

## ■ SKILLS ■

# ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

## The role of career training and enrichment workshops in tertiary education



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In today's transmogrifying job market, the significance of career training and skill-building workshops in tertiary education for creating job-ready graduates cannot be overemphasised. The liberal arts education, as compared to the traditional education curriculums, that usually lean toward offering degrees, transforms the lives of the students by developing graduate employability skills and capabilities.

Stakeholders such as guardians, alumni, and employers also find it beneficial to fund the higher education curriculum that creates career-relevant learning. As this form of learning is unlikely to be automated, even in this age of machine learning and artificial intelligence, organisations value it the most. Consequently, career preparation and training workshops are a key factor in equipping students with the knowledge and capabilities necessary to navigate workplace dynamics and complexities.

Creating pathways for career-building opportunities is as important as making a long-term commitment to advancing higher education outcomes for graduates. It is necessary to maintain a purposeful dedication to the continuous advancement of both educational attainment and creating paths for career development.

However, studies unveil a mismatch between the skills recent graduates come up with and the abilities required by employers. In a recent virtual forum titled "The Soft Skills Gap", organised by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, experts investigated a gap between the knowledge imparted by higher education institutions and the skills demanded by employers. The forum highlighted the growing importance of soft skills development in an era characterised by hybrid work and digital innovation.

Another study by Deloitte, the largest professional services network, reveals that approximately 74 million youths worldwide are seeking employment. Nevertheless, there needs to be more between the skills they possess and those required by companies, particularly in already-developed and emerging markets.

In his *Harvard Business Review* article "The Biggest Hurdles Recent Graduates Face Entering the Workforce", Professor Andy Molinsky of Brandeis University calls this gap a "cultural" void, that is "very significant, but typically underemphasised." He advocates that intelligent individuals should be ready to spend the time and learn the skills necessary to improve their careers.

It is crucial to ensure that education and skill development are equally accessible to all students in tertiary education institutions to ease the transition from academia to industry. So, incorporating career preparation and enrichment workshops into our tertiary education curriculum addresses these skill gaps many employers cite as barriers to new hires.

The article "The Employability Mismatch" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, suggests that graduates crumble due to a lack of necessary skills in oral and written communication, decision-making, logical reasoning, and research ability. To this end, we prioritise workplace skills enhancement training to bridge this

gap and ensure that students are academically prepared and well-equipped with the interpersonal and practical skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century modern workforce.

While some argue that higher education should educate individuals widely and not as narrowly as to teach the workplace skills required to be trained on the job, others claim that workforce capabilities should be taught as part of the curriculum to help graduates adapt to real-world experience as sustained by Mantz Yorke, "It is inappropriate to assume that students are highly employable on the basis of curricular provision alone."

Yorke continues that while an academic degree is a good indicator for seeking entry to employment, there is always a strong reason for co-curricular learning activities to boost students' employability after graduation. Career preparation training is meticulously focused on developing abilities essential to employment but is usually overlooked in traditional academic programmes.

Students develop communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and resilience skills through simulations and other practice-oriented activities. These skills transform them into market-ready seasoned individuals.

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Through personalised lessons and interactive activities covering the areas of soft skills employers look for the most, students gain the confidence to showcase their abilities and communicate effectively with potential employers. This hands-on approach equips students to articulate their strengths and experiences and makes them more competitive in the job market.

Integrating a skills enhancement and career development component into our tertiary education curriculum plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainability through education. Victoria Jackson et al. note in their *Routledge* article that "skills developed in a more situated context yield better outcomes." Moreover, these career enhancement lessons go beyond classroom teaching to networking opportunities with industry professionals and alumni. These opportunities allow students to build connections that can be influential in their job search and provide practical skills to meet specific needs and expectations and face the challenges within their chosen industries.

Career-enhancing training and workshops are essential components of a well-rounded tertiary education curriculum to bridge the skills gap in graduate employability. By investing in these programmes, we support our student's career aspirations and contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

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