THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Careers Service

CAREERS SERVICE BRIEFING

Future of Work

Inspiring futures

What will the future of work look like, what does it mean for students and how can we prepare them?

We've been examining recent research and modelling into the future of work to find out how it is likely to impact our students and the implications for the University in preparing them for the future.

This project creates an evidence base to inform the careers and employability aspects of curriculum development and reform. It also surfaces examples of good practice from across the University and beyond, contributing to the curriculum toolkit for employability.

Selected references:
CIPD (2017): *From inadequate to outstanding: Making the UK's skills system world class*

McKinsey Global Institute (2018): *Skill Shift: Automation and the Future of the Workforce*

OECD (2016): *The risk of automation for jobs in OECD countries: a comparative analysis*

PWC (2017): *Workforce of the Future: The Competing Forces Shaping 2030*

QS (2019): *2019 Global Skills Gap Report*

RSA (2018): *Good Work in an age of radical technologies*

SCDI (2020): *Upskilling Scotland: The future of skills and the Fourth Industrial Revolution*

World Economic Forum (2018): *The future of jobs report 2018*

How did we approach this?

We reviewed a wide range of the research and literature on the future of work including:

- World Economic Forum reports (2016, 2018) on the future of jobs in the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*
- OECD reports on the risk of automation to jobs (2016, 2018)
- Modelling of potential future scenarios undertaken by consulting firms and other interest groups including The British Academy (2017 & 2018), CBI (2017), CIPD (2017), McKinsey (2017 & 2018), PWC (2017), The RSA (2018 & 2019) and Scottish Government (2018, 2019)

We've provided some key references below and a full list is available on request.

Key findings

The future labour market will consist of rapid change and uncertainty, driven by several megatrends. These include technological advances, demographic change, a new division of labour, changing work trends/business models, hollowing out of the labour market, growth of big data, climate change and political uncertainty. Many of these are interrelated, giving rise to uncertainty and complexity.

There is ongoing debate about the likely impact of technological advances on jobs. Optimists predict new opportunities in, as yet, unknown sectors as technology drives productivity upwards and new markets emerge. Conversely, pessimists predict widespread technological displacement and consequent unemployment.

Despite the uncertainty there is broad agreement about the implications for individuals including the need to develop higher-order cognitive skills, uniquely human skills, digital skills, teamwork/collaboration, flexibility and resilience and other psychological factors including mindset, self-belief, self-efficacy and motivation.

Why does this matter?

- It's clear that the future of work will bring a great deal of uncertainty and we have a responsibility to prepare our students for a changing world, so that they can enjoy fulfilling futures and capitalise on opportunities in the future labour market.
- To do this they will need to be equipped with the right skills and there is a great deal of synergy between the skills needed to be successful in the future of work and those required to succeed in academic study.
- People are both living and working longer, so students will also need to become lifelong learners and build effective career management skills.
- Evidence from employer surveys and feedback (e.g. CIPD, 2017; QS, 2019; SCDI 2020) suggests that individuals entering the labour market are not adequately prepared, with employers citing skill gaps including digital and data skills, problem solving, linguistic and cultural awareness and resilience.
- Skills supply is not aligned with demand and it is, therefore, timely for us to consider how we can equip students with the right skills in order to enter the labour market with confidence and ensure that they have the resilience to cope with uncertainty.
- This is a shared responsibility and the education system has a part to play in developing students' skills. We need to consider how learning environments and teaching and assessment methods can support students to acquire the right skills.
- Disruption and change will be constant so we will also need to ensure we remain responsive and adaptive to change and that we create a positive and pragmatic narrative around the future of work to both inform and empower our students.

Key questions and next steps

Findings from this research present some challenges for the University, not least how we can ensure our students are prepared for the future, and raise questions that warrant attention including:

- How do we create a clear and positive narrative around the future of work so that our students feel informed and empowered?
- What learning environments and teaching and assessment methods best support the development of the skills outlined above?
- How do we support the acquisition of other social and psychological factors including mindset, self-belief, self-efficacy, resilience and motivation?
- How do we align this with other institutional agendas such as Student Support, Diversity and Inclusion and Wellbeing?
- How do we remain responsive and adaptive to change?

The curriculum toolkit for employability, developed following a mapping exercise commissioned by the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee in 2018/19, highlights examples of existing relevant practice which supports employability across academic schools. Work is ongoing to identify further exemplars.

Interested in finding out more?

Further discussion and suggestions for next steps for the project are invited.

If you'd like to discuss the project further or to request a copy of the full report and references please contact Rebecca Valentine at the Careers Service Rebecca.valentine@ed.ac.uk.

www.ed.ac.uk/careers/research-reports