



Fitting universities and businesses onto the yoke of development

The goal of the new national project “Universities as Engines of Development of a Knowledge-Based Society” is to adapt higher education to labor market needs. In the framework of the Operational Program Education, the project is co-financed from EU resources with more than 17 million euros.

The Institute of Information and the Prognoses of Education began implementing the project in June of this year. The aim is to create sustainable cooperation between universities and the private sector. Their communication has so far been individual, and often based on personal relationships. It is clear that the more technically oriented a degree program is, the better the cooperation between the university and the private sector is.

Generally, cooperation is initiated by the private sector. This is because small firms need to use the infrastructure of universities to implement innovations. On the other hand, large companies usually actively cooperate with universities as company strategy defines the preparation and training of newly recruited graduates in line with company needs. Universities and companies have so far accumulated valuable experience which can be utilized not only within the duration of the project through the end of 2015, but also in the long-term future.

Targeted use of academic and practical experience

The project frames the implementation of four key activities:

- Assessment of the effectiveness of university study programs in terms of their cooperation with the business sector and the needs of the labor market;

- Development of a collaborative network for universities and the corporate sector to provide hands-on experiential education;
- Improvement of educational content and support of innovative forms of education to match the labor market needs, particularly in promising fields of study;
- Advertisement of promising fields of study and furthering collaboration between universities and businesses.

Direct students towards practical experience

The key phase of the national project begins now, after the June nationwide meeting of representatives of universities and companies where they declared eagerness to implement it. The project is designed for all levels of higher education from Bachelor students to Doctoral students, in the regions of Trnava, Trenčín, Nitra, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, and Košice. It focuses on university students in the study programs in work areas with the most significant impact on economic growth and competitiveness. These students will be involved in both short- and long-term internships to gain practical experience. Sponsors of the project include representatives of the universities and the corporate sector.

Administrators and sponsors of this project presented possibilities for direct involvement of university students in the activities of the

national project in October of this year. Presentations took place at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the Constantine the Philosopher University and the Slovak University of Agricultural in Nitra, the Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín, the Faculty of Material Sciences and Technology of the STU in Trnava, the Technical University of Košice, and the University of Žilina.

The companies involved are expected to offer short-term educational practice to more than 3000 students and long-term internships with a range of up to 96 hours during a semester. Throughout the duration of the internship, college students will work on specific topics that they will later process into a diploma or dissertation thesis. Part of the national project is to create experiential teaching bases directly at the universities, and to help bring practical needs into the academic environment.

What will the project bring?

Most importantly, this project will produce an educational model based on real experience – a useable design for university education adjusted to the needs of the labor market, entrepreneurship, and the private sector – that will allow industry, services, and other important areas to increase employment and the GDP. In addition, the project will facilitate several thousands of students have practical experience and encourage creative

communication on the quality of education between universities and enterprises. We also hope to encourage individuals and collaborating organizations to continue long-term acquisition of knowledge and experience similar to that gained in the project.

Provide university students with internships in your company

The Institute of Information and the Prognoses of Education invites businesses to take part in this project. It welcomes businesses that can meet the set criteria to participate in the practical education of university students. Given the objectives of the project, employers (except universities) are the main subjects of cooperation.

Important industry and employment federations have been contacted and recommended experts from among their members through whom the institute established direct links with employers. Due attention is paid to small and medium-sized enterprises that offer the most job opportunities in Slovakia. The key value of this approach is that employers can define realistic and expected qualification preferences of graduates so that they match the market needs.



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We welcome each new offer of cooperation and internship opportunities for college students, including work in your company. If you decide to participate in the national project, Universities as Engines of Development of the Knowledge-Based society, do not hesitate to contact us. Together, we can offer students more!