

Report from session 5 - Careers and Skills for the Labour Market of the Future

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Dear Rectors, Dear Students and all the guests,

Implementation of specific and practical solutions that respond to the fastly changing educational needs of students is essential. Due to such developments as technology revolution, globalisation or demographic changes and migrations, we should focus on the teaching and learning of skills, which facilitate meeting the future challenges in education, society or labour market.

During the first part of the discussion about Careers and Skills for the Labour Market of the Future, we were delighted to listen to panellists: the Magna Charta Observatory Council, *Agneta Bladh* from Sweden, who presented the paper about the Bologna Process and the demands of the Labour Market, and *Pavel Sorokin* from the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia, who tried to answer a very essential question how can education contribute to socioeconomic development?.

Taking into consideration a role of future skills, we need to underline the employability is, and should always be, considered as an essential aspect for Higher Education, especially in respect of qualifications, which should be relevant to the European labour market for each of the three cycles, that are, undergraduate, graduate and doctoral studies.

By analyzing the current and past face of the labour market, it is needed to mention that the most essential elements and demands were related to the stronger focus on some subjects, like science, technology, engendering and mathematics (STEM), life-long learning and an ability to adapt students to changing rules and requirements of the changing world, and the economic and social dimensions. These elements were undoubtedly concentrated to improve curricula and some outcomes which should respond to the labour market's criteria.

The Magna Charta Observatory Council mentioned also about some critical elements related to the employability - very visible through the relation between the HEI and the labour market, because the close connection of those perspectives can impact on the inhibition of the development of new ideas and mainly of the society, but at the same time, the research

can influence the development of the labour market and some new profession which possibly we are not able to name now.

The second part of the presentation was based on skills gap on the local, regional and national level, caused by some circumstances, whose were underlined by Bladh, like, for example, some conditions of the labour market and the lack of attractiveness of some fields in which young people do not want to gain qualifications. How should we eliminate these gaps? Taking into consideration the Bladh's words, countries should influence on young people to experience some jobs before choosing the right higher education program related to their interests and at the same time grow possibilities of choosing a less popular field of study.

The next challenge which is about to be presented in our reality is related to the digital skills gap and the automation and artificial intelligence - two new perspectives which presence will change the form of the labour market. One of the critical task to take into consideration is to find some correlation between the elements mentioned above and the human cognitive capacity to eliminate weaknesses and strengthen at the same time some faces of the current and the future labour market, basing, for example, on the lifelong learning.

Analyzing the current situation of students, is very urgent to ask, and Agneta Bladh also made that question, what kind of competencies do we need in the future labour market? Primarily, we should focus on skills which could enhance the employability of students and to do that, and it is essential to give students new language perspectives and the ability to gain transversal skills, that are, for example, communication, analytical, entrepreneurial skills or the ability to make decisions.

The transversal skills are also related to intercultural skills, which existence respond to the changes in the current world. We, like our generation, should be prepared tho notice cultural differences, and be able to adapt ourselves to new perspectives, using the mobility or the contact with the very international environment, and it should be a goal for all the HEIs, for example by using the new concept of the European Universities, to create a linkage between needs of different cultures, countries and perspectives, strengthening at the same time the cooperation of them to stabilize the role of the labour market of today and the future.

The next panellist, Pavel Sorokin, decided to answer if education can contribute to socio-economic development? Firstly, this is needed to underline that statistics prepared by

him, reflect that since 2014 more than 20% of Russian students enter college to study engineering, a growing tendency which influenced on the labour market and the lack of employability for that group.

As in the previous part, Pavel Sorokin was also analyzing the societal changes related to the artificial intelligence and new communication platforms and networks, to underline that is needed to adapt some institutions to increase the economic growth, creating new perspectives and the new value of them, because new technologies have impact on the labour market and skills of the future. Taking that into consideration, that tendency we need to focus on the role of non-market services, to respond to the demographic transformation.

One of the elements underlined by Sorokin is the reaction of the EHEA to the demand for soft skills, which influenced on the growth of the number of students of humanities and the implementation of the classic liberal arts model of education, which allowed to open a broad spectrum of professional ways for our generation.

By analyzing that, we can mention at the same time, some weaknesses and challenges of the current employment system, which is replaced by part-time employment and freelance. This element can influence undoubtedly on the quality of life and at the change of dominating skills, which became non-routine skills, the abilities which any machine can not substitute.

Another problem is related to the entrepreneurial elements to curricula during secondary and tertiary education, which was solved, especially by innovating and economically developed countries.

Sorokin mentioned here some countries, like Finland, which implemented the entrepreneurial component to the curriculum of technical disciplines, which according to some analyzes can affect that students are more into business and want to create their own companies, and it is an essential challenge for the EHEA to prepare students to get this ability, because in some countries is still an unbelievable step to take.

