

Work experience gives students the edge

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University is rolling out a new education model to train students. **Zhang Zefeng** reports from Suzhou, Jiangsu.

This summer, most of Amanda Chinembiri's freshmen school-mates at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University went home for the holidays. But the electrical engineering major from Zimbabwe said she had an equally enjoyable break, by working during the one and a half months instead.

During her stint, Chinembiri wrote proposals, met deadlines and solved problems with professionals in various projects. She also familiarized herself with the company she worked for, including its business operations and strategy.

"The idea itself was very exciting," says Chinembiri. "I now know that the step from student to working professional is very big."

Chinembiri's work experience was part of a university pilot program called the Industry and Enterprise Tailored Education, which aims to train undergraduates as high-level professionals by working at enterprises in promising fields.

Chinembiri was one of the 37 freshmen who joined the program. "We had to change everything that we knew about how life could be or should be, in a professional and social context," she says.

"The program helped answer some questions that I had about the relevance of what I knew and what I wanted to do with my life."

The pilot program itself is under the university's proposed education model, Synte-

grative Education. The term "syntegrative" combines the words "synergy" and "integration".

The new model is designed to integrate different types of education — including its general, professional, industry, entrepreneurship and management aspects — to train talent for the future.

Artificial intelligence and robots are already expected to disrupt and replace many traditional industries in the coming decade, according to the university's executive president, Xi Youmin. That means society will not only need specialists such as researchers in particular fields to discover new knowledge, but also leaders from industry and other areas who can steer the emerging technology to respond to changing needs.

"The main purpose is to meet future development trends and demands," he says of the new education model.

Founded in 2006, the university in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, is a joint venture between China's Xi'an Jiaotong University and the UK's University of Liverpool.

In the past decade, the university has successfully combined the flexibility of US higher education, the British quality control system and the emphasis on fundamental studies in Chinese education to train internationalized professional talent through its student-centered and research-led education.

Chen Bing, associate professor of urban planning and design at the university, says:



Top: Architecture students at the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University showcase their designs on campus in Suzhou in November. Above: Zimbabwean Amanda Chinembiri (right) wins an award in the first phase of Industry and Enterprise Tailored Education program. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Syntegrative education is part of the new model of the future.

"It means all the things you learned from university can be put into practice."

The university's Syntegra-

tive Education is built on its current professional talent training approach, with three main programs: Industry and Enterprise Tailored Education, Entrepreneur College, and the

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Community.

Partnering with big companies such as JC Group and Probro Logistics, the tailored education programs allow

students to learn and access internship opportunities in sectors including finance, film and television, urbanization, enterprise development and logistics.

Qualified graduates who complete different stages of the programs get a chance to experience professional work in the respective companies. They may also get sponsored for a two-year, part-time master's degree to help the company solve practical issues.

Students who complete all the stages of learning and earn their master's while working will be "very strong candidates" for the future of the industry, says Xi.

The program also gives freshmen the opportunity to find out their interests and passion at an early stage, so that they can make career adjustments even before they graduate.

Second-year economics and finance major Qu Yingrui, who participated in this year's



Xi Youmin, executive president, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

tailored education program, says that it helped her gain an in-depth understanding of her current discipline. The field study also helped her get a clearer direction in terms of her future development.

"This experience made me realize that I am more interested in research," says Qu, 19. "I am planning to continue my graduate education."

Apart from the Industry and Enterprise Tailored Education, the Entrepreneur College is expected to be developed in due course to promote entrepreneur education for all the students. The university will also create an Entrepreneur Park business incubator for students to pursue their ideas.

The Innovation and Entrepreneurship Community will work with local government and enterprises to create an innovation and entrepreneurship community catering to emerging industry elites.

The main purpose is to use the university as a platform to leverage the resources in the local community, develop a creative environment and support innovation, says Xi.

It is all part of higher education's responsibility, to "train people for the future", he says.

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