Employability of Bachelor Graduates from Professional Higher Education Institutions

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The theme and topic of my contribution as the President of EURASHE is the employability status of the bachelors graduating from professional higher education institutions in Europe.

In the first place, I would like to take as a starting point a useful definition of ‘employability’, as it was adopted at the Bologna seminar held in Bled (Slovenia) from 21-23 October 2004 ¹:

“ 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”.

Why then limit myself to Bachelor graduates in professional education?

I have chosen this topic for various reasons:

Firstly a large number of partner institutions affiliated to the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) predominantly offer this type of training, in a wide variety of disciplines.

Secondly, a requirement from the Bologna Declaration is that all Bachelor (or undergraduate) studies should be ‘relevant for the labour market’, which created a fear in traditional university circles that all Bachelor programmes would be expected to be purely vocational and ‘geared to specific short term needs of the labour market’ (Trends II report).

I am claiming here that BA graduates from professional HE are per se ready for the labour market, and it may be useful for other graduates to know why that is so.

¹ The Bologna seminar in Bled (Slovenia, 21-23 October 2004) on ‘Employability in the context of the Bologna process’ accepted the interpretation of the term from the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (U.K.)
Finally with this study I would like to start a debate on the future of professional HE in the Bologna Process by disseminating useful information on the content and purpose of professional Bachelor education, which may not be known to all stakeholders, in the Bologna Process (European policymakers, traditional universities,...) though it is common knowledge among the stakeholders of professional HEIs themselves and in the world of employment.

I have structured my presentation in the following way:

In my **Rationale** I am first trying to demonstrate that there is only a seeming contradiction between the individual’s pursuit of knowledge and his/her challenge of meeting the needs of society in which this young individual has to make a living for him- or herself.

The **first part** takes a look at the changes that were introduced in HE in the various countries implementing the ‘Bologna Process’, and how this is leading to an increasing diversification in the European HE system, offering more opportunities for the graduates from both the ‘university’ and the ‘college’ HE sector.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to have an insight in the types of HEIs offering bachelor studies specifically oriented towards the labour market. I am therefore briefly expounding the main features of profession-oriented education (**part 2**) taking into account its further evolution along with the implementation of the Bologna Process, and I am also linking this to Eurushe’s role in this process, as the safeguard of the interests of this sector of HE.

A **third part** contains a reflection on the changing attitudes among both employers (industry) and the general public (consumers, ...) towards economic development and the impact this may have on the recruitment of graduates from professional HEIs.

In a **fourth** part, I am stressing the importance of the implementation of the overarching and of the national qualifications frameworks in the Bologna countries, which take into account the Lifelong Learning concept, with a view to enhancing employability. I also make use of the results of the stocktaking process in preparation of the latest Ministerial Conference in Bergen.

In a **fifth** part I am illustrating my point by interpreting the (at this stage incomplete) results of a survey recently held by EURASHE among its member institutions on the nature of the education provided at Bachelor level. I am also looking at the involvement of the world of employment, as the main stakeholder (next to the student), in both the educational process and the organization of the HEI awarding professional Bachelor degrees.

By way of **conclusion** I would like to reflect on the (healthy) tension between HEIs and the world of employment, which may be typical of professional HE as a whole.
RATIONALE

Knowledge for its own sake is not beneficial for civil society: it must serve a purpose, and especially in the field of professional higher education, where the link between education and training and employment is inherent, knowledge gained in the formative years of a student should be applied knowledge. Professional HEIs are a catalyst in this knowledge process, through education and training, applied research and service to the community, which is the threefold mission of professionally oriented HEIs.

Knowledge gained this way originates from direct societal needs and evolutions, and is therefore tributary to technological evolutions.

EFFECTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ‘BOLOGNA’ ON THE ORGANIZATION/EVOLUTION OF THE EUROPEAN HE SYSTEMS, AND ITS EFFECT ON EMPLOYABILITY.

