

HOLONIQ 'FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE SUMMIT' PARIS, JUNE 2024

At this year's HolonIQ <u>Summit on Higher Education and Workforce Education</u> it was refreshing to hear from a range of experts and innovators in higher education who we do not typically hear much from in Australia.

While I learnt something from all of the speakers - there were some sessions which really gave me a lot of food for thought.

I have shared what I learned from two keynote presentations, on AI and microcredentials, on the latest episode of the <u>'What now?</u> <u>What next?' podcast</u>.

For those who prefer to read rather than listen to new information, I have included the transcript of that podcast episode here in this written summary (and hence those sections are less formal in tone than my summaries of the other sessions).

And if you have already listened to the podcast, then skip ahead to page 6 for my key takeaways from three other sessions focussing on:

- Technology infrastructure for tomorrow's university
- The role of higher education in the new skills economy, and
- Rethinking institutional boundaries: New university models.

AI in higher education

Prof. Rose Luckin, University College London and CEO EDUCATE Ventures

(Podcast transcript)

What I found so refreshing about Prof. Luckin was her combination of incredible scholarship with the ability to speak simply and make complex issues very straightforward.

She has been working in the area of AI in education for about 30 years. She was a teacher and then studied computer science and artificial intelligence (machine learning) within her PhD and says:

"I didn't talk about AI because people didn't want to know about AI. You talked about educational technology. It was all actually AI, but you didn't say AI. Now it's really interesting. Everyone wants to know about AI, but actually half the things that you hear are AI, aren't actually AI. So there's a weird reversal going on for me where there's always been AI, it's just that nobody wanted to call it that."

She went on to add that for 29 of the 30 years she's worked in this space, she's been really optimistic about AI being a wonderful tool, increasing equality of opportunity in education, allowing us to individualize support for students with diverse needs, particularly students who are often overlooked with neurodiversity.

But in the last 12-18 months, she says she's become a bit of a curmudgeon rather than the optimist and the champion that she used to be, and now is more concerned than she was even 2-3 years ago. She explained the reasons for her concern including:

- the consumerisation of AI
- the "we're going to make it all simple" emphasis. According to Prof Luckin if we are focussed on making it effortless then she has concerns, "whoever learned anything being effortless, this is such a negative set of messages for people when it comes to thinking of using AI for learning and education."
- the inequality which comes with the consumerism of AI is also a problem the basic version of the iPhone or a new laptop aren't going to have the newest/most impressive elements of AI built into them. They will be reserved for the higher end products (and those who can afford them), and
- she is also concerned by recent research which asks young people about what they think of AI and the majority of respondents said they think it will solve a lot of problems that they are facing and of course it is not going to be a panacea.



Prof. Luckin went on to describe the capability gap in most educational institutions – where teachers have not been educated themselves on all the things AI can do to improve learning, and hence the focus is a narrow one, on assessment and preventing cheating.

As she notes - the answer is not to try and prevent cheating on traditional tests and essays, it is to redesign the assessments.

She mentioned a recent BBC news item on research by academics at the University of Reading who <u>created 33 fake students and</u> <u>used ChatGPT</u> to answer exam questions for one of the university's undergraduate psychology degrees. The AI students got results which were half a grade higher on average than the real life students doing the degree and 94% of the AI students' essays did not raise any concerns with their markers.

As Prof. Lukin notes we need to get away from seeing academic integrity as being about "policing", to seeing academic integrity as being about rethinking assessment.

And the reason for thinking about that in relation to staff capability is because too many educators do not understand enough about AI to move beyond the thought of, "this is about cheating and we've got to stop it."

Instead, what is needed is to assist educators to think more creatively and more innovatively, and to recognise how AI can help teaching and learning... which is not simply through using Generative AI to help with course content development and with tutors to help student learning.

Of course there is a lot that can be done in using GenAl to help create course content, and students can really benefit from well designed GenAl chatbot tutors... But Prof. Luckin points out that in the best educational institutions – they are using machine learning (Al, but not Generative AI) to interrogate their data and help work out what aspects of teaching and learning work, for which different students, and also what does not work.

