

**EMPLOYERS (Document 3)<sup>1</sup>**

**1. General findings from the large scale graduate survey of the HEGESCO project –  
Competencies and Early Labour Market Careers of Higher Education Graduates**

*Employers should be aware of the large reserves of underutilized human capital at their disposal*

One out of four graduates indicate that their knowledge and skills are not optimally used in their work. This seems particularly true for competences in the area of innovation and knowledge management. In companies in the private sector and firms operating in an unstable market in particular, employers do not make optimal use of the human capital at their disposal. Interestingly, organizations that are strongly involved in innovation make better use of the potential of graduates. Reaching the Lisbon goals may be more attainable if employers more fully exploit their highly educated employees' potential.

**Employers should look for better signals of quality**

Our results show that graduating from programmes with strong links to the labour market and/or a high level of academic prestige is highly rewarding, even though these programs may not necessarily produce better graduates. It seems that employers heavily rely on such signals to reduce uncertainty. However, this strategy does not necessarily result in hiring the best graduate and there may be a need for more diversity in the hiring process. Although both governments (see above) and higher education institutions (see below) have a role to play in improving the relevance of signals of educational quality, employers can contribute by taking more note of such things as the demand of the study programme and the effort and motivation shown by graduates while in education. This not only has the immediate benefit of providing employers with better employees, but should also contribute to a tightening of the link between the prestige and reputation of higher education institutions on one hand and the excellence of the education they provide on the other.

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<sup>1</sup> This section is taken from the summary on the Large Scale Graduate Survey of the HEGESCO project – *Competencies and Early Labour Market Careers of Higher Education Graduates*, HEGESCO PROJECT 2009, (eds. Allen & Velden).

## **2. Which competencies should be employers the most alert to when recruiting new graduates**

In the graduates' survey in NCMS we have found evidence that in tertiary level jobs the most required competences are ability to use computers and the internet, ability to use time efficiently, ability to work productively with others, ability to make your meaning clear to others and ability to perform well under pressure. When entering the world of work graduates in NCMS in tertiary level jobs lack mastery of own field or discipline, ability to perform well under pressure, ability to use time efficiently, ability to negotiate effectively and ability to assert your authority.

In the survey the most stressed competences were a) mastery and field specific knowledge, b) competences related to learning with the major distinctive subcategories identified as self learning and continuous learning, c) personal proficiency with major distinctive subcategories identified as team work and time management, d) communication skills with foreign language as the main distinctive subcategory and ICT skills. One of the most crucial questions identified during the field work relate to questions about how to balance and integrate professional expertise (mastery and field specific knowledge) with other general competences. For employers one of the key pieces of information is looking deeper into the competence 'incubation' phase.

## **3. How to strengthen collaboration with HE institutions**

The most common means of collaboration between HE institutions and employers were program creation, common lectures, research projects, informal contacts, practical training, final theses, seminars and conferences, involvement in common bodies and associations and career centres, including the offer of financial support.

**4. Relevant aspects of competence development in HE from the view point of employers – the relevance of the graduate survey** [In some cases in brackets we provide some relevant data at the general EU level, while the same issues could be considered at the individual employer unit.]

*Learn the main program characteristics in order to know what to expect from graduates.* The main concerns are *how demanding the most demanding study programmes are, what modes of teaching and learning were the most stressed or what the extent of relevant work experience was.*

*Gather information on how much graduates earn in the local community and internationally.* [The highest hourly wages are reported in Switzerland and Germany. The lowest hourly wages are reported in Lithuania and Czech Republic.]

*Consider which fields of study do graduates evaluate to be a good basis for starting work and their future careers.* [Graduates in the field of health and welfare most often evaluate their programme as a good basis for starting work and their future careers.]

*Consider which fields of study do graduates evaluate to be a good basis for further learning on the job and their personal development.* [Graduates in the field of health and welfare most often evaluate their programme as a good basis for further learning on the job and their personal development.]

*Consider which fields of study do graduates evaluate to be a good basis for performing current work tasks. [Graduates from the field of health and welfare most often evaluate their programmes as a good basis for performing current work tasks.]*

*Consider which determinant of study behaviour has the greatest impact on the most important competences. [The determinant that has the greatest impact on the most important competences is 'strived for the highest possible mark'.]*

*Consider which organisational characteristic is most influential for the utilisation of graduates' human capital. [The organisational characteristics that are most influential in the extent to which graduates' knowledge and skills are utilised in their current work is 'innovation (at the organisational level)' and 'quality orientation'.]*

*Additionally, consider elements between permanent contract and subjective job security.*