the future** – through the experiences from internships, workshops/seminars, advising, and mentorship, among others, contributed to the value and benefits of these HEI-industry partnerships:

> I engaged about ten students who wanted insights into the art industry. I noticed that about two years later, two of the students had started their businesses. I was happy I contributed to their career success. (CEO from Burkina Faso)

They found such engagements to be more fulfilling and impactful, hence advised HEIs to be proactive and creative with industry partnerships to support the employability of their students and alumni.

iii. Measurement frameworks

Employers use data and evidence while making important decisions such as hiring and partnerships. To ensure that employers attract and hire the right talent for their organisations, there are some assessment tools and indicators they have adopted in selecting university partners and young graduates.

Indicators for selecting HEIs/Partners

Although universities play a role in attracting employers to partner or hire from their student/graduate pool, employers admitted that students and young graduates are assessed based on their fit to company culture, skills, and competencies they demonstrate as individuals, and not entirely because of the university they attended or graduated from.

When probed further to share any indicators they are likely to use in selecting HEIs to partner with or hire, they outlined some key points.

HEIs that are proactive about preparing their students for work, that is, curricula that **equip students with skills for work** are attractive to employers who are looking to engage universities:

> The educational curriculum must be a fusion of both theoretical and practical or hands-on training. The schools must have internship programmes that create opportunities for students to learn from the industry before they graduate. (CEO from Ghana)

Similarly, an HR Manager from Burkina Faso stressed:

> The quality of programmes and activities designed by the university to prepare students for work is one selection factor for me.

Employers are interested to know the programmes or initiatives that have been designed to support students early in their education:

> We would partner with a university when we know the graduates coming out of that university are good potential candidates for work. (HR Manager from Rwanda)

They measure the output of these career support services in HEIs through the **quality of students/alumni churned out of the university, high job placement rates, and the positive impact or success stories of students and alumni**. These are all measurement frameworks or indicators employers highlighted.

Feedback from other employers/industries about students from specific universities was another factor in selecting a university to partner with. Employers want to know where their competitors are recruiting from and those competitors' experience of working with these students/alumni. They also compare the performance of employees at the workplace:

> What will attract us also is that we have worked with students from various universities for some time and we know what some students can do as compared to other institutions. (HR professional from Ghana)

The **brand or reputation of the university** plays a significant role in selecting the kind of HEIs to partner with or hire from. Some employers are strategic about the people to hire for certain positions in the organisation. These strategic hires help bring businesses and contracts to the organisation, as they tap into their network. As such, hiring graduates from universities with the right networks has added value to the business.

Although the size of the student population plays a role in determining the university to partner with (e.g., a larger size may provide a bigger pool to source talent), the **ease of access to establish partnerships or relationships with HEIs** is what every employer seeks from HEIs. Is there a dedicated office or professionals coordinating partnerships with the industry? How quickly would I get a response to my requests when I reach out to a university? These are questions that employers ask when looking to engage HEIs.

A few referred to the **quality of academic faculty** that the HEIs recruit to teach students. It was interesting to know that some check the profiles of faculty that are providing teaching and learning to students. For them, faculty should have some industry experience to connect what is being taught in the classroom to industry.

Although it is not a guarantee that all students/alumni from universities with these attributes or indicators will have the relevant skills for work, employers believe that HEIs with these career support systems help foster the career development of their students and prepare them for work.

Performance measurement

Like the indicators employers use to select the HEIs to engage with, there are some frameworks to measure the performance of graduates. These graduates are assessed by metrics based on the employers' needs. The employers refer to the skills and competencies they expect graduates to demonstrate at the workplace and based on these expectations, they design tools and scenarios to test the graduates' competencies and fit for their organisations' cultures.

The **CV layout and content** of a student or graduate are one of the basic measures of skills and competencies used by most of the HR professionals we interacted with:

> Us, if we want to measure a graduate's presentation skills, we will first look at their CV. How a CV looks will say a lot about a person's presentation skills. Are there typos or grammatical errors? It tells me about your writing skills. What has the student done outside the classroom? (CEO from Rwanda)

Aptitude tests and case study scenarios are some other tools that employers use to measure the performance of young graduates when recruiting. Employers also assess the experience and capabilities of graduates through **behavioural and skills–based interviews**:

We have open questions to detect some of the students' competencies and to understand how they think. (Global HR Manager from Kenya)

c. Knowledge and evidence from HEI case studies

The preceding section highlighted insights from engagement with industry stakeholders covering three main areas: experience engaging with young graduates; HEIs and industry partnerships; and measurement frameworks. In this section, findings from case studies of four HEIs **(i.e., Ashesi University, Kepler University, Strathmore University and Warwick University)** are presented.
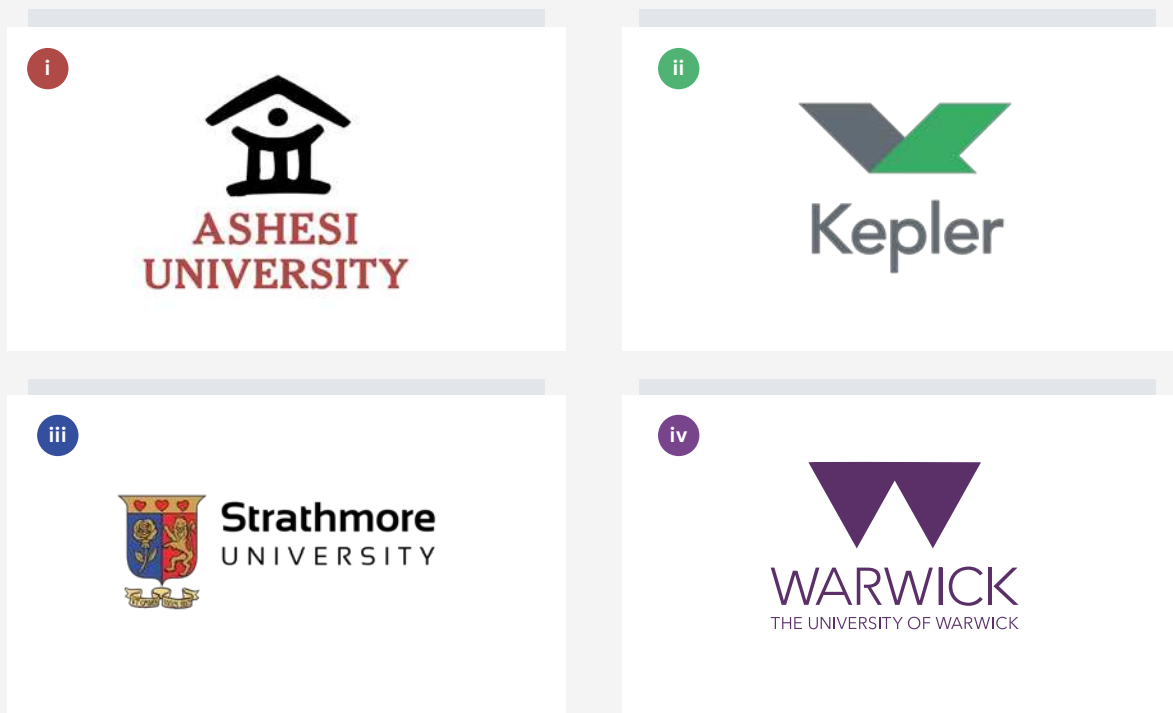
As mentioned in the methodology in section 2, we purposefully selected HEIs with evidence of effective career services and that had existing partnerships with the organisations conducting the research. Even though the research focuses on HEIs in Africa, we included Warwick University in the UK, to understand how our findings may compare across geographic contexts.

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Ashesi University

Overview of institution

Ashesi University (Ashesi), established in 2002 and currently located in Berekuso in the Eastern Region of Ghana, is a private, non-profit university with a mission to propel an African renaissance by educating **ethical, entrepreneurial leaders**. The university combines a rigorous multidisciplinary **liberal arts** core with major degree programmes in Computer Science, Management Information Systems, Business Administration, and Engineering. A student-led honour code, integrated community service, diverse internships, and real-world projects prepare students to develop innovative solutions for the challenges facing their communities, countries, and the continent at large with a strong inclination towards doing things in new and improved ways.

Ashesi is recognised as one of the finest universities in Africa, with a proven record of accomplishment in fostering ethical leadership, critical thinking, entrepreneurial mindset, and the ability to solve complex problems. The quest to impact their environment positively has led to the design of a curriculum that inculcates experiential learning through hands-on, project-based and industry partnerships driven by strong career services.

ASHESI UNIVERSITY

Structure of career services unit/department

The Career Services Department (CSD) at Ashesi is well structured with clearly defined roles in a formalised organogram presented in Figure 2. The structure ensures that all stakeholders – students, alumni, management, faculty, employers, and career services staff work together to ensure that students are equipped with all the employable skills required for the job market.

Figure 2. Ashesi career services

ASHESI CAREER SERVICES
Departmental Chart

Executive Head
Dean of Students and Community Affairs

Head of department
Director of Career Services

Senior Supervisor
Senior Assistant Director of Career Services

Supervisor
Assistant Director of Career Services

Supervisor
Assistant Director of Career Services

Officer
Career Development Officer

National Service Personnel

Career services approach

Ashesi University's CSD does splendid work. For this to happen, many factors must be considered. **Career services are positioned as a university–wide programme with many identifiable stakeholders who need to be engaged to achieve success**. These stakeholders include students, faculty, and management. There is also a strong collaboration with industry and alumni. The Ashesi career services approach encompasses career preparation and support, faculty engagement for curriculum development, alumni engagement, and industry engagement.

