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### 3.5 DILEMMAS OF LABOUR MARKET NEEDS AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE HUNGARIAN CASE STUDY

**Summary:** What should the students be prepared for during university studies, and how the higher educational institutions should take into consideration the need of companies – these questions are returning issues in Hungary. As a result of technical development and globalization, the structure on the economy changes continuously. New businesses start, the importance of some of them improves or decreases, the actuality of different disciplines may be changed. Higher education is similar to a large aircraft carrier with a serious military potential, which cannot change its position immediately, and the impacts of the changes may be detected much later. In European higher education, problems started by the Bologna Process, which although opened new dimensions for renewal, but also required new 'navigation methods' or in some cases 'new ships'. Moreover, an important question may arise from this new system, namely, what is the role of higher education in these changing economic and social circumstances, and how can it meet these new requirements? How can be higher education adjusted to the changing needs of labour market, how much it should be adjusted to the practical needs of the potential employers – in this paper we try to find the answer for these questions. In addition, we show a practice-oriented Business Administration and Management BA course, with well-functioning connections with the labour market as a best practice; and we try to mark the possible contacts between higher education and the companies, to show the weaknesses, to find their reasons and to search for their solutions.

**Keywords:** higher education, educational structure, labour market

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A key element of economic growth and competitiveness of a country is to align the needs of the labour market and the companies with the structure of the educational system. In Hungary, one of the most problematic issues is that the graduates can hardly use their theoretical knowledge in their new working places, where mostly the practical knowledge is needed. What should the students be prepared for during university studies, and how the higher educational institutions should take into consideration the need of companies it means a permanent question for the involved parties.

Nowadays, the changes in the structure of the economy, the range of the products and their functions have been much accelerated in some industries, which effects may radiate into other industries. As a result of the explosive development in communication and IT, virtual enterprises may be developed; different operations and activities may be transacted via e-channels. Globalization and capital flow has affected the birth of new industries; the role of others has changed. In this situation, higher education is similar to a large aircraft carrier with a serious military potential, which cannot change its position immediately, and the impacts of the changes may be detected much later. Higher education should have to respond these changes immediately, but it is nearly impossible. Even if its reaction is immediate, its effects will appear delayed. The spread of new ideas and new methods will need longer periods.

Newby (2003) highlighted another important issue, namely that the most significant changes over the past years may be described by the movement from an elite to a mass system of higher education. The change may be measured well in terms of increasing student numbers.

In the past decade, a significant restructuring process could also be experienced in the training fields of higher education. While in the 1990ies only 10% of the students learned at

economic courses, nowadays the number of students at economic field increased nine times, which represents 23%. Similar to the domestic data, the same process can be observed in OECD countries, where the students' interest has the greatest share in economic subjects, law and social sciences.

An additional challenge – and a possibility for renewal – for European higher education was the introduction of the Bologna process. The Bologna Declaration set out the specified objectives: the adoption of a common framework of comparable degrees, the introduction of a three cycle system of higher education (bachelor/master/doctorate) relevant to the labour market, a compatible credit systems also covering lifelong learning activities, a European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods and the free mobility of students and teachers. Employability has been one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process from the very start. In the context of the Bologna Process, employability is defined as the ability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market. (Bologna Declaration, 1999)

The changes affected not only the content of knowledge, but also educational methods. A very important question may arise from the new system, namely, what is the role of higher education in these changing economic and social circumstances, and how can it meet these new requirements? How can be higher education adjusted to the changing needs of labour market, how much it should be adjusted to the practical needs of the potential employers? Our conviction is that the institution should consider several different objectives either at BA/BSc or MA/MSc courses. One of its tasks is to provide students with up to date, competitive and relevant knowledge, secondly, it should teach learning abilities. The importance of this second issue has increased by our changing world.

In our paper, we examined this diversified topic, and tried to find the good examples and solutions to coordinate the specific needs of the labour market with the output issues of higher education.

## **2. PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

One can hardly answer the question about connections between labour market needs and the structure of higher education. How the higher educational system (knowledge, training, courses) should be adjusted to the needs and requirements of labour market? How far should the business sector connect to education through practical training? The question is still hard to be answer.

One of the possible solutions, when the universities should teach students only for learning practices, so the students will be able to learn new knowledge, to be self-taught in the lifelong learning process. The companies and chambers has formulated another extreme solution, namely, the main task of universities to provide the business sector by well-trained graduates with high quality practical knowledge, which they can use immediately in their workplaces. Of course, both sides have their own right aspects, but the permanent and rapid changes of our time will make the answers uncertain. For example, what to do with graduates who are specialized for a specific knowledge of a certain industry after a possible collapse of the industry is question? How can they knowledge survive? What kind of job do they apply?

