

EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES AND HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS –

SUMMARY OF DEHEMS PROJECT RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

As might have been anticipated, we can say that HE systems in all of the studied countries are becoming increasingly framed by expectations from the world of work and society at large to improve students' professional career paths. In this context, HE managers and staff particularly see own role in further improvements in developing general and field-specific competencies by strengthening practical training, increasing internationalisation and making improvements in teaching and learning modes. However, employers, trade unions and students want more than this. First, they see a clear need for any improvements in HE to be based on hard facts, such as the results of graduates' tracer surveys. They want these results to become broadly available, and integrated into HE systems in a transparent way. Students would then be better informed about choosing a specific field and be able to plan own careers. Employers, on the other side, would be able to use the data for recruitment and providing feedback to HE institutions. Moreover, employers, trade unions and students want to have a formal role in these processes. Yet the response to this request on the part of HE institutions is slow and varies significantly across the countries and study fields.

In the over 360 interviews conducted within the DEHEMS project the need to establish and improve the work of career centres and establish systems for tracking graduates has not been seen from the HE system perspective as a priority in all study domains and countries. At the same time and because of this, HE managers and staff perceive graduates' career dimensions and their determinants in a surprisingly intuitive way. Concrete activities and processes that presumably strengthen the responsiveness of HE systems to the world of work depend more on country than on study field bases.

The main conclusions are synthesised in this chapter in the four following interrelated sections: "Differences and similarities of HE study fields", "Determinants and dimensions of HE graduates' career success, and how HE experts perceive them", "Views of academics on the role of the HE institution in supporting HE graduates for entering the labour market" and "Positions of employers, trade unions and students on the link between HE systems and the world of work".

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DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES AMONG THE HE STUDY FIELDS

The main part of the DEHEMS report seeks to ascertain differences and similarities among the highly diversified study fields, exploring several aspects of them such as socio-demographic characteristics, programme structures, the transition to employment and graduates' job characteristics. In this project we analysed the following study domains:

Business and economics, which prepares graduates for a broad range of jobs in various economic sectors, covering a wide variety of programmes (e.g. more than 1,100 in Germany). Therefore, one can assume that graduates in this domain are highly equipped with general competencies that are ready to be applied in various work situations. Over the last few years, this domain has in most countries experienced a massive increase in enrolments, like in Turkey for example (more than 30% from 2005 to 2008).

In teaching and learning practices, there are several large variations among the DEHEMS countries. Examples include the highly above-average use of multiple-choice exams in Poland, the extensive practice of oral presentations and problem-based learning and group assignments in Austria, or lectures as the traditional teaching mode in Germany. In Austria and Germany, employers are more familiar with the content of programmes than in other countries (as was also found for other domains). There are substantial differences among the DEHEMS countries in the way study programmes have equipped graduates with work competencies. In Austria and Germany, 7 out of 10 graduates reported their programme had prepared them well for work, while in Turkey this is only the case for one out of three graduates and in Slovenia only for one out of four graduates.

In comparison to other countries, graduates in this domain most often look for jobs in advertisements in newspapers, through private employment agencies (except in Turkey), the Internet and family, friends and acquaintances. They less often find a job by setting up their own business (except in Poland and Slovenia where this happens more often), with the help of the HEI (except in Austria and Italy) or through a work placement during HE (except in Germany and Poland).

Education and teaching is mainly preparing graduates for public sector careers. The domain is highly feminised, indicating HE's surprisingly low capabilities to prepare graduates for work in most countries, even though the share of satisfied graduates is the highest among all the study fields. In line with statistical data the number of enrolments is still increasing, albeit not as much as for 'business and economics' or 'sociology and political science'.

The most obvious differences in the assessment methods among the countries in this domain include the above-average use of multiple-choice exams in Poland, while in Germany, Slovenia and Austria it is far below-average, also in comparison with other REFLEX and HEGESCO countries. Problem-based learning is quite equally used in all DEHEMS countries, with the highest scores in Poland. The assessment method of a research project is on average rarely used across the countries; the highest use is noted in Turkey and the lowest in Austria and Germany. In the DEHEMS countries more than 7 out of 10 graduates find a job as a teaching professional: the highest match is in Slovenia with 84% while the lowest is in Turkey and Italy with around 60%. Less than half of the graduates reported their programme has been a good basis for starting work to a high or very high extent, especially in Austria, while according to our data the worst prepared are in Slovenia.