Career preparation and support

The CSD does different things to help students achieve success. In terms of soft skills development, Ashesi has a career curriculum that runs from the first year to the fourth/final year and at each stage, they have different workshops targeted at the particular year group and their needs at that level. For example, in the first year, they focus on self–reflection, CV writing, basic work immersion, or job shadowing which will help the students to get a foundational understanding of what happens at the workplace. This helps to start conversations with students, for example about the careers they can consider after school.

In the second and third years, the CSD focuses on providing the students with interview skills training, business etiquette, and how to leverage their social media presence on professional platforms (such as LinkedIn) for career development, and networking skills, amongst others. In the fourth/final year, the University has exit strategies for the students, called the fourth–year exit plan, to help them transition successfully from school to work. Examples of what is available at this level include job search strategies, final CV building or editing, managing certain nuances at the workplace, and more. Dedicated career advisors are assigned to each year group to work full–time with students to provide them with all the resources and exploratory opportunities they need at every stage.

The University provides funding through the Ashesi Entrepreneurship Fund, to help students practice the skills developed. For example, the Ashesi Start–up Launched, formerly Ashesi Venture Accelerator, is a student–led accelerator that was set up to support student–run businesses. This accelerator provides students with the resources and funding that they will require in the early stages of their businesses, to help them to grow into full–fledged companies. Ventures accepted into the accelerator can be at any level of maturity, from simple ideas to existing businesses.

image by Charlotte May via pexels.com

Faculty engagement for curriculum development

Many approaches have been employed to engage the faculty at Ashesi to contribute to the CSD's work and to support the employability of the students. It is noteworthy that the engagement of faculty who can drive the employability agenda for Ashesi begins with recruiting faculty who have a blend of experiences – they know the theory and have also practiced or related to the practice.

In the context of course design, Ashesi faculty intentionally inculcate components that can enhance students' understanding and capacity to apply. As a form of pedagogical approach, most faculty blend theory with practical applications, which includes relating to real-life cases to enable students to see the relevance of the theory. For example, every programming course has a project(s) that requires students to apply all that they have learned in the course. Therefore, it is not about learning programming on the white board or paper – actual coding happens. The faculty also intentionally communicate some aspects of industrial behaviour and expectations to the students. For example, humility and bullying in the workplace.

Additionally, project-based learning in which the course/learning process is structured as a project is used. In this approach, students push themselves and seek help to understand and apply concepts to execute the project. Also, the final project is conducted individually or in teams and engages the student to apply the concepts to implement. Some learning assessment activities are organised not only to turn in final deliverables that test technical aspects but also to promote teamwork and train students to develop presentation and report-writing skills. These activities are augmented by field trips that help expose students to practical systems and equipment as well as what is happening out in the community.

Furthermore, the Capstone project implementation process that emphasises real-life project management mechanisms allows students to synthesise knowledge from various domains to solve a problem or investigate a research question. The faculty also encourages potential industry partners to bring their problems to be solved by students in the context of Capstone.

Lastly, the CSD allows faculty to link students with opportunities. They provide feedback to faculty formally and periodically, to update faculty on the impact of their work on the students' employability and ways in which the faculty may require improvement or retooling. Faculty in turn use this information to redesign for improvement if needed or to maintain the good components that produce satisfactory results. CSD also sends work-related opportunities to the faculty who then recommend the students that have the skills to undertake the given project(s).

Alumni engagement

Apart from the firm grounding given to the alumni in the various facets of employability while they were students, the CSD continues to support them even after they leave Ashesi. The engagement at this stage is about staying connected with the alumni to provide them with the necessary networks and connections with potential employers that may lead to job placements.

Firstly, Ashesi operates an online portal called "College Central Network" which is used to engage students, alumni, and employers. When students graduate, their details are not taken off the portal. Instead, a special provision is made for them to engage through the College Central Network so they can remain informed on time about job opportunities and build a relationship with registered employers who may post job vacancies they may have. Also, the doors of the CSD are open to the alumni who may contact them at any time to seek support.

Secondly, Ashesi has a very strong entrepreneurship architecture that provides training to students while they are in the university as well as other support opportunities when they graduate. All Ashesi students take the *Foundations in Design and Entrepreneurship* course in the first year, which teaches them how to turn their ideas into viable business ventures when they begin their major courses. There is also the Ashesi Entrepreneurship Fund which invests in (student and) alumni's ideas. Furthermore, the Ashesi Venture Incubator is a one-year incubation programme that provides alumni with funding and mentorship to grow their start-ups.

Finally, there is the continuous tracking of where the Ashesi graduates are – whether in graduate school or the world of work. This way, those who are not currently placed in jobs can be identified and engaged appropriately.

Industry engagement

The CSD has been able to keep the relationship with the industry, in that, many employers see the value in the students that graduate from Ashesi University. This makes it easy for industries to stay connected with the institution. A Career Fair is organised once a year which is part of helping students to get into industries. At the Fair, employers engage with students on campus to introduce students to internships and job opportunities that students can take advantage of. Students also get the opportunity of being interviewed and participate in lightning pitches. These experiences verge on simulation of what students will go through when looking for jobs after their graduation. This exposure also allows them to build confidence in themselves as well as have an idea of what employers are looking for, and what skillsets are required for their dream jobs.

Besides, the work of the CSD is driven by data. The CSD collects feedback from employers on how the department is doing, how the students are faring, and the kinds of changes the industries recommend. The feedback is taken to the faculties for consideration and implementation. In addition, the CSD organises employers' forums to engage employers once every two years, to consider how the relationship between the institution and the employers can be improved. Furthermore, the Department also considers the current trends in industries and new methods of teaching.

Student engagement strategies

One major strategy adopted to increase student participation and engagement with the CSD is getting the students to realise the importance of the sessions provided by the CSD concerning their future careers. The CSD has also introduced some regulations in their processes to ensure that students patronise the services. For example, before a student is given an introductory letter for an internship, they must have participated in a series of sessions provided by the CSD.

The CSD has a well-developed Career Coaching and Mentorship Training curriculum that runs from the first to final year and during which the various facets of the career-building process and journey are introduced to the students. The herculean task for the CSD is to plan and deliver its programmes without interfering with students' lecture times.

The CSD also has a Career Peer Advising Programme which includes training students to support the Department by interfacing with the student body. Some of their roles include supporting the CSD with social media outreach, dissemination of information to the student community, and holding events on behalf of the CSD (e.g., internship feedback sessions). Also, the CSD creates an approachable environment in its offices, which makes it easier for the students to relate with the CSD staff.

Tools and Framework for Measuring the Effectiveness of career services

In concert with accepted best practices, Ashesi's CSD employs several ways in tracking progress and measure the impact of the work the department does. First, they use an *Internship Assessment Report* to collect feedback from participating employers. According to Ashesi's Director of Career Services, *"The feedback helps the CSD to know how they are faring in terms of the support they offer to students."* Staff from the CSD will visit an internship site to interact with the employer/industry and obtain feedback from both students and the host. In addition, the reports are written by the supervisors based at the employers and these help the CSD to assess itself according to its own learning goals. Furthermore, the CSD is also mandated to fulfil Ashesi's *key performance indicator of having an 80% and above rating for its learning goals.* This is necessary because adequate coverage of the learning goals can be used to measure the extent of the student's preparedness.

There is also the **graduate placement report** which enables the CSD to track the graduates and identify which companies they end up working for after their National Service (a one-year mandatory service provided by graduates from tertiary institutions in Ghana to the state). This enables the CSD to assess whether it is close to satisfying the institutional and departmental key performance indicator which expects that the institution achieves 90% placement for each year group. Finally, the CSD has the **impact assessment**, which allows students, alumni, and employers to assess the performance of the CSD and provide the department with the necessary feedback.

Sustainability of programmes

To sustain the good works of the CSD and to perpetuate its impact, some steps are taken intentionally at Ashesi. Firstly, there is the judicious and accountable use of funds, which encourages the University's management team to continue to invest in their activities. Funding is crucial to the sustainability of their work and care must be taken to keep the funding pipeline active.

Another aspect of sustainability is efficient and multi-faceted relationship management. It is important to keep all stakeholders excited and valued. The Career Services team is motivated about their job, but they realise that they cannot do it alone; they must work with students, faculty, industry, employers, and management.

Finally, the CSD keeps innovating, always finding new ways to achieve its goals. For example, they produced the idea of Career Peer Advisors and its associated recognition scheme, to enable top performers to address various issues including cost. The CSD also then ended up having a category of students who could influence others. Furthermore, some activities are likely to have stalled if the CSD had not innovated in the face of extenuating circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSD moved online quickly. This is especially important because factors that affect graduate employability and systems are dynamic, in general, and it takes agility to match up to the challenges.

Programme success factors

One important success factor is that the CSD has a strong and committed team in the words of the Director of the unit, *"Everyone in the team is interested in students' success."* The team possesses the mentality of supporting students relentlessly and employs the services of mentors who support staff at the CSD to improve their skills to deliver on their tasks. Therefore, Ashesi has a motivated and purpose-oriented Career Services team that is amply supported through **mentoring**.

Another success factor for the CSD is the availability of a committed University Management that is well apprised of the need for such a department and is prepared to support the CSD to success. This also gives the CSD the authority to engage all needed

stakeholders. The linkage between university-wide learning outcomes and key performance indicators for career services has become a workable relationship. This commitment has resulted in the annual provision of funding for the budget required to do the work effectively.

Funding is another success factor. Lack of funding can make the unit unable to perform. However, Ashesi gives the CSD the resources it requires to carry out its programmes. The CSD does not have to spend time trying to raise funds to support its work. Instead, the Department focuses on its main tasks, and this enables the team to be effective.