The situation is complicated either by the unclear connections between the parties. Who is the customer of higher educational institutions? Who supports education? ... the state and/or government? ... and/or companies? ... and/or students or their families? The requirements of these customers are different in time, content and character.

It could be objected that higher education is primarily about developing advanced understandings of worthwhile subject matter, not about employability. It means that graduate employability is supported by teaching approaches that take this set of factors into account.

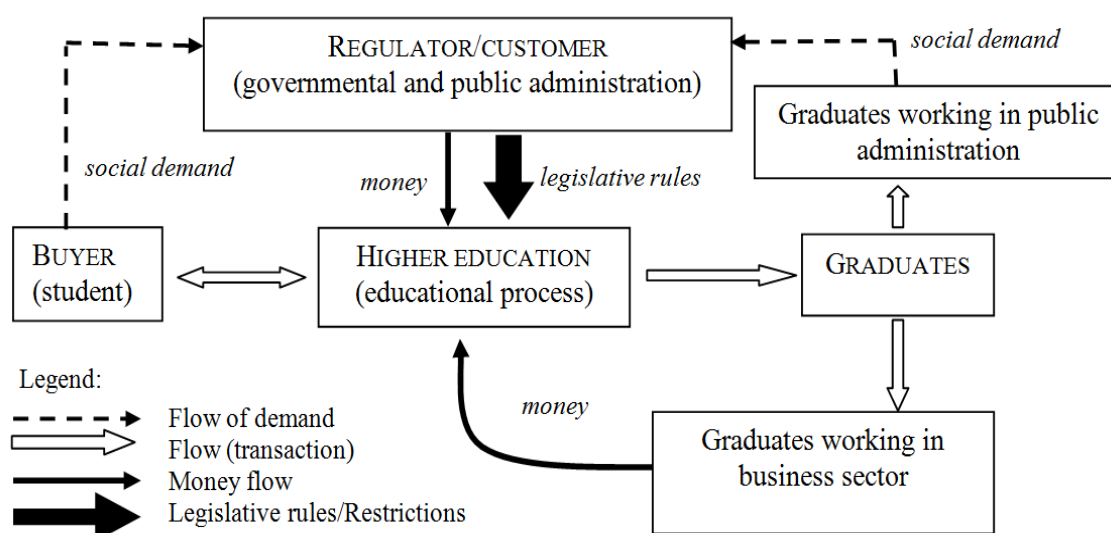
Whilst academic staff might reject employability as a curriculum goal, they are much more likely to accept that curriculum processes can improve the chances that students will gain in terms of employability. (Knight and Yorke, 2003)

According to Cichoblazinski (2010), there is a gap to be filled in between what a company can do and what the company must do for its competitiveness. This process needs acquiring new knowledge and needs an innovative behaviour of the educational sphere.

Human capital may be developed and improved through education and training process, but it may be improved through the connections between organizations (and of course business enterprises) and inside the organizations. This improvement has positive impacts on the individuals as well as on the functioning on the organization. (Bylok, 2010)

In the customer connection system (see Figure 1) the state or government acts as a regulator or a main customer, who determines the main inputs and outputs of education, as well as it controls its quality. The main interest of the state is to provide population with education and stimulate researches by as low supporting level as possible, which is financed from public money.

**Figure 1: Customer connections in higher education**



Source: own research

The question is how to align with the different needs of customers and the permanent changes of labour market. As a result of the scientific and technical progress different professions need higher knowledge level and skill, and need candidates with higher qualifications and more complex abilities.

English experts (Kippin and Wolf, 2010) differentiated the principles of the educational system in the UK according to the different educational stages. Each stage of education has a distinct institutional identity and a different set of underlying purposes, and there are different preconceptions about the value and/or benefits of education at each stage. Higher education has economic purposes (human capital development with immediate and measurable private and social returns) and human purposes (development of adults and their advancement because of learning). The mechanism of higher education may be under state provision for some groups of students, but non-state funded provision may also co-exist. The beneficiaries of higher education are students, workforce, employers and also wider society.

### 3. SITUATION ANALYSIS

In our globalised world, the technical progress has accelerated by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization process, the revolution of info-communication, the successful innovation process has also changed. According to Vizi (2007) (only the well developed and innovative population will be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Europe, as the introduction of new technologies or methods it may last for years. Slocinska (2010) emphasized, that in our time knowledge is the main factor which allows for new solutions, the recognition of appearing chances and threats and providing opportunities for development of enterprises. Knowledge is such a resource which does not have limits and which multiplies if shared and used. Those employees who manage their knowledge may be the most perfect component of the company's assets.