Graduates find employment by contacting employers on their own, which is an especially popular method in Poland and Austria and not so much in Italy. They quite often also use family, friends or acquaintances (most often in Italy and Turkey), an advertisement in a newspaper, or they are approached by an employer (most frequently in Slovenia and other non-DEHEMS countries) to get a job. As expected, they often find

a job by setting up their own business, through the Internet and private employment agencies (except in Austria) than graduates from all the other domains.

Engineering This highly masculine domain is one of the key pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy and experiences stable enrolment levels in most DEHEMS countries. Differences among the DEHEMS countries can be observed with regard to group assignments, project and problem-based learning and written assignments: teamwork and group assignments are emphasised the most in Poland and at a level far below the average in Slovenia. Graduates in Poland reported a strong emphasis on project and/or problem-based learning, which was again not the case in Slovenia.

There are big differences among the six DEHEMS countries with regard to the issue of study-related work experiences during study: with almost three times higher scores in Austria, Germany and Slovenia than in Poland, Italy and Turkey. Like in many other domains, graduates are best prepared for work during their studies in Austria (which is also at the top among all 19 analysed countries) and Germany. This is followed by Poland, Italy, Turkey and Slovenia.

Engineering graduates most often find employment by contacting employers (especially in Poland), through family, friends and acquaintances (especially in Turkey) and through an advertisement in a newspaper or they are approached by an employer. Every tenth graduate has been approached by an employer, which was not so much the case in Poland. Employment agencies (except in Germany) are far less frequently used in this field than in others.

Medicine is traditionally the most professionalised sector, and experiences stable enrolment levels. Similarly to the domain of Education and teaching, it is very feminised and has the biggest share in all domains of graduates with highly educated parents. In contrast with the two-cycle programmes within the Bologna Process framework, this is one of the few domains whose programmes are still mainly provided in a single cycle lasting 5 to 7 years.

Country differences in this domain are characterised by the above-average use of multiple-choice exams in Germany and Poland, while in Italy it is well below-average. In Austria, oral presentations are less typical than in other DEHEMS countries. In all DEHEMS countries graduates see their programme as a good basis for personal development, performing current work tasks and starting work. They often find work by contacting an employer on their own initiative (except in Turkey), with the help of the HEI (except in Germany and Austria) or through previous work (except in Germany and Austria). They less often use private and public employment agencies (except in Austria and Turkey), family and friends or the Internet. Every second graduate across the DEHEMS countries reported that their programme has been a good basis for starting work to a high or very high extent; the lowest result was found in Slovenia and the highest in Turkey.

Science encompasses four subdomains, namely life sciences, physical sciences, mathematics and statistics and computing, with quite different shares of students among them. In Poland and Austria, the domain structure is highly biased towards computing, with shares reaching 50% of totals for the domain, while Italy, on the other hand, is strongly biased towards the Life Sciences subdomain.

This domain is characterised by several differences in teaching modes such as, for example, an above-average stress on multiple-choice exams in Poland, oral presentations in Italy, Germany and Austria, low involvement in research projects in Poland and Slovenia, and an above-average involvement in Turkey. With regard to the level of acquired skills for work, the best result has been reported in Austria in Poland, and the lowest in Turkey. However, large differences are related to enrolment differences among the specific subdomains.

Graduates most often use the following job search methods: approaching an employer on their own initiative, the fewest in Austria with 16% of graduates and the highest in Poland with almost 46%; making use of family, friends or acquaintances is the second most popular method in the DEHEMS countries with the highest shares in Turkey and Italy and the lowest in Germany and Slovenia. On average, one out of ten graduates has been approached by an employer, the highest in Austria and the

lowest in Poland. In Poland, graduates reported that their HE institutions provided almost no job-search assistance.

Sociology and political science have over the last few years been entering into new professional areas like human resource management, European studies etc. and generating a wide range of professionals for work in business, finance and banking, media, diplomacy or non-governmental organisations (to name just a few). Similar to the domain of business and economics, graduate numbers from the field of social and behavioural science have been growing in all DEHEMS countries, except Italy.

Programmes in this domain are strongly characterised by lectures and theories in comparison to other REFLEX and HEGESCO countries. There are a few differences between countries like, for example, the above-average use of written assignments in Austria, while in Italy and Turkey it is below-average. As was expected, it is important to stress that across all the studied countries students see the programme more as a good basis for personal development than for starting work. According to our data, the situation is (like in some other domains) better in Austria and Germany and the worst in Turkey and Slovenia. The majority of graduates were working five years after graduation under fixed-term contracts, only in Austria and Turkey are there more graduates who have time-unlimited contracts.

