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Forward by Ross Hall #

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Global context for the report

A globalising economy

Diverging economies and new economic powers

The economies of the world are diverging. There is a big increase in global outsourcing within the manufacturing and service sectors, and businesses now see no boundaries to setting up wherever they think their interests will be served best. Amongst other outcomes, this has resulted in the emergence of new economic powers.

A global skills race

The global skills race is real, and it is intensifying. Skills will determine economic fortunes for many countries in the foreseeable future. Education will be the key to competing in the race.

Clear commonalities between countries

The nature of skills demand is increasingly consistent, with businesses and organisations in different countries looking for people with a core set of foundation qualities.

The demands on education

An unprecedented pace of change

Economic growth rates in Brazil, China and India are outstripping those of established economies by two or three times. This is creating significant challenges for education systems in these countries, and governments and businesses generally agree that future economic success rests on the ability of educators and industry to develop and nurture a highly flexible workforce.

The need for work-ready employees

With the intensity and scale of competition rising rapidly around the world, industry increasingly wants to recruit work-ready employees. Businesses need workers who excel in quality service provision, innovation and leadership. What's more, competitiveness can be inhibited by the costs of recruiting, 'misrecruiting', developing and retaining a competitive workforce.

A changing workforce

Employees need to be more flexible

There is a growing sense that there are no barriers to educational or professional mobility. This increasing mobility and the rapid pace of change in particular roles or sectors are creating demand for a more flexible, adaptable employee.

Increasing expectations among populations

Economic growth is funding increasing educational opportunity. This, in turn, is raising the expectations level among learners and employees. They want better jobs, and they want faster progression.

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4 Findings – Key Global Issues

The concept of globalisation is often used to refer to the blurring of international economic boundaries and the increasing connectivity of the world's economies. It seems now that professional education sits firmly within this paradigm.

While country-specific skills demands still exist, the focus of education is ever more on portable qualities that individuals can use in any job, in any sector, anywhere in the world. The irony is that in the knowledge economy, knowledge alone is not enough and, in fact, is less important than having the right attitude and understanding how to learn and how to behave. In one sense, the challenges for education are very much social and are therefore culturally defined.

However, the overall picture of demand and need is remarkably similar across the world. And it is possible to characterise both a set of common challenges (which we do below) and a definition of the ideal 21st century employee (which we do in the previous chapter).

Finally, we can propose a series of actions that all countries can pursue in order to improve the impact education can have on the ability of a workforce to support and grow the economy (this is our final chapter 4).

Many good things are already happening, and it will be some time before the impact of policy changes as well as business-led initiatives will be known. However, new thinking, new ideas and new approaches are required.

Discussion of key global issues

The issues identified above relating to **economic policy** (in the first column) are discussed in Chapter 2 – Context. Further issues exist in the following areas:

1 Workforce Requirements...

1.1 Amplifying employer voice

- there is, generally, a sense of scepticism from business leaders towards the nature and level of their involvement in professional education strategy and policies
- in some cases, there are simply not the mechanisms in place to facilitate this interaction. In others, the structures are seen as cumbersome, irrelevant or ineffective
- the need for industry to articulate what it needs and then to contribute to the design of any solution is starkly apparent. This should be policy led and should involve significant initiatives aimed at generating impact across the board
- the example of SETAs in South Africa is apposite in this context: many agree with the principle of sector-driven authorities. However, perceptions of the effectiveness of this set-up vary – in some sectors, the representative SETA is seen as proactive, dynamic and valued. In other, this is not the case
- if Government and policy makers can provide the political and economic support for these initiatives, businesses certainly seem positive about contributing
- those who manage this process most effectively will see long-term benefits accrue from having a policy driven by need and not by politics or guesswork

1.2 Difficulty in defining required qualities

- because for a fundamental disconnect between employers, government and education/educators, there are significant problems around communicating business needs and requirements
- however, before even that, there are issues around the specific definition of requirements with businesses ill equipped to identify specific skills gaps
- whilst employers often have an idea of the qualities and attributes they are looking for in an ideal employee, they more often than not fail to articulate this into a coherent vision
- without clearer definitions of required qualities, education will struggle to meet demand and those choosing educational pathways will do so without the benefit of knowing what sort of abilities and attributes they should be acquiring and developing