Prof. Lukin was succinct and eloquent in her explanation, saying:

"Al brings the possibility to do formative, nuanced assessment as students are learning. We know how to use data analytics, intelligent data analytics, to evaluate complex, sophisticated thinking skills, the kinds of thinking skills that contribute to learning to learn the soft skills which are not soft at all, as we all know. We know how to do it, but you can only do it if you've got the data. And in most instances, you haven't got the data.

And so actually that lack of data infrastructure really impedes progress on something like assessment, which could be so much more innovative. It could be great for students. It could be great for, you know, faculty. But we don't have that robust enough infrastructure in order to really be able to leverage that. A few institutions do, but they're the minority, not the majority."

Later she went further and explained:

"The value you could get from using AI tools to assist with assessment and feedback. To be able to provide feedback quickly, but also to be able to build up a body of assessment data that you could then probe to look to see where are the key challenges that students are facing as they're answering these questions?

You know, what are we seeing? What are the patterns we can see in the assessment? Now, how do we plug that in to what students are actually learning? How do we plug that into interventions?"

She cited the <u>University of Coventry</u> as being really well positioned for this era of AI and having the requisite data infrastructure to benefit from the massive potential of machine learning to improve student outcomes.

The reason for that is because the university's Provost (Prof. Ian Dunn) is an engineer, who has been at the university for years, and apparently has spent decades getting the university's data in order. And now the University of Coventry is in a position to do really interesting things with their data and analysis of it, to improve teaching and learning.



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Prof. Luckin went on to explain that AI could also make a big difference in relieving faculty workload and reducing marking times, leaving academics to then spend more of their time actually working with students who need support.

But she was honest enough to point out that there is also pushback from some academics who feel that the marking process, "however much they might dislike it on some days", is part of who they are.

She added:

"You know, there's a challenge here to academic self-worth that we have to be careful about, whether it's about creating content or whether it's about marketing and feedback.

There's something about what it means to be an academic that is challenged by AI, and I think you see that much more in the higher education sector than you do in the school sector. I think that limits the use cases."

Prof. Luckin also cautioned about the use of GenAl in creating tutors. She was not arguing against the use of tutors, but wanted to ensure educators focussed on their design and what they can do to support student learning.

She noted that there is 30 years of research on how AI can support student learning (not necessarily in the form of chatbots but nonetheless a raft of academic research is out there about how to use AI to support student learning).

She noted the benefits of AI tutoring come to the fore when, for example, a student is learning a particular subject where there is a shortage of teachers in that subject area, where the tutor is a very specific tutor that has been trained very carefully on a very carefully constrained part of the curriculum.

Her worry is that when tutors constantly help the student towards success and the student is always able to answer all of the challenges that come their way, then we need to question if we are actually helping students to improve their learning or are we helping them to follow the path that the tutor puts out for them?

It is such an important question - and obviously it comes from Prof. Luckin's years of research in this field.

She went on to exhort all Summit attendees (and the broader higher education system) to work harder. She argued persuasively that we are at a pivotal moment in human history where "our human intelligence is being challenged and the call to action is to get smarter because the AI will be calling you to be dumbed down. And we've really got to get smarter.

And so surely it should be the role of higher education to be really pushing the boundaries of how we become more intelligent as humans. And I'm not seeing that happening. And if they're not going to do it, who is going to do it?"

She continued, arguing that we need to push back on Silicon Valley, become more intelligent and the higher education sector needs to be leading on how we can evolve to be more intelligent. That the answer to the challenge of AI is about more than just regulation – because too often big tech companies see regulatory fines as the cost of doing business.

In her 2017 book, <u>Machine Learning and Human Intelligence</u>, she was worried (well before ChatGPT) that humans were at risk of overestimating the capabilities of artificial intelligence and underestimating the capability of our human intelligence.

