University World News

A Special Report previewing Going Global 2016 in Cape Town

Building nations and connecting cultures

BRITISH COUNCIL

Going Global 2016 – Setting the higher education agenda

Going Global 2016's theme of 'Building Nations and Connecting Cultures' came out of a rich and 'feisty' discussion on local versus international priorities in higher education and how they mesh – or don't – and reflects how the focus of the annual conference has broadened, reports **Karen MacGregor**

GOING GLOBAL 2016 really began with a "constructive but feisty" steering meeting in Cape Town about what the focus could be – and why the British Council was even leading such a global higher education debate.

The theme of "Building Nations and Connecting Cultures" came out of a rich discussion on local versus international priorities and how they mesh or don't, said Jo Beall, director of education and society for the British Council.

"This fed into the notion of universities contributing to nation building." The full theme of Going Global 2016 is: "Building Nations and Connecting Cultures: Education policy, economic development and engagement".

These are issues of interest to universities and governments around the world, and are of great pertinence to the region, said Beall, who is well placed to lead global development dialogues.

A graduate of the London School of Economics, she was a professor of development studies there and later deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town. She

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is an expert on internationalising higher education and international development and a prolific author who has researched extensively in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and South Africa.

This year's Going Global has attracted higher quality papers and panels than in the past, Beall said: "We think it is part of the evolution of Going Global towards being a much more serious, thoughtful conference. High quality papers have come from all over the world including the African continent, and that is very pleasing."

She stressed the importance of regional input. Going Global has an overarching advisory board, based in the UK and comprising a core of people representing key constituencies such as Universities UK as well as people who are knowledgeable about the themes. "As important, and meeting as often and steering the content to the same degree, is a regional committee."

The first of several regional steering meetings was held in South Africa in early 2015. It has representatives of key bodies like the Association of African Universities, Universities South Africa, the Cape Higher Education Consortium and the South African government as well as university leaders and experts from around Africa.

"The African steering committee made it very clear that they were anxious about holding a conference that smacked perhaps of imperialism or neo-colonialism. Were we coming to Africa to further the brain drain? Absolutely not. The reason why we have a regional steering committee is so that we can set the agenda for the conference together."

A change of direction

Beall described Going Global as the world's key non-membership based, independent international higher education conference. It is different from ministerial gatherings or international education association conferences. "Going Global started small and with a focus on international higher education and student recruitment, but it's moved way beyond that."

So where has Going Global been moving?

"The first thing is that it moves around the world, and this is going to be the first time in Africa," she said. "The second thing is that it is no longer is about the internationalisation of higher education and is much more about international trends and issues." Tertiary education and the skills field are also covered.

Going Global has been around for 12 years. In the early years the focus was on areas such as transnational education, branch campuses, joint programmes and student mobility.

Then in 2012 one of the keynote speakers was Harvard's Professor Homi Bhabha, a critical theorist renowned for his work in post-colonial studies. He spoke eloquently about international relations, the role of higher education in it and social identity.

After testing the water with Going Global's key constituencies of ministers, civil servants, university leaders and directors of international offices, the decision was made to go in a more thoughtful direction.

Two years ago, Going Global was in Miami, chosen as a bridge between Latin America and North America, with access and quality the big issues. Last year it was back in the UK, where the key issues – for all of Europe – were access and inclusion.

For Cape Town: "It is about how higher education can play a role in positive social and economic change. We know that economically higher education gives rise to a skilled workforce, and research universities contribute to innovation and knowledge economies. But we're also focusing a lot on the social contribution to nation-building – the creation of more informed

Jo Beall: 'It's about how HE can play a role in positive social and economic change'

citizens, more tolerant societies, more participative communities and then the better living conditions that come out of some of the research that universities give rise to."

Education policy, economic development and engagement

In 1961 the former president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, when the University of Ghana became independent from the University of London, spoke of the importance of the university for nation building – and also the importance of remaining internationally connected and relevant to be able to play the nation-building role.

The great African leader's argument, said Beall, "shows the connection between nation-building and local concerns but also the importance of not becoming parochial and cut off from international trends". This is one of Going Global 2016's key strands for debate.

Indeed, there are many burning issues among the themes of education policy, economic development and engagement.

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A UNIVERSITY WORLD NEWS REPORT

On 3-5 May education world leaders will descend on Cape Town, South Africa, for Going Global 2016, an open forum to debate international higher and further education issues and challenges, and to discuss collaborative solutions, for which *University World News* is a media partner. The focus will be on 'Building nations and connecting cultures: education policy, economic development and engagement'. In this supplement, our reporters preview some of the key topics that will be discussed.

Hot education policy issues include the question of reconciling global and local imperatives and competitive drivers with the need to address common problems. "For policy-makers one of the key challenges is how to open up your education system to increase access and competition – which is good for all – without undermining the national system."

Under the theme of economic development, said Beall, in terms of higher education there are two key areas up for debate – on the need to produce both employable graduates and research, and on differentiation.

It is important to shift a widespread view that the role of African universities is merely to provide employable graduates for economic development. While this is "absolutely critical", the right of African and other developing country higher education systems and universities to also invest in research and innovation must be respected.

Which leads to the second big question – whether to achieve that balance within one university or within one system, which is a hot debate, including in the UK and Africa.

"Going Global, with its high proportion of ministers attending, is a good vehicle for that debate."

