
"BEST, Academics and Companies Forum"

Istanbul

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Abstract - Summary

A "BEST, Academics and Company Forum" (BACo) is a public event of the Board of European Students of Technology. In such an event, students, academics and representatives from companies meet and discuss education-related topics. The goal of this event is to bring together the three stakeholders in education and help them exchange opinions, share experiences, offer suggestions and find solutions to common issues.

The topics vary on different educational issues: the topics of this event were accreditation, learning outcomes and the role of extra-curricular activities in the formation of engineers.

The event is mainly run by the Educational Committee of BEST (EduCo) and the hosting Local BEST group, in this case Istanbul. During the event the discussions were held in three groups facilitated by EduCo members, and minutes were also taken by EduCo members.

During these working sessions, each group was given valuable input by one of the professors, representatives from TREE or SEFI, or companies' representatives.

At this BACo, the group of participants was composed of 16 students from 11 different European countries and 11 students from Istanbul and Ankara. The students were in different stages of their studies from freshmen to PhD. It was ensured that the participants would have sufficient background knowledge to participate actively in the discussions, by having them read the so-called topic introductions provided by EduCo and by participating in the morning talks/presentations where several professors and other representatives gave valuable information about the topics of the event.

The outcomes of the working groups will be forwarded to the TREE Thematic Network and used in other occasions, so that the students' input will contribute to the overall quality of engineering studies in Europe.

Day 1: Accreditation

Introduction

Accreditation – a credit system which is a systematic way of describing an educational programme by attaching credits to its components. The definition of credits in higher education systems may be based on different parameters, such as student workload, learning outcomes and contact hours.

The first official credit system in Europe, the “European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)” was initially set up in 1989 as a pilot scheme within the framework of the Erasmus programme. Its aim at that time was to facilitate the recognition of study periods undertaken abroad by mobile students through the transfer of credits.

The 40 Signatory States in the Bologna Process have identified ECTS as one of the cornerstones of the European Higher Education Area. A large number of countries have adopted ECTS by law as an accumulation system for their own higher education systems and others are in the process of doing so. In some countries ECTS has become a requirement for accreditation.

Discussion groups' outcomes

Discussion group 1

The discussion started with the current situation in the universities from where the participants came. The academicians clarified them the meaning of accreditation.

The general idea about the accreditation system seems good for students unless there is an opposition of concerns. The accreditation has a reputation of bringing more workload to students. However, the purpose of accreditation is to exert pressure to the universities in order to modernize their systems. On that point, it is also important to mention that demanding for standards to a great extent can decrease the diversity among universities.

The students' point of view about the disadvantages of accreditation is that, with the accreditation systems, the professors are going to reduce the hours of the lectures. The lectures should just give the main ideas, and the students find out how things work. So decreasing the lectures' duration implies increasing the workload and time spent on the projects for students. This seems to make sense, as theoretical knowledge is forgotten very easily. Also the importance of accreditation is supposed to be the outcomes, not the process. Universities are supposed to be free to choose their methods of education.

Besides the education taken in the university, there are also soft skills learned during the studies. They are independent from the accreditation systems but they are in accordance with the university mission. Soft skills are indispensable for every engineer profile and they are varying according to students' personality. That's why students believe that accreditation systems are supposed to be a statement of basic requirements.

In some of the universities, there is an active participation of students in the accreditation issue. However, in most of the cases, there is a huge lack of awareness and communication. Either professors are not eager to involve them or students are not interested. Most of the times they think that it does not affect them directly.

There are some problems and relevant suggestions. In the first years, there is a lack of knowledge however during the final years there is a lack of interest. It is generally believed that accreditation as it is has a lack of objectivity of students and a lack of honesty of representatives.

On that issue, we have to make aware students inform the rest of them. As students and academicians, we have to produce feedbacks from the first years until post-graduating.

Discussion group 2

Students believe that accreditation is only about ECTS and credit transfers during Erasmus process. Except for some few countries, accreditation is still unknown to the student community. As far as this problem is concerned, students and professors agree that there are many unclear and unstable issues. Participants are facing many problems in these programmes, such as unbalanced mobility, recognition of courses taken in Erasmus and also the evaluation of the quality of these courses.

