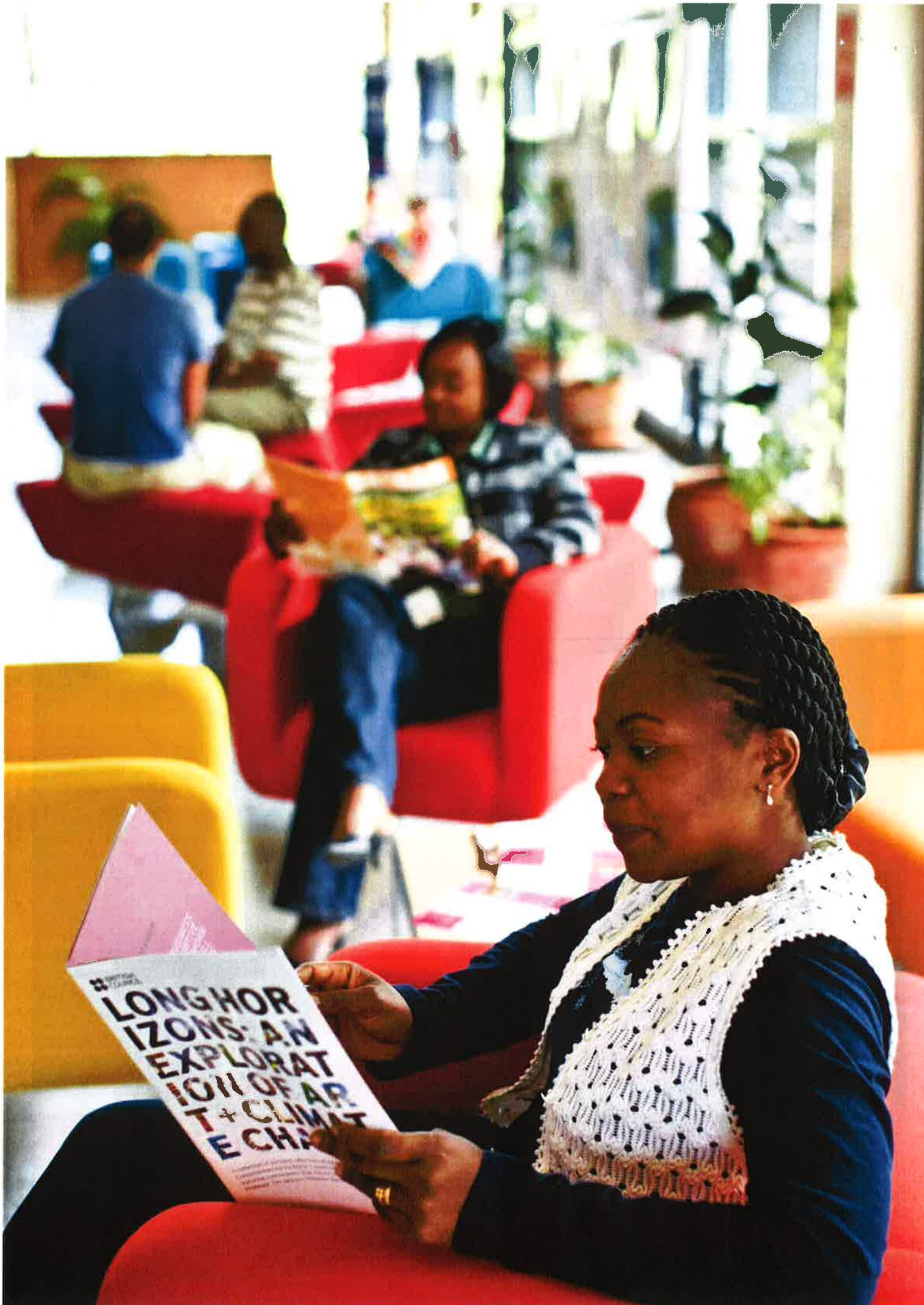


EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP IN AFRICA



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INTRODUCTION

As governments in Sub-Saharan Africa strive to modernise their economies and diversify their industries, education has never been more important.

