

1) What are the main challenges for your country in terms of employability? (e.g. 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 in Norwegian is at the moment exceptionally low, so for the time being we do not have any serious problems concerning unemployment.

One of the main challenges, however, is the fact that the degrees from the new degree system are not well known amongst employers. The new degree system was implemented in the academic year 2003/2004, and the learning outcome of the new degrees, especially the bachelor degree, is still not well known amongst employers. We do hope, however, that once the national qualifications framework is fully implemented the learning outcome of the new degrees will be easier accessible also for employers.

Is graduate unemployment a problem?

No, not a serious problem.

As was pointed out in the report from the OECD thematic review of tertiary education in Norway, job mismatch has been a challenge in Norway. The percentage of higher degree graduates in the humanities and the social sciences who were mismatched was increasing in the latter part of the previous century as well as the first part of this century. Both groups have had a strong growth in the number of graduates during that period. Graduates in the humanities have to a greater extent than social science graduates experienced job mismatch, but have to a lower extent been unemployed. For graduates in law and in natural science the situation has varied a lot during the period, with peaks in the percentage of mismatch in 1995 and 2003. Graduates in paramedical and social work studies experienced a favourable market for a long time, the reason being a persistent shortage of people with such qualifications on the labour market. Thus, the labour market varies a lot according to field of study. Some educational groups are highly exposed to variations in the business cycle, e.g. graduates in technical subjects and engineering. During an economic boom they often experience that their qualifications are in high demand as there might be a shortage of graduates, while in recession there might be an oversupply of graduates.

Involuntary part time work has been and still is a challenge in certain areas of the labour market, particularly in the health services.

Are there restrictions on access to certain jobs?

Norway has few regulated professions compared to other countries. Naturally, there are certain professions where a specific qualification is required, e.g. lawyers, doctors, dentists, etc, but as a general rule the system in Norway is quite flexible when it comes to access to jobs.

Is there a careers and guidance service?

Several of the higher education institutions have established their own career and guidance services, so called career centres, but no central authority exists in this area. In a recent report

presented to the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, Report No 16 (2006-2007) to the Storting, the need for a neutral, quality assured and possibly also central career and guidance service has been pointed out. Suggestions have been made to establish a inter-ministerial working group with the mandate to look into the matter, as well as suggestions to develop further the existing career and guidance service at the higher education institutions.

What would help you most as an output from this working group?

One important element for Norway would be for this group to establish clearly the link between employability and the qualifications frameworks in relation to explaining the learning outcome of the degrees to the employers.

- 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?

Dialogue between the higher education institutions and the employers, as well as between the employers and the Ministry exists, both at institutional, national and regional level. At a number of the higher education institutions so-called Research Institutes have been established in partnership with the business sector, and these institutes ensure close co-operation and dialogue between the higher education institutions and the business sector. The Ministry is in close contact and dialogue with the representatives for the employers, The NHO - Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise - which is the main representative body for Norwegian employers, in matters of mutual interest.

- 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?**

We would like to ask for the possibility to get back to this question in early January in order to be able to provide you with some relevant examples of good practice.