The Bologna Process and Employability: The Impact of Employability on Curricular Development

A Key Objective of Academic Studies and for Academic Institutions

Prof Dr Jürgen Kohler, Greifswald/Germany

O. Preface

0.1. Employability as a key feature of the Bologna Process – the situation

- „employability": key feature of the B.P. since 1999;

- but: neither B.P.'s only objective nor new nor specific for B.P.

0.2. Striving for „employability" – a „traditional" demand:

- Expectations of societies/states

- Expectations of individuals

0.3. H.E. striving for more than „employability"; also:

- relevance to society => inter alia, employability

- academic value/quality

- personal development

- democratic citizenship

0.4. B.P. and emphasis on „employability"

– reasons:

- enhancing the „European labour market"
- mobility
- become „the most advanced knowledge-based region"

– instruments:

- defining structural interfaces
  (bachelor-master-doctorate;) qualifications framework
- transparency (DS; ECTS)
- guaranteed recognition (Lisbon Convention)
  based on assured quality

0.5. The challenge:

From:

    B.P. aspiration to foster (pan-European/global?) employability

to:

    reality

via:

    tools provided in the B.P. documents (and those to come)

0.6. Survey of approach: questions and answers

- Considering the basics: terminology, validity of topic, and challenging conflicts (A)
- Defining the approach: scope, purpose, and method of investigation (B)
- Identifying the starting point: the human being vis-à-vis the labour market, incl. self-employment – relevant features and changes (C)
- Naming and correlating: synopsis of elements and trends characteristic of the labour market and of higher education (D)
- Consequences for programme structures derived from correlated labour market and higher education features – towards a qualification framework (E)
- Formulating theses (I): programmatic consequences to ensure employability – matching features of employability and academic studies (F)
- Formulating theses (II): programmatic consequences for institutional change – achieving employability in the world of academia (G)

A. Considering the Basics

A.1. Terminology, validity of topic, and challenging conflicts

- employability:
  - society/individual → usefulness of competences, judged by remuneration
  - self-employed and salaried
  - not only "professions"
  - not only concepts of "traditional" or "recognized" activities

- link to competiveness: concerning
  - the individual
  - institutions of HE

A.2. Reasons for „employability" as an objective: answers

- formalistic: B.P. demand

- political: societal expectations and neccessities

- essential: individual aspiration

- institutional: facing the demands of competition

- overall: sustainability

A.3. The Challenge: Conflicts – if any; or else: coincidences – and integration of objectives

- objectives:
  employability – personal value – academic quality

- conflicting objectives?:
  Identity of objectives via coincidence of key features

B. Defining the Approach towards „Employability": Scope, Purpose, and Method of Investigation

B.1. Overall

- What constitutes „employability" on an academic background?
- How can these constituents be transformed into an academic agenda?
- What effect and conditions can be identified concerning the governance set-up of HE institutions?

B.2. Exploring „employability" in the B.P. by

- describing features of the modern labour market (C)

- contextualizing these features (D):
  - o „vertically": holistic characteristics of the labour market
  - o „horizontally": correlated to academic features (objectives, skills, programmatic and didactic features)

- translate into study programme structures and programmatic action (E)

- condense into programmatic action (F) and institutional agenda (G)

C. The Human Being vis-a-vis the Labour Market and Society: Analysis of Relevant Features and Changes

- Activities highly differentiated, based on high level expertise, subject to accelerated change

- High expectations concerning social standards and ethics: participation and safeguarding social cohesion

- Internationalization and mobility of activities: „globalisation" and its tools

- Need for cooperation and gaining support/conviction

- New social patterns: „massification" of graduates, ageing societies, part-time and part-of-lifetime employment → maintaining and adjusting qualifications

- Trend towards more individuality, less typification

D. Naming and Correlating: Synopsis of Elements and Trends characteristic of the Labour Market and of H.E.

- Features of academia:
  objectives – skills – learning devices

- Correlating features of employability and of academia

- Table: „The Labour Market and Higher Education: Elements and Correlations" – how to read it

The Labour Market and Higher Education: Elements and Correlations

to be read horizontally

and vertically

	Labour Market (incl. Self-employment): Features, Requirements and Expectations	Academic Features: Objectives/Aims	Academic Features: Skills	Academia: Programmes and Didactics
1	highly developed, differentiated technical and social standards: subject – related expertise	knowledge of facts and their interdependence	structural and matter-of-fact orientation by learning a subject	to be developed subject to the specific characteristics of academic programmes; overall and detailed design and didactics targeted at defined accomplishment of aims and development of skills; internships linking academic and practical experience
2	competition and speed of change: innovative abilities; diversification	method – orientation; imagination; open-mindedness	research-approach learning: creativity; method, system and premises (and their alternatives)	
3	diversification and coherence of reality: comprehensive understanding	interdisciplinary approach	"windows" of choice, eligibles; "art of understanding" (history, philosophy, etc.)	
4	management of efficiency: cooperative and motivating approach; coordination	sharing and integrating expertise and talents	teamwork; social skills; organisational skills	
5	making matters work in a civil society: public understanding, transfer and interaction	expertise in presentation, adaptation, mediation	oral and written design of concepts; training human interaction (intellectual and emotional); media competence; political expertise	

E. Deriving consequences for structural Programme Features from correlated Labour Market and H.E. Features

E.1. Summary: identity of innovative and leadership qualities both in academia and in employability

E.2. „Academic" vs. „Professional" Programmes?