Furthermore, the CSD keeps innovating to adapt to the constantly changing employability landscape to fulfil its mandate. The need to adopt novel approaches and to discover areas in which efforts should be invested hinges on results from monitoring the outcomes of their activities and programmes. The use of different measurement frameworks helps the CSD to track the successes and shortfalls, to inform action. In the process, the CSD employs different tools such as portals for data collection and analysis.
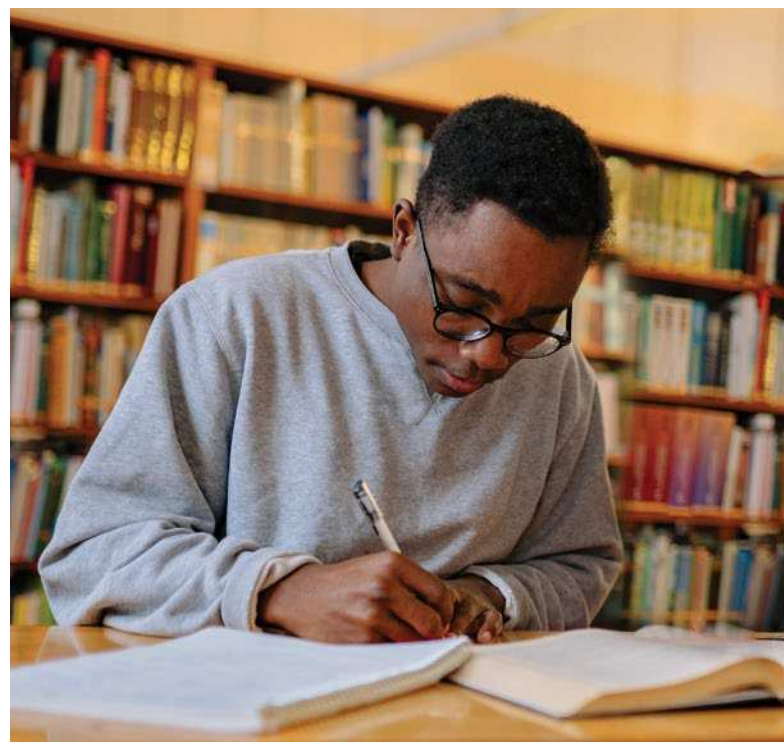

image by Yan Krukau via pexels.com

image by Charlotte May via pexels.com

Challenges and lessons

While the stated measurement indicators and framework align with some of those outlined by Hanover Research (2019) which prepared a well-documented Career Services Measurement Best Practices for the New York Institute of Technology using information from four US universities, they are too few. The frameworks do not give enough in-depth information, such as the number of students who attended interviews at career fairs, and the distribution of this information according to courses and departments. There is, therefore, the need to expand the scope of the measurement framework to capture more information for improvement.

The changing work landscape also needs dynamic adjustments from academia, which sometimes may lag expectations from the industry. Ashesi must determine ahead of time and orchestrate how the University is going to meet both expressed and hidden/perceived/predicted needs of the industry. Also, despite being grounded in the technical aspect as well as transferable skills, new graduates are still sometimes deemed to be inexperienced. Industry wants ready-made graduates, which in some cases may not be practical – graduates may have to work with a system to understand it better. Furthermore, there is a need to streamline industrial engagements. Employers should see the need to play their part. At present, a considerable number of students struggle to obtain internships; the industry ought to be willing to support academia to produce the products they are looking for.

Summary

Based on the case study at Ashesi, career services require institutional will and support, sustainable funding, effective stakeholder engagement, curriculum approach, adaptive monitoring, and evaluation programmes to function properly. Also, effective data collection mechanisms need to be in place to enhance analysis.

Ashesi has shown that a hierarchical or layered form of student engagement is very effective. For example, Career Peer Advisors have a full grasp of the career services processes and activities and are in a better position to influence their fellow students. This feeds into the career services structure to make it successful. Providing the faculty with feedback from industry and other sources to inculcate in their curriculum design also helps to address knowledge deficiencies. If any stakeholder in the loop fails, it can affect the smooth running of the career services curriculum or programme. Therefore, one major success factor is to ensure that the stakeholders are engaged, to produce maximum results.

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Kepler University

Overview of institution

Kepler is a non–profit HEI established in 2004 in Kigali, Rwanda. Kepler aims to create a global network of universities that deliver skills required for emerging economies at affordable cost. Kepler integrates Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Flip TLTY teaching, and other education technology practices into a blended learning curriculum, to lower the cost of higher education without a reduction in academic quality or outcomes. All graduates receive an accredited degree from the United States of America through the competency–based College for America at Southern New Hampshire University.

Structure of career services department

The Career Services Department (CSD) works as a sub–unit under the Academic Department of the University. The Department is made up of five members of staff, as presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Structure of Kepler University Career Services Department

Director of Careers & Alumni Affair

Provide overall leadership and oversee
operation of the department

Career Guidance Manager

Leads the development and implementation of student career support and preparation for the labor market.

Employer Relations Manager

Liaison between the labor market and Kepler and Alumni.

Career Guidance & Internship Coordinator

Coordinate the implementation of student career support and preparation for the labor market.

Employment & Alumni Coordinator

Coordinate employers' and Alumni engagement activities.

Career services approach

The career services approaches are derived from the institution's strategic plans. Since the leadership produces the strategic direction for the organisation, it becomes necessary to understand the need for a CSD and how it fits into the desired outcome of the institution. In doing this, structures, including career support, are set up for achieving the desired outcomes. This is referred to as buy-in on the part of leadership and "the buy-in from the leadership makes the entire process of producing approaches for supporting students' employability even easier." (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler.)

The approaches adopted by the CSD are structured under three fundamental areas. These are: serving as a bridge between the labour market and academics at Kepler, supporting students' career preparations and transition to the labour market, and leading and managing the alumni engagement to facilitate their career progression. These approaches are presented in more detail below:

Career preparation and support

The primary activity performed by the CSD in staying visible to students and supporting them in their preparation for the labour market is conducting a series of orientations. According to the Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, these activities focus on what they do, the kind of services students can obtain, and how the students can seek support. The following outlines the various specific career preparation and support activities carried out to aid students' employability.

First, career choice is introduced to the students. This involves a foundation programme, where students go through six intensive months of training on soft skills, communication skills, technical and technology skills, and business thinking. Also, students are assisted to go through interviews and job shadowing. Students are allowed to interview professionals and conduct research on the market to gather insights into their passion and values. One main event organised to aid this is the career fair. This creates an avenue for students to interact with employers to learn what is going on in the labour market.

During their bachelor's degree, "we have what we call competencies, and for us, if someone has 60 competencies out of 120 and is working towards their bachelor's degree, we can recommend them for internships" (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler).

Nonetheless, before students go for internships, they are enrolled in a job readiness module. This initiative introduces them to the labour market

through activities such as writing Cover Letters and CVs/resumes, interview preparation, and how to navigate through the labour market. The expectation of this module is for the student to have the ability to look for internships. For example, they should be tailoring their application to a particular job and understand the whole job search process (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler).

In affirmation, the Kepler Student Guide President recounted that the modules under job-readiness train students in all important ways of getting and keeping a job. These include an elevator pitch, ethical behaviours of an employee, creating resumes, and getting support to review application documents before submission. "They help you review application materials; they give you feedback, they train you in making quality deliverables, in case you missed that module, or in case you still need that support even though you have passed through the module."

Of all the services that are offered for preparing and supporting students' employability, the Director of the Career Services specified that the job readiness module is the one that the student's sign-up for most quickly each time the 25 slots are advertised. This is likely because a student cannot be recommended by the CSD for an internship unless they attend and pass this module. Also, the students know that after completing the job-readiness module which requires them to build certain competencies, they can apply for an internship and could even earn some money.

When answering the question about which of the programmes or support prepared one adequately for employment, a Kepler graduate readily specified that it was the job-readiness module. According to the graduate, knowing how to create a strong CV, how to write a cover letter, how to excel at interviews and to be professional had prepared him adequately for the working world.

While the CSD does its best to prepare and support students to be employable, there are other ways the unit could do its job better. One way suggested by the Kepler alumni is for the Department to continue to strengthen its partnerships with employers. This is to make sure that a vast pool of employers is available for both students and alumni to choose from when searching for internships and jobs. Similarly, the Student Leader suggested that the CSD needs to do more to engage with more organisations that are willing to take students for internships and/or employ them. This is because if the CSD has more industry partners, then the employment rate will also rise.

The faculty from Kepler encourage the continual training provided by the CSD to improve the students' soft skills such as communication, negotiation, and time management. They agree that such skills support the other knowledge and skills that the students have, to enable them to be a good fit at the workplace and to have a mindset for succeeding in life.

image by Erisvan Souza via pexels.com

Faculty engagement for curriculum development

The work of the CSD connects with that of others by serving as the link between academics at Kepler and what goes on in the labour market. The Department performs the liaison function by seeking an understanding of what employers are looking for through feedback from students' internships and then informing the counselling team to reflect on areas that need improvement for students' employability.

Furthermore, whenever students are due for internships, the Career Services team seeks the input of the academic advising team in the school. The task of the advising team involves tracking students' academic progress weekly and providing them with the needed support. In cases where students have been recommended for internship opportunities, the academic advising team, based on their record

of students' academic progress, informs the career team which student will be the best fit for the specific opportunity, or not. For example, the academic advising team may sometimes inform the CSD that even though they may want to recommend a particular student for an internship, s/he is struggling to strike a balance between their studies and other commitments (hence may not be the best choice) (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler).

Another academic support team that the CSD engages with is the Registry. Since the CSD has the mandate to build students' capacity to navigate the labour market, support is sought from the Office of the Registrar in the form of recommendations for validity. For instance, the Registrar provides recommendations on basic information such as the field of study of a student, to back the search for a particular internship.

