

EUE-Net Agenda 2010-2013

1. Background of University Enterprise cooperation

University – Enterprise (U-E) cooperation has been an important topic at European level for several years now. The first explicit ideas have been formulated in 2004 by the new launched Erasmus Thematic Network called “EUI-Net – European University – Industry Network” continued from 2007 under the name “EUE-Net – European University Enterprise Network”. Other important initiatives and measures followed shortly at the level of the European Commission, such as the inclusion in the LLL programme of a special type of projects dealing with UE cooperation and the launch of the University – Business cooperation Forum in 2008.

In 2007 EUE-Net published a comprehensive agenda to be promoted at European level under the University – Enterprise cooperation, which has been at the origin of many projects and initiatives in various countries of Europe. Three focus areas have been defined targeting mainly the employability of students, namely (i) Practical placement of students, (ii) Career Development Offices and (iii) Entrepreneurship. Each topic has been undertaken by dedicated Networks that have been built within EUE-Net (Q-Planet and CDO-Net) or attracted in the partnership (JEUNE) in order to best tackle the challenges raised. Numerous LLL projects funded under U-E cooperation scheme started also to produce results by now and the first effects are visible, especially in the academic sector.

The above initiatives and projects offer today a new and much richer picture of the subject U-E cooperation compared to the moment of start in 2004. Much clear agenda's are defined as entire networks and consortia are intensively working to define and refine principles and develop methodological instruments and tools to enhance and intensify this cooperation for the benefit of the whole society. When looking at the whole picture, one could easily observe that the main target group of all U-E cooperation Erasmus initiatives is eventually the university student. Another important conclusion after this experience is nevertheless that *education at any level could not be properly planned and conducted unless cooperation with the world of work is well established.*

Career choice – is a decision of school pupils that is crucial for the Universities competition to attract students. The students choose the University looking at the prospect of future employers. Every student before choosing between an University or another makes a significant amount of study, surveys about the potential Universities but also for the possible workplaces after graduation, sometimes even taking into consideration the dynamics of the society evolution according to various forecasts available in the media or Internet. Therefore the student option for an University or another is linked not only on the University performance and prestige, but also integrates a dynamics depending on the cooperation that the respective U has with future potential employers. Thus the student is the most important link between the U and E although apparently at early stages it has nothing to do with this issue ! Although the student is part and seems belonging to the world of University, in fact the University studies could be regarded as just the journey of the student from the school towards the world of work. It is clear in this context that the Universities study programs need to take this reality into consideration, especially by integrating into curriculum a growing share of Student placements, in particular towards the end of the studies.

Thus the main driver for enterprises to engage in cooperation with Universities is to gather access to abundant highly qualified Human Resources right in the fields needed at the right time. The main asset of enterprises in the knowledge age (HR) is not directly traded between the “producer” (U) and the “user” (E) but by some intermediaries.

For the Universities, the main driver to engage in cooperation with Enterprises is Quality of education – employability/self-employability of graduates. To enhance employability, the Universities will needs to focus more on the DEMAND (P.R Baute, at the U-E Forum, Puerto del Cruz, Tenerife, 31 Oct 2008). Closer U-E cooperation is absolutely necessary to allow the Universities to identify the needs of Enterprises and implement them into the curriculum design. Nevertheless, the Universities response cycle is 3...5 year, so if the needs are identified for the present, they are already too old !

Therefore, in order to enable the Universities to ANTICIPATE the future needs of Enterprises, it is necessary that a PERMANENT OBSERVATORY is put in place such as to make possible statistical analyses and forecasts to be elaborated in the same manner the economical forecasts are done. In principle the information needed would be about the number and profile of the jobs that are needed by the E. Based on this information, geographical profiles of employment could be drawn up at a given time and also the evolution of the European employment profile could be traced in time, becoming a true European Barometer for employment.

An important added value of employability of graduates is – entrepreneurship. The main question to which the Universities should find an answer is: “What are the skills and how to educate&qualify an operational entrepreneur ?” EUE-Net debates in the last three years led to a first set of

- Skills:
 - Entrepreneurial attitude
 - Leadership and management
- How to educate & qualify:
 - Entrepreneurial teaching and learning in the U
 - Every student is on his/her own
 - Problem/Project Based Learning

Based on this analysis, the EUE-Net agenda for the period 2011-2014 includes three main directions: Student placements, Career development and Entrepreneurship.

2. Student placements: Consolidation of Q-PlaNet - i.e expanding the network and creating the European area o Quality Placements

Practical placement of students in enterprises is an important part of the current University curriculum, with direct influence on the employability of the future graduate, as it facilitates the first contacts of the student with the real life environment in a small scale professional exercise.

