



In association with



# Conference Report Higher Education in the Age of Transformation

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Professors Without Borders in partnership with the Gulf Futures Center and the Bridge the Gulf organisation hosted Higher Education In the Age of Transformation, a two-day workshop seeking to examine the intersection of higher education, business, politics, and international development.

According to the World Economic Forum, “Technology and globalization are significantly transforming work. However, education and training systems, having remained mostly static and underinvested in for decades, are largely inadequate for these new labour markets.” The world economy is changing and an estimated **eighty percent of jobs that will exist in 2025 do not exist today**. With **youth unemployment in excess of fifty percent** in some countries now, it is clear that the education system is not catering as it should to the realities of the employment market.

Higher Education in the Age of Transformation took place on **Saturday 15 September and Sunday 16 September** at the **London School of Economics**. The conference offered solution-oriented approaches to achieve a better understanding of how higher education can cater to the pedagogical needs of Generation Z and prepare them to integrate into the contemporary job market. The conference featured 50 guests participating in five panels and two Q&A sessions. Each panel consisted of three to four speakers presenting for approximately 5-10 minutes each, with a moderator, followed by an open floor where the audience were active participants.

## 2.0 DAY 1

### 2.1 Development, Health and Education: an unbreakable link

Opening the workshop, Dr Michele Aerden, the first woman president of the World Dental Federation stressed the importance of linking health and education to secure development. As a leading practitioner and policy maker in oral health, she pointed out that the main reason for school absenteeism around the world is tooth ache, an easily preventable factor. She explained that strong leadership is key to development, but high rates of malnutrition have led to a cognitively stunted population unable to lead their countries responsibly.

Dr Aerden has personally created successful programs in several countries where school children are taught to brush their teeth with fluoride (which she provides), wash their hands, and are given anti-worm treatment to address the problems of malnutrition. This also brought down oral disease by 30% among her sample. After a year, student capacity in these schools increased by 30%. **Schools are a great place to start transforming a nation**, she said. By giving students responsibility, they grow in confidence and become leaders of their communities. The key is empowering teachers to identify classroom leaders and make them responsible for their own health and success.

Dr Aerden encouraged the audience to take positions of leadership, explaining the necessity of being politically active in order to effectuate positive change in policies. Using herself, President of the World Dental Federation as an example, she explained that by extensively lobbying members of the World Health Organisation, she was able to pass a Resolution that recognised oral health as a key indicator of overall health and quality of life, adding it to the agenda of the WHO.

In the process, however, it is important to maintain a high level of integrity, overcome ego, and remain ready to make deals. Finally, Dr Aerden left the audience with a positive message, saying that anything was possible, change was within reach, and that all it takes is a bit of balance to have it all.

## 2.2 Skills and Indicators for Employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Job Market

The first panel chaired by Prowibo co-founder Dr Caroline Varin, began with two important questions: what skills are required to find employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century job market, and how can universities cater to this? The first panellist, Manish Singh who is Chief Investment officer (CIO) at Crossbridge Capital, argued that universities have become a cartel, pushing students to take majors, which are not leading to employment. Conversely, businesses are providing lump sums to universities when really, they **should be focusing donations on areas that bring benefits to their industry to encourage centres of education to be employment and market-oriented**. Businesses today hire employees according to their attitude, not their skills, under the premise that skills can be toned, whilst universities are overall still focusing on teaching technical skills rather than encouraging the development of soft skills. The disparity between higher education and the job market is exacerbated by a lack of research into the role of universities particularly from think tanks and organisations that purport to specialise in education.

Sallyann Della Casa, a Skills 'hacker' at GLEAC and Founder of the Growing Leaders Foundation focused on the skills needed in the workplace. According to her, education cannot change the way students are being taught because stakeholders continue to make money using their antiquated methods. In other words, there is no incentive to change and update education in universities. Most employers are likewise maintaining archaic measuring tools such as academic transcripts and resumes to rate applicants, even though these are not reliable indicators of ability or motivation. Mrs Della Casa suggested that this can be solved using Science and technology. Neuroscience, for example, can tell us about attitudes and strengths, which need to be mapped properly when building a team within a company. This can also be done by group work in a classroom. For this to succeed, it is necessary to understand (or map) each person's strengths and weaknesses, especially with regards to their 'soft' skills. According to [Google's Project Oxygen](#), top performers in the firm are those who are strong in 'soft', not 'hard' skills. One of the reasons these results have not led to a refocus in education is because 'soft' skills are hard to measure, and therefore "if we can't measure it, it doesn't count". In addition, teachers today are rarely equipped to teach soft skills, simply because they themselves are not taught how. Mrs Della Casa explained that **soft skills are practiced through action, but universities today and still focusing on knowledge, which is gained through repetition**.