Aside from working closely with some academic support teams, the CSD also engages the faculty.

Based on feedback from employers, the curriculum team is informed to develop short courses for students, to ensure that these students have the requisite skills in bridging the gap employers have identified. (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler) Also, sometimes, faculty conduct site visits to employers, to discover the reality of the job market. This helps in the development of cases for engaging students in the various modules that are prepared to support their employability. This means that real–life scenarios are used, to enable the students to know what is happening in the world of work. In addition, guest lecturers are invited from outside the school/University to contribute to specific modules. For instance, if students are learning financial literacy in a class, someone who has vast knowledge in that subject area is invited into the class to support them.

Furthermore, for any skills that students are supposed to acquire, good scenarios are produced so that the student can demonstrate the skill required from that scenario. "We don't only give theories, but we have to make sure that our students are practicing what they learn through the use of those kinds of scenarios" (Kepler Faculty).

Alumni engagement

Alumni are also engaged meaningfully in several ways by the CSD. One way is by conducting exit interviews with the students before they graduate and become alumni. In these interactions, personal information such as phone numbers (for a WhatsApp group platform) and email addresses (for a group mailing list) are collected from the students and stored securely. The Department then tracks the employment status of these students when they become alumni and those who are unemployed are followed up monthly to enable the CSD to find out about their challenges and provide support.

Based on feedback from the monthly check–ins, the Department engages with employers to secure job (and entrepreneurship) opportunities. The CSD then shares such information via the WhatsApp platform and mailing list, for the attention of those alumni who are searching for employment. The CSD also has what it calls the 'Tuesday opportunity grab.' For this, different opportunities ranging from internship training, internship accelerator programmes, employment/professional opportunities, professional development opportunities, further study opportunities and more are shared with alumni every Tuesday via email and WhatsApp.

Organising events and inviting people for a guest speaker series is another avenue for engaging alumni. These events usually take place annually and bring alumni together to relive some memories and take part in fun activities together. Moreover, the gathering is used as an opportunity to communicate the objective of having the alumni community and how collaborative efforts can be made to support charitable causes.

Also, there is the alumni speaker session where at least one alumnus is invited as a guest to speak to current students. Since alumni have been through a comparable situation as the students, they tend to easily relate with the latter, who find these speaker series useful. (Alumnus from Kepler). Other forms of engagement expressed by the Kepler Alumnus include the CSD sharing grants and investment opportunities to alumni who are interested in entrepreneurship and organising career fair events that alumni can attend.

In as much as the CSD does its best to engage alumni, there are more avenues for making these engagements more meaningful. One of the interventions suggested by Kepler alumni is for the CDS to create partnerships with more employers locally, to enable the small number of Kepler graduates to have a vast pool of jobs to choose from. Another suggestion was the need to produce programmes that can enable some students from Kepler to get different jobs from partners outside Rwanda. Since it is now easy to work remotely, it will be of paramount help to tap into these partnerships to keep alumni engaged. This will also enable the institution to be recognised globally.

Industry engagement

It is safe to assume that one of the key stakeholders in students' employability is the employer. Therefore, a relationship must be established and maintained between them. The Director of Career and Alumni Affairs at Kepler mentioned that no matter the amount of time or resources one puts into employer engagement if these employers' challenging points are not addressed, it becomes difficult to retain them as partners. This buttresses the fact that establishing and maintaining a good relationship with industry partners is key to students' employability.

Establishing this relationship can come in various forms. For Kepler, these collaborations stem from employers' participation in career fairs, inviting employers to contribute to Kepler's guest lecture series, requesting internship opportunities and arranging mock interview sessions for the students, and seeking information from employers about their needs, for the University's considerations.

A major way that Kepler keeps collaborations with industry alive is by constantly engaging with employers and acting on feedback in building a relevant curriculum to address the needs of those employers. It is noteworthy that whenever employers are impressed with candidates for internships and jobs, they come back to Kepler for more.

In addition, as part of the curriculum, the institution's faculty have modules that introduce students to career choices and professional behaviour in the workplace.

When these modules are in session, industry partners are invited to speak to students at specific times. The industry partners share insights into what is happening in the workplace and motivate students to take advantage of the systems in place at Kepler in ensuring their employability. "If you are teaching a class and you can bring some external stakeholders just to share their experiences and motivate the students, it makes the entire process real for them to be engaged." (Kepler Faculty)

Although Kepler constantly engages employers for a successful relationship, the process sometimes comes with challenges. Some of these challenges, and how they are being addressed are highlighted below.

First, some employers tend to delay submitting students' internship feedback reports. Due to the busy nature of their schedules, employers consider the feedback process too demanding to complete. As a result, the CSD sometimes visits the employers to make the process of obtaining feedback easier for the latter. Through the visit, the Department gathers general information on how all student interns faired in that organisation where necessary, instead of obtaining the individualised reports required for improving each student's performance.

Secondly, there have been instances where employers were reluctant to allow students to come back to Kepler to complete their degree programmes after their internships. "Some employers, for instance,

don't mind whether or when someone completes their degree, as long as they are meeting their expectations." (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler) The students involved in this situation ended up taking longer periods to complete their degrees. Such occurrences sometimes distort the support being given to students to help them on their career paths.

Thirdly, because some employers still struggle to understand Kepler's programme, an employer board was established for these employers to have a taste of the institution's module. Although beneficial in engaging employers, the employer board has been too expensive to sustain. The CSD has therefore resorted to other means of engaging employers, which produces a level of result.

Fourthly, getting the right people to give guest lectures is challenging, sometimes because of differences in schedules. The faculty from Kepler stipulated that the availability of employers could be a big issue considering employers and faculty may have conflicting schedules. Therefore, asking these employers to give guest lectures at specific times is not always easy. Also, some employers do not buy into the idea of carrying out virtual presentations because they may not be conversant with that. "This situation forces us to resort to getting other people whose experiences may not be as rich as we expected." (Kepler Faculty)

In line with the above, it is of utmost importance to create a presence in the media for voicing out the wonderful job done by the institution: "I think, however much the CSD might have a responsibility to engage employers, institutions themselves should also make sure that they are talking about what they do, as it makes the entire process easy for even employers to contribute to building the partnership, especially signing MOUs with these companies." (Director of Career and Alumni Affairs, Kepler)

A fifth area for consideration – as suggested by the student leader and the alumni of Kepler, is the need to increase the number of partnerships that the institution has with industries. Some students or alumni are known to be employed outside of existing institution–industry partnerships. Kepler could therefore work with their students and/or alumni to serve as links to establishing the needed partnerships, therefore creating an opening to enhance the students' and alumni's employability.

Likewise, HEIs are encouraged to attend conferences and play active roles in contributing to the cause of such conferences. An important point mentioned by a faculty member from Kepler was that universities should "not wait for the potential industry partners to come to them, but instead make the conscious effort to choose to go and meet such organisations in person." Using this approach could enable those institutions to get the needed exposure in communicating their impact, which could spark the interest of others to ask, "What are you doing?" This could create opportunities for people to research those institutions.

Student engagement strategies

It becomes discouraging when a considerable amount of effort has been invested in organising a programme and only a few students show up. At other times, the attendance may be impressive, but the challenge lies with getting students engaged during the programme for their benefit. Considering this, it is essential to develop strategies for engaging students effectively, as that can increase students' satisfaction, enhance their motivation to learn, reduce their sense of isolation, and improve their performance. In Kepler's case, the three main strategies implemented to engage students effectively are provided below.

Firstly, the CSD consults with students and gets them involved in organising some of their programmes. For instance, before guest lecturers are invited, the CSD talks to students to understand their perspectives on the prospective speaker and the topic. In addition, students are allowed to be involved in organising career fairs, so they feel a sense of ownership of the event.

Secondly, the CSD maintains frequent communication with the students via emails, WhatsApp messages, phone calls, and visiting their classrooms. In these communications, the value propositions are always made clear by the CSD for the students to understand what they will gain by attending career–focused sessions organised by the CSD. Similarly, the student leadership association and academic advisors are engaged in disseminating information about upcoming sessions. An advisor can share the messages with the group of students s/he advises and specify that what the CSD is doing is important for the students to join. (Student Guide President, Kepler)

Lastly, the sessions organised by the CSD are made as practical as possible. The Student Guide President explained that the CSD's workshop contents are engaging because they address real and practical issues that students need to know about. The staff listens to students' questions and answers them accordingly. The CSD also brings in guest speakers who pay attention to students' concerns and support them as appropriate.

While the above strategies to engage students are noted to be effective, the CSD goes the extra mile to also devise other strategies to increase students' attendance and participation in programmes. One of these involves working with the academic departments to check the academic calendar and find out about the academic workload students have before organising events. This has made it possible for most events to be organised on Fridays – since students do not have a heavy workload on that day, hence increasing students' participation.

Another way of increasing students' attendance and participation in programmes is through constant communication via email and the student portal. These platforms are known to be the most preferred by students, as they are always active on there. In assertion, the Student Guide President noted that "an average of about 95 or 96% of students at Kepler check their emails at least once every three hours and you cannot find a student who spends 24 hours without checking their emails many times. In their messages to students, the CSD also uses incredibly attractive graphics in their communication material, which is believed to raise students' expectations to attend the programmes.

Making some of the career services modules compulsory is the last identified strategy for increasing students' attendance and participation. Modules such as **career choice and job readiness** are mandatory for everyone because they are at the heart of the career support services given to students. Since the two modules have also been added to the student's internship and graduation requirements, all students end up attending the sessions whenever they are organised.