- terminology: (non-)academic professions?
- programme reality: academic profession-oriented programmes
- in B.P. terms: academic – non employable?
- in essence: identity of competences – innovation and leadership; identity of practice and (good) theory
- validity of binary concept/systems:
  - o research-based practice/employability
  - o research-driven practice/employability

E.3. The role and interpretion of „soft skills"; competencies:

- knowledge-related

- methodologic

- personal

- social

=> overlap with „employability" and with „academia":

Aims/expectations of the labour market („employability")	Soft skills	Aims/expectations of science and research („academic quality")
High task-related, subject-based expertise and innovative approach „Circular thinking": applying a principle to a case, and revision of principles in view of cases	Analytical competence Mastering methods Understanding system and synthesis Awareness of axioms, preconceived ideas, and of limits of validity of interpretations Ability to transfer principles to cases, i.e. ability to make judgments/decisions	Subject-related knowledge Knowledge of terminology, system, methodology Identification of individual case and rules/principles („Subsuming", making a judgment") Understanding axiomatic limitations Creativity, yet embedded in an orderly mindset
Job-sharing and cooperation, in work teams and in/with society	Social interaction, namely: –Ability to communicate, orally and in writing –Ability to work in teams –Leadership: integrity, motivation. Delegation, constructive preparedness for conflict –Project management Social acceptance: –Presentation –Moderation –Mediation	Identification of (academic) interfaces; being aware of limits of understanding due to axiomatic assumptions; Integration of expertise derived from different academic fields; Interdisciplinarity; Ensuring public understanding of academic findings/transfer of expertise into society
Global dimension of activities – at least: "European-ness"	Intercultural competence Foreign language(s)	Transnational reception of knowledge and its transfer
Maintaining quality, in particular by integrating and developing innovation	Ability to sustain independent life-long learning Self-motivation Ability to act independently	Permanent widening of insight and skills; research-oriented approach

E.4. Translating the correlation of „employability" and „academic quality" into the B.P. „tier system", incl.

- lifelong learning

- trainee programmes, learning on the job („informal learning")

- the role of „descriptor systems"

The Labour Market and Higher Education: Practical Trends and their Consequences for Structural Design and Programmatic Action

	Trends	Requirements	Action
I	ad D. 1 – 5: increasing demand	developing imagination, methodology/analysis; understanding the system of (an) acadmic field(s) and its (their) key facts; providing specialisation	first cycle: providing general academic features; elements of research-based learning and windows on specialist detail; second cycle: specialist, or academic cross-over
II	ad D. 2 and 3: Increasing significance ad D. 1: futility of striving for perfection	life-long learning (ability); short-cycle specialist courses	introducing a specialist second cycle; providing further courses throughout life
III	ad D. 2 and 3: academic subjects and spheres of work less specifically correlated; basic generalisation and added individualisation of required competence	all aspects above apply; in addition: transparency of study programmes and exams	all aspects above apply; in addition: core/basic programmes and differentiation; individual programmes; multiple "entrances" and "exits" and recognition of previous learning experience (ECTS etc); acceptance of training on the job and specific employer-oriented (joint) programmes
IV	ad D. 4 and 5: expertise-sharing and (team-work) interaction	social skills	integrating courses on project management, organisation, oral and written presentation, mediation (psychology/language/law and economics/politics)

Note (Reminder): Items referred to under chapter D, above:
1. highly developed technical and social standards: subject – related expertise
2. competition and speed of change: innovative abilities; diversification
3. diversification and coherence of reality: comprehensive understanding
4. management of efficiency: cooperative and motivating approach; coordination
5. making matters work in a civil society: public understanding, transfer and interaction

F. Theses I – Programmatic Consequences Relating to Employability of Academics: Matching Features of Employability and Academic Studies

F.1. Acknowledge expectation of students and society for study programmes to be valid academically and to be relevant to the Labour Market

F.2. Both demands can be met not by contrasting them, but by matching them properly

F.3. Both spheres largely coincide as for objectives, features, and virtues:

(a) encouraging and developing imagination and circumspect approach;

(b) working by means of hypothesis and verification;

(c) understanding, developing and employing method and system;

(d) acquiring and applying substantial knowledge;

(e) integrating traditional experience and novelty;

(f) developing a sense of social skills as to cooperation, organisation and motivation in project teams of diverse talents and expertise and in an open, democratic society.

F.4. Diversity of employment demands and personal career patterns require flexibility/transversal opportunities

F.5. Diversity and change cannot be met by first-degree study programmes which intend to „produce ready-mades":
call for (structured) training on the job and for special programmes

F.6. Flexibility of study programmes entails:

(a)   a multi-tier structure, including life-long learning and distant learning,

(b)   a multiplicity of entrances and exits, clear interfaces, incorporating practical and informal learning

F.7. Each study programme should be steered by viewing

(a) „fitness *of* purpose": objective-driven, validated; incl. (but not only) understanding of „employability"

(b) „fitness *for* purpose": each element of a study programme and ist compilation must be gauged against ist value as to contributing to the overall objectives

G. Theses II – Programmatic Consequences for Institutional Change: Achieving Employability in the World of Academia

G.1. Evaluation/Accreditation must consider the „quest for" and the „accomplishment of" employability

G.2. Key structural features are: multi-tier, modular system; proper analysis of the labour market; targeting learning objectives towards, inter alia, employability; ensure imagination, research experience, organizing minds and cooperation in teams

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G.3. „client orientation" is a virtue, when properly understood: maintaining academic niveau, access on grounds of potential, partnership and participation

G.4. In procedure, „client orientation" requires listening and participation, and permanent updating

G.5. „client orientation" requires and promotes mobility and transnationality

G.6. Competition between H.E.I.'s follows from openness of client-oriented societies. So H.E.I.'s must act flexibly, which requires autonomy.

G.7. H.E.I.'s find themselves in an „entrepreneureal role" – their institutional steering devices need to be adjusted accordingly