

## Advancing education in Germany and Finland for better employability in 21<sup>st</sup> century

*Anzelika Krastina, MEd., Senior Lecturer, School of Northern Well-being and Services, Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Finland)*

*Oliver Fuchs, HBO-BE, CE bc. Vice Dean, Head of International Faculty Office, Aachen University of Applied Sciences (Germany)*

Key words: future education, employability, resilience skills, international mobility

According to World Economic Forum's competitiveness rankings, Finland and Germany are considered among the most competitive and efficient economies globally (The Global Competitiveness Report 2019). Economic and welfare state success story of Finland and Germany is largely the result of the education, training, research and development activities in these countries. It is understood at the governmental level, that human capital and education is a fundamental factor of economic development. However, in the era of fourth industrial revolution, rapid technological change and global competition education sector, including higher education, is facing new challenges.

### Employability as a central responsibility of universities

One of the main responsibilities of universities, besides teaching and research, is to prepare the students for the job market. Employability is becoming a central goal of universities. Right now, the universities have to adapt their curricula and ways of teaching to prepare the students not only for their first job but also for their second, third and fourth job. This way they can cope with their responsibilities for the students and for society. Teaching for the past and for the presence is no longer an option.

It is clear today that the job market is changing rapidly (influenced by e.g. digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data) and unlimited contracts or a job for lifetime will be the absolute exception. This means that today's students will need to become creative, innovative and fast adapting stakeholders to secure the personal employability throughout the working life.

Internationalization is another key aspect that will be essential for future generations as services, trade and even teams within the company will become more international. Without international communication skills and of course linguistic proficiency it will be impossible to go beyond becoming an administrator.

The universities have to provide the students with a toolbox that they need to be employable for their entire working life. This toolbox consists of various different tools that will secure the students a place in the front row of competitive international job markets.

Important tools in this context are “Innovation and creativity”, “Entrepreneurship”, “International Project Management”, “Personality development”, “Intercultural communication”, “Data Analysis” and “General political education”.

### Practice oriented education trends in Germany and Finland

Up to now universities in different countries have started to adapt their teaching methods towards modern, digital and multisensual ways. Universities in Finland adopt innovative approach in education. Other countries that have historically been strong in education like Germany are still in search of new ways in education, even in their technical education where they are supposed to be still leading. Still the combination of modern teaching and future-proof contents is often operated by single teachers at very few institutions even though this should be widespread to secure that the students of today will be creative leaders of tomorrow.

In Germany the big trend in modern education is combining university studies with either vocational training or part-time working in a company, so called Dual Study Programmes which usually guarantee the students a job after graduating. Of course, this means very hands on, practical education but curricula and teaching methods still are almost the same as 50 years ago and require an upgrade. For the universities the big advantage of these programmes are that they get strong links with local companies and at the same time educate highly motivated, good students that have been recruited by the companies. These strong links with companies are becoming more and more important for the universities as they can be sources for additional funding. At the same time the students exercise the theoretical knowledge acquired at university right away in the company which sets them apart from other students and strengthens their employability for the future. Germany’s well-established system of apprenticeships and continuing professional development, which is closely linked to research and industry, is seen as the key ingredient of the economic success. (Germany in the Eyes of the World 2017)

In Finland university education trend is connected with the term “työelämäläheisyys”, which can be translated as a proximity to working life and which has become a backbone of the curricula development and selection of teaching and learning methods and general education philosophy aiming to integrate the education and worklife in every possible education event. It can take a form of a practical training period, solving actual problem given by the company and in collaboration with the company, work in variety of real life connected projects, fieldwork, research and innovation work. Real life semester projects are integrated with the semester theme and courses providing needed competencies. The theory that students learn during their studies is applied in practical projects and business development cases. Entrepreneurship and own business development can become also a part of the studies and actual project cases can be incorporated into personal business development process already during the studies.

### **International mobility to develop resilience skills**

In order to succeed in the labour market, students need to acquire transversal skills such as problem-solving, critical and innovative thinking, intra-personal skills, cross-cultural communication and many other skills. In addition to that among one of the most important skill, that is rarely incorporated in the competence-based learning, is the skill of a resilience, that can be crucial in the work life of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Recently released Global Skills Gap in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century report (Employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century 2018) reflects graduate skills gaps and mismatched expectations by employers. According to the report greatest skill gap is adaptability and resilience. As referred by the employers, it is the most important skill to adapt and be resilient in modern world of rapid transformation of business models and industries.

Resilience is a human capacity to face, overcome and ultimately be strengthened by life adversities and challenges. People are not born with this skill and it can be trained in different learning situations and events.

One of the best toolboxes available for the students in the partner universities across Europe, including Lapland UAS and Aachen UAS, is a wide range of possibilities for a mobility to another county for studies or practical training period. Student and staff exchange are considered to be mainly valuable for the internationalisation of the institutions, while the development of resilience skills is in particular valuable for the students, that will boost their future employability. During the exchange period students learn to adopt to other cultures,

which even within one continent, such as Europe, can differ a lot from that in the home country. Being out of the comfort zone, away from all well-known at the home country, students learn to solve variety of problems, including finding accommodation, solving commuting challenges, integrating into new study environment and creating a new network of friends and colleagues. To solve the problems, they have to work on self-efficacy, ability to reach out to others, manage emotions, to deal with the stress, change and uncertainty.

When students from Finland study a semester in Germany, they have an opportunity to adjust to the German business culture in practice. While the matter of punctuality in Germany is similar to Finland, where Germans are rather 15 minutes early than one minute late and most of the time it will not be a challenge for the Finnish students, on the other hand they will be surprised about the power distance, which compared to Finland is high in Germany. Especially in the business world, but also at universities hierarchical orders still are very important. Professors and teachers are addressed with correct title and never with their given name. In meetings short small talk is appreciated but Germans are very goal oriented and straightforward. They usually stick to rules and regulations and in Germany there are lots of them. Hints, irony, sarcasm and humour are not part of professional communication in Germany and they avoid exaggerations and excessive compliments.

For German students coming to study in Finland it will be difficult to adopt to the lack of hierarchy as the power distance is low and therefore they will be surprised that students call teachers often just by their first names, but it does not mean that there is less respect for the teacher. Another observation is connected with the fact that German students are still used to the exams at the end of their semesters, while in Finnish universities of applied sciences and in particular in Lapland UAS the examination is taking the form of assignments or task portfolios, which are evaluated and graded for the final course mark. German students will learn that Finnish people are warm hearted when you get to know them, but in the beginning one needs to “break the ice” as Finns rarely enter into conversation with strangers and the lack of small talk might lead to some confusions. On the other hand, German students usually find many commonalities with Finns and know how to build a business based on trust and direct talk in negotiations.

In conclusion we would like to mention that the future is about more innovative partnerships to help our students to advance and succeed in the future worklife. Isolation of single universities in a world of complex learning systems will seriously limit potential and talents of students. Therefore, there is a need for internationalisation and strong partnership building in

order to create synergies and find new ways to enhance professional and cultural experiences of our students. In this regard Lapland UAS and Aachen UAS are broadening the cooperation beyond just traditional mobility programmes, by developing double degree programme, working on joint study module delivery starting with the pilot course on innovations and entrepreneurship, as well as developing ideas for RDI activities and joint EU project application on the subjects related to the impact entrepreneurship in the context of sustainable development issues. Many more future potential cooperation possibilities can be explored as there is common vision between partner universities regarding increasing university responsibility in preparing graduates for global jobs.

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