Notwithstanding the useful and effective strategies that the CSD implements to increase students' attendance, participation, and engagement in programmes, the Department has the potential of doing more. One option pointed out by the Student Guide President for consideration is the fact that many online workshops are not very engaging.

As such, career workshops should be conducted in person as much as possible. Having in-person workshops presents fewer challenges with internet connectivity and allows effective engagement of students. Another point for consideration is for the CSD to conduct workshops regularly and introduce competitions where possible, to attract students. For example, guest speaker sessions could be conducted monthly, and during career fairs. The CSD could also organise competitions such as the most entrepreneurial student, the best elevator pitch, and so on.

Tools and Frameworks for Measuring the Effectiveness of career services

Several measurement strategies and frameworks exist for tracking the progress and impact of one's activities. It is key to note that when the right measurement frameworks are developed appropriately, they become important in making good decisions to improve performance. As suggested by Hanover Research (2019), career services offices should conduct **regular evaluations** to improve service delivery. For the CSD at Kepler, it has been "mandated to meet the key performance indicator of having at least 90% of graduates in employment or further studies in six months after graduation." (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler)

Besides, **feedback from employers** is another way of tracking the effectiveness of the CSD. For instance, the CSD conducts employer surveys to understand their satisfaction with interns and employees from Kepler. The feedback from such surveys is used to improve the curriculum. This has "enhanced our services and employers always express satisfaction about the performance of our students." (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler)

One of the things that Kepler prides itself on is the fact that its "graduates enter the world of work as effective professionals, many of them getting job offers before completing their studies. Kepler's robust internship support equips the students with the professional skills and the confidence they need to build a fulfilling career or create a business. The institution leverages on the insights from employers to make all Kepler students immediately employable." (Kepler, 2021)

Sustainability of programmes

Funding is one of the key factors for ensuring the sustainability of the programmes organised at Kepler and most of the funding for the career services programmes is from the leadership team. At the beginning of each year, there is a budget allocation, and the CSD is involved with the organisational care. "We develop a process for the Department that feeds into the organisational care, and we look at initiatives we want to run for the year and assign the budget." (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler) After this, the budget amount is allocated to the CSD, and these are the funds used by the Department to run its initiatives.

Also, sometimes, Kepler's alumni raise additional funds to support certain initiatives that involve the CSD engaging with them. For example, in December 2021, a charity event was organised and solely funded by the alumni themselves without the aid of the leadership at Kepler. At other times, Kepler's leaders support programmes involving alumni up to a certain amount, to ensure the programme's success.

Programme success factors

People define success in numerous ways and for the CSD at Kepler, the success of their programmes is noted whenever students can obtain and maintain jobs. As stated by the Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, when a vast number of students get jobs within six months of graduating and can maintain these jobs, it speaks to the Department's success. In addition, seeking to understand employer satisfaction through surveys, having a substantial number of employers respond positively to the career support given to students, and using such insights to continuously improve the curriculum becomes a point of success for the CSD and Kepler.

Students and alumni also play significant roles in achieving some of these successes. According to alumni of Kepler, people need to continue to be involved in upscaling and knowing what they want. For instance, if one looks forward to getting a promotion at the workplace, then that person needs to do what is required to attain that promotion. This calls for self-discipline, as people in the CSD will not be at the workplace to give feedback on everything that happens in that environment.

Another factor for success is the ability to maintain the necessary networks and constantly engage in creative interventions to meet new people whenever student and alumni events are organised. The Kepler Students' Leader indicated that students and alumni need to be resourceful. They should not only apply what they learn and the connections they gain via the CSD. Instead, they should identify other opportunities by talking to families and friends and using job postings outside the University.

The last factor identified for success is for students and alumni to develop in their career journeys. They are urged to evaluate job opportunities to determine whether those jobs are in line with the careers of their choice, since not every job posting is worth applying for. Moreover, students and alumni need to explore external resources to understand whether they are a good match for that job. Just as one cannot take in any food because of hunger, it is also true for one to "choose a job that aligns with one's career journey; choose a job that lines up with what you want to do, what you are interested in, do not just apply for anything." (Student Guide President, Kepler)

Challenges and lessons

Challenges are inevitable in human institutions. The CSD at Kepler is no different. In discussing some of their challenges, the Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs at Kepler stated that some students misunderstand the role of the Careers Team. He said, "They think the Careers Team is going to get them a job, which is partially what we are doing but our main objective is to guide their career development and ensure they have the support they need to be able to transition into the careers they aspire for." Therefore, the CSD can learn from this and **communicate clearly about the role and expectations of the Department** – that is, what the Career Services Team does, and what obligation students have, for them to be supported properly.

Some of the lessons that people can learn based on the challenges identified is knowing the importance of always **working in collaboration**. "Sometimes, some people may feel that they know it all when students reach out to them for support. Meanwhile, they could have referred these students to other people with the relevant skills and knowledge to help them address their issues." (Director of Careers and Alumni Affairs, Kepler)

image by Andy Barbour via pexels.com

Summary

Kepler adopts an inclusive career services approach to ensure that all stakeholders, including students, alumni, academics, industry, and management, are brought into the planning and delivery of programmes. There is a strong integration of employability skills in the curriculum and academics provide opportunities for students to develop these skills through effective pedagogies (e.g., group work, discussion, etc.). Also, Kepler takes its partnerships with industry seriously and any feedback and/or concerns that the University receives about Kepler programmes and interns are addressed quickly to improve the quality of service. This has helped the CSD to provide comprehensive support to Kepler's students and alumni, leading to high employment rates for their graduates.

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Strathmore University

Overview of institution

Strathmore University (Strathmore) was launched in 1961 as the first multi–racial and multi–religious Advanced–Level sixth–form college offering Science and Arts subjects. It was established by a group of professionals who formed a charitable educational trust (now the Strathmore Educational Trust). In 2002, Strathmore University received its letter of interim authority to operate as a university and offer undergraduate programmes in Commerce and Information Technology. Over the years, the University has launched the Strathmore Business School (as a graduate school to fill in the then–existing gap in Leadership and Management); the School of Finance and Applied Economics; the School of Law; and three new master's programmes in the Institute for Mathematical Sciences.

In 2008, Strathmore was awarded a Charter by the Government of Kenya, giving it full legal recognition to operate as a university. Strathmore University's strategy is to promote lifelong learning among students as a way of increasing student employability and the University aims to become a preeminent centre that provides comprehensive career and employment services.

Strathmore
UNIVERSITY

Structure of career services department

Strathmore's CSD is a unit under the Dean of Students office, which houses other units including the International Students Office, Student Council, Clubs & Societies, etc. The Dean of Students' office is primarily concerned with student experiences. Therefore, the CSD was formed based on the University pillars and has the mandate to handle all career-related concerns for students (and alumni). The CSD, which has three staff (in July 2022: An Associate Manager, an Administrator, and an intern) supports students to gain transferrable skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and more that are useful in a broad range of areas – from sports and club activities to academic project work and professional lives.

Career services approach

Strathmore's approach to career service is based primarily on research and anecdotal data collected from students. Based on these data collection exercises, the CSD concluded that students tend to engage better in career service activities when they are placed in smaller teams, via online workshops and programmes, etc., and are more interested in workshops on case interviews, as compared to regular interviews. This approach of taking note of student preferences to inform programming has helped to increase student's engagement in CSD activities and allowed for more innovative, student-centred ways of running sessions. In tandem with other units on campus, career-related services are discussed broadly to ensure that work is not being repeated, and collaborations are established where necessary. For example, the CSD may engage faculty members in case a classroom activity or project aligns directly with a CSD engagement.

Career preparation and support

Career preparation and support activities are conducted professionally and diligently, based on the bandwidth of staff in the CSD. As a result, collaborations with other units on campus allow for more impactful work. The office supports CV writing, mock interviews, professional qualification examination preparation, etc. The University Writing Centre, one of the very few in Kenya, works closely with the CSD and guides students to ensure that all letters and documentation to be sent to employers are spell checked and grammatically correct.

The Job Placement Service at Strathmore has also worked well over time and allows students to gain industry experience while completing their undergraduate programme. Employers engage the CSD when they have work-related opportunities in their organisations. These opportunities are then shared with students via email, CSD-led sessions with students, and other avenues, for shortlisting and subsequent employment. Aside from job placements, the CSD proactively searches for opportunities via LinkedIn, set Google alerts where opportunities come up based on the filters used, explores career pages on employer websites for opportunities, etc. Twice a week, the CSD shares job links with students and emphasises opportunities within organisations that have partnerships with the CSD. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one partner organisation could take up to 28 students.
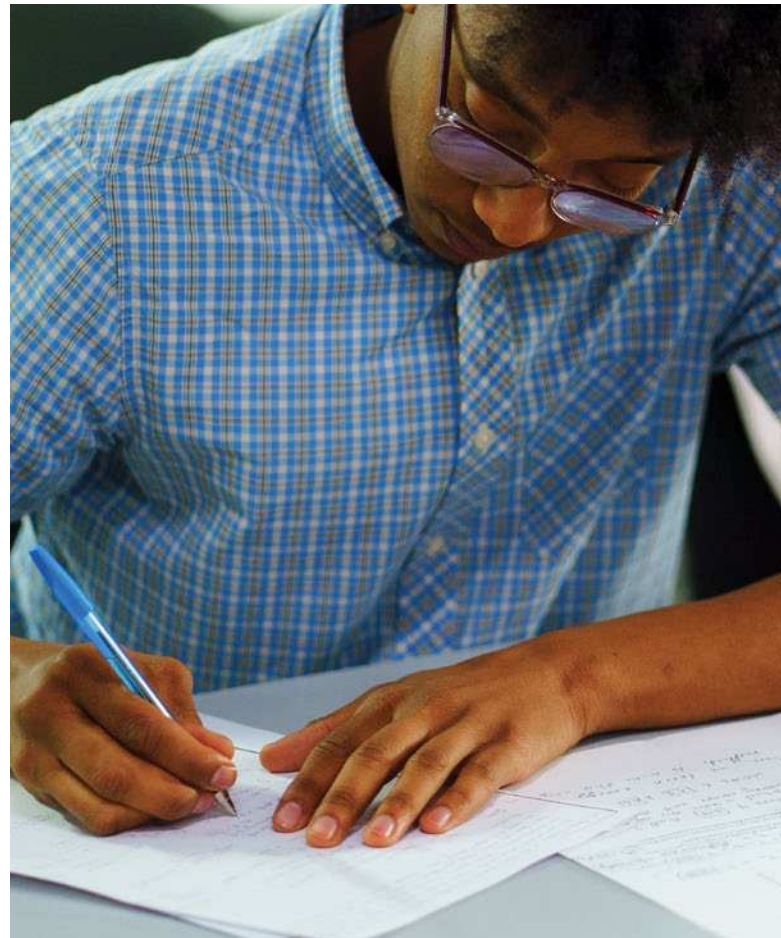