As briefly presented above¹, there are significant differences across the study fields in the way the HE institutions prepare their graduates for work and how employers absorb these graduates in relation to the economic situation, labour legislation, organisation of HRM practices etc. However, despite these differences we could pinpoint some similarities among the studied domains, clustering them into the following three groups: *analytical domain* (science, engineering, and medicine), *social science and business*, and *education studies*.

A general characteristic of the *analytical domains* is the relatively easier access graduates have to jobs – even though there is substantial turbulence in some sub-domains due to the economic crisis – study costs (for the education provider), and well-defined occupational paths. The *social sciences and business* domain has in the last few years experienced an over-supply of graduates, which in the last decade has in several countries been accompanied by the development of the private sector in higher education. Careers for most graduates within this domain are broad. The *education domain* shares some similarities with social sciences and business. The study costs are low, however public costs arise once graduates enter a well-defined labour market. The three clusters differ in several respects, such as hours of active teaching modes, the share of part-time students, entry requirements, prestige of the programme, international mobility, ownership sector (public or private), wage level etc. Moreover, all three domains vary in terms of the factors determining the labour market success of their graduates:

“In the domains of Engineering, Medicine and Science, the greatest impact on factors of professional success comes from personal traits and the environment and the surroundings in which respondents work. Generally speaking, education-related factors (study programme, teaching modes etc.) are less important. In the domain of Social Science and Business, the most relevant appear to be factors related to the education process, particularly those factors which allowed the respondents to stand out in a competitive labour market such as, for example, a diploma from a well-respected institution or possessing other certified skills or practical experience. Finally, in the Education field the influence of study process characteristics, personal attitude or international mobility were found to be insignificant for labour market success. This can be directly related to the fact that state regulations regarding the teacher profession create formal requirements as an employment entry condition. Meanwhile, their current work characteristics and teaching and learning modes have proven to be more

¹ The full set of DEHEMS analyses is available at the webpage <http://www.dehems-conference.eu>.

important, as these are the factors in which graduates might potentially be more differentiated”
(Conclusion of Chapter 4).

In the DEHEMS report we have found large discrepancies between graduates’ careers success empirical data, and the career success perceptions of academics, HE managers and HE stakeholders.

DETERMINANTS AND DIMENSIONS OF HE GRADUATES’ CAREER SUCCESS, AND HE EXPERTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEM

Academics are generally aware of only a few career success dimensions

The common practice of measuring HE graduates’ success only by employment status, occupational category and income does not adequately cater to larger research or policy interests. Instead, several complex models of graduates’ transition from education to the labour market have been developed. Key dimensions of graduates’ early career success identified in the DEHEMS project were: *education-job matching, challenging work tasks, job security, autonomy of work, work-life balance, and job satisfaction (with the highest correlations with e.g. high earnings, status, learning possibilities, career prospects...)*. These dimensions are related in various ways to the possibility of mobilising the acquired competencies. They depend on the following factors: sociobiographic characteristics, study process characteristics, study programme characteristics, teaching modes, personal attitudes, work experience and current job characteristics.

Academics generally have surprisingly mixed and individualised understandings of career success, although there are certain commonalities depending on study fields. In *business and economics*, most respondents linked career success with job satisfaction that is related to the salary, job search duration and doing meaningful work. However, most interviewees were well aware of the difference between short- and long-term success, the level of acquired professional skills and the (mainly vertical) education-job match. While the perceptions of career success in the business and economics domain vary significantly among the countries and respondents, this was not the case in the *teaching and education* domain. In this domain, academics share a similar understanding of career success: *“the career success of teachers is first a matter of finding a job and then being a good teacher, which is the key source of job satisfaction”*. The perception of career success is also relatively harmonised among academics in the domain of *sociology and political science*. Most respondents stressed career success as being graduates’ high level of flexibility as a competence allowing one to adapt to different jobs and tasks.

