

QS-APPLE: universities globally must meet pace of societal change

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Universities globally must navigate societal change, such as ageing populations in the Asia Pacific, and take a leadership position in developing further changes, according to speakers at the [QS-APPLE Conference](#) in Fukuoka, Japan.



The current degree model will not help students for life, according to Kong. Photo *The PIE*

About Anton Grace

Anton is an award-winning international education journalist and author from Australia. He has worked within the industry since 2011 and writes extensively on events throughout the Asia Pacific. In his spare time, he's watching rugby, cricket or basketball.

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The conference themed ‘The Changing Roles of Universities in the Asia-Pacific’ challenged higher education providers to consider how best to reestablish their offerings to meet students’ and society’s needs. It attracted more than 700 delegates from around the world.

“Unlike the advent of the internet or artificial intelligence, both of which are technological disruptions, the ageing society is a demographic phenomenon,” president of Singapore Management University Lily Kong told delegates.

“Supporting life-long learning bring tremendous socio-economic value to society”

“But, like the fourth revolution, it is also a form of disruption and one that has significant social and economic implications for the world.”

Kong said ageing populations had received far less attention from universities than the fourth industrial revolution, adding both combined would have substantial impacts on the way universities operate.

“If we think an undergraduate education is going to prepare a young adult for the rest of his or her working life, think again,” she continued.

“There is no way in which anyone can be sufficiently educated and prepared with a bachelor’s degree in his hand or her hand in their mid-20s for the next 40 or 50 years of working life.”

Kong added universities needed to better prepare for a rise in non-traditional students, such as workers needing to upskill or reskill as part of their career.

“This is not just a meaningful but necessary role for universities,” she said.

Supporting life-long learning bring tremendous socio-economic value to society, and arguably this should not be left to private providers only because universities have a responsibility and ability to ensure high quality upskilling and reskilling courses.”

While the conference reflected on lifetime employability skills, Kong also said universities had a crucial role in developing students for fields of work that meet future societal needs, such as the predicted increase in healthcare needs as populations age.

“Far less attention is given to the fact that with more hospitals, more complex operations and more integrated healthcare systems, we also need more healthcare planners and administrators,” she said.

According to Feridun Hamdullahpur, president of the University of Waterloo in Canada, the rise in links between technological advances means that change is going to continue at an exponential rate, urging universities to change their pedagogy at the same pace.

“Everybody is going to be affected, and the universities will not be immune from that change or that destruction,” he said.

“We, as university leaders, administrators, educators, should think harder and deeper as to how fast we can put [changes] in place... because these are urgent matters and action has to be taken yesterday.

Universities also must shift their view of students towards seeing them as talent acquisition to create further advances, he continued.

“[They are] the talent that is needed that will rise to the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution,” he said.

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“Not only will they rise to that challenge, but they will also be the ones that will cause more destruction, more challenges, and that is the kind of talent we want to see at our institutions.” Nigel Healey, vice-chancellor of Fiji National University, meanwhile said current administrative behaviour of universities made change difficult, challenging delegates to make long-decision that will come to fruition beyond their careers.

“Have we got the guts to say we need to change, or is it easier to say not in our lifetimes?” he said.

“Universities have been around for a long time; we’re not good at making long-term decisions.”

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