

The official Bologna Seminar on
Employability in the context of the Bologna process
Bled/Slovenia 21st-23rd of October 2004

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General Conclusions

1.1 The seminar confirmed that *the objective of employability of graduates is one of the main cornerstones of the Bologna process*. Employability is a major objective on the way towards the establishment of a common European Higher Education Area, yet not the only one. It is also the context where a wide variety of stakeholders can work together on an aspect of the process.

1.2 As the term 'employability' itself is still a bit vague and sometimes even controversial the participants focused – in close connection to the various objectives of the Bologna Process – to its clarification. At this stage of discussions, they found as particularly comprehensive the following interpretation from the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) in England, presented at the seminar: *a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy*. Employability takes different emphasis in different programmes.

1.3 Society, the labour market and individuals demand from higher education to make a significant contribution in order to help achieving *sustainable employability*, including continuous self-development. Sustainable employability should not be regarded in opposition to life long learning, but life long learning should be understood as a meaningful way of enhancing one's employability.

1.4 *Bridging of academic studies and professional activities* and making firm links between them is beneficial for achieving an enhanced employability. Development of an Overarching Framework of Qualifications, covering higher education and vocational education and training in all countries – members to the Bologna process, is welcomed and should contribute to this end. In principle, internships are a recommended element of degree programmes. Employers and higher education institutions should give possibilities for internships in such a way that programme relevance is ensured.

1.5 Providing *broad possibilities and flexibility in terms of structure, content, orientation and profile of study as well as allowing for various pathways* should be understood as a strong contribution to employability. The one-fits-all, prescriptive and normative interpretation of employability and rigorous regulations hamper the development of personal and institutional profile and restrict programme flexibility. In this context, full advantage should be taken of the flexibility provided through the new two-cycle structure.

1.6 *High quality education is a key to achieving employability*. The main responsibility for the assurance of high quality education lies with institutions. Involvement of employers (public and private), trade unions and professional associations contributes to achieving the goal of employability. Feedback and advice from actors of the labour market on new curricula and Bologna-related reforms is considered by the participants as beneficial.

1.7 As the *acceptance and relevance of first cycle degrees* is partially lacking on the labour market, a concrete effort of all stakeholders is needed to raise awareness for them and their acceptance as meaningful, varied degrees in their own right. They either lead to the labour market or provide the ground for second cycle studies. This presupposes a variety of knowledge and skills, ranging from specific disciplinary understanding to broad personal and social competences to be developed. Higher education institutions should develop curricula in the way to enable students to make a real choice.

1.8 A serious caution over the distinction made between *academic and professional study programmes* is expressed as these concepts *are not mutually exclusive*. There is a much better way of distinguishing various studies if the distinction is made between *the research based* and *the research driven* types of higher education curricula.

1.9 From the *employability perspective* the seminar participants also suggest that

- *first cycle degrees* should encompass general and specific disciplinary knowledge as well as development of personal qualities including the one of the autonomous learner, the capacity to approach new issues, communication skills and other transferable skills;
- *second cycle degrees* should either encompass specialized disciplinary knowledge or offer cross-disciplinary knowledge from different academic fields, as well as higher level cognitive and communication abilities.

1.10 Further efforts should be also made towards *wider and more effective use of recognition tools in the promotion of mobility and employability* on the national, European and global level. All stakeholders are encouraged to take advantage of the common goals and purposes of recognition tools in various modes of academic and professional mobility and to promote the added value of mobility both in personal as well as societal and economic growth.

2. Recommendations to the Bologna Follow-up Group

2.1 The seminar participants recommend to the BFUG that the notion of employability and general conclusions as developed above are included as reference points in further Bologna seminars and other activities, in particular those dealing with learning outcomes and an Overarching Framework of Qualification for EHEA.

2.2 The seminar participants recommend to the BFUG strengthening active participation of employers' and trade unions' organizations as well as professional associations at various levels and fostering a debate on their systemic integration into formulation of higher education policies.