In the next part of the presentation, Pavel Sorokin also tried to suggest a new definition of human capital, based on individual development. Taking it into consideration, we need to mention that there are four categories of the human capital, composed of specialized skills adapted to specific jobs, created, mainly by specific education. The second group form universal competences, like, for example, critical thinking or creativity, gained by independent activities which supplement the traditional education. The next group is formed

by essential noncognitive traits like, for example, perseverance or grit, elements that we can learn by participating in the socio-personal component in the education process. The last category is related to active independence, which reflects the ability to transform the world, some institutions to create new perspectives and to develop some areas of life.

In the end, Sorkin mention three elements or levels to improve economic growth using the power of Higher Education. First of all, we should be focused on quality assurance and the role of education to deal with weak institutes. Secondly, we should continuously analyze and transform all institutions to adapt them to new challenges and new needs of the labour market. Moreover, thirdly, we should answer a question of how does tertiary education contribute our capital analyzing, for example, universal competences and noncognitive skills, all the elements that we can consider our future.

The discussants of the panel titled *Careers and Skills for the Labour Market of the Future* reflected on significant matters that will undoubtedly influence the future labour market in Europe. The following experts participated in the panel: *Chiara Finocchietti*, co-chair of the BFUG Thematic Peer Group B on Lisbon Recognition Convention, *Silvia Bernardini*, Professor of the Alma Mater Studiorum — Università di Bologna, *Janne Loikkanen*, vice-chair of the Coimbra Group's Employability working group, *Ulf-Daniel Ehlers*, Vice President of EURASHE and as a facilitator *Matteo Vespa*, student of the Università di Bologna and the International Officer of UDU — the Italian University Students' Union.

Development of our societies requires especially profound and agile skills of teachers, and at the same time some professions key for the local leadership and competencies for community build-up. Whereas in East Asia, recent trends prioritise arts, humanities and social sciences as disciplinary fields where innovated knowledge and skills are crucial for the interest of diverse societies, while the same areas are not in sufficient focus of the decision-makers in the US and some states in Europe. Learning from the Asian examples might be an endless inspiration to the European Higher Education Area.

What can be determined as the future skills? According to professor Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, the author of *The Future Skills Report on Next Skills*¹, there are sixteen crucial skills like, for example, *subject-development related skills* like autonomy, self-initiative, self-management, need or the motivation for achievement, autonomous learning competence, ability to reflect, *object-related skills* like agility, creativity, digital literacy, and *social world or organisation related skills* like sense-making, future mindset, cooperation competence and communication competence. Should these skills be a primary part of the curricula, or maybe should they be obtainable as additional learning outcomes of some courses? The curricula are designed to prepare students for obtaining the new skills that enable adaptation to the rapidly changing challenges of labour market. Therefore many universities analyse future skills and implement them into the curricula, but the measurement of that tendency should be more visible and more discussed by higher education institutions to prepare student for the future labour market which will be completely different than the current one. Otherwise, one of the main goals related to the work which has to be made at HEI should be based on teaching students to understand and see the importance of future competencies and skills. They should not be just a part of learning outcomes, but they need to help seek knowledge and learning the content of the curriculum. Learning skills should not aim to overburden the students but equip them with the transversal skills they need.

Janne Loikkanen elaborated on a mission of the future society, according to the universities of the Coimbra Group. Are these institutions working on the formative influence on the societies effectively? Analysing the current situation, there are some actions in place, because the students' mobility abroad helps to obtain skills and competencies in intercultural communication and other transversal skills, like, for example, team-working skills, problem-solving skills or communication skills. Such competencies are crucial for the labour market: the employers are looking for applicants with well-developed transversal skills, so involving students in extracurricular activities or any other way of learning can practically apply what they learnt or made them ready for the future jobs.

The other side of the future skills and their role on the labour market is related to the need for finding a precise balance between the humanities and technology related competencies.

¹<https://nextskills.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/2019-05-17-report-vs.15.pdf>

Society need graduates who learn humanistic and social competencies, which are essential because the labour market is fastly evolving, and they provide an opportunity to learn the creative and innovative thinking which can be adopted in any circumstances. Humans will not be able to compete with artificial intelligence in calculating, but artificial intelligence will never be able to think with empathy, be creative or mind cultural differences. People need to control it and be responsible for the developments of all technologies.

One of the recurrent themes of the future of the labour market is a continuous automation because some analysts estimate that machines can entirely replace even by 50% of jobs. At the same time, lots of jobs that currently do not exist will develop from the process of automation. It is an essential element for professional education because it is crucial to achieving a balance between the high level of competences, specialisation required by the labour market and the flexibility to adapt to an ever-changing world of work. The universities should not compete with each other; they should instead build networks which would support the development of higher education institutions. These networks can contribute to the discussions in their sectors or local communities.

