



HOW TO RETAIN TALENTS IN THE REGION?

Brain drain is not a new phenomenon. Many highly developed regions have seen their share of it. The circumstances are always region-specific, but the general context is similar. We can learn from the successful regions, but it is us at home who need to do something about it.

Would you like to study abroad? Three out of five students answer this question positively. Young people often share the same opinion: they don't see enough opportunities for them at home. The same applies to their parents or teachers. Thus, our future colleagues, entrepreneurs, leaders and scientists consider leaving Slovakia. Students do not want to study at the universities in their home region or even in their home country. They are eloping to Czechia or further away. According to the statistical data¹, the number of Slovak students in the Czech Republic approached the total number of students at the Comenius University in Bratislava in 2020/21. And once they study abroad, the students often chose to stay there even after they graduate. Understandably, they wish to stay where they are familiar with the local conditions and the labor market and convincing them to return home gets more and more difficult.

Global university ranking² indicates the quality of foreign universities' graduates. Although it is clear why motivating these young people to come back home would be a good idea, it is easier said than done.

We can argue our universities understand this situation. I was recently asked to join a team of

experts from different industry fields to assess the syllabi at two universities. It is positive that schools are willing to open up and cooperate with businesses, as it is essential that students are taught skills and knowledge that the market really needs. But are teachers sufficiently motivated to introduce the required skills? It is critical we win teachers over, as the pioneering spirit does not come effortlessly. Motivated teachers are the key.



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A university is only as good as its students. The quality of university freshmen can improve the university's ranking. Hence, it is the secondary schools that play an important part.

I have had many opportunities to talk to high school teachers

over the last years. If we expect them to educate our future colleagues, innovators and scientists, their working environment has to change. Authorities responsible for secondary education have a difficult task ahead of them – they need to be able to see which professions will be needed at the market five years in advance. And if they do not have a crystal ball, they need to work closely with all relevant stakeholders to make this well-informed guess. Self-governing regions must not be left alone, as isolated decisions will not bring desirable results. Recent experience shows that it is important to have clusters involving all relevant actors, even those from the private sector, supporting the evidence-based decision-making in education. Košice's IT Valley is a good example of such cooperation.

Young people aged 20 – 25 are still formable and perceptive to the needs of society. If we can involve them in interesting projects and involve them in their implementation already at the secondary schools, there is a chance they will come back after their university studies and help the region, which will be beneficial for everybody involved.

The business sector alone cannot fix the system, but it can be a part of the solution. It can motivate individuals, find ways to

share knowledge with the education sector and help to integrate innovation in its DNA. Industry clusters, where companies work together towards this goal, are essential. If we expect the school system to promote team work, creativity and good language skills, we need to lead by example.

Many companies already cooperate with schools. The situation on the market requires companies to invest into new talents and prepare them for a smooth school-to-work transition. But businesses must do even more in this field. The current level of computer performance shows that AI will replace some of the existing jobs, and new ones will emerge. Therefore, introducing some topics to students earlier in their studies gives them more time to think, play with them and come up with relevant ideas for their implementation.

Oftentimes, teachers are focusing on existing processes and current circumstances in their teaching. But the challenge we are facing is to prepare for the unknown. Those who can find a way to achieve this will gain a competitive advantage. This is the very reason why companies should cooperate with teachers: if they have our support and know what companies need, they can make students engaged and interested in new

developments. On the contrary, if teachers do not feel such support, they tend to just go with the flow.

There is another aspect why businesses should cooperate with schools and universities. Young people can think out of the box and are great in spotting weaknesses and turning them into opportunities. Industry clusters can serve as a platform for public cases, which will show the students that interesting things are happening here and that it is worth for them to consider coming back.

Innovations generate opportunities. Showing students how to prepare a simple business plan already at high school could be the right seed. We need to start acting now and promote critical thinking, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and good language skills in students. Because outcomes won't change if we don't change the inputs.

Businesses alone cannot change the future, but we should be a part of this change, whether it is for better or for worse.

¹ <https://uniba.sk/studium/pregradualne-studium-bc-mgr-mudr-a-mddr/statisticke-udaje/> (consulted on 4 June 2023)
² <https://cwur.org/2023.php> (consulted on 4 June 2023)