Engagement was a theme enthusiastically suggested by the African steering committee and, continued Beall, it will now be influenced by activities in South Africa around the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements.

"Before all that happened, we were thinking in quite bland terms about the relationship between democracy, access to justice and rule of law. Now the debate will be much more about the role of students, their relationship with the wider world, outsourcing and so on."

The student fees debate is global. "It's going to be very interesting to have an African-led and African-demonstrated engagement issue put before a global audience."

> *'We are focusing a lot on the social contribution to nation-building – the creation of more informed citizens, more tolerant societies, more participative communities and the better living conditions that come out of research'*

Value of rankings – A means for universities to improve

"THERE CAN never be a single, reliable, overarching ranking system that is acceptable to all universities and interested parties, because universities mean different things to different people," says Gerald Wangenge-Ouma, director of institutional planning at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. But universities should use ranking as a means to improve, while ranking systems should support stability and recognise multiple expressions of excellence.

"I'm for a system that supports stability so that universities don't think they have to keep moving here and there to clinch a top position in the ranking. I'm for a ranking system that acknowledges that

Global university ranking systems are big business and are evolving rapidly, but are they all helpful? Gerald Wangenge-Ouma would like to see rankings that are stable, recognise difference and context, and acknowledge multiple forms of excellence, **Karen MacGregor** reports

universities are different, are located in different political economies and perform different roles. I'm for a rankings system that acknowledges the multiple expressions of excellence across the various things that universities do," states Wangenge-Ouma, who will participate in a panel on university rankings at Going Global 2016.

Hyperactive
The field of university rankings is bustling with activity. Global ranking systems are evolving quite rapidly and there are new rankings coming in, and offshoot rankings drawn from existing information such as those for Asia, Latin America, Africa and 'young' universities.

Many countries have national rankings and some – such as the United States – have numerous rankings across a range of indicators from research to cost to safety. Some countries, such as the United Kingdom and South Africa, have de facto rankings in the form of research

assessments, and others such as Kenya are considering producing rankings. The European Union is supporting U-Multirank, a ranking that is everything to everyone.

Rankings, Wangenge-Ouma points out, are big business and lots of people want a piece of the pie. "So going forward, we're going to see more and different kinds of rankings coming onto the scene and trying to distinguish themselves from existing rankings".

There has been a lot of criticism of the major ranking systems for not considering country or regional specificities, or country policy thrusts that should keep higher education busy, or for focusing too heavily on research and on science fields.

The big players have made changes to their systems. For instance, QS won't consider an article with more than 10 authors. The humanities are getting more attention and there are efforts to measure teaching and learning.

There is a push for university engagement to be considered. "We're seeing people coming up with all manner of things, claiming that they are trying to address the limitations of the current ranking systems. In certain instances they are making the whole thing unwieldy."

There remains considerable resistance to university rankings, which are essentially hierarchical and thus never going to be satisfactory to all institutions – alongside widespread acceptance of their importance.

Taking advantage of rankings

University ranking is like globalisation, says Wangenge-Ouma: "You cannot say you're out of it because it sucks you in." Universities are approached to provide data. "They say it is voluntary and it is OK if you don't want to. You say 'we don't want to'. But when the

Gerald Wangenge-Ouma

ranking is released you see that you're there."

The University of Pretoria has referenced a few rankings – Times Higher Education, QS, the Leiden University ranking and Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Academic Ranking of World Universities. Institutions should decide for themselves which rankings to use.

"We reference these rankings to drive internal performance. The University of Pretoria has determined that it wants to be a leading research university. There are certain things we want to achieve. We use these ranking systems inter alia to determine how we are doing." For instance, how does the institution's research in genetics compare with the best in the world?

Wangenge-Ouma argues that universities should relate to rankings vis-à-vis institutional objectives and national imperatives for higher education, "and not use a ranking as an end in itself, as a flag that you fly high up there when you appear in some ranking, and say 'We're the best in the world'. Because people change the ranking criteria, so the following year you might not appear – and what do you say then? Are you now a mediocre university?"

The case of Africa

Could Africa use university rankings in an innovative way?

"One hundred percent. I don't believe in this idea of African exceptionalism. We're not doing this, we're not doing that because of our colonial history, because we don't have this, because we don't have that." Continental plans and declarations, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and resolutions that came out of the African Higher Education Summit held in Dakar last March, aspire to enhance research on the continent.

Rankings, says Wangenge-Ouma, could play an important role, for instance in determining which universities have the wherewithal or concentration of capacity to set up centres of excellence. "We recognise that we do not have sufficient resources, so why is everyone on the continent doing the same things with the little resources that they have?"

Rankings can be used by universities not only at the institutional level but at the subject level to identify people who are

doing exceptional things in their fields. "What might that mean for the rest of Africa in terms of enhancing science, support for postgraduate education or partnerships across the continent?"

Although only a few African universities perform well in global rankings, "if you dig deep, you see there are very interesting things happening across the continent. And so the question becomes, how do you optimise these things to enhance excellence – whether it is in teaching or research or community engagement – and draw lessons?"

An African university ranking system would be a useful tool, Wangenge-Ouma argues, but should not be approached from the point of view of exceptionalism – that Africa should have a different ranking system in order to avoid being compared against the best in the world. "We would be lying to ourselves."

Differentiation

Considering the differentiated nature of higher education systems and the fact that universities (rightly) pursue different things, any ranking system should take into account that universities exist in particular contexts and have particular niches and visions.