The accreditation issue is developing differently in different countries. For example, in England it has been an issue since 30 years and it became part of engineering education. However, in France, there are two different systems.

It is also an unknown situation for the European Accreditation issue. However, in each country there is another level of acceptance to be an engineer. The length of engineering education and the distribution of courses during the academic years are different from countries to countries. Another issue is the measurement of the education level. Sometimes, attending classes is not enough to be an engineer and there is a question about how to evaluate it. In some countries, academicians and students are getting together and discuss the educational system, the situation of universities, the needs of the system. However, sometimes it is hard to have feedbacks from students and companies.

As for companies, there are also research institutions that they can work with. Moreover, the results of internships are different from countries to countries. In some places, you can have a great opportunity to be trained as engineer, however in other places there can be a danger of being used like an office boy. On the other hand, companies can hire also students with whom they have worked together in research projects.

In engineering education, even professors agree that grades are not always indicative of the level of knowledge or ability to act as an engineer. Some students are even thinking that what they are learning in universities is not enough to be an engineer. That's why accreditation is also not only grade based system, it's supposed to be part of governmental policies.

Here, an idea appeared: having classes from different universities, but taking the degree from one institution. Today, Erasmus is a kind of implementation of this idea, but quite limited.

There is another issue: same classes have different hours and different credits in different universities which are even in the same country. That's one more reason why it's impossible to create a perfect system for accreditation. There, students can be used as good evaluators. Problems such as the population in classrooms, the communication between student and professor, reasons of students for not asking questions and new teachers' deficiencies can be solved with the evaluation of students. Some universities are using feedback forms for these evaluations. In some countries, the relation between professors and students is well defined. In some cases, there is a great respect and even a fear of professors.

Some professors have good connections with students and whenever you need them, you can have an appointment with him/her. However, with other professors, it is impossible to get one, due to the behaviour of the professor or the overload of the professor's schedule. Students agree that even if the professor has high competence on his/her scientific field, this doesn't mean that he/ she can teach this field in a proper and good way.

As a conclusion, there is an important role for students, as end result of educational process and as client for the beneficiary of teaching in the accreditation issue.

The evaluation of professors should be part of all accreditation processes. There can be some general rules or centralized accreditation institution, for all European universities.

The cooperation with companies has to be improved because of internships and practical experience included in the curriculum. The value of credits has to vary for easy and difficult courses, and for the teaching skills of the professors.

Discussion group 3

There are basically two different types of countries:

1. Countries with Accreditation Boards
2. Countries where the accreditation is implicit

The importance of ECTS is increasingly becoming a generalized basis for the national credit system. The European Educational Commission is encouraging the further progress with the goal that the ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system, to be applied consistently as it develops within the emerging European Higher Education Area.

This postulation is a goal for Universities and governments that want to achieve it, but first they have to solve problems with credit transfer.

Many participants were abroad for the Erasmus program and all of them complained about the situation of the native University with credits transfer. The main reasons were differences of courses' program. Students proposed as a solution for this problem to find a balance between number of credits and hours of studying between all countries in which ECTS system are used.

Different labour market situations

Discussion has shown how much work had been done in accreditation process. Participants realized that is really important to get involved in the process from the beginning. Students from the first year should have basic presentations about the credit system and benefits coming from accreditation regarding a better job in future. Promotion and knowledge about ECTS, exchange programs and extra curricular activities should be done through student organizations. For the participants this would be the best way because they are representative of students and they know exactly all roles and problems connected with university life.

Accreditation plays an important role in the education program because this system can be used further for the life-long learning process after graduation and the Diploma Supplement which is one of the main documents required by employers. For these reasons, the well-known credit system (accreditation) on each University is so important for students to understand and know how to profit from. Furthermore it should be a rule that companies give the input to the learning process. Most participants shared the opinion that international companies are interested in accreditation and national companies are not.

Only cooperation between students, professors and companies could give valuable results and help do next step in the process of creating a "perfect" accreditation system.

Accreditation for Companies

Good for students?

