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# THE EU EXPERIENCE OF PROVIDING GRADUATES WITH EMPLOYMENT: CONCLUSIONS FOR UKRAINE

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**Abstract.** *The article analyses the current trends in provision of higher education graduates with employment in the labour market in the European Union by looking into the inter-related issues: the modernization of higher education to the market economy needs, effective measures for providing higher education graduates with employment in the labour market in the European Union, the experience of the European Union. The research is based on theoretical literature review of the existing materials available on this problem. Mainly, they are the EU legal documents and researches of the European scholars. It summarizes the European experience of taking effective measures to provide employment for graduates with higher education. The research is based on a theoretical analysis of authentic sources: the EU strategies, reports to the European Commission and publications of European researchers. The concept of the study is based on the principles of comparative, systemic, holistic, cultural, interdisciplinary approaches, as well as pedagogical forecasting. The article concludes with recommendations for the Ukrainian Government, the institutions of higher education, participants of the educational process. The recommendations are developed to harmonize higher education interaction with the national labour market, taking into account the experience of the European Union on this issue.*

**Key words:** *employment; HE graduates; labour market; measures; recommendation; the EU experience.*

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education as a factor of economic development, social stability is an urgent need of the present life-being, and drawing attention to the problem of employment of higher education

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institutions graduates (HE graduates), a clear national position in this field will contribute to the transformation of Ukraine into a civilized democratic state, where a man is the highest value, and for his self-realization the optimal conditions have to be created. In this sense, it should be emphasized that the study of European experience of providing HE graduates with employment, in particular, the Member States of the European Union, will contribute to the development of the higher education system in Ukraine based on the study and adaptation of the EU constructive ideas to the national educational area.

In this article it is important to explore the EU experience in providing effective measures to ensure the HE graduates employment that can be useful for Ukrainian higher education policy. The article concludes with recommendations for policymakers on measures needed to improve the current state of play of the HE graduates employment in Ukraine.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the EU an effective HE graduates employment is a key question of the educational policy. This problem is being researched by many scientists who highlights such issues as: the transition from education to the labour market (W. Bartlett, M. Jacob, C. Macchiarelli, C. Mocanu, M. Uvalic, M. Ward-Warmedinger, F. Weiss, A. Zamfir); HE graduates employment in the labour market in the European Union (M. Alves, J. Hurst, S. Simoens, E. Stiwne, P. Tamkin); prospective development of interaction between higher education and the labour market in the European Union (E. de Weert); higher education interaction with the labour market (E. de Weert, M. Kleiner, A. Kottmann, M. Koumenta, St. Machin, S. McNally); coordination policy of higher education interaction with the labour market (A. Obadić, S. Porić, J. Ritzen, S. Siebert, K. Zimmermann) and others.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research is based on theoretical literature review of the existing materials available on this problem. Mainly, they are the EU legal documents and researches of the European scientists. The key resource related to our exploring is a thematic report by E. de Weert “Perspectives on Higher Education and the labour market”.

## **MAIN RESULTS**

In the European Union, the employment of higher education graduates is an important issue of the Europe 2020 Strategy and a priority of education policy, in particular in the following legal documents: London Communiqué Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World (2007); Bucharest Communiqué (2012); Yerevan Communiqué (2015), etc. Successful completion of this task is a key to the economic development of the European Union and the creation of a Europe of knowledge.

The European Union ensures conditions for employment of HE graduates at all levels: at the EU level and national level of the Member States, higher education systems, higher education institutions. The Member States of the European Union provide diverse measures, including the professionalization of degrees, vocational education and training, involvement of employers in the educational process.

According to E. de Weert professionalization of the Bachelor degree and employer engagement in educational process are quite effective measures for providing employment of HE graduates. The professionalization of educational degrees is an important measure in promoting the employment of graduates. This “professionalization” of a bachelor’s degree is promoted in France by adding professional components such as internships or practical classes to the educational program. The

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goal of training the bachelors is to form key skills and competences necessary for their professional activity. Such skills include personal skills, the ability to analyse practical problems, language skills, computer skills, knowledge of disciplinary and service aspects. In France, the distinction between professional and academic degrees is gradually disappearing (Weert, 2011: p. 31).