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Faculty engagement for curriculum development

Strathmore is committed to creating an environment where all units in the University support students with career and professional development. With over 6,000 students on campus, CSD cannot provide all the career service support needed which is why they work with faculty. There are modules such as Entrepreneurship, Philosophy and Business Communication that are geared toward building students' employability skills. Strathmore classes typically have 30 to 70 students in a module. Students learn how to put together a CV in the Business Communication class. They then share their output with the CSD when they need support in customising those CVs for specific roles, showcasing their skills to employers in niche industries, etc.

The CSD also collaborates with lecturers and attends some classes to share additional (practical) input with students, to add to the knowledge that the faculty share in the classroom. Strathmore's curriculum is reviewed every four years to keep the content up to date and provide the needed knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support and prepare students for the world of work.

Faculty at Strathmore also tend to be very practical when teaching and they include a good blend of theory, to ensure that learning takes place in the classroom. Students and alumni have attested to the fact that adapting to the job market was not daunting for them, since assessments and classroom engagements at Strathmore prepared them for work. As an example, an alumnus/ noted how anytime s/he sees a billboard, s/he can professionally critique this marketing tool and share constructive feedback on how it can be improved. This connection between the classroom and real-world application is key, and very evident at Strathmore. Students are made to first understand the importance of learning these competencies and their relevance in the work world, and every other aspect of their lives (personal and professional).

Faculty also act as role models to students. For example, the faculty write and speak as professionally as possible, so that students can emulate this. Oral presentations and incentives for good writing are also used in the classroom to improve communication skills and consequently, students' employability. Apart from the modules in Business Communication 1 and 2 that are compulsory for all students to take, irrespective of their major, most assessments (especially ones that have to do with writing research papers) emphasise clarity of writing and expressions. Oral assessment rubrics also focus on effective speech during classroom presentations.

Alumni engagement

Strathmore's CSD engages alumni across all year groups, with customised support programmes for recent graduates and seasoned professionals. The Department facilitates some short courses for alumni, with modules focusing on areas where gaps have been identified (such as Content Creation and Marketing). This helps to strengthen the capacity of the alumni and increases their employability.

With its job placement programme, alumni can submit their CVs and participate in mock interview sessions where they receive guidance on how to properly review job descriptions, practice interview posture and questioning, etc. Through the CSD's collaboration with the Strathmore alumni office, the CSD has access to Strathmore Connect – an online platform with several functionalities including a spotlight where alumni can review job opportunities uploaded by CSD personnel. The platform also enables alumni with more experience to mentor younger alumni through career development support and peer mentoring programmes facilitated by the CSD. The CSD supports alumni from all of Strathmore's year groups and uploads opportunities that are tailored for alumni to experience higher job roles. Employers also reach out to the CSD and request for their vacancies to be put up on the platform.

Industry engagement

Strathmore leverages its alumni to engage the industry. A unit has been set up within the Placement Office. This unit's role is to keep in touch with the industry, take note of the kinds of students the University has produced, and determine whether there are vacancies within the industry that align with Strathmore alumni's expertise.

The University also operates two internship periods, each lasting three months: January to March, and April to June. Employers engage the CSD and share the number of internship slots available, and the qualifications required (e.g., degree programme or year group). Strathmore will then shortlist qualified students and share them with respective employers for interviewing and decision-making.

After their internships, students are graded by the University. With a pass mark of 50 out of 100, all students are expected to show their practical skill gain while enrolled in the programme.

This pipeline for industry engagement through alumni is honed during their undergraduate education where they (as students) are provided with an all-around transformative experience, unearthing their will to give back. The positive word of mouth from Strathmore students encourages HR practitioners and prospective employers to engage the CSD for an internship as well as a full-time employment recruitment pipeline.

Apart from leveraging alumni, some additional key industry engagement activities and lessons learned over the years at Strathmore include:

a. **Managing expectations:** The CSD keeps strongly to its word when engaging with employers and manages their expectations with reasonable timelines and outputs, to prevent misunderstandings. In instances where the expertise required for the role is not available in the University's CV directory, employers are duly informed, and alternatives are provided. The CSD also tends to advise employers against unrealistic job descriptions and can support adjusting these descriptions to be more realistic and fit for purpose.

b. **Career fairs and planned visits**: Career fairs are organised for the industry to interact with students by showcasing their organisations, sharing available career opportunities, facilitating sessions on professional qualifications required for specific roles, and more. Collaborations with the industry allow the CSD to take students for employer site visits. This helps those students to gain a practical understanding of their programme of study and how it is applied in industry. For example, students studying Supply Chain may visit a production company to understand how products finally reach customers, the processes involved, and how production is planned. According to an alumnus, Strathmore's industry-engagement programmes allowed him to see the practicality of course materials.

c. **Job shadowing:** This includes sessions where students are educated about the various roles, departments and leadership of the institution while shadowing personnel within the organisation.

d. **Industry-led guest lectures:** Guests from the industry lead lectures via webinars or in-person class sessions on various topics, hence helping the students translate theory into practice. Industry personnel is also invited to specific programmes at the University. For example, the CSD organises speaker sessions where personnel from industries working abroad talk about opportunities to encourage international students who want to return home.

Student engagement strategies

The CSD engages students through social media messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, word of mouth through lecturers, website postings, etc. The CSD also has a designated email address to which students can send queries. Email communication has proved useful as well, as it is the most equitable communication tool (all Strathmore students have a designated Strathmore email address and access to a device where emails can be read). Apart from the CSD, faculty engage with and support students by referring them to prospective employers, providing those students with recommendation letters, and more.

Challenges and lessons

Strathmore's lean CSD office has successfully driven career activities for students and alumni, with support from other units in the Department. Some of the key learnings include:

a. **Clear communication to students, especially with email subject lines:** Subject lines like 'Career Fair – Job Opportunities Available' are catchy and will capture students' attention to either come to the CSD to inquire or read the email and sign up for the opportunity. As students sign up for events or make inquiries, one tends to notice over time that there is a reduction in apathy and a close-to-exponential growth in students' participation.

b. **Collaboration with other units:** Students' professional development cannot be achieved through the CSD alone and must be an institution-wide effort. As a result, institutions need to introspect and ask reflective questions such as: What is the purpose of my CSD and how does it align with my institution's value proposition? What skills do my students have and how can we hone them? What engagement strategies will work for our context? Who is hiring my students and how can I get feedback from them for curricula and co-curricular improvements?

c. **Support from the university leadership:** The University leadership is key to all institution-wide efforts hence they must also include students' professional development as a component of their strategic plan. For example, capacity building within institutions to improve the skillset of CSD staff, and funding to organise CSD-related activities, are all instrumental to the success of the CSD and these typically need buy-in from the University leadership.

d. **Engage strategic employers as partners:** Employer engagement should focus more on quality rather than quantity. Quality of the organisation, alignment with industry and students' needs and/or majors, etc. In being strategic, it is important to find organisations that could or do employ several students from various majors. This is because such decisive action usually sends a positive signal/message to other employers, especially when there is evidence of good output from the students and/or alumni who have been recruited. In Kenya for example, most large organisations want to be affiliated with *Safaricom (known as MTN in Ghana)*. Therefore, if *Safaricom* hires most of its interns and employees from a specific university, other organisations will make inquiries about the university to find out what makes their alumni different and subsequently seek to employ their staff from said university.

Also, when a potential strategic partner is identified, the CSD lead must first conduct some research on what the firm's hiring needs are and connect this with the University's value proposition. The CSD lead could then engage the HR department of that organisation and request a conversation with their hiring manager to establish how the University's students and alumni could help resolve the organisation's employment gaps. The University's CSD can then recommend initial student-industry engagements through mentorship programmes, guest lectures, and the like. This approach could help to strengthen the relationship between the CSD and said organisation and eventually, develop a pipeline for student employment.

e. **Stakeholders** (specifically alumni) call for increased networking opportunities on campus, with specific days earmarked for students to engage with professionals across all industries, including law, finance, etc. Therefore, the University could consider doing more of this if feasible. Strathmore could also share more success stories and case studies about the employability outcomes of its students and alumni, as this could help to improve visibility and serve as a marketing tool to increase the employability prospects of other students.

Summary

Over the years, Strathmore University has developed an inclusive career services approach that brings together all stakeholders including students, alumni, academics/faculty, industry, and management to enhance students' transition to employment. Apart from the programmes provided by the CSD, there is a strong integration of employability skills in the curriculum, as well as close collaboration with industry/employers and alumni to understand the current and future needs of the market and the best ways to prepare students to meet these needs.