After the political transition, Hungarian economy changed for market economy, which brought several changes in the structure of different professions. New, entrepreneurial system was could be started, new technologies, methods, machineries and materials were introduced. The entrepreneurship brought new ideas and attitudes, the importance of business communication became a key issue for professionals. The quick technological development, the working possibilities abroad, the sharp competition in the market has basically changed the most requirements of the labour market. The employees should respond these changes by improving their knowledge, by lifelong learning methods. (Koszó et al., 2007)

According to Barakonyi (2004) higher education plays an increasingly important role in these circumstances, as in his opinion the key factor of competitiveness in the knowledge market is the quick and effective reaction to changes of the macro environment. Such training courses are needed and should be operated, which can satisfy the permanently changing needs of the labour market. The employee of our days shall be well trained and open-minded with very good abilities in problem solving. Barakonyi (2004) has defined the following three main trends of the present needs of labour market:

- The development of info-communication technology is so quick, that the obsolescence of knowledge is shorter, then the training period of a given course.
- The importance of the mobility of lecturers and students has increased by the globalization process; the labour market needs open-minded employees.
- The knowledge-based society needs graduated and highly qualified professionals.

Tímár (1996) has examined the connections between higher educational institutions and the labour market, and has stated that the most important determining factor of the well-operated labour market is the quality of the output of higher education. According to Magda (2007) basic (BA and BSc) courses shall be aligned with the requirements of the labour market by its high quality practical training methods, while the key issue of master (MA and MSc) courses is to provide with theoretical knowledge and to produce talented students for the research and development process.

Nevertheless, it should be stated, that some of the researchers and lecturers does not pay attention for improving the specialization and quality of master courses, or its adaptation for labour market needs and the possible ways of changing profession.

Company executives often complain that education is not adjusted to their requirements. This problem is quite extensive, as it is defined by both decision-makers and employers. In the employers' opinion, their requirements about the future employees and the needs of the labour market should be taken into consideration in higher education courses and other vocational courses. According to this party, the theoretical and practical knowledge and competences of the graduates is not in balance with the requirements, and the share and level of practical training at higher educational institutions is not appropriate.

The representatives of the chambers and the business sector have indicated for several years, that the number of training courses of the so-called trendy professions should be decreased. The government tries to meet these requirements by the change of state financed the number of students.

Several researches are connected to the examination of the job opportunities of graduates and the requirements for them. The labour market survey of Kiss (2008) confirmed that the practical knowledge became most important for the companies (language knowledge, practical competences, computer skills, etc), which is taught mostly at colleges. The theoretical knowledge given by the university courses has been widely criticised. The employers expect that the graduates would know how to work in an organization, what are the competences and knowledge for the given job, and what type of work he/she want to perform in the organization. The personal character and the working attitudes increased became issues that are more important. (Selmeczy, 2006) In addition to professional knowledge of the graduates, the importance of their competences for lifelong learning and their good language skills has also increased significantly. (Tóth and Várhalmi, 2010)

Researchers and professional experts define the oversupply of higher education in three groups. According to the first group, oversupply is harmful, and it is caused by the lack of state intervention. In the second groups' opinion, the increasing number of graduates does not make any problem, but there is a threat caused by the decreasing quality of the university degree. According to the third group, the further increase of the number of graduates is needed, and the leaving the professions has not considered a social problem in their point of view. (Tóth and Várhalmi, 2010)

According to Palócz (2001), the supply of the higher educational courses and the needs of the labour market differ fundamentally. In the structure of the labour market, there are conceptual differences, as the lack of practical knowledge is over-dimensioned by the employers, and it is explained by the defects of the output of higher education. It is not quite true, because higher education plays also an important role in higher-level vocational trainings, but it should be separated from basic and master courses, as their functions and objectives are very different. In the study of Selmeczy (2007) stated that the following requirements are preferred by the business sector in connection with the graduates: precise and independent work, good attitudes to teamwork, great workload, computer skills and theoretical knowledge of the given profession. However, most of these skills and knowledge may only develop through working experiences, which refers to a basic contradiction between the two parties. The connections between the business sector and the universities may be found at different levels, for example in the form of research support or company presentations and lectures, and are most typical for larger companies.

A special phenomenon of the labour market is that graduates with non-competitive degrees displace the employees with secondary education from those jobs, for which secondary education would be eligible, which is well represented by the employment data, as in the Hungarian labour market the share of unemployed with university or college degree is much lower. Best and medium-talented secondary school students are interested in BA and BSc courses, while poor-talented students prefer higher-level vocational training courses. The higher-level vocational training courses give more practical knowledge to the students, than universities and colleges, which can be well adapted to the needs of the business sector and the labour market.

On the contrary, the role of BA and BSc courses is to prepare students for lifelong learning abilities and to further studies at master courses, in order to be well-trained European citizens who can cope with the international requirements.

A present survey (INNOVA, 2011) has pointed on that the importance of the feedback has increased, i.e. the educational institutions ask for information about the needs of the business

sector, and they try to integrate these opinions into their educational system through the renewal of their curriculum and the development of new subjects.

