

Chapter 9

Graduate Work-Readiness Challenges in Mauritius



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Abstract With the country aspiring to become a high-income economy, it is evident that graduate work-readiness is even more pertinent for the socio-economic development of Mauritius as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). Several GWR issues are highlighted in this chapter. The overly academic education system is accused of being one of the main causes, as it does not sufficiently prepare fresh graduates for a smooth entry into the work environment. A survey of employers and educational institutions revealed that fresh graduates have more intellectual and meta skills as opposed to personality and job-specific skills. Despite genuine endeavours from stakeholders (government/regulatory bodies, educational institutions and employers), the results are still mixed. The lack of synergy between the three main stakeholders appears to a major constraint to successful graduate work-readiness initiatives. Nonetheless, some initiatives have had a positive impact.

Keyword Skills mismatch · Graduates · Employers · Government Educational institutions · SIDS

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9.1 Contextual Background

Situated at the heart of the Indian Ocean, Mauritius is an island of 1865 km² with a population of 1,348,242 (Central Intelligence Agency 2016). Since its independence in 1968, Mauritius has grown into an African role model with progression from a low-income to a middle-income economy. From being primarily dependent on a mono-crop (sugar) industry, the island has moved to a diversified and knowledge-driven economy dominated by its services sector, more specifically finance, tourism and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). For 10 consecutive years (2006–2016), the island has sustained its first position on the Mo Ibrahim index of African governance (Republic of Mauritius 2016), and since 2001 Mauritius has maintained a stable GDP annual growth rate, with an average of 3.89% (Trading Economics 2017). Like other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Mauritius is constrained by limited resources, small economies of scale and a strong dependency on international trade. The island's strength thus lies in the 70.3% of the Mauritian population found within the 15–64 working-age bracket defined by the World Bank (ArcGIS 2016). Investment in the human capital including quality education for sustainable employment prospects is, therefore, key for the continued development of Mauritius (UNDESA Division for Sustainable Development 2014).

9.2 Labour Market Issues

According to The World Bank's Country Diagnostic Report for Mauritius (2015), 54% of enterprises across all employment sectors of the island are unable to hire suitable candidates. Such difficulty in recruitment persists despite unemployment rates exceeding 7% since 2011 (Statistics Mauritius 2016). In addition, more than 75% of the 43,100 unemployed Mauritians in 2016 were reported to have stagnated on the job market for more than a year (Statistics Mauritius 2016) indicating a skills mismatch. With more than 50% of its university graduates preferring to live and work abroad as of 2010, Mauritius also tops the list of African countries suffering from brain drain (Harvard Business Review 2017). Labour shortage in the island is particularly acute in its tourism and ICT industries (Googoolye et al. 2013). With rising competition from cruise lines and hotels from other countries in the region, the lack of trained local skills reported by the Mauritian tourism sector results in increased costs and the need to recruit foreign labour (World Bank 2015). The ICT industry also grapples with skills availability issues and is forced to turn to expatriates to fill required posts (Googoolye et al. 2013). According to Statistics Mauritius (2017), the number of foreign workers in the Mauritian ICT industry increased from 330 in 2014 to 342 in 2015 and 387 in 2016. ICT GDP contribution has mostly plateaued since 2010 with a slight decline from 5.8% in 2015 to 5.7% in 2016 (Statistics Mauritius 2017). Further growth in the sector is dependent on the

promotion of advanced ICT value-added services predicted to create an additional 11,000–15,000 high-skilled jobs (World Bank 2015). Without relevant graduate training in the ICT sector among others, the skills gap in the local labour market is expected to further widen.