And she considers that this remains the case.

She ended her comments with a reminder and call to action: that learning to learn is what is required as we navigate an uncertain future – and this is what we need to be imparting to our learners.

If you have not heard Prof. Luckin speak before and you get the opportunity to – I cannot recommend it highly enough. A truly impressive education leader who I could have listened to and learned from all day.



Micro and alternate credentials and the implications and opportunities for universities Dr. Victoria Galan-Muros, Chief Research and Analysis, UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education (Podcast transcript)

Dr Galan-Muros began her comments to the Summit by sharing that before joining UNESCO, one of the roles she had was working at the OECD as a policy analyst for higher education. And at round that time (2018) there was some interest and curiosity from governments wanting to understand "what are these microcredentials all about?"

And so Dr Galan-Muros was involved in efforts to document what was meant with microcredentials. She noted that even at that stage there was a wide variety of opinions from "this is just a fad" to "maybe there is something there" to "Oh my God, this is the future of higher education".

She went on to note that the definition of a microcredential – was an issue back then and unfortunately it is still an issue today.

Dr Galan-Muros further explained that:

"We still define microcredentials almost like an exclusion, particularly all by exclusion, particularly within higher education institutions, we're saying the microcredential is everything that is not an official formal learning program, which is clear now you have the bachelor, the masters, a PhD, and everything else and everything else... we sort of agree that they're short, we sort of agree that they are practical.

But honestly, everything else, content, skills, even the nature of how we deliver them, (a lot of them are online, but not all of them). So everything is really varied.

And the implication is that without a shared definition it is difficult to measure, difficult to agree on things, and difficult to advance in every way."

Dr Galan-Muros was then asked about what different governments doing, even within these different definitions?

She responded by saying that only a minority of governments are doing anything in relation to microcredentials. And she then went on to say that Australia was one of the most advanced... given that we have already:

"...(included microcredentials) in the national qualification framework. And now they're doing the piloting with higher education institutions. They put a website in which they have the microcredentials." She went on to add though that even in Australia as an early mover, the introduction of microcredentials are still "within the voluntary range of things that universities could do. So there's no hard legislation on this."

In New Zealand, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority has also made it voluntary if an institution wants their microcredential recognised, then there are standards that that need to be met and then the course can be listed on the NZQA website.

The accreditation process for microcredentials in New Zealand though is an overlay of the accreditation process for undergraduate degrees, which means that it "took nine months to get accredited for a program that is a nine week program. And so they're having those teething issues of having to back solve into different ways of quality assurance which they're not set up for."

She then noted that Malaysia has "also put some rules about all around microcredentials and the European Commission is doing some definition, some guidelines, but again, its voluntary."

Dr Galan-Muros then went on to add presciently – that it probably does not help that governments know that they and their institutions are in a global market. And therefore - how much do we want government to get into this space?

She suggested we definitely want some protection for learners but if we think about quality assurance, if it stays "in the traditional way, that lovely process, bureaucratic process. We don't want that for microcredentials."



What is needed if we are to truly embed microcredentials is to innovate in the way they are quality assured and that is where things are heading but the reality is that progress is patchy, but it is moving in that direction, so expects that in five years' time, we will be having a different conversation about what constitutes credentials: non-accredited, accredited, endorsed, quality assured, etc.

She also emphasised the importance of microcredentials in the current economic and social landscape – where major global trends (technology, aging populations, transition to the green economy, etc) are seeing changes in the labour market, unemployment for some workers, and governments are worried that "their human capital is not future proofed for the future." And hence they are very focussed on skills development policies.

She then went on to distinguish between the demand for upskilling and reskilling from learners as distinct from the demand from employers and industry?