Enrolment in further and higher education has grown more than 20-fold since the 1970s according to UNESCO, but remains low amongst the tertiary education age group at six per cent, compared to a global average of 26 per cent.

Improvements in secondary education have fuelled increased demand for education and training which colleges and universities struggle to meet on limited resources. Meanwhile, developing the skills of the workforce is a priority for countries striving to improve standards of living.

To help address these issues and bring about long-lasting change in the region, the UK government has invested £4.5 million in projects to support partnerships between colleges and universities in the UK and Africa for the mutual sharing of expertise and experience.

The Education Partnerships in Africa programme, funded by the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and managed by the British Council, has supported 72 projects involving 40 universities and 15 further education colleges in the UK and 69 higher and 16 further education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Over the 18 months of the scheme, 388 African academics and students have visited the UK and there have been 305 visits from the UK to African partner institutions. Thousands have taken part in the 356 events organised by the partnerships.

Nearly 7,000 students have been trained or engaged in the projects, 3,555 trainers and academics have received continuous professional development, 8,510 community mentors have been engaged and 1,230 African businesses have contributed to forging greater links, drawing up curricula and providing work experience.

Most importantly, much of the work begun by the programme will continue in the form of new partnerships and projects.



MOBILE INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

A system for farmers in remote areas to share information and boost crop yield via text messages and an automated reminder for maternity clinic appointments are just two of the many ideas that came out of a unique partnership between students in the UK and Uganda.

The mobile innovation and enterprise project between Sheffield Hallam University in the UK and Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, aimed to improve teaching on the design of mobile phones. It drew up strategies to prepare students for the opportunities opening up in Uganda where subscriber numbers have risen sharply to almost a third of the population.

The absence of wired telephone infrastructure has resulted in an explosive growth in mobile phone usage in Uganda, but there is a desperate shortage of people with the IT skills to meet the demand says Dr Andy Dearden, a reader at Sheffield Hallam's Communication and Computing Research Centre.

The 18-month project helped to develop university and industry partnerships that could be used throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

Students are carrying on the work through a new incubation centre at Makerere, and new connections have been formed between staff in computing, design, agriculture and medicine.

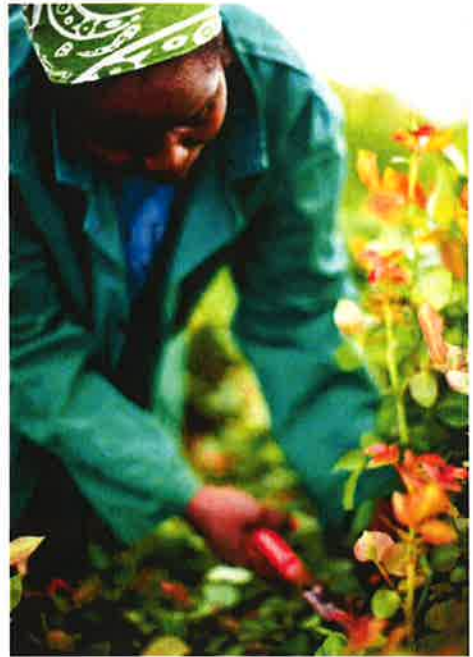
'The experience of working in the student workshops has opened up a dialogue between disciplines and contributed to the development of problem-based pedagogy in the department, with a major focus on staff development,' Dr Dearden said.

The partnership secured funding for a pan-African workshop on developing a regionally relevant ICT curriculum from Google. It also helped to develop changes to courses at Makerere to reflect the importance of mobile applications software and links with industry.

Dr Dearden worked with Dr Idris Rai, a former researcher at Lancaster University, now an associate professor at Makerere, who says the project helped students to develop high-value skills in design innovation and entrepreneurship, preparing them for employment.

In return, Sheffield Hallam has gained a deeper understanding of the challenges of applying information and communication technologies in developing regions and a better knowledge of the range of applications which can be supported on low-end and mid-range mobile phones.





ENTERPRISING AFRICA – SKILLS FOR INDUSTRY AND ENTREPRENEURS

New employer forums are transforming the training of electrical engineers in Ghana by improving the match up between education and the modern workplace.