9.2.1 Industry, Educational Institutions, Culture and Graduate Work-Readiness

Yet, both the quality and significance of the qualifications produced by the local education and training system to support the service-inclination of the new knowledge economy are questioned (World Bank 2015). Universities provide qualifications which are not always aligned with job market requirements, and employers view graduates as being overly academic and lacking vital soft skills including teamwork, reading/writing and communication (Business Magazine and Verde Frontier Employability Survey 2016). University enrolment rates also dropped from 50,608 in 2014 to 48,970 in 2015 (Statistics Mauritius 2016), and the World Bank (2015) reports poor collaborations between higher educational institutions and industry. In addition, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector remains minimal. Notwithstanding a spread of more than 350 Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions (International Trade Centre 2017), full-time enrolment rates are less than 3% of total secondary enrolment as compared to 8% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 17% in East Asian countries (World Bank 2015). Employers also find it difficult to gauge the level of vocational training provided, and the lack of communication between TVET institutions and industry further widens the wedge between the curriculum and current needs of the labour market. Qualified trainers are rare, equipment used are often obsolete, and TVET graduates are not sufficiently tracked for valuable feedback (World Bank 2015).

The Mauritian culture also has a role to play in the work-readiness of the island's graduates. Known as the gateway between Africa and Asia (Kumar 2015), Mauritius shares a strong bond with Asia dating back to the nineteenth century with the immigration of indentured labourers (Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, n.d.). With 60% of the population consisting of Asian descendents (Marriott 2016), Asian cultural traits are firmly ingrained in the Mauritian culture. As a consequence, the uncompromising Asian parenting style centred on high academic performance (Watkins et al. 2017) finds its way into the attitude and mindset of many Mauritian parents (Bornstein and Bohr 2011). Upon entering school, Mauritian children are pushed into the fierce 'rat race' of a highly competitive education system (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2015) where parents encourage their children to focus predominantly on academic excellence to the detriment of soft skills.

It is therefore not surprising that an inadequately educated workforce ranks third on the list of reasons hindering business in Mauritius (World Economic Forum 2015). This is supported by the Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016 in which Mauritius ranks 52nd in the Higher Education and Training pillar compared to countries such as Malaysia (36th) and Chile (33rd) (World Economic Forum 2015). It is thus critical that Mauritian graduates be better trained to develop the right skills sought by industry for economic sustainability. This chapter analyses the Mauritian graduate work-readiness challenge through different stakeholder lenses, and discusses strategies implemented to address the issue, before making recommendations for the way forward.

9.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

9.3.1 *Research Framework*

Aligning with the stakeholder model presented in Chap. 3, government, educational institutions and employers of Mauritius were surveyed using a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

First, senior representatives from governmental entities involved with graduate work-readiness were interviewed. These include interviewees from three ministries (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research; Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training; and Ministry of Finance and Economic Development), two regulatory bodies for higher and vocational education (the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the Mauritius Qualification Authority—MQA) and the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) which is responsible for the promotion and development of the labour force on the island. All interviews were face to face with group interviews conducted where more than one interviewee was present. Interviews were also semi-structured and covered themes which included the nature of GWR challenges experienced by the interviewees, their consequences and strategies developed to address them. Data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis.

Employers and educational institutions (both higher and vocational) were surveyed next. The aim of the survey was to gather their views on the issues discussed during the interviews. The questionnaire was designed, pretested and refined prior to administration. The top 100 companies by profit were targeted and a survey was emailed to their respective Human Resource departments. The questionnaire was also sent to the directors of the 11 largest public and private institutions identified from the Mauritian Tertiary Education Commission. Thirty-seven employers and six educational institutions responded to the survey. Such a response rate aligns with the acceptable range of 35–40% recommended by Baruch and Holtom (2008) for high-level institutional respondents. The data collected were then cleaned and analysed before presenting the findings.

9.4 Research Findings

The identified stakeholders realise that they need to put up a united front to fight the problem of graduate employability. Nevertheless, interviews of government and higher education regulatory bodies in Mauritius, along with further survey analysis of Mauritian employers and relevant educational institutions, revealed numerous issues which appear to hinder the effectiveness of this tripartite relationship. These are presented as follows: GWR challenges; their causes and implications; and solutions designed to address the challenges including three case studies of innovative GWR programmes.

