**Higher Education Commission, Your Attention is Needed!**

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Not long ago, aspiring graduates perching in university corridors were optimistic about their career paths. Those were the days when the degree programs had a lot to offer and their parents’ hard-earned bucks seemed to have the best investment hubs. The disarray regarding study options was out of equations since every degree program would come up with a streak of opportunities and it was pretty well-off to go about education choices with no serious perils attached.

By the way, how many of you have grown up hearing medical and engineering as the best prospects? Probably, most of us would track back to the whirlwind of contiguous events that happened between our childhood and adolescence, where our naïve parents’ yearning for such careers overpowered almost everything else. Medical and engineering were deemed as top-notch while people pursuing Central Superior Service examinations were thought to be outdated—provided it was a tall order, pretty much tantamount to looking for pies in the skies!

As of late, until 2014, the perceptions expedited and so were the contours of career prospects. A new shift to degree acquisition started ruling the roost and new career inlets paved the way for aspiring graduates. International Relations, Mass Communication and a handful of degree programs related to Earth Sciences had been so unjustly advertised that it sucked students’ eyes into the tractor beam of sheer semblance. Besides, few eccentric engineering sub-domains mushroomed and social sciences struck back with a bang. The roller coaster of emotions rode the students and parents into such a wilderness of fixation that most of them dropped off and still probing for an “oasis of prosperity” they were once promised. The outcome was cut-and-dried, the results were fixed: the whole castle of expectation collapsed as the job market plummeted and so were the prospects. The educational hubs, once claiming hefty fees, refused to endorse students’ narrative who drummed up against fallacious marketing the institutions did to them. The students who were promised to be worth their weights in gold had been left stranded only to resort to inferior jobs. Sad, isn’t it?

Could we do a bit of probing of what has led to this massive degradation and rather the annihilation of resources, from both perspectives, financially and morally? Well, before stepping up on the gas, I need a penny for your thoughts on this basic economic rule taken up from BCcampus Open Publishing: “Markets for labour have demand and supply curves, just like markets for goods. The law of demand applies in labour markets this way: A higher salary or wage-that is, a higher price in the labour market-leads to a decrease in the quantity of labour demanded by employers, while a lower salary or wage leads to an increase in the quantity of labour demanded. The law of supply functions in labour markets, too: A higher price for labour leads to a higher quantity of labour supplied; a lower price leads to a lower quantity supplied.” I would leave the contemplations to you as there are so many analogies that you could make out of this.

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Could we ask when HEC plans out to flood the educational hubs with new degree programs and courses, do they get recommendations from dedicated think tanks which lie at the heart of policymaking and strategy developments? For example, Geophysics and Geology courses were being offered at fewer universities until 2014 when there were last few jobs available on the menu of a petite industry. Post-2015, the job prospects diminished forthwith, and HEC went on to strew the degree programs across the country whereupon thousands had been left jobless post-graduation. Let alone mediocre universities of Pakistan, the likes of prestigious Imperial College of London put a full stop on geosciences courses once it gauged shrinking job market and proliferating graduates–keeping in mind that its graduates are taken up by likes of Centrica, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Schlumberger and Armco. Ironically, our policymakers didn’t pay heed and rather settled on the wayside, choosing to swim against the current. A rough and unofficial estimation reveals that thousands of earth sciences graduates pass out each year with absolutely no prospects. The opportunities are so slim that the National Oil and Gas exploration company receives thousands of request letters for an unpaid internship. The subsurface monitoring jobs hire specializations and not fresh grads. The folklores accounting for the renewable energy revolution has gone too boring that students laugh sarcastically straight from the shoulder. Where are the jobs? They ask. The melancholy doesn’t stop here; the universities have been notified of closing down their programs related to the aforementioned courses, and honestly, it was about time!

Let’s throw a panoramic look at the funny Hysteria of International Relations & other Social Sciences degree programs, now offered in bulk. The shift in degree-acquisition regime came along with this major fixation that becoming an international relation graduate would automatically mean business, and which proved to be otherwise—a far cry precisely. It started as the same: International Relations (IR) and other social sciences programs enticed a humongous lot at once. Aspiring diplomats drooled over the doughnuts without gauging the saturated-job markets, sensing the prospects and understanding the real-time dynamics. In our society, where the status quo stays at the root, these hyped degrees serve as perfect preludes to the ‘bright-career-prospects-candy-wrapping’. Again the consequences wreaked havoc, not even five per cent of a lot graduating in the last five years landed any relevant roles.

The reality-checks are even bitter to digest: students admitted in the name of certain degree programs requiring certain skills are either not trained on internationally prescribed lines on campuses or simply lack the talent for the particular field. How often do we see social science students being cut loose for a free debate, trained on life skills, and working for improving their communication and writing skills? The top names are having the bottom ranks on these criteria, unfortunately, and it owes to the fact that most of the faculty members hired based on an MPhil or a PhD degrees lack all these attributes themselves. Students are raised in an intimidating and fearful environment where any ‘out of box act land them in trouble whereupon they may get deprived of exam marks or degree in some cases.

It’s a wake-up call, HEC. It needs to revise the policy of hiring faculty members, the vehemence of hiring shouldn’t be limited to few paper writings and degrees, but a skill of ‘Effective Communication’ should be made the priority, the examination of which could be taken by impartial members.

In last, I rest my case here with just two cents going your way. The idea might drive you up the wall, but it’s worth it. Our gut feeling is our best mentor; it only comes off if it is within us. No matter, how bad the job prospects are, the talent within ourselves land us opportunities and everything get done in a clinch. Falling for fake temptations is a crime, nobody feeds us later. This country has been bearing the brunt of already ill-placed professionals infested in Government and private sectors, and this is the time to change it by being in the right position with appropriate skills. A scientist is born not made; a player possesses talent from the cradle and only gets groomed on the grounds. A bandwagon only leads us to the black holes of uncertainty. We need technocrats, not bureaucrats, we need high-class researchers, not fake paper publishing machines, harsh words, but this is what it is! Could we ask ourselves how many “more” barren social scientists, analysts, professors, bureaucrats and diplomats (except a few) are we looking to churn out in our backyard at the cost of our resources and time?

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