

SPACE TAKEN FROM PREVIOUS CONVERSATION



## EDUCATION & SKILLS

Across the globe and over the centuries, education has always been highly valued. For the individual, education can have a massive transformative effect. In fact, education is a right, recognized in the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Education operates at the highest level by inspiring and shaping a nation. It encourages shared values across a population and thus helps develop social cohesion. It also brings hard economic benefits: a skilled workforce does wonders for increasing national competitiveness. UNESCO reports that differences in average skill levels among OECD countries corresponded with a 55 per cent difference in economic growth over a 34-year period. For an individual, getting a degree can double earning power.

Getting people into and through the system, and making sure they acquire the skills they need to succeed in life, remains a challenge across the world.

### Where's the heat?

- / Basic skills
- / Participation
- / Funding
- / Education systems
- / Curriculum
- / Competitive skills



# 55%

A study found that differences in average skill levels among OECD countries corresponded with a 55 per cent difference in economic growth over a 34-year period

# 6m

China is producing 6m graduates a year, six times more than a decade ago

## / Basic skills

Certain core skills are necessary to function in modern society, such as how to manage money, use a computer, work with others, have good ideas, and turn up to work on time. What's the best way to equip people with these skills? It is an ongoing debate.

## / Participation

In developing countries, it is a struggle to keep children in secondary education because it can be tempting to earn money instead. In developed countries, the proportion of young adults in university has increased 25 percentage points since 1995 to 59 per cent today.

## / Funding

Educating a nation does not come cheap. In most countries, it represents a sizeable proportion of public spending. For example, Norway spent an average of about \$15,000 per student, per year in 2007, whereas Mexico spent \$2,000 per student in the same year.

## / Education systems

Schools have been around for thousands of years but it's still not clear how best to organize education. Simply pouring in money is not the answer and is no longer an option; the debate is intensifying.

## / Curriculum

Some argue that school should make us fully rounded individuals and citizens. Others complain that traditional education is too academic and want more vocational training. Finding the middle ground is one of the big conversations in education. Should the curriculum be imparting knowledge or building capabilities?

## / Competitive skills

In today's globalized economy jobs can go anywhere. China is producing 6m graduates a year – six times more than a decade ago. Being highly educated is not enough – it is the application of cutting-edge skills that drives innovation and creates jobs.

## What's the context?

A few years ago, a viral video called "Shift Happens" clocked up a few million hits on YouTube. Among the many startling factoids was the following: "The Top 10 most in-demand jobs in 2010 didn't exist in 2004. We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't exist yet, using technologies that haven't been invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."

It's something that many businesses are grappling with: as the pace of innovation continues to grow, the skills base that companies need continues to shift. Many businesses address this by developing closer links to universities. Rolls-Royce, for example, has a global network of University Technology Centres – established to draw on cutting-edge thinking to stimulate innovation.

At the other end of the skill spectrum, Douglas Coupland famously popularized the term McJob to describe "a low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job." McDonald's has responded to this by supporting its staff in getting basic qualifications, even going so far as to get several hundred McDonald's outlets accredited as exam centers. Skills development is relevant for every business.

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Learning happens in the minds and souls, not in the databases of multiple-choice tests

— SIR KEN ROBINSON, EDUCATOR

If you go to one of these tough schools, your chance of going to a four-year college is even less than your chance of going to jail

— BILL GATES ON US PUBLIC EDUCATION

Our schools should be the engine of social mobility

— MICHAEL GOVE, UK SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION

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**AMY CHRISTEN**  
*Vice-President of Corporate Affairs, Cisco*

**In the modern world, ICT skills have become as essential to a full education as reading, writing and arithmetic. At Cisco, Amy Christen, a Stanford MBA graduate and 15-year company veteran, heads up Cisco Networking Academy, an educational outreach program that has grown deep roots for the company in communities across the world. She explained to Brunswick's Oliver Phillips Cisco's motivations behind creating "the world's largest classroom."**

**What was the origin and purpose of Networking Academy?**

Since 1997, Cisco Networking Academy has grown from a small-scale program, designed to help schools get the most out of their networking equipment, into Cisco's largest corporate social responsibility program, with courses taught in 165 countries to nearly 4m students who have participated to date.