She categorised learners as falling in to two cohorts as they deal with the fact their jobs are changing and they need to do something:

- 1. For some workers, their employers will take care of their upskilling/reskilling needs and the employer may choose to do that internally, through an education company, or a university...
- 2. Whereas by contrast other workers will not have employer support maybe because they want to change career, or they want to improve within a company that is not providing them with those opportunities. What these learners see is a very complex and messy scenario in which, in most countries, there are so many potential credentials that they can acquire, they are not in a single platform, and they are not evaluated by the same criteria.

In this latter instance Dr Galan-Muros pointed out that without an easy quality assurance mechanism, it is the reputation of the provider which is really important in guiding learner choice. And therefore the brand strength of universities is an advantage.

But most universities offer microcredentials as separate courses mostly directed to executives and people who are in the labour market who typically already have a degree.

But she argued that if we think about the macro picture and governments' needs for upskilling and re-skilling, the people who need the most upskilling and reskilling are probably not executives or university graduates, and this is a cohort that universities find difficult to reach.

Dr Galan-Muros was also very rigorous in terms of what we reasonably can, and cannot, learn through microcredentials.

She started out by explaining that a lot of microcredentials are focussed on tech skills and others on leadership-type skills, and more are emerging in the field of sustainability as there are both more green jobs and more existing jobs now require workers to have sustainability knowledge and skills.

But she then asked when it comes to other skills - how much you can really learn in a very short course:

- Take negotiation skills in 3 days can you really become a good negotiator?
- How much can you improve your leadership if you have a leadership microcredential? How many hour, how many hours do you need to become a leader?
- What about teaching resilience in 5 days (a course she saw a university offering last year)?

She challenged us to think about how much we can "chop up learning" for it to still be a significant piece of learning that you can teach almost individually or without a context?

And that in turn leads to questions around assessing skills, and seeing the journey of the development of knowledge and skills as a journey of a lifetime, "it's not one block of three days or two blocks of three days, it's continuous."

And then there was a very interesting discussion about funding and how much that drives both demand for and supply of higher education microcredentials, and the degree of recognition (or lack of recognition) across different systems and institutions for the microcredentials awarded by other universities.



I note that Dr Galan-Muros was a visiting academic at the University of Adelaide for 4 ½ years up until January 2020. It is not clear that she spends much time in Australia now, but once again if you get the chance to hear her speak or to learn more about what UNESCO is doing in higher education – I would thoroughly recommend it.

Technology Infrastructure for Tomorrow's University Sidharth Oberoi, VP Partnerships, Instructure Benjamin Stevenin, Director of Business School Partnerships, Times Higher Education

This session started with a question to the speakers about their observations on the state of IT systems in higher education institutions. Drawing on his previous experience leading an EdTech company, Mr Stevenin described the current state of IT systems as "chaos". He explained this was in part because the size of most institutions meant it took considerable time to make changes, and added that the chaos would be exacerbated as the sector moves more into experiential learning, meaning there is a need for more systems.

Mr Oberoi agreed, adding that many universities operate in silos and frequently deploy different technology across different departments. He added that:

"There are a lot of different typologies of clients, so you're going to have, let's say, the fast moving Business School, standalone that has the power to do anything they want. And then you're going to have the traditional university where there are multiple faculties. All of the different faculties have different needs.

So, you're going to talk to the business faculty who's like, 'oh, I need to do that'. And then you talk to the philosophy faculty that don't want to do anything... (then) you have this layer at the centre of the university, which is already pre-legacy.... And then at every single faculty level, there is going to be some difference that is going to be even more complex.

So I think having this vision of where they want to go and where they want to lead is really important and it's quite often a big problem for the institutions."

When asked to identify best practice in institutions which have a clear IT strategy, strong infrastructure and were doing best in deploying their strategies, both speakers discussed the gulf between strategy and deployment in most institutions, and emphasised that the best results occurred when institutions invested in their faculty and their staff to encourage their adoption and adherence to the new technology.

The adoption of the technology by staff is:

"...going to be one of the biggest, you know, obstacles or barriers to ever come (up)... you're going to have multiple different faculty that want to accomplish different goals, which is really challenging and they may only want to use their tool that they've been using for the past 15 or 20 years and not want to move on to a new tool, which can really cause difficulty for some of the different institutions."