The Bologna Process itself is also about employability. The relevant section of the Berlin Communiqué says “Ministers underline the importance of consolidating the progress made, and of improving understanding and acceptance of the new qualifications through reinforcing dialogue within institutions and between institutions and employers.”

The Bergen Communiqué is even more explicit, where it says: “there is a need for greater dialogue, involving Governments, institutions and social partners, to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications...”.

The Bologna Process has a positive effect on the issue of employability through the creation of an integrated two-cycle system in all participating countries.

As was already mentioned by the authors of the Trends II report, published in 2002, there is an increased integration of the higher education systems in Europe. The report shows how in several European countries this integration process may take different routes, with some HE systems (officially, though not necessarily in practice) evolving into (or maintaining) a unitary higher education’ (Sweden, Norway, France, etc.), while others have only recently started to introduce the ‘college-type of HE’ (Italy, Malta, Lithuania), which in effect created a binary system of HE in those countries.

Whichever system is in use, there is a general awareness in most countries of a need for vocationally and professionally oriented courses (and education systems?), as may be seen from the new content of the restructured bachelor and master programmes.

On the whole Higher Education in Europe is evolving into a greater diversification, if not of educational systems, but certainly of types of degrees and programmes offered. One illustration of this is the proliferation of so-called ‘professional bachelor’ degrees, with many countries (Denmark, France - with its ‘licence professionelle’-, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia) also adopting the name ‘professional’ in the degree title (the qualification), and others professing the vocational (i.e. ‘professional’) content, but not the qualification.

Other countries, while proposing a unitary system, have in effect two subsystems in place operating more or less independently and clearly recognized as such by the labour market (Sweden & Norway). Still others (Portugal, Germany) have both
colleges/university colleges and universities which offer the same (types of) degrees (bachelor, master), irrespective of the institution which awards them. The many examples of ‘bridges’ between the universities and ‘other HEIs (college-type HEIs), which have been created in countries with the binary HE system (but also within the unitary systems as is the case in France) clearly demonstrate the willingness of the HE authorities to keep, if not two systems, then certainly two types of HE in place. This binary system of HE is found in countries as diverse as Belgium (the two Communities), the Netherlands, France, Germany, Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and also in the Czech republic, Finland, Greece (for the latter more in theory than in practice, as the Trends II report shows). The conclusion of the authors of Trends II that this transfer possibility was put in place for those students who “did not make the right choices immediately and for those who change their plans” is not altogether satisfactory.

It is a matter of speculation whether, once the Bologna Reform has been brought to an end in all participating countries, the ‘reverse option’ (first an academic degree, supplemented by a more vocational training in the ‘college system’) may not be perceived by the graduate student as a more complete preparation for the job market, and would become even more successful among the coming student generation.

If the ‘vocational’ drift in HE continues to persist (as is the expectation of this seminar), there are undoubtedly consequences for the HE itself, and their ‘internal’ stakeholders (students, educational staff, and also the management of these institutions).

As shown in the Trends II report future demands from the labour market will increasingly have an impact on the organizational structures, the programme content, the profile of academic and support staff of the entire HE, as has already happened in many countries with the professionally oriented HEIs (including the university colleges that pertain to that sector).

The point I would like to make here is that a continuous and sustained adaptation to the changes in society in general, and in the world of employment in particular is something inherent to the professional trainings offered at university colleges and other professionally oriented HEIs, which is not the case with the traditional universities. The question is how far the ‘elasticity’ of the more traditionally oriented HEIs can reach to adapt themselves to the needs of the world of labour, without losing too much of their identity (which in the case of the college-type of education is not felt as a problem, but rather as an asset, as I will try to demonstrate in the second part of this article).