- In general YES
- But as long as no conflicts of interests

A concern:

- Keep the reputation and being accredited can lead to more workload to students
- Impulse to modernize system
- Diversity, not push for standards.
- Active learning

Different educational background and cultures

- One profession, one acc. system
- Different systems, different acc.
- Outcomes, not the process
- University can choose the methods

Soft Skills

- Independent from accreditation system
- In accordance with the University mission
- Are indispensable for every engineer profile
- According to the students personality
- Acc. System just states the basic requirement

The Role of Students:

- in some faculties there is active participation of students
- In most cases:
 - Lack of awareness and communication
 - Professors nor eager to change
 - Students not interested
 - It doesn't affect them directly
 - Not interested in mobility

Problems and Suggestions

- First years: lack of knowledge
 - Final years: lack of interest
 - Lack of objectivity of students
 - Lack of honesty of representatives
-
- Aware students informing the rest
 - Feedback from the first years until post-graduating
 - Three level participation

Day 2: Learning Outcomes

Introduction

“Any learning college and its learning facilitators succeed only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners”

To be able to document student learning, colleges first need to identify and define the outcomes of that learning. The statement of learning outcomes at course, program, and institutional levels clarifies for all stakeholders the knowledge, skills, and abilities a student must possess to successfully complete a course or program and earn a certificate, diploma, or degree from the college. In every course and program in the learning college, in or out of the classroom, learning facilitators design activities to assist learners in achieving the appropriate course, program, and institutional learning outcomes.

The truest measure of their progress may also be the most difficult: assessing and documenting student learning. Assessment provides the means for accurately responding to the fundamental questions of the learning college: how does this programme, policy, or practice improve or expand student learning? How do we know? As outcomes are identified and defined and as activities to assist students in achieving those outcomes are developed, appropriate assessment methods must also be developed. By adopting ongoing, meaningful, and useful assessment strategies, the learning college supports the development of the culture of evidence necessary to accurately document student learning. This documentation becomes more meaningful when it includes clear evidence of student learning (e.g., instructor or student commentaries on learning achievements, samples of student work, external evaluations of student work). Recognizing the prudence of maintaining traditional grades and course credit, the learning college does not abandon current transcript systems; however, the learning college expands on grades and course credit by documenting student learning in non-traditional ways as well.

Discussion groups' outcomes

Discussion Group 1

The students started the discussion by sharing what each of them understood from the term “learning outcomes” and by trying to agree on a definition of this term. In an attempt to come up with the simplest and yet strongest definition possible, the students agreed that learning outcomes constitute the answer to the question “What will the students be able to do once they finish their course/degree?”

The question of how to measure learning outcomes is certainly one of the most important ones to be asked. The students feel that the outcome of a course consists both of academic knowledge, technical skills and soft skills. When it comes to academic knowledge, it is relatively easy to evaluate how much a student is familiar with the topic. The easiest way to do so is by quantitative tests. Even technical skills can be relatively easily evaluated, by making use of carefully designed practical test. Soft skills gained by taking part in a course are, on the other hand, much more difficult to evaluate. While it is easy to observe how students react when they work in teams or when they are asked to make a presentation, it is more difficult to assign a score to their public speaking or teamwork abilities.

Students told us that the way group work takes place is different in universities throughout Europe. They believe that this is a context issue, which is dealt differently in each country, according to its culture and habits. There has been some effort invested in measuring the involvement of individuals in group work. As it turns out, the best way to do so is to let the team members evaluate each other's involvement in the common work. It is impossible for a professor to be present all the time, and his/her presence may change the working habits of the group. Additionally, some measures can be taken to stimulate students' involvement in groups, such as having each student assessed individually and considering each student responsible for the entire work of the group.

Traditionally, learning outcomes have always been formulated by the faculty. If it was proven that students lacked certain skills and knowledge, then the faculty would simply create a course in order to

improve the situation. However, students consider that in this way the learning outcomes can be easily misleading.