9.4.1 GWR Challenges

Employers in Mauritius appear to experience great difficulty in finding the right skills in the job market (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development [MFED] 2015). They condemn an absence of essential soft skills among many young graduates. Fresh talent with a strong willingness to learn and adapt to the organisational culture and its work ethics is also rare. Employers perceive new graduates as inexperienced, overly academic and restricted by attitudinal barriers, which greatly inhibit their performance at work (MFED 2015). Mauritian universities are accused of being too content focused with little emphasis on soft skills (Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training [MLIRET] 2014). Graduates are not sufficiently exposed to authentic and valuable work experiences to shape their career-readiness, and the preparation of graduates by local tertiary institutions is perceived as inadequate as compared to their overseas counterparts (Business Magazine and Verde Frontier Employability Survey 2016).

As illustrated in Table 9.1, the results of the survey of Mauritian employers and education institutions reveal that there are a number of similarities in employer-sought skills between the university and vocational education graduates. Among the top five skills required from HE and VE graduates, four appear common to both. These include soft skills (such as social skills, character traits, conflict

Table 9.1 Main graduate skills required by Mauritian employers

	University (%)	Vocational education
Interpersonal/communication skills	14	5%
Self-management (social skills, character traits, conflict management and time management)	13	19
On-the-job training	8	10%
Technical skills	17	7%
Teamwork	7	13%

management and time management), on-the-job training, in-depth technical skills and teamwork. However, employers seem to rate communication and interpersonal skills as less important for VE graduates as opposed to HE ones. This could be explained by the more prominent technical focus of jobs secured by VE graduates as compared to their HE counterparts, who, on top of needing sound technical expertise, are also required to communicate effectively on the job.

Using the conceptual framework outlined in Chap. 2, the survey results in Table 9.2 also indicate that Mauritian graduates primarily acquire intellectual skills (foundation skills and cognitive capabilities) followed by meta skills (IT skills, communication skills, teamwork and political skills and system thinking skills) during their studies.

This ranking reflects the strong academic focus of the Mauritian educational system, which emphasises the development of cognitive and foundation skills. In addition, although the respondents see both higher education and vocational graduates as lacking communication skills to be work-ready, they nonetheless rated the graduates' communication skills as above average. Graduates, therefore, appear to have some communication skills, but these need to be further developed to rise to employers' expectations. Further analysis indicated in Table 9.3, shows that graduate personality and job-specific skills are rated low. This aligns with the general perception of skills mismatch between employer expectations and graduate abilities. Insufficient graduate personality and job-specific skills could also be attributed to the overly academic focus of Mauritian education.

Table 9.2 Ranking of graduates skills and competencies

		Mean	Standard deviation
Meta-skill resources	IT skills	3.8	0.679
Intellectual resources	Foundation skills	3.6	0.867
Intellectual resources	Cognitive capabilities	3.3	0.728
Meta-skill resources	Communication skills	3	0.921
Meta-skill resources	Teamwork and political skills	2.9	0.841
Personality resources	Self-management skills	2.8	0.972
Meta-skill resources	System thinking skills	2.8	0.919
Personality resources	Innovation and creativity skills	2.8	0.86
Job-specific resources	Core business skills	2.6	0.859
Personality resources	Leadership abilities	2.2	0.791

Table 9.3 Mean and standard deviation of integrated dynamic capabilities

	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Intellectual skills	3.5	0.65
Meta skills	3.1	0.61
Personality	2.6	0.71
Job specific	2.6	0.86

9.4.2 Causes and Consequences of These GWR Challenges

As is the case for many other countries discussed in this book, the Mauritian education system thus appears to lie at the core of the island's GWR challenges. This view is shared by representatives of government and educational regulatory bodies, as well as employers and some HE/VE institutions. Not only are curricula criticised for being overly theoretical, but teaching also appears to remain primarily one-way, with little focus on authentic work experiences and career-readiness skills such as independent learning and teamwork. Employer and higher education institution survey results also confirmed a gap between industry requirements and the academic system in place (12%), resulting in a mismatch between graduate skills and the needs of industry (13%). The lack of effective training of graduates prior to their entry to the labour market (39%) is also strongly emphasised, followed by the perception of insufficient focus on extracurricular activities that assist in self-development (17%). The current educational curriculum is yet again stated to be too academic.