A side effect of the Bologna reform is the apparent ‘academic drift of some HEIs’ (the so-called ‘university colleges, which are the degree-awarding HEIs in a binary system of HE). This is most particularly felt in the area of research, which is however not within the scope of this article.²

² A conclusion from the Bled seminar on Employability cited earlier is that the distinction between research based (using existing knowledge) and research driven (advancing knowledge) types of higher education (curricula) is more useful than the distinction between
It may be that the diversification process in HE has not gone far enough yet. In a Communication issued by the DG E&C of the European Commission ‘Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon strategy’, in preparation of the Bergen Summit of Ministers of Education in 2005, insufficient differentiation in programmes and teaching methodology is stated among the challenges that European Higher Education is facing. According to this study, The EHEA is likely only to attract the great mass of best-qualified learners and this leads to the exclusion of those who do not conform to the standard model. This lack of flexibility results into a much lower tertiary education ratio (in terms of graduates) among the working age population in Europe (21 %) than e.g. in the US (38 %), Canada (43 %) and Japan (36 %). These figures show that there is a mass of potential ‘learners’ which remains beyond reach. It is however, worth noting here that the figures for the US and Canada include the great mass of students in the Community Colleges, offering foundation degrees, which are comparable to the certificates and diplomas in short-cycle higher education.

The same disproportion is apparent in the figures of enrolment for tertiary education with an average gross enrolment ratio of 52 % in the European Union compared to 81 % for the US and 82 % for South Korea.

Clearly a sign that the education world is lacking its purpose to help meet the main objective of the Lisbon strategy, namely to make Europe into the most advanced knowledge-based economy of the world, an objective that cannot be reached if the general level of (higher) education is not substantially increased.

Concluding this item, we can say that the implementation of the Bologna reform has definitely started (though the process may not be ended yet) to have a positive influence on the differentiation of the degrees offered, the profile of the prospective graduates, etc., in the entire HE sector, so the trend may be irreversible. The creation of ‘professional bachelors’ (and in some countries of professional masters, with others aiming at professional doctors programmes), the broad ‘skills oriented’ training in some (though not all) ‘academic’ bachelors trainings, the ‘transfer possibilities’ between the two systems of HE (traditional university and college-system HE) bear witness to this evolution.

THE SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE PROFESSION-ORIENTED HEIS, AND THEIR ROLE IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS.

What is professional HE and how is it organized in the European countries?

Professional higher education is found in all European countries, either clearly visible as a separate education track (in countries having the ‘binary system’), sometimes as ‘professional tracks’ within traditional universities (in a unitary higher education system). In a binary system they may be called Colleges, University Colleges, hogescholen, Polytechnics, Hautes Ecoles, Universities of Applied Sciences, and other equivalent translations in the national European languages. Degrees offered range

*academic and professional study programmes, for reasons that the latter concepts are not ‘mutually exclusive’. 
from (professionally oriented) Bachelor and Master - and in some countries academically oriented Bachelor and Master degrees, and PhD degrees in cooperation with universities - to an ‘intermediate’ degree (short-cycle degree, sometimes called associate degree). 3

**Specific Features**

*b Competence-building: competence-based centres of knowledge and innovation*

Relevance of programmes for the labour market has always been a core value and finds expression in the mission statements of most institutions in the University College/Polytechnic Sector. The course accreditation assessment and examination systems in many institutions in this sector reflect the impact of industry, business and the professions on the education provided. In the College/Polytechnic Sector, it is not uncommon for peer review experts, external examiners etc. to be drawn from the world of work.

The programmes offered are also practice-oriented: work placements and internships are an integrated part of the periods of study and the majority of the graduates entering the labour market have a first-cycle degree, which gives direct access to a vocational or professional job. This is entirely in line with the Bologna objective that all first cycle graduates should be immediately employable in the labour market. Finally, a large number of first and second cycle graduates have through their professionally accredited study programmes access to the professions that have been regulated on a European level.

The regional setting

Most professional HEIs have a strong regional embedding. Their graduates have a qualification that is easily recognized because the colleges have a longstanding and structural cooperation with industry and local authorities. HEIs as knowledge and innovation centres in their region are thus able to contribute to regional development.

