ASEM Expert Group Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

Public Online Seminar on
"AI Skills: Are Universities Preparing Graduates for Labour Market Needs"
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CONCLUSIONS

Speakers: Shanti Jagannathan (Asian Development Bank); Bill Xu (SAP Labs China); Marc Murray (German Federal Association of Personnel Managers); Dr Sahara Sadik (Singapore University of Social Sciences); Jessica Buckley Chagnard (TBS Education, France).

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I. Short Summary

Employers today **expect graduates to bring a mix of technical and non-technical AI competencies** depending on their roles. **Soft skills** remain crucial for fostering **interdisciplinary collaboration**, as they enable the **boundaries** between technical and non-technical roles to be **blurred** and new, innovative projects to emerge. Higher Education Institutions must foster **critical and independent thinking** to ensure **cognitive skills** are not getting lost in the age of AI, while also **adapting assessment** methods toward more **project-oriented,** interdisciplinary learning. Companies emphasized the need for graduates to demonstrate stronger **problem-solving abilities** and apply AI knowledge in customer-oriented ways. Higher Education institutions should think of **revising their structures and guidelines** in order to embed more **innovative forms of collaboration** with companies into their learning culture such as hackathons or co-designed projects. Overall, participants agreed on the **importance of a lifelong learning mindset**. AI research and knowledge should be **communicated** by Higher Education Institutions to the business world in an **accessible and comprehensible** manner.

II. Conclusions

1. Future-Ready Skills for the Age of AI

The future of work also demands a **blurring of boundaries** between technical and non-technical roles. Co-creation enables professionals with diverse expertise to design solutions together. Consequently, **cross-disciplinary collaboration and communication skills are essential** to help spread AI knowledge across the workforce, alongside **ethical awareness** and a strong sense of **responsibility**. Graduates must also cultivate human-centred and adaptable competencies that define future-proof talent: judgement, critical and independent thinking to question and guide AI rather than be controlled by it; social skills, problem-solving and creativity; curiosity and an entrepreneurial mindset; as well as teamwork. In addition to teaching technical competences, Higher Education Institutions also play a vital role in preparing such non-technical competences by helping students **learn how to learn** and to provide also basic social skills to be able to **adapt**

continuously in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Above all, a **continuous-learning mindset is important as is** the confidence to engage with AI without fear.

2. Reimagining Higher Education

In addition to updating curricula, Higher Education Institutions should **rethink its frameworks**. **Research, new teaching techniques and (industry/ international) partnerships** could be integrated into more **multidisciplinary, hands-on, and adaptive learning experiences** such as hackathons, design sprints or lecture series with industry. A further challenge is the establishment of a more structured process for **protecting and strengthening human cognition** within an AI-driven education system. Not to forget that Investment in AI is an important domain for strengthening competencies that enhance a country's national competitiveness.

3. Bridging Academia and Industry

Stronger **collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and industry** can enhance **graduates' readiness for the workforce.** Through partnerships and collaborations between companies and Higher Education Institutions in shaping curricula and special courses, **co-designed programs, creative cooperation projects, living labs, joint research**, students can **connect academic learning with real-world applications**. This could help bridge the gap faced by some graduates, despite possessing technical skills, they lack the ability to apply them in practice or develop solutions for real-world clients. In some countries **greater AI exposure at undergraduate level** and **lifelong learning**, including for school teachers, are key.

Such **inclusive cooperation** should also involve Higher Education Institutions with limited resources and **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**—not only large corporations—to ensure that all partners benefit. Higher Education Institutions should communicate and disseminate information in an accessible and comprehensible manner to promote a widespread understanding of responsible AI, also across the business landscape and even beyond direct partnerships.

4. Assessment

New, innovative ways of assessment are required beyond traditional exams toward i.e. further project-based work to **strengthen human decision-making, social connection and to build resilient individuals**. **Applied assessment of AI competencies through real-life scenarios,** such as for example one-week sprints, hackathons, or datathons which could also include companies in the assessment. Assessment should evaluate **not just what students can build with AI, but how responsibly, ethically and thoughtfully** they can use it. This can be done via self, peer or expert assessment or through international hackathons for example.

5. Ensuring Higher Education Institutions Stay Ahead in a Rapidly Changing World

Preparing graduates for an AI-driven world requires that Higher Education Institutions are staying ahead of technological change. Higher Education Institutions must therefore **educate their educators**, building academic capacity in AI and pedagogy and enable academics to gain firsthand insights into emerging trends in order to anticipate what will be emerging in the job market. The offering of innovative tools such as **co-creation models are also valuable tools to include the industry perspective.** Finally Institutional structures and processes should undergo rapid and innovative reform.