The speakers also observed that a lot of universities are now bringing in Chief Information Officers from outside of academia "because they know how to get things done because they've worked at enterprise and they understand how to deploy software at a very large scale" and because they understand the need to invest in a solid change management strategy focussed on staff takeup of new systems.

Three European institutions singled out for praise for their strategy, infrastructure and adoption were:

- <u>Neoma Business School</u> (where the Summit was held)
- · <u>IE University</u>, and
- Erasmus Rotterdam University.

When the speakers were asked to identify the main disruptors for education institutions in relation to technology and their attempts to become more digital, Mr Oberoi made the very interesting observation that although universities have a history of



moving slowly, the COVID pandemic showed how quickly they could adapt and implement new technology and systems, but now he observed that many users of technology and the technology platforms themselves had "over deployed" or "over invested" in specific technology and gave the example of Zoom where their stock price has really decreased.

Mr Stevenin agreed, saying:

"COVID was a way for the digital landscape to move forward. The only problem is a lot of institutions went forward really quickly and now we're going backward really quickly as well. So a lot of the investment that they have made now is in the garbage because there was no actual vision, it was the emergency, COVID was hitting - what do we do? How are we going to teach tomorrow? So just purchase, purchase and purchase and now they're like, 'oh, business is back to normal'..."

He then went on to make the case that this was why these institutions needed a strategy – to allow them to move forward purposefully and not rush into decisions (or move too slowly).

In a subsequent discussion about stakeholder and student engagement the speakers emphasised that most universities have the best intentions of listening to their stakeholders, but ultimately most of them do not follow through on these good intentions.

They suggested the following steps to turn good intentions into actions:

- · letting students and faculty test the technology
- · letting students and faculty assess the usability of the technology,
- checking their familiarity with the technology, and
- finding out whether or not they want to utilise it.

But they both cautioned that while student input was important, price was also always a big caveat. And they gave an example of what you can learn when you involve students in testing new technology before deciding on which platform/systems to purchase...

At a university in central France, the institution ran a survey of all of their students (pre COVID), asking the students to give feedback on the new systems that the university was looking to put in place. They had more than 40% of their students respond to the survey and while the headline result was that students were "super excited" about new technologies... when they looked at the answers it showed that the students were not really impressed by any of the new systems the university was considering, and instead gave the following feedback: "we need electrical plugs, we need Wi-Fi, we need the basics."

So as the university was thinking about how they were going to move to a more digital approach, the students were still in classrooms that did not have reliable internet access nor enough electrical sockets for them to charge their phones and laptops...

Finally when asked what three things they would recommend that higher education institutions put in place with their digital strategy, speakers gave the following responses:

- modernise your infrastructure
- move into the cloud
- consolidate your technology to make the lives of your students easier, and
- do not move too fast, including in relation to GenAI (they cautioned that sometimes it makes sense to let someone else be the trailblazer and to learn from their failures and successes).

The Role of Higher Education in the New Skills Economy Jeremie Rossignol, Managing Director, ETS Global Russell Brooks, CEO, Heriot-Watt Online

Against an expected changing labour market where almost 1/4 of jobs will change in the next five years, and where 69 million new jobs are being created and 83 million are leaving the economy, there is a real global concern about the ability of systems and institutions to be able to develop courses to address these future skill needs and make them available to the workers who will need them.



In other words, there is a global conversation currently underway about what skills are needed and the role of traditional education providers to deliver on these new skills.

The speakers were asked to explain what was meant in terms of defining these new skills and whether in fact they even were new skills?

Their answers were fascinating.

Mr Rossignol explained that <u>ETS</u> had recently conducted a survey, the <u>Human Progress Survey</u>, which covered 17 countries, nearly 20,000 respondents, who were professionals, HR managers, etc.