Professional university colleges already play an important role in the development of the European Research Area (ERA) and the European knowledge economy. Professional HEIs offering two-cycle education have since long developed their own research capacities in their immediate regional environment, and have because of this had a strong influence on regional development.

Many of these university colleges are now opening up to innovative practices of cooperation with the world of employment, and are training both staff and students for collaborative research, often in cooperation with traditional universities.

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3 The fields of study in professional HE are numerous, and a non-exhaustive list comprises: economics and business studies, science, engineering and technology, fine and performing arts, architecture, health care, agriculture, teacher training, social work, and other major disciplines that have an applied track
A spirit of Entrepreneurship and innovation: Till now the results of our efforts to reach the Lisbon objectives with the goal to become the most competitive continent by 2010, have not been too promising. If we want to make better progress economic activity, entrepreneurship and innovation have to increase at all levels and in all sectors of European society and industry.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises on their own do not always have sufficient R&D capacity for real innovations and therefore rely on cooperation with other partners in this respect.

Entrepreneurship and innovation are of vital importance for the development of a region. The spirit of innovation is available in many professional HEIs, even if it is not at present fully exploited for lack of sufficient public funding. Similarly, there is a lot of research potential available in professional Higher Education Institutions, which if brought to full capacity, would benefit society as a whole.

Quality assurance in cooperation with other stakeholders

Through the intermediary of EURASHE professional HEIs have been instrumental in framing the new standards and guidelines for QA, including the establishment of a European register of quality assurance agencies and the European Register Committee. The ENQA report presented at the Ministerial meeting in Bergen on 20 May 2005 resulted from consultations among the E4 Group (ENQA, EUA, ESIB and EURASHE), where the specific expectations and wishes of the professional HEIs were taken into account.

Within this framework particular emphasis was given to the following aspects of QA, which reflect the immediate concerns of the professional HE sector: independence, representativeness for the whole professional HE field, involvement of stakeholders such as students, professional bodies and the world of labour.

These recommendations should also enable the large number of (often small and mono-disciplinary) HEIs to meet the new European-wide standards for QA, along with the (larger and more comprehensive) traditional universities.

The social dimension

The social dimension in HE is about equal access, progress and completion of higher education. It also implies that HE is looked upon as a public good, and not exclusively a tradable commodity. The Bologna Process clearly has a social dimension, as one of its goals is to open up higher education to a larger group of learners.

Professional HEIs have traditionally been more keen to create appropriate conditions for their students, so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. In a broader sense the social dimension includes all aspects of the social environment and relevance of education. University colleges and other types of professional HEIs have always been conscious of the emancipatory role of education and have brought in all stakeholders in their institutions through management, curriculum development, applied research, quality assurance and services.
Accessibility of professional higher education

Professional HEIs have a long and proud tradition in the provision of part-time, continuing and second chance education for the communities they serve, particularly at local and regional levels. If the objective of Lisbon that 50 % of the young should have completed higher education is to be reached further obstacles for free access to higher education have to be removed, and adequate regulations should be provided that stimulate the process of widening access.

Many professional HEIs have consciously taken this track, firstly by adapting their structures and adjusting their study programmes in order to incorporate new groups of students.

Secondly, by incorporating life long learning in a flexible way, through the recognition of Acquired Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) schemes, the validation of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning and the creation and strengthening of learning paths and learning methods to accommodate non-traditional learners.

Short-Cycle Higher Education

The Eurashe-study on Tertiary Short Cycle (now usually called Higher Education Short Cycle Education – HESC), published in May 2003 found that in the then 33 Bologna signatory countries over 1,4 MIO students studied in HESC and 0,8 MIO in post-secondary education. The study demonstrated that in a large number of countries where HESC exists there are possibilities of transition to degree programmes.

According to the survey there is an important group of HEIs in most European countries, offering intermediate degrees in response to the needs of the labour market. By upgrading these qualifications to Bachelor level, more opportunities for the validation of non-formal education may be created and access to higher education will be widened for other groups of students from a background that have no tradition of higher education studies.