Students have told us that in the current education system, the main focus is on teaching and thus all procedures are designed having this goal in mind. They suggest that there is a need for a change of focus, a shift from teaching towards student learning. In this way, learning outcomes would no longer be defined in terms of how much the student is able to memorize the taught subject, but in terms of how much the student has learned.

Students also suggested that newer learning methods, such as Project Organised Problem Based Learning, Active Learning, Enquiry Based Learning and Empirical Research and Discovery should be more employed in universities throughout Europe.

When it comes to the assessment of practical work, there should be a permanent interaction between students and professors. The professors should no longer be the source of all knowledge, but rather a facilitator that is actively challenging the students, sharing information and debating with them. The assessment should be continuous throughout the learning period and there should be less emphasis placed on the final exam.

To conclude, learning outcomes should be defined using the students and their learning process as a reference point, and not the teaching. In this way, learning outcomes can be more precisely defined which would help students have a better overview of their knowledge and skills.

Discussion group 2

Definition of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are what we acquire during learning which include knowledge, soft skills and attitude. Learning outcomes are not the outcomes of an examination, they reflect the ability to apply the tools and the way of thinking a student learnt throughout the programme. Eventually they encompass the development of the ability to perform a profession.

Assessment issues

Everybody seemed unanimous, they are difficult to measure and they involve indispensably the human factor. In the real life, there are different conditions that apply in each university, so assessments are, in a way, "artificial" methods. The application-based courses should be measured through practical application of the knowledge learned (projects) and they could involve simulated real situation (case studies, competitions, internships). In projects involving team-work it is even more difficult to assess students fair. In the chase of an optimal assessment method, the question of cost and allocation of human resources also arise.

Assessment tools

Taking the above issues into consideration, the group tried to come to conclusions about different assessment tools. It's evident that there is a need to find a compromise between the resources and the completeness of such assessment. Under the perspective of cost, the optical reading methods seem very promising. The oral examination is very time consuming, and can be unpractical and stressful if the examined group is quite big. On the other hand, oral examinations assess your level of understanding, they prepare you for real life (job interviews) and they give you the experience of work under stress. Possibly, the most objective way to assess a student is a combined exam (oral/written). Concerning the objectivity of the exams, the prejudgment of the instructor can influence the mark a lot; therefore there should an anonymous system for written exams, like in the UK.

Grading systems

They differ quite from country to country and they can be affected from quite many factors. In some countries (eg. Sweden), professors help their students to pass so as the department gets more generous financing. In others (eg. Slovakia), universities need to cut down the number of students after the first year of studies. Finally, in many countries, immigrant students pay higher fees and they are more

attracting to the administration of the department. Finally, it happens often that professors want their exams to be difficult as this boasts their status. With so many entangled factors, it is very difficult to develop a fair grading system. In an ideal system the results should be reliable, anybody who satisfies the outcomes should pass and grading systems should not use the Bell curve or make the results look like the Bell curve.

Teaching methods

Teaching methods are changing to outcome-based; instructors want students to have some particular skills and knowledge. But, according to many students, outcome-based evaluations don't always imply an accordance of the teaching methods. In any case well defined learning outcomes are the first step to find the right teaching methods, since the whole course can be structured based on them. But finally, the students are the recipients of the whole procedure and their involvement and assessment are necessary.

The role of the students

In general, students should be aware in advance of the desired outcomes of their programme so they can assess the programme. There was an agreement, that only graduate students can give an input to the definition of the learning outcomes, the students can give an input on the teaching methods. However, it's difficult to motivate students to be part of an assessment process of their curriculum. Students' representation seems to complicate the situation even more, since students' representatives are sometimes not "representative students" and the communication among them and the other students is quite bad. On the other hand, they have anyway very little power in many countries (eg. Turkey). In others (eg. Serbia), they seem to co-operate fruitfully with the professors.

Concerning the input of students during different phases of studies, there was an agreement that mostly graduate students can judge the achievement of learning outcomes, but it's difficult to motivate them to be part of the process, as they have already graduated. Freshmen's expectations should also be taken into account and students could assess individual courses, their teaching methods, their assessment methods etc.