Similar to the teachers, most graduates from *medicine* build a career in their own professional domain. For most respondents the career success of medicine graduates depends on finding the proper path within the broader domain and the ability to deal with several stakeholders. The understanding of graduates’ success in the *science domain* depends highly on the subdomain: academics from computing (and to some extent Life Sciences – biotechnology, chemistry) perceive the success of a graduate more in terms of finding attractive employment, a high salary and skill utilisation during the process. Interviewed academics from other subdomains emphasised the ability to develop one’s own professional path, similarly as in medicine. In the domain of engineering, academics were surprisingly aware of difference between the elements of *subjective* (adequate level of employment, a link between the field of study and competencies acquired during study and work tasks, job satisfaction) and objective career success (employment status, income), although the way they defined career success varied widely among the respondents.

In a nutshell, we can draw two conclusions about academics' understanding of graduates' career success. While they are generally aware of the importance of subjective satisfaction with the job, education-job match and career development, they seldom stressed the importance of job stability and security, work-life balance, the status of work or a decent salary (as mainly stressed in the business and economics domain). Moreover, they rarely link these career success dimensions to the context of originand students' individual attributes. The general impression from the interviews was that most informants only give priority to certain elements of job success based on their own perceived professional responsibility or own life experience. *Second*, they have developed an understanding of career success in a very intuitive way – very few respondents referred to statistical employability data or surveys.

In most countries, empirical data on graduates' employability receive little attention from HE institutions and HE governance

Despite the domain differences described earlier, the trajectories of graduates' careers depend more on a country than a domain-level basis. In most countries, the main sources of information on graduates' employment needs are alumni networks or own personal networks and experiences. However, in some countries occasional tracer studies are conducted and in some individual institutions stipulated by quality audits. A few interviewees mentioned that information is gathered at the level of career centres but these services focus more on supporting graduates in their job searches rather than by systematically collecting data. Interestingly, only a few respondents conceded that own contacts and alumni networks involve a certain risk of not yielding the right information because these sources often include only the most motivated students.

In addition, in most DEHEMS countries in the *domain of teaching and medicine* where career path options are the narrowest, information sources on graduates' careers are typical based on assumptions and experience from informal interactions with graduates. In these domains, academics are becoming particularly aware of graduates taking up roles in public administration, supervision, research, guidance, psychological services, curriculum development etc. due to the limited employment possibilities in their own traditional areas. In the *science domain*, HE experts reported there are associations of graduates who share their experience with the transition to the labour market with current students: this is particularly the case in German HE institutions via practically-oriented colloquia. In general, the interviewees admitted there is a lack of systemic data. However, some HEIs have conducted formal surveys of graduates in Germany and Italy: the results are largely used for the (re)accreditation of study programmes and in principle for the quality of teaching and learning, practical training for students and cooperation with career service centres, yet during our observations very few concrete actions were described.

From our observations, among the surveyed countries particularly HE institutions in *Germany* use the largest number of channels to track their graduates, and in many cases assign the responsibility to track graduates to HE experts and managers: "*According to a survey of the German Rector's Conference conducted in 2006, about 65% of higher education institutions in Germany had conducted at least one graduate survey within the previous five years, however about half these institutions do not conduct graduate surveys regularly*". The best known system for monitoring graduates in Germany is the INCHER-Kassel initiative that currently links more than 60 institutions across Germany taking part in the KOAB action (Kooperationsprojekt Absolventenstudien).

In *Italy*, there are some cross-university associations that conduct graduate employability surveys. The most well-known is Almalaura which serves as a meeting point for graduates, universities and the business world and currently involves 78% of Italian graduates with the total number of curricula from

64 Italian universities amounting to more than 1,620,000 units. Another network is the VULCANO service (On-line University Graduate List with Curricula Vitae for Companies) based on a web platform for graduates, graduating students as well as companies.

In *Austria*, only a few HE institutions conduct graduate tracer studies that in any case have a limited impact on either designing or implementing HE programmes. *“The fact that experts did not mention the utilisation of empirical data on employability is a strong indicator that it lacks importance. It can be concluded that in general there is little data and no systematic collection.”* (from the Chapter 4) However, there are a few accredited HE institutions that do conduct graduate tracer studies on a very high expert level. A large national graduate survey was recently conducted in this country.

HE representatives from *Poland, Slovenia* and *Turkey* reported that systems for graduate tracer studies are not formalised and they therefore did not provide any examples of the contemporary use of employability data in the implementation of HE programmes. This entails a particular problem because new programme development is based on internal discussion, without any underlying hard evidence. In Poland and Slovenia changes are foreseen due to legislative changes leading towards obligatory graduate surveys. However, at the moment in both countries different sources from national statistics have started to be used in addition to the subjective expert observations.