In the last three years, EUE-Net initiated a Network called Q-PlaNet (Quality Placements Network) which developed a standard for quality of student placements based on the concept of Reference Centers. This concept has been experimentally validated in three European countries and needs now to be generalized in Europe. EUE-Net will therefore next focus will thus to expand Q-PlaNet Network especially for Erasmus trans-national placements. To this aim, two main actions will be promoted:

(i) First, Erasmus Consortia and National Agencies will be invited to join the Network and to review and eventually adopt the Q-PlaNet standard. Dedicated national projects will also be supported by EUE-Net with expertise and networking wherever initiatives will raise with the aim of multiplying the Reference Centres that will adopt the Q-PlaNet standard.

(ii) Existing Reference Centres will be encouraged to label more and more enterprises so that an European area of Quality Placements (EQP) based on a “White List of Enterprises” labeled for quality placements to be created and made available for the Higher Education community. The principle of accessing EQP will be the adoption of the Q-PlaNet standard.

3. Career development offices: Consolidation of CDO-Net - i.e. expanding and structuring the network creation of the European Barometer for Employment

Career Development is nowadays present in all Member States under a form or another. Hundreds of CDOs are already working on a regional or national basis throughout Europe. By their nature, CDOs represent another “natural bridge” that has been established between the University and Enterprise sectors. Sometime, the CDOs are managed by students and have already a range of typical activities like maintaining job databases and organizing periodic job fairs, to name only a few. CDOs are successfully providing accompaniment to the students in their transition from the class-room to the enterprise. Usually a CDO database includes between 5000-50000 records related to students looking for a job and thousands of recruiting enterprises, with job profiles, requirements etc. EUE-Net has already created an European

network of CDOs in order to integrate the European dimension in this activity, especially to achieve an integrated European job database, but also to create a pan European forum for debates on the U-E cooperation best practice, problems, new initiatives etc. On the other hand, the opportunity to create a pan European job database by connecting and integrating the existing CDO databases is of an invaluable importance. It is anticipated that a network of CDOs will strongly increase the U-E communication and cooperation towards an enhanced employability. The federation of database at European level will allow having an European barometer of the employment demand, profiles, knowledge needs in Europe, information that is crucial for the Universities that urgently need to adapt their studies and curricula to the enterprises needs. The event CareerCon launched within EUE-Net in Vienna gathered the interest of numerous CDO's and many others are continuously joining the network. This Network expansion will continue in the next three years together with the efforts to offer Universities a new basis for curriculum development: millions of real job descriptions classified and analyzed instead of questionnaires for need analysis.

4. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is an important factor of growth in the world economy and this is the reason the European Commission makes all efforts to encourage its development. One important indicator of the level of entrepreneurship is the number of university graduates that intend to open their own business. According to some statistics it appears that only 40% of the European graduates admit this idea compared with approximately 60% in the USA. The main drawback seems to be the reluctance of European graduates to take risks very early in their career while the lack of initial funding is also an issue. As getting employed is nevertheless successful in a relatively high rate in European Union, the culture of entrepreneurship is maintained thus at a relative low level.

4. Development of Entrepreneurship in two directions:

4.1. International entrepreneurship

In the context of the globalised economy, and the rise of the knowledge economy in particular, companies are increasingly finding it necessary to turn to markets abroad in order to expand their businesses. While this option offers great opportunities, it also carries risks, and undertaking steps towards internationalisation may also present many obstacles. Some of these are particularly acute for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and include inter alia lack of appropriate skills and difficulties in establishing business contacts. At this point, Universities could open their traditional international networks towards SME's and facilitate international connections for business. This has been already demonstrated within EUE-Net by the PEP measure and will be encouraged in the future.

4.2. Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship via training leadership

Within EUE-Net debates it has been revealed that Leadership is a very important skill for entrepreneurship, especially in building joint ventures and generating entrepreneurial actions. Nevertheless, it can be seen that nowadays the training and education of leaders is often reduced at management methods and instruments. New training for leaders should be offered such as to develop the competence of taking initiative and managing risks that are the main barriers for entrepreneurial output. Within EUE-Net a new project will be promoted with the aim of development of Leadership education in Europe.

5. Conclusions

The intense activity within the scope of University – Enterprise cooperation revealed a huge potential for improvement of education of all levels. In the context of Lisbon agenda and the emergence of the knowledge based society, it is clear that an European approach for University – Enterprise cooperation is strongly needed. Establishing a framework to benefit from this synergy is a priority for EUE-Net. Several layers of activity have been identified above following some initial reflections and debates within EUE-Ne, requiring a concerted action in all European member and candidate states. Some of the proposed activities



European University
Enterprise Network

could no more be considered as improvements but urgent *corrections* needed in a society that advances very quickly. The establishment of a permanent structure and infrastructure to undertake these activities at European level at least in complement for the existing instruments seems to be an urgent necessity.

However, establishing a framework to undertake these activities needs a systematic and focused approach, first to design and establish the appropriate distributed infrastructure, involve the appropriate actors, derive plans of activities and then implement the strategy. This constitutes the EUE-Net agenda for the following period, that will be reviewed in the annual EUE-Net Conferences – the next one on 19-21 May 2011 in Reykjavik, Iceland.