"My position, from a differentiation and diversification point of view, is that universities occupy particular spaces in their societies and perform different roles across their regions. We can't take just one of the roles, which is privileged across many ranking systems, and say you are only going to be considered a good university if you are doing this well."

While knowledge is universal, he argues, there are universities producing context-specific knowledge that is, for instance, supporting subsistence farmers or being taken up immediately by communities. "Ranking systems should acknowledge some of these things. What we've seen is universities running away from their areas of strength, and trying to do things that are privileged by the ranking systems, even though they don't have the capacity."

That's why Wangenge-Ouma wants rankings that are stable, recognise difference and context, and acknowledge multiple forms of excellence.

'We've seen universities running away from their areas of strength, and trying to do things that are privileged by the ranking systems, even though they don't have the capacity'

How can universities respond to the refugee crisis?

Refugees spend on average 17 years in exile, yet fewer than 1% gain access to higher education. Providing scholarships or collaborating to offer connected learning in the camps are two key ways that universities can address this global challenge, reports **Brendan O'Malley**

Syrian refugees in Bekaa valley, Lebanon

THE EU migration minister has described the rising number of refugees queuing at the European Union's borders as the worst refugee crisis since World War Two. But it is also true that this type of problem is nothing new.

For as long as there have been wars and threats of persecution there have been populations on the move in different parts of the world, forced to resettle in whichever country will take them.

The world's biggest refugee camp complex, for instance, is not found outside the Channel Tunnel at Calais or at the border fence between Greece and Macedonia. It is located in Africa at Dadaab in eastern Kenya, 90 kilometres from Somalia and has been there for 25 years. Dadaab accommodates 350,000 refugees.

While the United Kingdom has quibbled over taking in any more than 4,000 Syrian refugees a year over the next five years, Jordan was estimated by the UN Refugee Agency, or UNCHR, to have more

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> *'We want to see connected learning moving into many countries where at the moment many refugees have very little access to opportunities in higher education. We see it as the most viable way of expanding provision to refugee students.'*

than 800,000 refugees last month, compared to its population of nearly 6.9 million. Next door, in Lebanon, the 1.4 million estimated refugees actually outnumber the national population of nearly 1.2 million.

The current crisis is being fuelled by the exodus from Syria, where 7.6 million were forcibly displaced inside its borders and a further 4.27 million were estimated to have fled the country by the end of 2015.

But there are also high numbers of refugees from Afghanistan and Somalia (2.59 million and 1.1 million respectively at the end of 2014).

Grand challenge

Many university leaders are in no doubt that this is one of the grand challenges of our time. But what is the role of higher education in responding to this crisis?

This question will be debated by education leaders at the British Council's Going Global 2016 conference in Cape Town in May.

The issue matters because so little attention is paid to – and still less aid spent on – the role of education in humanitarian situations. A large proportion of the world's refugees are stuck in indefinite limbo in host countries that deny them the right to work outside of the camps and where, for young people of university age, there is little opportunity of higher education.

While access to higher education is 32% on average across the world, among refugees it is less than 1%. With refugees spending 17 years

Brian Cantor

Refugee students at BHER's HE hub in Dadaab camp, Kenya

on average in exile, this is a gaping social injustice.

It may also be further fuelling conflict. Education is the key to development of marginalised communities and could play a critical role in helping young people resist the lure of joining militant groups or extremist causes.

So what can be done about it?

One of the speakers at Going Global 2016 will be Brian Cantor, vice-chancellor of the University of Bradford, UK. He believes there has to be a two-pronged approach of contributing to building peace

through education and research, and looking at the options for providing higher education to refugees.

His university – which includes what is thought to be the oldest peace studies department in the world, established 42 years ago – has a long history of contributing to the former approach, with a strong focus on disarmament.

Universities of sanctuary

An idea he wants to present at Going Global 2016 and also at the World Technology University Congress, which Bradford University is hosting later this year, is the notion of universities providing 'sanctuary' and being recognised for that.

'Sanctuary' could include supporting academics who face persecution, working with the students' union to develop student action for refugees and exploring, with other universities, how to take action collectively to provide higher education for refugees.

"Could there be a kitemark saying you are a university doing its best to support [refugees and asylum seekers]?" he muses.

But what could those routes to sanctuary be?

The obvious one, and the first one that most higher education leaders naturally think of, is offering places at their own university. Some universities, like Bradford, are already offering a smattering of scholarships and funded placements to threatened students and scholars with the help of organisations such as the New York-based Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund.

In Germany universities are expected to accept tens of thousands of refugees this year, and the EU Trust Fund's Further and Higher Education Programme for Vulnerable Syrian Youth, aims to assist 20,000 young Syrians through a combination of full-time scholarships and full-time enrolment in short-cycle higher education courses.

Important questions

Two important questions have been raised about scholarship schemes for refugees.

One is whether there is a mechanism to ensure or encourage the return of students to contribute to their country or community in exile once they graduate.

Another question is whether their effect is to support only students from wealthy families because in many cases scholarships cover tuition but not living costs.

An alternative approach is to look at ways of providing higher education in the camps and urban settings where refugees are being hosted in the region of their conflict.

A number of university alliances and partnerships such as Borderless Higher Education for Refugees, and individual institutions, such as the Australian Catholic University, and InZone, a centre at the University of Geneva, are attempting to do this using 'connected learning'.

