

Working Group employability - Answers for Germany (21.12.07)

- 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?

One central aspect of the Bologna-Process that should be pointed out in this context is the aim to continually improve the quality of academic studies and teaching in order to enable students and alumni best for entering and manage in the labour market. In terms of employability in a stricter sense the main challenges can be enumerated as follows:

- One main challenge is the acceptance of the bachelor as first academic degree relevant to the labour market: The bachelor as first-cycle degree represents a new type and level of qualification that did not exist in Germany before the Bologna-Process started. Different studies have pointed out that the acceptance of the bachelor degree is close to the acceptance of traditional diplomas. Nonetheless these studies also evidence that the master degree is more popular than the bachelor degree. The acceptance of the bachelor degree seems to be a problem in particular to SME. As a problematic area study programs that qualify for regulated professions as for example teaching, law and medical professions should be mentioned. In these areas there is still a discussion going on, (1) if the two-cycle system is adequate, (2) if the bachelor can be relevant to the labour market and (3) what positions it possibly could meet (for regulated professions as doctor, pharmacist, solicitors i.e. professions of these areas). At the moment admission to such professions usually requires a state exam at the end of a one-cycle study of at least four years (plus an assessment of working experience).
- In general the understanding and acceptance of the bachelor and its qualification-level must be improved. The society is also still supposed to realize that starting work-life after the first-cycle degree is not equivalent to the end of academic studies and higher education. One challenge on the way to achieve effective and sustainable employability is the development of academic further education in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions and the labour market have not yet fully realized the importance of academic further education and its relevance to lifelong learning, particularly in the context of the demographic development. One main focus should therefore be a substantial and significant development of academic further education master-programs specially adapted to lifelong learning i.e. compatible with fulltime or at least part-time jobs.
- For higher education institutions - large universities more than universities of applied sciences - the challenge of "employability" means to conciliate - sometime short-term interests - of the labour market and the impartment of academic, science-based knowledge and skills that will be useful for students and alumni all of their work-life. The teaching staff of universities sometimes still has reservation to align generic employability skills and in-depth knowledge of the subject. The paradigm shift that the increased integration of generic employability skills means has not yet been fully ac-

cepted by university staff i.e. there is still concern that academic studies might not be sufficiently science-based anymore.

- In a formal way the (public) tariff law and the civil service law take into consideration the two-cycle system: Each of the two cycles leads to a different classification in the collective agreement. Nonetheless there is still improvement possible and necessary, especially in the practical handling. Particularly the non public tariff law has not completely adapted itself to the new degree system yet, as the new degrees are very different from the traditional degrees and cannot be compared. The bachelor degree sometimes therefore does not have an adequate classification in some collective agreements (e.g. construction industry).
- The unemployment rate for graduates is by far lower than for non graduates, though there certainly are important differences between the different studies, professions and functions. The transition from higher education to an adequate job does, however, not always run smoothly. Statistical data do not always provide a reliable basis as bachelors will not necessarily officially register as job seekers but might for example study further, get financial help from home or do some temporary jobs.
- The federal employment office (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) has an area-wide network of offices all over the country. Moreover higher education institutions have established their own career and guidance services, called career centers. The organisation lies in the autonomy and responsibility of the institutions. Sometimes they cooperate closely with regional employment offices.

As an output of the working group it would be interesting to have an overview of the situation in the Bologna countries on these topics e.g. concerning the acceptance of the bachelor degree on the labour market. It would also be interesting to compare the situations in regulated professions as e.g. medical professions (doctors, dentists, pharmacists), law professions or architecture. Do bachelors find jobs in these professional areas? What positions do they hold then? How is the international acceptance of the bachelor degree? Are there any differences regarding the size of the business? What actions could make the bachelor more attractive to the labour market?

- 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?
- In Germany there is an intense dialogue between all relevant stakeholders, i.e. higher education institutions (teaching staff and students), politicians and ministries responsible for education and representatives of the labour market (confederation of German Employers, unions). The cooperation takes place at a national, regional or at an institutional level. At all levels all stakeholders take part actively in the Bologna-Process even if in all groups there are still some reservations to parts of the process or its realisation.
 - One central issue of cooperation is the spreading of information about the new two-cycle system and the aim to improve academic education according to the needs of the knowledge society (in-depth structural and content reform, integration of more generic employability skills in academic education, more relevance to the labour

market in science-based education) and to enhance the quality and attraction of academic studies for students, business and society in general.

- On a national level a working group with representatives of all stakeholders meets regularly to discuss action to be taken in Germany in implementing the Bologna-Process and to prepare the Bologna-follow-up conferences.
- In 2004 leading German business companies started an initiative called „Bachelor Welcome!“. In 2006 the initiative was reiterated with the topic „More Bachelor and Masters Welcome!“. With their initiative the companies committed themselves to the Bologna-Process and its new cycle and degree system but also pointed out their expectations. However the realisation of the Bologna-Process is not yet finished in the reality of higher education institutions and business companies.
- On a regional level all the 16 Länder which are responsible for (higher) education in Germany endeavour themselves to enhance the cooperation between higher education institutions and employers and business companies. As in Germany autonomy of higher education is taken very seriously the enhancement mainly is restricted to the setting of a (legal) framework (e.g. mainly in the higher education acts of the Länder) and moderating functions as spreading information, assistance to the realisation of common actions to make the Bologna-Process proceed. There are various actions taken at regional level by the Länders, business representatives and higher education institutions.
- Achieving a more intense dialogue and cooperation between higher education institutions and society has also been intended by more modern and professional structures within higher education institutions. Most higher education acts have been modernised recently in this way. Boards (Hochschulräte) have been implied in higher education acts as new body of higher education institutions. Usually at least half of the members are not members of the higher education institution itself but external i.e. representatives from society, respectively from business. The board is in general responsible for fundamental strategic decisions of the institution as well as for governance tasks and controlling.
- As a German particularity programmes that combine vocational training and academic studies should be mentioned. In these so called „Duale Studiengänge“ (dual studies) the students acquire in parallel two qualifications: an academic degree (Bachelor) and a vocational training and the relevant certificate to it. These programmes give students the opportunity to get to know in-house-training and work-life as well as academic education. Usually the curriculum of these studies is developed in close cooperation with the involved employers.
- Bachelor and Master thesis or doctorates are often coached by business and higher education institutions in common. This is also a contribution to the transfer and cooperation from science to business and the employability of students.
- In the federal system of accreditation and quality assurance all stakeholder of the Bologna-Process take part. The relevant act explicitly says that there are five representatives with relevant professional experience. When study programs are accredited peers with the relevant professional experience always are integral part of the accreditation process.

- 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?

Germany will come back to this question in early January as a choice between a various actions has to be made.