

Market Labour Expectations and Higher Education: Opposing Trends

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Abstract

Objectives

The objective of our research is to reveal the employment-related competences required by the labour market from recent graduates and to expose how current trends in higher education live up to these expectations.

Methods

Our research team at BCCB has studied companies providing work placement for final-year undergraduates focusing on their employment-related expectations from interns. Mentors (N=685) receiving interns were asked to mark the five most important skills and competences they expected to find in career starters on a list comprising 15 items and one open question.

Furthermore, we have examined whether certain groups of employers show any divergence regarding their expectations from entrants to the labour market. Using a hierarchical cluster analysis (hierarchical clustering) we searched for groups of employers that significantly differed from one another regarding their expectations.

Results

Our findings indicate that social competences are among the most important expectations within each group of employers, while individual groups highlight different social competences as the most crucial characteristics expected from graduates.

Conclusions

The findings of our research, however, reveal the existing contradictions between current trends in higher education and labour market expectations. Due to the continuously shrinking financial sources of the already *poor education* in Hungary, the number of students participating in study groups has been increasing. In higher education the lack of sufficient financial sources and the phenomenon of *mass education* have led to the preference of frontal teaching methods as opposed to the more expensive, practical form of teaching in small groups enabling students to improve their social competences. On the other hand, latest trends reflect the spread of *defensive education* with a preference of quantitative evaluation. These tendencies reward personal features that are mainly characteristic of female students such as hard work, tolerance for monotony, discipline, conformity and compliance with tasks (*pink education*).

Keywords: higher education, expectations of labour market, social competencies, opposing trends

1. Objectives

According to general belief, employers expect professional work experience and language skills from graduates at the start of their career. Relevant research, however, highlights the fact that in addition to the above mentioned requirements, social competences also play a crucial role in the successful transition of final-year undergraduates from higher education to the labour market (Fábri, 2001; Gyimóthy, 2008; Kiss, 2008; Major, Németh, Csekő, 2006; Varga, 2006)

The main objective of our research is to reveal the employment-related competences required by the labour market from recent graduates and to expose how current trends in higher education live up to these expectations.

2. Methods

Our research team at Budapest College of Communication and Business has studied companies providing work placement for final-year undergraduates focusing on their employment-related expectations from interns. Mentors (N=685) receiving interns were asked to mark the five most important skills and competences they expected to find in career starters on a list comprising 15 items and one open question.

Furthermore, we have examined whether certain groups of employers show any divergence regarding their expectations from entrants to the labour market. Using a hierarchical cluster analysis (hierarchical clustering) we searched for groups of employers that significantly differed from one another regarding their expectations. In the course of our research we analysed groups that included at least 10 respondents.

3. Results

3.1 Employers' expectations from graduates

The top five expectations marked by employers (*see Figure 1*) include the so-called social competences: communications skills: 67.9%; problem-solving skills: 61.7%; aptitude for teamwork: 54.7%; creativity: 46% and independence: 45%. Professional skills seem to lag a bit behind with the importance of language skills mentioned by 41.9% of respondents; learning skills mentioned by 32.3% and professional knowledge by 31.3%. In the order of preferences, professional skills are followed by further social skills of medium importance for employers such as assertiveness: 26.5%; flexibility: 22.9%; initiative: 20.8%; ambition: 20.8% and adaptability: 17.1%. One of the most astonishing findings of our survey is the fact that only 8 per cent of employers mentioned to expect any work experience from graduates.

3.2 Employer cluster analysis

In the course of our cluster analysis we have identified four groups that show significant difference regarding their expectations from graduates (*Figure 2*).

Companies in the first group are active in the area of commerce, finances, insurance, public administration and the light industry. The members of this seemingly varied group all employed their interns in the commerce, marketing, administrative and human resources departments of their companies, hence the name of the cluster: *business economy and management*.

The second cluster called *advertising and media* group includes advertising and media agencies.

The third group includes real estate agencies, television and film producing companies, businesses focusing on communication as well as public-oriented, non-profit organizations. Therefore, this cluster is called *human service* group.

The last cluster is called the *press* group since it includes radio stations as well as printed and online media companies.

The *business economy and management* group included 177 companies, the *advertising and media* group had 51 members while the *human service* and the *press* cluster included 171 and 68 businesses respectively. According to the hierarchical clustering, the areas of heavy industry, education and culture tended to show several dissimilarities with the activities of the previously mentioned clusters relating to their expectations from graduates, therefore they were excluded from further analysis. Subsequently, we have analysed responses received from a total of 467 companies.