According to government and educational regulatory body interviews, this issue is further exacerbated by the lack of synergy and dialogue among higher education institutions, industry and government. Despite an effort from the Mauritian government to set up advisory committees uniting all three parties, these lack effectiveness due to insufficient communication. For example, universities often fail to establish a good working relationship with industry to implement structured internship programmes. Inadequate industry input in course designs and evaluation is also deplored. Surveys carried out by higher education regulatory bodies to better understand industry needs for tailored courses are usually met with poor response rates. Such an exercise is often perceived as futile by industry, as actions rarely follow. Higher education regulatory requirements also fail to consider employability in their course audit requirements. Instead, they focus mostly on discipline content and assessment with little regard for soft skills.

Student attitudes also appear to be at the root of work-readiness issues. According to government and educational regulatory body representatives, many higher education students shun the additional work required to be career-ready and limit their focus to developing academic skills. This perception is reinforced by the employers' and higher education institutions' survey analysis, which indicated that one-quarter of the respondents perceive insufficient work experience of fresh graduates as a prominent work-readiness issue. Such disinterest in industry exposure during graduate studies often stems from Mauritian family values. Right from primary school, many parents drive their children towards achieving high examination scores, with little emphasis on employability skills. What does not count for exams is thus often ignored. This behaviour appears to emerge from a societal belief that graduates will secure a highly paid job solely based on their academic results. Academic achievement has also fuelled a culture of competition which,

unfortunately, hones individualistic behaviour to the detriment of teamwork. The issue of poor graduate attitudes is further reinforced by the survey of top 100 companies and tertiary level institutions, which showed that young graduates find it difficult to accept job realities and are often impatient to climb the ladder without taking the time to acquire precious on-the-job experience. For example, there is a strong perception that fresh graduates are reluctant to learn from seniors (16%), fail to adapt smoothly to the work environment (12%) and take too long to adapt to the workplace (11%). Their lack of focus on the development of their communication and soft skills (17%), and inadequate work performance (11%) also point towards prominent work-readiness deficiencies.

As a result of all these GWR challenges and their causes, Mauritius is faced with several consequences. While around 7000 Mauritian graduates leave university every year (Business Magazine and Verde Frontier Employability Survey 2016), 3000 were reported as unemployed in the 2015–2016 Mauritian Budget (MFED 2015). Graduates are thus insufficiently absorbed by the island's labour market, and many find themselves underemployed as their degree does not align with the requirements of job vacancies (Kisto 2015). Due to insufficient industry consultation and engagement, the local education system remains inadequately tuned into changing business needs, and, consequently, fails to provide the relevant quality training and skills sought by employers (MLIRET 2014). This is particularly apparent in the ICT and financial sectors which report significant skills shortages, as well as the manufacturing sector where plant and machinery workers are scarce (World Bank 2015). These industries often find themselves with no other option but to recruit from overseas at salaries which are often at least twice as high as those of local employees (Kisto 2015). This view is supported by Googoolye et al. (2013) who identify the ICT, financial and manufacturing sectors as hiring the most expatriates for professional level jobs requiring HE/VE qualifications (24, 22 and 20%, respectively). Business expansion is thus constrained, in spite of the boom of economic opportunities in Mauritius and other parts of Africa. Such dearth in the Mauritian workforce is reflected in the island's global economic performance. Despite maintaining its position as the most competitive economy of Sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritius dropped seven places from 39th to 46th on the global competitiveness scale in 2015–2016 (World Economic Forum 2015).

The Mauritian government is under pressure to reduce unemployment and ensure that graduates are appropriately trained. HE/VE institutions and employers included in this study also value GWR. More than ever, government, educational institutions and employers of Mauritius realise that they need to put up a united front to fight the problem of graduate employability. Some of their strategies and programmes designed to address the issue of graduate work-readiness in Mauritius are discussed next.

9.5 Current Strategies, Policies and Programmes to Address GWR Challenges

Set up under the aegis of the Mauritian Ministry of Education, the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) designs GWR remedial programmes in collaboration with other ministries and industry (HRDC 2015). One such programme is the Graduate Training Employment Scheme (GTES), which aims at enhancing the work-readiness of unemployed graduates through industry certifications, professional courses or training courses jointly designed by industry and training institutions (HRDC 2015). Others include placement programmes at secondary school level (lower six placement programme) to provide authentic work experiences and boost self-confidence before they join either higher education institutions or the workplace. This placement initiative was complemented by the Career3 project, a series of career talks at secondary schools to inculcate a career mindset through a strong focus on employability (HRDC 2015).