He explained that one of the important findings of the survey was the interest in contemporary skills assessments and significant interest in microcredentials, with 78% of respondents believing that by 2035 evidence of new skill acquisition will be as valued as a university degree.

The survey also asked people which skills were going to be the most valuable in the near future?

And while unsurprisingly technical and digital skills rated highly, so did the "so-called soft skills or durable skills", and of these the most highly rated were communication, critical thinking and creativity. Mr Rossignol then reminded us that these three skills have not really changed in 50 years. These are skills that employers wanted back in the 1970s. "So they are really durable and seemingly there's been a gap for a while."

Mr Brooks also drew on history when answering this question but with a very different focus. He pointed out that <u>Heriot-Watt</u> <u>University</u> was founded 200 years ago because of a shortage of watchmaking skills in Edinburgh. Demand for watches was climbing through the roof and the industrialists at the time could not find enough skilled watchmakers. So Heriot-Watt had its roots as the world's first Mechanics Institute.

He went on to offer another example of educational institutions being created to address 'new' skills needs, explaining that before he joined Heriot-Watt, he worked for the London School of Economics (LSE) which was founded in the late 1800s because the public sector was growing and there was a shortage of "really efficient administrators to work in the civil service". The LSE's first degree "was in railway management or railway administration."

Against these historic comparisons, he remarked that "what's changed is the pace of the disruption." And then added that:

"The other thing that has changed is access to higher education. Online education, for example, allows universities to reach a much wider cohort of students. We know that when students get older, they have rich and complicated lives, meaning that they have families, they have jobs. That means coming to a physical campus on a regular basis isn't as easy, but the opportunity to serve those people online means that we can now offer this reskilling and upskilling throughout their lives and careers."

In terms of what the new skills are that students need – Mr Brooks made an important observation that I have not heard widely discussed – which is (a) that we do not yet know with any great certainty what future skills will be needed but (b) "the answers are going to come from institutions that are conducting research into those things, which is the university. So I think there's a really good story for us about why we are the answer to this problem and how we also now have the means to deliver the (educational upskilling/reskilling) service as well."

The conversation then moved on to address whether upskilling and reskilling is a priority for universities and institutes of higher education? And specifically whether higher education providers are trying to unpack the skills they already deliver within their programs and better define them?

Mr Brooks described the way Heriot-Watt is increasingly thinking about the skills challenge around careers. That is, when they are designing and developing programmes, they are focussed on the job roles that are relevant to their students. The university is mapping these job roles closely, including talking to industry about what skills they need in the people they are hiring to do these new jobs.

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"And what that allows us to do is not just get the curriculum right around the skills that are required, but it also allows us to co-brand those courses. So we will put the logo, the label that again... is a sort of soft form of accreditation. But by putting that employer logo on it, we think that really is starting to drive efficiency in the marketing funnel and give students the reassurance that we are not just doing this on our own. But we really are understanding what the options are they need and what we offer will lead to leads to jobs."

ETS is also seeing a clear change in skills and skills-related activities, including:

- 1.a change in curriculum design and specifically a shift away from time based or content/knowledge based education towards skill based education and more modular learning
- 2. an increase in lifelong learning: higher education institutions have a critical role to play in helping professionals to upskill and reskill, but they are frequently doing so through an increase in "bridges" with industry. That is universities are setting up more industry partnerships (eg an Advisory Board, introducing more work-based learning including internships and apprenticeships, or even just more frequent consultations with industry), and
- 3. an increase in mobility between universities and across borders and this is an area where the European Union is doing a lot of work.

Panel facilitator, HolonIQ's Maria Spies, then (in asking her next question) gave a stunning reminder of why universities are finding it hard to 'modularise' their existing courses, and to explain what's included in their newly designed courses. She commented:

"One of the things I'm hearing here is that once you start to develop curriculum or partner with others, whether it be other universities or industry, one needs to articulate what one's doing. In the past and even up to now the inside of a degree program is a bit of a black box. It's known only to the academics who created it. The mapping of skills within degree programs particularly, has been difficult. I undertook a university curriculum mapping project in the year 2000. It was all Excel spreadsheets... and failed miserably because no one could actually articulate and map down to the assessment what we were assessing and where those skills were being developed and how they moved through a curriculum from year one to year four. All we found was that there was essentially a lot of replication. I'm wondering whether that's changed at all because of these new ways of working or is it 'leave those degree programs alone' and when we build new ones, we're going to start differently?"