The role of other stakeholders

It's clear that the technological status of a country affects the curriculum and the learning outcomes of a programme. Therefore, the companies should participate in the learning outcomes process and feedback the universities about the skills of their graduates. However, universities should not become "puppets" of companies - as companies would love to get ready-to-use engineers - and the role of students and their bodies not undermined. There should be also close cooperation with engineering associations and government agencies. It's difficult to take into account the needs of smaller companies, and there is the danger of overloading the system and making the whole feedback procedure too complicated and expensive. Therefore, there should be a balanced system taking many views into account.

Discussion group 3

Definition:

What one knows and is able to do after a learning process: **skills and knowledge**.

Measurement of learning outcomes

During the time the knowledge changes, so learning outcomes and skills are very important. University has the main task to prepare students to future vocation, that's why quality assurance of teaching and learning should be measurable.

Furthermore that measurement should be equal to everybody and one in every University.

As it was mentioned, knowledge is increasing during all students' life but all what students are getting from University they need to translate to practice. Only in this way students can evaluate their skills and also professors could notice advantages and disadvantages of each teaching method.

Activities such as competitions or projects in teams are a great opportunity to find interest in some topic. But the most important is the feedback from both sides – students and professors. This communication and analysis lead to improvement in order to fit standards.

All participants agree that measurement of learning outcomes is related to the University mission. Realization of this mission needs not only initiation from professors, students but also external bodies as government and Educational Institutions.

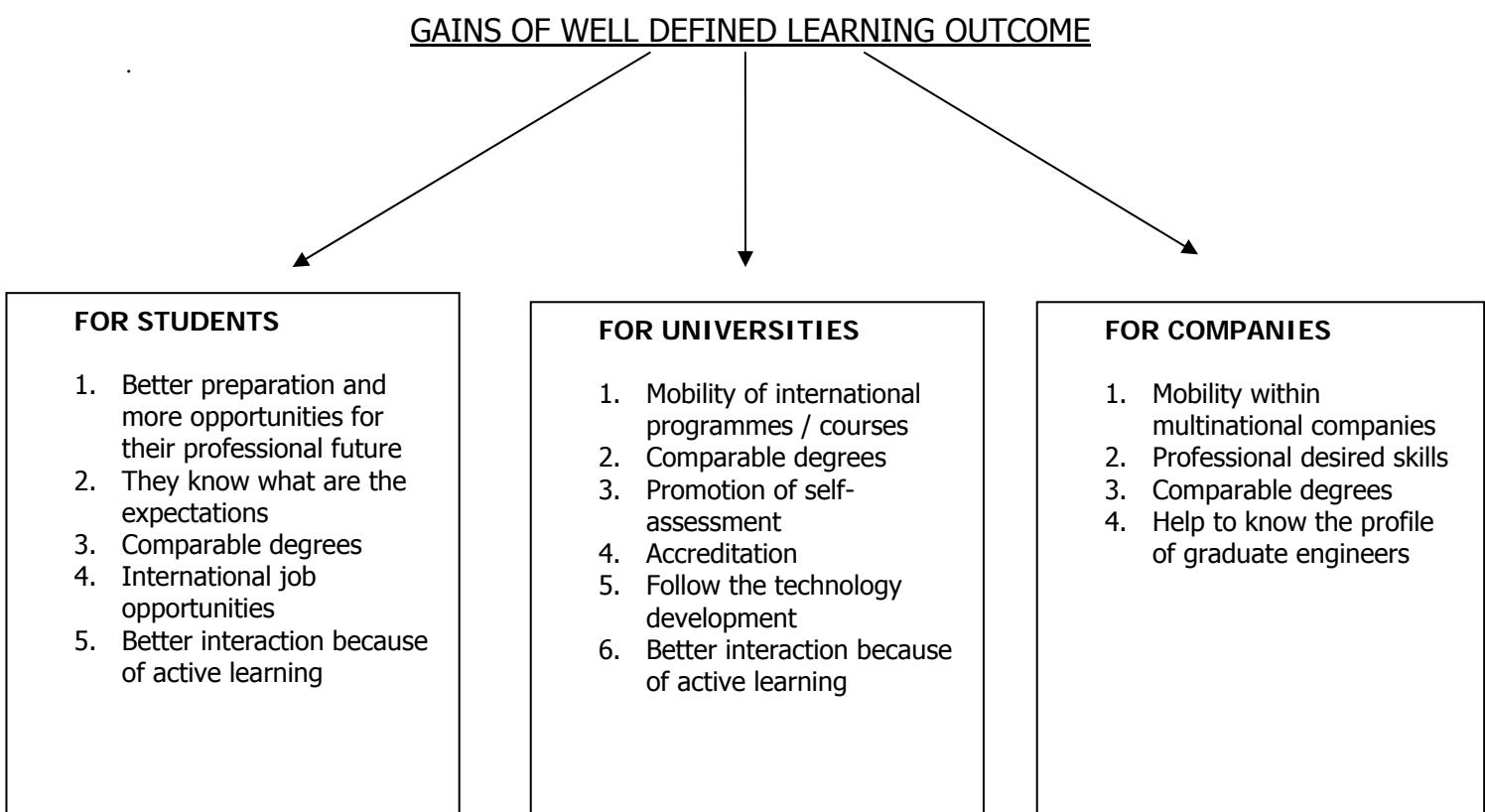
During the discussion participants shared methods of measurement of learning outcomes in their country and there are some examples:

