

Short country survey on employability among BFUG members

Response by France

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?

- Graduate unemployment is a concern in France, especially for PhD graduates (whose LOs are mainly unknown by lots of enterprises) ; and because of the development of many training schemes with increasing market-oriented programmes, there appears to be a longer period for young graduates before they can actually get a job for sure, as compared to other European countries. This does not concern engineers at all.

As far as the first cycle and short cycle are concerned, the market-oriented Bachelor proved to be quite successful in France ; and well-known degrees such as DUTs or BTSs - or Foundation degrees as you would say - are well-known and sought after by employers ; the fact that some DUT or BTS holders go on further studies afterwards is not connected to an unemployment pb at all, but merely reflects the strategy made by some students and their families to avoid the first two years at university (as there is no selection).

- We do have restrictions on access to specific jobs, which means that regulated professions require a specific degree like in many other European countries I suppose.

- There is a guidance service within each university ; and since our latest law on autonomy last summer, as effective guidance is a new mission of public service for universities, it is a must for each university to set up a careers and guidance service. For the next academic year, the 'active guidance' experience will be extended to all universities : it enables a student, engaged in 'A levels' for example, to get in touch with a professor from the subject area this student would like to focus on in his/her 1st year at university ; the professor is expected to explain what the programme will be about, what the student will be expected to study and to do, which kind of jobs are available eventually and information about labour market outcomes.

- This WG would be helpful to highlight some good practices on employability, especially for non-labour oriented programmes.

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?

Yes, there is such a dialogue, especially at the national and regional level with employers. At the level of HEIs themselves, the dialogue is real for market-oriented programmes of course and many "outsiders" from academia are involved for teaching professional issues ; but it is perhaps less true for general programmes or research-oriented degrees. - Somehow preconceived ideas between each other, from both parts, universities and employers, should be rubbed out if people are more and more used to work with each other, especially to define what LOs should be. But universities should not become subordinate to enterprises and only focus on skills and

competences, forgetting about knowledge ... Universities have a major and more prominent role to play in the future for LLL enabling lots of adults to come back to university all their lives long.

At the national level, framework agreements are signed between the ministry for higher education and research on the one hand, and the professional representatives of a whole economic sector on the other hand. (> please see below under question 3-ex 1)

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

** Ex 1 / National framework agreements with employers : one example could be provided (and further described for the sake of the report) for the engineering area and higher education.

The Ministry for Higher Education and Research and the Federation for engineering agreed on cooperating with each other about :

- the analysis - and it is meant to be both a quantitative and qualitative analysis - about the way jobs in engineering and computer services are expected to change in the future, which requires to take into account the local, national and European dimension ;
- the way degrees and programmes are expected to be adapted ;
- which kind of new or experimental higher education degrees should be created in such a context.

It is to be underlined that LLL is not forgotten for these issues and both the Ministry and the Federation committed itself to encourage enterprises to fully use opportunities provided by the recognition of prior learning.

** Ex 2 / Useful tools for PhD students' employability :

These tools are twofold :

> 'PhD days' (or 'Doctoriales' in FR) :

In addition to training courses in foreign languages, communication, management project, etc .., doctoral schools are encouraged by the Ministry to organise "PhD Days" - or what we call "Doctoriales". These seminars are specifically designed to introduce students to the business world as well as to help them meet potential partners. Students are also made aware of the importance of their personal involvement in designing their future career.

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.

> New emphasis on skill enhancement for doctoral students :

Doctoral students are also being trained for the job market. They are made to identify the different skills acquired while preparing a PhD and taught to put them forward in various professional situations. Advisors from recruiting firms are called upon to help students throughout the process often summed up in a document which is a real skill analysis. Further information about these skills enhancement programmes and PhD Days may be found on the Website of the Bernard Gregory association which promotes the value of training through research to the non-academic world and helps the entry of young PhDs from any subject area into business: www.abg.asso.fr