



Policy Recommendations (extended)

based on the experience and results of the project #europehome

Coordinated by: Lodz University of Technology

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INTRODUCTION

The turbulent changes which take place both on the global and the European markets lead to the development of brand new trends. One of them is the changing role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In the past they used to play a purely educative role placing strong focus on scientific knowledge, however, nowadays, it is becoming increasingly important both to educate students as well as to equip them with the necessary skills therefore boosting their employability.

There is an increasing need for the HEIs to be more innovative and outward looking as well as more entrepreneurial. The entrepreneurial potential of the HEIs can be facilitated only through well-defined and targeted actions involving all the stakeholders, including governments, HEIs, companies and NGOs. The actions and recommendations proposed within the #europehome project were based on the following premises:

- growth of youth unemployment is observed in most EU countries (sometimes even exceeding 50%);
- existing university curricula and graduate profiles often do not match the local labour market needs;
- increasing lack of graduates in STEM subjects;
- employer opinion that graduate skills often do not meet the labour market reality.

In order to support the development of an economy, it is essential to have a strong interaction among government, universities and industries. The recommendations proposed below outline concrete suggestions and examples of practices.

KEY WORDS: entrepreneurship, employability, cooperation, companies, policy, good practices

The recommendations are proposed from the point of view of the key stakeholders:

- higher education institutions;
- companies and industry representatives;
- national and local governments.



#europehome

The recommendations presented in this report are based both on the project findings and the general experience which is shared by the members of the consortium.

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HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS:

- **To establish an international/cross-border network of companies interested to host local and international students for part-time placements and set a cooperation system in close collaboration with university services, such as IROs and internship and/or career offices**

HEI's entrepreneurship policy implemented by Career Centres in cooperation with the business partners often consists of the following initiatives:

RECRUITMENT NOTICES submitted by companies are published on the websites of universities and presented to students and graduates. The initiative involves full-time, part-time, temporary and seasonal job offers as well as training opportunities offered by companies. It seems important to recognize the added value of the part-time and temporary job offers - they allow students to combine studying and working and provide companies an opportunity to verify their knowledge and capacity for work.

COMPANY OPEN DAYS allow students to visit and become more familiar with the employer, experience the working climate and learn more about the policies of the company regarding professional development, promotion paths, social support etc. Meetings in thematic groups with current employees of particular department/unit enable students to recognize the every-day activities dedicated to key business areas like management, promotion, orders, distribution, accounting etc.

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS and recommending candidates to companies based on the need of a particular business partner significantly support the increase of graduate employment rates. During the process it is important to consult not only the candidate and the company but also the university academic/research staff that work with students on daily basis and have objective knowledge on their competencies and potential.

One example is the Career Centre at the University of Latvia which works with students, graduates and employers. The specialists of the centre provide support to students and graduates in job and career-related issues. At the Career Centre, students and graduates can look for various job and internship vacancies, structure and improve CVs and motivation letters, reveal their strong qualities during various seminars as well as turn to the consultants with other development-related queries such as changing their study program, planning career steps or preparing for job interviews. Employers can become acquainted

with students and establish contacts with students who have begun or only plan to begin their professional lives.

Since majority of universities provide services mentioned above and work closely with local companies, projects, like #europehome, allow merging the resources on a wider scale - European scale – therefore allowing to benefit both groups of students (local and international students).

- **To increase the offer of entrepreneurial courses (either optional or compulsory) across all study fields**

The HEIs should provide not only diverse formal learning opportunities to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skills for the future graduates, but also enhance informal learning opportunities. The HEIs should also validate entrepreneurial learning outcomes which drives the design and execution of entrepreneurial curriculum.

- **To create a variety of concrete support mechanisms for students that allow gaining additional value from the international (exchange) studies**

The number of exchange students is growing steadily and there is an ambitious aim to reach 20% of mobile students by 2020. Although exchange studies are of great value to each mobile student individually and allows not only gaining academic knowledge at another European university, but also impacts the personality growth, increases cultural awareness and social skills in an international context. Erasmus programme celebrated its 30th anniversary this year and throughout the years a wide variety of additional programmes have been added, including for other sectors (in addition to higher education).

Project #europehome has experimented an approach of merging two elements – studies and placements – to allow students gaining professional experience abroad in addition to academic, thus offering to gain valuable experience and potentially increase the impact of the mobility period.