THE VIEW OF ACADEMICS ON THE HE INSTITUTION’S ROLE IN SUPPORTING HE GRADUATES IN ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET

Most respondents in the *business and economics* domain claimed the best way to support graduates in their careers is to tailor study programmes to labour market needs. They see this as a difficult issue as the goal of the HE institution is to provide general usable knowledge and not specific training. However, several respondents were aware that the curricula are still strongly theoretical at the moment – and there is little knowledge of how it fits with employers’ demands – which is becoming an increasing requirement for retaining sustainable enrolment levels. Few interviewees admitted that the close monitoring of labour market developments is missing. Most interviewees see the future challenges in this area in cultivating studies of graduates’ employers, the further development of teaching modes – even though we detected some uncertainty in these developments – limitations on student numbers per class, while the direction, autonomy and centrality of the role of career centres remained unsettled.

In the *education and teaching* domain, respondents generally agreed about the importance of practical training being the key element of preparing graduates for work. Practical training was described as the necessary tool that makes the difference from content-centred to learner-centred curricula and also an empowering tool for the development of soft skills. Respondents in this domain stressed the need for lifelong learning activities and the great relevance of the internationalisation of programmes. As for future challenges, most respondents emphasised the need to further strengthen relations with stakeholders and develop practical work and problem-based learning. In the future they were concerned about the autonomy of curricula development in order to make regular updates in line with emerging student needs. There were some indications that these needs are related to wider employment fields for graduates, which is why some interviewees mentioned the role of career centres.

A very important part of preparing graduates for work in the *engineering* domain is generating flexible graduates. Experts from all six countries mentioned that engineering graduates experience a smooth transition to the labour market. Because of this, flexibility is not seen in the sense of being provided with a wide spectrum of knowledge (as in the social sciences), but in the ability to constantly adapt in the face of technological change. The respondents emphasised that a practical orientation, cooperation with industry, and internship are key tools for enhancing graduates' employability skills which should also be properly combined with research activities. Regarding future challenges, they stressed three elements: the development of recruitment services and career counselling including maintaining contacts with former graduates, and student-centred learning.

A clear mission of HE institutions in the *medicine* domain is to cultivate a good doctor: "*The university programme shall provide students with the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for being responsible professionals when they finish their studies*". Interviewees see the main mechanism for achieving this goal in enhancing the traditional focus of the medicine programme, further development of an international orientation and, in the first place, practical experience in medicine which is inseparable from theory. They stressed that, despite budget cuts, research for students is best conducted in university hospitals, although there is still room to increase cooperation with private employers. The four elements most stressed as future challenges were related to: (a) increasing graduates' scientific skills and social competencies; (b) increasing curriculum interdisciplinarity; and (c) flexibility within the existing tradition, with teaching methods paying special attention to continuing medical education. A few of the respondents stressed that the necessary condition for any improvements in the area is to maintain the current allocation of funding.

In the *science* domain, despite differences in the subdomains, the interviewees' perceptions about their role of supporting graduates' careers were quite similar. Most admitted that the programmes are not very oriented to labour market requirements because most disciplines within the domain are hard sciences where the core curriculum is well defined by the nature of the discipline. An exception to this is computing. Therefore, programmes in the science domain are generally reported as not offering much flexibility. The challenges for the future here relate to teaching modes that properly combine practical and theoretical approaches (where possible) and providing generic competencies – which can be achieved, as one interviewee noted, through closer cooperation between students and professors. In all domains, research activities are seen as a very important element for fostering student employability. In some cases, mainly in the subdomain of computing, the existence of career centres is thought not to be so important as there is still a huge demand for studies. Many interviewees mentioned that an improvement in the quality of education leading to the higher employability of graduates would require better technical facilities and access to the latest technologies, laboratories and equipment. Another key problem they exposed is the issues related to HE drop outs, and a system that stimulates competition with studies attracting massive enrolments.

The central element of making graduates employable in the *sociology and political science* domain was described as the continuing broadness of the study programmes. This means preparing students for lifelong learning abilities rather than specific knowledge: "*We don't see graduates only as a workforce who would only satisfy the demands of employers and particular job positions. /.../ Learning in the workplace is the responsibility of employers and they have to enable their employees to get the knowledge which is demanded for a certain job position*". Other issues included the implementation of new teaching modes – including research and practical training – internationalisation and the involvement of employers in the implementation of study programmes, which is already taking place in several HE institutions. In some countries, the respondents stressed the need to further develop career centres, which was also described as a future development challenge.