The initiative is part of an EPA project to foster a stronger industrial-based curriculum that has been undertaken jointly by Ho Polytechnic in Ghana's Volta region and City College Brighton and Hove.

The partnership set out to address the difficulty that electrical and electronic engineering graduates at HND level in Ghana have experienced in finding work when their skills do not match the needs of industry.

Staff from Ho Polytechnic visited the UK and lecturers from Brighton took part in knowledge sharing workshops with local industry and Ho Polytechnic employees in Ghana. The exchanges led to a report into ways to improve the curriculum and teaching methods to enhance employability and promote entrepreneurial skills.

Ho Polytechnic staff attended mini-workshops and a series of industry training sessions with their local industry partners to pave the way for work experience sessions to be provided for students in future.

A new curriculum has been developed for an HND focused on automated control systems for industry, and a staff training programme was developed to address technical knowledge gaps.

The partnership grew to embrace teaching and learning across the polytechnic. As well as involving senior lecturers from the engineering department, there was input from Martyn Howe, City College's Teaching and Learning Manager, who visited Ho Polytechnic to organise workshops on quality assurance systems and effective teaching and learning. In collaboration with Ho Polytechnic staff, he drew up a report with recommendations for teaching practice and quality assurance across the polytechnic.

'It was not a case of going out there and telling them what to do, but sharing with the Ho Polytechnic staff systems used in the UK for assuring quality in education and the latest evidence-based research on the teaching methods that have maximum impact,' he says.

A series of workshops with industrial partners in the Volta regions, including the Cocoa Processing Company, Nestle Ghana, Maxxim Scientific, Tema Oil Refinery and the Kingdom Fruit Company, led to the ongoing employer forums that have assisted in the development of the new curriculum. Other departments have also recognised the benefits of employer development and are seeking closer links.



MODERNISING VOCATIONAL AND EMPLOYABILITY EDUCATION

Lecturers at an East London college felt enlightened when they witnessed the difficult working conditions of their peers in Africa through an EPA project designed to help modernise vocational education in Nigeria.

They found staff in Lagos had become masters of finding ways around problems caused by the lack of up-to-date technology or even a reliable source of electricity.

"There was something about people's resourcefulness and ability to improvise that we found very interesting," says Ian Ashman, the Principal of Hackney Community College. "One of my staff called it an invigorating and unique two-way learning process and it's true that we have benefitted greatly from the experience," he said.

'I know much more about quality assurance, curriculum management, lesson observation and employer engagement and we will continue to use this to improve our teaching,'

The Hackney Lagos Partnership for modernising vocational and employability education worked with the Ministry of Education in Lagos State and its five technical colleges. As Nigeria tries to develop its economy, the Lagos government wants to modernise teaching and introduce a fresh emphasis on entrepreneurship and employability in skills training.

The partnership focused on developing planning and leaderships and improving the quality of teaching, bringing it up to date with more emphasis on involving students in their learning. The project also sought to establish reliable teaching assessment and quality assurance methods to drive up standards.

A head of department in Lagos told how his management practice teaching had improved through the project: "I know much more about quality assurance, curriculum management, lesson observation and employer engagement and we will continue to use this to improve our teaching," he said.

A legacy of the successful partnership is an initiative to develop new accreditation for the 'informal' sector,

"There are people working in the construction industry or in micro-businesses such as roadside garages who have skills but no qualifications," says Ian Ashman. "We are looking to develop ways of assessing what they can do in the workplace and what they need to do at college to reach a level two or three.

"Employers are very keen, and it has potential not just for engineers but for other skilled workers, such as carpenters and cooks."

Hackney Community College is hoping to continue its relationship with Lagos State through World Bank funds.



DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY – A CREATIVE CHALLENGE

A partnership between universities on different continents set up under the EPA programme has opened up life changing opportunities for unemployed people in South Africa.

Workshops on employability have transformed the aspirations of workers such as Joseph, who is opening up his own business selling paraffin, and Asanda, who has rented a space at an airport to sell her jewellery and craftwork made of recycled materials.

The 18-month project supported by the EPA programme resulted in the setting up of 65 new businesses and jobs for many of the 734 people who completed the training.