Referring to her experience as a journalist and media consultant, Mrs Eithne Treanor highlighted the significance of communications by suggesting it currently "is the most important skill", but bemoaned the loss of curiosity and critical thinking in today's students who focus on tech skills. Ironically, these can easily be taught on the job, whereas the basics of a good journalist (for example) require; communication skills, some understanding of geography, weather and geopolitics. To what extent do universities cater to the real needs of the field, she queried? She agreed with Mrs Della Casa that there is a need to **maintain our humanity in education and beyond that it was essential to engage with one another to deliver strong messages and take care of the world around us**. These skills are central to tomorrow's leaders and managers.

Mr Bernhard Dedenbach, with a long career in executive search and wealth management, emphasized the human element of employment. Today, we trust machines more than human beings, a situation that has led to its own set of problems within the workforce. Communication, by listening to each other and building trust through creating relationships, puts networking at the centre of the employment market. Controversially, Mr Dedenbach also suggested that women can lack solidarity in the workplace, a detriment to their employers as diversity has previously enabled companies to perform better. Emotional intelligence (EQ), a term that is being touted with increasing frequency in the corridors of the [World Economic Forum](#), is increasingly sought after by firms. In this field, women arguably have an advantage over men. Furthermore, **in a world where**

**employees change career paths on average five to seven times, transferable skills (such as EQ) were key to a successful experience.**

The panel concluded that job advertisements are often misleading as the list of skills required were not necessary to perform most tasks. Human Resources, corporations and universities are to be blamed for this situation, as they continue to take an antiquated approach to skills acquisition, without taking into account the changing dynamic of the employment market. Panellists pointed out that although technology is going to replace many jobs in the middle echelon of society, it will also create new opportunities, many of which could not be imagined today. The risk, of course, was a polarisation of skills according. **To survive in the future job market, people need both social and emotional skills, not just technical skills.** Conversely, employers should value both knowledge and skills among their prospective applicants.

### 2.3 Technology and Teaching Generation Z

Author-philanthropist-entrepreneur Mrs Paola Diana chaired the second panel that zoomed in on the students, Generation Z. Dr Carola Hieker, Dean of the Business School at Richmond American University in London, opened the discussion by sharing her experience as a lecturer. Students today, she explained, are very different to the older generations. The generational gap is explained in terms of technology use; and a dialogue bridging the differences between the teachers and learners, needs to be encouraged. **To engage with Generation Z, lecturers need to use technology, revert to visuals such as YouTube, and design activities enabling students to participate in the learning process.** The old model of lecturing is ineffective as students, in this day and age, are easily distracted by their mobile phones and social media.

Anita Kouassigan, a small-business entrepreneur with a focus on media and recruitment, pointed out the difference between Gen Z in the first world and Gen Z in Africa. In the West, Gen Z are characterised by an over-use of technology, which has resulted in problems regarding communications and mental health issues among the youth. In Africa, Generation Z is facing other problems: for example, a lack of leadership skills among this generation, leaves academics wondering how young leaders can be created. In addition, students often struggle with the finances of tuition and books; many are unable to put themselves through schools. This means that **Generation Z is skipping education and becoming entrepreneurs, which is increasingly possible with the help of mobile phones and online learning tools.**

Offering an Asian perspective, Dr Sipim Sornbanlang from the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, described Generation Z as having “technology in their DNA”. They see the world through technology. The day begins and ends with a phone. As a result, **lecturers have to jump on the bandwagon and learn to communicate with their students by using the same technology.** To successfully teach this generation, the first step, Dr Sornbanlang explains, is to identify their characteristics. Her students don’t have time to listen, they need to be attracted in order to learn. They have no patience and require immediate responses. Chulalongkorn University focuses on enhancing lecturing through technology and social media. Game-based learning takes centre-stage in the classroom, so students maintain their engagement. Dr Sornbanlang argued that **Generation Z wants to be involved in social projects, they have a strong sense of responsibility and therefore it is best to draw them in through issues that they care about.** However, academics face the same challenges as anyone with a different relationship to technology than their students. The difficulty lies in helping teachers overcome their technological hesitations to create a level playing field in the classroom.