This is a form of blended learning in which students gather as a learning community in one resource centre, but learn online, with their studies supported by provision of laptops, a local facilitator and visiting lecturers, as well as academics online.

This has the advantage of being one 20th of the cost of scholarships on average, according to UNCHR, creating the potential to reach many more students and particularly those from marginalised communities who could not afford to pay the living costs.

There are important questions to raise about blended learning too, however, such as will the drop-out rate be higher and will the qualifications achieved be recognized in the host country?

Setting standards and exchanging best practice to help scale up provision of good-quality connected learning to refugees is the common goal of a group of institutions and higher education alliances working with UNCHR to try to establish a consortium of providers.

"We want to see this moving into many countries where at the moment many refugees have very little access to opportunities in higher education," says Ita Sheehy, senior education officer at UNCHR, which initially brought the group together – with InZone, now taking the leading role.

"We see it as the most viable way of expanding [provision] to refugee students."

Can internationalisation be a negative force?

MANY UNIVERSITIES value internationalisation as a way to improve education and research locally, through knowledge and technology exchanges, access to world-class education, international benchmarking of methods and teaching practices, education diplomacy, and interaction with other countries.

But is this always so? If institutions from emerging countries partner with those from rich countries, will Western models and assumptions, or even the use of English, dominate, unbalancing the relationship and deepening the disadvantages for the weaker partner?

Recognising and addressing some of the potentially negative sides of internationalisation will be an area of debate at this year's Going Global 2016.

An Egyptian perspective

Equality of funding and jointly setting priorities must be part of any international partnership, according to Professor Ali Shams el Din, president of Benha University, Egypt, where internationalisation has urged a revolution in higher education reform.

Does the hegemony of Western models of internationalisation serve to create and deepen inequalities in universities in the South, or is international education a force for good? It may depend on your strategy and approach. **Brendan O'Malley** reports

Without them there would be serious challenges.

On some aspects, particularly attempts to compete in international rankings, Egyptian institutions do not have the resources to match their goals, but on others they have been supported by external partners.

He said: "With the assistance from various foreign countries and parties, especially the United Kingdom represented in the British Council, internationalisation in the Egyptian universities has moved from being a marginal priority to being a high [priority] that is more carefully and centrally encouraged, organised and administered."

Egyptian universities have started to establish sustained international relationships, encourage collaborative research, introduce new schemes for student and faculty mobility, unify diplomas, foster international learning

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and adopt foreign reforms in order to make their status fit for this globalised education, he said.

But they have also attempted to improve their international ranking and attract talented scholars, without sufficient existing talent, resources and funds.

"This leaves the Egyptian universities at a significant disadvantage. They find it extremely challenging and complex to establish their prestige on the global higher education market. They barely register on world institutional rankings and produce a small percentage of the world's research output," he said.

Another critical challenge is some universities are being tempted to concentrate funds and efforts to improve performance specifically in areas measured in the rankings and pay less attention to other issues that are not rewarded in those scores.

Real internationalisation, says Shams el Din – who remembers fondly his own experience of studying for a PhD in France in what is now known as Paris Tech – is not just about having links, but having a genuine partnership. It should mean "having win-win relationships, relationships of equality".

A strategic partnership therefore means having student mobility in both directions, and an institutional partnership that looks both ways in different fields, with joint research, co-authorship of publications, joint workshops, and frequent meetings and exchanges of ideas.

For Benha University this type of arrangement was made possible by the establishment of the Newton Fund – a £375 million (US$533 million) fund through which science and innovation partnerships promote the economic development and welfare of 15 partnering countries focusing around their priority areas – through which the UK and Egypt co-funded activities including cooperation on a sector level and implementation by institutions.

Egypt and the UK are "working in an equitable way because the fund is co-funded, and the priorities are agreed together," Shams el Din said.

Both sides agreed to work on food, health, education, climate change and energy, covering many of the priorities in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Earlier this year 10 Egyptian and British universities signed memorandums of understanding with

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> *'When there is a lack of an internationalisation strategy on one side, this partner will be vulnerable to the power of the stronger one'*

each other to start scoping visits, study visits and joint research. Some of them will also be putting in place joint masters degrees.

Part of a "win-win", Shams el Din says, is that a PhD student sent to a laboratory in the UK to do research will learn from working with an international research team, and return to Egypt bringing their international experience with them, enriching the teaching in Benha University and the research he or she does there.

As well as the UK, Benha – which has had a strategic plan for internationalization in place for four years now – has partnerships with China, in joint agricultural research, and Japan in veterinary services.

A Brazilian perspective

Professor Evaldo Vilela, president of the State Funding Agency of Minas Gerais, a state in south-eastern Brazil whose name reflects the importance of gold and iron ore mining in its development, says Brazil is stronger internationally in research than teaching. In global terms it has a competitive group of excellence in research in health, agriculture and computing, and its key concern in internationalisation is having a local agenda for research.

"Today in Brazil we are very much concerned about having a local agenda for research. If we don't have a proper agenda for the country, people involved in international exchanges will take the international agenda," he says.

A key issue is funding. Brazilian universities are not looking for 100% but 50:50. His state has for a long time had partnerships with Germany, France and the US but in the past lacked funding to cooperate with the UK. That has changed since the Newton Fund was established.

