

# Driving Economic and Social Development in the Region: Pathways to Success

Forum of University and College Presidents

- Principals and VC's from universities and colleges across the ASEAN countries
- Key note speaker from the UK
- In the presence of leaders of the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Guangxi Government

18 September 2015

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## Speech – full text

As we all know, the economy within which we are operating has become increasingly global. It has also become increasingly knowledge-based, with knowledge replacing physical capital as the main source of present and future wealth.

Advances in information and digital technology have made this growing body of knowledge ever more accessible, effective, and powerful.

This is leading to significant innovations in biotechnology, high tech engineering, communications and green technologies, and other areas that are really changing the ways in which we both live and work – and these changes are happening at pace. It's a global phenomenon and shows no sign of slowing.

At the University of the West of England we see this unfolding in Robotics and Autonomous Systems with the development of robotic tools for precision surgery, the 3D printing of prosthetic limbs, and the development of robotics and sensors to support assisted healthcare delivery for our ageing populations, just a few examples of innovations and spin-out companies from our Bristol Robotics Lab, one of Europe's largest facilities in this area. We are also seeing this unfold with the testing of driverless cars on our streets in Bristol – this is an innovation that will change the way we live in less time than we often think.

In order to really participate and maximize the many opportunities on offer in the global knowledge economy – for nations, communities and individual citizens – it is clear that countries need to have well-performing systems of education. As Chair of University Alliance, representing 18 business-facing universities in the UK, and based on my other leadership positions in the business and health sectors, I have been very closely involved in the debates about how we best approach this in the UK – so we build an education system that truly supports the UK's ambitions in the global knowledge and high tech economy. I have argued in the UK, that it is important that we consider developments to our education system holistically, based on the overall objectives for our economy and society. This means building an education system with multiple pathways to higher skills, based on sector needs and playing to the different strengths of individuals. It means ensuring that the appropriate 'bridges and ladders' are in place, that we have blended approaches, not closed pathways, in order to meet the demand for higher-skills. Our education needs to develop the mind and theoretical understanding, but must, and I emphasise must, also ensure knowledge is applied and used in practical situations. We must also ensure we encourage creativity and innovation and a broad rounded education, where we blend science, engineering, the arts and humanities to create new and exciting opportunities for the future, where we value equally theory, practice and vocational education.

This is an area we have been working through in the UK, with the development of foundation degrees, higher apprenticeships and programmes co-designed with employers. At the University of the West of England Bristol, this involves working with organisations like Airbus, the BBC, HP, the National Health Service and many others. Absolutely key to this is collaborative working – involving schools, further education and vocational colleges, universities, and employers.

In the UK we need to continue to look at the whole student journey and build the open pathways that our economy needs – so we can really maximize the talent we have – with each pathway equally recognized in terms of the contribution it makes to the overall economy and society.

As one of the UK's largest universities, the University of the West of England Bristol, we are very focused on delivering a higher education experience for the real world. And we are having a considerable impact on driving growth in our regional economy, enabling our students and graduates to really engage and thrive in this environment, matching their talent to the multiple and varied opportunities on offer. Currently 99% of all University of the West of England graduates are employed or in further study just 3 years after graduation. And we consistently achieve one of the highest rates of graduates in employment or further study just 6 months after graduation.

Our success is due to our outstanding connections with employers, which facilitate internships, placements, project work, mentoring, guest lectures and workshops, as well as involvement in programme design and identifying future needs. This engagement with industry and practice feeds directly into our approach to learning and teaching, creating the opportunities our students need to really maximise their potential.

In this context, the relationship with SHAPE/ the Vocational Training Council of Hong Kong to deliver top-up degree programmes in IT and Digital Media in Hong Kong is an important next step for us. It enables students to progress from local Higher Diploma programmes. Since 2011 we have seen the number of students rise from 12 to well over 300 in 2014-15, with a further 300+ students ready to start in Sept 2015.

The partnership is now yielding significant academic and student experience benefits both sides of the globe. UWE Bristol's Faculty of Environment and Technology, whose illustrious alumni include CY Leung - now Hong Kong's Chief Executive, hosted a summer school for VTC students this year (which we plan to make an annual event) and we are intending to offer UWE students the opportunity to participate in a reciprocal arrangement from 2015 onwards. We have a PhD scholarship scheme in place, through which we hope members of VTC staff will undertake PhD programmes with UWE.

The VTC was recently invited by the GuangXi Provincial Government of China to help them develop vocational education in the region because of their success in Hong Kong. Part of the planned development is the provision of progression routes that enable students to obtain a degree award from a UK institution. This is just the sort of exciting partnership that helps meet the skills needs of the economy.

Initiatives like these will really help students to maximise their contribution to the workplace and the regional economy. At the University of the West of England, that is absolutely core to what we do – ensuring our students are prepared to play their full role in the global knowledge economy – wherever their ambitions and talent take them. This is why we talk about education in relation to real passion, real innovation, real experience and real life.

Thank you.