

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?

Main challenges in terms of employability in Finland

The Finnish higher education system consists of two complementary sectors: polytechnics and universities. The mission of universities is to conduct scientific research and provide instruction and postgraduate education based on it. Polytechnics train professionals in response to labour market needs and conduct R&D which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular.

In 2005 a new degree structure was introduced for universities. Students can study for lower (Bachelor's) and higher (Master's) degrees and scientific or artistic postgraduate degrees, which are the licentiate and the doctorate. Students first complete the Bachelor's degree, after which they may go for the higher, Master's degree. As a rule, all students are admitted to study for the Master's degree. Polytechnic Bachelor's degree studies include practical on-the-job learning. Polytechnics also award Master's level degrees since 2005. Today, most of the university degrees taken are Master's degrees (more than 60% in 2007) and the most of the polytechnic degrees are at the Bachelor's level (98% in 2007).

In general, the graduates from higher education institutes had been very successful in finding employment in Finland. The most recent data from the Statistic Finland gives information about placement of university and polytechnic graduates of 2005 at the end of 2006. In both sectors, the employment rate is over 87%. In all fields, higher education graduates find jobs more easily than secondary graduates. The employment rate after upper-secondary vocational qualification was 71% in 2006. There is still very little experience of Bachelor's graduates from the university on the labour market.

However, a study by University of Jyväskylä (2007) shows that there is some degree of uncertainty in employment also among university and polytechnic graduates. This is reflected by the fact that a fair number of the graduates had been unemployed at some point after graduating. A lack of working experience hinders the start phase of the working career. Furthermore, the study showed that the type of employment had not always been appropriate. It seems that if graduates have not been able to find a job corresponding to their education in three years, it will be unlikely later on. According to the study the graduates were also slightly critical about their work-oriented skills and knowledge provided by their education. In their opinion, their social and communication skills, leadership and managerial skills and problem-solving skills did not come up to the demands of working life.

The right to practice a profession in Finland is required from health-care professionals, veterinary surgeons, chartered public finance auditors, chartered accountants, advocates and seafarers. The rights to practise apply to both the public and private sector. Otherwise, private sector employers can decide independently what kind of qualifications and competences they are looking for.

There are qualification requirements for civil service positions that concern the education required for those positions. The required education may be a qualification of a certain level, a qualification of a specific title, or specified studies. In general, if there is a requirement for higher education degree, a holder of Bachelor's or Master's degree

either from university or polytechnic is qualified. However, some professions such as teachers and social workers have specific qualification requirements by legislation.

Careers and guidance services

Each university and polytechnic offers careers and guidance service.

There are also two networks, one for the universities and one for the polytechnics that are representing information, career and employment services. Networks offer services on-line for polytechnic and university students, graduates and employers. The aim is to build bridges between students and employers.

Expectations for the output from the working group

Good practice examples and experiences from other countries concerning:

- how to facilitate the transition from higher education to working life
- ways how higher education institutions have deepened systematically the connection between student and working life by the cooperation between higher education institutions and working life.

- 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 employers, as well as between the employers organisations and the Ministry of Education exist.

At the level of a higher education institutions universities and polytechnics usually have representation from working life in their governing boards. Polytechnics have advisory boards for each degree programme or each field of education. Advisory boards typically have representation from the working life and their task is to give ideas about the curricula content and competences needed in the working life. Many universities and polytechnics have established partnerships with the business sector to ensure closer cooperation, organise joint R&D projects and facilitate on the job training.

There is also need to build close connection between the teachers and students and working life. There are lot of good practises but the connection is not always systematic. For example students often do their thesis in close connection with working life, especially in the polytechnic sector and in the field of technology and business administration in the universities.

- 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 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.

- Network of all the polytechnics developed good practices for the practical training 2004-2006. The aim was to develop the practical training as a part of building professional competencies and deepen the contacts between students and working life. The network included all the polytechnics, student organisation and employee and employer organisations. The project published recommendations for organising of good practical training and examples of good practices.

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