In order to improve employment new educational background shall be established which helps the students to meet the real requirements of work in practice by new learning techniques and methods. The theoretical knowledge will improve the competences for lifelong learning, but in most of the jobs the practical knowledge is preferred, meanwhile, in practical training courses, the general knowledge level is lower and the improving of learning abilities is more or less missing.

The weakest link of the educational reform is the connections between education and business sector (Szabó, 2008), and according to her examinations the future employers cannot define concrete requirements in connection with the content of different training courses. The survey of Berde et al. (2006) resulted that 60% of the surveyed chambers and other professional organizations said that they had no appropriate information about the output quality of the new, two-phased educational system.

#### **4. INTRODUCTION OF A BEST PRACTICE – COOPERATION BETWEEN AN ECONOMIC BA COURSE AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR**

In this chapter, we introduce the *well-functioning connections* between the Business Administration and Management BA course of the Szent István University and the corporate sector and the direct ways of cooperation in the different fields of education. We also introduce the *results of our career tracking survey* carried out among the graduates of our Faculty. The results, which represent the opinion of our graduated students and their findings about the usefulness of our educational system, give us a direct feedback about our educational work.

The examined BA course is operated according to the principles of the Bologna system, which was introduced in the Hungarian higher education in 2006. The Business Administration and Management BA training course is the largest BA course of the Faculty with its approximately 900 students. When developing this course and adjusting to the Bologna system requirements, the intention of leaders of the course was to establish a practice-oriented training course with close cooperation with the corporate sector as well as to use the experiences of the former university system.

##### **4.1. THE DIRECT CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CORPORATE SECTOR AND THE EXAMINED BA COURSE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION**

The representatives of the corporate sector are connected to the Business Administration and Management BA course in many ways, for example as fellow lecturers, supervisors, members of final examination board, reviewers of theses, or the companies give a place for internship programmes or for research place of students' theses or works at students' scientific workshops.

In the field of several subjects, it is a general practice, that after giving the basic theoretical and practical knowledge, the representatives of the relevant business sector are invited for keeping lectures for the BA students. For example, in 'Project Management' subject, such professionals experts are invited to keep lectures who regularly manage large projects at their companies, having excellent theoretical and practical knowledge and experiences of this specific field and also has great performing skills. In the subject 'Basics of Insurance' our invited lecturer has managerial and practical skills who can perform the importance of insurances at company level, the management of insurance issues, and the significance of the management of the connections between the corporate sector and the

insurance companies to the students. In the subject 'Business Planning' the cooperation is performed at two levels. In the one hand, the students have to make teamwork presentations on their own business plans, which are reviewed not only by the lecturers, but also by professionals from the business sphere. On the other hand we have some invited lecturers for the specific lectures, for example on the bank lending aspects of business plan making the lecturer is a manager of a Hungarian bank, who can give the most up-to-date information in this topic. In 'Management of SMEs' subject, after the introduction of establishing and strategy making issues of SMEs and their life-cycle stages, a manager of a successful enterprise is invited to show the practical side of these development processes in the light of her/his own experiences. In 'Change Management' courses students have to make a case study on change management at a anonymous enterprise by the help of an external expert.

The involvement of the professionals of the corporate sector in higher education is very important, either for checking the usefulness and the actuality of the knowledge given by the lecturers, or as it gives an opportunity for the students to measure their own knowledge level, to meet the real practical importance of the topics they had to learn in theory. Moreover, it helps them to see these processes through an eye of a company. According to the results of surveying our students' opinion, they consider this kind of lectures given by of external experts very important and useful this.

In order to manage these lectures successfully, the topics of the lectures (the structure, the use of terms etc.) should be discussed between the supervisor of the subject, the lecturers and the external experts. In this way, the special topics performed by the experts will be not only interesting and practical for the students, but also they will fit into the curriculum of the given subject or course. Without this consultation process, the main objectives of this kind of education may be failed.

The students of the examined BA course may also get some experiences about the operation process of different enterprises in other different ways. In case of several subjects (Business Economics and Management, Logistics, Management of SMEs) they shall prepare compulsory or voluntary home essays, for which they shall visit a company and to collect data those are connected to the given subject. For example, in Business Economics and Management course, which is taught in the second semester, students shall compose a short essay about the ideal employee in economic fields by using the information collected from the job adverts in different economic papers. This work helps the students to meet the expectations of the labour market and the most important features of their future jobs even at the very beginning of their studies.