There was agreement on the stage (and across the Summit delegates) that an over-reliance on Excel spreadsheets has not changed. It was suggested that most universities have huge content libraries and very old systems, if indeed they have systems at all for recording this kind of detail. It was agreed that instead a lot of this information is still held in people's heads "and passed down from academic to academic probably on overhead projector slides and then onto PowerPoint presentations."

Collectively that means that "skills mapping is a huge effort in resource constrained organisations."

To tackle this challenge, Heirot-Watt is rolling out microcredentials alongside their degrees. In June they rolled out the <u>Coursera</u> <u>Career Academy</u> to their online learners (ie the \$300 professional certificates available through Coursera which have been designed by Salesforce, Google, Meta, etc, and therefore "are very, very industry aligned.")

Heriot Watt is also making the microcredentials available to their alumni as part of their commitment to lifelong learning and had 700 students sign up in the first seven days for these microcredentials – indicating "the demand from learners for the university to deliver career aligned microcredentials... with third party employer validation."

The discussion then turned to assessment and the disruption being brought about as a result of GenAI (and again there was a recent report by ETS, <u>Charting the Future of Assessment</u>, that Mr Rossignol was able to share insights from).

He explained that when it comes to technical skills and language skills there is enough scientific research available to know which assessment methods are valid, fair, and reliable. Today the big challenge is, with employers expressing an increased demand for soft skills, how do you assess them?



He stated that although there are:

"... tons of vendors of soft skills assessments... the main technique they use is to assess skills is based on self-reporting. So it's basically me in front of my computer who is going to inform the system about how I perceive my leadership skill, how I perceive my collaborative skills. And so it's completely subjective, it's completely biased. So how do we move from these models of assessments to models that are objective like we are able to do today for languages or for technical skills and that is very much a shift from this self-reporting approach to performance-based assessment, where you are going to be able to put people in real situations, situations where they have to collaborate, situations where they have to negotiate, a situation where they have to lead? And that is going to be enabled through technology, through AI, through the development of serious games, for example."

The conversation then turned to the potential benefits and serious issues associated with technology being used, for example, to measure digital skills in a corporate environment.

"It's very easy today to set trackers in people's systems and based on that to observe which software they are using, how they are using this software, which functionalities do they master, which ones they don't. And based on that, assess their level of digital accuracy and suggest training for them."

Researchers at ETS are grappling with this issue:

"OK, so invisible assessment that happens during the process of learning and you don't even know you're being watched and that your data is being harvested. I mean, there's all sorts of issues to potentially come along with that, but... the embedding of assessment inside the process of learning and inside the process of work, constant, continuous and feedback loops is the promise. I think we're still a long way from that. Although we do see some examples in, for example, in say, cyber skills, cybersecurity skills, testing or assessment. But it's immersive and real time, gamified pretend attacks and things like that."

And then the next question was "how are universities or higher education institutions thinking about those sorts of embedded assessment and tools or (are they) not yet?"

Mr Brooks explained that universities have got a lot of the same ethical considerations to work through but there are a large number of opinions on the future of assessment and the use of technology in the assessment process:

"There are people who are very positive and enthusiastic about some of the things you've talked about. And there are people who are very far away. And what we're not starting to see is the coalition emerging of what the way forward is. So I think there's a there's a long way to go."

And he concluded by asking if there might be a role for employers in the future – whereby they can use technology to assess students for the specific skills each employer is looking for – after the university has focussed on the teaching...

