

Tracer study of students completing their programme of studies during the academic year 2013/2014

Background

In an attempt to respond to the key challenges related to the economic crisis and demographic changes in societies, European education policies and programmes have been encouraging reforms that aim to improve the education systems' efficiency to decrease youth unemployment rates, and develop graduates' social capital, as well as their knowledge, skills and competences needed in a competitive labour market. With its general objective of providing support toward the achievement of the targets of the Europe 2020 strategy, the Erasmus + programme has furthermore specific objectives in the field of education and training, namely "to improve the level of key competences and skills with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market and their contribution to a cohesive society, in particular through increased opportunities for learning mobility and through strengthened cooperation between the world of education and training, and the world of work."¹ This is in line with the Bucharest Communiqué in 2012 ² which sheds the light on the need to develop the personal and professional skills of graduates through tighter cooperation between the students, the educational institutions and the employers.

The overall project

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education as the National Agency for the Erasmus+ KA3 project: Support to the implementation of EHEA Reforms, is undertaking a number of activities supporting the implementation of the Bologna Process in Malta with a strong involvement of the National Team of Bologna Experts.

The main rationale of these activities is to address the two central challenges for Malta's higher education system as identified in the Bologna implementation report (EACEA, 2012); the low higher education attainment and participation rates and the quality assurance system which is still consolidating.³ The project targets these two challenges through separate initiatives. In brief, the project consists of a graduate tracer survey, research on skills supply and demand in the Maltese labour market, and training sessions for higher education providers on the implementation of Bologna Process tools.

This information sheet focuses on the planned initiative of a graduate tracer study. The main objective of this study is to collect solid evidence about graduates' outcomes on the labour market to provide guidance for individuals and decision makers.

¹ European Commission (2013) 2014 Annual Work Programme for the Implementation of Erasmus+, the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.

² Ministers of Higher Education (2012) Making the Most of our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area, Bucharest Communiqué, EHEA Ministerial Conference, Bucharest

³ EACEA / Eurydice / Eurostat / Eurostudent (2012): The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report, Brussels, Eurydice, available online at: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/\(1\)/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf), last accessed 30th July 2015.

Research questions

The questionnaire aims to provide data on the following questions;

1. How do Maltese students' progress from compulsory education till their final degree?
2. In what kind of activities are students engaged in during their studies?
3. What are the labour market outcomes of different education pathways in terms of career prospects, unemployment rates, time to employment and employment conditions?
4. To what extent do graduates' study programmes and employment history affect their situation on the labour market?

Objectives

This survey is expected to yield valuable data on the social and economic conditions of graduates which will allow the following;

1. Evaluate the students' education and employment history to understand their needs and demands
2. Increase public awareness about the labour market outcomes of participating in further and higher education to assist individuals in their decision making
3. Advise stakeholders on the needs of a diverse student population on the one hand and the needs of the labour market on the other
4. Assess the impact of ongoing reforms of the education system in Malta
5. Provide a basis for future systematic and periodic graduate tracer surveys in Malta
6. Collect the feedback and assessment of graduates for consideration in decision making processes

Methodology

The survey is carried out as an online survey. It targets graduates from all licensed Further and Higher Education providers in Malta who completed their studies in 2014. All types and levels of degrees are included.

The questionnaire for the graduate tracer study has been designed based on existing tracer studies carried out by education providers locally as well as abroad. A consultation among Further and Higher Education Providers and the National Team of Bologna Experts is foreseen to ensure the relevance of the questionnaire.

The topics covered in the survey include:

1. The graduates' programme of study from post compulsory education until to date,
2. Activities during studies; student mobility, internships, student representation..
3. The graduates' retrospective assessments of their programme of study
4. The situation after graduation, including additional studies
5. The transition from education to employment and job search,
6. Graduates' employment history since their first paid employment until to date

7. Demographic and socio-economic background of graduates

Responses will be held in the strictest confidentiality and the respondents' identity will be kept anonymous as no identifying information will be used in the final report.

The data collection is foreseen in the second half of 2015 with findings to be presented by the end of Quarter 1 2016. A full report of the study will be published online.

Role of Further and Higher Education providers

The NCFHE requests the collaboration of all licensed Further and Higher Education providers in Malta to ensure that the survey covers all individuals, who graduated from a programme of study during the academic year 2013/2014.

In this regard, the NCFHE requests either the provision of contact details of these graduates to allow it to invite them directly to participate in this graduate tracer study or the regular and frequent dissemination by licensed Further and Higher Education providers of an email invitation to graduates in order to guarantee a high response rate.

Should you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Madonna Maroun at madonna.maroun@gov.mt or by phone on 23 810 146.