- **To offer academic flexibility to students interested in gaining both academic and professional experience while studying abroad**

Despite the interest of students to participate in the placement scheme offered by the project #europehome, the dropout rate was considerable and although there were several circumstances that influences the eventual decision of students, one of critical aspects was the academic workload and schedules of the lectures. Considering and offering more flexibility for mobile students and

their learning agreements, would allow tackling this issue. Another possible solution is wider usage and application of the online environment and online course offer to allow students to study at their own pace.

- **To establish permanent links with business partners benefiting both HEIs and companies**

The university-business cooperation still faces serious barriers like: time, costs, priorities, tradition and habits, lack of knowledge about the partner, underdeveloped institutional potential in technology transfer etc. Despite the challenges both the employers – aware of the costs of attracting valuable staff – as well as HEIs striving for students in the reality of demographic decline, aim at developing and improving mutual didactic and research cooperation.

Large companies are especially interested in strengthening the partnership with HEIs due to their defined pragmatic approach. Engaging in common initiatives and building a good relationship with graduates of prestigious universities translate in the long run into a recognition and attachment to the brand of a company. Many employers regularly organize workshops, presentations and contests for students and graduates or sponsor events held at universities. A constant presence at HEIs allows business representatives to attract not only their future employees but also clients and contractors.

On the other hand managers are often not aware how many significant business issues can be solved by the institutional support of HEIs as well as individual cooperation with academic/research staff and students. Business HEIs oftentimes engage in partnerships with corporations in order to prepare and implement high quality development projects which include specific needs, interests and preferences of a particular company. The latter can serve as a good practice for mutually benefiting cooperation scheme.

Effective management of business-science relations benefits both HEIs and companies and significantly affects the development of local economy.

- **To adapt study programmes to the needs of local government and business**

Many European universities successfully respond to the current needs of local labour markets. For example, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the Lodz University of Technology (TUL) created new study programmes related to aeronautics as well as turbine and jet engines being aware that the local government plans to open new aircraft maintenance and repair plants in the city of Lodz. Also TUL's Faculty of Electrical, Electronic, Computer and Control

Engineering recognized the significant lack of IT specialist and therefore increased its admission limits for IT-related study programmes in order to provide experts for the local labour market.

In Portugal (University of Aveiro), the General Council of the university share their opinion and vote when planning the design of the study programmes. There are several programmes, for instance, Commercial Management, that were created to answer the specific demand of companies. Moreover, companies often offer assistance at specific fields, and this assistance has various forms, for instance, curricular placements for students, contribution to contents of the programmes, organization of common events, development of projects, etc.

- **To encourage the introduction of dual studies**

Dual studies allow students to gain valuable expertise knowledge, practical skills and experience during their studies. After graduation, the student is awarded with the university degree and can benefit from gained practical experience which gives him/her a significant advantage on the labour market. In Poland, Poznan University of Technology implemented dual studies in cooperation with Volkswagen Poznan and Phoenix Contact. Another HEI from Poznan - the Poznan School of Logistics - offers dual studies in cooperation with Raben, Dachser and DHL IMPERIAL Logistics Sp. z o.o. The system of dual study organization differs among HEIs – predominant scheme involves 3 working days in the company and 2 study days at HEI a week or 9 weeks at the university and 9 weeks in the company.

COMPANIES:

- **To create a concrete win-win mechanism for companies to host local and international students and cooperate with universities across the EU**

Context of #europehome: The project focused not only on increasing the opportunities to gain both academic and professional experience, but also on ensuring preconditions for effective and high quality university - business cooperation. The projects #europehome and #empl-oi have designed and tested a model of a win-win cooperation which involved three target actors (Universities, Companies and Students) and were engaged in facilitating:

- *Close University and Business collaboration on the local level, as partner universities created local networks (=local hubs) to ensure dynamic and meaningful cooperation with companies.*
- *An opportunity for students to carry out part-time placements at the partner companies, either locally or internationally (as part of a "tandem").*

INTERNSHIPS: The organization of internships in the companies is a typical form of the cooperation between the companies and HEIs. The internships last generally from one to three months and it is evaluated at the end. The student can have it recognized as a compulsory internship during the studies. Sometimes the internships overlap with the regular studies and then the student spends one or two days at work (as an internship) and three-four days studying at the university. The types and the duration of internship differ depending on the HEI.