With reference to the situation in the United States and Canada where two-year foundation courses (and their students) are fully integrated in the Higher Education system (and consequently can be found in HE statistics, as cited above), it seems only logical that Europe should follow suit with the short-cycle courses.

In line with this EURASHE successfully initiated the debate on the inclusion of Higher Education Short Cycle (HESC) within the first cycle in the overarching Framework of Qualifications.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

On a global scale there is a growing awareness that sustainable entrepreneurship has a social dimension.

On both sides of the labour spectrum a broader view is held on employment, which is enforced by the changing attitude of the general public towards the economic
sector and commercial activities. The change is towards greater accountability and sustainability in the economy, both in the corporate world and in the SMEs. This is also reflected in the employment policy of the enterprises (including SMEs): recruitment of new employees may now also depend on the degree of awareness of the prospective employees of the changing attitudes in society towards accountability and sustainable growth.

**THE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND LIFE LONG LEARNING**

It is undeniable that the implementation of the overarching and national qualifications frameworks through the Bologna Process, which takes into account the Lifelong Learning concept and is underpinned by a well-functioning Quality Assurance system will have a stimulating effect on employability.

National Frameworks of Qualifications, which are compatible with the overarching (European) QF should contain valuable and state-of-art information on the bachelor trainings. Curriculums have to be seen in connection with the learning outcomes, and should provide enough flexibility in terms of structure, content, orientation and profile of study, next to allowing for various pathways.

The Copenhagen process is working on an even wider European Qualifications Framework where higher education and professional and vocational training will be recognized and validated. Competences seem to be able to bridge the gap between ECTS, VET and learning outcomes.

Quality assurance and the recognition of degrees are sure to play a key role in the establishment of international trust in the new structures of the European Higher Education Area.

Quality Assurance involving ‘external’ stakeholders such as employers, trade unions and professional organisations will ensure the necessary link between good academic content of education and professional relevance, and will have a direct impact on the graduate’s employability.

Accreditation and the recognition of degrees and study periods will provide the necessary legal framework for the further establishment of the EHEA.

Finally, the flexibility allowed by the new two-cycle structure, with degrees based on learning outcomes and competences, will also be able to encompass non-traditional forms of learning.

But how far are we now in the practical implementation of the Bologna objectives?

A mid-term stocktaking exercise was ordered by the Ministers responsible for HE meeting in Berlin in 2003, in order to establish the level of progress made in the implementation of the above-mentioned three intermediate priorities, namely QA, the two-cycle system and the recognition of degrees and periods of study.

Completely in line with the Bologna reform is the decision of a growing number of HEIs to abandon the focus on formal duration, with instead the appraisal of the
student’s learning outcomes. The attitude towards this major shift in educational values however varies a lot depending on the countries involved.

Acquired Prior Experiential Learning and Prior Learning: the issue of recognition of forms of non-formal and informal learning remains to be solved, and as long as this is the case the effect of such/these new forms of learning on a graduate’s employability remain an uncertainty.

As to the introduction of the two-cycle system the stocktaking brought forward a general lack of credibility among both employers and students concerning the new Bachelor and Master qualifications, which was confirmed by the Trends IV report. The advice from the stocktaking working group (acting on behalf of the BFUG) is that “a process of engagement must be opened with social partners, and specifically employer representative organizations, to explain the developments within the EHEA and to become receptive to the employability of bachelor graduates”. The conclusion that there is a “need for representatives of other than academia to participate within governance and decision-making structures of the HE system” confirms what is common practice in the professionally oriented university colleges/HEIs.

