

Short country survey on employability among BFUG members

Response by Switzerland

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?

The unemployment rate is comparatively low in Switzerland (March 2008: 2.6%). The job market for graduates is even better. However graduates often have problems finding a first job due to their lack of work experience. According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office 94%/ 96%* of all graduates found a job within the first year after graduation in 2005. But not even 75%/ 70%* of graduates had a job corresponding to their level of education 20 months after graduation (these figures vary between different fields of study). Furthermore, especially young people (15-24 year old) run a higher risk of not finding a job (2.9% unemployment, the figures used to be much higher in recent times) and older people have difficulties finding a new job when becoming unemployed.

Generally, the Swiss labour market decides on the value of a given diploma.

Nevertheless, the access to many jobs is restricted in some way or other. For instance a certain apprenticeship or university degree may be required. There are also some jobs with more rigorous (e.g. medicine) and others with more permissive restrictions. In order to facilitate entrance into the labour market and to provide a comprehensive network that covers a multitude of demands, careers services exist within universities/ faculties and in all cantons.

To sum up, it can be said that the employment situation for graduates in Switzerland is rather good.

* universities/ universities of applied sciences

It would be helpful if the working group could provide good practice examples of HEI-employer dialogue or collaboration: What kind of activities do exist? What is the added value? What are the success factors? Etc.

- 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?

Universities:

In Switzerland, there is little dialogue at a national level between universities and employers; national activities focus on the provision of information on the new two-tiered study architecture (internet, print publications). Some exchanges have been initiated in the context of establishing the Swiss qualifications framework for higher education, albeit on a rather general level.

Dialogue regarding individual study programmes is rather to take place directly between universities and employers, since all study programmes are designed

autonomously by the universities. Indeed, some of them seem to be in direct contact with the labour market, often with a focus on particular fields of study (e.g. regulated professions). Unfortunately, no systematic information is currently available on the nature or intensity of these contacts.

Furthermore, there are some members of the ETH Board, the strategic governing body of the ETH domain, representing the economy. Several cantonal universities also have strategic bodies with members from the economy.

Universities of applied sciences:

The study programmes offered by the universities of applied sciences have always been strongly oriented towards the labour market and/or specific professions. Therefore, contacts between institutions and employers seem to be much more frequent and regular. In addition, the competent political authority for these institutions is also responsible for professional education (non-tertiary and tertiary B) and, therefore, in close and systematic contact with employers.

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?¹

1. University of St. Gallen is very active in promoting the value of bachelors' qualifications to employers.
2. The Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) is currently introducing 1-semester internships for all its Masters' programmes in engineering with the aim of reinforcing practical experience and labour market relevance.
3. The Universities of applied sciences have developed many part-time postgraduate programmes for professionals; see e.g. the University of applied sciences of Zurich.

¹ 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.