One element that might foster automatic recognition of degrees is Europe-wide harmonisation of curricula, both in structure and contents. That is a contentious issue, where neither the European Union or the European Higher Education Area have legal powers, but they provide a supportive environment for cross-border degrees. The action lies in the hands of the governments to create joint initiatives for the entire continent to educate students based on clear criteria and objectives for all member countries that could create such programmes in many disciplines.

The European Master's in translation (EMT) is worth to mention, which is not a single program, but a network of institutions which provide that possibility to people interested in gain skills in that discipline. The main goal of EMT is to improve the quality of translations, taking into account the changing labour market and to encourage other higher education institutions to design their programmes based on that European initiative.

To become a member of that program it is necessary to prepare a structure of the given programme, coverage of the key competencies according to the new EMT Competence Framework, to assure sustainability related to staffing policy and the number of graduates over the past years and career support in form of tracking of careers for student after and

before graduation. The EMT also can promote a quality label of qualifications, giving at the same time more visibility to a study programme and building up some cooperation.

One of the problems related to its functionality, also mentioned by Silvia Bernardini, is the evaluation of students and lack of tools to review the effectiveness of designed curricula. Analysing this aspect from another side, it is necessary to mention that an essential learning outcome is to use technology to collaborate and develop long-distance learning and to give students perfect tools that facilitate and automatize in some way the process of translation and interpretation of the given context.

In that case, translation is an example of a field where technology can be used to improve it, but it can never replace humans because no machine can reflect the cultural context or behaviour. Undoubtedly it is an example of equalising the access to knowledge and competencies between countries, but we still have procedural problems on how we can work.

Finally, we can focus on the role of students in the process of designing and personalising the curriculum, because the personalised knowledge, skills and competencies become uppermost at the labour market and the mechanism of its creation should be based on certain agreements made by all the groups of stakeholders.

Although some may think that students are not ready for co-designing curricula, such solutions already work at many institutions, where students need to take responsibility for their learning. Once students enter higher education, they may not be ready for taking responsibility for learning, but then there is a place for the institutions to help and support them in getting enough skills to be prepared to take the lead in their education

One of the elements that can be a driver for employment in Europe is the automatic recognition of degrees and diplomas. However, despite many declarations of the European Higher Education Area, Ministerial Conferences and the European Union, automatic recognition is not yet a reality, although it is a tool that could improve conditions of entering labour market around the continued work.

The recognition of diplomas and credits is not yet automatic in Europe. Students need to be aware of the possibilities for recognition, but also the institutions should prepare their staff, who has to provide sufficient information and guarantee fast and efficient procedures. Smoothly working recognition is a must for the labour market of mobile workers.

Some are thinking of initiatives which would involve the entire academic environment in Europe, governments and all stakeholders. The European Commission promotes the idea

of the European Universities, intending to establish networks of European Universities with a profound structural collaboration which can become in the long-term single 'European Institutes' releasing 'European degrees'. Although it is an idea which includes specific perspectives and influences the international cooperation, it needs to be asked what should be done to make the project more inclusive, affordable for students, focus on tackling social inequalities and supporting a diversity of higher education institutions in Europe.

The European Universities seem to trigger the will of a cross-border collaboration of the institutions. This chance should be used to excel in mobility and to promote the integration of academia, analyse models and good practices from all the participating countries. The main objective is not only to expand the learning opportunities for students but also to shape a network of institutions beginning a discussion about the role of the labour market for the future and especially for the future of higher education, answering the question if there should be more standardised tools which would the higher education systems in Europe or the support should give more freedom of choice to the institutions. .

To conclude, the involvement of students in co-designing the curricula is essential for ensuring the new skills that students need to be provided with. The qualifications should not be the primary goal of education, but they should support achieving the learning outcomes.

Despite the increasing role of technology in the labour market, the human workers will play a crucial role, so a focus on education in fields such as humanities and social sciences is needed to ensure creativity and empathy of the future workers. Humans will be not be replaced by technology, but they need to learn to bear responsibility for it.

Because the skills useful at labour markets are changing so rapidly, tools like automatic recognition, European Universities or curricula planning need to be designed strategically to foresee the needs of the future skills for the labour market, instead of answering the current needs only.

Finally, I would like to thank you for the attention, and I hope that this summary has been useful to brief you on the critical discussion about the skills that the labour market of the future requires from us already! And please remember, students need skills and want to obtain them, but we will not achieve them without the support of institutions and governments.

Thank you!