Table 1 and *Figure 3* present what percentage of companies mentioned certain features among their top five expectations from graduates.

As shown in *Table 1* and *Figure 3*, the business economy and management cluster underlines the problem-solving and communications skills of freshmen as being crucial. More than 72% of respondents mark these skills among their top five expectations. Members of this group also welcome graduates who are able and ready to work in teams (56%).

The members of the *advertising and media* cluster also highlight the importance of adequate communications skills (71.4%). Nevertheless, teamwork is of higher significance (67.3%) than problem-solving skills (59.2%). Creativity (49%) and independence (40%) have also made their way into the top five but ranking lower than expected.

Within the human service organizations cluster, companies mention several social competences at a frequency of above 50%: communications skills (72.9%), problem-solving skills (60%), aptitude for teamwork (54.1%), independence (53.5%), although in addition to creativity, the good command of languages (48.8%) also appears as the first non-social skill.

In contrast with the above clusters but in line with our previous expectations, companies in the press cluster tend to rank creativity as first (67.2%) instead of communications skills (62.7%). They have also emphasized the role of problem-solving skills (55.2%) and independence (55.2%).

In summary, our findings indicate that social competences are among the most important expectations within each group of employers, while individual groups highlight different social competences as the most crucial characteristics expected from graduates.

3.3 Conclusion

The so-called social skills are among the most important requirements demanded from recent graduates by employers. Our research has not found evidence supporting the general view that graduates are primarily expected to have work experience, professional knowledge and competences.

The findings of our research, however, reveal the existing contradictions between current trends in higher education and labour market expectations.

The internationally approved, most efficient method to improve social skills is the so-called training technique which is a special way of learning in groups of 8-16 persons. Its main specific characteristic is the individual experience that participants receive by taking part in a highly intensive (morning-to-evening) programme.

Due to the continuously shrinking financial sources of the already *poor education* in Hungary, the number of students participating in study groups has been increasing. In 2010 the Ministry of Education regulated the number of maximum students in a class by setting a limit of 26 persons in elementary education and 35 persons for older students with the option to expand that ceiling by up to 20%.

In higher education the lack of sufficient financial sources and the phenomenon of *mass education* (Bálint, 2006; Lukács 2001) have led to the preference of frontal teaching methods as opposed to the more expensive, practical form of teaching in small groups enabling students to improve their social competences.

On the other hand, latest trends reflect the spread of *defensive education* with a preference of quantitative evaluation (tests, memorization tasks, reproduction), although the assessment of social skills can only take place by using qualitative methods (empathy, assertion, speech techniques, creativity etc.). In Hungarian higher education institutions oral exams are less frequently used while written tests are becoming increasingly popular.

Furthermore, these tendencies reward personal features that are mainly characteristic of female (Németh, 1999) students such as hard work, tolerance for monotony, discipline, conformity and compliance with tasks (*pink education*). On the other hand, they do not support the appearance and evaluation of such male characteristics as competitiveness, diverge thinking, creativity, teamwork, problem resolution). The percentage of girls taking part in higher education has been increasing since the beginning of the 1990s. At present the proportion of girl and boy students in Hungary is 42:58.

The social competence-related requirements of employers expose the deficiencies of national education. This statement is also supported by the fact that in the course of planning and devising their own training system, multinational companies choose to apply the training technique. In Hungary a whole industry has been established to offer a wide of range skills development trainings to various businesses.

Bearing these findings in mind, Budapest College of Communication and Business pays special attention to the improvement of social skills. Our students take part in a two-day-training in each semester. The trainings aim at the improvement of personality effectiveness, communications skills, presentation skills, negotiating skills and techniques to handle the media.

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Figures, tables

Table 1. Employment-related expectations from graduates. What percentage of companies included these features among their top five requirements (N=503)

