



TRACK I: EDUCATION – Mission and Profile of Professional Higher Education

Employers' Role in PHE – is employer involvement essential to qualify as PHE?

The Implication of Employers Improves the Attractiveness of the Training and Career Success of students

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Taking into account the trends and needs of the labour market

Last month Medef¹ launched a new tool: the Employment and Skills Trend Monitoring Observatory. This tool is based on a quarterly survey of a panel of 40,000 companies on their recruiting needs, workforce challenges and the expected skills of future employees.

Our objective is to enhance the performance of the labour market and to analyse the inadequacy noticed daily between the needs formulated by companies in terms of jobs, recruitments, skills and the situation experienced by numerous desperate job-seekers, very often young people, because they cannot find a fulfilling job or because they're not able to describe what skills they would be able to bring to the company.

The first available data, which will soon be the subject of a specific web site, show that 28 % of responding companies tried to hire new collaborators in the last quarter of 2012 (which represents a potential volume of one million jobs on the labour market). Among them 4 % gave up during the recruitment process (that is approximately a loss of 73,000 jobs in adjusted terms which is mainly related to the difficulty of finding a candidate with the necessary skills for the position). Finally, 22 % of recruiting operations (i.e. 342,002 jobs) were faced with difficulties essentially connected to the skills expected from the candidates (insufficient technical knowledge or know-how on the one hand), but also more subjective

¹ The French Business Confederation

elements as the image of the business, the localization and also the attractiveness of the company.

In spite of the rather unfavourable current situation, we find persistent strains on employment in numerous sectors, and more particularly in SME's (small and medium-sized enterprises). It is often difficult to find candidates endowed with the skills required to occupy a job or candidates willing to enter a training leading to a qualification. It reveals a certain inadequacy between career information, study programmes and the needs of the economy. I remind you that unemployment affects more than 22 % of 15 to 24 years old in France and that youth employment is the priority of the Government.

The challenge of skills is crucial for companies: maintaining their competitiveness and their position on the French territory is also achieved thanks to the quality of the available skills. The difficulty in recruiting can drive companies to refuse orders, even to relocate some of their activities.

However, at a time of globalised competition in terms of knowledge, we must encourage and organise synergies between the various stakeholders. With regards to training and research, procedures could become inter-operational. What we need is more effort to develop innovation. By innovation I mean training in all its forms, and research.

French Higher Education has long suffered from problems in terms of attractiveness, but it also generates inequalities and failure, which make the system inefficient overall and slow down our societal evolutions.

Employability as one mission of Higher Education Institutions

Recently, I took part in the presentation of the conclusions of the annual conference of the CIRUISEF (which includes the major Francophone scientific research universities) during which her president, Mrs Granier Zarli, a researcher and dean of faculty, explained that 90 % of the students integrating a first year of scientific Bachelor degree fit in the term of their program into one of 12 business sectors identified as the industry, the chemistry, 9 % choose to become secondary school teachers and 1 % to become university lecturers. And she concluded in saying that all the study programmes are designed and directed only for these 1 %.

Academics themselves recognize that this is now creating issues and that it's necessary to start deep transformations in the programmes offered to balance the double purpose of research and employability of Higher Education.

First condition: Design study programmes in terms of Learning Outcomes (Bologna process)

The MEDEF (and its predecessor the CNPF) is in favour of a competence-based approach, which allows the construction of diplomas in terms of learning outcomes. This naturally includes knowledge and disciplinary skills as well as generic skills (or transferrable skills) as the capacity of learning to learn and the capacity of adapting to a new environment. It is a question, no more and no less, of operating the principles of Tuning.

We have numerous representatives within National Councils who undertake to improve the design process of study programmes to take in a definition in terms of skills and learning outcomes. Last year, that undertaking was completed for the university general B-level degrees. We started to transcribe this level into reference table. It's in progress for DUT and engineering schools. The description of the skills which are acquired by the graduate of the award is important for its visibility: it is also important for the career information of young people, to lend meaning to the learning process, and for the employers.

Beyond that, we have to pay specific attention to the fact that the systems of evaluation and certification also include the learning outcomes because they guarantee the contents and the quality of the diploma. Now, it is still not the case and in spite of the description of diplomas in terms of skills, evaluation often deals with assessing the acquired knowledge only. It conditions the credibility of the process. We do not try to encourage pure « adequacism » and the immediate adaptation of the young person to the job. Everything is a matter of balance. The quality of the acquired knowledge just as much as the capacity to update it or to combine it with related knowledge is essential to insure professional success whatever the level of the job occupied or the obtained diploma. That is why, we also encourage any experimental initiative, training through research in particular. The Higher Education system has to strengthen the link between innovation and life long education.

2nd Condition: the dialogue between academics and professionals must be enhanced; business leaders must be associated to the definition of study programmes

The current reform of Higher Education and Research in France has placed competitiveness and technological transfers as a priority. That it is about knowledge transfer or about innovation transfers; it supposes that academic managers create a dialogue opportunity and a professional environment that listens and takes better consideration of the reality of the labour market. It is the reason why during Higher Education and Research Conferences, the MEDEF has developed several proposals which aim at strengthening the cooperation between institutions of Higher Education and economic sectors. For any given award, we advocate the systematization of a dialogue between academics and professionals upstream of the process of curriculum definition in order to take into account the priority criterion of employability in the ministerial process of accreditation.

For every new diploma, this dialogue has to become established concretely in the *Development Councils* which already exist in France in apprenticeship, and will not only allow to verify the adequacy of the Learning Outcomes to the reality of jobs, but also to prepare the periods of traineeships.