The two types of Generation Z were also highlighted by Chandni Hirani, LSE researcher and volunteer teacher with Professors Without Borders in Uganda. She bemoaned the lack of interest in engineering among the high school students she met and that the new ‘job’ of social media

influencer had more traction among Generation Z. The challenge, Mrs Hirani argued, is how to convince young people to become engineers, a trade that society still needs. Another thing she highlighted, was that **Generation Z cares about causes and people, they have interests in the state of the world. This is something that can be leveraged by educators.** The key element holding back education and development, according to Mrs Hirani, is the lack of access to the internet. Addressing this would enable Generation Z in Africa to gain access to the tools they need to upskill and contribute actively to the economy. It would also enable development in rural areas. There is a mentality that people have to move to the city to find jobs, but African Rural University in Uganda, a Prowibo partner university, focuses on teaching women to develop careers in rural settings. This benefits the entire community but needs further support from politicians and public officials.

The panel concluded that there are significant differences between Generation Z in developing countries and in the West. In the latter, Generation Z tend to suffer from mental health issues such as suicide and drug use. This is difficult to overcome due to the lack of public focus and medical investment. On the other hand, African students suffer from a lack of funding and often need to work in conjunction to studying, delaying the process of graduation. A member of the audience, from Generation Z, pointed out that **the actual generation of teachers and parents had limited knowledge of the effects of technology usage, but that her cohort needed more support to manage the quantity of information they were faced with on a daily basis.** Education has failed to evolve so that the issues of the current times are addressed. It instead focuses on adopting the same teaching tools used in the past.

### 2.3 Responding to Change: Academic Innovation

The third and last panel on Saturday, chaired by consultant-entrepreneur Mrs Anjum Malik, addressed the question of academic innovation in a changing world. His Excellency Professor Hassan Diab, previously Minister of Education and Higher Education in the Lebanese Cabinet, gave a perspective from the MENA region, where there are about 11,000 universities, claiming that “higher education has much to be desired”. Few universities focus on twenty-first century skills, which explains why so many graduates end up unemployed. Innovation is essential and research, according to His Excellency, should be central to education. **Universities must encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, but this is not actually taking place in the MENA region.** There is also a gap in the skills taught in high school and what is needed at university. This has prompted many universities to add a “foundation year”, a step that has also been taken in many UK and US institutions.

Dr Claire Gordon, Head of the Teaching and Learning Centre at the London School of Economics, argued that innovation does not have to be defined in terms of technology. She instead defined it as “any new teaching practice with the purpose of improving learning”. These should be transformative and address attitudes, approaches and outcomes. Dr Gordon explained that UK higher education was going through a period of huge flux. It was experiencing difficulties in measuring outcomes in education, facing a Brexit that would inevitably be affecting students, staff and funding, changes in funding structures, and dealing with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and how this shaped the way students needed to be educated. She suggested that **academic innovation had to start with how educators are being trained.** Traditionally, researchers have been erroneously assumed as natural educators. This has shifted, however, as universities put more emphasis on teaching standards, designing curricula enabling students to become effective citizens of the world and successfully enter the job market. Links also need to be built between research and education, bridging the gaps between theory and practice to enable inclusive learning for everyone. In addition, Dr Gordon pointed out the necessity to **engage with students of Generation Z by bringing them to the table and including them in the conversation.** This generation is incredibly creative and comfortable with technology, they drive engagement with other students. Any change needs to include them.

Richard Adams, who founded a university digital arts department and co-founded the School of Communication Arts, outlined the fundamental philosophy of his academic creations: teachers are replaced by project-oriented learning with students at the centre. He argued that the current education system locks out people who do not fit the traditional mould. There is a blockage of process that is difficult to overcome, prompting him, and others, to pull out of the system entirely: for example, by opening a college without institutional approval. Mr Adams encouraged the audience to find ways to break the process. **The challenge now in education is to get people to think, to critically pull things apart.** He agreed with Dr Gordon that teachers do not actually prepare students to be agile thinkers and suggested that degrees had outlived their use in the twenty-first century.

The panel agreed that the high stakes of education had meant that it was incredibly hard for students to fail and as a result, they are allowed less space for creativity. Dr Gordon suggested that exams are a pointless exercise and that institutions should explore how to give students the opportunity to take risks and fail. Sallyann Della Casa pointed out that the traditional metrics of student capabilities are undergoing a transformation, as applications are being developed for universities and companies to assess individuals in a more wholesome manner and select cohorts of students/employees who have compatible skills. It was pointed out that educators should have a better understanding of employment and the jobs market while businesses need to be more proactive in involving universities in their innovation units. The panel ended by pondering whether there was still a need for physical universities in this day and age.