Last year they received around US$1 million of external funding from the Newton Fund and support from the UK embassy in Brazil and the British Council.

Two factors which put Brazil at a

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disadvantage are the language, because Brazilians do not speak English and all of their neighbours speak Spanish; and the economy because the currency has plummeted against the euro and dollar.

"The main problem is the cost of living for our students [abroad], because of our economic crisis," he said.

Speaking English is not a problem Vilela faces himself, having earned a PhD at Southampton University, but it is one that has grown since the country focused on training people to be teachers who have a local language, rather than importing teachers from the US, as it used to.

Minas Gerais has a network for internationalisation, enabling universities to work together and negotiate en bloc with potential partners. For instance, research links have been built on human vaccines, nanotechnology, neglected diseases and dairy products with the Netherlands, for instance.

Institutions in Minas Gervais have partnerships with Africa, sending students for graduate courses but also researchers to Mozambique; and Latin America, with Argentina in health, physics and biology, and with Colombia in biology and agriculture.

For Shams el Din, whatever the risks and benefits of internationalisation, the key to getting the balance right in partnerships is to work within the framework of institution to institution agreements and with "government to government blessing".

"If we have an institution to institution partnership we will take care of issues like our policies, the approach to research subjects, the agenda, the intellectual property rights on both sides. When there is a lack of an internationalisation strategy on one side, this partner will be vulnerable to the power of the stronger one," he said.

Evaldo Vilela

University partnerships are vital to China's ambitions

China needs international university partnerships to become a global player. It is not just about improving higher education and research, but can also lead to broader linkages between cities and industry. **Yojana Sharma** reports

CHINA IS using international university partnerships to cement its regional and global position, making higher education a jumping-off point not just for research collaboration but also for city-to-city and industrial partnerships.

While the Asian giant is keen to bridge the quality gap between its universities and top universities overseas, it also needs to collaborate with top Western universities to boost innovation as it moves from being a manufacturing economy up the value chain.

"With the further deepening of [higher education] reform and opening up, the internationalisation of education in China is accelerating," said Zhong Weihe, president of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, in a recent speech, referring to the National Plan for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development, 2010–2020.

The reform document states China will "further open education" through "promoting international exchanges and cooperation, introducing quality education resources abroad and upgrading exchanges and cooperation".

Zhong said his university alone had signed cooperative agreements with some 305 overseas universities across more than 43 countries or regions. By 2015 the university had 180 international programmes for students, including 56 joint and dual degree programmes, he said.

"There is a lot of room for improvement on China's higher education in terms of its universality, exchangeability and openness," he said.

The emergence of China, its increasing economic ambitions and what it means for higher education will be a topic of debate at the British Council's Going Global 2016 conference on 3-5 May in Cape Town, South Africa.

Shifting focus

The focus of top Chinese universities is changing as the higher education system shifts from providing basic workforce skills to developing innovative capacity, while at the same time riding in tandem with China's global economic ambitions.

"In stepping up from being a manufacturing place to somewhere that needs more creativity and innovation, China recognises it needs a bit of assistance and help and this is part and parcel of that direction of travel," said Nick Miles, Nottingham University's pro-vice-chancellor for advancement and former CEO

> *'There is a lot of room for improvement on China's higher education in terms of its universality, exchangeability and openness'*

of Nottingham University's campus in Ningbo, China.

But it also fits in with China's broader ambitions. "China sees needs partnerships to become a global player, and acknowledges that it cannot do that alone," said Marijk van der Wende, professor of higher education systems at Utrecht University in the Netherlands and co-author of a recent

The Nottingham-Ningbo campus

Photo: Mayowa Ojo

'It's in the nature of universities to collaborate and cooperate. It is about the free exchange of ideas and we do this with partners all around the world'

paper on China's higher education internationalisation. University collaborations can lead to broader linkages, she argued.

Broader partnerships

For example, the decade-long partnership between UK's Nottingham University and China, which set up the first Sino-foreign university in China in Ningbo, a port city of eight million people – has evolved into a much wider partnership between the two cities.

An agreement was signed last month for city-to-city cooperation on trade and investment with trade offices being set up by both sides. The Nottingham city trade and investment office will be hosted on Nottingham's Ningbo Campus.

"The first Five Year Plan between Nottingham and Ningbo is the first cooperative plan not only between the UK and China but between China and anywhere else in the world," said Vice-mayor of the Ningbo Municipal Government Wang Jianhou after the agreement was signed on 26 February.

Through the city-to-city agreement the university is providing talent and that is "generating confidence" between the two sides, said Miles.

"The minute you start generating talent, it attracts talent; and that attracts companies and organisations who want to access the talent flow, and that in turn feeds into other areas – trade and investment, sporting and cultural, civic as well as higher education, and more broadly into the cities where [university collaborations] exist," Miles said.

Xiamen University in Malaysia

Similarly, a foray by China's Xiamen University into Malaysia – billed as China's first overseas branch campus – will be part of a much wider collaboration between universities and Malaysian and Chinese industries which are investing heavily in Southeast Asia.

It is part of a plan to involve universities as a jumping-off point for wider economic developments, trade and research – one of China's aims in funding the campus to the tune of MYR 652 million (US$159 million) for the first phase.

Xiamen University Malaysia opened its campus last month with 160 students. This exceeded expectations, according to Wang Ruifang, the Malaysian campus president, who said initially up to 100 students had been expected for the courses taught in English, which include traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese studies, journalism, accounting, new energy and engineering.

