Shaping Higher Education with Students
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Joseph’s key message is that research-based education can prepare students better for future work environments. More and more, employers are recognising the lack of soft skills in new student recruits and so, by collaborating with industry, universities can ensure students are able to gain more practical experiences.

Within this setting, the emphasis is on learning by doing as opposed to familiar theoretical learning environments. Through trial and error, students gain core knowledge and soft skills but also have the ability to challenge conventional methods by becoming architects of their own learning experiences.

While research-based education can be a new experience for all parties involved, bringing with it a handful of challenges, educators and students alike will benefit from an enriched learning experience by challenging the status quo and engaging with external organisations.

Joseph’s argument alludes to student engagement in the scope of industry projects: he states that research-based education should foster practical applications of academic and vocational experiences for students by collaborating with industry partners. A third party is thus added to the equation, one which who brings its own challenges and opportunities that will affect the success of student and staff efforts within research-based education.

Fostering more industry projects would entail a substantial time investment for staff, as clients have to be obtained, projects have to be coordinated, and correspondence has to be managed. It may also become more difficult to measure the success of projects and quantify the result as a grade. Projects will be different across
student groups, with some perceived to be ‘better’, more interesting, relevant or challenging. Therefore, a collaboration between all parties (including the client) is required. Clients might want to change details of the project – and the academics and students will need to be able to react dynamically to such changes.

• A potential pitfall is that students and researchers alike may feel compelled to participate in an artificial situation of collaboration. Some students might feel that they would rather gain more fundamental and theoretical knowledge at a research-intensive university as opposed to an institution that is focused on applied sciences. For staff, the involvement of industry can be appealing but only when outweighed by the time commitment and financial investment for all parties.

  My key recommendation is thus that we need to find a way to spark the ambition and excitement of both students and staff to work on meaningful and impactful projects together.