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Warwick University

Overview of institution

Warwick University (Warwick) is a world-leading public research university with high academic and research excellence, making it a prime attraction for global names in business and industry. Ranked among the list of great universities in the United Kingdom, Warwick describes itself as a place of possibility, always looking for new ways to problem solve and make an impact on its students, faculty, and environment, to change lives whether close to home or on a global scale. At Warwick, students learn teamwork, communication and other relevant social skills through lectures and co-curricular seminars and initiatives. The University is intentional about building valuable competencies.

What Next? Enhancing African Students' Transition to Employment Through Effective Career Services

Structure of career services department

Warwick runs an unconventional CSD model which has charted career paths for many of its students (through internships) and graduates, who still have access to (almost) all career-related resources even upon graduation. Warwick provides specialised career development support to its students and graduates through a robust office structure made up of the following units:

A. Careers– This unit is headed by the Director of Career Services at Warwick, who oversees all CSD strategy and leads operations. The Careers unit has staff who work in tandem with academic departments to allow for holistic career services support for students.

B. Central Team– The Deputy Director of Career Services leads the Central team with activity offerings including webinars and workshops for students.

C. Skills Team– Responsible for helping students develop broader-based skills.

D. Welcome Week Team– Organises activities for students when they arrive at Warwick to help them settle in.

E. Back Office team– Runs the technology, from websites to recruitment portals and other web-based applications.

F. External Relations Team– Organises events that invite employers to the Warwick campus for career fairs, and other student engagement activities, as well as advertise internship opportunities and other vacancies on websites. This team supports Warwick's vibrant international community as well, with specialised recruiter events that appeal to international students who plan to return home to start their careers, or other students who are looking to work outside their home countries.

G. Internship Team– Acting as or considered a consultancy unit within Warwick's CSD, the Internship Team advises on best practices and how to set up internships in the industry or gain work experience through the academic departments. The Team also advertises recruiter opportunities to students and supports the students to engage with recruiters to obtain such internships.

Career services approach

Warwick adopts a comprehensive career services approach involving all relevant stakeholders, to ensure students develop the competencies required for work and life.

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Career preparation and support

Providing students with requisite career preparation goes a long way to improve their employability outcomes. Warwick's CSD keeps improving career support services to match students' different contexts (e.g., major, local/international status.) while meeting current industry trends.

The one-to-one coaching service provided by the CSD is highly patronised by students, with a balanced preference for face-to-face and online sessions. Virtual one-on-one sessions have worked very well with students who tend to feel more relaxed when the sessions are in their surroundings, making them more likely to have open, broader conversations. Practical internship workshops are also organised for students to learn how to navigate an internship environment (from the application to securing the role and completing the internship). Students receive advertisements about vacancies and other graduate jobs from recruiters and may receive guidance on applying for roles via the Internship Team's platforms.

Warwick's comprehensive approach to employability allows the institution to weave internships into the core curriculum through intercalated year placements with a focus on academic internships, rather than vocational ones. The Warwick Internship Programme provides funding for students to undertake paid summer internships, some of which take place in the University, and others are Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). As an example, the Team delivers mini-projects that have paid internships for approximately 100 second-year university students every summer. Aside from providing students with the needed experiences, the University and other local SMEs are supported as they work towards securing quality human resources to train and work with on projects.

According to Warwick students and alumni, programmes like Sprint (which was focused on boosting confidence, including women's, in the work environment), research placements, undergraduate research summer scheme, CV writing workshops, volunteer opportunities and other career-oriented services have helped them to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and prepared them adequately for the work world. Summer internships provide students with a variety of options to choose from, as they narrow down their chosen career paths.

The **skills audit** has been noted as a useful way of enhancing student employability success, as it helps students make efficient choices about how to match their skills with internships or job applications and improve the quality of their applications. Research placements and other related programmes provide students with funding to conduct research in fields they are interested in and gain experience that can shape their research careers or help build innovations and start-ups. Due to the focus on employability through all departments at Warwick as part of its institutional strategy, students who do not engage with the CSD as much can still gain career support through the classroom and other avenues on campus.

Faculty engagement for curriculum developiment

Warwick supports its faculty and encourages them to develop student employability skills through team activities where students learn basic communication to hone their presentation skills; deliberately pointing out the practical skills gained while studying theory. Through reflection exercises, students can think through their coursework after the fact and note any lessons or challenges for when they must embark on a similar task in the future. This skill is very important for the work world and allows students to learn from their mistakes and/or successes.

With support from the CSD, Warwick instituted the **Academic Lead on Employability role**, to better connect the CSD and curricular programmes and emphasise Warwick's focus on employability as an all-around institutional strategy. This role has improved the CSD's engagement with faculty and allows for tracking employability outcomes while brainstorming ways to provide students with the skills they need to survive in today's work climate, either as entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs. Programmes that incorporate the development of employability skills include standalone compulsory/optional modules on employability, leadership, entrepreneurship, etc. It also covers the integration of skills development in discipline-specific modules.

Alumni engagement

Alumni engagement with Warwick's CSD is laudable. All alumni are invited to events organised by the CSD and are engaged via the Warwick Alumni LinkedIn group, newsletters, and social media pages where job vacancies and other employment opportunities are posted. They are also invited to join events and participate either as job seekers or recruiters. The CSD is in constant communication with alumni and has recently started a series of special workshops

for them, based on their needs. Alumni applying for graduate jobs are supported with information on when and how to apply, CV and/or Cover Letter writing, interview support, etc. The Central Team in the CSD provides support asynchronously (via email, usually with a five-day turnaround), or a virtual appointment to talk through challenges or answer any questions.

Warwick further encourages alumni to offer their services as mentors to students and support them through their educational journey. The External Relations Team manages the mentorship scheme for alumni, keeps the web application for the mentorship scheme up to date and promotes the scheme among students to create awareness. With funding available for students who need additional support, the External Relations Team matches students with appropriate mentors based on their areas of interest, skill needs, gender, and more.

Industry engagement

Warwick has partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of industries around the globe. This provides an opportunity for students to exhibit their skills and narrow their options for job placements or internships. For example, through industrial visits organised by faculty, arrangements are made for students in STEM departments to visit manufacturing sites to appreciate the theory being studied in the classroom and note how it is applied in the work environment. Such visits enhance students' commercial awareness and allow faculty to co-create class content with input from practitioners. Some courses at Warwick are created specifically to address challenges faced by the industry, with some part-time programmes designed for specific employers as part of their employees' professional development.

As part of Warwick's engagement with industry to improve employability outcomes through internships, career fairs, curriculum co-creation, teaching, and assessment, etc., the University previously run a programme dubbed **Sprint**, which relied on funding from recruiters to provide students with resources that helped to boost their employability. The programme had a good mix of high-profile international organisations as well as SMEs and involved 80+ students over four days. Sprint programmes were highly interactive and industry speakers were encouraged to tell stories that students could relate to and gain new, practical knowledge from.

Other academic departments at Warwick, such as the Warwick Business School, have established their network of industry collaborators through a department career team that supports students, alongside the support and resources provided by the University's CSD. Warwick's CSD usually approves request forms and brokers the relationship with industry collaborators who seek to work closely with academic departments. In some cases, the CSD will make recommendations to academic departments regarding which organisations to work more closely with.

The **Mathematics at Work** programme at Warwick is a great example of the industry – CSD – academic department triad where career consultants in the CSD liaise with the mathematics department to understand students' career goals. From this, the CSD will source individuals from the industry who can show a practical application of mathematics at work and give students some first-hand information about what options they have for jobs or internships. Students and alumni are very appreciative of the relationships and opportunities available through industry, especially the speaker sessions that focus on unconventional industries such as the creative industry, and how interested students could `be mentored and supported through their journey.

Student engagement strategies

The CSD has explored various ways to maintain student engagement during career workshops and other related programmes. The support from academic departments is very useful in maintaining engagement, as students are more responsive when their faculty or academic leads endorse these programmes. The programmes have *'champions'* in various departments, to act as CSD allies, and promote and collaborate on events that improve students' employability.

The introduction of a **weekly newsletter** by the CSD also caused major shifts in engagement levels. Although the information in the newsletter tends to be quite bulky, students at Warwick are encouraged to work with their career consultants who filter opportunities and share relevant ones with students, based on their professional interests and aspirations. Academic departments are also encouraged to share opportunities in the CSD newsletter that are relevant to the student's discipline. Some departments have **custom newsletters** as well and include CSD opportunities in their communication (either as a newsletter feature, or a general email) to make this information more available and accessible to their students.

Academic departments with the resources to create a designated career room where the CSD engages students within their departments are also encouraged to do so. Students spend most of their time working from their departments. Therefore, a **designated career room** makes the CSD more accessible to students and allows CSD personnel to join in on some academic department meetings (on request) to share any observations about their work, and how the department can support raising the students' awareness around professionalism and employability.

Student peer tutors also serve as a useful platform for providing support and sharing opportunities with other students. Training sessions are organised for peer tutors, who are provided with the skills and resources to support students and refer them to the CSD for further assistance where needed. Students and alumni commend the peer tutor programmes as a great way of promoting CSD activities and resources to the general student body.

Although social media has been touted as an effective way of communicating with current students, alumni at Warwick have expressed concern about information overload on social media and do not recommend it as an effective communication medium.

Other effective communication channels include targeted emails and newsletters, advertisements on TV screens across campus and sharing information with smaller societies, clubs and units on campus who can help to disseminate the information.