Developing employability and improving entrepreneurship and employer involvement in training were the aims of the partnership between Middlesex University in the UK and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth. Academics worked closely with Siya-Sebenza, a local charity providing skills training for jobseekers.

At the start of the project Siya-Sebenza trained around 600 students a year at its centre in Port Elizabeth. Since the start of the partnership five more centres have opened and are able to train another 3,000 workers. There are plans for 108 across South Africa by 2015.

Ena Richards, the founder of Siya-Sebenza, said, 'As all our systems were in place and were good, the extra resources could be used to grow what we had, enabling us to empower more young people with the job skills and the entrepreneurial skills to stand on their own two feet and support themselves.'

An important aim was to harness the work of postgraduates and junior academics at NMMU and widen their skills through the experience of running and evaluating a large research project.

Researchers at NMMU were trained to undertake the first employer engagement exercise, putting the partnership in contact with 200 local employers.

Lack of co-ordination in the local labour market meant that employers were not getting workers with the appropriate skills, says Dr Michael Brookes from Middlesex University's Department of Economics and Statistics.

'When you speak to people you realise that they do not know how to go about getting a job. Many come from households with no one in paid employment.

'From a base of virtually zero, there are now a significant number of employers using our services for recruitment and retention.'

'As all our systems were in place and were good, the extra resources could be used to grow what we had, enabling us to empower more young people with the job skills and the entrepreneurial skills to stand on their own two feet and support themselves.'



THE INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR – DESIGN FOR AFRICA

Tyler Scott found work as a designer within three weeks of graduation – an achievement beyond the wildest dreams of the young South African, the son of a single mother who worked hard to put him through college.

Despite widespread unemployment in Cape Town, Tyler had a choice of jobs. He attributes his good fortune to an EPA-supported project called Design for Africa, under which four universities worked together to fast track design students into the international arena and foster their entrepreneurial skills.

'The project exceeded all expectations,' says Shaun Borstrock, the head of Design and Business development at the University of Hertfordshire who worked with three Cape Town colleges: Ruth Prowse School of Art, Cape Peninsula University of Technology and The Design School.

Before joining the project the three partners in South Africa had little or no contact with an educational institution outside the country and very little, if any, contact with business and industry, he said.

'We wanted the students to understand industry and the needs and wants of consumers. They needed to know how to put a business plan together and market themselves,' he added.

A Creative Entrepreneurs Challenge, hosted by the University of Hertfordshire, involved more than 300 students developing fictitious products in cross-curricular teams. High profile companies such as Karen Millen UK and L'Oreal South Africa threw their weight behind the project, providing mentors.

Design for Africa is continuing its work through a new foundation for the creative industries, relying on donations and fundraising activities. A network of international employers provides support and practical hands-on experience for students to engage with global enterprise.

Tyler, one of the South African exchange students who spent time at the University of Hertfordshire, returns regularly to Ruth Prowse School of Art to share his experiences with other students.

He said, 'My studies were limited to lectures and textbooks until I visited the UK. Then for the first time I was able to see, in real life, awe-inspiring works in galleries. I had the opportunity to meet top designers and discuss my ideas with them.

'It was the greatest opportunity I have been privileged to have, and now I am doing what I can to share my experience with design students in South Africa.'

CONCLUSION

From the graduate designer embarking on a career he thought he could only dream of, to the students developing mobile phone systems to aid farmers and maternity clinics, to the jewellery seller inspired to set up shop at an airport, the Education Partnerships in Africa programme has been helping to transform lives in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Tens of thousands of workers, students, graduates, employers and educators in further and higher education institutions have been involved in and have benefitted from the projects, workshops, conferences, industry links and sharing of information and experience through lasting partnerships established through the programme.

It has been a two-way process which has brought inspiration, fresh ideas and new perspectives to UK academics and students as well as their African partners.

And it has become an ongoing process, with many projects continuing and evolving beyond the life of the programme. The legacy of Education Partnerships in Africa is that it will go on improving lives and helping to boost economies for many years to come.



If you're interested in finding out more or to discuss partnership or business development opportunities, please contact:

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