## 3.0 DAY 2

### 3.1 Challenging the status quo in education

Author-Entrepreneur Scott Smith opened the second day of the conference with an inspiring keynote speech stressing the importance of building an education system that serves the student and nurtures a sense of meaning and love. Mr. Smith argued that education in the US has failed to fulfil this objective. Graduation rates as low as 8% and student debt totalling \$1.5 trillion demonstrate the devaluation of the individual in the system.

The status quo needs to be challenged, said Mr Smith, who showcased his own efforts to find solutions to the growing problems of increased debt and taxation in his country: He has devised a cross-party solution that involves a small but powerful change to the operating system. By taxing payments instead of income, Mr Smith suggested that the need for income tax, property tax and sales tax would no longer exist, US deficit and debt would be paid off in ten years, college and healthcare would be free. In addition, each citizen could theoretically benefit from a \$24,000 basic income payment. Such a systemic change in the economy would reinstate the freedom for each individual to choose their own path, driving up creativity.

A maverick, Mr Smith has co-founded two charter schools, with one ranking top 30 in the US. Using a model that he designed, the best teachers are shortlisted and asked to give mock lessons where students then weigh-in on their recruitment. To keep teaching standards in check, an annual student survey has been implemented to give students the opportunity to rate their instructors. Teachers who perform well are given a raise, teachers who do not are fired. This system has been created so that the teachers are serving and empowering the students. Mr Smith concludes that **a simple change to the educational – or financial system – can have far-reaching consequences, ultimately ensuring a sense of meaning and love for the individual.**

### 3.2 Higher Education and Entrepreneurship

Dr James Strong, Lecturer at Queen Mary University, introduced the fourth panel with the following guiding questions: How can lecturers make students into Entrepreneurs? What can be done to help instil values of team work, confidence and ideas in students? What examples have the panellists encountered of successful programs that do these things? And what can entrepreneurs do to drive education forward?

The first panellist, serial entrepreneur Frank Floessel, began by arguing that higher education is not likely to foster an environment favourable to entrepreneurship. According to Mr Floessel, **entrepreneurs are outliers who follow their own ideas, contradicting the structure of university.** He recounted his own experience to illustrate this: When studying electrical engineering at ETH Zurich, he quickly became bored and frustrated by the heavily theoretical approach of the course. It was by getting involved in student politics and becoming president of the student association that he attempted to implement change. Three years in, Mr Floessel had founded ETH Junior, an enterprise that consulted with companies, providing projects and business opportunities to students. The fund was also established to sponsor student initiatives. Mr Floessel identified the skillset required for a successful entrepreneur, putting emphasis on leadership as a key attribute responsible for making people believe in your vision for the future. Teamwork, grit, confidence and resilience were also deemed necessary. This, he admits, is due to the intense position entrepreneurs are put in. It is the fluctuations of successes and failures that creates an unpredictable and unnerving environment. Moreover, Mr Floessel added that **by nature, entrepreneurship is inherently independent and vocational, therefore it cannot be taught. It can only be learnt through experience and participation in extracurricular activities that develop key transferable skills.** He concluded by stressing the importance of peer-to-peer interaction, especially given the isolation that comes with being an entrepreneur.

Founder of Nosh Detox, Geeta Sighu-Robb presented an alternative perspective to the conversation, asking whether entrepreneurs were born or made. She explained how her own background and circumstances forced entrepreneurship into her life. As a lawyer, getting divorced placed her in an extremely difficult situation: left alone to provide for three small children whilst she tried to work from home. Losing everything, she feared that her children would end up paying for the choices she had made. Mrs Sighu-Robb argued that her failings played a crucial role in becoming an entrepreneur. It gave her, for the first time, complete independence, having the freedom to make choices that would cater to her needs and wishes. She explained that the current operating structure does not work for women, and suggested that entrepreneurship for modern-day women provides a unique opportunity to build a life that they want in a way that suits them. Her own business was built to pay school fees, feed and clothe her children. Entrepreneurship means something different to everyone. By referencing her own experience of business development and leadership, she noted that women are very different entrepreneurs to men. Generally speaking, they lack confidence, hate fundraising and are easily intimidated by corporate jargon. She also added that they don't embrace power in the same way; to become a leader you must first become a powerful woman. Mrs Sighu-Robb emphasised the difficulty of achieving this, stating that it took her eight years just to become a CEO. On the other hand, **entrepreneurship allows women to undergo a journey of growth, pulling them out of, what can be for some, a repressive culture and background, and enabling them to reinstate their value.** Although they may initially lack the boldness to drive forward, women are natural team builders, inclusive and collaborative, an attribute central to running a business successfully and making a bigger impact.