In summary, what are the HE institution's main activities that currently and will in the future support graduates in their preparations for work? Our analysis shows several similarities and differences when a certain activity is placed in a disciplinary focus. Respondents from the business domain directly admitted they should respond better to employers' requirements. A similar impression is gained in the area of sociology and political science, although the perspective there was related more to generating new professional areas rather than adjusting in line with employers' want. Interestingly, we detected some tendency in the education domain to widen the employability focus of the graduates, which may be attributed to the limited financial sources in the public sector. However, in the domain of science (except computing) the respondents admitted it is hard to adapt to employers' expectations due to the importance of generic competencies.

The need to develop career centres and implement tracer studies was chiefly stressed in social sciences, engineering, and business and economics. In all other areas, we only detected individual needs or no need for these activities. On the other hand, persisting autonomy was largely stressed in the case of teaching (mainly referring to curricular autonomy), medicine and social sciences. Lifelong learning activities were stressed in education and medicine, while in the other domains only in a few individual cases.

The most cross-domain, universal activities for supporting graduates in their careers are: (a) the development of generic competencies; (b) practical training which only in the sociology and political science domain was not so emphasised; (c) the internationalisation of all HE aspects (students, teachers and research); and lastly (d) improvements in teaching activities – which was related to all of the three other activities. Respondents in the domains of medicine and education saw a big role in maintaining the highest professional standards as it is only they that can safeguard the development of their areas in the longer term.

POSITION OF EMPLOYERS, TRADE UNIONS AND STUDENTS ON THE LINK BETWEEN HE SYSTEMS AND THE WORLD OF WORK

Employers' perspectives

In general, employers were satisfied with the level of theoretical knowledge provided by the HE degrees but believed that HE graduates lack practical experience. They were surprisingly well aware of the importance of general competencies such as, for example, social and communication skills, job self-efficacy, adaptability, flexibility, teamwork, foreign language skills, intercultural skills etc.

Hence, the employers' main expectation of HE systems is that they ensure a short- and long-term job fit. As a result, they are largely interested in tracer surveys and other hard data in general. However, they expressed the need for multiple foci of such surveys: possibilities of benchmarking, accreditation and the acquired level of graduates' competencies. Particularly in Germany, where over the last few years tracer studies have been developed the most, they expressed a concern about the "*huge differences in the way HEIs deal with the results of graduate surveys*". In Poland and Slovenia, employers expressed disappointment that such data are not used but still necessary.

Employers in all countries indicated the need to empower their cooperation with HE institutions, although they would like to participate on more formal bases. One of these is to create a robust mechanism for adapting HE programmes to their needs. From their point of view, this can best be

achieved by being involved in all aspects of curriculum development. However, the interviewees gave several already existing examples of good practice that also take place less formally.

Trade unions

Trade unions regretted the very scarce use of hard data on graduate labour market outcomes as a means for devising and organising university curricula. Similar to the employers, they would like the social partners to become more involved in HE institutions' planning as they have unique observations of the labour market, particularly concerning the current and future needs of today's workers they represent. *“These considerations are shared across the countries and are coupled with a relatively sceptical assessment of the effectiveness of the Bologna Process and the opportunities it has supposedly brought about for the younger generations.”*

Student organisations

Representatives of the student organisations were eager to proactively contribute to development of the system, particularly in that point where the system creates general and specific competencies. In some countries, especially in Slovenia, Italy and Turkey, they were concerned by the growing unemployment of young graduates. As *'key clients' representatives* they expect to be more involved in the shaping of HE systems. Moreover, they are concerned about how much the HEI can provide them with hard and soft competencies, which are both necessary for succeeding in the job market.

Student organisations see the implementation of graduate surveys, and utilisation of the results, in the design of study programmes as the most effective tool: Italian students appreciated the work of the AlmaLaurea Consortium as a best practice in the country, while the Turkish interviewees regretted the fact that in Turkey currently no such system is available. In most countries, the student representatives made it clear that if HEIs are to be at the forefront in supporting students in their transition to the labour market, *“they need to be attentive to job market trends and emerging opportunities”*. The process of stakeholders' involvement in the implementation of HE programmes is in the view of the student representatives slow and in many countries weak. In Turkey, the student representatives pointed out that private universities (foundation universities), unlike state universities, develop their study programmes in close cooperation with employers. In all countries, student representatives see internationalisation, internship and the production of soft skills as key developmental perspectives in HE.