In the new-type Bologna system the students of the Business Administration and Management BA course shall accomplish a whole semester long (about 13-15 weeks) compulsory practical training programme (internship) in the 7<sup>th</sup> semester, where the work of the students is coordinated with close cooperation and the supervision of one of the lecturers and a representative of the given enterprise. The monitoring process of during the internship is very important from both sides, to check the students' knowledge, attitudes, and working abilities. The monitoring system of the internship has been established basing on the experiences of the former, university level system, in which the practical training programmes were limited only for summer holidays. According to these former experiences and the findings of the past three years of the BA system it may be stated that both the students and the external supervisors of the internship programme shall be prepared for these programmes, without providing appropriate information the training programmes may be unsuccessful or even failed.

The students are informed about the internship by a detailed written material, and in addition, the Head of the BA course keeps a lecture personally on the most important issues of the programme, about its requirements, objectives and conditions as well as the experiences of the

previous years. The basic criteria of the internship programme were established in accordance with the needs and requests of the companies.

After finishing the training programme, the students get an overall assessment of their internship programme. It is based upon two documents; the first is the compulsory summary of the internship programme written by the students, which is evaluated by one of the lecturers. The second is the report made by the external supervisors about their experiences and observations connected to the students' work.

During the time of the internship programme, there is a living connection between the university and the companies. The lecturer colleagues visit all companies and all students once during the programme. By these personal visits, we can get a direct feedback about the possible problems of the students, thus we can solve the problems in time. In these visits, the external supervisors of the internship programme are also asked about their additional requirements or their experiences, the working competences and the knowledge of the students in the form of a structured in-depth interview. The main findings of these visits show that the students make their jobs very seriously and diligently, according to their best knowledge.

The external supervisors at the different companies are generally very informative about the work of the students and they give several useful proposals and suggestions by which we can improve our educational work. After finishing the internship programme, the supervisors shall fill in an assessment sheet (by closed questions with a five-grade scale) and they are asked to fill in another assessment sheet by opened questions, to make an overall summary of their opinion about our students' work. Table 1 introduces the questions and the results of the assessment sheets in the past three years.

***Table 1: Assessment of the internship programs according to the external supervisors' opinion between 2009 and 2011***

<b>Aspects of assessment of the students</b>	<b>2009 (n=150)</b>	<b>2010 (n=170)</b>	<b>2011 (n=152)</b>
Working attitudes	4,77	4,81	4,82
Cooperation with colleagues	4,76	4,78	4,80
General quality of work	4,63	4,76	4,71
Adaptability	4,63	4,69	4,72
Evaluation of the work completed by the student	4,55	4,53	4,64
Relations with the company management	4,52	4,46	4,59
Oral communication skills	4,51	4,61	4,61
Written communication skills	4,48	4,59	4,63
General knowledge in connection with the work	4,41	4,40	4,50
Initiative skills	4,36	4,51	4,50
Communication with the customers	4,36	4,48	4,52
Self-sufficiency in decisions and working actions	4,24	4,38	4,37
Knowledge of the concerning industry	4,14	4,16	4,19
Language skills	3,76	4,05	3,83

Legend: 5-excellent, 4-good, 3-medium, 2-acceptable, 1-non-acceptable

Source: own research

The results of the assessment of the internship programmes (Table 1) show that the working attitude of the students, their cooperation with the colleagues, the quality of their work, their adaptability and oral communication skills were classified as excellent. The students' language skills, their information about the given industry, self-sufficiency in decision-making and working actions were considered medium or good by the external



supervisors. In the latter cases it should be remarked that the standard deviation of these values was very high. As it can be observed, the results of these assessments in most aspects have improved in the past years.

In summary, it can be stated, that companies are satisfied by the work of our students. Their knowledge about their future profession is good, and they can use this knowledge in practice as well. In the open questions some supervisors has remarked that at the very beginning of their internship programme some deficiencies could be observed in their specific knowledge, but the students looked after these problems. In some cases, the company has provided the students with specific practical information and techniques to compensate the lack of knowledge, or the students could get the practical skills during the internship. The experiences of the internship programmes confirm us that structure of the practice-oriented subjects in this BA course was formed properly and the students can adapt their knowledge well. The communication skills and the self-sufficiency of the students have improved significantly. However, the language knowledge – mostly in business English – of the students should be improved.

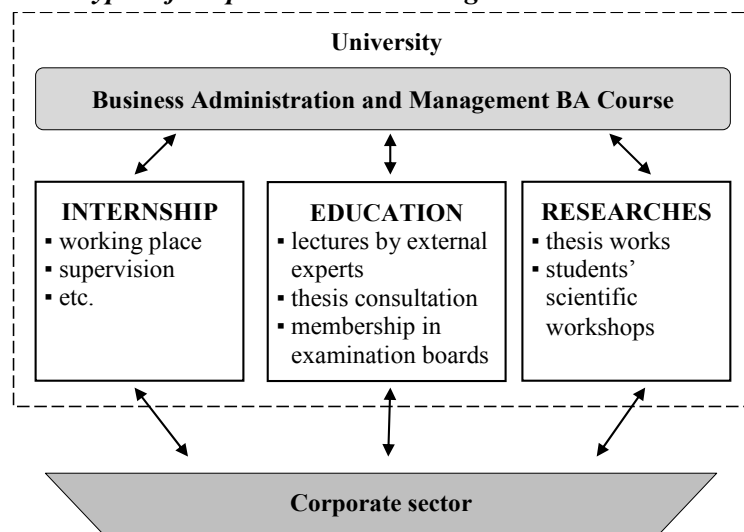
The assessment sheet of the practical training programme and the observations of the company visits are used not only for improving the structure of the internship, but also for the development and modification of our subjects and subject topics. Many students apply successfully for specific trainee programmes announced by different companies. In these cases, the companies often ask for a consultation with the universities and particularly the management of the courses about the time and the criteria of traineeship.

