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Linking education with practice is a must!

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The knowledge-based society has been one of the long-standing essential starting points for the Slovak economy. Because of this, it is increasingly important that businesses employ skilled, educated employees. However, an employee who is a university graduate but possesses merely academic knowledge is not enough. It is important that graduates bring value to the company as soon as they begin their first job. This requires an intensification of the links between business and academia. This is also one of the reasons why the Government of the Slovak Republic has committed to "...promoting the development of an educational system directly linked with practice, with a focus on social and technological modernization."

The Act on Universities has gone through a number of amendments since 2002, each of which strove to tighten links between education and practice. The amendment from 2007 enabled the establishment of specialized art and R&D centers where this linkage is most intensive within public university incubators. The amendment from 2009 enabled public universities to participate in establishing start-up and spin-off companies. This allowed universities to lease or lend property to an entrepreneur at a lower than market-based rate to carry out research and development within a university incubator.

In the most recent amendment of the Act on Universities, the current government continues to connect universities with practice. It proposes a change in bachelor's degrees that allows the division of study programs into those that are professionally-oriented and those that are academically-oriented. The key objective of a professionally-oriented study program is preparation for a specific profession, although it doesn't rule out the possibility for graduates to continue on to a higher level of university study. Graduates of professionally-oriented programs should be prepared in a more targeted manner for the labor market after graduating from the 1st level university education. The Government of the Slovak Republic has also decided to promote university education, research and innovation with a particular emphasis on natural and technical sciences. This is connected to the needs of society and the economic development of the country. To do this, the amendment of the Act on Universities introduces a new type of incentive scholarship aimed at promoting particular academic programs. The promoted programs will be defined annually based on analysis and forecasts for the labor market prepared by the Central Office for Labor, Social Affairs and Family.

However, connection to practice is important beyond university education. The activity of businesses is of particular importance in secondary professional education as well. It is imperative that employers more intensively engage in professional education and preparation. One way of doing this is for employers to clearly define requirements for professional knowledge and practical skills necessary to carry out work assignments on positions available in the labor market. Employers should participate in preparing graduate profiles that specify the desired knowledge, skills, abilities and work-related habits and patterns for new employees.

We believe that by improving university-related legislation to better meet labor market expectations, universities will produce graduates who will be increasingly better prepared for practice.

For businesses it is important that the graduates bring value to the company as soon as they embark on their first job right after the actual graduation.