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RELEVANCE OF THE HEGESCO PROJECT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS:  
**CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT –  
HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES (Document 5)**

**1. General findings from the large scale graduate survey of the HEGESCO project –  
*Competencies and Early Labour Market Careers of Higher Education Graduates*<sup>1</sup>**

***Follow your interest and talent***

Although graduates from some fields of study (such as Humanities and Agriculture and veterinary) find it more difficult to enter the labour market and acquire a good job, this by no means indicates that these fields of study should be avoided. For all fields of study we find that two thirds (or more) of the graduates are satisfied with their job, and this also applies to the two fields mentioned (Humanities and Agriculture and veterinary studies). Moreover, we find only small differences between fields of study in the percentages of graduates who regret the choice of their program. In our view, students should primarily follow their own interest and talent when choosing a study program in higher education. Information about labour market prospects can of course play a secondary role in helping students choose between programmes they are equally interested in.

***Acquire relevant experience outside higher education***

Our findings show that acquiring work experience that is related to the study program is beneficial for the later labour outcomes. The same holds for holding a position in student or other voluntary organisations (e.g. chair, committee member) or spending time abroad for study and/or work. These experiences have a positive effect on the development of skills and serve as a signal to future employers. Although many students are engaged in non-relevant work to cover the costs of living, it is far better to focus on relevant work experience. Non-relevant work does not pay off in the long run, and – if it leads to an extension of the study duration - it might be better to rely on study loans.

**2. Which are the most important competences of graduates to function well in the workplace and society?**

In the graduates' survey in NCMS we have found evidence that in tertiary level jobs the most required competences are ability to use computers and the internet, ability to use time efficiently, ability to work productively with others, ability to make your meaning clear to others and ability to perform well under pressure. When entering the world of work graduates in tertiary level jobs in

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<sup>1</sup> This section is taken from the summary on the large scale graduate survey of the HEGESCO project – *Competencies and Early Labour Market Careers of Higher Education Graduates*, HEGESCO PROJECT 2009, (eds. Allen & Velden).

NCMS lack mastery of own field or discipline, ability to perform well under pressure, ability to use time efficiently, ability to negotiate effectively and ability to assert authority.

In the survey among HE institutions and employers in NCMS, the most stressed competences were a) mastery and field specific knowledge, b) competences related to learning with the major distinctive subcategories identified as self learning and continuous learning, c) personal proficiency with major distinctive subcategories identified as team work and time management, d) communication skills with foreign language as the main distinctive subcategory and ICT skills. One of the most crucial questions identified during the field work was related to question on how to balance and integrate professional expertise (mastery and field specific knowledge) with other general competences.

### **3. How can competences be best developed in HE and the world of work? Finding from survey among HE institutions**

In the survey among HE institutions and employers in NCMS, we found an indication that HE should consider and balance between various types of teaching and training, among which the most stressed were lectures and classes, discussions/meetings, active learning, laboratory classes, team work, assignments and evaluation, presentations, project work, conferences and seminars, practice classes and practical training and internships. In addition, HE institutions should consider constant improvements to programme creation, forge links with employers, stress lectures with practitioners, implement research projects, strengthen and institutionalise their informal contacts with the world of work and involve practitioners in final theses and common bodies and further develop career centres.

### **4. What the students (future, current and graduates) should consider about their HE study in order to strengthen their employability potential?**

***Consider which fields of study are the most demanding and be prepared to study hard, since it will pay off.***

***Think about which fields of study employers are the most familiar with, as this might be beneficial when looking for the first job.***

***Gather information on the modes of teaching (e.g. team work, project-based learning, research projects ...) and integration of the relevant work experience, as these factors strengthen competences. Be aware that different modes of teaching and learning have different effects competences – some examples are given below (see the full Hegesco report for more details).***

***Which mode of teaching and learning has the greatest impact on the ability to use time efficiently?*** [These are 'facts and practical knowledge', 'lectures' and 'multiple choice exams'.]

***Which mode of teaching and learning has the greatest impact of the ability to work productively with others?*** [These are 'group assignments' and 'facts and practical knowledge' and 'oral presentations by students'.]

***Which mode of teaching and learning has the greatest impact of the ability to perform well under pressure?*** [These are 'theories and paradigms', 'teacher as a source of information' and 'oral presentations by students'.]

***Which mode of teaching and learning has the greatest impact on the mastery of one's own field or discipline?*** [These are 'written assignments', 'facts and practical knowledge' and 'lectures'.]

***Carefully plan internships, work placements and relevant work experiences to be better prepared for a future career. Also consider investing extra work above that which is required to pass exams.***

***If possible try to gather international experiences via Erasmus study exchange programmes and build an international network.***

***When looking for the first job, consider short and long term prospects. Consider which job characteristic is most influential in the extent to which graduates' knowledge and skills are utilised in their current work?***