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# GiLE Journal of Skills Development

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## Preparing for a Sustainable Career: Challenges and Opportunities

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### 1. Introduction

A sustainable career can be understood as a dynamic and flexible process that plays out over time whereby, via career agency, an individual commits to lifelong learning and the generation of personal resources across a series of career experiences that provide meaning to the individual (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Therefore, the three dimensions of a sustainable career are person, context, and time. Our paper examines the challenges and opportunities that university students face when preparing for a sustainable career since time spent in higher education can act as an antecedent to career sustainability. The content is based on our Closing Keynote Speech at the GiLE4Youth Conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022. Conference Website: <https://www.gile-edu.org/trainers-and-participants-of-the-gile4youth-conference/>

### 2. Challenges

Chance events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and climate change mean that individuals must embrace change and adapt to ensure their skill sets remain relevant for the needs of society in the future. The pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to the education of university students and significantly restricted their opportunities to acquire work experience. This means that current cohorts of students are some of the least prepared for entry into the labour market, and university career services are struggling to meet the increased demands for support (Donald et al., 2021). Some students lack knowledge of ‘when to apply’, ‘how to apply’, and ‘where to apply’. Those who receive interviews must be capable of signalling their employability to potential employers (Anderson & Tomlinson, 2021). However, reduced opportunities for lifewide learning and a lack of understanding of the recruitment process mean some students receive many rejection decisions, leading to high stress levels and loss of confidence due to uncertainty for the future. These experiences can have a compound effect since three-quarters of university students, and recent graduates report reduced subjective well-being since the pandemic began (Donald & Jackson, 2022).

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### 3. Opportunities

Donald et al. (2019) propose that the self-perceived employability of students increases when they develop human capital, seek career advice, and proactively take ownership of their careers. Moreover, Mouratidou and Grabarski (2021) found that during the pandemic, individuals who felt in control of their careers experienced enhanced sustainable career outcomes of health, happiness, and productivity. Therefore, students can benefit from adopting a growth mindset and committing to lifelong and lifewide learning during university and their lifespan (Cole & Coulson, 2022). This may involve participation in clubs, societies, charity work or paid work to develop resources and build personal networks. Additionally, students need to seek career guidance early during their degree studies, and university career services must partner with industry to share resources and foster win-win outcomes (Buckholtz & Donald, 2022). Finally, the ability to signal one's employability is crucial for success (Anderson & Tomlinson, 2021).

### 4. Conclusion

We believe students will need increased support from university career services and industry. Such support can enhance understanding of what is required and enable students to acquire the necessary resources during their university studies to navigate the transition into the industry and establish the foundations for a sustainable career across the lifespan.

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