

BFUG Employability country survey: Croatia

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?

a) Croatia used to have academic "diploma" level as the norm for employment in occupations at the professional level. A three cycle system of higher education was introduced in 2005, and the first Bachelors are expected to graduate in late 2008. As an output of this working group, Croatia is very interested in the exchange of experiences and practices of other countries with employability (including regulation for public sector occupations) and career prospects of Bachelors. We expect the same may be the case with other countries in which first Bachelor cohorts will enter the labour market in 2008 or later.

At this moment, graduate unemployment is lower than general unemployment (or youth unemployment), but employability of the graduates at the bachelors level is yet a big unknown. Since old "Diploma" level is treated same as the new MA degree, most regulated professions in public sector (e.g. teachers, social workers) are bidding for MA as the level necessary for professional activity, whereas others (Medicine, Legal studies) have retained integrated study profile with no BA level. New public sector regulations allow BA graduates to apply for some mid-level civil service positions, but the implementation of these regulations has not yet begun. In the private sector, there is a traditional demand for non-academic (i.e. professional) tertiary degree graduates (primarily in technical and business fields) and "diploma" graduates, yet it is to be seen whether graduates of BA level will displace the former, compete with the later or find out their own labour market niche. So far, regarding the climate of demand, regulation, and tradition it is likely that most BA graduates will continue with the MA level, effectively prolonging their education duration from 4 to 5 years.

b) Although there were some fruitful initiatives coming from the civil society (see example 3a), public careers and guidance services for tertiary graduates are non-existent or in nascent phase of development. The national Public Employment Service is running an extensive career and guidance programmes for the lower and upper secondary school students, but no substantial provisions exist for students at the tertiary level. Therefore, we would appreciate to hear the experiences from other countries in the set-up of guidance for students and/or recent graduates, available either at schools in form of a permanent reference center or within the national employment services.

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?

There is little in terms of institutionalized dialogue between the higher education institutions and employers in Croatia, either at the national or university level. So far, business sector representatives from the Croatian Employers' Association and Croatian Chamber of Economy have not been engaged in this process, apart from a few declarative statements. Getting account of other countries' best practices would be a very valuable output of this working group for Croatia.

Apart from some regulated professions, there is no institutionalized dialogue at all about the curriculum development or labour market needs, either at the local or national level. With the exception of one Tempus project aimed at informing the employers about the Bologna process output (see example 3b), most efforts are concerned with matching the soon-to-be graduates with the potential employers.

To that cause, there are some projects led at the level of individual faculties, as well as some students' organizations (in particular in fields of language teaching, IT and business and economy). In addition, in IT and business and economy these projects provide services such as Job Fairs, CV databases, meetings with employers etc. In the institutional vacuum, a leading private job-mediation firm MojPosao has emerged as the main agent in brokering the graduates in the job market. MojPosao is the organizer of the biggest graduate national Job Fair, and provides various brochures and lectures.

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?

a) While the provision of careers and guidance services at Croatian universities is in a nascent stage, the non-governmental organization Institute for the Development of Education led a Tempus project in 2006 called "Platform for the Career Advice Centres in Croatia (CAREER)". As a result of this project, an extensive survey of students and stakeholders was made and a handbook was written to assist the Croatian universities in structuring, establishing and developing career advising services. Based upon this project, three Croatian universities (Dubrovnik, Rijeka, Osijek) have started a two year JEP Tempus project that should result in foundation of Career Advice Centres in these universities.

b) There was a dedicated component in the 2007 Tempus project "Furtherance of Bologna Promotion in Croatia" that aimed for awareness-raising amongst employers of the value of a bachelors qualification and associated learning outcomes. As part of this component, a survey was carried out among employers about the level of awareness about Bologna reforms. Based on the survey results, a brochure is being written in association with the Croatian Employers' Association and the Croatian Chamber of Economy. This brochure will be disseminated among employers via these two organizations.