Degrees will be granted by Xiamen University in Fujian Province in China, and will be recognised by the Chinese and Malaysian governments. The plan is for it to grow to 10,000 students.

It is being seen in a much wider context, however, of major Chinese investments in Malaysia. The campus will be home to a China-ASEAN marine research institute that, like other higher education collaborations, would be part of China's so-called 'One Belt, One Road' initiative – a huge Chinese economic and foreign policy initiative which seeks to create a 'commonwealth' along the old Silk Road that ran from China through Asia and the Middle East to Europe.

"Internationalisation is an imperative in the educational reform; its goal is to train the younger generation to have the capability to solve problems of sustainable development," said Gong Ke, president of Nankai University, who said the university had cooperation and exchange relationships with 331 universities in 45 countries and regions.

Global problems such as climate change require global solutions, he said. "A sustainable world needs highly educated people all over the world. Universities, especially elite universities, should shoulder the duty to reduce the gap between developed and developing areas in education by every means."

Starting small

One of the first colleges established jointly by China and the UK, and based in the UK rather than China, is being set up in Cardiff in Wales as a collaboration between Cardiff University and Beijing Normal University.

It will offer a joint degree from the two universities after two years of study in the UK and two years in China. One of China's aims is to increase the number of foreign students at Chinese universities and this type of programme will do that, with Cardiff hoping to attract students not just from the UK but from the rest of Europe as well.

At present the joint college in Cardiff will offer mainly Chinese studies with a focus on the language, "but we hope to build on it longer term", said Colin Riordan, vice-chancellor of Cardiff University.

"We are also looking at computer science as the next area that we would want to work on together."

Looking at opportunities to tie up with Chinese industries "is the obvious thing to do", he said.

"It's in the nature of universities to collaborate and cooperate," Riordan said. "It is about the free exchange of ideas and we do this with partners all around the world."

Xiamen University in Malaysia

Skills and research – are universities relevant enough?

Governments spend heavily on higher education and demand impact on the economy and employment, but how should national priorities be balanced against university autonomy? Yojana Sharma reports

POLITICIANS AND policy-makers have been putting pressure on universities, insisting on relevance of both research and teaching. They argue that universities must respond better to national economic and social needs in their research; and to the labour market by turning out employable students.

This dual role of universities is a juggling act for any successful higher education system. How national systems can ensure 'relevance' will be debated by global education leaders at the British Council's Going Global 2016 conference in Cape Town, South Africa, to be held on 3-5 May.

"Governments are investing a lot of tax dollars in higher education and they want to see results. They want impact, that's natural," said Richard Armour, secretary general of Hong Kong's University Grants Committee. Yet, "balancing institutional autonomy and national priorities is quite a tricky issue to deal with", he added.

At the same time relevance of high-end research is hard to gauge, particularly for basic research where relevance and impact can take decades to become apparent.

"In publicly funded universities there is sometimes a tension between institutional autonomy and national priorities, yet if they enjoy a high level of public funding the government and tax payer expect to have some influence in the direction universities are pursuing," Armour told *University World News.*

But it is far from clear where the balance lies, and it is different for each country, depending on country size, its stage in economic development and other economic and political factors, said Caroline Chipperfield, senior advisor at the British Council in London.

"Education systems respond to governments and make different decisions depending on the country," she said.

Relevance

Relevance has also become important in curriculum design and teaching, in order to prepare students for the labour market. This often requires other skills – so-called soft skills – in addition to the academic, technical and analytical skills traditionally imparted by universities.

"It's hard to think that every higher education system should focus on skills. But it is the primary driver," said Chipperfield.

But making graduates employable goes beyond even academic knowledge and soft skills. As Erik Bloom, a senior economist at the World Bank's human development and economic management department in Washington DC, points out, "we don't know much about improving relevance and skills."

So far there are no specific indicators for employability that measure it in any useful way, he said. "It is not fair to ask a university to be accountable for their graduates' employment rates, as so many other factors dictate this, such as quality of entrance and the condition of the economy.

"So many World Bank higher education projects say their goal is employability but what does that mean?" Studies need to be carried out that separate employability from employment itself, in order to come up with employability indicators, said Bloom.

Universities "need to ask: are we researching the right things; and are people studying the right things and are they learning well? Honestly, there is no easy answer to this," Bloom said.

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Are we doing the right thing?

According to Armour, "graduates these days have to be prepared for different types of situations, several career changes in their lifetime and they will have to expect to continue to work throughout their working lives." Yet, often, institutions, policy-makers and the public get caught up in the debate about which subjects are more useful or relevant to the economy.

This may be the wrong approach, Bloom said.

Particularly in developing countries, what is important is not the difference between science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, graduates and non-STEM graduates – all are learning to be analytical – but the quality of teaching and learning. Unless students learn to apply the facts they have learned, the courses are not very useful, Bloom argues. "Quality is very important," he said.

In a country like Vietnam, students are already questioning what is being taught and how. They are aware that the education they are getting may not be serving them well, yet they are unable to get the right information to make better choices – they are like consumers who do not know what they are buying, Bloom said.

By the time they graduate and start looking for jobs it is too late.

And it is often forgotten that university education needs to be relevant to a particular student for that student to be successful.