The companies may propose different topics for theses and essays for students' scientific workshop, which – after the approval of the Head of the BA course – are announced for the students. Moreover, the students may also propose specific topics supported by the concerned enterprise. This interactive work is very useful both for the companies and the students, as well as for the educational system of the BA course. Our experiences show that these specific topics give a more practice-oriented background for the students, and they are more conscious about their work. The knowledge they obtain through these connections is very up-to-date and may be used in practice. These connections generally end with the employment of the students at the given company or result a good reference for them in applying for a job. Nevertheless, it should be remarked, that – in order to avoid any problems deriving from too heavy or too easy topics – these specific topics should be assessed and approved by the Head of the BA course.

Another example for the good connections between the corporate sector and the examined BA course is the system of the final examination. Besides the own educational staff and the colleagues from other educational and research institutions, the representatives of the corporate sector are also invited to the final examination boards. 50-60% of the 7-10 members of the final examination boards are came from the corporate sector, mostly company leaders, who generally also take part in the assessment of the theses as external opponents. The members of the final examination boards can directly observe the theoretical and practical knowledge of the students. The experiences and the opinion of the committee members are discussed at the end of the final exams, and the head of the board fulfils a summarizing assessment sheet, which should be submitted to the head of the BA course. Of course, each members of the final examination board may fill in this form with their own remarks and opinion. This process was started at the Business Administration and Management BA course, and now it is carried out in each BA courses of the Faculty. The most important advantage of this system is the continuous feedback, which can help to get more information about the results of the educational work. The observations of the members may help either to implement the needed modifications in the final exam questions or to change the sequence or the structure of the concerning subject. The topics of the final exams are reviewed year by

year, and the opinion of the representatives of the corporate sector helps to improve the actuality of their content so they may be in accordance with both the educational structure and the needs of the labour market. We summarize the three main types of cooperation between the corporate sector and higher education.

**Figure 2: Three main types of cooperation between higher education and the corporate sector**



Source: own construction

The abovementioned examples are mostly depending on the personal connections of the lecturers or the former researches. The higher educational institutions make efforts to stabilize these connections by bilateral or multilateral agreements. Unfortunately, the realization of this process is sometimes very difficult, as it needs much work and time for both sides. In one hand, from the university's side it would be necessary to support consultations and tutorial activities equivalent with the lectures and seminars. On the other hand, at companies' side, the additional work of those colleagues, who are involved in higher education, should be supported even by extra salaries or specific allowances.

Unfortunately, the present economic situation does not improve this process. Without sufficient support this system could not be maintained at reasonable level, as it is not enough to base upon the commitment of the lecturers and the companies, therefore some supporting actions are needed at governmental level.

## 4.2. EXPERIENCES OF THE GRADUATES' CAREER TRACKING SURVEY

Conducting career tracking surveys is useful for universities, who would like to be informed about their graduated students: what were they experiences as job seekers, what were their strategies for their future career. It is also useful to explore the students' findings about the education in the light of their working experiences, for example, what knowledge should be given by the course, how can our students fulfil the requirements of the labour market, what fields should be strengthened or missing, or even what are those fields which are unnecessary. Students career surveys are widely used tools for the exploration of the students' opinion. The results of Cichoblazinski (2011) strengthened that the turbulent environment is one of the most important factors which determine the students' career plans for the future.

