

## Curricula Development

- A core area of European educational reform (QF-EHEA + EQF)
- Definitions and understanding of the curricula is changing to emphasise: learner-centred pedagogies; increased attention to learning styles; innovative approaches to learning outcomes and assessment; collaborative curriculum development; transferable skills/employability agenda, etc.
- This is a problematic area of reform with particular difficulties associated with: the effective use of learning outcomes; introduction of transferable skills; new forms of assessment; staff resistance; academic autonomy, retraining costs, etc.
- The 2014 proposed revised *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) have implications for curriculum development. See the parts on the design and approval of programmes + the requirements associated with student-centred learning, teaching (pedagogy) and assessment, etc. The new ESG now await ratification by the Bologna Ministers in May 2015.
- Lots of free publications on curriculum development are available on the Internet - many published by individual universities highlighting their staff development approaches in the light of Bologna reforms. In addition see the 2011 BiH '*Curriculum Development Good Practice Guide*'.

## Employability Agenda

- Enhancing the academic, personal and professional development of learners to meet the changing needs of employers, the economy and society, employability has become an increasingly important issue in higher education.
- There are many definitions of employability. For the purpose of the Bologna Follow-up Group, employability is defined as '*the ability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market*'. Another useful definition is: '*a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy* ([HEA, 2012, PDF](#))'.
- The role of higher education in this context is to equip students with skills and attributes (knowledge, attitudes and behaviours) that individuals need in the workplace and that employers require, and to ensure that people have the opportunities to maintain or renew those skills and attributes throughout their working lives. At the end of any HE qualification, students will thus have an in-depth knowledge of their subject as well as generic employability skills.
- In the period 2012-2015, the Bologna working groups, ad-hoc working groups and networks, in addition to the specific tasks defined by their respective Terms of Reference, will aim through the policy recommendations developed at the end of their mandate to enhance employability, lifelong learning, transversal, innovative and entrepreneurial skills and stimulate student-centred learning of the graduates.
- However the '*employability agenda*' must not dominate the curriculum - it is only one important aspect of higher education. Higher education has many purposes in addition to preparation for the labour market including: preparation for life as an active citizen in a democratic society; personal development; development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base; cultural transmission, etc.
- Useful EC reports on employability are the:
  - 2013 'Student Advancement of Graduates Employability (SAGE ) project: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project\\_reports/documents/erasmus/CD/EMGR/era\\_mgr\\_518189\\_fr.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project_reports/documents/erasmus/CD/EMGR/era_mgr_518189_fr.pdf)
  - 2013 Final report, '*The Employability of Higher Education Graduates- the Employers' Perspective*': [http://www.delta.tudelft.nl/uploads/pdf/employabilitystudy\\_final.pdf](http://www.delta.tudelft.nl/uploads/pdf/employabilitystudy_final.pdf)

## Transferable skills

- Universities across the globe are focusing on producing highly skilled graduates who have the ability to perform well in rapidly evolving workplace situations - this has caused them to increasingly focus on transferable skills. These are an essential part of the employability agenda (above).

- Transferable skills can be defined as *skills developed in one situation, which can be transferred to another situation*. They are sometimes called generic, soft or key skills.
- They are necessary for effective performance, not only in the workplace and in postgraduate study but also in life in general. Examples of such skills include team working, autonomy/self-management, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, planning and time management, numeracy, etc. There is no agreed universal list of such skills.
- The Tuning Educational Structures in Europe has useful insights into transferable skills (called generic competences) see: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>
- A very useful EC publication is the 2011 '*Transferability of Skills Across Economic Sectors*', see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=6070&type=2&furtherPubS=no>

## Occupational Standards

- There is no European-wide agreement on the exact definition, use, nature, format and expression of National Occupational Standards (NOS)<sup>1</sup> or on what constitutes a 'vocational qualification'. Occupational standards can have several functions and their format and nature in relation to HE qualifications require careful consideration. The 2013 ETF publication, '*Improving vocational qualifications - vocational qualifications system reforms in ETF partner countries*' confirms that there are big differences in how occupational standards are described: see [http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Making\\_better\\_vocational\\_qualifications](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Making_better_vocational_qualifications)
- Often an occupational standard is a document that describes the knowledge, skills and understanding an individual needs to be competent at a particular job. They are statements of the standards of performance individuals must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace, together with specifications of the underpinning knowledge and understanding.
- Occupational standards can be used in different ways for example:
  - Establish/raise skills standards; to aid 'awarding bodies' in creating qualifications to train individuals for a job;
  - Help employers create a job description to recruit new staff or a training plan to develop their skills;
  - Allow individuals to research different types of jobs and match their skills/experience to those that are needed, etc.
  - Identify the main roles and responsibilities within a defined occupational area;
  - Capture defining occupational characteristics such as ethics, values and creativity.
- Employers and employee representatives normally agree Occupational Standards. They should include any statutory or legal obligations and health and safety regulations; they can also capture defining occupational characteristics such as ethics, values and creativity.
- The exact role, nature, function, control system, level of detail and relationship of occupational standards in BiH to the qualifications framework and quality assurance system(s) needs to be determined. A CEDEFOP study in 2009<sup>2</sup> indicated that occupational standards could take three forms as:
  - a. A comprehensive classification system whose primary function is supporting labour market monitoring;
  - b. Benchmarks for measuring occupational performance, either in a work context or in an educational context;
  - c. A way to describe the occupation targeted by a qualification. In this group they are developed in an integrated process with educational standards.
- It is useful to explore (i) the '*Roadmap for the Development of Occupational Standards in BiH*' and (ii) '*The Handbook: Development of occupational standards (2012)*'.<sup>3</sup> These projects produced a methodology and handbook for the development of BiH occupational standards.

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<sup>1</sup> National Occupational Standards are the same as 'occupational standards' except they are applied nationally.

<sup>2</sup> *The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards*, Cedefop panorama series, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2009. See: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5195\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5195_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> This was the product of a EU IPA '*Support to vocational education and training in BiH IV*'. The handbook focused on the occupational family 'Agriculture and food processing'.