Students complete hands-on learning activities and network simulations to develop practical skills that will help them fill a growing need globally for networking professionals.

**How difficult was it to convince the powers that be that making the investment was worth it and relevant to your core business?**

Many countries regard the ICT skills gap as their biggest impediment to global competitiveness. Cisco decided to take on the challenge of helping them close that gap for several reasons:

First, there's a huge gap in terms of the number of technologists we need and the numbers that are coming out of school.

Second, creating this program was something that we uniquely could do.

Third, it was something that was also good for our business. It has produced more students who understand what to do with networks, and has also demonstrated what networking can do.

**What accounts for its rapid growth over the last decade and a half?**

You need networking skills everywhere in the world to be competitive in today's economy. The Academy just grew a lot faster than we anticipated, and growth in recent years has been larger in developing countries. Networking Academy has actually given us a foothold in some countries before they have become markets for Cisco. I believe we have offices in 80 countries now; we have Networking Academies in 165 countries. So, in the developing world, we're often benefiting the community before we're there as a commercial entity. Some 55 per cent of our students are in the developing world. And we only have about 17 per cent in the US.

**What has surprised you about the scale and reach of the program over the years?**

Once I went to visit the Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia. They are trying to build a very strong, Silicon Valley-type of capability in Central and Eastern Europe. To his right was the guy who runs the network for their schools and all their education. I introduced myself and said, "I'm Amy. I work with Cisco. I don't know if you're familiar with it but I'm here to talk about Networking Academy. He says, 'Oh, are you kidding? That guy standing right next to you was my professor. He taught me through the Academy program. That's how I got started in ICT.'"

It takes longevity for that to happen. But that's clearly the result of being able to invest in building talent early. Then you have a unique and trusted relationship with people who have a direct impact on the future growth of their country.

**A striking aspect, particularly in the Middle East, is the proportion of women in the program – Egypt 43 per cent; Saudi Arabia 37 per cent; Oman 55 per cent; and so on. How do you view Networking Academy's role in this? Is it mirroring society or helping to shape it?**

Well, we definitely are trying to shape it and gender has always been one of the focus areas in Networking Academy. We have a global participation rate of 20 per cent for females. In ICT, in general, we believe that diversity really helps drive innovation and success. The surprising thing to me was how much more effective we've been at that in the Middle East than in other areas: the highest participation for women right now is in the Middle East, the lowest is in northern Europe.

There are reasons why, I think, in the Middle East women are very interested in

finding a career where your value is based on your knowledge and your skills: you can do networking from a remote location; you don't have to socially interact, and that gives them degrees of freedom that other careers might not. So, I think we are helping to shape society, but I think it's also an opportunity that's particularly appealing to women.

**How much bigger do you think Networking Academy could get?**

I think right now, we're filling a gap in schools because the curriculum isn't available any other way. So, as long as that gap is there, I think it could continue to grow.

But size is not what really matters. To me, it's much more about the impact on students' lives, and the positive influence we have in transforming education wherever we go. And having people understand that education no longer needs to be the 18th century model that tries to pour knowledge into a kid's brain. It's much more about providing the opportunity to learn and then coaching the students to pursue their passion. That's going to make the big difference in the society of the future.

We have also had a really amazing adoption by a Facebook community – we currently have more than 330,000 "likes." This was all spontaneous and they are helping each other learn, helping each other through school, helping each other find jobs. It's where I think corporate social responsibility needs to go – to a place where there's a lot of shared value. That's what makes it sustainable and why Cisco can keep investing in it; because it is benefiting all of us.

**What makes you believe the Academy is making an impact?**

Let me share a story. I went to visit an Academy that was at a technology-oriented high school in a challenged economic area. It was interesting because I was talking to some of the girl students there and everybody's always surprised that there's a woman running this program – a lot of people think that technology is all guys. So I asked the girls, "Why did you take this class?" And they said, "Because all of our friends told us we had to take this class. It's the best class." I said, "Why do they say that?" And they said, "Because it's the only class that teaches us how to think. The rest just teach us a bunch of facts." That is the big impact that we can have. ☺

*Oliver Phillips leads Brunswick's corporate responsibility and sustainability practice in the US. He specializes in communication strategies addressing environmental and social challenges that impact corporate reputation.*