Graduate career tracking surveys has already been taken regularly at the examined BA course, but in 2011, it was carried out in a new, unified form, and – as a part of the quality controlling measurements of the Faculty – it covered all the other BA courses of our faculty. The questionnaires were sent by e-mail, and we get the anonymous answers back in printed form. The share of the evaluable questionnaires was 6,5%, between 5-10% in case of different

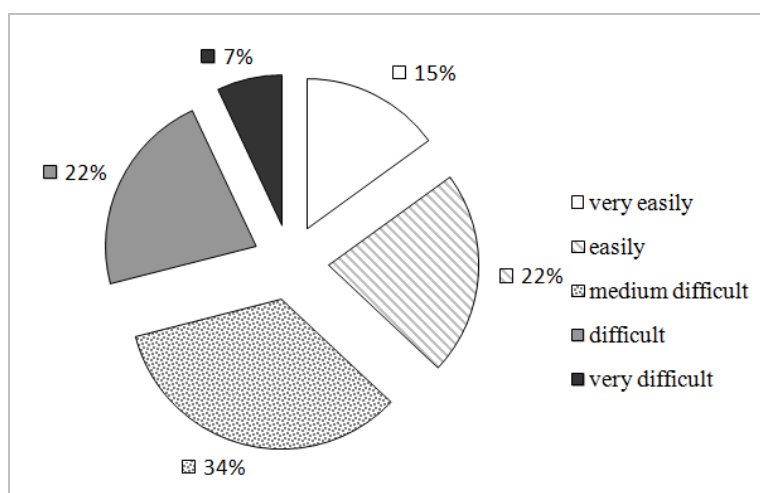
courses. The results of our survey may give adaptable answers for some questions and problems raised in the previous chapters of this paper.

One of our first questions was ‘Would you apply for the same faculty and the same course?’ A great share (81%) of our graduates would choose the same BA course according to their working experiences and the knowledge they obtained. 13% of them would choose the same Faculty, but another BA course, which means, 94% of our graduates were satisfied by the education they get at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences.

The assessment of the Faculty is basically good in our graduated students’ opinion. The highest grade was given to the following statement: ‘I am proud of our Faculty’ while the statement: ‘I ashamed to be a student of the Faculty’ got only 1,06 grade on the five scale, (value of standard deviation was 0,23). These answers suggest that the students can use their knowledge and those methods and techniques what they learned during their studies well both in their profession and in everyday work.

The level of the educational system may be characterized mostly with its acceptance by the employers, i.e. how quickly the graduated students were employed after their graduation and what kind of jobs did they get. Figure 3 illustrates the answers of this question of the survey. Although the unemployment rate in Hungary was 10,5% in the 3rd quarter of in 2011 and the negative impacts of the economic crisis are still unchanged, 70% of the respondents remarked application for possible jobs as very easy, easy or medium. It shows that their degree is competitive and well accepted in the labour market.

**Figure 3: How did you find a job after obtaining your degree?**



Source: own survey

79% of the respondents had a job, 15% continued their studies at MA or MSc courses, 3% were on maternity or childcare, and only 3% were unemployed. 80% of the employed worked in their own profession or at a very close field. 50% of the employed graduates started their work during the last months of their university studies; the other half got their job in four months after obtaining their degree. 10% of the students could find a job in connection with the compulsory internship programme. Nevertheless, it should be underlined, that these results are slightly distorting, as 76% of the respondents works in Budapest and the county seats, where one can more easily find a job than the country average.

We also examined the satisfaction of the graduates with their present jobs, by a five-grade scale (1 – not satisfied, 5 – maximum satisfaction), which resulted a 3,66 grade average (value of standard deviation was 0,87). More than two-third of the employed graduates do not plan changing their job in the future. 78% of the respondents plan further studies, which mean a very outstanding level. Most of them would like to obtain another university degree in order to be more competitive in the labour market.

40% of the respondents marked the usefulness of the knowledge they get at the BA courses very useful and well adaptable, while according to 47% of them marked this knowledge is medium adaptable.

The fields of knowledge and the subjects that were considered most useful can be well distinguished according to the different courses. For example in Human Resources BA course labour law, HR management issues and labour connections were regarded most important, in Business Administration and Management BA course business economics and management, finance, management and leadership and business communication were evaluated as most useful. According to the graduated students of Andragogy BA course, the most useful subjects and topics were psychology, labour market studies, and communication.

As a result of the experiences of this survey, in some courses the curriculum of some subjects proposed to be broadened and more practice-oriented. However, it should be stated – as it was mentioned in the first chapters of this paper – that it is a very difficult task for higher educational institutions to improve the practical knowledge of the students, particularly nowadays, where the needs of different working places are so different, wide, and changing continuously. Higher educational institutions are in very hard situation. In BA courses not only a well-built base should be made in different economic and general methodological subjects, which the students may use in their further studies, but also other, more specific knowledge should be submitted for the students. The situation is more complicated in different types of courses. There is a clear difference between students of full time courses and correspondent courses. The students of correspondent courses are generally have working experiences, and they more easily recognize the importance of practical knowledge, and for example, they pay more attention for choosing elective subjects.

The respondents of the career tracking survey would improve their knowledge on the following fields: business language, business finance, and they would like to get more information about practice, the working methods of companies, so they would like to get a more realistic view about the operation of the companies, and the different methods they use. Language studies make a special problem in education. In part-time (correspondent) courses there is no or not enough opportunity for language courses, while in state-financed or full-tuition (financed by the students) full time courses the institutions (universities) cannot or hardly can finance the special needs of such language courses, which really improve and maintain the active professional language knowledge of the students.