Field of company/organization activities	Frequencies	communication skills	problem-solving skills	aptitude for teamwork	independence	creativity	language skills	learning skills	professional knowledge	assertiveness	flexibility	initiative	ambition	adaptability	mobility	work experience	humble attitude towards work and high work ethics	outstanding study record
commerce	73	69,0	71,8	49,3	43,7	35,2	43,7	23,9	40,8	32,4	26,8	14,1	23,9	18,3	8,5	7,0	1,4	0,0
TV, film production	63	69,8	65,1	61,9	52,4	49,2	38,1	38,1	15,9	34,9	28,6	20,6	17,5	14,3	6,3	19,0	1,6	1,6
communication	56	70,9	56,4	49,1	60,0	43,6	56,4	29,1	41,8	23,6	20,0	23,6	18,2	18,2	5,5	3,6	1,8	0,0
printed press	37	61,1	50,0	27,8	52,8	63,9	44,4	38,9	22,2	8,3	22,2	38,9	30,6	11,1	11,1	11,1	0,0	0,0
public administration	30	76,7	76,7	70,0	33,3	30,0	26,7	40,0	36,7	16,7	16,7	26,7	26,7	26,7	3,3	13,3	0,0	0,0
finances, insurance	30	83,3	70,0	60,0	36,7	36,7	40,0	33,3	46,7	43,3	26,7	23,3	26,7	16,7	3,3	0,0	0,0	0,0
education, culture	26	68,0	60,0	80,0	44,0	64,0	32,0	48,0	24,0	36,0	4,0	4,0	8,0	36,0	4,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
advertising agencies	26	72,0	48,0	68,0	48,0	48,0	36,0	12,0	40,0	28,0	16,0	20,0	16,0	20,0	8,0	20,0	4,0	0,0
media agencies	25	70,8	70,8	66,7	33,3	50,0	20,8	20,8	29,2	29,2	16,7	29,2	8,3	4,2	4,2	4,2	0,0	0,0
light industry	22	54,5	77,3	54,5	36,4	27,3	40,9	54,5	22,7	9,1	22,7	18,2	22,7	22,7	9,1	0,0	0,0	0,0
tourism, catering	22	77,3	68,2	59,1	31,8	36,4	54,5	40,9	54,5	18,2	27,3	9,1	18,2	18,2	9,1	9,1	0,0	0,0
online media	21	57,1	71,4	57,1	61,9	61,9	38,1	38,1	42,9	4,8	28,6	19,0	19,0	9,5	0,0	4,8	0,0	4,8
business management counselling	20	80,0	50,0	50,0	45,0	55,0	50,0	25,0	45,0	30,0	40,0	35,0	30,0	25,0	20,0	0,0	0,0	5,0
real estate	16	81,3	68,8	50,0	50,0	56,3	50,0	25,0	12,5	50,0	31,3	25,0	25,0	12,5	18,8	18,8	0,0	0,0
non-profit, public service	16	75,0	56,3	50,0	50,0	50,0	62,5	37,5	18,8	25,0	37,5	43,8	12,5	25,0	25,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
heavy industry	10	80,0	70,0	80,0	70,0	40,0	70,0	50,0	50,0	30,0	30,0	0,0	20,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	0,0	0,0
radio	10	80,0	40,0	60,0	50,0	90,0	40,0	20,0	30,0	0,0	30,0	20,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Total	503	70,5	62,8	57,1	46,8	45,6	44,3	33,3	33,3	27,6	24,0	21,2	20,5	18,1	8,4	8,0	0,7	0,5

Table 2. Mark the five most important requirements your company/organization expect graduates to have (N=467)

Field of company/organization activities	press	advertising-media	human service	business economy and management	Total
communication skills	62,7	71,4	72,9	72,0	70,9
problem-solving skills	55,2	59,2	60,0	72,6	64,0
aptitude for teamwork	41,8	67,3	54,1	56,6	54,7
independence	55,2	40,8	53,5	38,3	46,6
creativity	67,2	49,0	48,8	33,7	45,8
language skills	41,8	28,6	48,8	41,1	42,7
learning skills	29,9	34,7	27,6	40,6	33,6
professional knowledge	35,8	16,3	32,4	34,3	31,9
assertiveness	6,0	28,6	31,2	26,9	25,6
flexibility	25,4	16,3	28,2	24,6	25,2
initiative	29,9	24,5	25,9	17,7	23,2
ambition	23,9	12,2	19,4	24,0	21,0
adaptability	10,4	12,2	17,6	20,0	16,9
work experience	7,5	12,2	10,0	6,3	8,5
mobility	7,5	6,1	10,6	6,9	8,2
humble attitude towards work and high work e	0,0	2,0	1,2	0,6	0,9
outstanding study record	1,5	0,0	1,2	0,0	0,7
N	68	51	171	177	467

Figure 1. Mark the five most important requirements your company/organization expect graduates to have (N=685)

