

## Rethinking higher education

Positive changes have begun to take hold in higher education on a small scale. These innovations, updates and refocused ways of thinking about higher education have proven successful in individual schools, leading to better outcomes for students and thus for the economy at large. If ideas like these could take broader hold over the coming years, higher education could become more effective for students, educators and employers.

### 1. Condensing the academic experience

A traditional four-year degree is widely considered the standard requirement for career success. But in a wide range of fields, four years of higher education is superfluous. Rather than demanding that students arbitrarily extend their education over the course of four years, more focused, affordable and practical alternatives should be encouraged.

The premium placed on a four-year degree can prevent many people who do not have the means or opportunity to delay their careers for four years from obtaining the same level of success as their peers.

About [60%](#) of full-time college students fail to complete their degrees in four years. This argument also holds for graduate schools, such as law school – at its heart a technical training that [could be completed in two years rather than three](#).

Part of the *grandes écoles* system in France, [La Grande Ecole du Numerique](#) is a network of short, free digital training programs that have no required prerequisites. These programs specifically target young people and aimed to train 10,000 people by the end of 2018.

## 2. Doing away with focus on credentials

According to [The Atlantic](#), the average education level across 500 occupational categories increased by 1.2 years from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. Over the same period, the education required to hold those positions did not rise. The implication is that workers obtained (and paid for) more education to do the same jobs.

If less emphasis were placed by schools and employers on paper credentials that do little to affect actual job preparedness, job-seekers would be encouraged to improve their qualifications in other ways, such as through online courses, credentialed certificate programs, self-teaching and entrepreneurship.

With locations in Paris and San Francisco, [42](#) is a complete redesign of higher education. Not only are there no credentials offered, but the engineering school also doesn't have professors or classes. Students take charge of their own education and have their projects graded by their peers.

## 3. Aligning the incentives of students and educational institutions

One way to align the incentives of students and educational institutions is to do away with or supplement traditional tuition models with Income Share Agreements (ISAs).

With an ISA, students can complete their education without the burden of high tuition and instead repay the school after they graduate with a set percentage of their income. The result is a system that avoids student debt, holds schools accountable for student success, and affords more students who wouldn't otherwise have access to higher education the opportunity to attend the schools of their choice.

Located in Rwanda, [Akilah Institute](#) describes itself as a “radically different” women's college with an academic focus on sustainability. Akilah Institute has partnered with Germany-based [Chancen](#) to offer ISA

financing for in-demand careers like information systems, hospitality management, and business management and entrepreneurship.

#### **4. Forging stronger ties between industry and education**

When institutes of higher learning partner with industry, everyone benefits. Students get increased access to mentors and internships, schools improve the relevancy of their curriculum, and companies get the first pick of rising talent.

[Hyland](#), an Ohio-based software company, partners with local higher education institution, in addition to middle and high schools. By co-teaching, guest lecturing, sponsoring team projects and providing mentorship, it's a win-win for students and Hyland. Stronger relationships mean better outcomes for students and a hiring pipeline for the company.

#### **5. Implementing project-based learning**

Modern careers require creativity, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, writing ability, presentation skills and negotiation. Crafting and presenting a reasoned argument, asking the right questions and seeking out the answers – these are skills that must be taught in combination with any sort of technical education.

One way to integrate these real-world skills into the classroom is through project-based learning. By having students plan, design and execute their own projects, they learn to function as they will in our ever-evolving job market.

Based in San Francisco, [Make School](#) is a first-of-its-kind two-year bachelor's degree in applied computer science. Students are treated like junior developers and engage in project-based learning with a curriculum that blends liberal arts, computer science and character development.