Rethinking institutional boundaries: New university models Derek Jan Fikkers, Director of Strategy & Policy, University of Twente Boris Walbaum, Founder & CEO, Forward College

This discussion was an interesting contrast between the experiences of <u>the University of Twente</u> a 60-year old, highly ranked research university currently undergoing transformational change, and the new 'start-up' <u>Forward College</u> which was only established in 2021.

The opening question was whether current models of higher education are equipped or structured for the changing demands they face as the labour market and work are transformed by trends such as digitisation, the transition to the green economy, etc, and as student and employer expectations change?

Speaking from the perspective of an established university, Mr Fikkers argued against the notion "that the old model isn't fit for the future." But he added that:

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So we're building new partnerships, for instance, to provoke our colleagues to think about how education could look like in let's say 20 years from now. And so I think that at the end the way we organise our higher education right now, in Western Europe, is fit for (the) future as long as there is a very significant willingness to change and that's the hard bit."

He went on to explain that up until a couple of years ago, the University of Twente's partnerships were probably similar to those of other universities. They had "dozens of institutional partners, strategic partners all over the world, and that didn't really work." So they really narrowed down their strategic partnerships "to three universities that we found really inspiring".

He added that the university is also placing a new focus on "proximity and being close to students physically." They are not only setting up new campuses in Amsterdam, they are also offering their programs in a completely different style. "We're really focusing on the new types of students who would normally not come to engineering schools."

By contrast Forward College, is not tweaking something that is already there. Instead, it is a new and quite different higher education institution.

There are some key differences in the learning experience offered by Forward:

- 1. their pedagogy is based on contemporary, research-proven practices drawing on expertise in education, cognitive sciences and neurosciences
- 2. they offer Leadership Development Certificates and Programs concurrently with their undergraduate degrees
- 3. they have an explicit focus on building students' entrepreneurship through incorporating a social project in year one, a digital project in year two and a consulting project in year three of their degrees
- 4. the degrees they currently offer are business-related social science courses designed by their two university partners: the London School of Economics and King's College London (the partners are involved in course design, exam supervision and grading), and
- 5. their degrees are offered across campuses in Lisbon, Paris and Berlin with students spending one year in each city (in student accommodation with their cohort).

The work-based components of the course (focussed on building entrepreneurship) also help students to become familiar with employers' language and practices. This has helped their students go on to roles in companies like Amazon, L'Oréal, Henkel and EY even at such an early stage in the College's establishment.

Their partnerships with LSE and KCL are also important to Forward as a start-up institution, as they help the College attract students with strong academic records (who might not otherwise have been interested in studying with a new and unknown institution.

The conversation then shifted to the top three messages the speakers thought needed to be conveyed about the changes that are "swirling around" higher education?

It was a very candid and interesting discussion – with the panellists reminding delegates of the scepticism within many institutions about change in higher education and how transformative it will/will not be:

"Be aware that change is going to come... Yeah, that's what you guys said in 2008... That still hasn't happened. And that's what was said in '68 as well... but (universities) survived nevertheless."

"While it is true that universities have survived and thrived through past change periods the difference for many universities in Western Europe is that governments "have run out of money (for higher education), which is a critical thing, and we are running out of students. Which is also a critical thing. And I think that will much more than any of us realise, will force us to really change."



Finally Mr Walbaum ended the discussion on a note of optimism and positivity reminding us that:

"...there is a space to reinvest the sense of mission of (universities). We are responsible for the world as it is going today. We've trained the people - what is the impact we want to have?

In a few cases now I think the sense of responsibility has escaped higher education a bit. I think a way to bring change and to generate energy is to give back this sense of responsibility and the sense of mission. Because people who work in these institutions have not come here just because there was a place. They've come here because they had a mission."

So in other words we need to think specifically about the purpose and mission of our institutions as we prepare for change in higher education – and that is clearly what many of the speakers at the Summit were doing within their own organisations.

A really thought provoking day with a lot of takeaways I will be reflecting on for some time.

Claire Field 11 July 2024