THE EMPLOYABILITY STATUS OF BACHELOR GRADUATES

According to the Bologna regulations, Bachelor graduates who have completed a period of study of minimum three years are meant to be ready for the labour market. In reality their employability status varies a lot in the different European countries. Countries with an Anglo-Saxon HE tradition have no problem with such a provision, as the bulk of their (Bachelor) graduates goes to the labour market right after finishing their undergraduate studies (3 to 4 years). In some academic circles in a number of other European countries, however, such a finality after a first degree is unthinkable. The Trends IV report is clear on this issue:

“In many universities, professors and …. still express profound doubts regarding the possibility to offer a degree after only three years that is both academically valid and relevant to the labour market.”...

“Employability to these critics often seems to be synonymous to lowering of academic standards.” The authors rightly attribute this attitude to “a misunderstanding or disregard of the pedagogical re-orientation that has come to be associated with the Bologna reforms, characterized by the terms ‘outcome-orientation’, ‘student-orientation’, and ‘student-centred learning’.”

The question is also related to the distinction between the so-called professional and academic bachelors and the content of these studies (cf. infra).

There are no overall figures available which compare the different European countries, and as there is no formal agreement on the length of studies either, in practice they vary from three to 4 and ½ years.

The prospect of short courses which are (wholly or partially) vocationally oriented, and which contain the option of a terminal degree may not be attractive in most academic disciplines, the professional HEIs on the other hand (as also appears form
the Trends IV report) are confident that their Bachelor graduates are competitive in the labour market. Unlike in traditional university circles, professional HEIs have secured themselves a structural cooperation with the world of employment, which appears in a large number of issues: the design of new courses and curricula, promotion of the new curricula among employers, involvement of regional enterprises in the management of the HEIs, often in dialogue with chambers of commerce and employers’ associations (as is the case in Germany, Spain, UK and the list is not exhaustive). As shown earlier in the section about the Special Features of Professional HE, there is a close interaction between teaching staff, students and employers, in the pedagogical field as well, e.g. in the planning and organization of practical or work placements, project and thesis work, assessment and evaluation of students, social activities, etc.

For social reasons we completely agree with the university sector’s proposition that governments should set an example of the value of Bachelor graduates with regard to government employment. This could be done by hiring Bachelors for (civil) service posts, taking into account their specific training and education, and so enhance the credibility of the Bachelor degree towards both students and employers. This may however not necessarily have an influence on the enterprises and the other segments of the private sector, who recognize (and reward) prospective workers and jobseekers on the basis of their individual merits and skills, rather than on the status of their diploma (degree).

It was our intention to incorporate in this text the results of a survey on the nature of bachelor trainings offered at member institutions affiliated to EURASHE, and on their varying employability status.

However, as there was no sufficient time and due to lack of resources to further elaborate the result of this survey, for the purpose of this seminar, it may suffice to list the set of questions proposed to the HEIs, which shows the scope and radius of this initiative.

**Questionnaire on the members section (“Forum”) of the EURASHE website [www.eurashe.be](http://www.eurashe.be) (Text of questionnaire)**

1. Type of higher education institution : according to the Types of degrees & programmes offered, the orientation of the degrees and the mode of delivery.
2. List of disciplines at Bachelor level offered at your institution
3. Status/employment rate of the Bachelor graduates
4. Practical content of studies offered (internship/project work/other)
5. Participation of socio-economic sector in the governance of your institution:
   Categories: students, trade unions, businesses, professional organisations, ...
   Levels of participation: institutional, on faculty level, other
   Degree of participation : 1-5
6. Level of cooperation with the socio-economic sector in the region: range 1-5
7. (forms of) cooperation with the academic world (traditional universities)
The Bologna seminar held in Bled (Slovenia, 21-23 October 2004) on ‘Employability in the context of the Bologna process’ points at the major ‘recognition problem’ of the bachelor degree, both in the world of labour and in government positions. The examples that are given underneath are for the Czech Republic, based on a survey on the Cooperation between HEIs and Production and Service Companies\(^4\), though they are likely to be characteristic for a number of new accession countries.