We also examined how the university studies could improve the different competences, which are needed in professional life and work. The statements should be valued at a five-grade scale. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Assessment of the competences and attitudes obtained during the studies at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the Szent István University, Gödöllő**

Statement	Average grade
Competences for further learning activities (using new knowledge, organizing my studies)	3,73
Professional communication competences (oral and written communication skills, self-expression skills)	3,57
Learning professional approach and attitudes	3,54
Adaptation to new situations, self-control	3,46

Source: own research

The graduates, after having their basic practical experiences, regarded the knowledge-level and further learning activities as most important, while connections and the university degree was marked only as medium according to the five-grade scale. According to the results of our

survey it may be stated, that the three main issues of the professional success in our graduates' opinion are practical approach, professional communication and good management of information. Language knowledge and team working competences were also marked important.

A very important result of this survey is that it makes an evaluable feedback about our faculty's educational system. In one of the questionnaires, there was a question about what are the strengths of our faculty in the students' opinion, and there was another question about which knowledge and competences they acquired during the university studies are considered as most useful in the work. A significant share of the respondents marked the same subjects and competences as the strengths of the faculty that was regarded as most useful in their professional life and working experiences.

Our faculty is in the middle of upper quartile in the rank of the Hungarian economic BA courses. The faculties in the upper quartile are most likely have such courses where the specificities and the general structure of education can be used successfully in practice and give such knowledge, which is competitive in the labour market and helps to get appropriate job opportunities for their graduated students.

The connections between the financing form (state-financed and full-tuition training), the type of trainings (full-time and part-time i.e. correspondence courses), and the different courses were examined by Chi-square tests and analysis of variances.

Another interesting result of the survey was that the students of full-tuition part-time (correspondent) training have assessed the usefulness of their studies by significantly better values than those of state-financed training courses. The reason of this situation may be that the part-time students at full-tuition training courses could use the knowledge they acquired during their studies immediately in practice in their working place.

There may be differences between the different courses of a given faculty, which should be taken into consideration by the institutions. For example, in the examined six BA courses, those students of the Business Administration and Management course who had the opportunity to learn some subjects in foreign languages, and they could learn business language intensively in two semesters, regarded their professional language knowledge significantly better.

In order to maintain the competitiveness and practice-oriented educational structure and to keep the good connections and close cooperation with the corporate sector, university courses shall establish and operate an effective quality assurance system, by which the different activities (e.g. education, research, practical training etc.) of the given course may be controlled, and the possible deviation from the original objective may be detected, so as the needed actions may be taken in time. The system should work in an interactive way, i.e. the experiences of the different parties (students, educational staff, and partners from the corporate sector) may be shared and submitted towards the management of the course.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Higher education should not satisfy all requirements of the changing needs of the business sector, because its main task is to provide general basic knowledge for the students, which will be a good base to acquire additional, mainly practical knowledge.

The management of higher educational institutions – in order to work successfully – should consider their stakeholders' needs, by keeping good relationship and have parallel discussions with both sides. This cooperation may help to keep the balance in the changing labour market and also may improve the quality of education. The Bologna system supports the building up of these relations, there are many ways to build cooperation between the business sphere and the system of higher education, but there are still many unused potential. Based on the results

of our case study it may be stated, that the relationship between corporate sector and universities are be multi-layered and both parties can use the feedbacks of the common work. In our time, the cost effective approach has been strengthened in the business sphere, which amplifies the need of quick returns which implies the need for “instant” labour force who can work well immediately. It can be successful in short terms, but it involves serious dangers in medium- and long-term periods. When only practical knowledge is considered most determinant, those key competences, the basic of knowledge may be omitted, which make the basement for further self-improvement, lifelong learning, synthesizing abilities etc. The balance between the short-term and long-term needs of the whole society should be kept even in crisis-time.

In order to accomplish their mission, universities should build up a system of planned and regular measurements by which they can use the feedback from the experiences of both the graduate students and the corporate sector. By this process, the experiences and the opinion of the stakeholders may be built in the further work, and it may improve the performance of the higher educational institutions.

The new educational system has brought new opportunities for connecting business sector and educational institutions. The efficiency of this cooperation may be improved by a more direct governmental support (e.g., tax allowances and cost compensation for companies which are involved in students’ internship programmes, programmes, supporting the contributions of new graduates, etc.).

In summary, in establishing and developing university courses and their curriculum efforts should be made to satisfy the needs of all the stakeholders. The knowledge and competences acquired during the studies shall meet the requirements of the students, the employers, the labour market, and, in addition, the needs of the whole society. As it was mentioned earlier, higher education cannot change its position immediately, it is more important to keep these goals in balance.

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