



UNIVERSITY AND BUSINESS CO-OPERATION IN UK

AARON PORTER, NATIONAL CENTRE FOR UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESS

The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) was born out of a deep belief – based on sound evidence - that open, sustained, networked collaboration between universities and business is and key to prosperity and a good society. Our report, the State of the Relationship seeks to capture innovative ways universities and businesses are working together.

(taken from the [NCUB State of the Relationship Report](#), Dr David Docherty, Chief Executive, National Centre for Universities and Business)

ONLY CONNECT – GRADUATES

The education of the whole person is as relevant today as it was when Cardinal Newman wrote his celebrated The Idea of a University in the mid-19th century. According to the great man, a graduate should know how to:

- Get to the point.
- Detect sophism.
- Disentangle a skein of thought.
- Master different subjects.
- Accommodate themselves to others.

- Have common ground with every class.
- Know when to speak, and - as importantly - when to be quiet.
- Ask questions pertinently and gain a lesson seasonably.
- A pleasant companion; someone you can rely on.

Suitably updated, this list of attributes is precisely what employees of modern businesses require. And in the report we highlight innovative ways of using work experience, different types of degrees, placements and continuous professional development to help bring about the rounded graduate. We also explore how graduates perform across their career. A great deal of focus is placed on a graduate's first job, overlooking the fact that critical skills and qualities of the high-performing employee in his or her fourth job were first developed at university.

In our analysis of how best to understand specific shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), we challenge some myths. For example, only 3 per cent of engineering students go into the City, and physics graduates struggle to get jobs just as much as those with creative degrees. And endeavour to get under the skin of real industry challenges. Although unemployment rates suggest there are more STEM graduates than businesses can absorb employers continue to express concern about the quality of some graduates in key sectors.

We believe this could best be remedied by attracting high quality female employees into the MTEC (manufacturing, technology, engineering and computing) industries. Our Target 2030 project aimed at attracting girls into physics, shows that we need to change the way we think about the MTEC challenge. At present only 8% of the UK's professional engineers are women, the lowest level in Europe. From any perspective this is a huge waste of talent. As well as direct outreach with schools, we have been building up the policy case for change within government, business and universities and have published an ambitious set of targets setting out the number of young women in the UK that need to be studying physics, mathematics and engineering from GCSE through to PhD.

Furthermore, our experience with Brighton Fuse demonstrates, high-growth firms are often driven by super-fused companies, which are led by arts and humanities graduates who are able to harness the technical abilities of software specialists. Simplistic analysis of recruitment problems leads to simplistic supply-side policy solutions. Brighton Fuse starts with the belief that by connecting the arts, humanities and design with digital and ICT, then creativity and innovation can be enhanced. An initial 2-year research and development project which mapped, measured and assisted Brighton's creative, digital and IT (CDIT) cluster was carried out in 2013. The project supported mutually beneficial connections between higher education, those engaged in the creation of arts and culture and Brighton's digital technology sector.

The NCUB has also been working with universities, government and businesses to explore how work experience and placements can close the gap between employer expectations and university experience.

This is vital to a well-functioning graduate market, but remains a challenge of scale and persuasion. There are 2,340,275 students studying in UK higher education. The challenge of connecting them to employers is a vital task for the system.

ONLY CONNECT, ALWAYS COLLABORATE

‘Only connect’ has become somewhat of a cliché, but it sums up the simplicity and the complexity of bringing two sectors together. The words are, of course, EM Forster’s from *Howards End*. But in the novel, the context is surprising to a modern reader. The book’s passionate heroine is engaged to an uptight materialistic businessman and she reflects on how she would change him:

“She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of every man. Only connect! That was her whole sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted...” (*Howards End*)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Porter is a Director for the National Centre for Universities & Business (NCUB), which was launched from the Council for Industry and Higher Education as a central recommendation in the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) response to the Sir Tim Wilson Review. He has also launched Talent 2030 a campaign to encourage more girls and young women into engineering working jointly with industry and higher education institutions. In addition to this, Aaron is a higher education consultant working with a range of higher education institutions and bodies and is also an associate for the Leadership Foundation, the Higher Education Academy and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Winchester. He was previously President of the National Union of Students during the high profile tuition fee debate in 2010-11 and dealt extensively with government across the 4 UK nations. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society for Arts. In July 2014, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Leicester in recognition of his contribution to higher education and the student experience.