Other Mauritian ministries have also implemented GWR programmes. For example, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED) launched the Service to Mauritius programme in 2008 to attract university graduates who qualify for job scarcity areas including ICT, engineering and finance for a 2-year internship in the public sector. These young graduates have the opportunity to serve the Mauritian government, while gaining work experience and mastering essential employability skills (MFED 2016). Additional benefits of this programme include a possibility to fill some vacancies in job scarcity areas and discourage potential brain drain. In addition, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training (MLIRET) joined forces with the HRDC and industry to develop a Dual Training Programme (DTP), which blends classroom training with workplace experience to address the skills shortage while developing greater work-readiness. This programme was implemented with the support and participation of the MFED, the Mauritius Employers' Federation (MEF), the private sector and tertiary education institutions for its smooth operation. The MLIRET also teamed up with the MFED and the private sector to introduce the Youth Employment Programme (YEP), offering Mauritian youth the possibility of acquiring essential skills sought by different sectors of the economy. Both the DTP and YEP are discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) in Mauritius are also committed to producing employable graduates for the country's economic growth and social well-being. They have adopted various initiatives to assist in bridging the gap between graduate skills and labour market expectations. These range from counselling support and training to internships. For example, industry work placements are mandatory for full-time students studying at the University of Technology Mauritius (UTM) to provide them with pre-professional work experience aligned with their chosen field of study (UTM 2016). Similarly, the University of Mauritius (UOM) implemented the Work-Based Learning programme, 6 weeks credit-based

training in a company or institution pertinent to their field of study, for students to enhance their readiness for work (UOM 2016). For courses not requiring a mandatory internship, the UOM also provides the Student Work Experience Programme (SWEP), a 6–8 weeks' training programme offered during vacations (UOM 2016). Another credit-based initiative includes the Employability Skills Development programme (ESD) of the UTM, integrated within all undergraduate course curricula to provide students with fundamental employability skills such as communication, self-management and teamwork (UTM 2016). The Charles Telfair Institute (CTI) of Mauritius, partner of Curtin University, Australia, also provides internships to all its final year undergraduate students. The programme is well structured with the allocation of both CTI and industry mentors for a productive work placement experience. Closure of the programme is marked by reflective sessions for transfer of learning (CTI 2017). CTI's internship programme is only a small part of its wider Work Integrated Learning (WIL) strategy to provide students with authentic learning experiences both within and outside the curriculum. This is discussed in more detail in the next section of the chapter.

Many HEIs also organise employability and career events every year. For example, the University of Mauritius collaborates with its student union to organise graduate employability workshops. The students benefit from the insight of private sector experts on topics including labour market expectations, discipline and ethics at work (Employability and Career Forum Employability 2017). The Mauritian Branch Campus of Middlesex University provides coaching, weekly employability drop-in sessions and organises employability skills workshops in areas such as leadership, networking and presentation skills. Several other events including Graduate Prospect Day and employer presentations provide students with the opportunity to meet with employers to become aware of employment, graduate training schemes, internships or volunteering opportunities (Middlesex University 2017). Furthermore, HEIs in Mauritius also participate actively in organising and attending career fairs to ensure continued networking with industry partners with a view to enhance employability of future graduates. An example is the annual Career Day organised by the Charles Telfair Institute where students have the opportunity to network with the largest employers in Mauritius to better gauge their expectations (CTI 2017).