Dan Choon, founder of Cycle, a venture capital and private equity fund investing in high tech companies, focused on how entrepreneurs can use their businesses to ensure the continuation of an individual's learning journey beyond higher education. On the one hand, there exists a sense of openness in academia that can be explored. This he illustrated by a student programme he had

integrated as a youth that arranged for exchanges and international summer schools, training gifted students to become young scientists. Yet once at university, he was frustrated by its rigidity, which prompted him to turn to entrepreneurship where he could freely pursue his hunger for knowledge. Beyond university, Mr Choon argued that all companies undergo a learning as well as a teaching journey, having to constantly retain and convey information to employees. There are diverse sets of systems and cross cultures that create challenges that need to be addressed, for example in the transfer of knowledge from Europe to Asia. Mr Choon **concluded by calling for more effective, flexible and self-driven ways to assist learning paths and pointed to Professors Without Borders as one example of this initiative.**

Serial entrepreneur Vincent Dassault discussed the ways in which higher education could be reformed to address the fundamental roots of entrepreneurial upsets, specifically by delving into the four areas of a system: drivers, vectors, processes and witnesses. There is a discrepancy between the agility of industries and existing methods of education, particularly with regards to Artificial Intelligence. Education hasn't adapted at all to modernity, still retaining the old-fashioned teacher-to-student system. Mr Dassault sought to identify the psychological underlying mechanisms needed to acquire knowledge and competence to enable education to evolve. He emphasised the role of subconscious drivers within our brain's functioning system, responsible for precipitating traits such as curiosity and geekiness, which in turn nurture an entrepreneurial culture. **Education should be all about engaging, thinking and sharing rather than delivering messages, and Mr Dassault criticised the existing one-sided delivery of messages conveyed by universities in their attempt to tackle global issues.** Instead, feedback must be utilised as a hidden driver and adapt to the physiological profile of each individual, formulating a more unique student-teacher relationship. **By working as guide and mentor, teachers should focus on imparting the ability to think at all levels of education.** With the advent of the internet, drilling information into students is a futile effort.

Assistant Professor Guilherme Lichand closed the panel by clarifying the distinction between entrepreneurs by choice and entrepreneurs by necessity, both categories that require distinctive tools and are driven by different motivations. Born into a privileged family in Sao Paulo, Brazil, an obligation to give back to society contributed to Dr Lichand's decision to become an entrepreneur. How can education help entrepreneurs by choice, he asked? After studying economics and working for the World Bank, he completed a PhD to help achieve his goal of providing better opportunities to disadvantaged communities. He set up his company with the help of the government to address limitations to the data collection of Brazilian citizens. By using cell phones, Dr Lichand was able to present a tangible solution that improved the distribution of milk to poor families in east Brazil. Using this as an example of a problem-solution model, Dr Lichand stressed that education is important to solve real world problems. **Students should be challenged with these tasks on a regular basis, particularly in developing countries where direct contact to or awareness of such problems remains weak to non-existent.** Dr Lichand concluded that by investing in education, local solutions could be found to local problems, thereby stimulating the economy and creating new jobs.

### 3.3 Building Bridges

Prowibo co-founder, Princess Tessy chaired the fifth panel on Building Bridges. Princess Tessy put forward three questions to the panel: What can be done within the education sector to recruit, train and retain the best educators? What roadmap for constructive change can be suggested? What is the role of the government in building bridges?

James Monckton, former officer of the British Army and currently head of communications strategy for Verbalisation stressed the need to employ a more bottom-up approach to education.

He explained that his service in the British Army, specifically his first tour of Afghanistan and work with UK Special Forces in Iraq, galvanised his deep appreciation for education. Mr Monckton was impressed with the risks that students were taking to gain access to school, realising the value of education for these communities. This was further enforced by his visit to a Syrian refugee camp, **where receiving an education seemed to be the number one priority, overriding requests for food and water.** As an example of a roadmap for constructive change, Mr Monckton talked about Bridge the Gulf, an organisation he set up to bring youth communities together in the GCC. The Cambridge Conversation was another initiative mentioned, where conferences among young adults were held every six months to challenge issues facing their communities today. Mr Monckton also underlined the problem of enforcing large scale reforms of education systems overseas, suggesting that such an endeavour is unlikely to succeed. At the moment, the government's powers are limited to suggesting a percentage of the foreign aid given to education. However, this is only a recommendation, which legally cannot be enforced. Mr Monckton suggested that private sector companies and institutions in the region had a role to play to improve access to education.