- **To create structured and regular dialogue between business representatives and universities about the essential elements, competences and knowledge that should be included in the HE study programmes**

Many companies sponsor laboratory equipment so that students can acquire specific skills required by the employers. The company representatives also take part in the juries assessing student projects. In 2008, University of Gdańsk has opened the laboratory of Thomson Reuters Data Suite with a free access to the business information provided by the company. It was the result of the agreement between the HEI and Reuters. It referred to the implementation of the financial and banking programmes for the students of economy and the major in International business. It was the first project of this type in Poland and the first in Central and Eastern Europe.

- **To involve business representatives in student projects (in the role of a leaders, advisers, team members, sponsors etc.) and in regular teaching**

COURSES TAUGHT BY BUSINESS EXPERTS: There are cases when professionals are invited to act as regular academic teachers and to give courses at the HEIs. At Lodz University of Technology, for instance, the following course at the Faculty of Organization and Management are delivered in this way: Consulting management, Human Resources Management in a Small Company; at International Faculty of Engineering- Risk management.

PROJECTS IN COMPANIES: The projects conducted in companies are based on an approach that a real business environment favours the maximization of the training effect. The students, besides working in a real environment, have an opportunity to test and implement the acquired knowledge. Many companies invite the students to such projects in order to start the pre-selection of candidates, solve problems, which regular staff does not have the time to solve, or improve the existing solutions but it is also a great opportunity to teach the students practical skills and share solutions which are applied.

REAL PROBLEM BASED TOPICS: A company might address a supervisor (academic staff member) looking for the methods of solving a certain problem or having a need to have a certain aspect of the operation analyzed. The academic supervisor can then propose this topic to students, also as a potential topic for master thesis. This type of cooperation provides mutual benefits, and often results in the employment of the student. At the University of Alcalá, for instance, the Colleague of Telecommunications receives proposals for the master thesis from the association of the companies.

- **To create structured and regular dialogue with academics (including curricula designers, programme directors, etc.) about the essential elements, competences and knowledge that should be included in the study programmes.**

An innovative structure of university-business cooperation was established and implemented among the #europehome project partner universities and labour market actors. The aim of suggested cooperation model was to facilitate close partnerships with employers and put intentional effort to modernise, diversify and expand the curricula and extra curricula offer at each project partner university via

- *Local Hub activities in a form of meaningful discussions with employers, feedback and reflections about the current educational offer and the existing skill mismatches as well as interventions during the*

courses/lectures to allow both, raising awareness about entrepreneurial skills and offer concrete steps to practice.

- o Part-time placement scheme (performed in various ways, including in international tandems).

The collaboration structure was part of the holistic approach of the project and the main tool to establish basis for long-lasting collaboration and therefore bring education closer to the world of work.

- **To revise HEIs curricula considering the actual needs of companies/industry branches**

Consultations with entrepreneurs have led to a creation of a new study programme (chemistry of building materials) at the Lodz University of Technology. There was a lack of engineers who have interdisciplinary knowledge connected to civil construction and engineering studies in the fields of mechanics, chemistry, ceramics, civil engineering, chemical technology, ecology or material engineering did not offer such knowledge.

The graduates from this programme can be employed in any chemical company specializing in designing or/and producing building materials, as well as analytical or research laboratories in industry as a process engineer, research and development department worker, analytical laboratory technician, or production specialist. The graduate also has competencies in the area of group work, labour organization and formulation and solution of problems. Companies interested in employing the graduates are as follows: Atlas, Schomburg, MC-Bauchemie, Mapei, Ha-Be, Remei, BASF.

The students who choose this field of study, have an opportunity to study at three different HEIs in Poland. They typically spend four semesters in the first university, and then one semester in each of the partner universities. Additionally, the way of teaching was changed taking into consideration the demand of local production companies, distribution companies and logistic operators. While creating the new study programme, the following companies participated: Dachser, Rossmann, BSH, ABB, Philips, Procter & Gamble.

- **To involve business representatives in the sponsorship of entrepreneurial initiatives and events**

DEDICATED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR DIDACTIC EQUIPMENT: The insurance of a dedicated financial support (such as the laboratories, purchase of software or equipment), teaching methods or other important elements of the didactic process increase the presence of the business institutions or public institutions at

HEIs. The existence of dedicated financial support is the result of the engagement of the company in social responsibility and for HEIs it is a chance for an effective realization of new tasks and the preparation of learning outcomes taking the specific needs into consideration.

SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED BY COMPANIES: The financial support for the most promising students can be ensured by companies. This kind of support creates the prestige of the company and increases attractiveness for the future employees.

DEDICATED SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED BY COMPANIES: These are the scholarships offered by the companies with a promise of a future employment. This kind of scholarship connects the student with the company and guarantees the work after graduation.

- **To anticipate the future needs of a company in terms of human resources needed in the future and communicate their needs to the HEIs.**

Companies should evaluate what kind of skills will be needed by their employees in the future and analyse whether such skills are and will be available on the market in the future. When a mismatch of skills is detected, it is recommended to address universities and discuss the elements missing, this way paving the way towards possible changes in the study programmes.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

- **To consider national strategies for development, innovation, internationalization of HEI-business initiatives**

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland has developed a national strategy after accession of the country to the EU. As a result Lodz University of Technology opened new study programs in civil and environmental engineering where all students received additional governmental grants. The policy was related to the extensive construction works aimed at the development of infrastructure undertaken in the frames of the Coherence Fund. Nowadays, the Ministry sets expected graduate competencies in many of its grant initiatives leaving HEIs with a free choice to form new study programmes or modify the ones already implemented in order to meet the needs of the labour market and promote entrepreneurship.

- **To ensure that HEI curricula meets the current and forecasted needs of the EU, national and local labour market**

After the analysis of the projected needs of the labour market, the governmental units responsible for higher education can either increase the official admissible student limits, and at the same time the amount of funding assigned to universities. For instance, the Portuguese National Agency for Education (A3ES) analyses the curricula during the triennial assessment and then decide on the accreditation of the programmes. The study programmes can change every 3 years since the stakeholders (A3ES, employers, former students, current students, professional associations and academics) agree it is necessary to meet the expectations of the market.

- **To offer scholarships/special awards to students, graduates, HEIs and companies for outstanding achievements in common entrepreneurial initiatives in order to promote good practices in HEIs-business cooperation among national stakeholders.**

In June 2017, Lodz University of Technology was awarded with a Grohman Award by Lodz Special Economic Zone in the category "Important for Lodz". The award was taking into consideration the developing cooperation with business stakeholders.

- **To introduce an obligation for HEIs to monitor the career of graduates and their entrepreneurship**

A standardized monitoring of professional career of graduates is an excellent example of a supporting initiative that allows HEIs to verify effectiveness of its educational offer and introduce required modifications to study programmes based on the employment rate of its graduates. An open access to reports enables candidates to examine the success scenarios of a variety of study programmes and choose the most suitable one with the highest rate of employment. In Portugal, for instance, the monitoring is done using the data of the Portuguese Institute of Employment (IEFP), the questionnaires are collected and analysed each year.

- **To create local infrastructure for entrepreneurial initiatives and foster cooperation between HEIs and business at a local level cooperation**

Local governments may support the development of territorial economic potential by introducing legal initiatives attracting both large companies as well as SMEs and start-ups for example by creating special economic zones (preferential investment terms) and business parks (housing and technical support). It is essential to involve local HEIs in those processes for example by introducing university business parks or encourage special traineeship programmes for students in emerging local companies. A complex initiative involving local government, HEIs and companies was recently introduced in the city of Lodz (Poland) which faces an urgent need of structural revitalization. As a response to the city's demand, local HEIs – the Lodz University of Technology and the University of Lodz – created a common study programme "Urban Revitalization" which will provide specialized staff responsible for the sustainable territorial development of the city of Lodz. It is the first study programme in Poland dedicated entirely to the complex issue of revitalization. It will last 5 semesters and its graduates will receive a diploma signed by both universities. Courses within the programme will be held by practitioners - business representatives.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the cooperation between the HEIs and the companies is becoming a must. Without it, sustainable economic growth cannot be ensured since the interests and forecasted needs of all the relevant stakeholders need to be taken into consideration.

It is essential to continue improving the different forms of cooperation, share practices among the universities and propose, create and launch new initiatives depending on the demand in a given moment and forecasted needs.

Therefore, it is necessary to continue supporting initiatives and activities as the ones which were implemented in the framework of #europehome project.

#europehome team