In Germany, the Ministry of Education has introduced a professional bachelor's degree as a new qualification for vocational continuing education (beruflichen Weiterbildung). Employers support the introduction of a professional bachelor's degree, which can guarantee graduates the opportunity to start a professional activity. Also, the term "professional" helps to distinguish this qualification from an academic bachelor's degree (Weert, 2011: p. 31).

Another effective measure for providing HE graduates employment is introduction of higher vocational education. Thus, Sweden has introduced advanced (higher) vocational education to fill the labour market with skilled workers. It is worth noting that in Sweden provides close cooperation between employers, universities and colleges while designing the content and organizing the training courses. As the result of this collaboration they introduce Advanced Vocational Education as a new form of vocational secondary vocational education designed to the needs of the labour market. Such courses, equivalent to secondary education, were organized through close collaboration between secondary education and higher education, adult education and private companies. Their goal is to provide a vocational education, where students spend one third of their working time in the workplace and have the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. Such courses are conducted for 5-6 years of training with the involvement of employers. There are two types of programs: Higher Education Vocational Degree – 1 year of study, Qualified Higher Education Degree – 2 years of study, corresponding to Associate Degree (Weert, 2011: p. 26-27).

In Netherlands, the experience of employers' involvement in the educational process at universities is quite effective. They take an active part in development of educational programs. Traditionally, employers are involved in such activities through a quality assurance and accreditation system, as well as the adaptation and updating of educational programs as new technologies are introduced in the professional fields. Professional bachelor's and master's programs are designed according to the needs of the labour market. The link between professional education programs and employers' demands is an urgent requirement for recognizing institutional profiles (Weert, 2011: p. 60).

The French Government has proposed a number of higher education reforms, where one of the central topics is the employment opportunities for graduates, especially bachelors. Reforms are changing the bachelor's educational program in two ways. First, the bachelor's degree programs are flexible, allowing students to easily change their course of study, and universities to change their courses to suit students' interests. Second, Bachelor's educational programs should provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to find a suitable job according to their level of qualification. In order to improve the employment of bachelor graduates, a mandatory component of bachelor education programs is to provide students with the opportunity to undergo internships or gain work experience while studying. Traditionally, in France, this stage of training is seen as an important means of facilitating adaptation in the professional environment. In addition, cooperation with companies contributes to the study and analysis of the professionals needs in continuing higher education, as well as the development of vocational education programs for bachelors (Weert, 2011: p. 36).

In order to upgrade the staffing potential, the Foundation degrees were launched in the UK in 2002 as a new qualification corresponding to Level 5 of the NQF. These programs combine academic training and on-the-job training that fosters student engagement with employers. The basic degree must be both academically and vocationally oriented, thus linking higher education and the field of work. Students who have received a basic degree as a full-time qualification have

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the opportunity to continue their education at the next qualification level – bachelor’s level. An important feature of the basic degree is to encourage and intensify the strategic partnership between universities and colleges (Weert, 2011: p. 32).

It is worth noting that the training of students in vocational-oriented basic degree programs is organised in collaboration with employers, which allows graduates to get a job in six months after graduation, mainly from those employers who took part in their training. In addition, among different measures of providing HEIs graduate employment E. de Weert highlights financial support or study leave from the employers.

*“77 per cent of the part-time students receive support from their employer, mostly in the form of study leave; 28 per cent receive financial support or get the tuition fees remunerated”* (Weert, 2011: p. 29).

The basic degree programs are professionally oriented and developed in collaboration with employers and the relevant Sector Skills Councils to train professionals in various fields.

Trends in introducing PhD training in accordance with the labour market demands are also an important step in improving their chances in the EU labour market. Typically, a PhD is designed to build a career in academic and other government research institutes, but PhD students are increasingly looking to the private sector to expand their employment opportunities. The question arises of the possibility of training such specialists for the wider labour market. This issue is related to their high degree of specialization: PhD students are considered to have very narrow education and training, lack of the key professional skills to be attractive to prospective employers, and have almost no employment opportunities outside the educational field.