Mohammed Abdel Khaliq, CEO of Gulf Conferences, began by stating the importance of acknowledging and understanding the generational differences of today's youth in order to have a more accurate discussion on issues regarding higher education. He offered an anecdote of a taxi full of professors and ministers, who were schooled by the driver who argued that their ideas on mobility and skills in GCC countries simply didn't make sense. In the UAE, the driver said, young people born into rich families are not interested in education, they just want to work within government entities. As a result of this conversation, Mr Khaliq organised a conference to address how the design of university courses could satisfy young people today. Mr Khaliq also addressed the question of women in education. He pointed to a business centre of 5,000 women who conducted operations for some of the biggest companies in the world as an example of a roadmap for constructive change in female empowerment. Mr Khaliq concluded by stating **that just being part of this conference, networking and debating these questions was innovative in itself.**

Professor Pansiri Phansuwan from the Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok argued that **as higher education was the last platform before students enter the workforce, the issue of reform was very important.** She explained that sustainable development required a change to the way society thinks and acts, and therefore education was key to achieving this transformation. More specifically, efforts should focus on training professors on how to teach students in the right way, shaping it around the necessary **skills required to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity and emotional control.** In appreciation of the commercial and governmental links to education, Professor Phansuwan has built a model representing this interconnection, firmly believing it will create more opportunities for students and teachers. The role of the first component, universities, is to provide life support in the form of scholarships, student exchanges, and facilities. Businesses, the second component, must co-operate with universities assisting with community service, job requirements and alumni connections. Finally, the government should be the provider to all lines of resources so that universities can achieve this vision. Professor Phansuwan, asserted that if the model is implemented and succeeds, as her university has done, the whole of society will benefit and become sustainable in the age of transformation.

Patrick Wheeler, founder of CyberWayFinder, looked at the consequences for higher education institutions and businesses operating in an age where **career change is almost an imperative. The problem, he said, is finding a large pool of qualified talent and experience to fill new but critical markets.** He pointed out that there is, for example, a high demand in cybersecurity now and that waiting for people to take up stem subjects, complete a relevant Masters and obtain ten years of work experience is simply not a viable option. Mr Wheeler explained that **plenty of talent, desire and skill were trapped in the mid-career workforce, which can be utilised to satisfy the demands**

**of new markets.** His organisation CyberWayFinder, which facilitates the career transition of professional women into cyber security is an example of such a solution. Mr Wheeler argued that requirements for the level of qualification to teach, normally a PhD, was a challenge to the recruitment, training and retention of the best educators. He **called for more practitioners to come into the teaching profession as well as educators to go out and experience the private sector.** He did stress however, that like any other infrastructure, we must not completely change the core values underpinning higher education. Change must be gradual.

Talking about the brain drain in emerging markets, Wael Aburida, owner of a private equity platform running private schools in the UAE, described the **significant bias towards private schools and the degradation of public school.** While students from families willing and able to spend money on private education benefit from a robust standardised regulatory system for curriculums across 120 different countries, those who cannot are left to study in heavily overpopulated public schools that teach minimum content, forcing students who can afford it to hire teachers as private tutors. Mr Aburida argued that this was **a strong reflection of the failure of government's education policy.** He also noted that **pressure to enter only a limited range of industries, typically medicine or engineering, has caused an overpopulation of certain job markets.** He asserted the need for a stronger collaboration with the business community so that the gap between the demands of the markets and the output of higher education could be closed. If the domestic market is efficient enough, Mr Aburida concluded, it can curb the brain drain across the GCC region.

### 3.4 Concluding Message

The first conference on Higher Education in the Age of Transformation organised by Professors Without Borders in partnership with the Gulf Futures Centre produced a written report and video of the conference and made these freely available to the public. The conversation on improving education and access to education will continue with an annual meeting of minds to address problems facing the academic system and job markets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The organisers, Princess Tessy, Dr Caroline Varin, Mr Titus Ayodele and Dr Abdalla Al Tayer thank all the participants.