DEHEEMS project

Sampling plan for interviews among HEIs’ representatives (WP6)
WP6: Interview questions

* asterisks mark more important questions

1 General suggestions

1.1 Research goals

The interview attempts to answer the following three basic research questions:

1. What is the overall idea of your higher education institution in the domain of … about how your studies should take into account the future professional activities of their graduates?
2. What does your higher education institution do in the domain of … in order to successfully help graduates to make the transition to work (short term) and their professional career (long term)?
3. Against this backdrop, where do you see major developmental needs for your higher education institution in the domain of ... ?

These three core questions will serve to structure the interview in three general parts, where they will be complemented by more detailed questions.

1.2 Recommended procedural approach

We suggest asking questions in a very general way to get people to talk freely. In many cases these experts will then ‘automatically’ mention the topics we aim to cover. This is our intention.

This means we as interviewers ask the basic research questions (1-3, see above) and when needed more detailed question will be asked. These sub-questions serve two purposes:

a) All DEHEMS partners conducting the interviews share the same idea of what aspects should be touched by the interviewees' answers within one domain, and comparatively.

b) Only if the interviewee does not ‘see where we try to go’ after being asked the basic research questions, the interviewer will ask sub-questions.

A minimum quota of half of all indicated sub-questions should be covered.

1.3 Additional remarks

Please consider which interviewee will give you honest answers (as opposed to ‘political’ answers more likely from e.g. rectors) and choose your interview partners accordingly.

Please remember: We do not try to get detailed answers related to the Bologna process. That is why we did not include any questions that might lead the interviewee to talk extensively about the Bologna process. If this happens, try to carefully move away from this topic.

We suggest to use more everyday-language as opposed to scientifically established terms (e.g. ‘future professional activities’ as opposed to ‘employability’ or ‘career success’).
2 Draft: Interview guide - Which questions to ask?

2.1 Urgent introductory questions

For beginning the interview we suggest the interviewers provide an introduction to the general research purpose of the DEHEMS project. Also, the interviewee will be asked to agree that the interview is recorded while any data obtained will be treated anonymous in order to protect the interviewee’s privacy.

After starting the recorder we suggest the following questions:

1. Please tell us in short – 2-3 minutes - some details about your personal background.*
2. Please explain your position and your experience in the organisation and in the development of higher education systems.*
3. How do you personally understand career success/success of your graduates in their professional life (please choose a wording that makes most sense to your interview partner)?*
4. To what extent are you in touch with former graduates and do you know what they are doing now?*

2.2 Area 1: “overall idea of graduates’ future”

Basic research question:
What is the overall idea of your higher education institution in the domain of … about how your studies should take into account the future professional activities of their graduates?

Comment: We suggest to use more everyday-language as opposed to scientifically established terms (e.g. „future professional activities“ as opposed to „employability“, „career success“).

Topics to be included upon agreement with domain coordinator:

1. What future professional activities do your graduates engage in? (What type of jobs, level of jobs)?*
2. How relevant are your graduates’ future activities for the design of your studies? On what basis and how do you consider it when developing your study programmes?*
   Possible answer categories
   2.1. Graduates’ future professional activities are of little or no relevance.
   2.2. Graduates’ future is relevant to some extent, namely in the area of ...
   2.3. Graduates’ future is a central influence factor, as is evident in ...
2.3 Area 2: “HEI activities to enhance graduates' success”

**Basic research question:**
What does your higher education institution do in the domain of ... in order to successfully help graduates to make the transition to work (short term) and their professional career (long term)?

**Sub-Topics to be included upon agreement with domain coordinator**
In which of the following areas do you enhance graduates’ short term and long term professional activities and in what way?

1. **Teaching/Curriculum development**
   1.1. Programme creation and changes – general aspects*
      1.1.1. What triggers changes in curricula?
      1.1.2. How responsive should your programme be to employers’ needs/demands?
   1.2. Focus of fields of study, Flexibility within curricula*
      1.2.1. Please describe how generalpecific your study programmes are in comparison to the domain as a whole?
        (e.g. Domain Business and Economics: To what extent does your curriculum cover topics in business AND economics as opposed to covering particular fields like specific accounting lectures or monetary policy classes)
      1.2.2. In what way are students within one study programme free in choosing their own subjects? (How many credits are freely selectable? How broad is the available range?)
   1.3. International orientation
      1.3.1. How important is internationality in your studies?
      1.3.2. How easy is it for students to get credits at your HEI for courses completed at a foreign institution?
   1.4. Teachers' training, teaching modes
      1.4.1. How is the quality of teachers assessed?
      1.4.2. In what way are teaching modes (e.g. lectures vs. group work) important for graduates' short term and long term career success?
      1.4.3. Others (e.g.: building up relationship student – professor; changing student mentality; ...)
   1.5. Practical orientation (practical training, lectures with practitioners)
      1.5.1. Should your HEI ‘produce’ ready-made skills or rather prepare for life-long-learning?
      1.5.2. How much practical experience should be included to achieve these goals?
      1.5.3. Are specific skills better developed in the context of generic ones or vice versa?
      1.5.4. In what way can learning at the workplace complement learning at HEI?

2. **Research**
In what way do your research activities enhance graduates' future activities?
   2.1. Student participation in research projects
   2.2. Common research projects with employers
   2.3. Others (e.g.: access to technological advancements; international exchange, exchange internet portal, general reputation of HEI ...)

3. **Relationships between HEI and other groups**
To what extent do you build relationships with employers and professional associations in order to support your graduates’ future careers?

4. **Other services**
   4.1. Does your institution provide any financial services in order to enhance graduates’ career success?
4.2. Does your institution provide any recruitment services career counselling in order to enhance graduates’ career success?