- USA - specific tests measured with assessment. In 2005 was published official scale for skills' evaluation.

Students are not stupid. Education should be effective.

- Portugal - Lack of measurement. non objective. evaluation is difficult.

The second part of discussion was focused mostly on advantages and effects of well defined Learning Outcomes.



In more cases the internships or project students do is evaluated through effects and because of this companies aim to check students' skills, not only marks/degrees from final diploma.

Day 3: The role of extra-curricular activities (XCAs) in the formation of engineers

Introduction

Most students in technological universities around Europe would describe education as the process of going to classes, attending lectures and getting graded, obtaining recognition for their work.

However, in today's society, an engineer needs to be prepared for other kinds of challenges. For example, an advert in a newspaper could go like this "we are looking for a person with a degree in civil engineering and strong communication and marketing skills to fill a position of "technical support" for our customers".

This is where extra-curricular activities come in. They are activities students perform without usually getting credits, they are optional and they are not related to the main field of study of the engineer.

Discussion groups' outcomes

Discussion group 1

Benefits of XCAs

Extra-curricular activities were seen by the participants of the discussion group as an important and positive element in their career as students of technology. Among the factors that contribute to such assessment, motivation plays an important role.

In fact, they constitute a change from regular university routine and give students the skills and knowledge that either cannot be found in academic education, or are present in a significantly low measure. Gaining self-confidence, experiencing team work, and putting to the test their leadership abilities: these are just some of the reasons why they can be truly considered some sort of "complementary education".

University support of XCAs

Considering them an important and positive element in the formation of the student, the participants suggested that universities should support such activities both financially and through other means as well.

In many cases (e.g. Netherlands and Italy), a strict curriculum doesn't allow students to focus on other activities, not having enough free time for them. In such cases, a bit more "freedom" in the curriculum is needed to allow students to engage in XCA. Also, more flexible exam periods are requested for people who perform these activities.

Furthermore, contributions in terms of logistics are very welcome. The university should help students by allowing them the use of buildings, class-rooms and office materials free of charge for their XCA.

Considering the promotion of XCA, too often it is noted that professors show their encouragement only for academic-related XCA in their own field of study (e.g. the Robocup[1] project as an XCA complementing a course on robotics). In other cases, nothing more than moral support can be expected.

As a conclusion to the issue of university support, it was noted that the recognition of such activities would be a key element in getting students interested in XCA and thus fostering their personal development.

Recognition process

Why should XCA be recognised, then? As already said, because XCAs are an important step in the professional growth of students by providing them significant skills and competences, which will be used in their future career. In some areas, though, it is difficult to evaluate them properly (e.g. sport activities).

To see what kind of recognition is possible, the participants addressed the issue of recognition by universities and recognition by companies separately.

