

Short country survey on employability among BFUG members

The employability working group agreed to conduct a short country survey and that each member of the group would cover their own and two allocated countries. The members of the working group agreed to contact the members of the BFUG for the allocated countries with the following questions:

- 1) What are the main challenges for your country in terms of employability? (eg Is graduate unemployment a problem? Are there restrictions on access to certain jobs? Is there a careers and guidance service?) What would help you most as an output from this working group?

Danish higher education institutions are part of a binary higher education system. Higher education is taught in two different types of institutions: Traditional research universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes (bachelor and candidatus degrees) in all academic disciplines and academies of professional higher education and university colleges offering 2-year or 3-4 year professionally oriented undergraduate degree programmes (academy profession degrees and professional bachelors degrees).

Due to the booming Danish job market for academics graduate unemployment rate in Denmark is rather low (2.7 % in December 2007). University bachelor unemployment rate is also low. However, the vast majority of graduates who finish a first cycle university programme continue to a second cycle university programme (normally the 2-year candidatus programme (MSc/MA)).

Employment rates for the professionally oriented higher education degrees are high; 97.1 % for first cycle graduates (professional bachelors degrees) and 95.3 % for short cycle graduates (academy profession degrees).¹ In some professions, i.e. nursing, there is a shortage of graduates.

The main challenges in terms of employability at university level are:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes should be relevant for the job market
- Employability of graduates at the university bachelor level is a problem with a perception amongst both graduates and employers that a bachelor degree is not adequate for employment. University bachelor programmes should therefore lead to better job opportunities. In this respect it is important that undergraduate programmes have a profile that qualifies for further studies but also for a professional career.
- All Danish universities offer career guidance to students and graduates and some universities offer employers to help recruiting new employees among their students and graduates. However, there is a great difference in the effort the universities put into career guidance activities. It is important to strengthen and enhance the quality and relevance of the different career guidance activities.

¹ UNI•C, The Danish IT Centre for Education and Research. The employment rates are from 2005, which are the newest validated rates available.

The main challenges in terms of employability at university college level are:

- To build a continued strong dialogue with the labour market in order to ensure that programmes are continuously of high quality and relevance for the labour market.
- To ensure better recruitment of students and lower drop-out rates in order to meet the labour market demand for graduates.

2) Is there a dialogue in your country between higher education institutions and employers? If so, at what level does this take place – national, regional, institutional etc? What sort of issues does it cover?

The dialogue between universities and employers takes place primarily at the institutional level. Since 2007 it has been compulsory for universities to establish advisory boards with representatives from employers. Each advisory board is centred around one or more programmes and provides advice concerning programme objectives, structure, curricula, recruitment of students and the programme's quality and relevance to the labour market.

The dialogue is also included in the process of accreditation of new and existing programmes, especially regarding the following accreditation criteria which concern programmes' relevance for the labour market:

- New programmes are required to document, by presenting a labour market analysis, that there is a demand amongst employers for the new programme and that relevant employers have been involved in the process of the programme development
- New programmes are required to describe the job situation of graduates from similar programmes
- Existing programmes are required to document that there is an ongoing dialogue with employers, advisory boards and graduates regarding the quality and relevance of the programme
- Existing programmes are required to document that graduates find relevant jobs.

With regard to the professional oriented higher education sector a Council for academy professions degrees and professional bachelors' degrees are set up by law. The Council advises the Minister for Education on a number of issues, i.e. the developments of the labour market and the consequences in general for academy profession degrees and professional bachelors' degrees.

At institutional level the majority of the members of the Board of a University College have to be external to the school; mainly coming from the region in which the school is based. The members have to have profound experience of public and private business, strategic management, organisation and economy.

Furthermore, the Board of a University College can set up a committee for each programme. The committee advises the Board, Dean and board of directors on the programmes curriculum, profile, quality, relevance and the regional supply. The committee is composed of persons with competence within development and quality assurance of programmes and persons with knowledge of the labour market.

Similar rules apply to the Academies of professional higher education.

3) Can you provide two examples of good practice in your country in relation to any of the themes to be covered by the report? ²

² Suggested themes to be covered in the report are:

- awareness-raising amongst employers of the value of a bachelors qualification and associated learning outcomes;
- involving employers in devising curricula;
- the provision of careers and guidance services;
- employment and career structures within the public service that are fully compatible with the new degree system;
- self-employability;
- curriculum innovation based on learning outcomes;
- the recognition of degrees in the labour market across Europe;
- the role of higher education in lifelong learning and continuing professional development.