"People jump to the wrong conclusions, for example, over the value of IT, or under-valuing something else. But without proper information students are not going to make the best choices for themselves," Bloom said.

Post-conflict challenges

Countries emerging from conflict have particular problems in ensuring relevance, and at the same time must build up their higher education systems from scratch.

One example is Afghanistan. In the immediate post-Taliban period, the country first had to respond to the crucial need for infrastructure and access, according to Osman Babury, Afghanistan's deputy minister for academic affairs at the country's higher education ministry.

A decade and a half later "the next phase is how to enrich higher education in terms of creativity and innovation", he said.

It was clear the country needed to strengthen research to respond to Afghanistan's needs and despite severe budgetary problems. "There is no alternative except for higher education to be engaged in research and innovation," he said.

"There is much to be done as the country's development has been neglected for decades."

What is relevant now, is quality, he said. "Now we would like to stress quality of education and higher education. We did not pay enough attention to the [quality] of graduates before because we were under pressure on access and the need to include women and vulnerable groups and so on in our expansion of higher education.
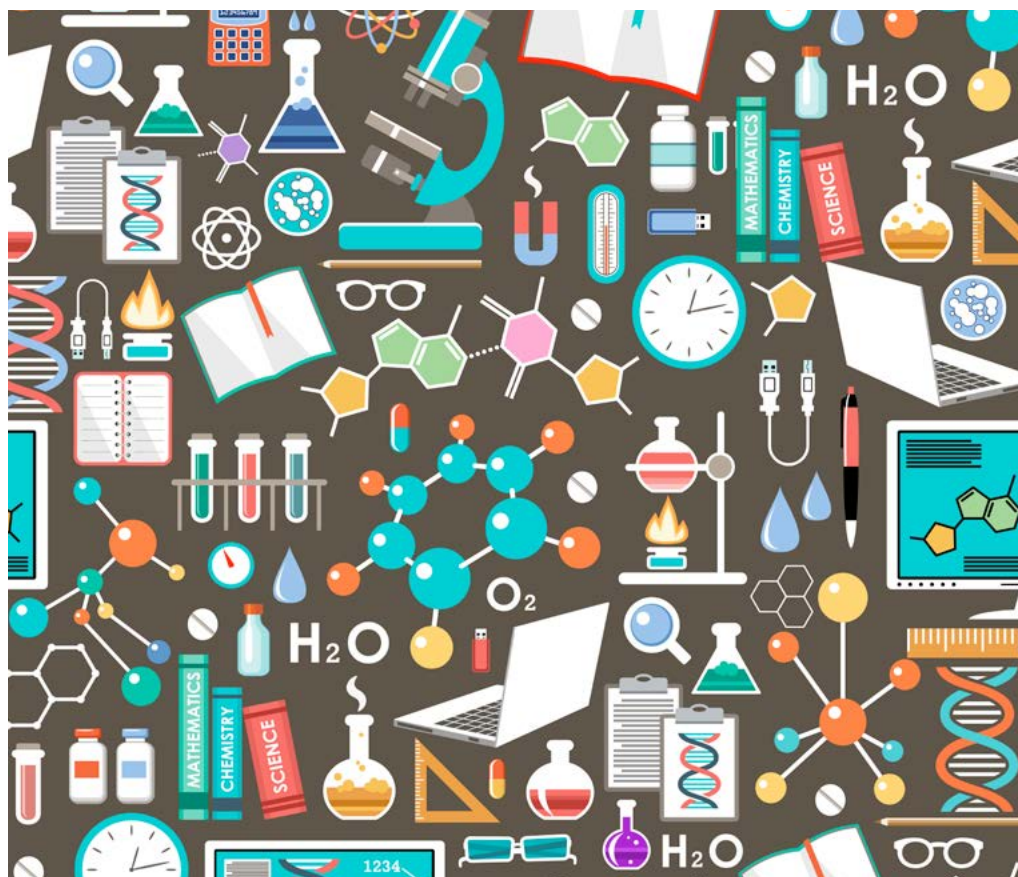
"The demand in the labour market for skilled and semi-skilled labour is very high and our graduates could not fulfil the requirements of employers,

'Graduates these days have to be prepared for different types of situations, several career changes in their lifetime'

so people from neighbouring countries came in for the jobs."

Uphill battle

"Security is a very critical issue for us. Unfortunately, Afghanistan is passing through a very hard time," he said referring to Western troop withdrawals since 2014. International stakeholders and programmes are leaving and that leads to joblessness especially among young people."

Graduate and youth joblessness is as high as 64%, according to British Council reports.

"Employability is a multidimensional issue," he said,

admitting that the higher education system neglected soft skills.

It is an uphill battle. The country recognised that the majority of disciplines and their curriculum were outdated and introduced a new curriculum in 2012. "But we see that this curriculum is not respected sufficiently by institutions because of a lack of resources, infrastructure and teachers," he said.

"Our concern is quality. Institutions are trying to respect our requirements, but not being able to supervise them causes dilution of quality, so we would like to be more organised to focus on quality and focus on employability."

The world needs strong higher education in Africa

For the first time, Going Global is being held in Africa. **Karen MacGregor** asked experts for their thoughts on mega-developments under way in African higher education and why they are important for the rest of the world.

" ANY WASTED neuron on this planet is a waste for humanity," says Professor Jelel Ezzine, president of the Tunisian Association for the Advancement of Science, Technology and Innovation.