It may suffice just to enumerate them:

- firms do not differentiate between a bachelor and a master, graduates are perceived on the same level;
- firms are often not prepared to take bachelors as tertiary education graduates; they regard them as “better” secondary school graduates and their salary range reflects this fact;
- similarly, there is no corresponding salary class for bachelor’s study graduates in the state institutions;
- an important percentage of the firms stated that they do not search graduates actively;

**GENERAL CONCLUSION**

Anyone involved in higher education, either as a stakeholder or in a management position will be aware of a healthy tension between the objectives of the HEIs and the world of labour. This can not only be explained by historical references, but is due to the fact that they have a different set of objectives. For one thing, professional HE is part of an educational system, which makes use of pedagogical processes. I can therefore not disregard the general educational objectives and values, inherent to the overall education process, and therefore professionally oriented HE, should also have an academic or ‘general education’ content.

This is completely in line with the findings of the above cited Bologna seminar on the theme of ‘Employability’, which state among others that most employers agree on the skills required from graduates, next to a ‘specialist knowledge’ within their domain, namely knowledge of languages, managerial abilities and “soft skills”. A similar recommendation was formulated following the Bologna seminar in St.-Petersburg on 25-26 November 2004.\(^5\)

The important thing is that the two ‘systems’, namely the world of labour and of higher education should keep the dialogue going, and tune their respective actions to each other. The co-operation between the professional education and the world of labour is concretized in that the learning outcomes of the relevant curriculums should also take into account the aspirations of prospective employers of their graduates. Conversely, the professionally oriented HEIs are accountable towards their graduates when it comes to securing their employability in the labour market.

\(^4\) PhDr. Marcela Smidová, Centre for HE Studies, Prague (Presentation at Bled seminar, 21-23 Oct. 2004)

\(^5\) Bologna seminar “Bachelor’s degree: What is it?”, St.-Petersburg, Russia, 25-26 November 2004.
Overall in the education provided a careful balance must be sought between theory and practice, between academic and vocational content, and a continuous attuning is hereby needed.

There are of course still other means to strengthen the link between the professional Higher Education and the world of labour (cfr supra): professional people can be involved on the various levels of participation and government of the HEIs (here a delicate balance should be found between aloofness and complete dependency), the enrolment of guest lecturers in the various sub-disciplines, the internship arrangements, the representation of prospective employers on examination boards of students and the presence of the professional field in recruitment committees for engaging new staff, etc.

Another example of the interconnection between the worlds of education and labour is in the implementation of the internal quality assurance system at the professional HEIs: on site visitation committees should have a component of the world of labour, which means both employers and the specialists in the various professional and vocational disciplines.

This in order to put to valorize the cooperation and as a continuous support to the employability factor of the specialist education provided.

We can therefore fully endorse the recommendation of the stocktaking working group in their Report for the Ministers’ meeting in Bergen that “a process of formal engagement should be initiated with employer organizations, both at national and European level” with as objectives to “communicate the process of reform” and to “ensure the employability of the bachelor graduate”.

It is this ‘right’ combination of ‘general educational values’ and ‘professional/vocational’ content which is the trademark of the truly profession oriented higher education, and which distinguishes it from more ‘narrow’ vocational-technical trainings offered by professional bodies, chambers of commerce, tradesman’s education, etc. and which usually fall outside the remit of the Ministry of Education of the relevant countries. Characteristic features of such ‘general education’ content are the training in attitudinal skills, such as team-work, linguistic and communication skills, creativity, a sense of criticism and self-reflection, etc. It is precisely this general educational surplus that can substantially enhance the employability prospects of the young undergraduate and though he or she may be disadvantaged sometimes as to familiarity with the purely technical practicalities of their (often narrow) specialization, he or she ultimately gains through the ‘broader’ general education they have acquired in a pedagogical environment.

In accordance with EURASHE’s strong opinions on the social dimension of higher education we would like to point out that the concerns for employability also encompass the underrepresented groups in society, by effectively fighting any form of discrimination in all matters affecting employment.