

BFUG Employability Working Group 2007-2009

Short country surveys – Employers point of view

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?
- 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?
- 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?

Answers

A) Germany

(Dr. Irene Seling, Education and Vocational Training, BDA – Confederation of German Employers' Associations)

1)

Although the purpose of the Bologna process is to create the European higher education area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe, it has also to focus the issue of lifelong learning and the necessity of keeping employability as much high as possible during the working life. Universities are requested to engage themselves also strongly in the field of continuing education.

Graduate unemployment rate is below 4 % currently in Germany, whereas the general unemployment rate is approximately 10 %, so until now an academic degree is in some way an insurance for unemployment.

Yes, there are restrictions on access to certain jobs. The European Commission has listed 57 professions in Germany which are regulated (also including non academic professions, from optician to town and country planner).

Careers and guidance service can be found in some universities (Career Service as a help desk between studies and labour market or a bridge between science and practice). From

the employers' point of view these career services are appropriate and future-oriented and should be installed at every HEI.

2)

Yes, indeed there is a dialogue on the national level. BDA – Confederation of German Employers' Associations and HRK –German Rectors' Conference have formed together a work-group, which is discussing twice a year a wide range of issues in Higher Education Policy (employability, accreditation, continuing education, university admission for vocationally qualified people without official university admission certificate, excellence initiative for teaching). Both institutions are working closely together and are also publishing together statement and position papers.

Also on the regional level the employers' associations in the federal states ("Länder") are working together with the respective universities associations.

3)

Company and employers' associations' representatives are often members of the university councils, which are existing since some years in Germany. The university council is responsible for the development of the university. It proposes measures intended to build its profile and improve its efficiency and competitiveness. It supervises the Rektorat's (President's respectively) management. The composition of the university councils is determined by the universities laws in each federal state (and within this framework also in the university charter). In some universities the council is composed only by external members (from outside the university, mostly from business, but also school directors, representatives from scientific institutions, politicians etc.), but in the bulk of universities by internal and external members. Because of this personal link there a closer cooperation between business and universities than it has been some years ago.

B) Portugal

(Luís Henrique, Legal Adviser, CIP - Confederation of Portuguese Industry)

1)

In Portugal there are a serious concern regarding the employability of graduates.

In the third quarter of 2007, there were about 64.700 unemployment graduates, 10.000 more than in the third quarter of 2006, witch represented 14.55% of the total unemployment.

In our view the high number of unemployed graduates comes from the fact that a large number of them have degrees in areas that aren't needed by the labour market.

In Portugal there are careers and guidance services in schools and in the labour market (provided by the Portuguese Public Employment Service).

In our opinion the above-mentioned services aren't efficient enough and therefore should be reinforced with the objective of giving a more realistic and pragmatic view of the present and future needs of the labour market.

In our perspective, to improve employability it is necessary to continually improve and adapt the curricula to needs of the companies.

The access to certain professions, such as the cases of lawyers and engineers, are restricted due to the fact that they are obliged to register in professional orders and in some cases even the realization of exams.

Regarding the output of the Employability Working Group we would like to know the best practices in other countries in this field.

2)

In Portugal there is the National Council of Education.

This Council has advisory functions and comprehends a large number of different entities including representatives of employers and higher education institutions.

The objective of the mentioned Council is to obtain consensus by the different players on matters of education, such as the structure of education, school programs and guidance.

3)

We are not aware of relevant examples of best practices.

C) Italy

(Arianna Domenici, Confindustria – Italy)

1)

In Italy there's still a huge problem regarding the graduates' absorption by the Labour market. In fact, the forecast of companies' hiring for the whole 2007 is around the 9% of graduates. Moreover, there's a mismatching between the vocational skills of the young graduates and the demand of the labour market. The employers and the relevant stakeholders of the education system are committed to guide the students, attending the last year of upper secondary schools, to the Scientific and Technological Degrees. The comparison with the situations of the other States would be very useful: knowing the policies adopted by the other European States and widespread the best practices in order to emulate the winning model.

2)

In Italy, the dialogue between higher education institutions and employers is very strong. It takes place at national but also at local level. It covers all the issues related to the reinforcing cooperation between the academic world and the business one. But, in particular, it is focused on the rethinking of the subjects composing the university courses according to the needs of the labour market.

3)

- A Common Programmatic Document on the University for reinforcing the autonomy of the Academic Institutes and the meritocracy of the Professors, signed by the 18 Italian employers organizations and used as the key document for the employers' policies to be adopted in the Italian education system by the government, the trade unions and the employers jointly.

- A Project for relaunching the Scientific degrees sponsored by Confindustria, the Education Ministry, the University and Research Ministry and the National Deans Conference of the Scientific and Technological faculties.

D) Switzerland

(Alexandre Plassard, Confederation of Swiss Employers)

1)

We would mention here the problem of non-qualified or low qualified foreigners who have difficulties to enter the labour market.

This is particularly the case with groups of foreigners who were not at school in Switzerland - but in other countries - and thus do not master the official languages of our country.

In terms of the employability of graduates there are no problems, although engineering graduates are getting easier a job than graduates from humanities.

2)

The Confederation of Swiss Employers is represented in the federal Commission on vocational training (Berufsbildung) where a dialogue takes place at national level. Our organisation concentrates its efforts especially on vocational education and training (VET).

Concerning Universities, there is a federal structure ("Konferenz") where the economy is represented, by the Federation of Swiss enterprises.

3)

- The Swiss firms contribute on a full voluntary basis to the training (VET) of thousands of young people (Duale Berufsbildung). In 2004, they invested nearly 4,7 billions Swiss Francs in VET. In 2006, more than 205'000 young people were attending VET in Switzerland.
- Another example of good practice is the cooperation between the Swiss Confederation, the Cantons (region) and the economy on matters concerning VET.

The Confederation and the Cantons take care of general problems whereas the firms of the economy concentrate on the practical aspects of VET. This system works harmoniously.

E) Austria

(Monika Gamper, Federation of Austrian Industry)

1)

The lack of highly qualified labour constitutes a genuine challenge at the moment, especially in the industry sector. At this juncture, migration does obviously represent an important topic of discussion where the recruitment of foreign qualified labour and specialists must be particularly emphasised. Unemployment of university graduates is not a major theme that needs highlighting in Austria.

2)

Our University law envisages a so-called University Council, a strategic advisory organ, for each rectorate. In most cases these councils consist of entrepreneurs. Otherwise, these dialogues only take place on an informal voluntary basis. Our Industry Association regularly exchanges information with the Austrian rector's conference.

3)

Unfortunately we cannot name any good practice examples. If anything actually we can only refer the contrary: with reference to Bologna, we have and are continuously promoting and demanding to use the new university structures as an opportunity to modernise degree curricula. Furthermore, we believe it is essential to acknowledge the Bachelor as a standard degree, qualifying graduates for the professional world. There are unfortunately tendencies to design a form of “scientific bachelor”, not guaranteeing a fully qualified employability status and where only a Masters degree ensures a qualified status for employability. We also consistently register problems with mobility: for example, it is hard for students to change universities or the location during their Bachelor degree. Even after having completed the Bachelor degree and going on to pursuing a Masters degree, it is very problematic to change universities or the location. This seems and is indeed very bizarre and totally contradicts the idea of Bologna.