Universities

First of all, students should be allowed to describe such activities themselves. This self-assessment would imply that the student understands the importance and the relevance of XCAs to his/her personal development and knows how to value the acquired skills and competences.

Such assessment would contain: a description of the XCA, with all the necessary details, and a description of the outcomes achieved through the XCA. The assessments of all XCAs performed by students would go in their personal “portfolio”, a document that gathers the non-academic experiences of the student. The guidelines for compiling such document would be provided by the university; in the same way institutions provide citizens with guidelines on how to compile a CV.

After recognising the need for such self-assessment, participants asked themselves how this document could be used to officially certify the student’s experience. At European level, nothing could be done since the level of bureaucracy would be too high; the differences in type and value of XCAs from country to country would constitute a further obstacle. Furthermore, it would violate the autonomy of the universities. This is why the participants proposed the recognition to be done at university level by a recognition unit that was referred to as “Unit for accreditation of prior and experiential learning”.

Such unit would be responsible for: promoting XCAs, gathering the self-assessments of students; implementing the final recognition (i.e. official certification) of such activities.

All the students’ experiences would be valued on an individual basis, with the optional use (decided by the university) of international guidelines for the assessment of XCAs. It should be kept in mind that different XCAs require different assessment types and therefore a mapping should be done among them.

Such unit would have a similar role to what the Erasmus office in the universities belonging to Socrates countries has now. The comparison comes from the fact that Erasmus offices deal with the recognition of academic experiences (abroad and under particular conditions), whereas the “Unit for accreditation of prior and experiential learning” would take care of non-academic experiences (XCAs). Therefore, such unit should have trained personnel and a coordinator, as in the case of Erasmus offices.

The final recognition (i.e. official certification) could be done by including the outcomes of the XCA, self-assessed by the student and approved by the recognition unit, in the Diploma Supplement of the student. Participants also stressed the fact that not always credits (local credits, ECTS credits, or any similar) should be given for XCAs, but always the outcomes should be included in the final official certification of the student (i.e. Diploma Supplement).

Companies

Regarding the recognition of XCAs by companies, no special improvement was suggested. Students should be always able to self-assess them and either include them in their CV, or in their academic “portfolio”. The company would then proceed with their judgement of the student’s experience according to their own criteria.

[1] <http://www.robocup.org/>

Discussion group 2

Definition:

Activities done during the students' free time, depending on context and not included in academic curriculum: contribute to self-development and are welcomed by future employers.

Benefits of XCAs

- They provide self-confidence
- Their combination and balance with curricular activities prepare the student for real life
- They are not necessary for every engineer, it is up to the students to choose their activities and their profile
- They improve the image of the university

University support of XCAs

Discussion about the role of Universities in support of extra-curricular activities started from the question "Whose responsibility is the involvement of students?". All participants had many ideas but finally they agree that extra-circulate activities are activities which should be students' initiative. University should not obstacle them but have an umbrella to embrace and bridge the activities.

The universities sometimes support the students in the easy way; just say "go", but do not support them in essence. How should universities support the activities? How should they commit to the activities? There are main guidelines from the participants what University could provide for students:

1. The funds and the facilities
2. Flexibility
3. Publicize the different options of activities
4. Contribute when possible
5. Not categorize-classify the activities
6. Not push students' participation
7. Students' guidance students from open-minded professors
8. Credibility of the activities done in the frame of the university
 - Through participation
 - Through observance

We need an institution which will present our ideas and try to initiate them in official Universities' program of extra-curricular activities. The institution should not only be a bridge between students and professors, but more importantly be the communication among students. Information from_students' union and motivation for participation in extra activities are much more important then support from University. All participants came to the conclusion of this part of the discussion that without students' initiative universities can't give to students the support they expect.

The roles of universities in organizing extra- curricular activities are not belonging to new topics and some of the countries found solution. To give an, example one of our guests, Mrs. Fiona Martland presented two systems in UK. The first gives credits to students for activities done before joining the university. The second gives credits for things done during studies, but they are regarded as extra credits, they don't replace lectures. Also in Spain, the University of Barcelona uses similar system: 3% of the credits come from XCAs, but participation in XCAs should be balanced and the activities should be versatile. Sometimes, these credits can count for credits of normal courses.