4.3. Does your institution provide any other support to enhance graduates’ career success (e.g. improved system of administration systems; improved system of student recruitment, ...)?

2.4 Area 3: “Developmental needs”

Before asking the final group of questions, the interviewer will briefly repeat the areas covered by the questions above (without the interviewee’s answers, only on an abstract level of the topics we aim to cover).

We talked about selectivity, cooperation with employers, practical orientation, enrolment, teaching modes, important competences...

Basic research question:
Against the backdrop of what your institution should do and what it actually does, where do you see the 3 major developmental needs for your higher education institution in the domain of ...?

Sub-Topics to be included upon agreement with domain coordinator
In what way should you develop the following aspects in the future in order to enhance your graduates’ short term and long term career success?

1. Teaching/Curriculum development
   1.1. Programme creation and changes – general aspects*
   1.2. Focus of fields of study, Flexibility within curricula*
   1.3. International orientation
   1.4. Teachers' training, teaching modes
   1.5. Practical orientation (practical training, lectures with practitioners)
   1.6. Others (e.g.: building up relationship student – professor; changing student mentality; ...)

2. Research
   2.1. Student participation in research projects
   2.2. Common research projects with employers
   2.3. Others (e.g.: access to technological advancements; international exchange, exchange internet portal, general reputation of HEI ...)

3. Relationships between HEI and other groups

4. Which other services should your institution provide (e.g. financial support, career counselling, improvement of administration systems; improved system of student recruitment ...) in order to enhance graduates’ career success?
3 Technical aspects

3.1 Recording and summarising the interviews

We propose to assure documentation through the use of a digital voice recorder during the interviews. Thereby a detailed verbatim record can be kept without additional effort and any incertitude of memory can be avoided/clarified by switching back to the passage in question. If needed citations from the interviews can easily be obtained. Recordings of the interviews should then be made available on the internal section of the project web page (via mp3 files).

After each interview a summary of the main answers/findings/citations is written in English. In order to obtain early feedback from the interviewers partners are asked to submit these summaries (1.5 pages per interview) as quickly as possible after conducting the respective interviews to the lead partner. These summaries will be for internal use only and should cover the major points covered in the interview. The aim of this is twofold. In the early phases of data collection, this helps to further improve the interview guidelines if necessary and to be able to incorporate interviewers suggestions as soon as possible; later, it helps all partners to keep track and ‘get a feel’ for what goes on in the various countries. In addition, it supports a self-imposed project discipline for documenting.

Writing verbatim transcripts in the original language is not considered necessary for the purposes of DEHEEMS as (1) in many cases they will not be understood in other countries, (2) aggregated answers are more relevant. However, if partners choose to make verbatim transcripts for further analysis they can feel free to do so.

3.2 Analysing the interviews

An overview including the main categories of possible answers will be provided for data analysis. These categories are firstly created deductively based on former reports and test interviews from the lead partner and secondly supplemented with country specific categories, in order to account for country particularities. In general, it is suggested to apply the codes provided (i.e. fit findings into general categories) but these can of course be complemented by additional categories that were not anticipated.

For the coding process we strongly recommend, even require for methodological purposes that the assignment of codes should be done at least partly in pairs of researchers/by two or more researchers. Especially on the first few interviews, we will try to establish inter-rater reliability within each country’s data set. This will be imperative for methodological and publication purposes. After the two or more individual researchers have a consistent idea of how to code, they can proceed individually.

3.3 Supporting Software for coding

We suggest that each partner uses supportive software for coding their interviews. Ideally, all partners should agree on the software they want to use. (Suggestion AT: NVivo). This gives use the possibility to share coding schemes and to support our project documentation. For transcribing we recommend F4 a freeware for digital recordings (see http://download.chip.eu/en/f4-audio-3.0.2_1087273.html).

4 Sampling plan

4.1 Sample size

The original project application envisages 40 interviews and 4 national workshops. Despite this, a minor deviation is suggested in order to improve both research findings and dissemination effects: It is
suggested to increase the number of national workshops to 6 so we can cover all domains while the number of interviews will be reduced to 36 per country (6 in each domain).

This draft proposes to choose a few representative institutions per domain and interview stakeholders with different backgrounds (‘2 x 3’ approach: 2 institutions, 3 interviewees, 6 domains = 36 interviews). We think that persons in different positions see the role of HE quite differently and that for the purposes of the DEHEMS project these different perspectives will provide more relevant insights than what would come from interviewing fewer people at a high number of different institutions.

4.2 Sampling strategy

Each partner will conduct 36 interviews with HE management units. These units should not only be representative for each domain but also be responsible for study curricula design and strategies. Thus, we suggest each partner selects interviewees according to the following criteria:

1. Full-time member of academic staff who is an expert in domain and has links to organisational practice and has long teaching experiences
2. HE Management: A person who is responsible for designing curricula, quality control management, program directors
3. Career centre’s expert

We deem it less important what position an interviewee occupies or what her/his job title is. Rather, we focus on her/his knowledge of and experience in the specific domain (e.g. if a new program director with little experience was appointed, it might make sense to interview the former director even if s/he does no longer occupy an official position).

4.3 Sample - Whom to interview?

For first contact we suggest writing a standard e-mail including a description of DEHEMS and project goals, followed by personal contact. An invitation letter template for the first contact with interviewees will be provided by SI and AT partner.

Each partner is asked to submit a road map of proposed interviewees as soon as possible, and then the final list of interviewees. This list serves both to internally explain the selection of interviewees to other project partners (particularly the lead partner) and also as a possible external justification for sample composition. Please fill in the table below.
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