



Press Release- 26th April 2018

Graduates are leaving college without essential workplace skills: Colleges must step up

In a fiercely competitive jobs market, third level institutions must ensure that students are workplace ready, a leading careers expert says.

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A significant proportion of companies have difficulty filling vacancies because graduates do not possess the requisite skills they need to enter the workplace. A gradireland survey last year found that a full 16 per cent of employers said that graduates did not possess the skills they required.

As competition in the jobs market heats up, do universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) have a responsibility to fill those skills gaps? Do HEIs have a duty to prepare their graduates for the jobs market?

“Subject discipline knowledge is necessary but it is not sufficient for graduates to be recruited,” says Caroline Kennedy, Careers Officer with National College of Ireland. “The graduate job market is intensely competitive. Employers are looking for graduates who are flexible, take the initiative and have the ability to undertake a variety of tasks in different environments,”

Kennedy was speaking ahead of, Innovations in Third Level and Employer Partnerships, an event organised by the Association for Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS) which will highlight some innovative partnerships between industry and HEIs aimed at improving the employability of undergraduate students.

The event showcased how seriously some HEIs are taking their responsibility to students.

The event, on the 26th of April, showcased six examples of innovative employer and Higher Education Institution collaborations which aim to improve the employability of third level students. The highlighted collaborations were: Waterford IT and Jameson; UCC and Musgrave; Galway Mayo IT and Analog Devices; National College of Ireland and Hays Specialist Recruitment; UCD and Ireland China Business Association and Enterprise Rent a Car across a number of HEIs.

Employers are enthusiastic partners in these collaborations. After all, a large pool of graduates with workplace experience and skills works in their favour.

Sinéad D’Arcy, head of Jameson’s international graduate programme explains, “As employers it is our responsibility to build student employability skills from early in their college career. Placements and internships are one way of doing this but there are so many other opportunities available to employers such as partnering with academics on live projects and

partnering with career development centres through guest lectures for employability modules. We value these opportunities to work with students from an early stage to ensure they have the skills to hit the ground running when they apply for roles upon graduation.”

Siobháin Scanlon, Early Careers Manager with the Musgrave Group agrees, “Our partnerships with Higher Education Institutes provide the opportunity to shape and nurture new talent who can in turn work with us to create an exciting future for food in Ireland.”

Another business, Enterprise Rent a Car has partnerships across a number of HEIs. Its Group Human Resources Manager Leslee O’Loughlin says, “It’s crucial that employers and HEIs work together to ensure that graduates entering the world of work are getting the skills they need to succeed.”

The event’s keynote speaker, Rebecca Fielding Managing Director of GradConsult UK, further explored how universities and employers are working together around employability. She will share what is happening across the sector now and what her predictions are for the future. It is important that both employers and graduates learn how to get the best from one another.

To this end, the AHECS also launched two booklets at the event. *An SME’s guide to recruiting students and graduates* is aimed at employers while the *Guide to starting your graduate career with an SME* is targeted at students.

Innovations in Third level and Employer Partnerships took place on Thursday 26th April from 12-3pm in National College of Ireland

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For more information contact Caroline Kennedy, caroline.kennedy@ncirl.ie, 086 073 7470

Notes for the editor

Association for Higher Education and Careers Services works across the 26 Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland north and south who support 180,000 students studying in the higher education sector - 60,000 of whom are preparing for graduation