

EMPLOYABILITY: SPAIN

- 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?**

Employability has been a very relevant point the in the Spanish higher education agenda for many years. This is a consequence of the serious problem of unemployment of graduates (especially in the 90's). The percentage of unemployed graduates was the higher in EU countries for many years. This was the consequence of two factors. On one hand, the enormous growth in the number of graduates in the 80's and 90's produces an oversupply in the labour market. On the other hand, the Spanish labour market is in a process of modernisation and is not yet able to absorb a high proportion of high qualified people.

The positive aspect of this situation is that universities and governmental agencies have developed tools for softening the problem. Career offices, follow-up of graduates, surveys to employers are extended in most Spanish universities. Some of them could be considered examples of good practices.

- 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 are contacts with employers in aspects related to employment, in organising work placement for students and, obviously in aspects related to research transfer. These contacts happen mostly at institutional level and in some cases at regional level. Nevertheless, the role of employers in the design of the curricula is irrelevant, mostly due to some reluctance from academic staff and lack of tradition of mutual understanding.

- 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?**

Institutional level: The Comprehensive Employment Service (SIE, Servicio Integral de Empleo) in the Technical University of Valencia (UPV, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia)

This is a typical case of a university office that started as an employment office but became a centre devoted to follow-up their graduates, to research employers' opinions, to organise work-placements for students and to intermediate between employers and graduates. The SIE is structured in four services:

- *Unit for work placements* (practices during studies). This unit provides work placement in companies through an agreement of collaboration between the company and the university. This agreement regulates working conditions and the formative character of the experience that is controlled by two tutors, one in the company and the other in the university. Only students in the second part of their studies are eligible for these activities. Around 50 percent of students use this service.
- *Centre of guidance and information for employment*. Unit for advising graduates in the job search through information and counselling, but also through training candidates in basic skills for accessing different jobs.
- *Unit for employment*. Unit in charge of establishing a direct connection between the jobs demanded for graduates of the UPV and the positions offered in the market.
- *Unit of prospective*. This is the unit in charge of analysing the transition of graduates to the labour market. This unit has developed several surveys from the middle nineties. Nowadays, it is gathering information from graduates at two different periods of time.

At state level: The CHEER and REFLEX surveys

At state level two consecutive studies on graduates have been carried out in Spain:

- The CHEERS project (*Careers after Higher Education – A European Research Survey*). This project was supported by the IV Framework Programme. From autumn 1998 to spring 2000, about 3,000 graduates each from 11 countries of Europe (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Norway and the Czech Republic) and Japan provided information through a written questionnaire on the relationship between higher education and employment four years after graduation (graduates from 1995 were surveyed in 1999). The CHEERS study helps to understand the common elements and differences between various fields of study and occupational areas. It helps to look at current salient issues of higher education, i.e. equality, the role of educational levels play, the demand for specialized or general competences, the growing role of international mobility and of life-long education, the regional diversity in higher education. The study also allows examining the extent to which socio-biographic background, educational experiences and achievements as well as the transition process determine early career and links between competences and work assignments.
- A second project was the REFLEX project (*Research into Employment and Professional Flexibility*) in collaboration with 12 countries. 5500 graduates were surveyed in Spain in 2004-05. This project focused on educational experiences in relation to development of competencies, in particular those required for flexibility and professional performance; the role played by competencies acquired during the study in the initial transition and early career development; and competence match.