Several employers also play an active role in addressing the GWR issue in Mauritius. For example, employers registered on GTES, DTP and YEP programmes are required to provide their input in the design of training curriculum and have their share of responsibility in the selection of graduates for placement with the possibility of future employment (HRDC 2015; MLIRET 2015). Many employers also actively participate in reskilling programmes in collaboration with government bodies. An example is the Graduate Innovative Learning (AGILE) programme, which aims at training unemployed graduates with the essential 'attitudes, knowledge and skills' required to secure a job at middle management level in the hotel industry (HRDC 2015). Similarly, four big ICT companies have designed a postgraduate diploma course in IT to develop IT graduates' technical expertise in line with the needs of the industry (Le Roy 2016). Many employers have also

developed self-initiated projects. For instance, the Barclays bank implemented the ‘Ready to Work’ programme, a free online platform, to equip fresh graduates and young job seekers with employability and job readiness skills (Travail: La Barclays 2015). Successful candidates can also benefit from internship opportunities for professional experience. Adopting a unique approach, companies like Adecco have launched the ‘Way to Work’ initiative, whereby, apart from the possibility of benefitting from traditional internships, career guidance and training, graduates also stand a chance of becoming the CEO of Adecco for a month (‘CEO for one month’, 2017). Figure 9.1 provides a summary of the stakeholder initiatives and collaborations as discussed above. Three of them, YEP, DTP and WIL programmes, are discussed in the case studies which follow.

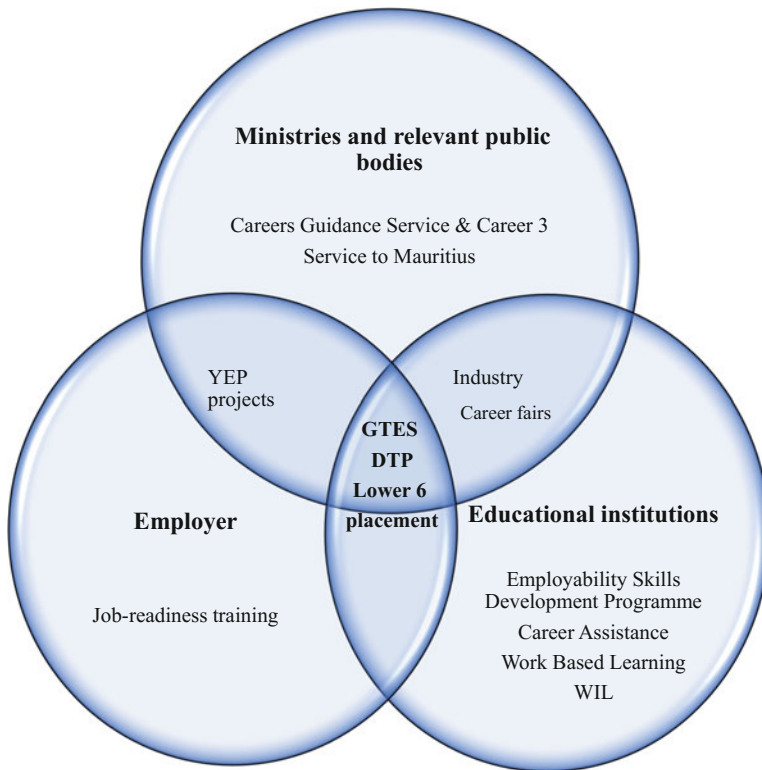


Fig. 9.1 Summary of programmes for graduate work-readiness improvement in Mauritius

9.6 Some Innovative and Successful Programmes

9.6.1 Youth Employment Programme

Launched in 2013, the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) is an example of a public–private partnership set up to boost employability and address the issue of graduate work-readiness in Mauritius. The programme is an initiative of the MLIRET and MFED in collaboration with the private sector. It is managed by a Skills Working Group (SWG) comprising of both government and private sector representatives. Young Mauritians (including graduates) aged between 16 and 35 register on the programme online for training or placement over a period of 1 year with possibility of employment based on performance (MLIRET 2017a, b). Registered employers can either recruit the participants directly or can select their candidates from the YEP database, and stipends, as well as training costs, are partially refunded by the SWG (MLIRET 2017a, b). Since its inception in 2013 until June 2016, a total of 1004 and 14,984 YEP applicants were placed in the public and private sector, respectively (Republic of Mauritius 2016). By June 2017, 1600 employers had participated in the programme, and a completion rate of 62% was noted among its graduate participants (MLIRET 2017a, b). Dropouts were primarily attributed to securing better jobs or opportunities for further studies. Nevertheless, the programme remains effective as a significant 82% of graduates who completed their 1-year YEP programme was offered permanent employment. As with dropouts, reasons for not providing employment include better job opportunities or a preference for further studies (MLIRET 2017a, b).