Tools and Frameworks for Measuring the Effectiveness of career services

The curriculum across different majors has evolved to become more experiential and inclusive of insights from employers to make students career ready. The CSD has advocated for a holistic collaboration on graduate employability outcomes to include faculty. Through teaching excellence framework meetings, academic departments share their contributions to improving graduate outcome data. As part of the institutional structure, there are Academic Leads on employability who share feedback from faculty with the CSD and help embed employability into the curriculum of the different programmes. As a result, employability sits within Warwick's wider education strategy, with reporting mechanisms that allow it to be tracked effectively.

Globalisation, digitalisation, and the permanent alteration of information have led to major changes in the world of work. To keep up with technology management in this new digital world, Warwick is intentional in measuring the effectiveness of all programmes that provide students with these skills. The University also communicates success stories to inspire other students and encourage critical thinking and other key skills needed in today's work world.

Warwick's CSD pays particular attention to feedback from programme evaluations, employer surveys and assessments to revise and improve its services. Inside the Warwick classroom, students, through reflective exercises, work on independent or supervised projects based on skills gained, which are then recorded in a university–audited portfolio. Students who complete this portfolio will receive an official certificate: The University is currently working on incorporating these certificates into the official transcripts for students to show relevant skills gained, which in turn increases employability.

Warwick encourages its students to pay attention to HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Record) and subscribe to its programme. This is a formal degree transcript that provides a full record of a student's university achievements and allows students to update their online profiles with career–related skills, internships and other curricular/co-curricular information acquired during their time at the University.

Sustainability of programmes

Aside from University funding, initiatives in Warwick's CSD are funded by:

A. Alumni – who fund the mentoring programmes through annual donations. This creates a virtuous cycle where alumni who were supported during their time at Warwick can also give back to the University. Alumni, through the funding they raise each year, invite bids from other individuals and organisations to support employability initiatives on campus. Alumni share feedback with donors on the impact of their donations, which keeps the donor pool informed, maintains relationships, and helps recruit new donors.

B. Recruiters – focus on the motivations and fund programmes that align with their organisational mission or objectives. Currently, several Warwick industry collaborators are focused on social inequality, minority ethnic groups, and gender, as areas that need improvement.

Through these funding sources, Warwick can provide career support to students and alumni all-year round through flagship events, forums and initiatives focused on improving employability outcomes.

Programme success factors

Warwick's success in positioning employability out-comes as an overall institutional strategy is a worthy feat and deserves commendation. In defining success for the CSD, Warwick considers students' confidence in themselves and preparation for their professional lives as a measure of progress. Additional evidence of success is the student's ability to gain the needed knowledge, skills and dispositions that contribute to their career development, and/or to take advantage of CSD programmes, monitor their progress, and ask for help from faculty, career consultants, etc., where necessary.

Furthermore, although most students, especially those at the undergraduate level may not have narrowed down the specific professional path they want to embark on, the positive mindset gained through employability programmes at Warwick increases their chances of success. Students have a responsibility to navigate the resources or opportunities available and make the best out of them. Once this happens, the CSD can report progress and ramp up efforts to increase the number of students who account for this success.

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Challenges and lessons

Most students at Warwick patronise CSD resources, attend events and share opportunities with other colleagues. However, some students – especially those who live off-campus and only plan to visit the CSD when they have lectures on campus or other related activities, are disengaged. The Student Engagement Initiative and Peer Tutoring Programme at Warwick are fantastic ways of getting students to promote opportunities amongst themselves. These initiatives need to be scaled up, as alumni have noted that the more students are involved in CSD resource sharing, especially from the department level, the higher the chances of increasing students' engagement.

In addition, managing a virtual careers office has its challenges that need to be controlled, as the ripple effects on graduate outcomes can be unfavourable. With increased staff members, the CSD needs to increase communication channels among the team, reduce duplication of efforts and perform robust inductions and orientations to prepare new or inexperienced staff for their roles.

The introduction of new staff should also be followed by intercultural training that creates awareness about Warwick's way of doing things, and the student culture, as well as manages individual prejudices that can negatively affect the employability objectives of the University. For example, some students have very unconventional career paths or may have narrowed down their options incredibly early due to a family business they are in line to work in, etc. It is therefore important for CSD personnel to appreciate these distinct individual and cultural standpoints and support students in their chosen path while making the recommendations needed for improvement.

Summary

Warwick's comprehensive approach to employability is the main reason for its success in graduate outcomes over the years and must be encouraged. The support from academic departments through faculty and student engagement agents grounds employability in the student's discipline; the power of academics influencing students' career decisions is heavily emphasised at Warwick and has contributed immensely to the University's success in employability. The CSD needs to cultivate relationships with the academic departments, manage intercultural understanding and enhance interactions with students, to obtain students' buy-in.

In supporting students (and alumni), the CSD needs to manage the potential information overload and some events, programmes, and initiatives available to students at separate times, since some students get distracted easily. CSDs should start modestly by running flagship events and a few high-impact one-off events to grasp students' attention. The demonstrated impact is a clever way for CSDs to show the value they provide to students and the University as a whole and justify the need for additional resources to continue the excellent work.

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4. Conclusion

Youth unemployment and its negative impact in sub–Saharan Africa is a growing concern. Universities and colleges are expected to lead the effort in ensuring that students develop the required skills and knowledge to facilitate their transition to employment. To do this effectively, they need to understand the skills requirements of employers in their target markets. Employers in SSA require graduates to demonstrate both subject–specific and soft skills including academic knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving, ability to learn, interpersonal, teamwork, communication, leadership, and time management, among others.

Understanding the skills needs of employers will help universities and colleges devise ways to address them. One way that the literature highlights this is through institutions establishing functioning career services. Current understanding of career services incorporates multiple perspectives, including career support and preparation, alumni engagement, industry engagement, and curriculum and pedagogy. These perspectives provide opportunities for students to develop employability skills.

To enhance the effectiveness of career services initiatives, universities and colleges require reliable tools and data sources, such as an Alumni Survey Tool, Career Services Impact Survey Tool, Internship Assessment Survey Tool, Career Readiness Competencies Checklist, and Centre Quality Benchmarks.

In all, universities and colleges cannot do it alone. They need to work with all stakeholders, especially employers/industry, to better prepare students for work and life. Based on findings from the project, we propose recommendations for universities and colleges, as well as for industry, below.

a. Recommendations for universities and colleges

1. Universities and colleges (HEIs) should work closely with industry to implement ongoing assessments of the labour market, to better understand current and possible future skills that graduates should ideally have. The focus should be on both job-specific and generic or 'soft' skills. Without this information, it will be difficult for HEIs to prepare students to meet the expectations of employers. Also, because skills (especially job-specific skills) differ across careers, the approach should be discipline-driven. For example, the Department of electrical engineering may want to understand the skills needed in that sector.

2. Universities and colleges should engage their students in career service initiatives right from entry. Most often, students do not actively consider their career goals nor seek support for doing this until late in their programme, which might result in missed opportunities. Engaging students early will help them better understand themselves and to decide whether the course they are pursuing is the right one for them.

3. There should be opportunities, through teaching and learning, for students to develop employability skills. Active learning strategies such as discussion, group work, presentation, research, problem-based learning, and field trips should be prioritised. In addition, assessments should require students to apply knowledge, rather than recall facts. This is because the application of knowledge helps students develop critical thinking skills.

4. There is a need for reliable and trustworthy measurement indicators to be developed through broader stakeholder engagement. Career services programmes should be evaluated regularly, using multiple data sources, and feedback should be used to improve programme delivery for better outcomes. The scope of measurement indicators also needs expanding, to capture more information for the improvement of career services. This includes capturing information at lower granularity, such as the number of students who attended interviews at a career fair and distributing such information according to the students' majors and departments.

5. The quality of programmes and activities designed by universities and colleges to prepare students for work is a key indicator when employers are considering potential partnerships and recruitment of students/alumni. This suggests that universities and colleges should be intentional in investing in programmes that provide opportunities for students to enhance their career readiness.

6. Universities and colleges should explore other ways to increase students' participation in career services initiatives. In addition to postings of programmes on institutions' noticeboards and websites, student volunteers should be engaged across year groups to talk to their colleagues about these initiatives.
Also, these institutions should engage faculty members to inform students about opportunities available during their orientation, as well as during the first lecture of the academic year. Subsequent reminders can then be sent to students during the academic year, alongside referring students to participate in relevant initiatives. Furthermore, initiatives should be planned to reflect other commitments of students, such as the need for them to attend lectures. If/when the timings of career-focused initiatives are not flexible and clash with lectures, uptake by students will be low.

7. Institutions should incorporate students' and alumni's voices in designing and evaluating initiatives. Students can suggest relevant initiatives based on an assessment of themselves and their future goals. Also, inclusive processes promote students' participation and ownership.

8. Time spent by students in participating in career services programmes should be accounted for when cumulating students' credits. In addition, these institutions need to make the academic timetable flexible to allow students to participate in such programmes.

b. Recommendations for employers

1. University–industry partnerships bring mutual benefits. Therefore, employers should not wait to be approached by universities. They should also reach out to universities to discuss opportunities for potential partnerships.

2. Employers need to share current and projected skills requirements with universities to help incorporate such skills into the curriculum and enable career services departments to provide relevant support to students and alumni. A digital platform can be created to share data from different sectors of the industry. This will also help students and parents align career choices to areas that have promising job prospects.

3. There is a need to create more avenues for internships. One possibility is to give shorter internship placements so that more students can have access. Another option is to consider virtual internships where possible.

4. Employers should work with universities to improve existing courses to address skills needs, rather than duplicate courses by setting up their training institutions. When employers design work readiness or training for new graduates and existing employees, they need to work closely with universities to promote knowledge transfer.

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