



13 December 2010

THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AFTER BOLOGNA ORGANISED BY THE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

ADDRESS BY PHILIPPE DE BUCK, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Monday 13 December 2010, 2nd session 14h00 – 16h00
University Foundation, rue d'Egmont 11

BUSINESSEUROPE's main messages

- On the Bologna process and the establishment of European Higher Education Area

The Bologna process and the creation of a European Higher Education Area is strongly supported by BUSINESSEUROPE. We particularly appreciate the increased transparency between European education systems and the actions undertaken to improve the quality of teaching and recognition of qualifications.

With a higher level of transparency, mobility has also increased between national education systems by 4% relatively speaking. This is a modest increase but it has still broadened labour markets for those students going abroad for studies, as they tend to be more likely also to work abroad. Studies show that formerly mobile students transfer more smoothly and faster into the labour market.

- On competitiveness and higher education:

It is easy to understand why education is at the heart of business concerns. In order for companies to be competitive, they need a work force with skills of high quality and relevance.

The value that European employers attribute to the skills of their employees was demonstrated in the recent economic crisis. Although forced to take drastic measures to ensure their survival, companies have taken far-reaching measures to avoid laying off employees, mainly explained by the latter's high level of skills and competencies.

At the same time, skills shortages on European labour markets are the main obstacle for economic growth in the EU. The lack of high skilled workers, in particular within Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics is severe. Currently, over 300,000 IT skilled workers are lacking on European labour markets. In Germany alone, a supply of 105,000 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics graduates annually will be required just to fill the replacement demand.



Addressing such shortages requires taking action already at an early age. It is fundamental that students are able to access and complete tertiary studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. This is a key part in equal opportunities. The main route to ensure accessibility is through high quality primary and secondary education, measured against a baseline of the world's best education systems.

Increasing the number of students choosing higher educational pathways is crucial in light of the projected demand of high-skilled workers. Cedefop estimates that the demand for such workers will increase by 16 million by 2020. At the same time, the demand for low-skilled workers will decrease by 12 million.

However, we should be careful not to adapt all secondary educations to university studies. The demand for vocational skills on a medium level is still going to be the greatest by 2020, in relation to high- and low-skilled workers.

Instead, efforts should be stepped up to improve the progression opportunities between vocational and higher educational studies, as well as between work and studies. For this, two main developments are necessary.

1. Firstly, tertiary educations should be constructed of modules that are transparent in terms of content and enables the student to add "building blocks" to his or her education.
2. Secondly, a shift towards the learning outcome approach in national qualification and credit systems is required. Methods needs to be developed to better assess learning outcomes like the capability to apply the skills and competences acquired. Moreover, the learning outcome approach allows for recognition of knowledge irrespective of how it was acquired, including informal and non-formal learning which could take place at a work place. BUSINESSEUROPE welcomes in principle that the Single Market Act proposes a Council Recommendation to promote and validate training outside the classroom.

Also, many tertiary educations have become too theoretical. In Sweden for instance, too strong an emphasis on the theoretical elements in the education of nurses (which is a university education in Sweden) resulted in the incapacity of newly graduated nurses to perform basic medial procedures.

One key element is missing in the social dimension of the action lines for the European Higher Education Area: employability after graduation. Equal opportunities are not just about possibilities to undertake a university education. More importantly, individuals who have invested several years in tertiary studies expect a return on their investment.

Higher education institutions also have a responsibility to ensure that competencies acquired are relevant to labour market needs, by creating connections with companies and society at large. The crucial role universities play in providing a work force that can help develop our health care, find solutions to combat climate change and develop our transport systems is not sufficiently recognised.



The individual learner obviously also holds a responsibility to make informed study choices. To support students in this, guidance and counselling tools need to be developed as well. It is crucial that the guidance officers at schools, universities and employment services are well informed about job prospects and future skills demands. In particular, the competence to advise on study options in science, technology, engineering and mathematics needs to be improved.

➤ On the need to open the door to employers in education and training

The responsibility to ensure that higher educational studies lead to employment is also shared by employers. Existing and foreseen skills needs should be communicated to both universities and schools.

However, the most efficient way of making higher education more relevant to labour market needs is to make it easier for companies to become involved in education and training. As an example, the bureaucracy surrounding companies' provision of apprenticeships should be reduced and business representatives could be invited to take part in the boards of educational institutions. By consulting employers on how the content of courses, teaching methods as well as assessment of learning outcomes matches their need for skills and competencies, a continuous adaptation of supply to demand would take place.

Creating links with business is important also to provide a context for theoretical knowledge. Learning how to apply this knowledge to solve real world problems is crucial for the employability of students.

Moreover, there are numerous examples of how partnerships between academia and business have led to successful research spin-offs, improved the quality of teaching (for instance by sharing of equipment) and raised interest for studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Business is committed to bridging the gap between the worlds of work and education. According to a 2010 CBI survey, over half (56%) of employers believe the best thing they can do to prepare young people for the transition from school to working life is to provide opportunities for work experience through apprenticeships, tutorships and mentorships. However, the obstacles for collaborations are still important, including scepticism within academia towards creating links with business.