Companies

All participants are exposed to many different activities to make the right decision when choosing them. Some are worthy for future careers, others help students be self-conent. Both are of the same importance. HR responsible of a company will check all students' skills, and activities will be judged the same way. The point is just to try to get people involved in the university, not just to study, no matter which skills they will choose to develop.

Students gather few ideas how they see involvement of companies:

1. Provide the activities to fill the gap between the university's and companies' needs
2. Support trainings and workshops since it's of their interest too
3. Concerns about companies' reliability

Let's look at the example of Aalborg. A company educates the students, they give them a project, the students form team, and they have very interesting experiences, they learn leadership, teamwork skills, they get ready challenges. The state urges companies to do that. The students use the labs of the companies.

Companies should get more involved because they have a major role, and also the power to give students what is missing in their programme in the University. What more companies should cooperate at with universities to provide students with XC activities. Some of the participants believed that companies have a more important role than universities.

Recognition process

Considering all benefits of extra-curricular activities presented by students, the recognition process is an important step in the evaluation of students' achievements in University. Competence assessment is one of the most important but in the same time one of the most difficult parts to evaluate in the recognition process. Measurable competences should be the ones relevant to possible future professions and course's learning outcomes; the measurement process can be realized by gathering feedback and constantly up-dating it. There is only one problem: some activities are under-estimated.

Students who took part in the discussion didn't have a definite idea for the recognition system for extra-curricular activities. They decided about three most important things that should be taken in consideration by Universities and companies:

1. Assessment by an external body to allocate extra credits, but not to replace courses
2. Transcript should include all activities taken during the studies, without involvement of another body
3. Students' initiative: up to them to choose, develop and prove their extra-curricular involvement

Discussion group 3

Professors' support in XCAs

The support of professors in XCA differs from country to country. Some of the students are complaining about not receiving any support from professors on this issue, some of them are thinking that they have an unofficial support from professors. But main idea that students give is they need more support.

From professors' view, XCAs are really important for students' self-development. Students must be supported and motivated for getting involved in such activities, but when these activities are starting to affect students' degree, students must be warned to concentrate more on their profession. GPA is not something that gives an idea about students' potential. XCAs cannot be mentioned in transcripts but they may be mentioned by professors in support letters. American Universities are good examples for it.

Universities' support in XCAs

Universities already support financially and with certain facilities XCAs almost in all countries represented. However, the general impression is that it is not easy to get this support due to bureaucracy problems for example, not being able to transmit the real importance of the XCAs. Not all universities in Europe have an umbrella student union that connects all associations, no matter how big they are, to the rector. Therefore, sometimes not all associations taking care of XCAs are able to receive the support and might be marginalized. However, not everyone feels the need of having this umbrella department because they consider the needs of each association different and the ways of finding support within the university might be different and therefore each of them will have a diversity of means to get support. The feeling is that students have to look for their own means rather than waiting for the administration to give the facilities without any effort.

Companies and XCAs

Nowadays, both XCAs and university grades are taken into account. Companies give lots of importance to grades depending on the kind of job you are going to perform. Others are looking for certain profiles where soft skills are more significant. Therefore, students should include all the XCA in their CVs and emphasise them during interviews.

Competence assessment of extracurricular activities

Even if it makes sense to have diploma supplement for this, it is rather difficult to assess them. It becomes difficult to decide which XCAs are suitable to be assessed and therefore it is unfair to compare. The involvement in any XCAs develops the person, but it is difficult to assess how much. Moreover, companies don't see as important the assessment, they have other ways of seeing what a student gained from them and what was the aim of each one. The idea is that it is more important is how much one gained as a personality rather than what you have done. XCAs should not be done in order to include them in the CV but in order to develop oneself, therefore it should be activities in which one is interested.

Creating tools for recognition

As it is very difficult to assess XCAs, it is even more difficult to find the tools for their recognition. It was mentioned that the best way to explain one's extra-curricular activities is to simply explain yourself. Companies will always see what is behind each of them and how much one made profit of them.

Credits

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