

Higher Education and the Labour Market – An Austrian Perspective



Higher Education and the labour market – EU experiences

- Skills and Competences for the European Labour Market?
- Employability Driving Curricular Design?

Higher Education and the labour market – EU experiences

- 1. Current European policy perspectives**
- 2. Institutional perspectives**
- 3. Mapping the context: Bologna in Austria 2009**
- 4. University of Vienna's complementary curricula**
- 5. Perspectives**

European Policy Perspectives

- **Current phrasing in the draft Communiqué for Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuf**
- *Higher education should equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals need in the **workplace** whatever their position and status. Employability is also **empowering the individuals** to **renew** those skills and competences throughout their working lives.*

European Policy Perspectives

2. Definition of working group on employability

- *the ability to gain **initial meaningful employment**, or to become self-employed, **to maintain employment**, and **to be able to move around** within the labour market*
- *to equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences that they need in the workplace and that employers require*
- ***to maintain or renew** those skills and attributes throughout their working lives (whether they are employed or self-employed)*
- *students should have an in-depth knowledge of their subject as well as **generic employability skills**, including the ability to engage in **different disciplines**; to pursue **flexible learning paths** and to ensure continued personal and professional development.*



European Policy Perspectives

3. EHEA as a **key economic force**

- Higher education area recast as an **economic entity**
- Higher education institutions are called upon and activated to generate transparent, sustainable and quantifiable output to overall economic performance
- Higher education institutions are increasingly held accountable
- Employability can be seen as a vital interface – clearly detectable market-oriented spin
- European Commission heralds employability as a **key driver of Europe's modernisation agenda**



European Policy Perspectives

skills forecasts project trends to higher levels of educational attainment

political drive: upgrade skills in a bid to face future challenges and meet the predictions for development of a European labour market

- prediction of almost **100 m job openings until 2020**
- next decade will see an **increasing demand for a high-qualified and adaptable workforce** and more skills-dependent jobs.
- **lifelong learning:** 'too little is done to increase and adapt the skills of an ageing workforce'
- **EC verdict on status quo: 'The composition of skills emerging from EU universities and training systems does not fully support a truly innovation-driven economy.'**



European Policy Perspectives

Goal is to boost the European labour market – make it more competitive

‘The removal of obstacles, including administrative barriers, to the free movement of workers in the EU, as well as more transparent information on labour market trends and skills requirements, would contribute to the promotion of occupational, sector and geographical mobility and allow a better match between peoples' skills and job opportunities.’

upshot with curricular and specific higher education implications: need from employers for transversal key competencies



Institutional perspectives

- Increasing disappearance of national orientation and references
- **momentum has clearly** shifted from national guidance and coordination to individual institutions carving out their unique profile
- Employability serves as an encapsulation of new developments as it unites a host of challenges
 - **governance**
 - **participation and dialogue with stakeholders and society**
 - **design of curricula**
 - **Funding**



Mapping the context: Bologna in Austria 2009

- Overall a **solid performance**
- On the face of it: virtually full Bologna implementation and compliance
- Fall 2007: 82 % of all study programmes follow Bologna structure
- Amendment of University Act of 2002 to accommodate 4 year Bachelor programmes
- Over 182.000 students (below doctoral level)
- 40 % of which are enrolled in a Bologna programme

Yet a host of tasks remain – facing a burgeoning Bologna-fatigue



Mapping the context: Bologna in Austria 2009

➤ **Key Shortages**

- No representatives of employability-relevant stakeholders in the national Bologna Follow-Up Group
- No structured dialogue with labour market
- 87 % of Bachelor students follow up their first cycle immediately to continue with a Masters degree
- Below par performance in field of joint degrees

➤ **Identified Challenges at hand**

- Towards student-centred learning
- Learning outcomes-based approaches
- ECTS implementation
- LRC
- mobility boost



University of Vienna's complementary curricula

- ideal “double function” of Bachelor degrees:
 - foundation for specialisation at Master level
 - sustainable employability for Austrian and European labour market

- **answer:** realisation of **flexible, modularised curricula** that equip students' for their future fulfillment:
 - possibilities of “branching” inside curriculum
 - provide and offer additional knowledge & skills through “complementary curricula” (CC)



University of Vienna's complementary curricula

Austrian law: 180 ECTS

Typology developed autonomously at University of Vienna:

- 180 ECTS used for one subject area only (sciences)
- 120-150 ECTS used for „major“ + 30-60 ECTS usable for „complementary curricula“
(humanities, social sciences, educational sciences, philosophy, ...)



University of Vienna's complementary curricula

- CC are modularized „mini-curricula“ of 15/30 ECTS
- obey the same rules as all curricula at UoV:
 - student-centred
 - learning outcome oriented
 - go through the same quality procedures as „regular“ curricula
- targeted at „non-specialized“ students
- non-consecutive and consecutive
- reflect the rich variety of subjects offered at the UoV
- reflected and marked in DS



University of Vienna's complementary curricula

- free choice of CC according to interest and/or future professional interest
- offer of CC will be continually expanded in order to keep up with recent developments and demands of the labour market

Prospects

starting from academic years 2009/10

- **more narrow focus on employability**
- **discussions with stakeholders from university and the labour market**



University of Vienna's complementary curricula

- **Has employability been significantly boosted through CC?**
- ✓ too close and too early to call a verdict
- ✓ cohort of Bachelor students entering the labour market will only generate
- ✓ viable data in two years
- ✓ Critically **depends on subject area** (informatics, economics fare rather well – those already in demand; **some are not cut** out for this approach – case of law studies in Germany – detachable mobilisation)
- ✓ **Flexible approach needed**
- ✓ Crucial: **monitoring and tracking of graduate careers**
- ✓ Lead to establishment of **career centre** and expansion of its portfolio as **key link and moderator** of dialogue with labour market



Perspectives

- **4 challenges at European level**
- ensuring that the value of **first cycle/bachelors programmes** are **fully understood** by all stakeholders (employers, students, parents, academics and higher education institutions);
- increasing **dialogue** between higher education and employers to allow them to understand, and be responsive to, each other's needs;
- encouraging more **work related placements** which are sensitively integrated into study programmes and workload;
- improving the **provision of career and employment related information, advice and guidance**



Perspectives

- **Personal thoughts**
- Learning from each other
- Crossing sectors and borders
- Provide best possible environment for curricula designers
- Remain self confident as universities
- Engage in an open and eye-to-eye dialogue with students
- Continuous dialogue with alumni and labour market representatives