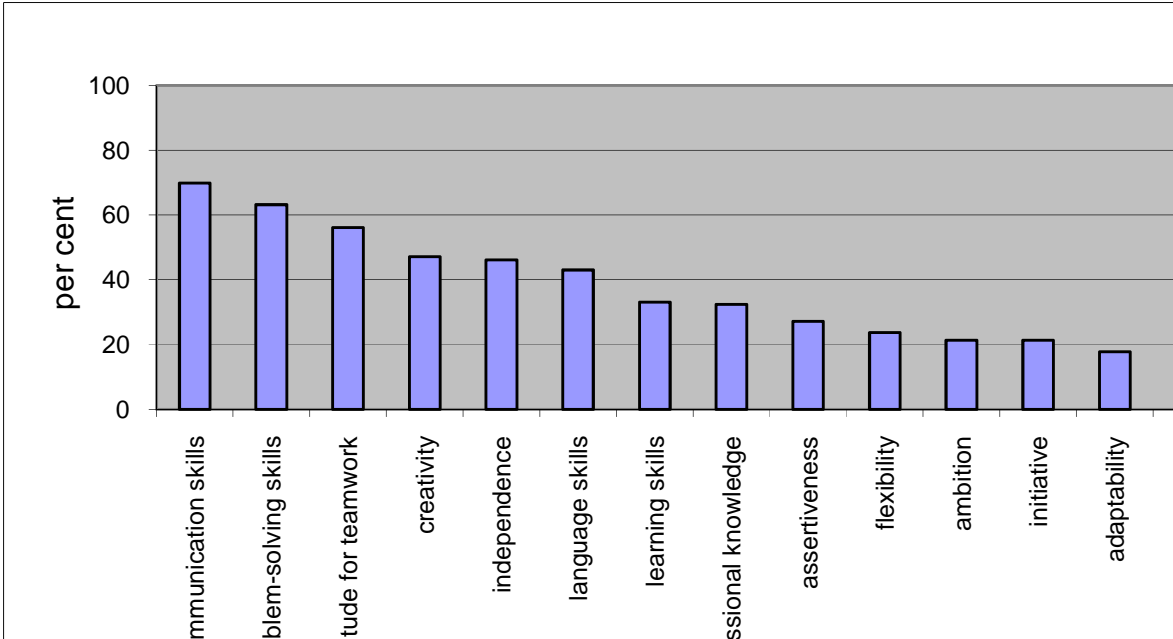


Figure 2. According to the hierarchical clustering we have identified four groups with significance difference regarding their expectations from graduates

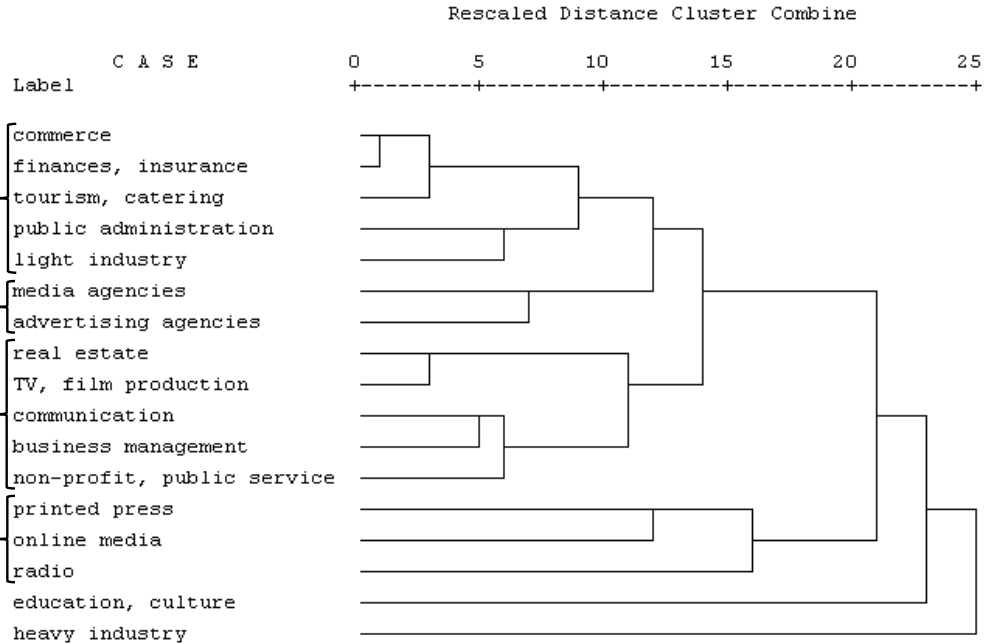


Figure 3 Mark the five most important requirements your company/organization expect graduates to have (N=467)