When people are non-educated, problems are generated – locally and globally. "Supporting the development of higher education all over the world is of great importance."

It is a simple but compelling argument.

"It is fundamental that everybody gets appropriate education as well as higher education when possible and needed," adds the professor of systems theory and control at the University of Tunis El Manar in Tunisia, while contemplating why African higher

education is of consequence to the rest of the world.

Some countries have shown that Africa can build strong higher education and contribute to the global production of knowledge. One is Tunisia, on the northern tip of Africa, and another is South Africa on the southern tip.

South Africa produces the most peer-reviewed articles in absolute numbers, Tunisia the most in relation to gross domestic product. There are many other countries where higher education has strengthened and is contributing to development, though "much remains to be done".

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Bringing about change

As a former director general in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, founding director of Graduate Schools in Tunisia, a journal editor and consultant for global organisations, Ezzine has local and international and government and university experience. "Sometimes

a very simple policy can bring tremendous positive change to a system," Ezzine points out. "In Tunisia in 1996 we promulgated legislation that dealt with research, that had a tremendous impact on the production of knowledge. It showed the importance of political engagement and also the relevance of the right policy moves to change things for the better."

While African countries work hard to strengthen higher education, there is growing support for the sector at the regional and continental levels through, for instance, the postgraduate training Pan African University, the World Bank-supported African Centres of Excellence initiatives, and regional university associations and economic groupings.

"The main 'maestro' is the African Union," says Ezzine. Higher education's role in capacity building

'Non-traditional players like China, India and Brazil have entered the African higher education space with unprecedented vigour'

and human resource development has become important for the African Union, and is emphasised in its Agenda 2063 continental development framework.

"The political will is there because nobody can question any more the importance and role of higher education in developing the socio-economic dynamics of any country."

There has been a great deal of continental activity around higher education – such as the first African Higher Education Summit held in Senegal in March 2015. The Arusha Convention is supporting qualification recognition. The Julius Nyerere initiative is providing mobility scholarships and mechanisms to

structure university cooperation. There are big harmonisation drives around quality assurance and accreditation.

Such actions, says Ezzine, are key to overcoming great differences between countries and enhancing inter-African mobility. Importantly, "Africa is going through a demographic transition and has to respond very swiftly to a coming tsunami of youth that has to be educated and trained, and it is not an easy task."

Africa on the move

There is a positive side to Africa being the most youthful continent, says James Otieno Jowi, executive director of the African Network for Internationalisation of Education.

"This is very important for global higher education.

"First, it means that enrolments in higher education will grow tremendously. Africa is now the region with the fastest growing enrolment rates. There are reports of increases in numbers of universities in almost all African countries. It also means that Africa will be a major player in global mobility, with many young people seeking study opportunities in other countries."

There is renewed interest in African higher education, Jowi adds, both within and outside the continent. "Non-traditional players like China, India and Brazil have entered the African higher education

> *There will be opportunities to discuss how far Africa has gone global, whether it remains at the periphery of the knowledge society and what are the barriers to its participation*

space with unprecedented vigour. China has opened 60 Confucius Institutes in Africa and has committed to offer 150,000 scholarships for developing countries."

With African countries experiencing economic growth, its driver – the knowledge sector – is growing. Also expanding is the middle-class, which means that increasing numbers of Africans will be able to make choices regarding university.

"Higher education and international higher education are taking centre stage in Africa. African stakeholders are calling for more level ground in collaborations as a move from the imbalances and unfairness that have characterised historical collaborations.

"Going Global is an opportunity for global higher education to demonstrate responsibility in collaborations with Africa, so that such efforts spur developments rather than stifling Africa's efforts." Africa also presents global challenges ranging from poverty to environmental problems, global inequities and low knowledge production. There are many opportunities for universities to engage in interventions around the global Sustainable Development Goals.

Old knowledge, best brains

Dr Peggy Oti-Boateng, senior programme specialist for science and technology at UNESCO's regional office in Zimbabwe, says there is a lot going on in higher education in the area of educational technology through, for instance, the award-winning African Virtual University.

She also coordinates the African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions, a regional non-governmental agency that facilitates collaboration among institutions to support science, engineering and technology. It has

some 200 member institutions in 37 countries.

It is important to understand the great differences between universities in Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone countries, because of their colonial pasts – as well as differences within these groupings.

Africa, says Oti-Boateng, has varied cultures and rich natural resources that the world is interested in studying. There is also a wealth of indigenous knowledge, which brings about "quicker innovation, because you are starting from what you know today".

Perversely, what African higher education also offers the world is its best brains. Universities in the West are brimming with African academics and while there are diaspora initiatives, Oti-Boateng believes more can be done to draw on talented Africans with feet in different worlds.

There need to be more partnerships between African and

University of Cape Town and University of the Free State

international universities so that higher education can draw on "diaspora people who understand our issues and aspirations, so that we can work together on common fronts".

Going Global

At Going Global, Jelel Ezzine says, it will be good to see people exchanging successful practices and trying to adapt them to their contexts.

James Otieno Jowi agrees that it is positive to have Going Global in Africa. Concerted efforts could eradicate the continent's scars, and the conference will present opportunities to discuss major issues such as the extent to which Africa has gone global, whether it remains at the periphery of the knowledge society and barriers to its participation.

"African higher education leaders need to take their place at the table and discuss these issues. The future of Africa's youth is at stake."