As a result, doctoral programs have been modernized, where more attention is paid to expanding doctoral research and introducing employment skills in education programs. In France, for example, the state uses the results of labour market surveys to eliminate inconsistencies between doctoral programs and labour market requirements. To overcome the difficulties that PhD students face when entering the labour market, the French government has taken steps to fill the gap between business and doctoral programs. These activities were aimed at supporting PhD programs and facilitated their diversification, such as the expansion of doctoral programs (CIFRE) and the organization of training seminars aimed at increasing the chances of doctoral students to find employment in the labour market. The CIFRE doctoral programs are funded by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research in the framework of a public-private partnership and provide opportunities for academic researchers in various fields of science and business (Cifre, n.d.).

In Montenegro, the development of educational programs is also directly linked to the needs of the labour market, national strategic plans, and requirements for increasing the mobility of teachers and students, internationalization and enhancing the role of higher education. The distribution of educational programs is in line with the real needs of Montenegro’s economy and society, human resources and infrastructure. In order to achieve better compliance of educational programs with the needs of society, they analyse the current situation on the national labour market and set standards for optimizing their structure and content (Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro, 2016).

The above-mentioned European Union experience in providing graduates with employment provides an opportunity to summarize it. Among the program-targeted measures to provide graduates with employment are the professionalization of educational programs and degrees (organize education process in accordance with the labour market requirements). Professionalization of bachelors means: consistency of qualification of bachelor with the needs of the labour market; development of educational programs in cooperation with enterprises, employers and students; providing internships (Germany, France); involvement of employers in education and training (Netherlands); development of educational programs according to the needs of the labour market;

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the distribution of educational programs in accordance with real needs of the economy and society, human resources and infrastructure of the state (Montenegro). Professionalization of Master degree means: compliance of the master's programs with the requirements of the labour market; introduction of vocational oriented programs (professional Master programs) (Finland); participation of representatives of professional branches in the quality control of the process of preparation and evaluation of learning outcomes (Finland, Germany); assignment of professional qualifications (professional master's degree) to relevant professional organizations (Sweden, United Kingdom); private financing of special professional master's programs (Weiterbildungs Masters) (Germany). Preparing PhDs in accordance with the requirements of the labour market involves: modernization of doctoral research; introduction of market-oriented doctoral education programs (CIFRE) funded through public-private partnerships and guaranteeing employment for graduates (France); organization of joint projects between individuals and the university (Denmark, the Netherlands) (Mospan, 2018).

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the European experience on measures to promote employment of HE graduates makes it possible to draw such conclusions for Ukraine. To improve the transition of graduates from higher education to the labour market:

*the Government* should provide:

- regulatory and legal support for the interaction of higher education with the labour market;
- joint development of national qualifications frameworks with employers and government;
- quality assurance of higher education in accordance with the requirements of the labour market;
- support for graduates in the transition from higher education to the labour market;
- establishment of official graduate employment services;
- the labour market forecasting;
- monitoring graduates' employment;
- personnel planning of specialists with higher education;
- legal regulation by the government of professional employment;
- support for employee mobility;
- modernization of qualifications;
- increasing investment in the training of highly qualified personnel;
- recognition of the results of training received abroad;
- establishing cooperation between higher education institutions and employers;
- introduction of joint (state and employers) financing of training of highly qualified personnel;

*the higher education system* should provide:

- cooperation between universities, colleges and employers;
- expanding the interaction between academic and professional higher education;
- development of joint educational programs (between different universities);
- professionalization of educational degrees;

*higher education institutions* should establish:

- counselling centres for vocational guidance;
- provide consultations with employers and representatives of the labour market to ensure the quality of internal bodies of higher education institutions;
- survey of graduates; monitoring graduates' employment;
- development of vocational-oriented programs;

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- cooperation with companies in the implementation of joint training programs for specialists through internships with further employment;  
*the participants of the educational process* should ensure:
  - the spread of vocational training;
  - engaging employers in the educational process, internships, as well as in the development, adaptation and updating of educational programs;
  - interdisciplinary training.

We believe that the summarising of the EU experience on measures to promote HE graduates with employment presented in this article and suggested recommendations based on the EU experience on this issue will make an impact on improving the current state of play of HE graduates' employment in Ukraine.

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