9.6.2 Dual Training Programme

Inspired by the success of apprenticeship programmes in Europe (Petmesidou and Gonzalez-Menendez 2016), the MLIRET, HRDC and private sector worked jointly to implement the Dual Training Programme—a mixed approach where learning happens both in the classroom and on the job. Any company or association of companies with a dearth of employees in a specific field would register on a training programme, recruit DTP participants and partner with a training institution for course delivery. Companies would be involved in the course curriculum design, delivery and assessment. Trainees on the programme would spend a few days of the week learning on the job under the close supervision of their company mentors, and some days at an educational institution for in-class training. The recruiting organisation sponsors both the training fees and the monthly stipend of Rs 3000 prescribed for each DTP trainee. The latter is fully refunded by the HRDC along with 40 % of the trainee fees or Rs 45,000, whichever is lower (MLIRET 2015). Young DTP graduates are exposed to excellent conditions for work-readiness, as they not only follow a classroom course co-designed by industry, but they are also

trained at the workplace. Companies enrolled on the DTP are able to contribute to the employability of the young Mauritian workforce, while addressing the issue of skills mismatch and retaining good talent for their organisation. From 2015 when the programme was first introduced until February 2017, 25 companies registered on the DTP for courses ranging from Management to Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, IT, Communication, Banking and Logistics. By February 2017, a total of 130 trainees had registered on DTPs from which 16 dropped out and 3 failed (MLIRET 2017a, b). Reasons for dropout range from health issues, difficulty in adapting to the French system (where training institutions were French), problems coping with the work environment and wrong choice of study field and permanent employment opportunity from another company (MLIRET 2017a, b). The programme thus appears to have been applied by several companies and to benefit from low dropout and failure rates.

9.6.3 Work Integrated Learning

Work Integrated Learning exposes students to a multitude of authentic work experiences aimed at forging their career-readiness. Traditionally, this has been implemented by HEIs through industry internships and employability coaching. However, WIL transcends the traditional work placement (Billett 2009) to embrace an array of real-life projects, both within and outside the curriculum (Ferns and Lilly 2016). Driven by the need to produce more work-ready graduates, the Charles Telfair Institute of Mauritius embraced this challenge by creating its WIL committee in 2016. The committee mandate was to set up a WIL strategy, as well as facilitate and monitor its implementation. The CTI WIL framework illustrated in Fig. 9.2 was thus developed, and, under the strong leadership and commitment of CTI senior management, adopted by academics, students and industry.

Since then WIL has become an integral part of the CTI DNA. Within the curriculum, industry visits and guest lectures from industry experts have become a