One of our other propositions is to improve the modularisation of every Higher Education qualification to provide for the capitalization of experience of knowledge and skills throughout the professional life in order to facilitate career changes and enhance study opportunities without losing previous gains.

Another important component of the current reform is the transfer of several duties to the Regions and in particular, to develop Regional maps of vocational training but also the regional plans for Higher Education and Research. In France, the importance of national diplomas and the centralised management of the educational system historically has so far left little space for the local initiatives.

Our organization is mainly national with local delegations, which are able to conduct a local dialogue. Some professional Higher Education degrees can already contain adapted local contents (BTS, DUT) but on the whole, engineering work can be defined nationally. The future evolutions are going to allow supporting projects of economic development in the territories so the regional institutions will also have to set up a real process of dialogue with the representatives of companies to establish their project of opening or closing vocational courses. It will be advisable to cross reference the data from Regional Careers Observatories on job uses in professional sectors with the capacities of the higher education institutions. Regionalisation could have many consequences for the Education system in terms of quantity and contents and we have to think the regulation process.

Today, from our point of view, institutions of Higher Education and Universities in particular, face a challenge that is less one of urging all students to gain the highest possible diploma, than to propose an offer of training that allows them to develop their skills gained through life and work experience.

Several professional sectors have already introduced, in partnership with Higher Education Institutions and Universities, real courses of training and plans for the accreditation of prior learning and experience through the validation of non-formal and informal learning within the framework of the social advancement of their employees.

Indeed, France has an organization that clearly separates initial training of the young student and the training of adults. Higher Education Institutions, including establishments offering vocational training, have to open more to life long education. In the sector of IT engineering for example, technology and development evolve very fast. Initial training cannot only be theoretical but has to allow "cross-fertilization" between life long learning and initial training. If engineering schools and IUT's (University Institutes of Technology) are able to identify the modules of training that they can offer to companies, they are still not endowed

however with a "commercial" approach towards companies and in particular SME's (small and medium-sized enterprise).

Yet, the partnership approach, the employability of graduates, the reputation of the courses and establishments all feed on this strategy of permanent dialogue.

Increase the professionalization of training and generic competencies to guarantee employability

Another issue which has its importance in increasing the cooperation between companies and Universities, is the professionalization of training: establishing traineeships and apprenticeship, developing entrepreneurship and generic skills. Regarding apprenticeship, we attempt to verify that dual training doesn't consist in a close succession of two periods in the training centre and in the company but that it applies the pedagogy appropriate to combine and exploit at best both learning instances. This conditions for example the accreditation of engineers' training by apprenticeship. We also verify the modalities of evaluation and apprentice follow-up in companies. The most important for us is the synergies created and the efficiency of learning.

As regards the development of entrepreneurship skills (which we call « enterprising mind »), we support all the initiatives which aim at enhancing the creative capacity and entrepreneurship skills of learners such as junior enterprises in higher education and « Mini-enterprises » in secondary schools.

The MEDEF has actively accompanied the development of the Student Entrepreneurship Poles (PEE) in France since 2010 and the generalization of the modules of entrepreneurship training for students. We also took part in the writing of competency framework of skills for "Entrepreneurship and Enterprising Spirit" for the students registered in Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorates. It's a guide for the action of teachers. The development of entrepreneurship has officially been a part of educational objectives in the Bachelor's degree since its renovation in August, 2011 as well as in the National Curricula for IUT's (University Institutes of Technology).

We advocate that this policy should be expanded to all courses and we're very satisfied that the President of the French Republic confirmed that such was his policy last week.

We also helped a lot in the developing of 2 competency frameworks for additional skills which aim at improving entry and progression in the labour market, as well as at perfecting the acquisition of a culture of entrepreneurship: a framework on economic intelligence and a 3rd one on the knowledge of the enterprise. In this case, businesses are involved in conferences or modules of training, often with the help of business managers. Through these 3 components (entrepreneurship, economic intelligence and knowledge of the enterprise), it seems to us important to equip students with the standards that govern professional life.

Professionals from the businesses must be involved in career information

Finally, last point and not the least important : the career information of young people. Job prospects linked to study programmes are important criteria for young people and their families in the process of career guidance. The statistics of the employability of graduates must be made systematic for all courses. The statistics will have to be made public and access to them facilitated.

So, it is advisable to make sure that the students have access to statistics containing in particular indicators of success in the examinations and awards, ahead of their enrolment into a higher degree.

Furthermore, the process of career guidance will have to integrate some knowledge of the economic sectors and business as soon as possible. Every day, managers open their enterprises to study visits and to trainees, welcome classes, recruit apprentices, participate in study programmes, accompany establishments in their strategic reflection and advise public authorities.

To answer the initial question of this workshop, the attractiveness of PHE is conditioned by the closeness of the education system with the professional sectors. The value of a diploma invariably comes true on the labour market. We share the same interest in this efficiency drive.

More generally, a partnership strengthened with the professional environment has to make allowance for:

- For higher education: better to take into account the needs of the economy. It is one of its missions in France.
- To accompany students in their study choices more effectively,
- To enhance the effectiveness of the authorities of consultation, evaluation and certification,
- To maintain the quality and employability for the diplomas of Professional Higher education
- To optimize resources for apprenticeships,
- To bring to a successful conclusion the initiatives for the definition of competence frameworks and Diploma Supplements.
- To strengthen the actions in favour of innovation, in particular for SME's (small and medium-sized enterprise).