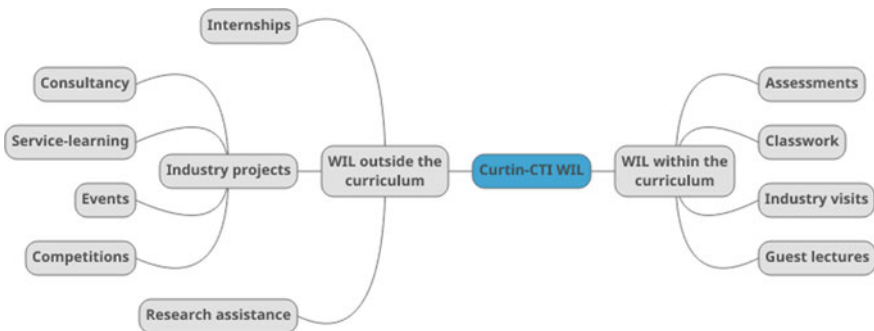


Fig. 9.2 The CTI WIL framework

regular feature at CTI to bring a real-life dimension to classes. Assessments and classwork are also increasingly viewed from a more authentic angle, as they are designed to produce deliverables, such as marketing plans and advertising campaigns, for actual industry clients. Outside the curriculum, apart from internships, industry CTI WIL projects have gained remarkable popularity. Supervised by mentors from both CTI and industry, these projects require students to work closely with organisations on consultancy work, community projects, national events and even industry-based competitions. Students are thus able to enhance both their discipline knowledge and soft skills such as communication, teamwork, self-management and problem-solving (CTI 2017). Community-based or service-learning projects additionally help them develop a more inclusive mindset, and the altruistic values required to give back to society (Beatty 2010). Research assistance as an outside-the-curriculum WIL endeavour is also well-anchored into the CTI WIL philosophy. Advocated by Xia, Caulfield and Ferns (2015), research participation is an excellent avenue to enhance student learning and develop their employability skills. This is particularly relevant for the Mauritian labour market, since the island aspires to turn into a full-fledged knowledge-based economy. Students on CTI WIL research projects are thus able to contribute to the researcher's attempt to solve real-world problems, while honing their employability skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking. Outside-the-curriculum CTI WIL project closure is marked by a student reflective report or presentation for students to better understand their strengths and weaknesses in terms of career-readiness (CTI 2017). As specified by Jackson (2015), such reflection also facilitates the transfer of both discipline and employability knowledge to future, similar work experiences. Since the introduction of WIL at CTI in 2016, the number of student employability experiences increased exponentially (CTI 2016). The CTI WIL committee continues to strive in collaboration with the whole institution and its industry partners to maintain the sustainability of the CTI WIL programme for improved graduate work-readiness.

9.7 Conclusion

Graduate work-readiness is a global issue and Small Island Developing States like Mauritius are not spared. With the country aspiring to become a high-income economy, it is evident that graduate work-readiness is even more pertinent for the socio-economic development of the country. Several GWR issues are highlighted in this chapter. The overly academic education system is accused of being one of the main culprits, as it does not sufficiently prepare fresh graduates for a smooth entry into the work environment. This was supported by a survey of employers and educational institutions, which revealed that fresh graduates have more intellectual and meta skills as opposed to personality and job-specific skills. Graduate attitudes are also considered inadequate. Despite genuine endeavours from stakeholders (government/regulatory bodies, educational institutions and employers), the results

are still mixed. The lack of synergy between the three main stakeholders appears to be a major constraint to successful graduate work-readiness initiatives. Nonetheless, some initiatives have had a positive impact. For example, the Youth Employment Programme, where 82% of graduates were offered permanent employment at the end of their 1-year training. Similarly, the Dual Training Programme has been a flagship programme involving all three major stakeholders. Although limited in its reach, the programme offered the possibility for trainees to spend time in an educational setting but also have hands-on experience within the workplace. Another successful graduate work-readiness initiative is Work Integrated Learning, which provides students at higher and vocational education institutions with authentic work experiences during their studies. The success of this initiative resides mainly in the strong relationship between educational institutions and industry. As stated by Verma et al. (2016), bridging the gap between higher education institutions, employers and graduates is key to aligning demand and supply on the job market.

The graduate work-readiness issue can only be addressed through strengthening links in the tripartite model. Although it appears that the link between industry and institutions is getting stronger through initiatives such as Work Integrated Learning, such programmes are not widespread. Government links primarily to public education institutions since they are the main source of funding. The link between government and private institutions is mostly through the regulatory bodies. However, this does not provide sufficient grounds for promoting graduate work-readiness. Such relationships do not help either party and are not conducive to making graduates work-ready. It is therefore imperative that this relationship be further strengthened, while preserving the interest of all parties involved. The relationship between government and industry needs further development. Although there is an effort through the YEP and DTP to fund traineeships, the scale and reach of the programme is still not sufficient. The nature of the DTP is such that it might be difficult to have a bigger outreach. The number of industry graduate sponsorships and university capabilities for customising courses for the industry remains limited. It is, therefore, important that other avenues of collaboration be explored between government and industry, while keeping the interest of graduates' work-readiness at the centre of any such initiatives. Despite their common concern about graduate work-readiness, government, industry and tertiary education institutions need to strengthen the links within the tripartite model and, instead of developing remedial and isolated initiatives, a holistic approach needs to be adopted when implementing graduate work-readiness initiatives.

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